LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY
IN RURAL EASTERN KENTUCKY

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ABSTRACT

Linguists still know relatively little about the speech of the rural US South, in part because rural speech is thought to be more conservative than urban speech with regard to language change. In order to fill in a gap in our dialect map and explore the innovative capacity of rural speakers, this dissertation examines language use in its social context in Wilson County (a pseudonym), a small rural community in Eastern Kentucky. Data come from interviews with thirty women, stratified by age and education level, who have spent most of their lives in the community. I employ a combination of ethnographic and quantitative methods to analyze interviewees’ use of three local dialect features, monophthongization of /ay/ before voiceless consonants (n=270), raising and fronting of /ʌ/ (n=309), and leveling of standard-were to was (n=450).

Results show that speakers use pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization and /ʌ/-fronting and raising nearly categorically, but use was-leveling infrequently. Metapragmatic commentary indicates that the overall low level of morphosyntactic variation is driven by standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997) and negative ideologies that characterize rural and Mountain Southerners as old-fashioned, unsophisticated and ignorant. Such commentary also indicates that, inversely, the high use of local phonetic features is motivated by those same negative ideologies about rural and Mountain Southerners: Wilson Countians appear to have developed a strong sense of local identity and pride in oppositional reaction to cultural and linguistic marginalization. I conclude that speakers combine strongly locally-accented phonology with relatively prescriptive grammar in an effort to appear local and authentic, yet at the same time competent and modern.
As predicted, younger and more-educated speakers use less of the local phonetic features than older and college-educated speakers do. More-educated speakers also use less was-leveling than less-educated speakers do. Mainstream language norms appear to be entering the community through those speakers who feel the greatest pressure to appear competent and modern.

The high rate of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization (a relatively new Southern feature), as well as the complete reorganization of linguistic constraints on was-leveling since Northern British settled the region, indicate that rural speech can be highly innovative.
PREFACE

I was motivated to study language in rural Eastern Kentucky in part because I grew up in that region and language is by far the most salient aspect of my regional identity. When I left my small hometown to go to college at the University of Kentucky, only an hour and a half away from my home, people commented on or made fun of my rural Eastern Kentucky accent multiple times each day. My social identity shifted very rapidly from “the good student” to “the girl with a hillbilly accent.” In California more than ten years later I still find that people are shocked and confused by my strong Southern accent. My social identity is still powerfully shaped by how others perceive my speech. Rather than try to hide my accent, I speak as naturally as I can, and I resent others’ marginalizing and condescending comments about my speech, rural areas and the South. When I speak to others from my hometown, I find that most of them also feel proud and affectionate toward their accent rather than ashamed of it, even if they are ideologically very outward-oriented. I wondered whether rural Eastern Kentucky speech patterns might remain highly distinctive due in part to an oppositional reaction to cultural and linguistic marginalization. Therefore I chose in this dissertation to explore how ideology, identity and language do in fact interact in this frequently misunderstood and maligned region.
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Thank you to my family—Mom, Cody, Kyle, Dad, Sally, Emmy, Evan, Amy Jesslyn, Pap and Mamoo—I love you all so, so much and I have never doubted for a second that you all love me just as much. I know that you would believe in me and support me no matter what I did, and you want nothing but happiness for me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. OVERVIEW. Linguists still know little about speech in the rural South because most large-scale studies of Southern speech have been conducted in urban areas (including Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Baranowski 2008, 2007, 2000; Fridland 2003, 1999; Feagin 2003, 1986). Sociolinguists often assume that rural speech changes more slowly than urban speech (cf. Tagliamonte and Smith 2000), so they look to urban areas to study changes in progress. However, there is evidence that rural Southern speakers are leading in the use of a salient, stereotyped Southern feature, pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization (Irons 2007, Thomas 1997) and that rural speakers can rapidly reorganize the linguistic constraints on the use of a grammatical variable (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1999). In order to explore the innovative capacity of rural dialects further and to fill in the US dialectological map, this dissertation examines language in its social context in Wilson County¹, a small, rural community in Eastern Kentucky.

Data come from interviews with thirty women, stratified by age and education level, who have spent the majority of their lives in Wilson County. I use ethnographic and quantitative methods to examine two local phonological variables, the monophthongization of /ay/ before voiceless consonants (PRICE), and the fronting and/or raising of /ʌ/ (STRUT), which is less salient than /ay/-monophthongization. I also analyze one grammatical variable, the leveling of past tense-be (we was). I interpret how speakers combine these variables into meaningful styles, based on correlations with age.

¹ Names of places and people have been altered.
and education, the content of speakers’ interviews, ethnographic information and data from other studies.

My initial hypothesis was that college-educated speakers would use less pre-
voiceless ay/-monophthongization, √/-fronting and raising and was-leveling than non-
college-educated speakers because the former have lived extensively outside the county, been more exposed to mainstream culture and language and been immersed in an environment that stresses prescriptive speech norms. I also suspected that younger speakers would use these local features less than older speakers because the community has recently begun to experience some in-migration and younger speakers are more likely to have grown up hearing mainstream speech features among peers.

In an adoption of mainstream, prescriptive language ideologies, many Wilson Countians say that they do not approve of “bad grammar.” Indeed, most speakers use was-leveling at relatively low rates compared to speakers in other communities. However, interviewees use local phonological features almost categorically. Interview data suggest that this use reflects strong local identity and pride developed in oppositional reaction to the same mainstream ideologies that portray them and their language as unsophisticated and drive them away from local grammatical features.

As hypothesized, college-educated speakers do tend to use local speech features less than non-college educated speakers do. Younger speakers also use local pronunciation features less than older speakers do. However, older speakers use was-leveling infrequently, just as younger speakers do. Local phonological features appear to be decreasing slightly in overt prestige while local grammatical features remain at a stable low level of overt prestige.
Two other factors arise as key determiners of Wilson Countians’ language use—occupation and regional origins of one’s partner. Those working in the field of education are particularly likely to use low rates of was-leveling, and those whose long-term partners are non-Southerners use particularly low rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization.

My results also offer important insights about the apparently robust ability of rural, isolated speech communities to innovate in terms of language change. Wilson County speakers use pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization almost categorically even though it is a relatively recent Southern innovation. Also, they appear to have completely altered the language-internal constraints on was-leveling from those likely used by Northern British settlers of that region (cf. Tagliamonte and Smith 2000).

1.2. DEMOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY. Wilson Countians’ experience of marginalization at the hands of outsiders is related to the community’s socio-geographic liminality. Wilson County lies on the edge of the Appalachian Mountains, as well as on the edge of the South (see Figure 1.1), and residents often cross major cultural isoglosses for shopping and work. However, Wilson County closely fits the stereotype of a Mountain or rural Southern community, with its high poverty, homogeneous white population and strong local accent. Residents therefore confront outsiders’ negative opinions of their home and their speech quite often.

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2 Mountain is used rather than Appalachian, because the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas are typically discussed and represented in very similar ways in national popular discourse, and because Mountain is a local, non-pejorative term for people from the Appalachian and Ozark regions of the South. Closely-related terms include Inland, Upland, and Highland.
Wilson County is an extremely small, rural community, although a recent population increase has brought the county a number of new residents. Most Kentucky counties, including those surrounding Wilson, have grown significantly in population in recent decades\(^4\) and have highways, strip malls and so on. By contrast, Wilson Countians tend to feel that their community is particularly rural.

Local roads are almost entirely narrow, curvy two-lane roads unsuited for transportation of goods, and there are no highways, railways or navigable waterways. As a result, little to no industrialization and urbanization have occurred, so there are not many jobs in the county. Among other factors, the absence of infrastructure, development and jobs in Wilson County contributes to its extreme poverty.

\(^3\) Adapted from http://www.google.com.  
\(^4\) http://www.city-data.com
County is not alone in its poverty, but it lies in a larger pocket of poverty covering Eastern Kentucky. Eastern Kentucky is distinctly poorer even than other parts of Kentucky and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. It remains unclear why that particular region is so poor, although some explanations put forward to account for Appalachian poverty in general are discussed below. Because there have never been jobs in Wilson County to draw in outside populations, Wilson County is mostly made up of people whose families have been there for many generations. Residents are almost exclusively white non-Hispanics.

Just as in most poor areas, education rates are low in Wilson County. However, Wilson County’s rates of educational attainment are particularly low, below even those of US African Americans and Hispanics, based on national demographic figures.\(^5\) There is also very little work in Wilson County. Many men work far away, doing construction jobs that require them to stay gone for weeks at a time, or to commute long distances.\(^6\) Women’s occupations, in contrast with men’s, are mostly white-collar, primarily in education (ibid.). There has been some mountaintop removal of coal, but it has never constituted a large part of the local economy. For many years, Wilson Countians grew tobacco and household produce on small family farms. Tobacco farming has almost ceased since the government removed price supports for burley tobacco growers in 2004 and no crop has yet filled tobacco’s former role in the local economy. Today, residents farm cattle and grow a wide array of crops.

Socioeconomic class does not seem to function the same way in Wilson County that it does in much of the nation. It has been suggested that Appalachia represents an

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\(^6\) http://www.city-data.com
altogether separate status group, based on criteria including its distinct traditions, isolation, economic situation and popular stigmatization (Hurst 1992). Also, the range of occupations is quite limited, most of the best-paying men’s work is blue-collar, and most women are married to blue-collar men, so that blue-collar work has a somewhat higher social prestige here than it has in mainstream US culture (cf. Gilbert and Kahl 1982).

Although researchers have traditionally drawn upon occupation or husband’s occupation to help assign social class (along with income and education) (ibid.), occupation does not appear to be a good measure of class in Wilson County. Therefore I test Wilson Countians’ speech patterns for correlations with educational status, but do not test them for correlations with social class.

Wilson Countians are generally very positive about the county, despite its dire poverty, and different individuals often provide many of the same reasons. For example, interviewees describe the county’s rolling hills, small farms, and one small town as particularly unspoiled and untouched by development. The comment in (1.1) is representative of such statements.

(1.1) There’s nothing like good green soft grass to walk on, and you know, nice big trees everywhere, and you know, the rolling hills, … I like working in the flowers and I like getting my hands down in the dirt and the rich soil that’s…and it’s not like that a lot of places away from here. And you know, even in different parts of the world, I’ve been to other countries that are very beautiful, but I still think that Wilson County is just as pretty.

Similarly, Wilson County is thought to be a safe place where your children will not be abducted from your yard (as exemplified by 1.2).
You know, and then I have children, and I didn’t have to worry that if they wanted to go out in the morning, to go play outside in the yard or go ride their bike, that, someone was gonna come by and snatch them or whatever you know, and you know I think that that’s helped them a lot in their childhood, too.

Wilson County is also seen by residents as a place where you have a good amount of physical privacy from your neighbors, because the distances between most homes are great, and many houses are in fact out of sight of other houses. Many interviewees also note that they like the fact that people in Wilson County are friendly, warm, and family-oriented. Many interviewees say that they had never thought about leaving the county at any point in their lives, and almost all expressed some quite negative views of life outside Wilson County. Wilson Countians express particularly negative views of large cities, which they see as crowded, traffic-filled, scary, anonymous and unfriendly—the antithesis of their peaceful, comfortable rural community (as illustrated by 1.5).

When we were in New York, it was like, straight forward, we don’t look, we don’t speak, you know, it’s just like robots going back and forth you know. When we were getting back and forth off the subway, it’s like nobody even sees you, just back and forth, you know.

Despite their generally positive opinion of life in Wilson County, interviewees often describe outsiders in general and especially city residents as looking down on them for being from Eastern Kentucky, largely on the basis of language. Interviewees tell stories of being asked, “Where are you from?” and other less polite questions about themselves after having only a few words with people outside their community, and especially outside the rural South (see statements 1.6-9).
When I was in [a large urban area], they would look at me and say, “Where are you from?” They would say that I draw out the yes…I guess that’s what, ye-es, and they always will look at me and say, “Where are you from?” When I was going through the internship…there was a girl from [Eastern Kentucky] that was going through it as well, and I still have to brag about this. She made fun of me all the time, and I know that I put negatives together when I shouldn’t, I know that my grammar’s not like it needs to be, I try to be more careful now, especially when I’m with kids, but she made fun of me. Every time I would open my mouth, there was someone from Ohio, every time I opened my mouth up, she made fun of me. When it came down to having to take the finals [of my teaching credentials course], and pass [a] test, I felt like getting up and looking at her and saying, “I passed it, you didn’t!” That’s the way I felt like, I just wanted to look at her and say that, but I didn’t do it, I kept it in my mind, and I was nice, but I wonder if she thinks about that, now that she makes fun of me.

I’ve had bottles of pop threw at me, I’ve had people make fun of my accent.

I've gotten a lot, you know, just, “Say something again, hillbilly⁷ girl.”

When I was working in D.C., one of the guys, I was too young to know it was an insult, I thought it was funny, asked me if one of my legs was shorter than the other. And, “Uh, well, I don’t think so, but I’ve never measured them,” you know, just kind of, and he says, “I mean from walking on the hillside,”—you know, and like I said, I was so young, I didn’t realize it was an insult.

However, despite the linguistic and cultural marginalization that accompanies life there, a number of Wilson Countians are somewhat saddened by the changes that would accompany growth and make Wilson County like everywhere else (as illustrated in 1.10).

RG: Do you think that it’d be good for Wilson County for it to keep developing, the way that it is, or would you kind of like to keep it the way it is, or…?

Speaker: I’d kind of like to keep it the way it is. I think we’ve about progressed as much as I care to see…otherwise it turns into Morehead,

⁷ A pejorative term for Mountain Southerners.
Grayson, and then Morehead turns into Lexington, there we go, Huntington, there we go.

RG: And that’d be the end of any place like it…

Speaker: That’d be the end of days as we know them. My, my grandchildren and my little great-grandchildren will never know, what good times that we had.

Many people in Wilson County identify with a broader country cultural pattern that centers on nature and working-class values such as ordinariness and authenticity (cf. Fox 2002:317). Country music and home décor are very popular, and men often dress in work-wear such as Carhartt overalls and steel-toe boots even when not working. Of course, not all Wilson Countians share a clear country orientation, but even the most outward, urban-oriented interviewees express warm, positive sentiments about Wilson County and its country way of life and good people, whether they want to live there themselves or not.

This is not to suggest that everyone who grows up in Wilson County is completely enamored of everything about life there (see 1.11). Complaints that Wilson Countians have about their community include that it lacks jobs, shopping, opportunities and culture, that there is a terrible drug problem and that people gossip too much and know each other’s business.

(1.11) [Wilson] County needs to have some growth, I mean, we don’t want to be in the Dark Ages all of our life. Need to have some more opportunities come through.

Also, some people certainly grow up and dislike the county so much that they leave and never return, and are less likely to be interviewed by me. However, I did
interview several young women who say that they are likely to move outside the county in the future, and do not envision themselves returning. All are well-educated and two do not currently live in the county. We might expect them to be highly outward-oriented, but instead they express quite mixed feelings about both the county and the outside. I can attest, myself, to the deeply mixed positive and negative feelings I have about my home and my dialect, as someone who grew up in rural Eastern Kentucky but left for urban life as an adult.

The warm feelings that Wilson Countians have toward their community extend toward the local speech variety (see 1.12-14). Almost all interviewees say that they know they speak with an Eastern Kentucky accent, that they do not mind doing so, and that they would not want to change. They see dialect as natural, comforting, fun, and expected in their community. They also see the loss of traditional dialect features as a shame.

(1.12) RG: When you’re away from here, can you recognize somebody that’s from around home, by their voice, and say, that person must be from Eastern Kentucky?

Speaker: Um-hmm.

RG: Does it ever, does it feel like, ‘Aww, that sweet voice from home’? Or is it just kind of like, ‘Hmm’?

Speaker: Well I usually stop and ask them…I’ll say, “Would you happen to be from Eastern Kentucky?”, you know, I’ll say, I can tell, and usually they can tell by mine too, and usually we’ll end up stopping and having a conversation, you know, because we can tell from each others’ dialect that we’re from the same area. And that goes back to the morals and values a lot too, because how many strangers are you going to meet that you could walk up to and say, “Are you from such-and-such?” and they’re not going to be offended or think you’re crazy, you know, and you end up having a ten- or fifteen-minute conversation…
I was listening on the radio the other day, and up about Pikeville, they was having classes, teaching people how to get rid of their native accent. Why would you want to? That’s who you are…that’s who you are. Why would you want to get rid of who you are?…I’m not embarrassed about where I come from.

RG: When people will comment about your speech and stuff, how does that make you feel?…

Speaker: Oh, I’m not taken aback by it at all. Huh-uh. No, because I know what that they want. I know that there’re a lot of people out there looking for something, and possibly if they’d been raise the way I had been, and in the environment and so on, they would find it. They would know where it was at. We definitely have, around here, we definitely have a little piece of our soul that’s not missing. We got our puzzle pieces together.

Wilson Countians’ use of dialect in resistance to oppressive negative ideologies seems to be a type of self-valuation, as described by Collins (1986). Collins was describing Black women who embrace their assertiveness, the very values that others criticize them for, as a way of validating their power as human subjects.

While Wilson Countians express mostly positive sentiments about their community and their speech, they also have several criticisms of them (see 1.15-16). They appear to be more negative overall about the local dialect than they are about their community in general, seemingly due to the strength of standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997) which essentially values one ‘standard’ variety of a language and derogates all others (see Section 1.5). Interviewees describe their dialect in terms including bad, slurred together and hick and they point out that it elicits discriminatory attitudes from outsiders.
(1.15) RG: Did you ever have teachers in school that would say anything about [your accent], or...?

Speaker: No, no, pretty much not. I mean, of course, when you was in English and you didn’t say your words right, you know they’re going to correct you, and tell you how to talk, but you know that’s their job, that’s what they’re supposed to do, that’s how you’re supposed to learn...

(1.16) I don’t talk like I’d like to, I know that. Yeah, I probably draw out words, and I do forget to put the ‘–ing’ on words, but I try to be, like, sitting here talking to you, I’m trying to be more careful, uh, I think though, just having a regular conversation, that I probably uh, I don’t watch my grammar as close and I probably do draw out the words, and sometimes I even think I have that nasal sound, but I try and be real careful not to do that...I probably have that whiny sound that most people think that—yeah, I would like to be different. Would like to, I guess, study language or study the more correct way. And I’ll still make mistakes with putting two negatives together in a sentence, ‘don’t know’, so I try to be real careful with that, but as far as the sound, I probably sound, I’m pretty sure I sound just like the rest of us.

Wilson Countians are particularly negative about regional grammatical patterns (see 1.17). This appears to reflect a broader global preoccupation with prescriptive syntax norms as opposed to somewhat relaxed pronunciation norms (Sharma 2005, Rickford and Rickford 2000, Cameron 1995, Hoover 1978). Also, there are numerous elementary school teachers included in this study, and the deep involvement of elementary teachers in teaching prescriptive grammar seems to have a standardizing effect on both their language ideologies and their language use.

(1.17) RG: Do you want your kids to have an accent like we do here, or would you want them to not have it, or...?

Speaker: I don’t care so much for [=don’t mind them having] the accent, as I really would wish that their grammar, that they spoke correctly, because I think if you’re speaking correctly, the accent’s not going to be as obvious. Even though it’s still going to be there, it’s not going to sound so non-educated, or, so yeah, I do want them to be different.
Table 1.1 summarizes the characteristics that interviewees commonly use to describe Wilson County and the country more generally, and those that they commonly use to describe the city. Interviewees use a combination of negative and positive characteristics to describe both the country and the city, although the positive terms are more elaborated about the country than about the city, reflecting the community’s overall local orientation.

Table 1.1 Characteristics commonly used by interviewees to describe Wilson County and the city

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilson County/ The country</th>
<th>The city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>Convenience (businesses, hospitals, entertainment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family values</td>
<td>Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family is all here</td>
<td>Correct language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home/All I’ve ever known</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful/unspoiled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforting/natural accent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossip</td>
<td>Scary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of culture</td>
<td>Unfriendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of jobs/opportunity</td>
<td>Dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of shopping, hospital, entertainment</td>
<td>Lack of privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug problem</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect language use</td>
<td>Too much traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proper speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may appear odd that I construe the description of city speech as *correct* to be positive, while I construe the term *proper* as negative. However, this apparent contradiction is a result of the power of prescriptive language norms—Wilson Countians do not attempt to deny that city speech is correct (at least in terms of grammar), but
instead they often invert the value judgment attached to correct speech and describe it with the word *proper*, using a tone of disapproval. If interviewees do take a supportive stance toward city speech, they seem more likely to use the word *correct*.

Interviewees describe local speech as being natural, comforting and fun *despite* its incorrectness, rather than explicitly reevaluating incorrect speech as *good*. Individual speakers express particularly mixed feelings about the local accent, as compared to life in the county more generally, which highlights the extent to which subordinate groups take up mainstream ideologies about language.

Interview evidence indicates that the characteristics used to describe the country and the city play out in fractally recursive ways (Irvine and Gal 2000, Gal and Irvine 1995). For example, the larger the city, the more likely it is that Wilson Countians will imagine it to be intimidating and its residents unfriendly (as illustrated by 1.18).

(1.18) **RG:** Have you traveled to [some of the other towns in the area?] How do you think they compare, in those kind of towns around that are a little bit bigger?

**Speaker:** Yeah, people are rude […]

**RG:** And what about if you went to […] bigger cities?

**Speaker:** It’s even worse.

Country-city distinctions play out within Wilson County as well, so that residents from further into the hills or from outside the county seat are seen as more hick (see 1.19), and those from the county seat and the flatter part of the county are seen as more sophisticated and modern.
(1.19) RG: So, do you think that some people in the county have more of an accent than other people in the county?

Speaker: Yes.

RG: What do you think it is that makes the difference?

Speaker: […] I think the deeper in the holler you get, the worse it gets. […] Here in [the county seat], I feel like I have less of one than someone from [a small community out in the county]. […] They’re, like, on top of a mountain.

Although Wilson Countians express a mixture of both positive and negative statements about their home and its local dialect, as well as about the city and mainstream speech, they are on the whole embracing toward the community and its speech and negative toward big cities and city people’s speech. This strong local orientation seems to be driven by how well the community fits stereotypes about Mountain and rural Southern communities, and how frequently and bluntly residents are confronted with their profound Other-ness. Cultural and linguistic marginalization seems to trigger an oppositional reaction. The quote in (1.20) illustrates that Wilson Countians’ positive orientation to dialect can be construed as part of an oppositional, value-inverting strategy for dealing with outsiders’ negative comments. Wilson Countians realize that they do not fit into the outside world and that outsiders often are discriminatory, thoughtless and degrading. In many ways, rather than rejecting marginalizing notions about themselves, they accept them, but invert the value judgments and play up more positive aspects, such as friendliness, privacy, safety, peacefulness, family-orientation and nature, while playing down more negative aspects, such as poverty, lack of education and lack of sophistication. This strategy allows them to maintain self-esteem in the face of negative evaluations by outsiders of themselves and their home.
(1.20) I have been guilty of talking more hillbilly, that’s really not how I talk, just because someone’s made me mad. They’ve upset me. You know, when I get the feeling that they’re being degrading […] I’m like, so, you think this is bad? […] So I have been guilty of that. Not, not a whole lot recently, but I done it a lot when I was younger, just because it made me upset that they were having a derogatory… […] I don’t do it a whole lot now, but I guess, if somebody hit me the right way at the right time, I have enough spitefulness in me that I probably would do it again.

The strategy of opposing mainstream modern, urban values with working-class, rural ones is not one that is unique to Wilson Countians—residents hear messages throughout the media and the commercial world marketing a country, Mountain and Southern ethos, which also invert value judgments about urbanity, poverty, education, and modernization more broadly (cf. Fox 2004, Kirby 1995). Country music is one of the most popular forms of music in the nation. There is much impetus for corporations to put Southern-sounding, cowboy-hat-wearing singers and traditional-values-extolling country personalities on TV, on stage and in print. Despite its roots in regional folk music, country is certainly now big business. Wilson Countians’ sense that they are country people may be driven in part by corporate country.

Stigmatization at the hands of outsiders, along with a strong sense of insiders and outsiders and a concomitant orientation toward the inside (and its speech), also occur in small, isolated Southern communities other than Wilson County. After noticing that traditional dialect features were used a great deal in other isolated Southern Mountain and island communities, including Beech Bottom and Ocracoke Island (also in North Carolina), Wolfram (2003:143-143) developed the concept of “historical dialect enclave communities,” with the following characteristics (1.21):
Characteristics of historical dialect enclave communities (summarized from Wolfram 2003)

1) geographic remoteness
2) economic self-sufficiency
3) sufficient time depth and historical continuity for the establishment of linguistic divergence from wider sociospatial population groups
4) limited in-migration
5) dense and multiplex social networks
6) low social status relative to the national mainstream
7) a strong sense of “insiders” and “outsiders”
8) heavy emphasis on community-internal social and linguistic norms which then sets up “sociopsychological (and often linguistic) barriers against the encroachment of the outside world.”

The majority of these apply to Wilson County, including stigmatization by outsiders (attribute 6) and sociopsychological and linguistic barriers against the outside (attribute 8).

Also pointing to the connection between linguistic marginalization and oppositional reaction, Luhman (1990:346), examining language attitudes to Appalachian English in Kentucky, wrote of Appalachians:

The fact that many Appalachians have temporarily lived elsewhere and experienced negative stereotypes and prejudice toward their group creates and additional factor regarding in-group attitudes toward a nonstandard variety that can play a role in the vitality and maintenance of that variety. Knowledge of negative stereotypes about a group’s speech exist elsewhere can serve to increase the level of in-group solidarity rather than decrease it [sic]. The vitality of Appalachian English is only hinted at by the findings of this study. [...] negative experiences and stereotypes typically encountered by speakers of Appalachian English...serve to strengthen ethnic identification and group boundaries; in such social settings, linguistic differences become important boundary markers that require careful cultivation. (Emphasis added)
Relating his experience with linguistic and cultural marginalization, as well as his oppositional reaction, Lynch (1994:141), an Eastern Kentucky native, wrote in the *Southern Quarterly*:

While traveling through Florida nearly four years ago, I struck up a conversation with a sales clerk that ultimately revealed the disdain that many Americans feel for those who hail from culturally scorned or economically depressed regions. The conversation itself began amiably enough. We talked about the weather, nearby beaches, the store’s merchandise—until, to break a momentary silence, *he looked me in the eye and inquired about the state that I called home*. Proudly, I answered that I was from Kentucky, only to watch him walk away without so much as a backward glance.

At the time, I was not insulted so much by his contempt for the state of my birth as by his audacity in dismissing me on the basis of an implied association with the stereotypical mountain residents who are the basis of Kentucky’s national reputation. There was nothing in my dress or manner to indicate any link whatsoever to the state’s Appalachian region. The fact that the clerk made such an association in the absence of the native accent, the most telling characteristic if all, was further proof of the arbitrary nature of any sort to ethnic, racial or regional prejudice. Judging from his attitude, the presence of such an accent would have prevented us from having any sort of conversation at all.

Any society that is ridiculed on the basis of its language is in danger of cultural repression. *Little wonder, then, that first-generation immigrants and member of ethnic subcultures cling so tightly to their native tongue, preserving their traditional ways in the face of a pervasive and often violent prejudice.* As a Kentuckian with Appalachian roots, I have learned that such intolerance has shaped and continues to shape the way Americans think about the state and its people. (Emphasis added)

Further demonstrating a country inversion of cultural values, a family member forwarded me an email that contained numerous ‘redneck humor’ jokes about Kentucky, and at the end, it read, “EVERYONE can't be a Kentuckian; it takes talent. You might say it’s an art form or a gift from God!” There is also a Facebook page called “I am From Eastern Kentucky and Damn Proud of it!” Among other things, it proclaims, “If
you have to take the Mountain Parkway to go home, this is the club for you. We love our accents, we still call it *pop* and not *soda*, we know people that make moonshine, and we are damn proud of it!,” and “Welcome to the elite group for people from the BEST part of Kentucky!!” A poster on the page complains about the marginalizing stereotypes of Eastern Kentucky portrayed by the television show *American Idol*, and her decision to boycott the show (see 1.22):

(1.22) **Facebook post on group “I am From Eastern Kentucky and Damn Proud of it!”**

Did anyone else see the disgusting portrayal of Eastern Kentucky on American Idol this week? […] the American Idol camera crew without Paula, Randy, Simon, or Ryan goes to Letcher County KY. What do they find? A broken down school bus in someones [sic] yard with grass grown up around it, and a toothless illiterate woman. […] *Idol came to further spread the untrue stereotypes that all Kentuckians are toothless, illiterate, pregnant and barefoot hillbillies.* Personally I am sick of this. […] The culture of the people in the Eastern part of this State is a rich and beautiful culture, and I am sick and tired of feeling like we are the only people that are aware of it. So what to do? I'm really not sure, but I know that I will never be watching American Idol again. Personally I am not a big fan of boycotts because I don't believe that they work, but as a personal choice I am so disgusted with the program that my TV will not tune it [sic] ever again.

Indeed, Americans (Southern and non-Southern alike) have long described Southerners in general as oppositionally oriented toward the rest of the US, using terms like *defensive* (Montgomery 1993:50), *contentious* (ibid.), *countercultural* (Kirby 1995) and *unwilling to go along* (Ayers 1971:71). The Confederate flag is nicknamed the *Rebel Flag* and no one has forgotten that the South attempted to secede from the Union. Illustrating the link between Southern oppositional identity and marginalizing stereotypes, historian Ayers (1996:71) wrote:
When Southerners meet people from other places they know that those non-Southerners know the stories too—and believe some of them. One Virginian who went to Harvard in the early 1980s fantasized about putting a sign around his neck to foreclose some of the questions he repeatedly faced, or imagined he faced: “Yes, I am from the South. No, I do not know your uncle in Mobile. No, I was not born there. Both of my parents, in fact, are literate. No, I do not own slaves. No, I do not want any. Thank you very much. Have a nice day.” He concluded that the sign strategy would not work, though, “because everyone would think someone else had written it for me, probably so I wouldn’t have to memorize it.”

Research also suggests that Southerners are not alone among minority groups and their strong sense of oppositional internal norms. Woolard (1985:744) points out that minority communities typically enforce in-group language norms strongly:

…it is as important to produce the correct vernacular forms in the private, local arenas of the working-class neighborhoods or peasant communities as it is to produce the official form in formal domains. That there are significant social pressures toward the vernacular has been evidenced in three types of data: actual language behavior, spontaneous overt community censorship, and subjective reactions.

Similarly, Ogbu (2004) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have noted that some African American high school students reject white language and culture norms, and form an oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference, in reaction to racism and poverty. Minority groups in general may tend to uphold in-group norms in reaction to the marginalizing and painful experiences tied to group membership. We should consider oppressive marginalization to be a force driving group identity in other sociolinguistic studies as well, since, as Bucholtz and Hall (2004:371) point out, “When individuals decide to organize themselves into a group, they are driven not by some pre-existing and recognizable similarity but by agency and power.”
By exploring how Wilson Countians may view their poverty differently than the rest of the world does, and by highlighting that residents are not generally particularly eager to see urbanization and industrialization, I do not intend to suggest that there is nothing problematic about their poverty. Not having enough money to eat decent meals or have health care or leisure time are certainly problems for many residents. Farm work and manual labor are grueling and dangerous, and fathers are often gone from families for weeks at a time. A lack of education would seem to inhibit numerous residents from making fully empowered decisions about their lives. The lack of stable work and entertainment has recently helped foster a significant prescription drug problem in the county, and there have been numerous drug-related home invasions and murders.

Furthermore, poverty combined with residents’ strong local orientation can result in some people feeling or being “stuck”, such that the idea of leaving becomes simply unthinkable to them, whether they are happy in Wilson County or not (see 1.23).

(1.23) Speaker: I think that’s why some people get stuck here, because there’s brain drain, and they don’t think they can do anything else, so they just waste away in Wilson County.

RG: What do you mean?

Speaker: Like they feel like they’re stuck. Um, or they don’t have enough money to get out of college, or to get out of here…where it’s such a small area, and it’s so far away, from like, anything else, you know, I think that’s why people get stuck here, or […] get on drugs and stuff, and stay here, is because they just don’t feel like they can go anywhere else, don’t have the money to do anything else…

When other scholars have examined the poverty in the Appalachian Mountains, they have arrived at an array of explanations. These include a culture of poverty, which held that isolation led to cultural traits such as stubbornness and extreme individualism,
which then trap residents in poverty (e.g. Weller 1966). Explanations have also included structural factors such as outside collusion with corrupt local elites and difficulty in transitioning from subsistence farming (Billings and Blee 2000), as well as economic exploitation and absentee resource ownership (Gaventa 1982). Scholars have also pointed out that there is rampant discrimination against the region’s residents due to marginalizing popular and commercial stereotypes about hillbillies, dating back to the early twentieth century (Shapiro 1978, Batteau 1990), and my project follows this line of work, although it also acknowledges that all of the structural factors are likely to play a role in shaping Wilson Countians’ lives, and thus their language, as well.

If we ask why the United States and other nations are continuously compelled to imagine their rural areas and inhabitants as old-fashioned, quaint, backwards, unsophisticated, friendly, homey, and so on, it seems that this ideological process has many benefits for non-rural people. Non-rural people get to envision rural people as an Other, someone against whom they can feel civilized, modern, and tolerant. They also get to imagine that there are still fascinatingly archaic and unspoiled places, which helps ease alienation associated with modern urban and suburban life. Regarding the South, Ayers (1996:70) writes:

Stories about the South tend to be stories about what it means to be modern. The South often appears as the locus of the nonmodern (as in so much country music or in Mayberry, R.F.D. or The Waltons), or of the modern world gone bad (as in Deliverance or Cape Fear or Walker Percy’s novels). People have long projected onto the South their longing for a place free from the pressures of making a profit, free from loneliness and isolation; for just as long, others have projected onto the South the disgust, and maybe anxiety, they feel toward those who are unable or unwilling to keep up with the headlong rush into the future.

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8 A spin-off of the Andy Griffith Show.
Adding further incentive for the nation to marginalize rural Southerners, the nation gets to profit from drawing resources (coal, timber) out of the region with little environmental or safety accountability, or local investment—cultural marginalization seems to both support and be supported by economic exploitation of Wilson Countians and other Mountain Southerners. As Kentucky writer and critic Wendell Berry (1990:54-5) wrote:

[…] it has been possible for […] writers to write so exploitatively, condescendingly and contemptuously of their regions and their people as virtually to prepare the way for worse exploitation by their colleagues in other industries. *If it’s a god-forsaken boondocks full of ignorant hillbillies, or a god-forsaken desert populated by a few culturally deprived ranchers, why not strip mine it?* [Emphasis added]

Overall, there is a strong degree of local cultural and linguistic orientation in Wilson County, driven by an array of factors, although residents do express negative views on their community and its speech and particularly on regional grammatical patterns. The strong local orientation appears to be motivated in part because Wilson Countians are frequently forced to confront negative stereotypes about themselves. The county resembles an archetypically rural Southern or Mountain community in many ways, and joblessness and proximity to the edge of the Mountain and the South lead residents to be confronted frequently with negative stereotypes of themselves. Furthermore, it is acceptable to comment on strangers’ speech patterns, and there is little taboo attached to marginalizing rural Southern whites (Lippi-Green 1997). Although they partially accept marginalizing messages as negative, Wilson Countians also invert the value judgments associated with rural stereotypes and characterize their county as a
wonderful, safe, peaceful place to live, while downplaying its negative aspects. Other factors are likely to contribute to the strong degree of local orientation in Wilson County as well. For example, country stereotypes benefit corporate interests seeking to profit directly by selling stereotypical images, and by keeping rural Southerners from gaining the social power to control their own resources, as well as their own labor and environmental safety. Country culture is heavily mass-market ed through music, clothing, home decorations, and so on, informing residents in the rural South that they are in the country, and encouraging them to feel positively about that fact.

1.3. RELEVANT SPEECH VARIETIES.

1.3.1. SOUTHERN SPEECH. Wilson Countians generally recognize themselves as Southerners and their speech as Southern (although they most frequently describe their accent as hick, Eastern Kentucky or Wilson County.) Southern English is spoken roughly in a band from Virginia to Texas. Scholars have proposed that the South’s distinctive speech patterns reflect its settlement primarily by Northern British immigrants (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998), as well as the influence of a large African-American population (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998, Dillard 1975).

The use of monophthongal /ay/ (night, rise) has become a sort of shibboleth of Southern speech (Bernstein 2006). This monophthongization of /ay/ is thought to have begun in the Appalachian mountain region, and set off a chain of vowel changes still in progress across the South, known today as the Southern Vowel Shift (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006). The Southern Shift is thought to have begun with the change of /ay/ from a diphthong with a low-back nucleus and a high-front offglide, to a low-central
monophthong (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:242-4). Then in a pull chain shift, the
nucleus of /i/ and then /e/ move down and the nuclei of the front lax vowels move into
that vowel space (ibid.). Southern English is also reported to contain a wide range of
other features, such as y’all, vowel breaking [bad \rightarrow [bæd], look \rightarrow [lʊk]], and the
merger of pen and pin. It has been divided into an Inland (or Upland, Mountain, etc.)
variety, which is /r/-ful and uses monophthongal /ay/ before voiceless consonants, and a
Coastal variety, which is /r/-less among many older speakers, and avoids pre-voiceless
monophthongal /ay/ (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006).

Southern English is the most salient regional dialect of American English (Preston
1997, 1996). It is also the American regional dialect most commonly pointed out as bad
or incorrect.9 The Mountain or Inland South variety tends to be most closely associated
with ignorance and backwardness, but it seems to have “risen to the status of
representative of southern speech in general” (Bonfiglio 2002:234). In contrast, the
Coastal variety, with its associations with Gone With the Wind and plantation owners
(Feagin 2003), may be dying out (Bonfiglio 2002).

1.3.2. MIDLAND SPEECH. Linguists have posited the existence of a Midland dialect, with
varying boundaries. Most generously, it stretches from Delaware to Nebraska and
Kansas (cf. Murray and Simon 2006). It is usually divided into North and South Midland
dialects, separated roughly by the Ohio River. Features claimed to be most closely
associated with the Midland dialect region include the needs-Xed construction (my car
needs washed), 2nd person plural you’ns, and positive anymore (I go there a lot anymore)

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9 It is likely that African American Vernacular English, an ethnic, non-regional variety, is equally or more
salient and marginalized in America (cf. Rickford and Rickford 2000, Lippi-Green 1997)
Midland English is different from Southern English, in that Midland English is generally discussed only by linguists, and not by the general American public. Speech in the region described as the Midwest, which includes the posited North Midland dialect, is frequently considered the basis for Standard American English, and its features are largely socially unmarked (diphthongal /ay/, /r/-fulness, /ow/-fronting, *caught/cot* merger). In fact, Midland English is frequently defined using negative, rather than positive, criteria: it is the area where many Northern and Southern features are not found (Murray and Simon 2006). There are also many city-specific speech features in the North Midlands region. Those who posit Midland English’s existence do so on the basis of far fewer isoglosses than typically delineate Northern and Southern speech (Murray and Simon 2006:4-5). Speech in the South Midland dialect area is roughly contiguous with the dialect of the Inland South and it shares more features and stereotypes with the rest of the South than with the Midwest.

There has been significant controversy over whether 1) the Midland dialect is a valid construct, 2) it instead represents a transitional zone between the North and the South, or 3) it was once a valid entity linked to settlement patterns but has now dissolved due to the loss of traditional lexical features that originally distinguished it (cf. Murray and Simon 2006). The issue remains unresolved among linguists, but evidence seems strongest for treating the North Midland dialect area as a separate entity and including the South Midland dialect as part of Southern English.
1.3.3 Appalachian Speech. Since the seventies, linguists have published a number of works on Appalachian English (Hazen and Fluharty 2004, Montgomery 1997, Wolfram and Christian 1976) but it is likely that their use of this notion was influenced by popular cultural ideas about Appalachian distinctiveness more than an impartial examination of feature isoglosses. Certain features associated with Appalachian speech are shared by Midland speech, including /r/-fulness, second-person-plural you’ns (Wolfram and Christian 1976), and the cot/caught merger (Hazen 2005); more features are shared by Southern speech, including monophthongal /ay/, the pin-pen merger, and y’all (Wolfram and Christian 1976). Many speech features associated with the Appalachian area are also common across the South Midland or Inland South area, extending all the way to Texas (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006). A large number of these features probably originated in the Appalachian area, which was populated by relatively high numbers of Scotch-Irish, and low numbers of African Americans, and then moved westward as large numbers of those people migrated in that direction (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998). It seems more accurate to discuss this bundle of linguistic features as Inland South.

Scholars who have worked on language in the Appalachian area recently have indeed struggled with how to label it. Hazen (2006) notes that many traditional grammatical features in West Virginia are disappearing, and labels Appalachian Heritage Language a moribund dialect. He refers to the collection of distinctive local speech varieties now used in West Virginia as Appalachian Englishes. However, this term does not acknowledge that Appalachia is not an ethnologically-valid concept.¹⁰ Wilson

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¹⁰ Linguistic anthropologist Puckett [2003:541] writes that, “Historically, both Appalachia and Appalachian English are […] non-indigenous lexemes not recognized by community residents or, if recognized, used under systems of metapragmatic awareness and linguistic ideological construction that conform to the
Countians do not generally call themselves Appalachian and frequently appear to relate to the concept uncomfortably, based on their tone of voice when they use the term. Far more frequently, as noted above, they refer to themselves as Eastern Kentuckians, and sometimes as hillbillies, both of which are related to the stigma of the Mountain South; within Kentucky, Eastern Kentuckians are stigmatized as uneducated and backward.

This might seem to indicate the importance of Appalachia as a concept, but people living in the Ozarks experience a very similar marginalization. Furthermore, many of the culture and language norms of the Mountain South, as well as its stereotypes, are shared by people in non-mountainous regions of the Inland South, including Texas, even though those people are not seen as Mountain people. Indeed, Preston’s (1998) perceptual dialectology maps show Americans distinguishing a Southern dialect region, but perceiving no clear internal divisions within that category. Notions about Appalachians are not that different from notions about Southerners in general, but rather, an intensified version of them.

Montgomery has recently moved from using the term Appalachian English to Smoky Mountain English, which is more firmly grounded in the psychosocial reality of the speakers he studies (Montgomery and Hall 2004, Montgomery, p.c.). I follow this lead and use local categories such as an Eastern Kentucky accent or a Southern accent.

1.5. IDEOLOGY. Interviewees made numerous similar statements explicitly or implicitly acknowledging the superiority of standard language, at least in terms of grammar. Indeed, standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997:64) is extremely common around

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linguistic ideologies of their communities and networks rather than those of scholars or governmental officials.”
the world and functions as a sort of gate-keeping mechanism, limiting access to power to those who are able to use language in the ‘correct’ way. A competing ideology in Wilson County holds that local speech is natural and comforting, and that standard language is stiff, formal and affected. These and other ideologies are embedded in a larger, internally intricate ideological system. Notions about Southerners relate to food, clothing, speech, race, sexuality, religion, politics, sports, music, humor, politeness, and almost every realm of life. These systems of ideas become linked according to strong, coherent, and complex logics, so that when they are transferred from one level of experience to another, they are borrowed along with long chains of other, related ideas. In other words, when we think about Appalachian people, it is easy to draw on notions about Southerners and rural people more generally, and apply them to Appalachian people in a wide range of ways.

Another observation supported by this study is that our ideological systems tend to favor dichotomous oppositions (Collins 1986), so that for example, complex webs of ideas about rural places mirror inverse complex webs of ideas about urban places. The dichotomizing nature of ideology frequently contributes to oppressive marginalization, as inter-group and intra-group differences are erased, two separate groups are constructed, and one group is valued above the other (Collins 1986). This phenomenon is evident in the construction of the North versus the South, the urban versus the rural, and the city versus the country.

Generally speaking, I envision ideologies as large-scale, complex, power-structured system of ideas and discourses about the world, which can include both descriptive and prescriptive components, and exist at varying levels of consciousness.
They can also exist on the level of the individual as well as the social group. I arrived at this definition because I want to describe ideologies about hillbillies, the South, Southern speech, the North, standard language, the country, the city, poor people and so on. In reference to hillbillies, for example, I want a definition of ideology that is broad enough to include (at least) how a given individual talks about hillbillies, how I estimate her to talk, feel, and think (consciously and unconsciously) about them, and how people in broader society tend to talk and feel about hillbillies. Some scholars have limited use of the term ideology only to mental/ideational notions (Thompson 1984) or explicitly expressed notions (Briggs 1998, Silverstein 1979), but others (Kroskrity 1998, Lippi-Green 1997) have also found it useful to treat ideology as having social and unconscious facets as well.

A key social aspect of ideology in Wilson County is the fact that discourses surrounding place and language appear to represent highly conventionalized local practices, observable from the interview data I collected. Interviewees touch on a number of the same themes repeatedly, regardless of their age or education level, and separate individuals’ comments are overall much more similar than they are different. The fact that people from Wilson County are prompted by outsiders to talk relatively often about both language and place appears to drive them to develop and share elaborate ideological practices surrounding those topics in particular.

While some scholars have treated ideology as negative, and as trapping people in subordinate social positions (Thompson 1984, Althusser ([1969] 1971), I describe how Wilson Countians adapt popular ideologies about themselves in ways that help them cope with oppressive marginalization. Therefore, I describe ideology as *power-structured*, but,
following scholars such as Eagleton (1991) and Geertz ([1964] 1973), I am agnostic as to whether a given ideology is necessarily harmful when applied in real life.

1.6. METHODS. To examine language use in Wilson County, I conducted interviews of approximately one hour in length with thirty community members. I contacted interviewees through the friend-of-a-friend method (Milroy 1980). I conducted interviews in the homes of interviewees, preferably in quiet areas with other family members not present. However, several interviews were conducted in offices and schoolrooms, and one was conducted in a fast-food restaurant. Sometimes other family members can be heard on recordings. I recorded the interviews with a Lavalier lapel microphone on a Marantz PMD 660 digital recorder into .wav format, sampled at 44,100 Hz. The first approximately thirty minutes of the interviews consisted of general conversation about life and culture in EC (see Appendix 2 for the interview schedule). This was followed by overt discussion of a wide range of issues surrounding language, both the local accent and other accents.

I measure speakers’ monophthongization of the vowel /ay/ before voiceless consonants (right→[ra(:)t], like→[la(:)k]), their pronunciation of the vowel /a/ (with regard to fronting and raising), and their use of the grammatical feature was-leveling (we was, kids was). Combining the two vowel variables allows me to examine the effect of salience within vowel variation, because /ay/-monophthongization is highly salient in Wilson County, whereas variation in /a/ is relatively non-salient. Adding was-leveling to the study permits me to compare morphosyntactic variation with phonetic variation.
I interpret speech patterns in light of the social analysis I detailed in this chapter; statistical correlations with age group and education level; individual speakers’ life trajectories, occupations, ideological stances, as well as their particular combinations of speech features; and other studies’ findings about these variables. Methods that are specific to individual variables are discussed within the chapters devoted to those variables.

I stratified the set of interviews with regard to age (18-24, 30-45, 55-70) and education (half of the participants had at least a two-year college degree, and half did not). I interviewed only females, because gender has also been shown to be a significant dimension for language variation (Cheshire 2002), so by eliminating this variable I am keeping my project at a manageable scale. I chose females rather than males because females have generally been shown to demonstrate broader patterns of language variation than men (Cheshire 2002). Also, I believed females would be more likely to establish rapport with me as a female interviewer.

My perceptions as a native speaker of the regional dialect helped me in the perceptual analysis of /ay/-monophthongization. My rapport with interviewees benefited from the fact that I still speak with a Southern accent (as I am frequently informed in California); several interviewees complimented me on having kept my accent despite leaving. They laughed, discussed common bonds with me, provided personal histories, shared their opinions and feelings quite freely and used relatively colloquial speech. Of course the interview context was more formal than an everyday conversation with family or friends. Speakers likely have more colloquial speech styles than those that I recorded, which involve greater use of local features. Since Wilson Countians’ phonology is
already heavily regionally-accented, more colloquial speech styles would probably show an increase in local grammatical features such as was-leveling.
CHAPTER 2: PRE-VOICELESS /ay/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION

2.1. INTRODUCTION. Southerners frequently pronounce the vowel /ay/ as a monophthong, [a] or [a:], at least when it occurs before voiced consonants in the same syllable, and before pauses.\(^{11}\) In contrast, Non-Southern whites typically pronounce /ay/ with a significant fronting offglide (resulting in pronunciations such as [ay] or [ai]\(^{12}\)), in all phonological environments. The monophthongization of /ay/ is one of the most widely stereotyped features of Southern American English (Bernstein 2006:210; Thomas 2001:34, Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998).\(^{13}\) Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998:69) note that “Southern Americans are perhaps more well known for their pronunciation of /ay/ as [a]…than for any other dialect feature.” In the interviews I conducted with the speakers in this study, /ay/-monophthongization stands out as an important social symbol, both in terms of what outsiders criticize speakers for doing, and in terms of how they identify themselves as Wilson Countians. Interviewees in this study talk about /ay/-monophthongization as much as or more than they do about any other feature of the local accent.\(^{14}\) The monophthongization of /ay/ seems to act as a lightning rod for criticism of rural Eastern Kentuckians. In my own experience growing up in rural Eastern Kentucky, and being from there as I lived and traveled away, I heard people talk about /ay/ more than any other feature of my county’s speech, and I have long

\(^{11}\) Sometimes Southerners pronounce monophthongal /ay/ with a short or weakened offglide, resulting in a pronunciation such as [ae] (Wells 1982:537, Kurath and McDavid 1961:109-110, as cited by Bernstein 2006:212).

\(^{12}\) Kurath and McDavid (1961:109-110, as cited by Bernstein 2006:212)

\(^{13}\) Researchers have referred to this feature by various names, including glide-shortening (Bernstein 2006), ungliding (Hazen 2006, Mallinson and Wolfram 2002), glide-weakening (Thomas 2001), and monophthongization (Irons 2007; Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Anderson 2002; Wells 1982).

\(^{14}\) But they do not seem to be consciously aware of the social significance of the phonological environment following /ay/.
noticed my own and others’ variation in /ay/ more frequently than that of any other variable.

I provide an in-depth sociophonetic analysis of /ay/-monophthongization in Wilson County, combining quantitative and qualitative methodology, because the pronunciation of /ay/ seems to be a key locus of ideological and social struggle for Wilson Countians, and is an ideal variable to consider in this study that seeks to understand the social embedding of this stigmatized regional dialect. Despite their stories about outsiders’ frequent, often negative, commentary on their pronunciation of /ay/, Wilson County speakers use the feature almost categorically, and several explicitly embrace it as part of the local dialect. Indeed, I remember that when I was a child, other children would mock the idea of people from Ohio\(^{15}\), whom we saw as snotty, by saying things such as, “Oh, I’m from Ohio,” with a sarcastic tone and an exaggerated diphthongal /ay/. (The most common local pronunciations of the word *Ohio* are [ɔhaː] and [ʌhaː].)

This study focuses on /ay/-monophthongization before voiceless consonants for several reasons. I wished to capture socially-meaningful variation, and previous studies indicate that pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization is much more socially stratified in the South than is use of the feature in other contexts. For example, the monophthongization of /ay/ before voiceless consonants has generally been associated with rural (Irons 2007:4, Thomas 1997, Hazen and Hall 1999), Inland (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:246), lower-class (Pederson 1993, as cited in Bernstein 2003:222) and less-

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\(^{15}\) The nearest Northern state, where many local men work.
educated (ibid.:224) Southerners. Although pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization is used most by Southerners in groups with relatively low social prestige, use of the feature appears to spreading in the last few decades, especially in rural areas of the South (Irons 2007, Thomas 1997). This study suggests that regional pride (driven by an oppositional reaction to marginalization) may be motivating rural Southerners’ increase in the use of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization. Data from this and other studies (Irons 2007, Thomas 1997) also indicate that rural speakers are leading this language change, in contrast to the general trend of urban-led changes in North America (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006). In addition, preliminary analyses of all phonological environments indicated that the use of monophthongal /ay/ was almost categorical. Therefore, narrowing my study to the pre-voiceless context helped me to focus on controlling for other language-internal factors including the following consonant’s place (front/back) or manner (fricative/stop) of articulation.

2.2. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF /ay/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION. In order to determine the social significance of /ay/-monophthongization in Wilson County, it is helpful to understand where and when the feature has been noted by other researchers in the US, and to be aware of and control for any possible language-internal factors driving or shaping the use of the feature. Therefore in this section I present historical and linguistic information about /ay/-monophthongization in the US, as well as a description of the social and geographic factors that have been found to influence use of the feature.

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16 Pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization has also been associated with piney woods region (Bernstein 2006:221, Thomas 2001:37), which is just South of the Ozark Mountain region, and includes East Texas, Southern Arkansas, Western Louisiana, and Southeastern Oklahoma (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piney_Woods).
2.2.1. **History and Linguistic Description of /ay/-Monophthongization.**

Southerners are thought to have begun using monophthongal /ay/, in all contexts except before voiceless consonants, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the feature is reported to have become broadly characteristic of Southern speech by World War II (Bailey and Tillery 1996:313). Use of the monophthong before voiceless consonants is presumed to have arisen later, although it is not clear exactly when (Thomas 2001:37). Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006:240) theorize that the emergence of this feature triggered the chain of Southern vowel changes known as the Southern Vowel Shift, in which the nuclei of the front tense and lax vowels change places (such that beet $\rightarrow$ [bεɪt] and bit $\rightarrow$ [biət], for example).

Thomas (2001:38) describes Southern monophthongal (or glide-weakened, short gliding, etc.) realizations of the /ay/ as varying among [á:], [a:], [æ:] and [á:æ], and Wells (1982:537) described them as lying on a continuum from [a(:)] to [aâ]. For many speakers there appears to be a (violable) sonority-related hierarchy of environments favoring monophthongal /ay/ in the South, as shown in (2.1), from most likely to be monophthongized on the left, to least likely, on the right

(2.1) **Sonority hierarchy for /ay/-Monophthongization in the South (Hazen 2004:66)**

\[
\text{Pause}^{17} > \text{Liquid} > \text{Nasal} > \text{Voiced obstruent} > \text{Voiceless obstruent}^{18}
\]

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17 This context has not always been included in studies of /ay/ in the South.
18 Hazen (2004:65) finds that the effect of the following phonological environment is observable across syllable boundaries (although in a weakened form), so that /ay/ is more likely to monophthongize in *high school* than in *heist*. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus only on the same-syllable context.
Moreton and Thomas (to appear) hypothesize that the use of the monophthong in the South is driven by the phonologization of a phonetic difference. They notice that the glide of /ay/ is realized higher and fronter before voiceless consonants than in other contexts, and at the same time, that the pre-voiceless context shortens the vowel duration, allowing coarticulatory pressures to have a greater effect overall on the perceptual character of the vowel. According to their theory, as language learners hear the resulting differences in offglide realization and vowel quality, they interpret the pre-voiced and open-syllable contexts as requiring categorically different vowel sounds, one with and one without an offglide, instead of filtering the variation out as phonetic noise.

This explanation for the Southern monophthongization pattern is attractive because it links the phenomenon to other, supposedly similar vowel changes, specifically Canadian Raising and the Great Vowel Shift, on the basis of physiological and cognitive pressures. This explanation also accounts for why the monophthongal variant occurred in the pre-voiced environment first, and then spread to the pre-voiceless one. However, it remains unclear why voiceless codas appear to front and raise /ay/ offglides, although Moreton and Thomas suggest that it is related to a broader pattern of exaggerated articulations before voiceless consonants (which itself remains unexplained). Also, Moreton and Thomas’ proposed explanation for /ay/-monophthongization does not account for the extension of monophthongization to pre-voiceless environments, as observed in Wilson County and other parts of the Inland South.

2.2.2. GEOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL DISTRIBUTION OF MONOPHTHONGAL /ay/. Linguists have found that speakers use high rates of /ay/-monophthongization before voiced consonants
(and pauses when assessed) all across the South (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:246; Bernstein 2006:220-221, based on Thomas [2001]; Wells 1982:537).\textsuperscript{19} Atlas data indicates that /ay/-monophthongization before voiced consonants and pause is frequent across the South and relatively rare outside it (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:246).\textsuperscript{20} Pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization is more geographically and socially limited than monophthongization in the pre-voiced/pause environment. Quantitative findings from many existing studies of /ay/-monophthongization in the US are presented in Table 2.1.

\textsuperscript{19} Studies have generally noted low rates of pre-voiced /ay/-monophthongization only in certain urban areas (Irons 2007, Baranowski 2000). Irons (2007:10) shows low levels of pre-voiced /ay/-monophthongization in the areas of the state surrounding the cities of Louisville, Lexington, Bowling Green, Henderson, and along the Ohio River from Ashland to Cincinnati. Baranowski (2008:36), in Charleston, South Carolina finds his sample of 100 interviewees using /ay/-monophthongization in an average of 6% of their pre-voiced and open-syllable toks of /ay/, and fifty-two Charleston people surveyed on the street using the feature in that context only 6% of the time.

## Table 2.1. Rates of /ay/-monophthongization in various communities of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker group or sub-group, number of speakers, study (see Appendix 1 for a list of abbreviations)</th>
<th>Pre-voiceless n</th>
<th>Pre-voiced n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roaring Creek, NC Euro. Amer. (Mallinson &amp; Wolfram 2002)</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech Bottom, NC Afr. Amer. (Mallinson &amp; Wolfram 2002)</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit Afr. Amer. men age 20-45 (Anderson 2002)</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit Afr. Amer. girls age 4-7 (Anderson 2002)</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robeson County, NC Euro. Amer. (Schilling-Estes 2000)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern KY (Irons 2007)</td>
<td>78%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit Afr. Amer. (Anderson 2002)</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So. Midlanders (Bernstein 2006, based on Thomas 2001)</td>
<td>66%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Anglos (Bernstein 2006, based on Thomas 2001)</td>
<td>63%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, GA mill villagers (Dupree McNair 2005)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Town and rural' Texas Anglos age 18-29 (Thomas 1997)*</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texana, NC Afr. Amer. (Childs &amp; Mallinson 2004)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis Afr. Amer. (Fridland 2003)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Anglos (Thomas 1997)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, GA farmers (Dupree McNair 2005)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So’erners (Bernstein 2006)</td>
<td>37%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class AL (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class Southerners (Bernstein 2006)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So’ern Whites (Bernstein 2006)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So’erners ages 46-70 (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class So’erners (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX sorority women (Gregory &amp; Bernstein 1993)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV Afr. Amer. (interview) (Hazen 2006)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So’erners age 13-45 (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class TX (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class So’ern (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large metro TX Anglos age 18-29 (Thomas 1997)*</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis Euro. Amer. (Fridland 2003)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class AL (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class TX (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL sorority women (Gregory and Bernstein 1993)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So’ern Blacks (Bernstein 2006)*</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX Afr. Amer. (Bernstein 2006, based on Thomas 2001)</td>
<td>0%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. and No. Midland (Bernstein 2006)</td>
<td>0%*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of speakers who were perceived as having generally monophthongal systems, not percentage of tokens that were perceived as monophthongal.
†The number of speakers included is unavailable.

In terms of geography, pre-voiceless monophthongization appears to be used primarily by speakers from the Inland South (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:246), especially from Appalachia (Bernstein 2006, Hazen 2006:140-141, Thomas 2001:37, Wolfram and Christian 1976:64-65, and Kurath and McDavid 1961, Map 27) and from
rural areas of the South (Irons 2007:4, Thomas 1997, Hazen and Hall 1999). Part of the data showing greater use of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization in rural areas was collected in Kentucky. Irons (2007) maps and analyzes patterns of /ay/ realization across the state of Kentucky, based on sociolinguistic interviews conducted from his Phono Atlas of Kentucky English Project, and comparisons of his contemporary findings with previously-unanalyzed data from 1955 (LANCS) and 1965 (DARE [Cassidy and Hall 1985]). Irons’ (2007) analysis of the DARE data shows speakers in 1965 in Southern and Southeastern Kentucky using monophthongal /ay/ across phonological environments, and in the rest of Kentucky, using the diphthong in the pre-voiceless environment, and the monophthong in other environments. However, his study indicates that Kentucky speech has been “undergoing a significant reorganization along the urban-rural dimension”, and that 78% (25/32) of speakers interviewed across Eastern Kentucky in 2005 use completely monophthongal /ay/.

Findings in other Southern states also indicate an urban-rural divide with respect to pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization. According to Thomas (1997), Texas Anglos from towns and rural areas across the state used monophthongal /ay/ in 39% (42/108) of realizations of the word night, while Texans from very large metro regions did so in only 25% (42/166) of their tokens. The urban-rural difference is even more pronounced among 18-to-29-year-olds, among whom town and rural speakers use the monophthong 60% (12/20) of the time, but the “very large metro[politan area]” speakers in that age group used the monophthong only 19% (8/42) of the time. In his survey of fifty-six rural and thirty-five urban high school students presented in the same paper, Thomas finds that rural Texas teens use significantly (p<0.001) more monophthongal /ay/ than urban teens.

21 The exact number of speakers in each group is not available, but the Texas Poll surveyed 1000 people.
(based on eight tokens per speaker of the word *night*).\(^{22}\) Hazen and Hall (1999, as reported in Hazen and Fluharty 2004:55) also found a similar rural association with pre-voiceless */ay/-monophthongs in West Virginia. They found rural *Creeker* teens using pre-voiceless monophthongs, but the urban *Hillers* avoiding it.\(^{23}\)

The monophthongization of */ay*/ before voiceless consonants has also been associated with working-class (Pederson 1993, as cited in Bernstein 2003:222) and low-education (ibid.:224) Southerners, who share with Appalachians and rural people the fact that they are stigmatized within mainstream American culture, and relatively poor. For example, Bernstein’s study of Pederson’s LAGS data finds that 40% (21/62) of the least educated speakers used a monophthong or short glide, while only 14% (7/51) of the most educated speakers did so, and it also finds that 36% (18/50) of the lower class speakers used the monophthong or short gliding variant, while only 12% (2/16) of the upper class speakers did so.

Overall, pre-voiceless */ay/-monophthongization appears to be associated with white Southerners that have relatively low social prestige, including Mountain and Inland residents, rural residents, and those in lower socioeconomic positions. Despite its hick associations for many Americans, the feature seems to be spreading in the South, particularly among rural communities.

2.3 **Methods.** I analyzed 270 stressed tokens of */ay/*, ten from each of twenty-seven speakers. In order to make sure that tokens were not phonetically reduced, no tokens shorter than seventy milliseconds were included. The vowels ranged in duration from

\(^{22}\) Exact rates of use are not available.

\(^{23}\) Exact figures are not provided.
seventy-eight to 158 milliseconds. In an attempt to capture the kind of language that most closely approximates interviewees’ everyday speech style, no tokens were considered from the first five minutes of interview speech, when interviewees were more likely to speak formally due to nervousness or discomfort (cf. Miller 2008:660).

I included only tokens in which /ay/ is preceded by a nasal or liquid consonant (because these were the most frequent preceding environments for pre-voiceless /ay/ in the interview speech data), and is followed by a same-syllable, voiceless consonant. In order to achieve maximum comparability across speakers, I balanced the speakers’ set of tokens as much as possible with regard to the features listed in (2.2) because in preliminary analyses, tokens with preceding nasals appeared to be shorter, start farther forward and end further back, and move at a steeper angle across the vowel space than did tokens with preceding liquids. Similarly, tokens with following fricatives appeared to begin and end further back in the vowel space, and rise as a slightly steeper angle, than tokens with following stops. I balanced tokens with regard to whether the following consonant is articulated in the front or back of the mouth, to account for potential place assimilation.

(2.2) Phonological environments included in roughly constant ratios across speakers

**Preceding environment**

- nasal (/m/, /n/) v. liquid (/l/, /r/)

**Following environment**

- stop (/p/, /t/, /k/) v. fricative (/s/, /f/)
- front C (/p/, /t/, /t/, /s/) v. back (/k/) C
Most other studies of Southern /ay/ that have attempted to control for the effects on monophthongization of both preceding and following environment have used a single lexical item (Thomas 1997:314, Pederson 1993:66). It is impossible to determine the specific effects of each environment, because my corpus of tokens is dominated by seven lexical items, nice, life, might, night, right, verb-like, and preposition-like, across which phonological environments are not balanced. (I treat verb-like [I like this.] and preposition-like [This is like that.] as separate lexical items, because they belong to different grammatical categories and have very disparate meanings.) Furthermore, the lexical items vary with regard to lexical frequency and average duration, and it is impossible to extricate these effects from that of phonological environment in this study. I include at most three tokens of the same lexical item for each speaker.

I did not include tokens of quotative-like (He was like, “Oh yeah.”) and discourse-particle like (I, like, really want to go.) in this project. Hazen (2006:146-147) points out that these uses are popularly associated with California, ‘mall speak’ and he finds that they tend to diphthongize more frequently than most tokens, and so they should only be compared to other lexical items with considerable caution. However, an analysis of lexical item as a factor conditioning /ay/ realization was beyond the scope of this dissertation.

I used Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2007) to conduct a spectrographic analysis of /ay/ realization to determine the extent of monophthongization. I took LPC measurements of F1 and F2 in Hertz at two points for each token: first at the midpoint of

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24 For example, Hazen (2006:145) finds Lisa using monophthongal /ay/ in only 10% [10/104] of tokens in the word like, as opposed to 92% [47/51] of other tokens. Similarly, Kyle monophthongizes none of ninety-two tokens of like, but 48% (22/42) of other tokens.

25 It is possible that eliminating tokens of the innovative uses of like in my study could have raised the rates of monophthongization somewhat overall, and this is a topic for future exploration.
the vowel and again at twenty-five milliseconds before the end of the vowel (to avoid
I use the increase in F2 from the midpoint to the offglide to measure diphthongization (or
lack of monophthongization).

I distinguished mainstream, fronting diphthongs from Southern monophthongs on
the basis of perceptual coding in order to obtain a detailed acoustic description of how
Wilson Countians pronounce the two perceptual variants. I checked my perceptual
categorization of 150 tokens against that of another rural Eastern Kentuckian, with whom
I agreed 91% of the time.\textsuperscript{26} I replaced tokens that my co-rater and I rated differently with
randomly-selected tokens that I heard as more clearly either monophthongs or
diphthongs.

The following factors were tested in mixed model regressions:

\begin{enumerate}
\item F2 movement from midpoint to twenty-five milliseconds before the end of the
vowel (Hertz)\textsuperscript{27}
\item Perceptual categorization (monophthong or diphthong)
\end{enumerate}

\subsection*{(2.3) Factors included in regression analyses}

\textbf{Dependent factors}

\begin{itemize}
\item F2 movement from midpoint to twenty-five milliseconds before the end of the
vowel (Hertz)\textsuperscript{27}
\item Perceptual categorization (monophthong or diphthong)
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Independent factors}

\begin{itemize}
\item Individual speaker identity
\item Age category
\item Education category
\item Vowel duration (milliseconds)
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{26}I checked every token from the speakers who I thought were most likely to bring about rater disagreement
between myself and someone else, including all the speakers in the youngest age group, and all of the
speakers whom I heard as varying at all in their realization of /ay/.
\textsuperscript{27}This measure was used because some tokens involve notable movement across the vowel space, but not
in a fronting direction, and so they are not perceived as /ay/. F2 difference measures only the front-gliding
nature of tokens.
• Final consonant (stop or fricative)
• Final consonant (front or back)
• Preceding consonant (nasal or liquid)
• Lexical item (verb-like, preposition-like or other)

Using NORM (Thomas and Kendall 2007), I also plotted each speaker’s /ay/ tokens in her broader vowel space, based on her average realization of /i/ (FLEECE), /ɑ/ (LOT) and /ʌ/ (STRUT) from my analysis of /ʌ/ (see Chapter 3 for details of how I measured /i/, /ɑ/ and /ʌ/). The front and top of a speaker’s vowel space is represented by /i/, the back and bottom of the vowel space is represented by /ɑ/. The vowel /ʌ/ provides additional data about speakers’ vowel spaces, which is useful in normalizing for vocal tract length.

2.4. RESULTS.

2.4.1. OVERVIEW. The Wilson Countians I interviewed showed very little movement on average in their pronunciation of /ay/ preceding voiceless consonants, and according to perceptual categorization, they pronounced /ay/ using a monophthong in 89% (239/270) of the pre-voiceless tokens I collected, a rate more than twice as high as those found by most other studies of this variable in the South (see Table 2.1).

Figure 2.1 shows a plot of the mean /ay/ realization in barks28 for all of the individual speakers, including /i/ and /ɑ/ to represent corners of the vowel space.29 It is apparent that few speakers’ mean realizations glide far across the vowel space or reach

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28 Formant measurements in Hertz converted to barks using the formula \text{BARKS}=13\times(\text{ATAN}(0.00076\times\text{HZ}))+3.5\times((\text{ATAN}(\text{HZ}/7500))^2)

29 Jean and Allison’s values for /i/ and /ɑ/ are not included, due to reasons discussed in Chapter 3.
into the front of the vowel space, illustrating the overall /ay/-monophthongizing nature of Wilson County speech.

**Figure 2.1. Individual speakers’ mean realizations of pre-voiceless /ay/ (with /i/ and /a/ for reference)**

2.4.2. **Social Factors.** Both age and education generally have the predicted effects on pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization in Wilson County. Older speakers use more pre-
voiceless /ay/-monophthongization (=less F2 movement) than younger speakers do,\textsuperscript{30} although this pattern does not reach statistical significance (likely due to the small overall number of diphthongal tokens and the fact that among the oldest age group the trend is reversed, with college-educated speakers using more monophthongization). Younger Wilson Countians may be acquiescing to social pressure to avoid /ay/-monophthongization more than they have in the past, due to recent rapid growth of and in-migration into the community. Similarly, Hazen’s (2006:144) study of West Virginia families suggests that younger speakers are using more of the mainstream diphthong in the pre-voiceless environment as well.

Also as hypothesized, college-educated Wilson Countians use less pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization than non-college educated speakers do (see Table 2.2), ostensibly due to having been exposed more heavily to outside language and culture norms. This pattern does not reach statistical significance either\textsuperscript{31} (likely due to the small overall number of diphthongal tokens). The effects of education and age combine such that young, college-educated speakers use /ay/-monophthongization the least.

\begin{table}[ht]
\centering
\caption{Pre-voiceless /ay/, F2 movement (Hz), for each age-by-education category\textsuperscript{32}}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Age} & \textbf{Degree} & \textbf{No degree} & \textbf{Average} \\
\hline
18-24 years & 237 Hz & 132 Hz & 185 Hz \\
30-45 years & 155 Hz & 106 Hz & 131 Hz \\
55-70 years & 61 Hz & 97 Hz & 79 Hz \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{30} Other factor groups included in this run were duration, age group, individual speaker identity (random), final C (mode), final C (place), verb-like/preposition-like/other (random) and initial C (liquid or nasal).

\textsuperscript{31} Other factor groups included in this run were duration, education, individual speaker identity (random), final C (mode), final C (place), verb-like/preposition-like/other (random) and initial C (liquid or nasal).

\textsuperscript{32} Based on averages of speaker averages, because not all age-by-education categories contain the same number of speakers.
It is also informative to examine the patterns of individual speakers, because five speakers (Lisa, Selena, Alice, Hannah, and Tammy) are responsible for a vast majority (94%, 29/31) of the total perceptual diphthongs and the bulk of fronting movement. This is illustrated in Figures 2.2-3, which provide mean F2 movement and perceptual ratings for each speaker. Pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization is a highly individualized feature in Wilson County, one that most speakers choose to use nearly categorically, but also one that a small number opt out of partially or altogether, so averaging across age and education categories is somewhat misleading.

**Figure 2.2. Average F2 movement of pre-voiceless /ay/**
One speaker in particular, Tammy (30-45 years), uses almost no pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, while the other non-college educated speakers in her age group used monophthongization almost exclusively. Her differentiation from the general trends seems likely to be due to her husband’s origins outside the South, as well as time spent with non-Southern neighborhood children as a child who she explains teased her about her accent (see 2.4).

(2.4) Tammy (30-45 years)

I had friends from [outside the South], and they moved in [near me], and they’d make fun of my accent, all the time, […] and so I ended up talking more like them […] I got their accent. […] they would make you repeat [what you said] over and over again, stuff like that. But […] they’re your friends, […] you want to fit in with them.
Lisa (18-24 years) is the other speaker who almost exclusively avoids prevoiceless /ay/-monophthongization, and her partner is also a non-Southerner. Also like Tammy, she espouses standard language ideology relatively strongly. According to Lisa, her partner comments that her accent gets worse when she is in Wilson County, and better when she is away (see 2.5), apparently expressing the mainstream view that regional dialects are bad or incorrect. Lisa’s partner’s ideologies about language are likely to be influencing Lisa’s views on language, which are among the most prescriptive in the study. It seems that long-term romantic partnerships with non-Southerners may function particularly strongly to suppress /ay/-monophthongization among Wilson Countians.

(2.5) **Lisa (18-24 years)**

RG: How would you describe, you know, the way we talk?

Lisa: Well, [my partner] actually says all the time, that it, that it, when I was away from Elliott County, it actually got better. In some ways. It wasn't as, I don't know what the word is, it wasn't as bad, I guess, I don't know, but when I moved back and I started teaching, it's gotten a lot worse. And I can catch myself quite a bit you know, and start to talk faster and the accent comes with it, so, it's very distinctive.

RG: Yeah? Do you think that some people in the county have more of an accent than other people?

Lisa: Mm-hmm.

RG: Who, what makes a difference?

Lisa: Those without an education, definitely. And I know that's mean to say, but you know, at lea-, we're more aware, you know, of you know, what's correct to say, what's correct grammar. Or we try to be at least, with it. A college degree, I think that makes a big, you know, you were around more people, you were kind of, put into situations where you, you
saw, what you were doing wrong, whereas, those people never left the county, and they don't know.

In contrast, going to college and living outside the region alone generally do not appear to be enough to have such an effect, as evidenced by Amanda, Lori, and Krista, who are all 18-24 years old and went to college in a city outside Wilson County, but use 100% perceptual monophthongs. Lori and Amanda in particular express heavy local orientations, strongly preferring the country to the city, and planning to live in Wilson County for the rest of their lives (see 2.6, 2.7a-b). Amanda explicitly mentions being made fun of by outsiders for using /ay/-monophthongization, and using it anyway (see 2.7c-d).

(2.6) **Lori (18-24 years)**

a. [The city I lived in] was too big. […] Here, if you walk down the street and smile at somebody, they’ll smile back at you, and then there, they’re just like, I can’t even speak words, I’ll just show you. [imitating people ignoring each other passing in public]…

(2.7) **Amanda (18-24 years)**

a. I don’t like big towns, ‘cause of where [I’m] so used to [it] being such […] a little, confined [place…] I went to [a large city outside the South], and I didn’t like that, at all. Like, it was too fast paced, and it was too extreme, for my taste.

b. I like [having an accent], ‘cause I think it’s what makes you [you], […] I wouldn’t change it for the world.

c. My roommate’s from Louisville, and she thinks she’s like, on a higher level ‘cause she can say, like, right right, and I’m like, [raːt]…
d. And they’re like, “How do you say it?” and I’m like, “I say [raːt] [=right], you know, I don’t say [rait] [with mocking tone],” and they’re like, “Well what do you mean?” and like, I’ll snoot my nose up, just ‘cause that’s how they make me feel.

Krista, though she is young, college-educated and outward-oriented (planning to probably never live in Wilson County again), is nevertheless quite positive about Wilson County (see 2.8a) and the local accent. She specifically mentions that she uses monophthongal /ay/ and sees nothing wrong with doing so (see 2.8b).

(2.8) **Krista (18-24 years)**

a. It’s very comforting to come home and know that the people are still going to be there the way of life’s still going to be the same.

b. What you hear when you're growing up, that's what you, that's, you learn to pronounce [aː] instead of [ai], and I've always said [aː].

Simply going to college outside the county does not seem to suffice to lower most Wilson Countians’ rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, even though several interviewees talked about being made fun at college of for using /ay/-monophthongization. Rather, most Wilson Countians who go to college appear to react oppositionally to mainstream language and culture norms and use heavy /ay/-monophthongization as a symbol of strong local identity.

2.4.3. **LINGUISTIC FACTORS.** Several linguistic factors correlate significantly with F2 movement as an acoustic measure of /ay/-monophthongization. Duration of the vowel
correlates positively with F2 movement (p≤0.017)\textsuperscript{33}, which is unsurprising given that the more time the articulators have to move, the further they will be able to travel and the more that vowel formants will be affected. Because unstressed tokens or tokens shorter than seventy milliseconds were not included, it does not seem likely that the tokens rated as perceptual monophthongs in this study represent undershoot of diphthongal targets.

Whether the following consonant is a front or back consonant also appears to correlate with F2 movement, with following back consonants eliciting nearly three times the F2 movement of following front consonants (see Table 2.3). Whether the following consonant is a fricative or a stop also has a significant effect on pre-voiceless /ay/ realization, with following stops eliciting nearly four times the F2 movement of following fricatives. The reasons for this effect remain unclear as well. The presence of a significant difference in F2 movement between verb-like and preposition-like, even when duration is held constant suggests a lexical effect on pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization.

\textsuperscript{33} Other factor groups included in this run were age, education, individual speaker identity (random), final C (mode), final C (place), verb-like/preposition-like/other (random) and initial C (liquid or nasal).
Table 2.3. Linguistic factors that have a significant effect on pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean F2 difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following C (place)34</td>
<td>Back (/k/)</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Front (/t/, /s/, /ʃ/)</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following C (mode)35</td>
<td>Stop (/k/, /t/)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fricative (/s/, /ʃ/)</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb-like or prep.-like36</td>
<td>Verb-like</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preposition-like</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preceding liquid consonants (n=190) show a weak favoring effect over preceding nasal consonants (n=180) (averaging 165 Hz and 69 Hz respectively), in terms of F2 movement, although the effect did not reach statistical significance. Preceding consonants seem to have less of an effect on /ay/ articulation than following consonants do.

2.4.4. COMBINING PRODUCTION AND PERCEPTION. The acoustic correlates of perceptually-categorized monophthongs and diphthongs are quite complex in Wilson County. Most of the pre-voiceless /ay/ realizations perceptually rated as monophthongs tend to begin and end in the back of the vowel space, and show very little movement, as demonstrated by Figure 2.4, a plot of the means of all perceptual monophthongs compared to the mean of all perceptual diphthongs. The majority of tokens categorized

34 Other factor groups included in this run were duration, age, education, individual speaker identity (random), final C (mode), verb-like/preposition-like/other (random) and initial C (liquid or nasal).
35 Other factor groups included in this run were duration, age, education, individual speaker identity (random), final C (place), verb-like/preposition-like/other (random) and initial C (liquid or nasal).
36 Only tokens of verb-like and preposition-like were included in this run. Other factor groups included were duration, age, education, and individual speaker identity (random).
as diphthongs appear to involve significant movement across the vowel space, beginning in the mid-to-low center of the vowel space, and ending in the mid-to-high front region of the vowel space, at an approximately forty-five degree angle across the plotted vowel space.

**Figure 2.4. Mean of all perceptual monophthongs and diphthongs**

Figure 2.5 provides a plot of Hannah’s (18-24 years) individual tokens of /i/, /ay/, and /a/, illustrating typical examples of the two types of tokens. She uses seven perceptual monophthongs and three perceptual diphthongs.
While it is increasingly common to measure vowel movement in terms of Euclidean distance, F2 movement is a better measurement of /ay/-monophthongization, because front-gliding is more relevant to perception as [ay] than up-gliding is. A few tokens that were perceptually categorized as monophthongs involve considerable forward movement in the vowel space, but remain in the back of the vowel space or glide upward or backward (see Figure 2.6). Perhaps for some speakers in Wilson County, /ay/ is undergoing another process known as breaking that gives centralizing offglides to lax

**Figure 2.6.** Wanda, 55-70 years, /i/, /ay/, /a/ individual tokens; circled /ay/ token perceived as monophthong but exhibits considerable gliding

There is indeed a wide range of variation in F2 movement for both perceptual monophthongs and perceptual diphthongs, as shown in Table 2.4.
Table 2.4. F2 movement of perceptual monophthongs versus diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All tokens</strong></td>
<td>Monophthongs 633 Hz</td>
<td>-281 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diphthongs 1088 Hz</td>
<td>126 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaker means</strong></td>
<td>Monophthongs 174 Hz</td>
<td>-21 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diphthongs 995 Hz</td>
<td>279 Hz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alice (30-45 years) uses extra-long gliding on her perceptual diphthongs (see Figure 2.7), which may be the result of hypercorrection. Her career is in the education field where standard language is highly valued, but her relationships with non-Southerners are relatively distant and she has spent relatively little time outside the region, limiting her access to mainstream speech features.

Figure 2.7. Average F2 movement of perceived /ay/ diphthongs

* = based on fewer than three tokens

2.5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS. Speakers of all age and education levels in Wilson County use a high rate of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization (89% overall, according to
perceptual rating). This high rate of monophthongization is unsurprising in light of findings of similarly high rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization in the Appalachian area and in rural parts of the broader Inland South. For example, as discussed in Section 2.2.2, Irons’ (2007:10) data show that 78% of speakers in Eastern Kentucky use pre-voiceless monophthongal /ay/, and that Kentucky is undergoing a significant rural-urban division on the basis of this feature, with rural speakers advancing the feature and urban speakers avoiding it. Additionally, Mallinson and Wolfram (2002:762), in Beech Bottom and Roaring Creek, in rural, Appalachian North Carolina, find that over 98% of pre-voiceless tokens were realized as monophthongal.

However, such high rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization are unusual within Kentucky as a whole (Irons 2007), as well as West Virginia (Hazen 2006), and the South more generally (Bernstein 2006; Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Dupree McNair 2005; Fridland 2003; Thomas 2001; Baranowski 2000; Thomas 1997; Gregory and Bernstein 1993). Indeed, it seems to be quite stigmatized, at least in Alabama (Gregory and Bernstein 1993, as cited in Bernstein 2006) and West Virginia (Hazen and Hamilton 2008, Hazen 2006). Why rural, Inland Southern speakers use speech features that others avoid and label as country or hick (Gregory and Bernstein 1993, as reported in Bernstein 2006:209), has not yet been fully explored (cf. Montgomery 1997:17, Montgomery 1993). Most studies have attempted to describe who is using rural Inland Southern speech features, rather than why. However, as Woolard (1985:758) points out, “Having recognized that different people talk differently, and that the same people talk differently at different times, a central problem of sociolinguistics is—or ought to be—to understand
why people talk the way they do. It then becomes clear that the research questions of sociolinguistics are preeminently social questions.”

When researchers have discussed speakers’ social reasons for using Southern speech features, they have frequently highlighted the role of local or regional *identity* (Miller 2008, Irons 2007:4, Hazen 2006:145, Childs and Mallinson 2004:46, Wolfram 2003:143). My study suggests that a strong sense of local identity is indeed important to Wilson Countians and shapes the way they talk about language, but it also helps explain why Wilson Countians are motivated to have such a strong local identity. My interview data suggest that county residents develop strong local identities and affiliations in reaction to linguistic and cultural discrimination they encounter at the hands of outsiders, and that county residents use high levels of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization in defiance of mainstream norms.

The high level of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization appears to reflect interviewees’ generally positive talk about life and language in Wilson County, as well as their explicit, positive discussion of /ay/-monophthongization. The ideological interpretation of monophthongization arises out of several observations. The feature seems to be highly salient; speakers are generally aware of variation in it, regardless of time spent outside the county. It is also frequently explicitly discussed as an integral part of the local accent (as illustrated by the quote in 2.10), and speakers all express a desire to speak with the local accent, as discussed in Chapter 1.

(2.10) Why, they’d probably think you were crazy or something [if you were to go around saying [ai]]!
Finally, leaving the region for college is not enough to reduce rates of the feature, although partnering with a non-Southerner is. This suggests that it is not exposure to mainstream speech and culture, but intimate emotional investment in them, that decreases monophthongization.

Hazen and Fluharty (2004) describe a speaker they call Lisa (not to be confused with the speaker Lisa in this study), who seems similar to Wilson Countians, and many Southerners (Montgomery 1993:50-51), in that she embraces rather than rejects local language and culture norms in reaction to outside stigmatization. Hazen writes, “A college junior who spent a summer in China for her economics studies, she is from a small southern West Virginia town. Though she intends to live and travel in other parts of the country, she is proud of both her heritage and her speech…she maintained high rates of [ay] ungliding (96%) and demonstrated vowel mergers in the following words: *pin~pen, cot~caught, tour~tore, hill~heel, pull~pool* (60).”

Some Wilson Countians I interviewed do report that they avoid /ay/-monophthongization when attempting to sound more ‘proper’, or that they have done so in the past, although more frequently, interviewees said that they saw no reason to use diphthongal /ay/. Overall, it seems that most speakers in Wilson County use monophthongal /ay/ very heavily, including even young, highly educated and outward-oriented Wilson Countians. In this community, pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization appears to primarily signal locality and authenticity, not low social prestige, although Wilson Countians are rural Appalachian Southerners, and outsiders certainly hear their use of pre-voiceless monophthongal /ay/ and other local features as hick.
CHAPTER 3: /ʌ/-RAISING AND -FRONTING

3.1. INTRODUCTION. I chose /ʌ/ (STRUT) as the second vowel for analysis in this dissertation because very little is known about its pronunciation in the South. However, in eye dialect, words like *just* are frequently written as *jest* or *jist* for Southern or hillbilly characters, suggesting that there is some distinctive Southern variant of that vowel. The absence of /ʌ/ from most studies of Southern vowels is likely to be related to the fact that it is not generally considered to participate in the Southern Vowel Shift (cf. Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Feagin 2003, 1986; Fridland 1999). Furthermore, variation in this vowel has a very low level of psychosocial salience. There was no explicit reference to this vowel in any interviews conducted in Wilson County for this project, nor have I found any other research suggesting the presence of explicit metalinguistic commentary about Southern /ʌ/. I did not even notice anything nonstandard about Wilson Countians’ pronunciations of /ʌ/ until non-Southern colleagues pointed the vowel out to me.

There has been some discussion of /ʌ/-fronting in the South (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:89; Thomas 2001:28; Feagin 1986:87). However, the fronting of /ʌ/ alone probably does not fully account for the distinctiveness of Southern /ʌ/, because other heavy users of /ʌ/-fronting include young, urban Midlanders (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006) and young Californians (Hinton et al. 1986:119; Eckert 2008:34), who are unlikely to be using country-sounding /ʌ/ realizations. There are also indications that some Southerners may *raise* /ʌ/ (Thomas 2001:28; cf. data presented by Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:88). However, due to the limited amount of research on this vowel, no studies have yet provided an in-depth phonetic or social examination of /ʌ/ in the South.
An analysis of variation in /\a/ is also an ideal complement to the analysis I provide in Chapter 3 of /ay/-monophthongization, a much more salient phonetic variable. Comparing the patterns of these two vowels allows me to look more closely at the role of salience in language behavior and ideology in Wilson County.

Results indicate that a large number of Wilson County women use a variant of /\a/ that is both raised and heavily fronted. Results also show that a small number of speakers tend to use variants that are raised but only moderately fronted, and few others tend to use variants that are heavily fronted but not raised. All three types of variants often sound impressionistically Southern. These different variants of /\a/ appear to be resources for the construction of gendered local styles. They also reflect speakers’ ages and education levels. The oldest group of speakers front and raise the most, suggesting that both fronting and raising have been used by the community for quite some time. College-educated speakers front /\a/ more than non-college-educated speakers do, while non-college-educated speakers lead in raising, suggesting that fronting is perceived as relatively prescriptively normative in Wilson County, while raising is perceived as relatively hick.

3.2. PRIOR RESEARCH ON /\a/. Researchers have made much progress in the last several decades toward describing the complex vowel variation in Southern US English, but as Thomas (2001:150) and Fridland (1999:267) point out, we still know relatively little about Southern vowels. Fridland notes that, “Little is known about the direction and progress of [the Southern Vowel] shift, including which groups of speakers in the South are affected by it.” We know even less about /\a/ than we do about the large number of
vowels that researchers have implicated in the Southern Vowel Shift at various points in
time (/i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /aʊ/, /u/, /o/, and /ɑː/). With regard to patterns of
vowel variation in the rural South, we know still less because most quantitative studies of
Southern phonology have focused on urban areas.\textsuperscript{37} It seemed clear initially that there is
a variant of /ʌ/ that is perceived as country or Southern, although little is known about the
acoustic character, sociolinguistic distribution, or social meaning of variants that may be
fronted, raised, or both.

Two studies have associated /ʌ/-fronting with the South. Labov, Ash and
Boberg (2001:89) describe the fronting of /ʌ/ as occurring most heavily in the South and
the Midland, and indeed the map they provide illustrates a concentration of moderate
fronting (as defined as from 1433 Hz to 1539 Hz) and heavy fronting (1539 Hz to 1907
Hz) in the South relative to other parts of the US. Additionally, Feagin (1986:87)
impressionistically noted heavy fronting of /ʌ/ for two Alabama speakers.\textsuperscript{38}

The fronting of /ʌ/ has also been associated with suburban Detroit-area jock
teens\textsuperscript{39} (Eckert 2000) and young Californians (Hinton et al. 1986:119; Eckert 2008:34).
Therefore fronting on its own is not likely to be the sole characteristic distinguishing a
perceptually Southern variant of /ʌ/. It is intriguing that in terms of popular perception,
the other groups who front /ʌ/ actually represent the opposite of Southerners in some
ways. Americans see Southerners and their speech as country, unsophisticated and rustic.

\textsuperscript{37} Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006) select speakers from cities across the South. Feagin (2003, 1986) focuses
2000) focuses on Charleston, South Carolina.
\textsuperscript{38} However, commenting on Feagin’s data (1986), Fridland (1999:270) observed that “it is unlikely that the
mid-central vowel is involved in any major shift,” and suggested that the observed fronting of /ʌ/ “may
merely suggest idiosyncratic positioning of this vowel for isolated speakers.”
\textsuperscript{39} And particularly with girl teens.
In contrast, the other groups who front /ʌ/ represent youth, modernity and life centered around cities. Americans perceive California speech as the speech of privileged, financially-secure young people (Hinton et al. 1986:126), and rate it high in correctness (Preston 1986:237). However, California women generally lower rather than raise their fronted realizations of /ʌ/, helping to explain how California /ʌ/-fronting can sound perceptually different from Southern /ʌ/-fronting (cf. Hagiwara 1995:39). Labov, Ash and Boberg (2001:269) indeed express confusion about the social embedding of /ʌ/-fronting, writing, “Though this is sometimes heard as a rural characteristic, it is strongest in several large cities […] Kansas City, Indianapolis, Columbus.” The social meaning of /ʌ/-fronting appears to be complex.

The fronting of /ʌ/ may be related to the fronting of other back vowels, particularly /uw/ and /ow/, which is also associated with the South (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006), the Midland (ibid.), and California (Hall-Lew 2009, Hinton et al. 1986). Labov et al. (154-8) suggest that the fronting of all three back vowels is inter-related in the Midlands, because they observe the fronting trends of the three vowels to be advancing in similar geographic and temporal patterns there. They do not raise the possibility of a relationship in the South between the fronting of /ʌ/ and the fronting of /uw/ and /ow/. Widespread /uw/ and /ow/ fronting were indeed observed in preliminary analyses of Wilson County speech, but those vowels are not examined in this dissertation, so the issue of their relationship with /ʌ/ remains beyond the scope of this project.
In addition to /ʌ/-fronting, raising of the vowel has been associated with the South as well. Atlas data indicate that Southerners, and particularly Inland Southerners raise /ʌ/ more on average than speakers in the rest of the country do (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:272). The average F1 values of /ʌ/ in the dialects outside the South range from 787 Hz to 692 Hz, while the averages of the South, Texas South, and Inland South are 687 Hz, 673 Hz, and 664 Hz, respectively. Thomas (2001:27) notes /ʌ/-raising among a small number of Southern speakers in his data set as well. However, we still know little about what Southern /ʌ/-fronting and –raising look like acoustically (including whether they occur separately or within the same token), or how they are distributed socially within the South.

3.3. METHODS. It is difficult to find stable vowels in speakers’ vowel systems against which to characterize the position of /ʌ/. By pairing the results of two different methods of analysis, I present a triangulated analysis of /ʌ/ pronunciation, comparing speakers to each other as well as to speakers in other communities. I examined raw formant values, as well as values produced by converting to barks and then normalizing for vocal tract length (using the Lobanov method). Formant values for /ʌ/ and /a/ were measured using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2007) at hand-selected midpoints of vowel nuclei, and values for /i/ were chosen at a hand-selected point near the end of the offglide.

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40 F1 value and vowel height are inversely proportional, so higher F1 values are associated with vowels that are lower in the vowel space.

41 All normalization and plotting was done using NORM 1.0 (Thomas and Kendall 2007). The Lobanov normalization scheme performs best when a large number of vowels in the vowel system are included, but when I included /æ/ and/or the midpoint of /ay/ in the normalization scheme, the results for /ʌ/ did not appear any less clustered. The Watt-Fabricius normalization scheme was also applied, but it failed to normalize away a good deal of variation that appeared to be related to vocal tract shape/size.
Between eight and eighteen tokens were included per vowel per speaker for each of twenty-eight speakers, resulting in a total of 309 tokens.\(^{42}\)

I did not include tokens from the first five minutes of interviews, or any tokens that were unstressed or less than 70 milliseconds in duration. Analyzed tokens came from narrowed lexical and phonological contexts. No single lexical item was included more than three times per speaker per vowel. For \(\text{/æ}/\), tokens of the word *just* and tokens of the word *up* as part of a verbal construction (*meet up, grow up, play up*) were excluded due to frequent reduction. I excluded tokens of \(\text{/æ}/, \text{/i}/\) and \(\text{/a}/\) before \(\text{/t/}, \text{/l/}, \text{glides and nasals}\) to avoid the effects of coarticulation. I did the same for tokens of \(\text{/æ}/\) and \(\text{/a}/\) after glides. I also excluded tokens of \(\text{/a}/\) before fricatives and velar consonants, as well as tokens spelled with *aw, au, and ou*, in order to make individual speakers’ data as comparable as possible within the limits of conversational speech data. I also excluded due to infrequency:

- \(\text{/i}/\) after velar consonants
- \(\text{/a}/\) before velar consonants
- \(\text{/a}/\) and \(\text{/æ}/\), after \(\text{/h/}, \text{glottal stops, and pauses.}\)

For each speaker and each vowel, I kept the proportions of different phonological contexts relatively constant, in order to make different speakers as comparable to each other as possible. More tokens were selected from more frequent environments to maximize the amount of data that could be extracted from the interviews.

\(^{42}\) Jean (55-70, non-degree) was excluded because her \(\text{/æ}/\) and \(\text{/a}/\) were extremely raised in relationship to the rest of the speakers, and her articulation could be an age-related effect, since her vowel space is notably compressed. Allison (18-24, non-degree) was excluded because I was not able to collect enough tokens for her that were balanced across phonological environments.
Attempts were made to find statistical correlations among the factors listed in (1), in order to determine the social factors that affect the raising and fronting of /æ/.

(1) Variables included in regression analyses

- Independent variables
  - Raw /æ/ F1 (Hz)
  - Raw /æ/ F2 (Hz)
  - Normalized /æ/ F1 (first converted to barks)
  - Normalized /æ/ F2 (first converted to barks)

- Dependent variables
  - Age group
  - Education level
  - Individual speaker identity (included as random effect)
  - Duration

There are problems associated with using /i/ and /a/ as anchor vowels for the measurement of /æ/ although I have done so for the purposes of normalization. Almost all of the speakers in my study consistently have /i/ in a lower position (in terms of a higher F1 value) than do General American (Peterson and Barney 1952:183) or California (Hagiwara 1995:39) women. Most speakers also realize the /a/ vowel in a higher position (in terms of a lower F1 value) than do General American (Peterson and Barney 1952:183) or California (Hagiwara 1995:39) women. I am able to draw tentative conclusions about

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43 General American and California women are at 310 Hz and 362 Hz, respectively. This lowering seems likely to be related to Southern-Vowel-Shift lowering of the nuclei of front tense vowels (cf. Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Feagin 2003; Fridland 1999).

44 General American and California women are at 850 Hz and 997 Hz, respectively. One possible reason for this raising of /a/ is merger with /ɔ/, which Irons (2007:146) finds widespread in northeastern Kentucky, and I suspect is widespread in Wilson County based on impressionistic observation and my own
in Wilson County despite any potential variation in /i/ and /a/ because I am also comparing Wilson Countians’ realizations with other Americans’, in terms of their raw Hz values for F1 and F2 using data from Peterson and Barney (1952), Hagiwara (1995) and Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006).

It is important to be cautious in comparing my data with data from Peterson and Barney (1952), Hagiwara (1995) and Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006), because the studies use tokens collected from different arrays of phonological environments, and elicited in different sociopragmatic contexts. Peterson and Barney’s (1952) data come from the environment h_d (heed, hud hod), and were based on laboratory-elicited repetitions with women mainly from the Middle Atlantic states. Hagiwara’s (1995) data were based on laboratory-elicited repetitions, using the environments b_t, t_k, and h_d (beat, teak, heed; but, tuck, hut; bought, tock, hod). Labov, Ash and Boberg’s (2006) data include men, are drawn from a telephone survey, and are based in part on elicitations; exact phonological environments included are not specified. Therefore, I am conservative with regard to findings based on comparisons with other studies.

It is possible that listener perception of /ʌ/-raising is increased by the backing of /i/ in Wilson County, because backing /i/ would retract the front of the vowel space, and place /ʌ/ in a relatively more front position. An attempt was initially made to analyze tokens of /ʌ/ perceptually, as was done for /ay/ in Chapter 3. However, this method of analysis was not pursued, because my own perceptual categorizations of individual tokens (e.g. Southern or not) were too different from those of a second listener. Therefore I am not able to say

native speaker intuitions. Southern California women generally merge /ʊ/ and /ɔ/ as well (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006:63).
with certainty exactly what distinguishes tokens of /ʌ/ that sound Southern or country from those that do not. This sort of variation in /ʌ/ does not appear to be salient enough for listeners to easily evaluate consciously. A matched guise-type of analysis could solve this problem, but lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

My original hypothesis was that most Wilson Countians would use a fronted and raised realization of /ʌ/, based on vowel plot data from Thomas (2001) regarding the South. Just as for /ay/-monophthongization, I also hypothesized that college-educated speakers would use less fronting and raising than non-college-educated speakers, due to their experience outside the county and their greater exposure to mainstream American cultural and linguistic norms.

3.4. RESULTS. There are three broad patterns of /ʌ/ realization in Wilson County:

1) confirming my original hypothesis, most Wilson County speakers’ mean realizations are both raised and heavily fronted;
2) some speakers’ means are raised but fronted only moderately or not at all; and
3) some are heavily fronted but not raised.

However, no speakers tend to use realizations that are neither fronted nor raised.

Figure 3.1 provides a plot of Wilson County women’s mean formant values for /i/, /ʌ/ and /ɑ/, compared to those for Southern California (Hagiwara 1995) and General American (Peterson and Barney 1952) women.

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45 Based on comparisons with Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006), Hagiwara (1995) and Peterson and Barney (1952), as discussed in Chapter 4.
The three categories of /ʌ/ realization do not correspond to three clearly different types of speakers, but based on impressionistic observation, most of the speakers who raise and only moderately front use an earthy, rougher type of gendered style, which involves lower pitch. The speaker who uses the least fronted, but second-most raised pronunciation, Jeri (30-45 years), is a good example of this trend. Her outward appearance was relatively plain, and her speech style is succinct, with relatively low and level pitch. Her voice quality is relatively harsh and creaky. In contrast, the speakers
who raise and front heavily tend to use a girlier, higher-pitched, ‘Southern-Belle’-tinged speech style. The speaker who leads in fronting is Lori, who exemplifies this style very well. Her pitch is high and dynamic, her voice quality is crisp and modal, she talks abundantly, discussing fashion and makeup and relating one colorful personal anecdote after another. Her personal style is quite girly. Perhaps the heavy use of /ʌ/-fronting among young people in the urban Midwest and California (cf. Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006 and Hinton et al. 1986) allows that articulatory gesture to take on shades of association with middle-class, mainstream hetero-normative femininity within Southern speech, even though fronting is also a Southern pattern. The speakers who heavily front but do not raise /ʌ/ tend to use more prescriptively normative speech overall, as I discuss further in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.2 provides a plot of the mean (non-normalized) /ʌ/ realizations for each age-by-education sub-group, showing that the middle age group raises /ʌ/ the most, while the oldest age group fronts the most. Young, college-educated speakers do the least raising or fronting, although they still raise and front more than general US women.
Individual speakers vary somewhat in their use of /ʌ/-fronting, and Figure 3.3 is typical with regard to their degree of F2 dispersion.
For the purposes of statistical analysis I measure fronting (using F2) and raising (using F1) as separate variables, although this measurement cannot capture the effect of combining fronting and raising in a single token. Wilson County women’s realizations of /ʌ/ on the whole are very fronted (whether they are also raised or not). Figure 3.4 presents mean F2 measurements for each of the twenty-eight speakers, highlighting the fact that all speakers have a higher F2 value than the 1400 Hz of General American women (Peterson and Barney 1952:183). Specifically, Wilson County speakers’ mean F2 values range from 1450 Hz (Jeri, 30-45 years) to as high as 1961 Hz (Lori, 18-24
years), and average 1770 Hz. Sixteen speakers (57%) even have higher F2 values for /ʌ/ than the 1753 Hz average of young California women (Hagiwara 1995:39), even though Californians have also been associated with strong /ʌ/-fronting (Hinton et al. 1986:119; Eckert 2008:34). Every age-by-education sub-group has an average of at least 1667 Hz, well above the 1400 Hz of General American women. Four of the six sub-groups have heavily fronted realizations, with mean F2 averages above the 1753 Hz of California women.

**Figure 3.4. Mean /ʌ/ F2 for each speaker**
Older speakers use fronting more heavily than younger speakers ($p \leq 0.025$)\(^{46}\) (see Table 3.1), as was predicted. In the two youngest age groups college-educated speakers defy predictions however by using more /ʌ/-fronting than non-college-educated speakers do. The effect of education fails to reach statistical significance, even among the two youngest age groups alone, but this would likely change if more data were included. /ʌ/-fronting appears to be increasing in overt prestige in the community, likely because it is concentrated in the urban Midwest and California as well as the South.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1. Mean /ʌ/ F2 for each age-by-education subgroup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-70 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to fronting /ʌ/, most speakers also raise most of their realizations of the vowel, creating a variant that is both fronted and raised, as noted previously. Eighty-six percent (24/28) of Wilson County speakers have F1 values that are lower (= higher in the mouth) than the 760 Hz of average of General American women (Peterson and Barney 1952:183). All of the Wilson County speakers have F1 values lower than the 847 Hz average /ʌ/ of Southern California women (Hagiwara 1995:39). Individual Wilson County speakers’ F1 values range from 790 Hz (Tina, 55-70 years) to 582 Hz (Sheila, 30-46 yrs) degrees.\(^{46}\) Factor groups included in this regression include age, education, individual speaker identity (random), and duration.
45 years) and average 695 Hz. Figure 3.5 includes the F1 values (in Hertz) for all speakers, compared to General American and Southern California women.

**Figure 3.5. Mean /ʌ/ F1 for each speaker**

Education level and age group interact with regard to /ʌ/-raising, as shown in Table 3.2, which presents mean F1 values (in Hz) for each age-by-education sub-group. Among the two youngest age groups, non-college-educated speakers use more raising, but in the oldest age group, the pattern is reversed and it is college-educated speakers who lead in raising. /ʌ/-raising appears to be decreasing in overt prestige, in contrast to fronting, which we saw appears to be increasing in overt prestige.
Table 3.2. Mean /ʌ/ F1 for each age-by-education subgroup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>No degree</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 yrs.</td>
<td>687 Hz</td>
<td>739 Hz</td>
<td>713 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 yrs.</td>
<td>661 Hz</td>
<td>673 Hz</td>
<td>667 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-70 yrs.</td>
<td>723 Hz</td>
<td>684 Hz</td>
<td>704 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>690 Hz</td>
<td>699 Hz</td>
<td>695 Hz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the middle age group leads in raising when raw F1 values are considered, when normalized F1 values are considered, older speakers raise /ʌ/ significantly more than younger speakers (p≤0.046) (see Table 3.3). Since normalized vowels help control for variation in vowel tract size, I place slightly more analytical weight on results based on normalized measurements, so I credit the oldest age group with leading in raising in addition to leading in fronting. This confirms the prediction that younger speakers use more mainstream speech than older speakers.

Table 3.3. Regression analysis results for normalized /ʌ/ F1 by age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Log odds</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 yrs.</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 yrs.</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-70 yrs.</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(p≤0.046)

Normalization does not alter the data trends in any other notable ways, as illustrated by Figure 3.6, which plots the normalized mean /i/, /ʌ/ and /ɑ/ for each age-by-education sub-group. College-educated speakers’ greater use of /ʌ/-fronting does become

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47 Factor groups included in this regression include age, education, individual speaker identity (random), and duration.
more evident, and the reverse education trend among the oldest age group is nullified, with education seeming to have no effect on fronting among the oldest speakers.

3.5. CONCLUSION. Previous research has indicated that both /ʌ/-raising and –fronting are concentrated in the South. Our knowledge about the production and perception of /ʌ/
in the South remains limited. Thomas (2001) mentions both fronting and raising of /ʌ/ in that region, but previous studies have not yet examined the way that the two dimensions of variation may interact.

This study finds that Wilson County speakers almost always use a raised-and-fronted variant of /ʌ/, just as they use pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization nearly categorically. Most of the remaining /ʌ/ tokens are either heavily-fronted but not raised, or they are raised, but with moderate to very little fronting. Wilson County speakers do not tend to use canonical, mainstream US pronunciations of the vowel. The overall relatively Southern way that Wilson Countians pronounce /ʌ/ further supports the idea that they tend to embrace local phonology ideologically, and that they use local phonetic features heavily throughout the community, irrespective of the level of salience.

With regard to the dimension of fronting alone, all Wilson County speakers tend to use variants that are fronted beyond the mean realization of General US women (Peterson and Barney 1952), and some tend to use variants that are fronted even beyond those of Southern California women, who have been noted for that feature (Hinton et al. 1982, Eckert 2008:34). All but three of the twenty-eight speakers also raise /ʌ/ in comparison to General American women.

The oldest group of speakers leads in both raising and fronting, indicating that younger speakers are adapting more than older speakers to mainstream speech norms, as predicted. At least among the two younger age groups, a college education correlates positively with fronting and negatively with raising. While rates of fronting are decreasing, the gap between those speakers who went to college and those who did not is growing, just for pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization. Mainstream language norms
appear to be entering the community through young, college-educated speakers as predicted.

Impressionistically, the raised but less fronted variant tends to be used by speakers with a less-girly, rougher type of country speech style. The most fronted variant is used in constructing a girlier, more Southern-Belle-type speech style.
CHAPTER 4: WAS-LEVELING

4.1. INTRODUCTION. The third dialect feature I have chosen for analysis is was-leveling, or the use of was in contexts where standard English calls for were (we was gone). This is one of the most frequent nonstandard morphosyntactic features used by Wilson Countians in this study, and in fact, it has been associated with a large number of ‘vernacular’ varieties of English around the world (Chambers 2009:258). Was-leveling is part of a general tendency of languages, known as default singulars, to extend singular forms to plural contexts (Chambers 2009:258). Was appears to have been in variation with were continuously since the days of Middle English (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:152-3). Researchers have noted a number of groups of speakers, including some Southerners, using this feature at very high rates. For example, Mallinson and Wolfram (2002:756) find European American residents of Roaring Creek, North Carolina using was-leveling in 93% (n=90) of possible contexts, and Wolfram and Christian (1975:112) found Mercer and Monroe County, West Virginians using the feature in 91% (n=515) of contexts.

It would have seemed reasonable to find high rates of was-leveling in Wilson County, given Wilson County speakers’ highly local vowel patterns, including their 89% rate of use of pre-voiceless /ay/ monophthongization, a highly stereotyped and stigmatized Inland Southern feature. The overall rural, isolated, Inland Southern nature

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48 Preliminary analysis found only use of the singular verb form for the plural in the present tense (people goes) to have occurred more frequently than was-leveling in the interview data set. I chose to analyze was-leveling instead of this feature because there are more studies of was-leveling available for comparison.

49 This tendency is particularly strong in languages that are least affected by prescriptive norms.
of the community, and the high rates of use of was-leveling in other vernacular\textsuperscript{50} varieties of English in the Inland South, as well as the South and the world more broadly, would also suggest Wilson County speech to be relatively nonstandard morphosyntactically. However, the overall rate of was-leveling in Wilson County is relatively low (32%, n=459), particularly in comparison to the results of other studies in the rural Inland South and elsewhere.

The low rate of was-leveling in Wilson County seems to be driven in part by standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997), and by explicit negative ideologies about bad grammar. In interviews, many speakers talk about bad grammar as a part of the local dialect that is undesirable and should be avoided, and more educated speakers use the feature significantly less often than less educated speakers do. University-educated speakers use was-leveling significantly less than other speakers do, suggesting that working as a grammar instructor and model for students over several decades has a standardizing effect on the grammar of Wilson County speakers.

Observing fine-grained grammatical constraints on the use of was-leveling allows me to control for their effects in my analysis of social constraints, and to compare Wilson County speech linguistically with the speech of other regions. Analyses of data and previous studies suggest that, even in ‘relic’ communities of the Appalachian Mountain area, was-leveling does not generally exhibit the traditional Northern British linguistic patterns that we might expect. Given the extent to which the Inland South, and the Appalachian Mountains in particular, are thought to have been settled by Scotch-Irish immigrants (Montgomery 1994, Wolfram and Christian 1976), we might expect to see

\textsuperscript{50} Vernacular varieties are varieties that are spoken by relatively powerless social groups and that are relatively unaffected by prescriptive norms.
evidence of the Northern Subject Rule (Montgomery 1994) and a high rate of leveling with the subject you (cf. Tagliamonte and Smith 2000). However, neither of these patterns is present in the Wilson County data, or in the findings of most other studies in comparable communities in the American South. Instead, the chief grammatical constraint shaping contemporary was-leveling around the world appears to be the favoring effect of existential-there contexts (there were people). This observation problematizes assumptions made by many linguists about the linguistic conservativeness of relatively isolated communities, and theories built on those assumptions, particularly about the history of African American Vernacular English.

The present study also adds to our limited body of knowledge about the speech of rural and Inland Southerners, and provides an ethnographically-grounded analysis of the social pressures shaping the use of this was-leveling. Pairing the study of was-leveling with the study of two phonetic variables allows me to explore how speakers may respond to various social pressures by speaking more or less standardly on different levels of language (cf. Sharma 2005, Rickford 2000, Cameron 1995, Hoover 1978).

4.2. Prior research on was-leveling.

4.2.1. Overview. Speakers of a large number of nonstandard, or vernacular, varieties of English around the world variably use was in contexts where speakers of standard English use were, in effect leveling, or partially leveling, the past-tense be paradigm (Chambers 2009, Tagliamonte and Smith 2000).
The use of *was* for standard-*were*, in at least some grammatical contexts, seems to have been frequent in Northern British dialects, at least in some grammatical contexts, since at least Middle English (Brunner 1970, Forsstrom 1948, Mosse 1952, cited in Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:152). *Southern* British dialects are thought traditionally to have primarily used the same past-tense *be* paradigm as contemporary standard English, that shown in (1a) [Forsstrom 1948, cited in Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:152]. One pattern that appears to have long been common in Northern Britain is what has been dubbed the *Northern Subject Rule*, or the use of *was* in all contexts of standard-*were* except those where a plural pronoun subject (*we, they*) is immediately adjacent to the verb (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:153, Montgomery 1994).\(^{51}\) Another pattern believed to have been common in Northern British dialects is a favoring effect on *was*-leveling of the pronoun *you* as the subject (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:152-154).

*Was*-leveling appears to be part of a broader trend in which languages generalize plural forms to singular forms, leveling or partially leveling verbal paradigms, known as ‘generic singul"-s’ (Chambers 2009:258). Regularization of verbal paradigms would allow for greater efficiency in language planning and processing. Indeed, a similar regularization went to completion in the past and present tense forms of all other verbs in English, -ed (*I/you/she/we/they like, liked*), and in some varieties occurs in the present tense of *be* as well (*we is, you is, they is*). One reason that *was* remains in variation with *were*, and does not simply replace *were* in many of the world’s standard English varieties, may be that speakers of standard varieties tend to resist linguistics simplification, in order to cultivate an air of sophistication or difficulty (Chambers 2009:267-8).

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\(^{51}\) This rule also applies to the present tense, and to other verbs, as well.
Overall, the (mainly vernacular) varieties of English that have been closely analyzed for \textit{was}-leveling have exhibited widely varying levels of the feature, ranging from nearly absent, to nearly categorical, as is illustrated in Table 4.1. The Inland South appears to have traditionally exhibited quite high rates of \textit{was}-leveling (Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988; Wolfram and Christian 1976; Wolfram and Christian 1975), but recent studies point to a decline (Hazen, in progress; Hazen and Hamilton 2008, Hazen 2002).
## Table 4.1. Results of prior studies of *was*-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker group or sub-group, study</th>
<th>% <em>was</em></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>No. of spkrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working class rural AL (Feagin 1979)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech Bottom, NC Afr. Amer. (Mallinson &amp; Wolfram 2002)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roaring Creek, NC Euro. Amer. (Mallinson &amp; Wolfram 2002)</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe &amp; Mercer Co., WV (Wolfram &amp; Christian 1975)*</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club members (Afr. Amer. teen boys) (Labov et al. 1968)</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-high school-educ. Cabell Co., WV (Hazen &amp; Hamilton 2008)*</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, UK teens (Cheshire 1982)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C. teen girls (Kendall, Mallinson &amp; Whitehead 2007)</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe &amp; Mercer Co., WV (Wolfram &amp; Christian 1976)†</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>1177</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson Co., AR (Ozarks) (Christian, Wolfram &amp; Dube 1989)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV (Christian, Wolfram &amp; Dube 1988)†</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class AL (Feagin 1986)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class urban AL (Feagin 1979)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Co., NC Afr. Amer. (Wolfram &amp; Thomas 2002)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guysborough Enclave, Nova Scotia (Tagliamonte &amp; Smith 2000)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Plantation Overseers (1794-1876) (Trub 2006)</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texana, NC (Afr. Amer.) (Childs &amp; Mallinson 2004)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckie, Scotland (Tagliamonte &amp; Smith 2000)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV, born 1919-1947 (Hazen, in progress)*</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Co., NC Afr. Amer. (Hazen 2002)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fens, UK (Britain 2002)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Preston, UK (Tagliamonte &amp; Smith 2000)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Co., WV (Hackenberg 1973)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robeson Co., NC Lumbee Indians (Wolfram &amp; Sellers 1999)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cajun Amer. (Dubois &amp; Horvath 2003)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school-educ. Cabell Co., WV (Hazen &amp; Hamilton 2008)*</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harker’s Isl., NC (Wolfram &amp; Schilling-Estes 2003)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guysborough Village, Nova Scotia (Tagliamonte &amp; Smith 2000)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lames (Afr. Amer. teen boys), NYC (Labov et al. 1968)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar Brothers (Afr. Amer. teen boys), NYC (Labov et al. 1968)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Co., NC Euro. Amer. (Wolfram &amp; Thomas 2002)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney, Australia teens (Eisikovitz 1991)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocracoke Island, NC (Schilling-Estes &amp; Wolfram 1994)†</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith Island, NC (Wolfram &amp; Schilling-Estes 2003)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV, born 1950-1979 (Hazen, in progress)*</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocracoke Island, NC (Wolfram et al. 1997)†</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Co., NC Native Amer. (Hazen 2002)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York, UK (Tagliamonte 2008)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1706</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV, born 1980-1989 (Hazen, in progress)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocracoke Island, NC (Wolfram &amp; Schilling-Estes 2003)‡</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood (Afr. Amer.) teen boys, NYC (Labov et al. 1968)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Co., NC Euro. Amer. (Hazen 2002)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class urban AL (Feagin 1979)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class AL (Feagin 1986)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
† These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
‡ These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
4.2.2. LINGUISTIC FACTORS.

4.2.2.1. PROCESSING-RELATED FACTORS. A number of facts about the grammatical context of a given token have been found to correlate with was-leveling. Most of these factors suggest that was-leveling is more likely to occur in contexts where it is more cognitively difficult to process the fact that past-tense be must agree with a plural subject. The factor found by far most frequently and consistently to affect was-leveling across communities is whether or not the verb is part of the existential construction \textit{there} + \textit{be} + [plural noun phrase (NP)] (hereafter existential-\textit{there}), such as \textit{there were people}, or \textit{there were buildings}. Studies have repeatedly found existential-\textit{there} contexts to strongly favor was-leveling, as illustrated in Table 4.2, which compares that context with full NP contexts (\textit{the dogs were}, \textit{the boxes were}).\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, among the seventeen studies that provide percentage rates for was-leveling in existential-\textit{there} contexts, fourteen (82\%) show a clear favoring effect of existential-\textit{there}. The only group that shows less leveling in existential-\textit{there} contexts than in other NP subject contexts is the six African Americans in Mallinson and Wolfram’s (2002) study of Beech Bottom, North Carolina. Their data set contains only five existential tokens, so perhaps these results would match those found in all the other communities if more data were analyzed.

\textsuperscript{52} Wolfram and Thomas (2002) also find a strong favoring effect of existential-\textit{there} contexts on was-leveling in Hyde County, North Carolina, as do Wolfram and Sellers (1999) among Lumbee Indians in Robeson County, North Carolina; Cheshire and Fox (2009) in London; and Tagliamonte and Smith (2000) in Buckie, Scotland, as well as in Guysborough Village, Guysborough Enclave, and North Preston, Nova Scotia. However, exact rates of was-leveling in existential contexts are not available for these studies.
Table 4.2. Findings of previous studies regarding the favoring effect of existential-*there* on *was*-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>% *was, exist.-*there</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% <em>was</em>, NP subject</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>existential &gt; NP subjects (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen (in progress), WV*</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008), WV*</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002) Roaring Creek, NC (Euro. Amer.)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, Wolfram &amp; Dube (1988) Johnson Co., AR (Ozarks)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Christian (1976) Mercer and Monroe Co., WV†</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram et al. (1997) Ocracoke, NC‡</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Schilling-Estes (1994) Ocracoke, NC‡</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuBois and Horvath (2003) English-first-lg. Cajun spkrs</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feagin (1979) Anniston, Alabama</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (2002) Fens, UK (positive;negative contexts)</td>
<td>81%;100%</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>48%;67%</td>
<td>130;12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte (1997) York, UK</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisikovitz (1991) Sydney, Australia teens</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No clear difference between existential-<em>there</em> and NP subjects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackenberg (1973) Nicholas Co., WV</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Christian (1975) Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>existential &lt; NP subjects (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002), Beech Bottom, NC (Afr. Amer.)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
† These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
‡ These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.

There is evidence that the favoring effect of existential-*there* contexts on *was*-leveling is driven by the cognitive processing difficulty of making a verb agree with a plural subject that has yet to occur in the speech stream. The two studies that to my knowledge have examined the effect on *was*-leveling of another VERB-SUBJECT word-order context, the interrogative context (*where was we*?), have noted that interrogative
contexts also promote leveling. In their study of forty-four London residents, Cheshire and Fox (2009:17) find was-leveling in 79% of VERB-SUBJECT interrogative tokens, but in only 41% of SUBJECT-VERB tokens.\footnote{Exact figures are not available.} In her study of forty teens in Sydney, Eisikovits (1991:250) found that was-leveling occurred at very high rates in interrogative utterances; 100% of (n=6) ‘question’ tokens were leveled to was, while only 12% (n=492) of ‘statement’ tokens were leveled. (However, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions on the basis of only six ‘question’ tokens.) I suspect that the low frequency of interrogative utterances in interviews has prevented in-depth study of this constraint on was-leveling, and this is true of the present study as well.

Two of the three studies that, to my knowledge, have examined the adjacency of the be verb and plural subjects have found that was-leveling tends to increase when other linguistic material intervenes between the verb and its plural subject (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Findings of previous studies regarding the favoring effect of intervening material on was-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>% was, adjacent</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% was, non-adjacent</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazen (in progress) WV* (among non-exist.-there contexts only; no other data is available)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008) Cabell County, WV*</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte (1998) York, UK (among exist.-there contexts only; effect is not present for NP subj. contexts below 4 intervening words)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.

Tagliamonte’s study of forty speakers in York, United Kingdom (1998:173) also showed that at a distance of four or five words between the subject and the verb, the favoring effect of distance was strongly increased. Just as it is more difficult to make
past-tense *be* agree with a plural subject that has not yet been uttered, it may also be more
difficult to make past-tense *be* agree with a plural subject that is linguistically further
from it.

In contrast to the findings of Hazen and Hamilton (2008) and Tagliamonte (1989),
Hazen (in progress) does not find an adjacency effect in his study of sixty-seven West
Virginia speakers. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Perhaps
Hazen’s data would show such an effect if existential-*there* tokens were included (as in
the two other studies), or at a distance of four our five words of intervening material, as
Tagliamonte (1998) did. Or perhaps the adjacency effect occurs in the speech of a
number of West Virginians, but not in the speech of many others. Or, it is also possible
that some combination of the factors listed above is operating to cause the discrepancy
between the two West Virginia data sets.

There have also been six studies of *was*-leveling that have looked closely at
whether the grammatical subject of past-tense *be* is a conjoined NP (*Bill and I*), as well as
whether it is a collective NP (one that does not mark plurality with a canonical –*s*
morpheme, e.g. *people, a lot*). Conjoined NPs have a relatively consistent favoring effect
on *was*-leveling, while collective NPs have no consistent effect, as illustrated by Table
4.4.
Table 4.4. Findings of previous studies regarding the effect of conjoined NP- and collective NP-subject (as compared to other NP-subject) on was-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>% was, conjoined NP-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% was, other NP-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% was, collective NP-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>conjoined &gt; NP &gt; collective</strong> (by a difference of 15 percentage points or more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, Wolfram &amp; Dube (1988)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson Co., AR (Ozarks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>conjoined &gt; NP ≈ collective</strong> (by a difference of 15 percentage points or more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen (in progress), WV*</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No clear difference between conjoined, NP, collective</strong> (of 15 percentage points or more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008), WV*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Christian (1975) Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV†</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
† These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
‡ These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.

The favoring effect of collective NPs on was-leveling is thought to be due to the effect of agreement with a singular conjunct that is close to the verb (Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988:118-9), so that for the utterance *Bill and I were there*, a speaker produces *Bill and I was there*, because she makes *be* agree with the singular pronoun *I* rather than with the entire plural NP *Bill and I*. However, collective pronouns show a significant54 effect on was-leveling in only one of the six communities studied (Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988), so clearly the mere lack of an –s morpheme does not trigger was-leveling in the same way that single final conjuncts in conjoined NPs do, and the processing constraints on was-leveling are complex.

---

54 Favoring or disfavoring.
4.2.2.2. **HISTORICAL FACTORS.** The traditional dialects of Northern Britain are thought to have used a great deal of *was*-leveling since the time of Middle English (Forsstrom 1948, as cited in Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:152-4). Contemporary varieties of English worldwide have been analyzed to see if they exhibit the same linguistic constraint patterns that are historically associated with *was*-leveling in Northern Britain.

A well-attested traditional pattern in Northern British dialects is the Northern Subject Rule (Montgomery 1994; Murray 1873, as cited by Tagliamonte and Smith 2003:153), which entails that past-tense *be* is realized as *was* except in contexts with pronoun subjects immediately adjacent to the verb. Numerous studies have compared the effects of pronoun subjects and full NP subjects on *was*-leveling as a way of testing for the effect of the Northern Subject Rule on contemporary English varieties; NP subjects (*cats were, boys were*) should theoretically favor *was*-leveling more than pronoun subjects (*we were, you were*) do if effects of the Northern Subject rule are still present. (Although it was actually only contexts with adjacent subjects and verbs that were affected by the Rule, researchers appear to assume that relatively infrequent non-adjacent tokens will not mask the effects of the Rule.) Table 4.5 provides the rates of *was*-leveling in third-person plural NP- and pronoun-subject (*they*) contexts found by a wide range of studies.
Table 4.5. Findings of previous studies regarding the effect of 3rd-person plural full NP- and pronoun (they)-subjects on was-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>% was, NP-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% was, pron-subj. (they)</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NP &gt; pronoun subjects (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schilling-Estes &amp; Wolfram (1994) Ocracoke, NC*</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (2000) Buckie, Scotland</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>(study total of 302)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>(study total of 302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (2000) Guysborough Village, Nova Scotia (Euro. Amer.)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>(study total of 276)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>(study total of 276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No clear difference between NP and pronoun subjects (less than 15 percentage points difference)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen (in progress), WV*</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008), WV</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002), Beech Bottom, NC (Afr. Amer.)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Christian (1975) Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV†</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>368**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackenberg (1973) Nicholas Co., WV</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (1999) Samaná Peninsula, Dominican Republic</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuBois &amp; Horvath (2003) French-first-lg. Cajun spkrs</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>(study total of 130)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>(study total of 130)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feagin (1979) Anniston, AL</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (2002) Fens, UK</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte (1997) York, UK</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram et al. (1997) Ocracoke, NC‡</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire &amp; Fox (2009) London</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian, Wolfram &amp; Dube (1988) Johnson Co., AR (Ozarks)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisikovits (1991) Sydney, Australia teens</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NP &lt; pronoun subjects (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002) Roaring Creek, NC (Euro. Amer.)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Christian (1976) Mercer &amp; Monroe Co., WV†</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>826**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
† These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
‡ These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
** Includes we and you as subjects also, because they were not reported separately in the study.
Despite the large number of studies of was-leveling in communities that are thought to have been settled by Northern British immigrants, NP subjects and pronoun subjects appear to behave similarly, regardless of the location or relative isolation of the speech community.\textsuperscript{55} This is true even in Inland Southern communities where Scotch-Irish settlement was predominant, including West Virginia (Hazen, in progress; Hazen and Hamilton 2008, 1975; Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988; Wolfram and Christian 1975; Hackenberg 1973), Arkansas (Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988), and Beech Bottom, in western North Carolina (Mallinson and Wolfram 2002). In three studies of rural communities in the Appalachian Mountains (Mallinson and Wolfram 2002; Christian, Wolfram and Dube 1988; Wolfram and Christian 1976), the trend predicted by the Northern Subject Rule is even reversed, and full NP-subjects favor was-leveling more than pronoun subjects do. There do not appear to be any remaining effects of the Northern Subject Rule in most contemporary English dialects.

Another means that Tagliamonte and Smith (2000, citing Forsstrom 1948) use to test for contemporary effects of Northern British historical dialect influence is comparing rates of was-leveling with they as a subject as opposed to those with you as a subject, because they claim that in Northern British dialects, there was traditionally a high rate of was-leveling with second-person pronoun you as a subject. However, like the Northern Subject Rule, this pattern is not generally detectable in contemporary was-leveling regardless of community settlement patterns or relative isolation, as shown in Table 4.6 which compares rates of was-leveling with you and they as subjects. In Outer London,\textsuperscript{55} Although exact percentages are not provided, in Guysborough Enclave, Nova Scotia, Tagliamonte and Smith [2000:160] do find full NP-subjects favoring was-leveling significantly more than pronoun-subjects do. In North Preston, though, they find no significant difference between NP- and pronoun-subject contexts.
Cheshire and Fox (2009) note a complex interaction between polarity and *was*-leveling, in which *you*-subject strongly favors *was*-leveling in positive contexts (83%, n=46), while it strongly disfavors leveling in negative contexts (0%, n=7). Of the five communities that have shown clear favoring effects of *you*-subject on *was*-leveling, two—the English Fens (Britain 2002) and Inner London (Cheshire and Fox 2009)—are in Southern England, and are unlikely to be doing so as an effect of historical retention.

Table 4.6. Findings of previous studies regarding the effect of *you*-subject (as compared to NP-subject) on *was*-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>% <em>was</em>, <em>you</em>-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% <em>was</em>, <em>they</em>-subj.</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em><strong>you &gt; NP (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (2002) Fens, UK</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackenberg (1973) Nicholas Co., WV</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisikovitz (1991) Sydney, Australia teens</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire and Fox (2009) Inner London</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No clear difference between <em>you</em> and NP</strong> (less than 15 percentage points difference)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen (in progress), WV*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008), WV*</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002), Beech Bottom, NC (Afr. Amer.)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feagin (1979) Anniston, AL</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte (1997) York, UK</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfram et al. (1997) Ocracoke, NC†</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schilling-Estes &amp; Wolfram (1994) Ocracoke, NC†</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallinson &amp; Wolfram (2002) Roaring Creek, NC (Euro. Amer.)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><strong>you &lt; NP (by 15 percentage points or more)</strong></em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (1999) Samaná Peninsula, Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.
† These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.

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56 Additionally, Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:160) find that in Guysborough Enclave and North Preston, Nova Scotia *you*-subject shows no clear effect on *was*-leveling (Respectively, *you*= Varbrul factor weight .58, *they*= Varbrul factor weight .42; *you*= Varbrul factor weight .65, *they*= Varbrul factor weight .54 ), while in Buckie, Scotland, it has a clear favoring effect (*you*=Varbrul factor weight .70, *they*= Varbrul factor weight .48), and in Guysborough Village, it has a clear disfavoring effect (*you*=Varbrul factor weight .11, *they*= Varbrul factor weight .45). However, no percentages are given.
The lack of a contemporary favoring effect of you-subject on was-leveling in locations thought to have been settled by the Northern British further highlights the robust ability of relatively isolated language varieties to innovate rapidly. Again, we should not assume that communities with similar settlement histories and similar geographic and demographic circumstances will use linguistic variables according to the same linguistic patterns, as we just saw above. Was-leveling appears to have entirely re-morphologized in the rural Inland South since the time of settlement by the Scotch-Irish; the Northern Subject Rule no longer appears to affect was-leveling there (if it ever did), while existential-there contexts strongly do. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 2, linguists have noted rural communities to be leading in the spread of pre-voiceless monophthongal /ay/ (Irons 2007:4, Thomas 1997:314-324) as well.

It is particularly surprising not to have found evidence of the Northern British patterns in studies conducted that focused heavily on relatively isolated communities in the Inland South. Linguists have typically assumed that language in isolated communities is relatively conservative. For example, Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:141) write, “relic […] areas, because of their peripheral geographic location or isolated social and/or political circumstances, tend to preserve features typical of earlier stage in the history of a language.” Indeed, linguists have frequently used the language of ‘relic’, ‘remnant’, or ‘enclave’ communities as a window onto the history of African American Vernacular English (Mallinson and Wolfram 2002, Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001, Tagliamonte and Smith 2000, Poplack 2000).57

57 In fact, Rickford (2006) finds that Tagliamonte and Smith’s conclusions about the history of African American Vernacular English on the basis of speech patterns observed in contemporary Nova Scotia and Scotland are problematic in several ways. For example, he suggests that the authors rely too heavily on statistically insignificant results, and token numbers are not provided. He also suggests that the authors’
However, as pointed out by Montgomery (2000), isolated communities retain some historical features that other communities do not, but they also rapidly innovate other features. However, we tend to observe the retentions and ignore the innovations because we envision rural, isolated places as static and antiquated. Indeed, Wolfram (2004:75) claims that “the role of innovation tends to be overlooked in most descriptions of enclave dialect communities.” Indeed, Andersen (1988:54, as cited by Wolfram 2004) noted that

[…] there are internally motivated innovations which arise independently of any external stimulus. These too have an areal dimension and may appear to spread merely because they arise in different places at different times. (75)

Wolfram (2004) was compelled to problematize linguists’ reliance on similar grammatical constraint patterns across varieties to draw historical ties, after he observed clear differences between, on one hand, grammatical constraints on the speech in rural enclave communities in the Southeast US that are believed to have been settled by Northern British settlers, and on the other hand, grammatical constraint patterns attributed to traditional Northern British dialects. For example, along the coast of North Carolina, in areas believed to have been primarily settled by Northern British immigrants, he noted the presence of weren’t-leveling (the leveling of all past-tense plural negative be tokens to weren’t), a feature not historically associated with Northern British dialects (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2003, Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1994). Wolfram (2004:75) suggests that perhaps early regional koiné dialects developed and spread in the Southeast US, and that grammatical constraints on was-leveling (as well other features)

presuppositions about the behavior of female speakers, language change, and historical migration are unjustified.
were at that point re-organized, and features like weren’t-leveling were spread. This idea seems reasonable, but my own observations suggest that the dialect patterns in the rural US South are more than mere remnants of historical regional koiné dialects. Rather, individual speakers across the South appear to be agentively selecting and avoiding various linguistic features, from a vast array of features that are considered appropriate in Southern speech styles (cf. Johnstone 1999).

4.2.2.3. Polarity. A number of studies have found that whether a token of standard-were is positive (my friends were) or negative (cars weren’t) is correlated with whether the token is leveled to was. However, this grammatical constraint is not historically attested (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:162) and the motivations behind it are unclear. As illustrated by Table 4.7, its effect across communities is inconsistent.58

58 Also, Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:160) find negative polarity to favor was-leveling significantly more than positive polarity in Guysborough Enclave and North Preston, Nova Scotia, and no significant effect in Guysborough Village, Nova Scotia. Percentages are not provided. In London, Cheshire and Fox (2009) find a complex interaction of polarity with ethnicity.
Table 4.7. Findings of previous studies regarding the effect of polarity on was-leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Negative &gt; positive (by 15 percentage points or more)</th>
<th>No clear difference between negative and positive (less than 15 percentage points difference)</th>
<th>Negative &lt; positive subjects (by 15 percentage points or more)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazen &amp; Hamilton (2008), WV*</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (2000) Buckie, Scotland</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte &amp; Smith (1999) Samaná Peninsula, Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schilling-Estes &amp; Wolfram (1994) Ocracoke, NC</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (2002) Fens, UK</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliamonte (1997) York, UK</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These studies likely contain an overlapping set of speakers.

The effect of polarity is not even consistent across those communities thought to be settled by speakers of Northern British-derived varieties, such as West Virginia (Hazen, in progress; Hazen and Hamilton 2008); the Samaná Peninsula (Tagliamonte and Smith 1999); Guysborough Village and North Preston, Nova Scotia (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000); and Ocracoke, North Carolina (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1994). There appears to be a wide range of variation regarding the effect of polarity, even among quite similar, relatively isolated communities, again highlighting the capacity for rapid innovation in all types of communities.

4.2.3. Social factors. More studies have looked at linguistic factors influencing was-leveling than have looked at social ones, but we do have a considerable amount of information about social distributions of was-leveling around the world. Speakers use

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59 However, Tagliamonte and Smith (2000: 160) demonstrate a favoring effect of negative polarity on was-leveling in Buckie, Scotland; North Preston, Nova Scotia; and Guysborough Village, Nova Scotia, and argue that this is further indication that the dialects are closely historically-related.
was-leveling at widely-varying rates, even within a single, narrow geographic area, as exemplified by the difference between urban upper-class and rural working-class residents of the area of Anniston, Alabama, who used the feature at rates of 3% and 98%, respectively (Feagin 1979:202-3) (see Table 1 in Section 4.2.1). Among white Inland Southerners, rates vary from 4% in Warren County, North Carolina (Hazen 2002) to 93% in Roaring Creek, North Carolina (Mallinson and Wolfram 2002). To my knowledge, no comparable studies of this feature have yet been conducted in Kentucky. However, rates in neighboring West Virginia range from as low as 25% (Hazen, in progress) to as high as 91% (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1975).

Rates among African Americans have typically been found to be high, ranging from 56% in Hyde County, North Carolina (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2003) to as high as 94% in Beech Bottom, North Carolina (Mallinson and Wolfram 2002).

Some studies have found rates of was-leveling to be (inversely) correlated with speaker education and socioeconomic class. For example, in their study of nine residents of Cabell County, West Virginia, Hazen and Hamilton (2008), find non-high school educated speakers using the feature in 86% (n=37) of the time, but high school educated speakers using the feature at a rate of only 37% (n=49). Among urban speakers in Anniston, Alabama, Feagin (1979) found urban working-class speakers using the feature in 70% (n=905) of tokens, while urban upper-class speakers did so in only 3% (n=658) of tokens. In York, Tagliamonte (1998:176) found that less-educated speakers used the feature more frequently as well, although exact percentages are not available.

Other social factors found to influence was-leveling include rurality and migrant status. Feagin (1979:202-3) found working-class rural speakers using the feature in 97%
(n=304) of tokens, while working-class urban speakers did so in only 70% (n=905) of tokens, as mentioned above. In their (2008) study of West Virginians, Hazen and Hamilton note speakers who have remained in West Virginia most of their lives using was-leveling in 70% (n=44) of tokens, whereas those who have migrated to non-Southern, urban locations use the feature in only 45% (n=42) of tokens.

There is no general pattern with regard to gender and was-leveling; women on the whole do not seem to be more prescriptively normative than men, despite the principle put forward by Labov (1990:210-215) and commonly accepted within sociolinguistics that women tend to speak more standardly than men do. While men lead women in use of the feature in Anniston, Alabama (Feagin 1979:202-3); Warren County, North Carolina (Hazen 2002); and North Preston, Nova Scotia (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:160), women lead men in use among speakers in Guysborough Enclave and Guysborough Village, Nova Scotia; Buckie, Scotland (Tagliamonte and Smith 2000:160); and the Dominican Republic (Tagliamonte and Smith 1999:15). For was-leveling, as for most other linguistic features, the gender of speakers seems to interact with other social factors on the local level in complex ways (Eckert 1990).

In general, was-leveling indexes marginalized groups, including less educated, working class, rural, and African American speakers. The close affiliation of this feature with powerless groups suggests that was-leveling is stigmatized according to dominant social norms. Indeed, even though Wilson County speakers frequently make statements praising local, nonstandard pronunciation features, they also frequently criticize local

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60 This serves to undercut the argument made by Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:161-3) that because women use was-leveling more than men in the varieties they study, the leveling is not socially stigmatized (and therefore not likely to be a relic of a prior Creole status). Indeed, most studies of was-leveling suggest that the feature is socially stigmatized due to prescriptive norms (e.g. Hazen, in progress, 2002; Hazen and Hamilton 2008; Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Feagin 1989, 1986).
nonstandard grammatical features. Wilson County appears to participate in a common pattern in which standard language ideologies are more stringent regarding grammar than regarding pronunciation (cf. Sharma 2005, Rickford 2000, Cameron 1995, Hoover 1978). Chambers (2009:267-268) suggests that standard varieties tend to retain arbitrary complexities, including avoidance of was-leveling and other generic singulars, in order to provide users with the social distinction of having learned the correct forms, a type of social gate-keeping.

The association of was-leveling with powerless groups of speakers also suggests that, like other stigmatized vernacular features, was-leveling is probably also used by speakers to orient to local norms and express solidarity with other low-prestige speakers, as well as intimacy, emotion, humor, opposition to mainstream values, and other such qualities. Indeed, Hazen (2002) finds that Warren County, North Carolina speakers with locally-oriented identities use significantly more was-leveling than do speakers with outward-oriented or expanded identities. Also, Cheshire (1982:109) noted that “bad” girl teens, who were part of an anti-mainstream vernacular culture, used was-leveling at a rate of 81%, while “good” teens used the feature at a rate of only 63%.

Overall, rates of was-leveling vary widely, even among nonstandard, vernacular varieties of English, but the social prestige of a group and its rate of was-leveling tend to be inversely related.

4.3. METHODS. From interviews with the thirty Wilson County interviewees, I extracted all realizations of past-tense be in which standard English would require were,

61 Exact figures are not available; the study included 707 total tokens.
62 Exact figures are not available; the study included 712 total tokens.
specifically, with the subjects you, we, they, and 3rd person plural full noun phrases (NPs) such as people, the books, and so on. I excluded contexts with singular subjects in the subjunctive mood (I wish I was/were taller) because, based on my intuitions as a native resident, quite a low number of Wilson County speakers would recognize were as the standard form in this context.63

Using regression analyses, I tested the factors in (4.1) for an effect on was-leveling.64

(1) **Factors used in regression analyses**

- individual speaker (fixed/random effect)
- age group
- education level
- polarity (positive or negative)
- declarative/affirmative or interrogative
- whether the subject was you, we, they, a full NP, or an existential-there construction
- whether the subject and verb were immediately adjacent or not

4.4. **Results.** Wilson County women overall realize only 32% (156/459) of tokens of standard-were as was. See Figure 4.1 for the rates of was-leveling for each speaker. Thirty-two percent is a relatively low rate of was-leveling compared to rates across other vernacular varieties of English including those in the Inland South. Sixty-one percent (27/44) of the groups or sub-groups of speakers analyzed in prior studies of this variable (see Table 1) demonstrate higher rates of was-leveling than Wilson Countians do.

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63 No other studies of was-leveling that I have come across have mentioned excluding singular subjunctive tokens, so I assume that most studies included such tokens as cases of standard were, potentially making rates of was-leveling appear relatively higher in Wilson County than rates in other communities of study. However, the number of singular subjunctive tokens in conversational speech is so low that I believe any such effect is negligible. Furthermore, I eventually conclude that Wilson Countians are using was-leveling at a relatively low rate, so the move to eliminate singular subjunctive tokens from analysis is a conservative move.

64 Word order was omitted as a factor because interrogative tokens were very infrequent in the data set, and therefore the vast majority of VERB-SUBJECT word order tokens were existential-there constructions.
Seventy-one percent (12/17) of the white Inland South groups or sub-groups listed in Table 1 use was-leveling more frequently than Wilson Countians do.

**FIGURE 4.1. Rates of was-leveling for each speaker**

4.4.1. **SOCIAL FACTORS.** Education level has a significant effect on was-leveling in Wilson County (see Table 4.8) as predicted. The 55-70-year-old teachers’ many years of experience teaching school and explicitly teaching prescriptive verb agreement and modeling grammar for students seem to have reduced their use of was-leveling. All five speakers use the feature in less than 30% of tokens, while two of the five younger teachers (Lori [18-24 years] and Jennifer [30-45 years]) use quite high rates of the feature (50% [n=14] and 47% [n=15], respectively).

65 Four of the five teachers in the oldest age group are retired.
A cross-tabulation of *was*-leveling with education and age group in Wilson County shows that the effect of education is consistent across age groups (see Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9. Percent *was*-leveling by age group and education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Less than 2-year-degree</th>
<th>2-year-degree or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 yrs.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 yrs.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-70 yrs.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to my original hypothesis, however, age does not have a significant effect on *was*-leveling (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10. *Was*-leveling by age group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>% <em>was</em></th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24 yrs.</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 yrs.</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-70 yrs.</td>
<td>0.394</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This suggests that *was*-leveling is not currently undergoing change in Wilson County, and contrasts with findings in neighboring West Virginia that show a decline in

66 Other factor groups in this run were polarity, adjacency and grammatical subject, age group, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.
apparent time (Hazen in progress, Hazen and Hamilton 2008). It seems likely that *was*-leveling in Wilson County has already fallen from a previously higher rate. Older studies of *was*-leveling in the Inland South showed quite high rates of the feature, and most other recent studies of *was*-leveling in the Inland South show modest levels akin to that in Wilson County.

In Wilson County, standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997) and negative ideologies about Southern and Mountain language and culture focus most heavily grammatical features (see 4.2-4), and appear to be a key factor driving speakers to use low rates of *was*-leveling.

(4.2) **Beth (30-45 years)**

a. I worry more about the grammar coming out than I do about the accent.

b. You know, I wouldn’t really be like, “Oh, don’t talk like that, that’s an accent” [to my children in the future], I would just be trying to correct their grammar.

(4.3) **Amelia (55-70 years)**

If you don’t like my dialect, that’s too bad, I use correct grammar.

(4.4) **Sheila (30-45 years)**

RG: So, did you ever have any teachers in school or anything that would ever try to correct the way that kids talked?

Sheila: Grammar. Not, not so much how we say it, but if it was used properly, you know. I think that was the main concern.

Noting the stigmatization and decline in use of *was*-leveling in West Virginia, Hazen (in progress) writes:
For the variables analyzed to date, more social change appears for *was* leveling than for any other variable. It appears to have started off as a ubiquitous feature and ended up being typified as a Southern, male, lower class feature.

Indeed, I believe Wilson Countians have reduced the level of nonstandard *grammatical features overall* in their speech due to ideological pressures. According to my preliminary analyses, *was*-leveling is the second-most numerous nonstandard grammatical feature in the interview data set, second only to present-tense verb non-agreement (*people is*), and most other nonstandard grammatical features occur less than ten times in the entire data set.

Some other non-mainstream American groups may share with Wilson Countians the strategy of using relatively nonstandard pronunciation but relatively standard grammar. Rickford (2000:224) defines Standard Black English as “a variety in which the speaker uses standard grammar but still sounds black, primarily because of black rhetorical strategies and selected black pronunciations […],” and discusses educational specialist Hoover’s (1978) study showing great support among East Palo Alto and Oakland, California parents of elementary school children for such a variety. Also in California, Sharma (2005) finds Indian Americans pairing relatively standard grammar with relatively Indian-accented speech.

4.4.2. LINGUISTIC FACTORS. Studies have frequently noted that the speech of the Appalachian Mountain region shows effects of its Scotch-Irish heritage (Montgomery 1994, Wolfram and Christian 1976), including such traditional features as *a*-prefixing (*She was a-running*) and initial *h*-retention (*it*→*hit*). Therefore, it would not be
surprising if linguistic constraints on was-leveling also exhibited patterns similar to those associated with Scotch-Irish speakers. Further suggesting that Wilson County might exhibit Scotch-Irish language patterns, the community is quite isolated, even among other Eastern Kentucky communities.\footnote{In the estimations of Wilson Countians and other Eastern Kentuckians alike.} However, as discussed in Section 4.2.2, historical Scotch-Irish and Northern British grammatical constraints seem to have little effect on contemporary varieties of English. Instead, the primary grammatical constraint on the use of was-leveling is now existential-there contexts, which seems to be driven by cognitive processing pressures.

Was-leveling in Wilson County follows the general pattern of almost all studies of this feature, as discussed in Section 4.2.2.1, by showing a strong favoring effect of existential-there contexts, while other grammatical subjects show no clear effect. This is illustrated in Table 4.11, which lists the effects of all seven types of grammatical subjects considered in this study.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Was-leveling and grammatical subject\footnote{Other factor groups in this run were polarity, education, adjacency, age group, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.}}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
Grammatical subject & Centered factor weight & \% was & n \\
\hline
Existential there (there were--) & .80 & 60\% & 55 \\
Collective NP (people) & .55 & 33\% & 24 \\
Full NP & .49 & 22\% & 41 \\
Conjoined NP (the kids and I) & .44 & 14\% & 14 \\
you & .44 & 31\% & 49 \\
they & .38 & 24\% & 161 \\
we & .36 & 23\% & 115 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

p≤0.03
Although it does not reach statistical significance, ostensibly due to a low number (eight) of interrogative tokens, a favoring effect of interrogative contexts on was-leveling, as opposed to declarative contexts, suggests that the favoring effects of both existential-
there contexts and interrogative contexts are driven by the same cognitive processing pressure—the difficulty of making a subject agree with a plural subject that has yet to occur in the speech stream. Results are shown in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12. The effects of interrogative and declarative contexts on was-leveling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>% was</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative (<em>where were we?</em>)</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declarative (<em>we were here</em>)</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p≤0.014

Another linguistic factor that also affects was-leveling in Wilson County is adjacency of the subject and the past-tense be verb. Just as was found by Hazen and Hamilton (2008) in West Virginia and by Tagliamonte (1998) in York, United Kingdom, intervening material between the subject and the verb favors was-leveling, as shown in Table 4.13. This effect is thought to be driven by the difficulty of making a verb agree with a plural subject that is far away from it.

**Table 4.13. Adjacency and was-leveling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjacency</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>% was</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-adjacent (<em>the cats that were</em>)</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjacent (<em>the cats were</em>)</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p≤0.014

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69 Other factor groups in this run were education, polarity, grammatical subject, age group, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.

70 Other factor groups in this run were education, polarity, grammatical subject, age group, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.
Though it tells us little about Wilson Countians cognitively or socially, negative polarity contexts promote the use of *was*-leveling in Wilson County speech, as shown in Table 4.14. As discussed in Section 4.2.3, Hazen and Hamilton (2008) found a similar pattern in West Virginia, as did Tagliamonte and Smith (2000) in Buckie, Scotland, and Guysborough Village and North Preston, Nova Scotia. However, no explanation for this pattern has emerged, and indeed, several other communities fail to exhibit the same pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polarity</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>% <em>was</em></th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive (<em>they was good</em>)</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative (<em>you wasn’t here</em>)</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p≤0.004

Collective and conjoined NP-subject contexts have no significant effect on *was*-leveling in Wilson County, although conjoined NP-subjects tend to promote *was*-leveling in other communities. Nonsignificant factor groups are included in Table 4.15. Despite the presence of several seemingly processing-driven factors (existential-*there*, interrogative, and non-adjacent contexts) influencing *was*-leveling in Wilson County, in contrast, it does not clearly appear to be affected by either of the features traditionally associated with Scotch-Irish and Northern British dialects specifically, favoring effects on *was*-leveling of full NPs and the pronoun *you* as subjects (cf. Tagliamonte and Smith 2000). For example, third-person plural full NP-subject contexts and third-person plural

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71 Other factor groups in this run were education, adjacency, grammatical subject, age group, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.
pronoun (they) contexts are not significantly different, showing no clear effect of the Northern Subject Rule. Furthermore, you-subject contexts have no significant effect on was-leveling in Wilson County, in contrast to traditional Northern British patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical subject</th>
<th>Centered factor weight</th>
<th>% was</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective v. full and conjoined NP&lt;sup&gt;72&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Collective NP</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full NP</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conjoined NP</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full NP v. they&lt;sup&gt;73&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Full NP</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you v. they&lt;sup&gt;74&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, neither of the historically Northern British grammatical constraints on was-leveling appear to affect Wilson County speech today, underscoring the overall high level of linguistic innovativeness of Wilson County and other rural, relatively isolated speech communities, and raising problems for work that assumes that language changes more slowly in such communities. The existential-there and the adjacency constraints, as well as the possible interrogative constraint, reinforce the notion that cognitive processing efficiency is the main grammatical factor affecting the use of was-leveling in Wilson County, as well as in most contemporary standard varieties of English.

<sup>72</sup> Other factor groups in this run were adjacency, education, age group, polarity, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.
<sup>73</sup> Other factor groups in this run were polarity, education, adjacency, age group, declarative/interrogative and individual speaker identity.
<sup>74</sup> Other factor groups in this run were polarity, education, age group, adjacency, declarative/interrogative, and individual speaker identity.
4.5. CONCLUSION. The use of *was* for standard-*were* is common across unrelated varieties of English across geography and history, and in fact, the extension of singular verb forms to plural ones has been described as common among vernacular varieties of languages worldwide. Rates of use of *was*-leveling vary widely both across and within communities. In Wilson County, an overall rate of thirty-two percent *was* in contexts of standard-*were* is quite low, given rates found in other Inland South communities, as well as the relatively isolated nature of Wilson County, and residents’ relatively nonstandard vowel pronunciation.

*Was*-leveling has been associated with powerless and low-prestige groups in society, including speakers who are less educated, lower class, African American, or all of the above. In Wilson County, as well, college-educated speakers use *was*-leveling significantly less often than non-college-educated speakers do. Interviews with speakers suggest that Wilson Countians see bad grammar as a part of their dialect to be essentially avoided, while they see nonstandard pronunciation as natural, normative and comforting. Wilson Countians’ distinction between phonetic and morphosyntactic features seems to be an attempt to resolve competing pressures—the pressure to sound modern and educated, versus the pressure to sound authentic and local. However, unlike the phonetic variables analyzed, older speakers use low levels this local feature just as younger speakers do. Rates of *was*-leveling have likely already fallen in this community from previously higher levels.

*Was*-leveling appears to be shaped by cognitive processing pressures in ways that highlight the difficulty of making a verb agree with a plural subject that is after it in the speech stream, that is separated from the verb by intervening material, or that is a
conjoined NP. Grammatical patterns associated with Northern British dialects, in contrast, show no significant effect on was-leveling in Wilson County, as was also observed for the majority of other studies of the feature, even in rural and relatively isolated Inland South communities. This observation problematizes the traditional assumption of many linguists that language changes in isolated communities more slowly than it does in other communities.
5.1. **Introduction.** In the three preceding chapters, I showed that most Wilson Countians use a great deal of /ay/-monophthongization and also that they have a mean realization of /a/ that is fronted and likely to be raised as well. I also showed that they use a relatively low amount of *was*-leveling. I interpreted language use on the basis of generic social categories (age and education), ethnographic and demographic information and prior research. Now that I have presented that analysis for each of the variables under study, I can also discuss how speakers combine these features and incorporate them into personalized *styles* (Campbell-Kibler 2010, Zhang 2005, Eckert 1996) that help give the features their social meanings.

The majority of research on regional dialects has treated them as vernacular varieties, which are thought to be primarily learned in one’s formative years (Labov 2001:444) and to vary in a single dimension from more to less formal (ibid.:438-45). It is assumed that if speakers pay more attention to their speech, that they will speak more standardly, and with less of a regional accent. There is little room in the vernacular model for adult agency or creativity in the use of regional speech features. Labov (2009) remains puzzled as to how the set of vowel changes knows as the Northern Cities Shift is managing to spread so rapidly. However, findings indicate that individual Wilson County speakers vary considerably on what features they incorporate into their accents. In constructing speech styles, Wilson Countians appear to select from an array, or *repertoire* (Benor 2010, Gumperz 1964), of speech features that they perceive as normative or acceptable in their community. Wilson Countians construct the local accent
in ways that are highly individualized and reflect each speakers’ age, education, occupation, regional origin of partner, ideological orientation, and gendered style. It seems felicitous to treat Eastern Kentucky English and other regional dialects as performative and creative, rather than as simply an unconscious reflection of the vernacular acquired in one’s early years.

Linguists’ traditional treatment of regional varieties as un-reflective shows that they have difficulty believing that people might aim to speak with a regional accent. However, almost all Wilson Countians that I interviewed explicitly say that they like speaking with an accent, and many say that they would wish to speak with an accent, no matter how formal the context. And indeed, I expect that all of them would sound Southern to most American listeners, though in varying ways. Similarly, Johnstone (1999:514-5) found women in Texas using Southern-sounding speech in personalized and ideologically-motivated ways, to indicate “gentility, […] closeness and friendship, […] set a Southerner apart from others, [or] manipulate men…” In England, Trudgill (1972) found men using features of the Norwich regional variety for their covert prestige, or prestige derived from not being valued by mainstream norms. Highlighting the performative nature of regional dialects helps to answer the perennial question of linguists: why do stigmatized varieties persist? (Ryan 1984). The local dialect in Wilson county appears to be a “symbol of solidarity and truth” (Rickford and Traugott 1984) for speakers.

5.2. OVERALL TRENDS. Most Wilson County speakers combine a high rate of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization with a low rate of was-leveling, as illustrated by
Figure 5.1, which shows the rates of (perceptual) /ay/-monophthongization and was-leveling for each of the twenty-seven interviewees whose results were tabulated for both variables. Of these speakers, sixty-seven percent of individuals use high (≥ 50%) levels of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, while at the same time using less than 50% was-leveling. Fifty-six percent even use 90% or higher rates of /ay/-monophthongization, combined with less than 50% was-leveling.

**Figure 5.1. Rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization and was-leveling used by each speaker**

The pattern in which local phonological features are used more heavily than local morphosyntactic features is likely to be driven in part by differing popular ideologies about the two levels of language. Almost all interviewees explicitly say that they are proud and happy to speak with a local accent, but several explicitly distinguish an accent
from incorrect or bad grammar. Wilson Countians talk about their local accents very positively overall, and say that dialect is natural, fun, comforting, and a valuable part of their heritage. They seem to embrace local speech norms heavily as part of a broader pattern of heightened local orientation, in opposition to outsiders’ marginalization and stereotyping of their language and culture. However, phonological features seem to be more appealing than morphosyntactic features for speakers to use in expressing their local or in-group identity. This is likely to be driven by society’s general willingness to accept that there are multiple valid ways of pronouncing words, but reluctance to accept that there are multiple correct ways of using grammar, because grammar is seen as a symbol of social order (Cameron 1995). Wilson Countians express anxiety that outsiders will perceive them as dumb or ignorant on the basis of their speech; using relatively prescriptive grammar seems to be a way for them to alleviate that concern.

Further supporting the notion that speakers make an ideological distinction between phonology and grammar is the fact that speakers who diverge from the high-/ay/-monophthongizing/low-was-leveling pattern do so in the ways we would predict: several speakers use high levels of both features, or low levels of both, but no speaker combines high levels of was-leveling with low levels of /ay/-monophthongization. College-educated speakers overall also use this pattern heavily: 85% of thirteen college-educated speakers use more than 50% pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, but less than 50% was-leveling (see Table 5.1), which is unsurprising, since they have been under heavier pressure to appear intelligent and competent than non-college-educated speakers have. Also, speakers who work in the educational setting, where prescriptive grammar ideologies are strong, are particularly likely to use low rates of was-leveling. Retired
teachers use was-leveling at an average rate of only 9%. Even Bridget, Jean and Janice, who are not teachers and are not college-educated but work in other positions in the education sector, use the feature at an average rate of only 12%.

The strategy of combining in-group phonological features with prescriptive morphosyntactic features has been attested among other subordinate social groups as well, including African-Americans (Rickford and Rickford 2000, Hoover 1978) and Indian Americans (Sharma 2005). This seems to be a compromise strategy, designed to relieve the tension of competing social pressures to 1) fit in with one’s marginalized social group and be authentic, yet at the same time, 2) appear competent and intelligent according to dominant, mainstream standards.

It is difficult to correlate variation in /ʌ/ with variation in /ay/ or in past-tense be because the variation is multidimensional and it is difficult to say which tokens of /ʌ/ are Southern and which are not. However, one pattern does arise: of the four speakers who tend to avoid /ʌ/-raising altogether, three use quite mainstream speech overall—Krista, Lisa and Nell use only 5% was-leveling at most and Lisa uses only 10% /ay/-monophthongization as well. This suggests that /ʌ/-raising is more stigmatized among Wilson Countians than /ʌ/-fronting is, which is logical, since fronting is used heavily in the urban Midwest and California and not just in the South. However, this prestige difference cannot be confirmed by metapragmatic data because variation in /ʌ/ is too far below the level of consciousness.

Overall, most speakers monophthongize /ay/ and front /ʌ/ while some also level was and raise /ʌ/. /ay/-monophthongization, was-leveling, and /ʌ/-raising and –fronting
seem to index country or Southern speech (though in varying ways and to varying extents), although the fronting of /ʌ/ seems also to be related to different gendered personal styles. Speakers generally tend to embrace local phonological factors, but criticize and avoid grammatical ones, as the result of social pressures to be authentic yet competent. Looking at the speech, life histories, ideologies and emotions of individual speakers illuminates even greater nuance in the social meaning of linguistic variation in Wilson County, as I show in the next section.

5.3. INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS. Age, education, occupation and the regional origin of one’s partner are related to individual Wilson Countians’ speech patterns and cultural values. Younger speakers use /ʌ/-raising less than older speakers do and college-educated speakers use was-leveling less than non-college-educated speakers do. Teachers use particularly unlikely low rates of was-leveling, as do women who work in the educational system in non-teaching positions. However, individuals are the perceiving and acting subjects who give life to social meaning and social categories. Individual Wilson Countians, with their unique life stories, experiences, and personal styles, combine linguistic features throughout each day, in ways that define and re-define how a Wilson Countian speaks. Combining generalizations about categories of speakers, with fine-grained individual details of the speakers who make up those categories, allows us to understand how individuals relate to and constitute local social categories such Wilson Countians and Southerners and broader, generic social categories such as educated people and young people.
How Wilson Countians become different types of speakers seems to be based in
differential experiences, as well as in differential meanings and ideologies, in ways that
are impossible to tease apart. What experiences we have is bound up with how we
interact with the world because, as found by Bourdieu (1984) in his study of
socioeconomic class and personal taste in France, our experiences and our values are
constantly shaping each other in a cyclical way. For example, Wilson Countians with
more education have had different life experiences molding their ideologies and
behaviors than people with less education have had. They have spent a great deal of time
outside Wilson County, and probably in a city, in a place where it was important to
appear smart and competent, and where they were likely to have friends, acquaintances,
and possibly professors make marginalizing comments about their speech. Such
experiences have shaped their cultural and linguistic norms directly—several talk
explicitly about how their feelings and their speech were affected by experiences at
college.

However, parents with college degrees are more likely to produce outward-
oriented children who want to go to college, and also more likely to have the money to
send them there, so that the differences between college-educated and non-college-
educated people is not reducible to the experience of going to college alone, but rather, is
perpetuated from generation to generation. Similarly, people who work in education are
more likely to use prescriptive grammar, ostensibly due in part to the close attention paid
in the educational realm to prescriptive grammar, and the close proximity with other
people who are in education, went to college, lived outside the county, and do white-
collar work. However, the people who go into the educational setting for work are more
likely to be people who feel relatively comfortable there, and who subscribe to the ideologies of the school. Therefore, I do not attempt to isolate single causes for the language of individual Wilson Countians, but rather, situate their behavior in fields of different forces and circumstances.

As explained in the previous section, most Wilson County speakers use high rates of pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, and relatively low rates of was-leveling, because they want to sound local and authentic, yet competent and modern. Most (64%) of the eleven speakers who follow this pattern are college-educated, and most (85%) of the thirteen college-educated speakers, are in this group. Overall, however, this group of speakers is quite internally diverse. For example, it includes Regina and Janice, two women in the oldest age group, who have never lived outside the county and do not have college degrees, as well as Krista and Selena, two young women who are currently attending college in an urban area. The speech of these women seems to reflect their different backgrounds. Regina uses 38% was-leveling (n=13), a rate similar to that of most non-college-educated speakers, while Krista and Selena use 0% was-leveling, reflecting their college-educated status. Regina’s mean /ʌ/ realization (n=11) is also 25 Hz lower (=higher in the mouth, and more prototypically Southern) than Selena’s (n=12), and 81 Hz lower than Krista’s (n=18), as illustrated by Figure 2. Surprisingly, Janice uses low rates of was-leveling, only 5% (n=19), perhaps because she works in an education setting (in non-teaching position), where standard language ideology appears to be particularly powerful.

Two speakers, Lisa and Tammy, diverge from the high-/ay/-monophthongization/low-was-leveling pattern by using very low rates of /ay/-monophthongization in pre-
voiceless positions (only 10% perceptual monophthongs). The next-lowest user of /ay/-monophthongization is Selena at 50%, followed by Hannah and Alice at 70%, so Lisa and Tammy are doing something that is quite different from what the rest of the speakers are doing, with a highly salient, stereotyped variable. Lisa and Tammy are also the only two interviewees in long-term romantic relationships with partners from outside the South. It seems that the long-term, in-depth contact with a partner from outside the South provides a particularly strong pressure to use mainstream phonological features instead of local or regional ones.

Lisa also uses one of the lowest mean realizations of /A/ (n=8) (refer back to Figure 5.2), and she uses only 5% was-leveling (n=19), in addition to using only 10% pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization.

The only other speaker who generally avoids /ay/-monophthongization is Tammy, who did not go to college and has never lived outside of Wilson County, but is married to a man from the Midwest, and spends time with his family there. She uses a very low level (only 10%) of the Southern stereotypical feature /ay/-monophthongization. Tammy’s mean /A/ realization (n=10) is also marginally less raised than (and therefore less Southern than) those of most other Wilson Countians (see Figure 5.2). However, she does use was-leveling at 44% (n=16), very close to the 42% rate (n=188) of all interviewees who did not go to college. Her local dialect draws more heavily on

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75 Although it is fronted in comparison to the mean realizations of most Americans (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006; Peterson and Barney 1952), and fronting is very common in the South (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006). Using /A/-fronting but not raising seems to allow Lisa, Selena, and others to pronounce the vowel in a way that is local and Southern-sounding, but not as stigmatized among outsiders as a raised or raised and fronted /A/ would be.
morphosyntax and less heavily on phonology than do the local accents of most other Wilson County speakers.

**Figure 5.2. Speaker means for /i/, /æ/ and /a/**

![Speaker means for /i/, /æ/ and /a/](image)

Of the speakers who use greater than 50% was-leveling, none are college-educated, and all are relatively locally-oriented and married to or dating local men. Carol represents this group well—she is a blue collar worker without a college degree who has never lived outside the county. She enjoys nature, privacy, family and the country, and says that she has never wanted to live outside of Wilson County. She uses 100% was-
leveling (n=12), 100% perceptual monophthongs for pre-voiceless /ay/ and her mean /ʌ/ realization (n=11) is the eighth most raised, and sixth most fronted, of the twenty-eight included in the analysis.

Another example of a speaker who embraces local grammatical features as well as phonological ones is Tina, who does not have a college degree, but has traveled outside the region doing blue collar work. She is ideologically very locally-oriented, saying that people elsewhere have a “little piece of their soul that’s missing.” A quote from her is included in (5.2).

(5.2) **Tina (55-70 yrs.)**

I couldn’t wait for my [few] weeks off, to be home. Just to be home. This is home. […] You can actually see the trees and the sky here. You can, and you can feel it. It’s a feeling that we have, down right in our soul, it is. Makes your soul feel good.

Tina’s speech reflects her age, education level and ideological orientation. She uses 100% perceptual pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization and 63% was-leveling, and her mean /ʌ/ realization is the third-most fronted of the study.

While Wilson County speakers’ language use is affected by social factors like age, education, occupation, gendered style and partner’s regional origins, speakers also differ from each other in ways that are not clearly attributable to these factors. Individuals can have quite similar life circumstances and social characteristics, but be very different in their ideologies and behaviors for reasons that I have not captured here. For example, Krista and Lori are both women in their early twenties with post-graduate schooling. Both come from relatively well-off families and have lived in a large city,
although both say that they proudly use an Eastern Kentucky accent. However, Krista is quite outward-oriented and Lori is quite locally-oriented. Krista never plans to live in Wilson County again. Lori expects to live in the county in the future, is in a relationship with a local man, has a job in the county and talks negatively about life in the big city as illustrated in (5.3).

(5.3) **Lori (18-24 yrs.)**

a. I decided I didn’t like that big town. So I come back home, yeah. I come back home.

b. It’s really a dog-eat-dog world [in the city].

The ideological differences between Krista and Loris seem clear in their speech as well. Krista uses 0% *was*-leveling (n=4) but Lori uses the feature at a rate of 50% (n=14). Lori’s /ʌ/ (n=10) is 57 Hz lower (=higher in the mouth) and 231 Hz fronter than Krista’s (n=18), so Lori’s mean pronunciation is more Southern than Krista’s in both dimensions. Krista seems to express her warm, positive feelings about Wilson County and its speech through her use of monophthongal /ay/ alone, while Lori does so using /ay/-monophthongization, /ʌ/-raising and -fronting as well as *was*-leveling. Krista and Lori construct Wilson County accents that are highly personalized and that reflect their unique ideological positionings, life histories and circumstances, and that are also within the bounds of what is acceptable in Wilson County for a young woman who grew up there. The differences between their speech patterns illustrate why the notion of a repertoire of local features from which speakers can select is useful.
5.4. CONCLUSION. Combining the findings for /ay/, /ŋ/ and past-tense be in Wilson County brings several trends to light. Most speakers heavily monophthongize pre-voiceless /ay/ and front and raise /ŋ/. However, they pair heavily locally-accented phonology with rates of was-leveling that are relatively low, especially for a small, rural community in the Inland South. Overall, Wilson Countians prefer local phonological features to local morphosyntactic ones, both in terms of how they talk about language and in terms of how they actually speak. This strategy is based in popular language ideologies that eschew incorrect grammar and it allows speakers to resolve the competing pressures to appear local and authentic but at the same time, intelligent, modern and competent. College-educated speakers and especially older teachers rely particularly heavily on this strategy, as do most of the non-college-educated speakers who work in an educational setting in non-teaching positions.

The observation that individual Wilson Countians are linguistically and culturally heterogeneous despite their overall similarities not only counters the vernacular model, but it also counters pernicious\textsuperscript{76} stereotypes about the Southern Mountains, the South and rural places in general. Americans have imagined these places as homogeneous for many years, just as people erase (Gal and Irvine 2000, Irvine and Gal 1995) internal differences within all groups that they imagine as Other. Pointing out the heterogeneity of the community also represents the emic, or insider, perspective. Wilson County interviewees themselves often complain that the media stereotype them as backwards hillbillies, and that the general public treats them poorly as a result. They rebut that not

\textsuperscript{76} In that they are painful for residents, and also in that they contribute to the furthering of oppression, by allowing residents to be discriminated against structurally and socially, and their land to be damaged environmentally.
all people from Eastern Kentucky are like that,\textsuperscript{77} highlighting the internal diversity of their community in resistance to demeaning stereotypes.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{77} Repeating the Other-izing process in a fractally recursive way within their own community.}
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I set out to explore the relationship between language and society in Wilson County because we understand relatively little about the language of the rural and Mountain areas of the South, and because rural areas are assumed to be linguistically conservative. This study offers an ethnographically-informed social analysis of Wilson County speech as well as new insights about linguistic constraints on morphosyntactic change.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, results indicate that Wilson Countians use /ay/-monophthongization almost exclusively, even in the pre-voiceless environment (89%, n=270), and that for them, the feature is a salient symbol of rural, Mountain South identity, even though they explicitly acknowledge that it is heavily stigmatized by outsiders. Older and less educated speakers use more pre-voiceless /ay/-monophthongization, although the patterns failed to reach statistical significance, likely due to high overall rates of monophthongization and highly individualized patterns of variation. It seems that the speakers who are under the most pressure to speak according to outside, mainstream norms indeed accommodate phonetically to those norms. The disparity between those speakers who went to college and those who did not is growing, indicating that mainstream language norms are entering the community primarily through young, college-educated speakers. Metapragmatic comments indicate that Wilson Countians use this innovative Southern feature heavily because it is a salient symbol of rural Southern identity. It seems to be an ideal feature for demonstrating that one is not “talking proper.”
Being in a long-term relationship with a non-Southerner has a particularly powerful effect on the way Wilson County women speak. The two women who are married to non-Southerners are the only ones to use perceptual monophthongs for pre-voiceless /ay/ less than fifty percent of the time, and in fact, each uses the feature at a rate of only 10% (n=10). Merely going to college or living outside the county does little to alter how Wilson Countians use this salient Southern speech feature, no matter how much outsiders comment on it or tease them about it. However, the intimacy of a long-term romantic relationship with a non-Southerner appears to bring mainstream language norms close enough to a Wilson Countian to lead her to use mostly diphthongs for pre-voiceless /ay/. To my knowledge, no other study has considered mate’s regional origin as a factor conditioning the use of regional dialect features.

In Chapter 3, I note, based on other studies, that Southerners tend to both front and raise /ʌ/. Results of this study indicate that most Wilson Countians use a raised-and-fronted variant of /ʌ/, and that the rest use either a heavily-fronted but not raised variant, or a raised but only moderately fronted variant (n=309). Speakers who front and raise /ʌ/ the least also use relatively mainstream, prescriptive speech in general. As predicted, older speakers use significantly more raised variants of /ʌ/. The pattern for fronting is more complex. As predicted, older speakers use the feature most, but in the two youngest age groups, college-educated speakers actually front more than non-college educated speakers do (although this correlation does not reach statistical significance). I suggest that the use of fronting by college-educated speakers is related to the use of /ʌ/-fronting among prestigious outside groups, including young urban Midwesterners and Californians. The realization of /ʌ/ also seems to be related to gendered speech styles—
users of raised and heavily-fronted tokens tend to use a girlier, higher-pitched speech style, while users of raised and less-fronted tokens tend to use an earthier, lower-pitched speech style.

Wilson Countians’ overall high rate of use of local phonetic features seems to be driven by their strong orientation to local language and culture norms. This strong local orientation seems to represent a reaction against linguistic and cultural marginalization at the hands of outsiders. Local identity and speech norms are likely being driven by an oppositional reaction to marginalization in other parts of the South as well.

As I argue in Chapter 3, Wilson Countians’ explicit ideologies about and use of local morphosyntactic features represent a different kind of reaction to marginalizing mainstream ideologies. Local residents use notably lower rates of was-leveling (only 31%, n=450) than speakers have been shown to in many other locations, especially speakers in other poor, rural, and Mountain South communities. As predicted, college-educated speakers use was-leveling significantly less than non-college-educated speakers do, although speakers talk about “bad” grammar as a part of the local dialect. It seems that all of the Wilson Countians in this study use phonological features in part to signal their local identity, but that they avoid local grammatical features in an effort to appear competent, intelligent, and modern. College-educated speakers and people who work in education use particularly low rates of was-leveling, apparently reflecting the high value that schools place on correct grammar. The especially negative evaluation of morphosyntactic variables in Wilson County mirrors a wider societal ideology that places high value on prescriptive grammar as a symbol of social order (Cameron 1995).
Existential-there, interrogative contexts, intervening material between the subject and the verb, and conjoined NPs, which would all seem to make subject-verb agreement more cognitively difficult, show significant effects on was-leveling in Wilson County. Negative contexts promote was-leveling, as is true in many communities, though the reason for this pattern remains unclear. Speakers do not seem to show the effect of two constraints that have been attributed to Northern British dialects (NP>Pronoun, you>other pronouns). I have also collected findings from a number of other studies, and noted that Northern British patterns actually seem to have been retained in very few of the isolated, rural, Northern-British-settled communities where researchers have examined was-leveling. This observation problematizes the common assumption in linguistics that language changes slowly in isolated communities, and underscores the point that we cannot expect linguistic constraints on variables to necessarily be retained for numerous generations in any type of community.

This study benefited heavily from asking speakers directly about speech. It was a highly useful tool for understanding local categories of meaning (such as Eastern Kentucky accent, bad grammar and hick), local ideologies and emotions surrounding language, and the experience of linguistic and cultural marginalization. Ideologies about place (surrounding Wilson County in particular, as well as Eastern Kentucky, the South, and the country more generally) play a powerful role in shaping Wilson Countians’ lives, and language ideologies are a significant thread woven throughout those place ideologies. By asking speakers directly how they feel about language, and exploring the topic from a variety of different angles with them, and then comparing this information with the way that speakers actually use language, I was able to put together a relatively full picture of
local language ideologies, from more to less conscious. I would recommend that linguists at least attempt to examine metalinguistic commentary as part of any sociolinguistic analysis.

This dissertation also suggests that low education rates and poverty in Eastern Kentucky and Appalachia may be tied to stereotypes in complex psychosocial ways, and that language plays a key role in this relationship, leading residents to orient strongly toward local norms and away from hierarchical authority and condescending judgment. I suggest that researchers’ own standard language ideologies have helped lead them to erase the existence of, or problematic nature of, linguistic marginalization.

Additionally, this dissertation helps us to understand that individual communities in the Mountain South can be quite different from each other culturally, counter to popular ideologies that portray the region as monolithically traditional. Wilson County appears to be somewhat unique in Kentucky, and in the South more generally, in that it is heavily democratic and not heavily religious, even though it is entirely rural.

Focusing on the perspectives of Southerners helps us understand why Southern difference is continually being replenished, rather than extinguished, by generation after generation of Americans. It seems that Southerners continue to identify as Southerners in part because people often tell them that they are Southerners, and in quite jarring ways, and that Southerners take on that identity wholeheartedly but re-evaluate it, in a positive light.

It seems likely that non-Southerners continue to cast the South as Other, because it helps them to feel civilized, non-racist, and modern, and to imagine a separate place that remains pre-modern, quaint and traditional, and that can serve as a repository of
nature and heritage. Other-izing also helps outsiders exploit the South (and particularly the Mountains) economically and environmentally, by excluding residents ideologically from the realm of real people, and rendering their opinions and fates less consequential than those of outsiders. The Other-izing of the South also feeds a widespread and booming industry of country entertainment, products, political rhetoric, and so on.

My findings, both linguistic and metalinguistic, also indicate that standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997) is extremely widespread and powerful, even in this small, rural community where almost everyone seems to use some sort of localized accent. Wilson Countians feel far more insecure and conflicted about their language than they do about other aspects of their community. Standard language ideology seems to be a key way that social domination is experienced here, and probably elsewhere as well—it seems to be highly internalized by subordinate group members, ostensibly because it seems to go almost entirely unchallenged in public discourse. As McNeil (1998:42) observes, “…in the United States—as in many parts of the industrialized world—language prejudice remains a ‘legitimate’ prejudice; that is, one can generally say the most appalling things about people’s speech without fear of correction or contradiction.”

In general, it is only when people take an introductory linguistics class that they are told that all varieties of language are equally valid. In contrast, people seem to discuss equality based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, class and sexuality far more frequently in the public discourse. Therefore, outsiders tend to feel quite free to comment on the speech of Wilson Countians and other marginalized groups. Language marginalization

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78 These statements are essentially applicable to Mountain, Appalachian, rural Southern, rural people, and other geographic categories as well, since stereotypes and ideological structures repeat across different social categories, and in recursive ways, across levels of social categorization.

79 For instance, through dangerous and destructive resource extraction, absentee resource ownership and highly exploitative labor practices (Billings, Norman and Ledford 1999; Gaventa1980).
appears to remain a wide-open channel for cultural marginalization, which itself seems to be more taboo (Lippi-Green 1997, Greene 2002).

This study also suggests that stereotyping and internalized oppression are significant sources of suffering for marginalized groups, causing them to feel out of place among outsiders, and forcing them to hold negative thoughts and feelings about their own abilities, characteristics, pasts, families and friends. Residents are placed in a conundrum of sorts in that they can attempt to conform to mainstream, prescriptive language and culture norms, but they risk being considered inauthentic and a traitor within their home community and are likely to be unable to fully hide their dialect and their origins among outsiders anyway. Alternatively, they can defy mainstream, prescriptive norms and embrace local, in-group norms though this brings the risk of humiliation and discrimination outside the community where most of the job and educational opportunities are. A compromise strategy that treats accent and grammar differently seems to be one way that Wilson Countians manage the conflicting demands that accompany their socially subordinate status.

In addition, this dissertation raises the notion that cultural and linguistic marginalization can lead to further differentiation, as communities set up norms that oppose the mainstream. An oppositional orientation in turn seems likely to lower rates of participation and success in mainstream institutions such as education that represent urban, middle-class domination, thereby contributing to an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Sociological accounts of poverty tend to focus on its material and occupational aspects, but this study demonstrates that the symbolic facet of inequality should not be
overlooked, because it is a source of significant suffering for the marginalized, and it powerfully shapes their behavior in ways that lead to further inequality.

I do not consider local ideologies of place and language to represent false or distorted consciousness. Although I see Wilson Countians’ highly locally-oriented ideologies of place and language as contributing in some ways to the perpetuation of their poverty, I also see those ideologies as a key way that county residents maintain self-esteem and social face in the face of demeaning stereotypes. I also emphasize that the idea that every community in America needs to have factories, strip malls and highways in order to be modern and well-off is an urban, capitalist, middle-class ideology, self-interested and positioned just as Wilson Countians’ competing local, country ideologies are. The way that we define and understand poverty seems to be overly simplistic, and should perhaps take factors such as an unspoiled environment, privacy, and close family networks into account as bearing on a community’s sense of wealth.

This study also raises the possibility that ideologies are able to spread and persist throughout societies, and to play a key role in domination and resistance, because they tend to span a wide range of cognitive domains in a linked, logical fashion. Ideologies about the country and the city, the South and the North, the Mountains, among other social categories, bear on politics, entertainment, language, food, fashion, nature, the family, religion, ethnicity and so on. These chains of meanings and values also seem to be readily transferable laterally, from one social category to another (e.g. from Southerners to ranchers in the West [Hall-Lew 2004]), and readily transferable vertically, from one level of analysis to another (e.g. from rural people in general to Southerners in particular).
Overall, this dissertation helps fill in our lack of knowledge about language and culture in the rural and Mountain South. It also indicates that even rural, isolated communities undergo rapid language change. Finally, it illuminates how regional identity and regional speech are shaped by power relationships and raises larger questions about the functioning and nature of ideology and oppression in general.
APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Afr. Amer. = African American
AL = Alabama
Euro. Amer. = European American
GA = Georgia
KY = Kentucky
NC = North Carolina
So’ern(er) = Southern(er)
TX = Texas
WV = West Virginia
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Preliminaries
Age?
Where do you live?
Kids? How many?
Job?

Sociolinguistic Interview Section

Wilson County Module
*Do you like living in this part of Wilson County? How long have you lived here? How long do you plan to keep living here?
*Did you like growing up in Wilson County? Why? Where in Wilson County did you grow up? What is it like to grow up here? Do you plan to stay here or move away?
What’s good about living in Wilson County? Bad?
*Have you ever lived or wanted to live somewhere else? Why? What would be good about living somewhere else? Bad?
*Are people here good people?
*Are people in Morehead or Grayson any different from Wilson County? *What about in Lexington? *What about up North, or out West?
*Have you traveled much outside this region? [Where, and for how long? Is it nice to come back, after being away, or do you wish you’d stayed away? Why?]
*Is this a good place for kids to grow up?
*Has Wilson County changed since you were young? Do you think it would be good for it to develop more, or stay like it is?

*Do you ever go to Wilson County events like the [local] Festival or ball games? Why? What do you do there? Who do you go with?

*Do you go to a church? [What kind? Did your family mostly go there too? If not, why did you pick that one?]

**Family Module**

*Do you have any brothers and sisters? [Do you still see them? How often? When was last time? What happened?]

*Were your parents strict when you were growing up? Did you ever visit your grandparents? [Were they strict?]

[Do your kids take after you? How? What do you like to do with them?]

[How often do you see your kids? When was the last time? What happened?]

[What was it like to have a kid for the first time? Did it change your life? And the times after that? What was the biggest surprise?]

[Any grandkids? What do you like to do with them? Who do they take after?]

**Childhood Module**

*Did you grow up on a farm or in town? Did you have to do farming? [Did you like it? What parts did you like? Dislike? What were your duties?]

*Were you a good kid? Did you ever get in trouble for anything? [What was something you got in really bad trouble for?]
*Did you ever do anything funny in school?

*Did you play with other kids when you were young? What kinds of things did you do for fun? What kind of games did you play? Do you remember any funny stories from then?

*Were your parents strict when you were dating? [What was dating like when you were growing up?]

*How do you think the way kids grow up now is, compared to then?

**School Module**

*How far did you have a chance to get in school?

*Where did you go to school?

*Did you like school when you were growing up? Why?

*What were kids like in your school? Were there bullies? What did they do?

*Did you have good teachers? A favorite subject?

[Did you ever hear stories about the old one-room schoolhouses? What do you think it would’ve been like to go to one?]

*How did life change when you got to high school? What did you do after high school?

**Job Module**

*What did you want to be when you grew up? What changed your mind?

*When did you start working?

*Do you like your job? Why? How long have you been doing it? What are your duties? How are/were the coworkers? The boss?
**Miscellaneous Module**

*What are your hobbies? Do you ever ride four-wheelers/motorcycles?  [Where?] Do you like to go boating? [Where?] How about hunting?  
What’s the craziest thing that’s ever happened to you?*

[Have you ever been afraid for your life?]

[Do you have any pet peeves?]

[What’s the best trip or vacation you’ve ever taken? Why?]

[What was the last trip you took? How was it? Like you expected? Would you recommend it to other people? What would you have done differently?]

[Where would you want to go, if you could go anywhere in the world?]

**Language Attitudes Section**

**Wilson County Speech Module**

*One of the things people talk about with regard to Wilson County is the way we talk. Do you think people from Wilson County have a particular way of talking? How would you describe it? Can you give examples of words, grammar, or pronunciation?*

*Can you recognize someone from here by their accent?*

*Do some people here have more of an accent than others? [Who? Why?]*

*Do young people here talk differently from older people? Can you give examples of words, grammar, or pronunciation? Why do you think this is so?*
*Do you think dialect is disappearing or changing? [How so? Why? How do you feel about that?]

*Where else do you think people might talk kind of like we do?

*Has it ever felt good run into someone from around here when you’re away, and hear a familiar accent?

**Respondent’s Speech Module**

--- **General Description Sub-Module**---

*How would you describe your own speech? Can you give examples of words, grammar, or pronunciation? Do you like it?

--- **Social Relations Sub-Module**---

*Did outsiders ever make comments to you about your speech? [What kind of things did they say? How did you feel about that?]

*Has anyone here ever said to you about your speech?

*Did you ever have teachers talk about your accent in school? How? How did you feel about that?

*Have you ever had communication difficulties due to dialect?

*Can people tell where you’re from by your accent? [How?]

--- **Accent Use and Feelings Sub-Module**---

*Are you proud of your speech? Are you proud to be from WILSON COUNTY?

*Are you ever embarrassed about your speech? Are you ever embarrassed about where you are from, to be from a poor place?

*Do you ever try to talk with less of an accent? [Why?]
*Are there times when you talk with more of an accent?  [What changes?]
*Did you used to talk differently from you do now?  [How so?  Why?]
*Did you used to feel differently about your speech?  [How so?  Why?]

Situating Respondent’s Speech Module
*Do you think you talk differently from other people your age from here?  [How so?  Why?]
*Are your parents from here?  *Do you talk differently from them?  *Can you give examples of words, grammar, or pronunciation?  [Is it on purpose?  How do you feel about that?]
*Where are your grandparents from?  *Do you talk differently from them?  [Can you give examples of words, grammar, or pronunciation?  Is it on purpose?  How do you feel about that?]

[Has your family been here for generations?]

Speculative Module
*If you were on [a large regional city] TV, how would you speak?  Why?
*If you were on national TV, how would you speak?  Why?
*Do you expect your speech to change in the future?  [How so?  Why?]
*Would/do you want your kids to have an accent, too?  Why?  What might be good or bad about it for them?]
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