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The Southern Accent and "Bad English": A Comparative Perceptual Study of the Conceptual Network between Southern Linguistic Features and Identity

Dean Hayes

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**THE SOUTHERN ACCENT AND “BAD ENGLISH”: A
COMPARATIVE PERCEPTUAL STUDY OF THE
CONCEPTUAL NETWORK BETWEEN SOUTHERN
LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND IDENTITY**

by

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**B.A., ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH,
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DEDICATION

In memory of Eugene J. Sanders.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the perception of Southern American English is linked to specific linguistic features, both phonetic and grammatical, in addition to how these features are interpreted differently by two different groups, one Southern and one non-Southern. Using interview-based methodology, I produce a holistic conceptual representation of the identity invoked for each constellation of features for each group and provide a unified framework for features and corresponding associations that previous works have discussed individually. Finally, I analyze imitations offered in interviews, by which means I am able to glean more detailed information from participants than they would otherwise be able to convey without technical terminology.

The Southern group distinguished two classes of linguistic features, which I term "phonetic" and "grammatical" features. This distinction allowed two separate constellations of associations with Southern American English, one generally positive and one generally negative. The grammatical features were considered "bad English" and associated with a lack of education, while the phonetic features, such as the Southern Vowel Shift, deletion of /t/, and realization of (ING) as [-m], were regarded as merely an "accent" and interpreted as "laid-back." In addition, Southern American English was associated with politeness and humility. For some features, especially t/d-deletion and alveolar (ING), the perception as positive or negative varied dramatically with the context. The non-Southern group, on the other hand, interpreted every aspect of Southern American English as negative, from grammar to phonetics. Notably, the Southern Vowel Shift, perceived as abnormally slowed speech, was thought to correlate to slower cognitive processing, and grammatical features were interpreted as demonstrating lack of education or even stupidity. Concomitant associations included religiosity, xenophobia and racism, and jingoism.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to link the perception of Southern American English, or language attitudes and ideologies surrounding it, to its specific phonetic features. In particular, I study how linguistic forms interrelate with nonlinguistic experiences and generalizations, including stereotypes. Although many of the features studied in this thesis have been investigated in previous works, what is novel here is the arrangement of these features within a single, holistic framework. Furthermore, I outline the perception of Appalachian English for two separate groups: a community that uses it for quotidian purposes and another that has no extensive contact with it whatsoever, whose perception I take to represent the understanding of Southern Appalachian English (or Southern American English in general at the national level, since usually no distinction is made even by Appalachians). I do this by selecting a group of participants that represent each group, one from my native region in Southeastern Middle Tennessee and another situated in Albuquerque, New Mexico, whose members originate from various non-Southern regions within the United States. I use sociolinguistic interviews, including especially imitations, in addition to traditional ethnographic methods to ascertain what each group most often holds to constitute Southern American English and what each group most often believes one can assume about an individual who uses it.

This goal necessitates that I distinguish and trace the interactions among the physical phenomena that make up the linguistic variety that I call Appalachian English, the regional discourses and associations that people use to attach further, super-referential meaning to this language variety, and the national discourse that a much larger population uses toward the same end with vastly different results. I contend that language structures, even when used by one community in a function there

entirely referential, may convey distinct social information for a separate community--in this case better understood as a language style, or "Repeated sets of stance taking moves [that] become relatively stabilized repertoires... associated with situations or social identities" (Johnstone 2002, 138).

Furthermore, features that are distinguished by the first community with social significance, such as nonstandard grammar as opposed to nonstandard phonology, may find no correspondence in the second community, which may treat both features as, for example, equally "hick." Thus, the indexical landscape or, as Eckert (2008) refers to it, the "indexical field" of each population as it relates to the linguistic features of Appalachian English can differ in an overwhelmingly complex number of ways. Finally, in both instances the stereotyped identity linked to the language style has the potential to interact with the perception of that variety even at nonlinguistic levels of interaction. Thus, one must investigate the stereotyped identity associated with a language style at the greatest detail in even nonlinguistic dimensions to truly understand the perception of the corresponding language variety.

I demonstrate that Southern participants distinguish between nonstandard pronunciation, termed the "Southern accent," and nonstandard grammar, termed "bad English." This distinction allows Southerners to link a constellation of positive associations and functions with the former, including use for politeness, while the latter is regarded as a mark of poor education, with other related negative associations. Non-Southerners, on the other hand, regard Southern American English as "bad English" in its totality, and concomitantly link it only to negative associations, including backwardness, lack of education, religiosity, and jingoism, in line with previous studies (See the subsequent chapter for summaries of such studies).

Chapter 2

Previous Studies

This section consists of summaries of previous works and concepts in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology that I find pertinent to the current study. I have grouped them by tradition: Within the first subsection, the reader will find works from the discipline of sociolinguistics, especially those dealing with "language attitudes." In the second, I have summarized works from linguistic anthropology. This second group I have additionally subdivided into general concepts and those relating to identity.

Sociolinguistics and the Tradition of "Language Attitudes"

Many works treating dialect perception, subsumed under the study of "language attitudes," start with a phonetic analysis and treat language variation as reflective of meaning. In many of these studies, the "strength" of a given accent is analyzed according to the presence or extremity of a number of phonetic features (Allbritten 2011, Kirtley 2011, Evans 2010). A dominant theme within this tradition is to use a recording of a given speech sample along with a survey to lead participants to identify perceived social characteristics of the speaker in the sample. I consider these works to fall within the tradition of what Eckert (2005) calls the "first wave of variation studies" (2). As such, I extend to these studies the same strengths that Eckert extends her earlier exemplars: They present a "big picture" and, through the shifting values of prestige and stigma, relate social hierarchy to language styles. These works provide the foundation to studies more concerned with the local and the recursive interrelationship between meaning interpretation and construction, Eckert's second and third waves,

which I will treat in the subsequent subsection.

As an example of Eckert's first wave, Soukup (2001), in line with the dominant tropes of language attitudes studies, performs a number of experiments to elicit perceived social characteristics associated with Southern American English. She concludes that Southern American English is overwhelmingly regarded as negative on the national level according to various criteria, including, for example, its reflection of competence and trustworthiness. Of significance to this study is that her survey methodology uncovers many of the same trends elicited through more ethnographic methodologies. However, Soukup investigates mainly how Southern American English is perceived by non-Southern English speakers; while a group of informants was drawn from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, it is unclear from where these informants originated or with which style they spoke (A "stronger" Southern accent is associated with rural areas with less tradition of education, and university students, in addition to having at least some degree of higher education, can come from anywhere within the country).

Preston (1997) develops a folk theory of American dialectology and language standards. 5 His analysis focuses on a dichotomy between what he terms "insecure regions," here southern Indiana, and "secure regions," here southeastern Michigan. Preston notes that insecure regions are less harsh in their criticism of nonstandard English. Furthermore, Southern speakers are less likely to admit to one standard variety of English. Overall, Preston concludes that there is no inter-regionally accepted understanding of what constitutes standard or bad English; each region reflects its own associations, which may or may not parallel those of other regions. An important aspect of this study is that it includes the perception of Southern American English by Southern American English speakers, where participants note mixed perceived social characteristics associated with the style. This is carried further in Preston (In press), in which the author discusses the position that Southern American English in

particular holds in American folk dialectology. He demonstrates that Southern American English is both the most recognized dialect in the United States and also the most heavily stigmatized, even within the South. That said, Preston does recognize that Southern American English is regarded differently in the South, where it also serves for group solidarity. In fact, he demonstrates that even other regions in the United States hold some degree of affection for Southern American English. An important contribution made by these works, and one that I shall carry in mine, is that the perception of any particular variety of English differs among different English speakers (However, more thoroughly covered in my summary of Agha (2003), this does not mean that the standard variety is not subconsciously applied universally to evaluate regional varieties). Thus, while both a Tennessean and a New Yorker may have a similar association of ignorance with Southern American English, this does not exclude the possibility that the Tennessean possesses an additional association with other forms of competence than those implied by education. While Preston demonstrates that such differences exist, I will more fully describe these differences and demonstrate that associations that cannot necessarily be polarized as good or bad or nonetheless meaningful.

I have so far discussed sociolinguistic works on Southern American English in order to set a foundation for theories based on communities of practice. While I will otherwise draw little from the theories presented in language attitudes studies, I will draw from a particular methodological consideration. In my personal experience, whenever the topic of regional accent comes up, I have encountered frequent imitations of Southern accents performed by both Southerners and non-Southerners. From the point of view of a researcher with linguistic or anthropological interests, such performances provide data concerning what participants associate with Southern American English without them having to overtly state it. Studies concerned with language attitudes have noted the opportunities presented in imitations of accent: Evans (2010) asks if the imitation of a regional dialect

by nonnatural speakers is capable of producing results phonetically comparable to natural speakers. The author begins with an overview of professional imitators and demonstrates that such imitations, although not precisely the original, do alter their formant frequencies in systematic ways; the limit of success in imitation here seems to be the difference in f_0 between the imitator and his or her target. This leaves open the possibility that dialects, in which it is the relative distribution of formants that counts, can be imitated to a point phonetically (and, it follows, perceptually) indistinguishable from the speech of a natural speaker.

This question is investigated later in the article and more extensively in Evans (2002) with the use of a non-Southern speaker's imitation of a West Virginia variety of Appalachian English. A local who did not speak Appalachian as his usual vernacular was recorded speaking his usual vernacular and then imitating the West Virginian variety, and participants were asked to score these recordings along with others according to their certainty that the speaker was a local. While the imitation was not overwhelmingly regarded as local, many participants did regard it as either another variety of Southern English or from a separate region in West Virginia. A marginal number of participants identified the imitation as such. A phonetic analysis of the imitation versus the speaker's natural vernacular did reveal systematic differences between the two corresponding to [ay] monophthongization and the Southern vowel shift; however, it was the unnatural "drawl" that was identified as the feature that gave the imitation away in some instances. One can conclude that while the authenticity of imitations is no doubt inconclusive, important for uses in the current study, imitation is useful at least for identifying what a casual listener finds to be the salient features of a regional accent.

It is important to distinguish between the performance of a mere imitation of a dialect, a mock style, and a caricature. Chun (2004) describes the use of "mock Asian" by Korean American comedian Margaret Cho. Chun's example of mock style demonstrates that a broad range of features inspired by

nonnative accents interplay with other, nonlinguistic stereotypes, resulting in a combination of style and figure. Cho incorporates features from each specific target group, such as emphatic syllable elongation for a native Korean speaker or confusion of intervocalic /l/ and /r/ for a native Japanese speaker, when imitating a member of that group, but does so only within a set context of content for each target group. Thus, while a figure is invoked in mock performances, the style nonetheless plays a central role.

Preston (1992) theorizes "the caricature," which he describes as an exaggerated mental representation or performance of the most representative member of a given group. Thus, while an imitation is any performance of a style that the performer does not consider his or her own, and a mock imitation is such a performance that invokes part of a figure along with a style, in the caricature it is the figure that is emphasized. Preston demonstrates the notion of the caricature by having a group of black students imitate white speech stereotypes and a group of white students imitate black speech stereotypes. The result was a mix of lexical, morphological, syntactic, but especially content features representing both groups. Preston regards the whites' imitation of black stereotypes as more consistent, which he attributes to a more widespread folk understanding of black culture. White culture, on the other hand, is often regarded as "standard," a register which most blacks emulate, perhaps unconsciously, at least in some circumstances; as such, many of its features are invisible and do not appear in the content structure of the caricature. In relation to the current study, since there is a well formed folk understanding of "Southern" (probably more so than any other American region), imitations from either region of a stereotypical Southerner should generate consistent results.

In instances where a participant imitates Southern American English during the course of a conversation, the entire performance, from phonetic features to content, can be taken as points in a constellation of a caricature--this notion of a constellation of associative features will be taken further

in my discussion of Eckert's (2008) *indexical field*. For now, it can be posited that imitation, although a form of production, is an opportunity for a researcher to accumulate a broad range of data involving the perception of a regional English variety at once. Furthermore, since any mock performance of a style will imitate a figure as much as the way he or she talks, one must take the content of such a performance to be as representative of "Southernness" as the accent used to express it; one will bleed readily into the other. In the present study, I hope to have each group perform imitations of both Southerners and someone who speaks only "standard" English. From the studies reviewed above, I posit that both groups will be more consistent in their impressions of Southerners than of standard speakers, while the standard impressions will have a greater variety. Imitation data must be given special treatment, since what is seen in such a performance is approximated production data for a speaker's mental representation of an identity--many non-Southern speakers may never have even heard a native Southerner's speech, and in such case the resulting data is actually an imitation of a previous imitation. In fact, one might posit that a style with a longer tradition of imitation is simply more readily imitated inter-regionally. While these performances, regardless of their perceived "authenticity," cannot necessarily be likened to natural production data, they do speak for an understanding of a corresponding identity associated with the style. Therefore, they can offer as much to this study regarding someone's perception of Southernness as a list of responses in an interview.

Language attitude studies lead to a number of further questions. First, while some of the studies summarized above have demonstrated that a Southern accent is widely regarded as undesirable, they do not ask how such stigma comes about (that is, how meaning is created). Also, they do not ask how the style persists despite this stigma, nor do they exhaust the possible associations with a given language style (While a Southern accent may indeed elicit an association with incompetence in most participants, this does not bar the possibility that those same participants possess other, nonnegative associations,

absent in a researcher's survey). In order to answer these further questions, I turn to Eckert's (2005) "second wave" of variation studies, those with an emphasis on ethnographic methodologies and local communities. Her "third wave," which I believe readily blends with the second, further relies on the theory of communities of practice. These broad theoretical traditions are what is briefly outlined below, and I hold this study to fall among them. I have divided these summaries into general concepts pertinent to the current study and concepts relating specifically to style as reflecting identity.

Ethnographic Takes on Dialect Perception

Eckert (2008) argues that "...the meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings--an *indexical field*, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable" (454). She follows the lead of linguistic anthropology in that she sees meaning as both constructed and reflected in a given speech act; how a feature is interpreted will depend on the context and will from there influence the understanding of subsequent contexts. The purpose of the current study is essentially to construct one such indexical field, as proposed by Eckert, and then to compare that indexical field with that of another group. However, while Eckert's model identifies one linguistic feature at a time, I investigate an entire language style as an index of meaning in addition to its constituent features. That is, while Eckert studies how a constellation of meanings can become indexed by one linguistic feature, I investigate this in addition to how a group of linguistic features can all work together. For example, alveolar [ING] might be regarded as lazy, and the Southern Drawl might be regarded as uneducated, but the style indexed by each in combination, "Southern," will take on further, perhaps contradictory meanings; a blue-collar worker in the South, for example, might use a Southern accent, with its associations of masculinity, to imply greater competence at his job, but without any implication of

laziness. Thus, in order to truly grasp the significance of a language style, one must investigate how its features work in conjunction as much as how each component works in isolation.

One finds a parallel with Eckert's *indexical field* in Campbell-Kibler's (2008) study on the perception of (ING). In short, Campbell-Kibler concludes that (-ing) or (-in) can each either be perceived as desirable or undesirable depending on the listener's knowledge of who is talking. Thus, both positive and negative associations can potentially exist simultaneously for a given linguistic feature, and elements of the context determine which is activated. At a more abstract theoretical level, one finds an interesting parallel with the cognitive linguistic literature pertaining to schemas (Langacker 1979, 2008; Tuggy 2007). Here, the concept of a schema is related to the human capacity of generalization (Tuggy 2007, Langacker 2008), where experience conditions any number of meaningful abstractions at various levels, which in turn sanction instantiations. These schemas can produce complex networks, and schemas within each network compete for activation for any given instantiation, much as Eckert's *indexical field* consists of any number of meaningful structures that each have the possibility of being activated in any given circumstance. Furthermore, an association with a lower level schema may conflict with an association with a higher level schema within the same network.

In the way outlined above, the conceptual structures indexed to a given utterance or style can be massive and varied. Basso's (1988) classic work investigates how single forms, toponyms, are used to index extensive cultural knowledge, not only in the sense of conventional stories, but also even in conventional visual memory. The Western Apache use a practice called "speaking with names" in certain contexts, where place names are used in almost complete isolation to index a visual image of the place from a specific perspective and a corresponding, morally pertinent story. One finds similar examples even in more familiar contexts: In my personal experience, I have heard and used what are

called "old country sayings," often humorous, established utterances that relate to a given context. Even when used by someone who normally uses a "standard" style, these phrases must be uttered in a Southern accent. While some are used universally around the region ("He couldn't hit the broad side of a barn"; "She cain't carry a tune in a basket with a lid on it") others, in form indistinguishable from the first group, are used more within a specific family ("He couldn't find his butt with both hands and an Indian guide"), and some blend into the catchphrases used only by a specific individual ("Wake me up when we get there," uttered when no travel is taking place, or "there's the thunder wheels a'rollin"). These phrases, when used outside of their context or by someone not usually associated with them, index that context or person. In some cases, the phrase can index the event in which it was coined. For example, I know someone who invented the phrase, talking about an untrustworthy friend, "If he told me the sun was setting in the west, I'd have to run outside and check for myself." Now, I can ask the phrase's inventor, "Where's the sun setting?" and he immediately recounts the most recent lie told to him by his friend. Here, a group of memories (in addition to other contextual information) is indexed to a set phrase, just as a corresponding moral story is indexed to specific toponym in Basso's account of the Western Apache. If complex conceptual structures can also be indexed to individual language features or styles, then how will these large conceptual structures influence the perception of those features or styles? For instance, how might someone regard a particular style differently who has extensive memories of people speaking the style versus someone who does not?

One must also theorize on the process through which such conceptual structures become indexed to a given style. As a template, Agha (2003) uses a model of speech chain events to account for the adoption of Received Pronunciation in Great Britain. The most important point of the work is that Received Pronunciation is the result of production and reproduction of local forms of interaction compounded through time, with an ever-changing landscape of social meaning and function that,

although ever-changing, are nonetheless present throughout the register's evolution. In addition to how this concept of register strengthens the argument of communities of practice, of interest here is his representation of Received Pronunciation as an interregional register that indexes education and high social class--One finds an interesting parallel with General American English, with Southern American English its antithesis. Also of interest is that many more people recognize Received Pronunciation than emulate it. Both of these points find a direct correlate with General American English and have guided the research in this study accordingly. Specifically, just as Received Pronunciation is interregional and regional varieties nonstandard, so varieties tied to a specific region in the United States will likely receive some stigma for being nonstandard--the following body of the thesis will serve to provide an example of this with Appalachian English. Also, since the interregional variety is more widely understood than emulated, so one would expect that elements of the standard variety will be used inter-regionally to analyze regional varieties. Other perceptual studies (Allbritten 2011) also show that accents are perceived in degrees of "strength" according to their distance from an ideologically standard variety. Thus, of importance to the present work, the standard variety will be the most common, albeit invisible, standard for understanding the regional variety. For example, alveolar (ING) can only be understood as such when compared to the ("standard") velar (ING), which, even if rarely articulated by a given speaker, will nonetheless be accepted by him or her. Indeed, every feature of Southern American English, when taken as components of a style, can only be understood as such when differentiated from their correlates in General American English; speakers exploiting this style therefore must grasp both at least to some extent.

Finally, one must theorize on wider semiotic processes governing language ideologies, which in turn influence the perception of language styles. Irvine and Gal (2000) explore how three semiotic processes have conditioned the language ideologies and structures surrounding three regions: Southern

Africa, Western Africa, and Macedonia. These three semiotic processes are (1) iconization, in which an indexation becomes fused with a constellation of language features so that the union is naturalized, (2) fractal recursivity, in which dualities are conceptualized as opposing one another with the possibility of further divisions within each opposition, and (3) erasure, in which realities that oppose the ideology are ignored or, one faced, rationalized to fit, often through simplification. I will summarize their example of West Africa as a demonstration: While Fula, Sereer, and Wolof coexisted in a complex relationship dominated by multilingualism and native language ideologies, colonial powers imposed their own understanding on the region in which Europe was pit against Africa at one level of recursivity, and then each language group was pit against each other in a further division. This of course necessitated that each language corresponded to a specific ethnic group, an example of iconization, which extends to an example of erasure in that no one-to-one correspondence existed either then or now. The model introduced by Irvine and Gal is useful to this study at a number of levels, and I will make use of their terminology frequently. If Eckert's (2008) indexical field will be used to organize participants' associations with Appalachian speech, then Irvine and Gal's semiotic processes will be used to analyze and compare these associations within and between groups. In short, since Appalachian English can only be considered nonstandard when compared to General American English (an instance of fractal recursivity), personal memories of highly respected individuals using the style sanction its usage when no comparison takes place but are erased when the ideology of bad language is made salient in a given context.

Language as a Marker of Identity

One essential function of Southern American English and, thus, an emphasis of this study is that the variety in question has the potential of indexing one or a number of Southern

identities. In this regard, it may be considered an example of "style" (Johnstone 2002) or "footing" (Goffman 1981). Johnstone provides a definition for language style: "Repeated sets of stance taking moves can become relatively stabilized repertoires, or *styles*, associated with situations or social identities" (138). As such, style is intimately connected with stancetaking ("Stance...has to do with the methods, linguistic and other, by which interactants create and signal relationships with the propositions they give voice to and the people they interact with" (137)). Goffman (1981), in his discussion of "footing," states, "A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (128). Goffman's emphasis is that footing changes continuously even within the same conversation; he relates it both to code switching, both between languages and dialects, and what he calls the "frame for events" (128), a combination of a speaker's relationship to any number of listeners and a given context. While a particular utterance is likely to produce a particular set of conceptual structures in interpretation, it does not imply a single structure; just as any particular language feature can index any number of disparate social meanings, so multiple related and unrelated identities, in addition to broader stances or even no social meaning whatsoever, can be brought into focus at different times or even simultaneously. Thus, within a single exchange, a speaker might produce [a:] in place of /ay/ in order to index Southernness, express solidarity, or simply because that is how he or she happens to articulate that sound. That is, with footing in mind, one must remember that there is more going on than simply footing and that a single footing can take on many more values than the researcher can hope to exhaust. For the sake of this study, of importance is both the value of a given footing (a Southern accent) to the *listener(s)* (that is, its *perception*) as well as the invoked *figure*, or Goffman's counterpoint to Preston's "caricature." While "caricature" implies an overdone impersonation of a stereotype to accent salient social significances, the concept of "figure" reminds us that any emulation of an accent or the character that a speaker ties to it is an approximation of a

collection of memories in which that accent was produced and by whom; thus, every instance of Southern speech (or, indeed, any speech act at all) is in imitation of some figure. I ask, how does the figure invoked in a Southern accent differ according to region? I will demonstrate that it is a particular figure associated with Southern American English transmitted through personal memories that sanctions its continued usage.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) describe a model for identity as produced through local linguistic interaction and therefore as much a form of production as interpretation. This is in essence the theory of identity as produced through a community of practice. This model allows for the analysis of identity at various levels, from region, to ethnicity, to ideology. Bucholtz (1999) provides a more specific example of identity as produced through language with the example of "nerd girls." Presented in the article is an account of how this community of girls use language to index a strengthened appreciation of intelligence when compared to other groups within the school. That is, both membership in a group and personal values are indexed by a certain manner of talking; furthermore, this identity is in fact perpetuated through the practice of speaking. I mention this theory in order to emphasize a key aspect of Southern American English when interpreted as an expression of identity: its speakers, at some level, use it volitionally. This provides a parallel to Preston's (In press) findings that Southern American English speakers sometimes regard their manner of speaking with pride, although they also concede that it is an example of "bad English." It is obvious that Southern American English is capable of marking identity, and, given Bucholtz and Hall's assertion regarding the nature of identity, a speaker perpetuating the identity would of course have some positive association with it, perhaps comparable to the notion of "covert prestige." It would depend on the researcher, then, to investigate the nature of that association.

After reviewing these previous studies, several questions remain to be asked. First, how do

indexical fields relate to each other? How will associations with Southern American English in Albuquerque overlap with those in Tennessee, and how will they be different? In what ways will the network of associations with Southern American English be more complex among Southerners when compared to non-Southerners? Using interview data, including imitations of both Southern and "standard" styles by Southerners and non-Southerners, I hope to compile a list of linguistic features that are regarded as "Southern" for both groups; I will compare these features, either stated overtly or performed in imitation, with the findings of previous works. Also, I will take special note of how a Southern identity is encoded through linguistic means and what that identity actually entails. Ultimately, I will identify the functions of Southern American English that make it a desirable style within the region and, thus, motivate them to perpetuate its corresponding Southern identity. I will demonstrate that Southerners, although they share an association of stigma with Southern American English with non-Southerners, also possess extensive personal memories of what they regard as highly respectable people using the style; these personal memories, constituting a particular desirable figure, form an index with the regional style absent among non-Southerners.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The key method employed in this study was the sociolinguistic interview: The better part of the research presented here is based on a series of conversations with twenty first-language speakers of American English, ten from Southeastern Middle Tennessee and ten originating from other parts of the United States and currently residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I acknowledge that what is often construed as "North" versus "South" is perhaps better expressed as "(urban, liberal) North" versus "(rural, conservative) South," and the dichotomy is better imagined as two polarities separated by a continuum with certain constellations of associations lying closer to one than the other. In line with these expectations, I selected Southerners from a rural areas and non-Southerners from urban areas. Also, in an effort to control for as many social variables as possible, I only included interviews in this study with white participants whose ages ranged from 20-39 years. Furthermore, I only included participants who had either graduated from college or were currently college students. Thus, all of my participants from both groups were young, white, educated, and middle class; the remaining key difference separating the Southern and non-Southern groups was region of origin within the United States and population density. I drew participants from my personal network of acquaintances in both locations. I by my own discretion determined that participants were close enough to me to be comfortable talking about language ideologies openly, but not so close that our friendship compelled them to participate in the study. In each group, half of my participants were male and half were female.

I consciously structured my interviews to produce the widest possible range of results; that is, I hoped to produce the most holistic indexical network possible for associations with Southern American English. The conversations were therefore of no set length or structure, but I did introduce topics that I

found to foment conversation. After a natural conversation was initiated, I would guide the conversation in the direction of what I deemed pertinent topics with as little overt control as possible until the conversation halted. That is, I diminished my role as researcher by allowing the participant to introduce whatever themes came to mind and would only invoke my position as interviewer with a list of questions once the conversation seemed to require it (This was in reflection on Briggs' [1986] admonitions). I therefore consider these interviews to lie precisely between open and semi-structured in form, since the degree to which I structured the conversation as researcher depended on my estimation of the success of the conversation, although I would never abruptly shift the flow of conversation for any reason. After each interview, I recorded and transcribed each conversation. Afterwards, I would abstract dominant trends from the entire body of interviews that represented each region. I would only include an association in my analysis if it appeared in at least three interviews for the given region. In the body of the thesis, the associations with Southern American English for each group are presented in order of the total number of conversations in which they appeared.

In an effort to provide an example of my interview methodology, here is how one conversation proceeded: The participant greeted me and declared that she had read an article on how Texans no longer speak with a Southern accent (“This sounds like something you'd be interested in”). I asked why the article said the Texan accent was disappearing, and she said it did not say but that she guessed it was improved education that was producing the changes. I asked her how education would influence how people say words, and she responded that more education would improve people's pronunciation. During this segment of the interview, the participant provided an example of the Texan accent through a spontaneous George W. Bush imitation. The conversation eventually shifted toward recent political events, and I took the opportunity to ask how rurality in New Mexico contributed to the results (The participant had earlier mentioned a recent trip to a rural area in New Mexico, and she provided stories

about how she perceived the people there). Then, the participant, in her answer, connected the topic back to the South. As is apparent, there was no guarantee that a participant would stay on a topic for an extended period of time, but the distribution of topics within a conversation, along with priceless clips of opinions and observations, sometimes within imitations, was nonetheless useful. How each participant guided the conversation on his or her own, that is, how topics were related, was as important to this study as opinions on the topics discussed. Cohering the fragments of beliefs within each interview required no small amount of analytical license on the part of the researcher, but I compensated for this by only including trends that appeared in three or more interviews. There is indeed a large number of more tenuous trends that do not appear in this thesis in any form.

Within the genre of the interview, I encountered a large number of spontaneous imitations from both Southern and non-Southern participants used to demonstrate how a language variety sounded or could be used; in such cases, the participant used the imitation to relate an understanding of the variety in question in a manner that could not be related through any other means. Such imitations served to express linguistic data that the participant did not have the terminology to express otherwise and also contributed additional information about the performed caricature through the content of the imitation. Notable imitations and data derived thereof will be discussed in the body of the thesis.

While the data presented in this study are based primarily on a set of conversations, my contributions to those conversations were informed by personal experience as a local of one of the investigated regions. I am a speaker of the dialect to be presented in the subsequent section, and my interactions with family and other community members, as well as with acquaintances and strangers from other parts of the United States, have made me aware at various levels of the ideologies associated with my dialect and how those ideologies tend to change with the setting. This leaves me with a unique conundrum: I, as do many of my participants, have a number of intuitions concerning the way I speak

and how I and others feel about it, but must find a way to express this knowledge in terms comprehensible and acceptable to a wider academic community. Although it would indeed be a lie to say that my connection with my dialect has in no way affected this thesis, in most cases my intuitions have only guided my questions; if my personal experiences contribute anything else to the body of this thesis, I shall inform the reader each time. Furthermore, extended time with each community has provided me with a number of observations I acquired outside of interview settings. Once again, while such ethnographic data more often only guided the construction of this project, if I introduce such data in my analysis, I shall notify the reader each time.

Chapter 4

Overview of Common Linguistic Features in Southeastern Middle Tennessee

This section consists of a brief overview of the variety of English commonly spoken on the Eastern Highland Rim in Tennessee in an effort to place the following discussion of dialect perception within a more "objective" backdrop. Note that, while I do make some use of external sources that include the region in their descriptions, I have more heavily relied on my own ear. A difficult part of talking about English in Southeastern Middle Tennessee is deciding what to call it and how to properly define it against Standard American English. I have never encountered anyone who spoke the variety to regard it as anything other than a "Southern accent" or "bad English"; however, the region falls both within the geographic and linguistic boundaries of Appalachia (Wolfram et al. 2006), and I therefore refer to it as both "(Southern) Appalachian English" and "Southern American English." Note that unless explicitly stated otherwise, the latter term, in the context of the present work, is always in reference to the variety of English that I will describe below.

Perhaps the most identifying features of Southern American English when compared to Standard American English are its intonational patterns and vowel system (Montgomery 2006, Wolfram et al. 2006). Appalachian English exhibits a number of unique intonation patterns; however, unfortunately, I am not aware of any widespread, consistent framework for discussing them. That said, they do feature even in imitations of Southern American English by nonnative speakers--For the sake of the current study, I can do no more than state that regional intonational patterns that appear in Southern American English are a distinguishing feature of the dialect. An easier feature to discuss is the variety's vowel features, of which the most salient are the Southern Vowel Shift and monophthongization of /aɪ/. Wolfram et al. (2006) define the Southern Vowel Shift as "A vowel shift or

rotation in which the short front vowels are moving upward and taking on the gliding character of long vowels, the long vowels are moving backward and downward, and the back vowels are moving forward" (405-406); they do not include /aɪ/ in their definition, but this does not preclude the possibility that the phenomena are related, as they indeed likely are. A simple description of the former in terms of vowel quality is difficult; put simply, the front vowels /i/, /e/, and /æ/ are pronounced higher and realized as diphthongs perhaps best represented as [iə], [eə], and [æə]; in emphatic contexts, they can also be realized as the stereotyped triphthongs [iʃə], [eʃə], and [æʃə] or even as disyllabic. The high front vowels /i/ and /eɪ/ are also altered, often pronounced as [iɪ] and [eɪ], respectively. Finally, the back vowels /u/ and /ʊ/ and the mid vowel /ɜ/ are all heavily fronted. The other vowel process, the monophthongization of /aɪ/, refers to this phoneme's realization with either a weakened glide toward [ɪ] or with none at all; the literature often expresses it as [a:], even though there is often still a perceptible glide. However, speakers may realize it as a complete monophthong, as slightly weakened, or as a full glide all within the same sentence. Despite this common variability, speakers of lower socioeconomic status more often pronounce /aɪ/ as [a:] in all environments.

The consonant system of Appalachian English is much like Standard American English, with some exceptions that might be considered minor when compared to the differences in the vowel systems. Appalachian English may possess the same number of phonemes as Standard American English or more, depending on the interpretation and the generation studied. Some speakers clearly distinguish /w/ and /ɹ/, so "Wales" and "whales" form a minimal pair, especially among older speakers. That said, younger speakers more often only preserve /ɹ/ in question words, especially emphatically. In many instances, younger speaker do not preserve /ɹ/ at all. Other salient features of Appalachian English from the perspective of its representation at the national level include the fact that the gerund is almost always realized with the nasal alveolar as [-m] and that the rhotic is heavily retroflexed as /ɻ/.

which effects differences in the quality of the preceding vowel. Finally, some phonological processes present in Standard American English are simply more advanced in Appalachian English; for instance, t/ d-deletion and post-nasal t-deletion take place even when speakers articulate technical terms (I have heard "ontological," for example, pronounced [ʌnə'ləgɪk]), and vowel nasalization is strong enough in highly frequent words that even final syllables ending only in /n/ are realized with a nasal vowel in place of the nasal consonant ("on" in "turn the light on" is commonly pronounced [ɔ̃]).

The greatest differences between the morphosyntaxes of Standard American English and Southern Appalachian English are in the paradigms of a number of frequent verbs and the forms of some monosyllabic preterites. In general, the negative of "do" is "don't" for all persons and numbers. Also, "ain't," the negative for all present forms of *be* and *have* when used as an auxiliary, is utilized extensively, especially by lower socioeconomic groups in rural areas. Differences in preterites are represented in Table 1. "Double negatives" are used mostly by lower socioeconomic groups, but all speakers may use them in comical or emphatic contexts, in which circumstances they may co-occur with other stereotypical lower class usages ("It looks like you ain't going nowhere," spoken to a friend whose car is stuck in the mud).

Table 1: Common Nonstandard Preterites Used in Southern Appalachia

Present form	Preterit form
be	was (all persons and numbers)
bring	brung
catch	catched
come	come
dive	dove

drag	drug
do	done
drink	drunk
give	give
go	gone
grow	growed
know	knowed
run	run
see	seen
throw	throwed

Finally, the pragmatic rules of Appalachian English differ significantly from those of Standard American English. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss them in detail, in general speakers of Appalachian English exhibit longer pause lengths between turns. Humor also seems to function markedly differently in Appalachia, where jokes more often revolve around puns and semantic disjuncture than situational humor. For instance, "It's participating on the windshield," playing on the expected "precipitating," is a perfectly acceptable and entertaining joke in Appalachia. At last, I should state that the cultural expectations, including what one talks about and how language is used, differ greatly between rural Appalachia and the "Standard American" mainstream, including in Albuquerque. In particular, sexual and religious topics are avoided even among close friends in Southern Middle Tennessee, and, when brought up, they are addressed in vague terms.

Chapter 5

The Perception of Southern American English from the Perspective of the Southern Group of Participants

As predicted, the associations with Southern American English among the Southern group of participants were exceedingly complex and, at many points, apparently contradictory. However, given Eckert's (2008) concept of an *indexical field*, such "contradictory" associations are to be expected, especially after considering, for example, Irvine and Gal's (2000) notion of *fractal recursivity*, where an opposition drawn at one level produces other perceptual extremes within a single category at another level--This takes place, for instance, where the North is associated with "rich" and the South with "poor," but, at a lower level, the Lowland South is considered "rich" and the Highland South "poor." Which component of an indexical field is triggered depends on the context. In the case of my Southern group of informants, what the South was, what the Southern accent was, and what one could assume upon hearing it all fluctuated to absolute extremes with the context and schematic level, with even the general notion of "Southern American English" regarded as both very desirable and very undesirable by the same participant at two separate portions of the conversation. The rest of this section will be an outline of the indexical field for "Southern American English" for my group of Southern participants with an overview of the contextual cues that would trigger a given portion of the schematic map.

While the emphasis of this thesis, like most academic works treating Southern American English, is on prejudices that many Americans harbor against Southern American English and its speakers (a concern that, as is demonstrated in the section dealing with non-Southerners' views on SAE, is certainly justified), I should note that many of my Southern participants firmly expressed their own prejudices against other regions within the United States. I will deal with such common prejudices in

turn as they relate to themes in the present work. I will also demonstrate that understandings of regions, including the identity of people from a given region, are intimately linked to a stereotyped form of language use in that region. Linguistic prejudices are only one manifestation of an entire network of ideologies, and such prejudices surface in any number of topics. Furthermore, a thorough discussion of style perception must necessarily include a discussion of these prejudices.

Self-Identification

All of my participants in the group from eastern Middle Tennessee referred to themselves as either "Southerners" or as "Tennesseans." None of my participants, however, ever explicitly self-identified as "Appalachian" or used any regional term besides the state name to differentiate themselves from the Lowland South. When they did differentiate (and they all did perceive a difference at least between the Lowland and Highland Souths when pressed), they did so through a discourse on class: The Highland South, which all of my participants inhabited, then became the unmarked category ("normal/plain people"), while the Lowland Southern accent was identified with wealth and the "Old South." Note that the application of these terms was not always a compliment; the overwhelming majority of my Southern participants perceived the Lowland or Coastal Southern accent as indicative of "snobbiness," at least in part--Multiple participants described the language variety as "rich sounding" and "kind of snobby." However, despite this stereotyped wealth and "snobbiness," the Lowland South was otherwise regarded as culturally indistinguishable from the Highland South. That said, none of my participants had extensive contact with anyone from the Coastal South, and some participants admitted that the assumed cultural similarity between themselves and the Deep South was due primarily to the "South" being included in the toponyms of each region. Given this phenomenon in self-identification, taken with how participants perceived themselves to speak (discussed in a following paragraph), even

in the case of Southerners perceiving themselves or other Southerners there is ample room for identity and other conceptual categories to condition perception at least as much as vice versa.

My participants also used county names to differentiate themselves, but I found the associations linked to each county to be inconsistent; in many cases, regardless of the county in which a given participant lived, he or she would use it as the butt of a joke relating to its rurality ("When you finish school, you can always come back to ___ County and profess to the cows around here"). Thus, I will leave the associations with specific counties out of my analysis. As for the phenomenon of jokes mocking a county's rurality, see the section entitled "Relaxation."

All of my participants admitted to possessing a Southern accent to some extent. In the case of accent, this was generally regarded as benign or, when considered a reflection of place of origin, even taken with pride (Only one participant acknowledged a degree of embarrassment with what she perceived to be her "mispronunciation" of some words). As will be addressed in the next section, this was not the case for Southern grammatical forms, which were universally regarded as "incorrect" and "lazy." Most of my participants denied using nonstandard grammar (more than half erroneously, as they produced nonstandard forms even during the interview), but those that did admit to using "bad English" in some contexts stated that it was due to sloppiness. This distinction between a Southern accent and "bad English" was a key difference between my Southern and non-Southern participants; in the latter group, Southern English was overwhelmingly considered one form of "bad English" in its totality, from grammar to pronunciation. Among the Southern group, however, this differentiation allowed for the perceived benign features of the language to serve as indexes for a large number of generally positive associations that were entirely lacking in the non-Southern group. My discussion will therefore begin with an account of this differentiation and follow with descriptions of the more common associations indexed to the perceived benign, phonetic features. Note that, following my participants, I use the term

"accent" in reference to these phonetic features.

Southern English and Bad English

No paper on language ideologies in the South would be complete without a discussion of "bad English." In general, Appalachian English ("talking Southern" among my participants) is equated with "bad English," and standard English with "good." However, such a straightforward correlation is misleading: in fact, while the canonical Appalachian English as outlined in Montgomery (2006) and Ellis (2006) was indeed regarded as "bad" by all of my participants from the Southern group, the specific stigmatized elements were nonstandard grammatical ones--The "accent," that is, its phonetic features, was by all but one participant regarded as neutral. Furthermore, since the accent is perceived as neutral regarding its correctness (or, more often, simply how English is spoken), it has the potential to index what some perceive to be positive associations with the regional characteristics of its speakers. Meanwhile, its grammatical features, such as double negatives, nonstandard preterits, the use of "ain't," and nonstandard verb conjugations, were universally regarded as markers of a lack of education or a lack of intelligence and to be avoided (although one might from time to time give into laziness). This dichotomy is reflected, for instance, in education: Note that while regulating the standard articulation of English vowels, for example, would be extremely difficult in public education, since very few Americans (or, indeed, humans) who speak any form of English (or language) are at a discursive level aware of the phonetic particularities of their speech, the grammatical features of Appalachian English as different from the corresponding standard forms could be reflected in writing and are therefore easy targets. I, for one, can attest that the eradication of "ain't" and double negatives, as well as the strict memorization of one particular set of past tense verb forms, are among the most exigent of priorities in public education in eastern Middle Tennessee, although almost all of my instructors from elementary to

high school spoke with accents.

Among my participants, nonstandard grammar was perceived as degradation that would eventually render English more poorly suited for communication. Most of my participants used the concepts of "clarity" for describing standard grammar and "difficulty to understand" for nonstandard grammar. This was described as continued progress on a downward spiral; for

instance, one participants said, in reference to school children, "People are getting harder and harder to understand." Also, through an example of iconization (Irvine and Gal 2000), "incorrect" grammar was associated directly with poverty. For example, one participant stated,

I grew up in an area where bad English just wasn't tolerated. Here [She currently resides in a different county], people speak differently. They just weren't taught right, and they use a lot of words wrong. There isn't as much money here to spend on education.

That is, the county's perceived lack of funds are correlated with a lack of education, which has led to the inhabitants failing to receive instruction in how to "speak clearly." Earlier in the same conversation, this speaker had indicated that she was aware of her accent and had declared that "Everybody just talks this way." When asked why some educated people speak "incorrectly," she replied that it was due to "sloppiness." Interestingly, none of my participants used the concept of grammar to discuss their notions of "bad English." Instead, they spoke of using "wrong words" or "words wrong"; even replacing the ablaut in "knew" with the regular past ending -ed to form "knowed" was simply regarded as "using the wrong word." "Grammar," on the other hand, was associated entirely with writing and included such concepts as correct comma usage in addition to using correct words--even a clear style was analyzed as pertaining to grammar.

"Accent," on the other hand, was associated with the regional phonetic realization of English. Among my participants, the "Southern accent" was used to describe the phonetic features of the

English spoken in the area, and no distinction was made with other regions within the South unless prompted. When asked to describe what the Southern accent was, participants either refused to answer the question, stating that it was too difficult to express, or responded in very specific or very general features. The most commonly listed attributes were: "longer/drawled vowels," "the twang," and "different stress." All participants that listed "different stress" as a major difference included nonstandard intonational patterns along with what they regarded as a heavier stress and, as I ascertained from demonstrations, concomitant heavier reduction in unstressed syllables.

This last point had a number of implications, both in my participants' normal speech and in imitations. First, as in General American English, a set of direct object pronouns are often affixed to the verb in natural speech ('I saw him' is realized as [a: sɑ-m]). One participant, in an attempt to characterize Southern American English that exemplified trends in other interviews, realized the phrase above as [ə'sɑ̃:m] ([ɑ̃] is my attempt to represent the often stereotyped sound in the Southern pronunciation in, for example, "dog" as "dawg"). In this exaggerated display, "I" is realized as nothing more than a schwa, while all that is left of "him" is the bilabial nasal, which is itself realized as the coda of the verb. On the other hand, the [ɑ̃] in "saw" was held out for an entire second. While the effect is less dramatic in natural speech, my Southern participants were aware of the differences in suprasegmental features of their variety of English.

Relaxation

As stated previously, by distinguishing between "bad English [grammar]" and what is no more than a regional "accent," my Southern participants were able to index positive associations to the perceived benign form of Southern American English that my non-Southern group did not. That is, the Southern accent was interpreted as a language *style* that indicated a particular *identity*, while the

grammatical features, although still analyzable as a style in the sociolinguistic sense, was by my participants simply regarded as wrong. Note that in the context of the present work, the significance of *style* as opposed to *variety* is its potential for evaluation according to social criteria. My Southern participants, when they described what the Southern *accent* implied to them about the person speaking, drew from a stereotyped, mostly positive identity. The identity invoked by nonstandard grammar, however, included such associations with the additional association of being uneducated. The remainder of this chapter shall be devoted to the various components of this identity, which, besides those already described under associated with "bad English [grammar]," are all generally positive. In addition, they are either formed through fractal recursivity with other (predominately negative) stereotyped regional identities, especially the American Northeast, or pave the way to extend fractal recursivity from the Southern stereotype to the North or other regions.

First, while the "sloppiness" associated with nonstandard grammar can only be regarded as negative (especially when it leads to the destruction of the English language), my participants also associated Southern American English with a related concept, one that might be regarded as the flip-side of sloppiness: relaxation. Multiple participants discussed this notion by contrasting stereotyped cultural features of the South with the North. One participant described it as follows:

They [Northerners] say we can't drive. That's funny. You've never driven up there, but they drive like crazy people. You can never relax anywhere up there because the people are strung so tight. It comes out in how they talk, too. You've heard them. And they give you a hard time for taking your time to say something. But you know what? We're going to live longer.

The assertion is that what is perceived as a slower rate of speech in the South is a mark of less stress in general, and such a feature can be attributed to the culture of the region at large.

Stress was correlated with a number of environmental factors by all of my participants who discussed the topic; these included traffic, the urban landscape, including pollution and lack of trees,

and an increased pace in work and living. Most of my Southern participants had either visited or lived in cities at some point in addition to having worked with people from the Northeastern United States, and these were delivered as firsthand impressions (It is hard to say how Southern cities fit into this model, but, since they lie in a marginal place between the prototypes of the urban North and the rural South, it is safe to assume that, in general, how they are regarded could go either way depending on the context). These environmental features were contrasted with (eastern Middle) Tennessee, which was always regarded as "beautiful/green" and "laid-back." Although such dichotomies are of course in many instances misleading, the stereotyped characteristics of each region were identified with the accents that people carried from them. In the case of Southern American English, the slower rate of speech, longer pauses, and "drawled vowels" were all taken as indicators of being "laid-back" or "not being in a hurry." This was contrasted especially with stereotyped dialects from the Northeast, which were regarded as "ugly," "abrasive," and "too fast to understand." One participant described the accent so: "They're trying to say too much too fast, rushing, and so they don't have time for anything, and they never have time to really talk."

Stress was in general considered a negative quality when the person did not have time to spend with company; when asked what constituted "rudeness," for example, as will be detailed in the following section, most participants equated it directly to "not having time for people." In conclusion, the perception of slower speech in the South is correlated not to slower thinking (as in the Northern group), but rather to having time for company and, by logical extension, politeness in general. Someone who speaks with a Southern accent is therefore perceived as likely to exhibit these locally desirable properties. Relaxation was in general equated to a slower pace of life and, eventually, to rurality in general. I previously mentioned jokes concerning the rurality of a given area; these jokes were as much a celebration of rurality as mockery of it.

A language feature often regarded as both "relaxed" and "lazy," depending on the context, was the realization of the gerund ending with an alveolar nasal as [-ɪn]. Campbell-Kibler (2008) similarly found that the perception of (ING) depended entirely on the context. Understanding the perception of [-ɪn] versus [-ɪŋ] among my Southern participants necessitates understanding the most common metaphor used to discuss it: The alveolar pronunciation is regarded as "dropping a letter," considered easier than the velar pronunciation, which is regarded as requiring at least some effort. Put differently, pronouncing the extra letter is envisioned as requiring more effort, even though in reality the difference is the place of articulation and not the insertion or deletion of any sound. During my conversations with Southerners, I would normally inquire about "bad English" relatively early in the conversation, and I would purposefully introduce the issue of "dropping final 'g's." In this context, speakers would universally respond that the alveolar pronunciation was less desirable than the velar pronunciation, since it was associated with education and "correctness." However, in discussions of Southern American English as laid-back I would reintroduce the notion of "dropping 'g's," and, in almost all of these interviews, participants would express that the alveolar form was desirable because it demonstrated that the speaker was unpretentious, more worried about what was said than how it was said, or simply more comfortable to be around, while the velar form was regarded as undesirable. That is, the participant's stance toward [-ɪn] and [-ɪŋ] depended on the context within the interview.

Politeness

Three common terms often appear in sociolinguistic literature that relate to the topic of politeness as described by my Southern group of participants: solidarity, formality, and face. A discussion of my participants' concept of politeness cannot be provided without a description of how all three of these concepts interrelate; what is especially striking is that what sociolinguists and linguistic

anthropologists normally refer to as formality and solidarity are both subsumed under the single concept of politeness in Appalachia, which itself refers to the proper balance between formality and solidarity in a given circumstance. Furthermore, the Appalachian accent and a special use of titles serve a clear function in maintaining this balance. The concept of face can also be utilized to describe politeness in Appalachia, but from a different perspective. Specifically, speech act participants are expected to demonstrate their mutual interest and time investment in the interaction or, in the sociolinguistic terms, positive face is emphasized through exaggerated interest and accommodation toward the interlocutor, while negative face is respected by avoiding certain topics (This will be treated in greater detail later on). I will start with a discussion of face and continue with a discussion of how the Southern accent is used to balance formality and solidarity.

The clearest association with the Southern accent and the first mentioned by all Southern participants when asked when they were most likely to use a Southern accent was for "politeness." One participant provided the following scenario to demonstrate the concept:

Can you imagine like a waitress coming up to you and saying 'What do you want?' [ʌɜ̃th du ju wʌnth]. No, she's gonna say 'What can I get for you, sweetie?' [ʌɜ̃? kɪ a: giə? fə ju swi:ri]

As is the case with every element of language ideologies, no variable exists in isolation, and politeness is here directly related to a number of other associations. In very general terms, politeness is the traditional "face" as commonly understood in sociolinguistic literature: One must respect the listener's positive face by acknowledging what they want acknowledged and respect their negative face by avoiding topics that they do not want acknowledged (Brown et al. 1987). However, this explanation says nothing about how such a universal rule manifests in any given setting. In eastern Middle Tennessee, what information about the speaker should be acknowledged, and what should be ignored?

Several things are evident concerning associations with politeness given the quote above. First,

the idealized polite waitress used the term of endearment "sweetie." If this scenario, in line with its delivery, can be taken as the epitome of politeness, already apparent is an emphasis on the positive face of the listener--What is to be emphasized in an interaction is accommodation to the speaker and friendliness. Second, the accent was emphasized almost to the point of caricature, even though the participants already spoke with a light accent; I will address this point in my discussion on solidarity. Third, as the participant added directly following the quote, "and she would be willing to stick around and talk." At a cultural pragmatic level, willingness to converse is regarded as a desirable personality trait. Terseness or busyness, on the other hand, are regarded as extremely negative. The inverse of this, refusing someone one's time, implies that that person is not important enough to merit it, which, as will be addressed under a following section, is regarded as arrogant, that is, impolite.

When asked for what they would most likely use a heavier Southern accent, participants universally responded "to be more polite." Younger participants further noted the a Southern accent was especially essential in the context of speaking to older listeners. When asked why, the response was almost always that using a standard accent would be pretentious and alienating. Using a Southern accent, on the other hand, highlighted the similar backgrounds and joint concerns of the speaker and listener in the context of the rural, Southern setting. That is, it was regarded as an expression of solidarity. Solidarity will come up again in my discussion of "predictability," but, for now, to be emphasized is that the Appalachian accent is used to stress the mutual backgrounds of the interlocutors.

While "politeness" was taken as an expression of solidarity at one level, at another it was taken to express what the general sociolinguistic literature denominates "formality." Irvine (1979) deconstructs the Western notion of "formality" and posits that it consists of four components: increased code structuring, code consistency, invoking positional identities, and emergence of a central situational focus. Of these, the use of an Appalachian accent with certain speakers constitutes increased code

consistency, since, in "formal" settings between two speakers from Southern Appalachia, speakers are much less likely to deviate from a Southern accent to, for example, Standard American English. That is, the phonetic features of Appalachian English in some contexts form an invariant code that flag a more formal exchange, and it also happens to express the solidarity between the speaker and listener. Another expression of politeness among my Southern participants, however, was the use of the terms "sir" and "ma'am." While still considered elements of politeness, these, as opposed to solidarity, mark what Irvine calls the "invoking of positional identities." Although "sir" and "ma'am" are used throughout the English speaking world, their usage in Appalachia, as opposed to the rest of the United States is markedly different. The main difference with the Appalachian usage is that "sir" and "ma'am" can be used with addressees of the same age as the speaker as well as with older addressees. While the usage with older speakers is comparable with usage in other English dialect (if perhaps more invariant), when used with someone of the same age as the speaker, these forms indicate that the speaker and addressee do not know each other--They invoke the positional identity of (respected) stranger. This usage is not common throughout the United States; I can attest to being corrected by airline attendants close to my age multiple times ("I'm not old enough to be a 'ma'am'"), and one participant related that he was similarly corrected by a waitress younger than himself in a city outside of the South. Thus, separate components of Appalachian English are used to negotiate the boarder between solidarity and formality.

As with implications of relaxation, the Southern accent is again contrasted with stereotyped Northern varieties. These take the form of pragmatic differences. For example, in the rural South one is expected to greet someone passed by while walking, even when the person is a stranger, while this is considered bizarre in the urban North (and a rural affinity even in the urban South). Similar differences in expectations are numerous and complex. One non-Southern participant provided a story demonstrating how the Appalachian notion of politeness is perceived from the other side: My

participant related that she was walking up an escalator in a city outside of the South commonly visited by tourists. There was an older couple standing on the escalator on different sides with steps between them, and my participant rushed past them. As she passed, the man made an offended noise and complained that she had not excused herself, and, feeling that the man was in her way and that it was her right to move past him, she told the man, "Fuck you." As she continued up the escalator, she heard the woman yell after her, in a "heavy Southern accent," "No, fuck you, bitch!" The themes that my participant emphasized in the story were, first, that the older couple was blocking her progress and, second, that it was her right to move at whatever speed she deemed appropriate in a public space without having to excuse herself. However, from the perspective of the Southern couple, her failure to take time to politely excuse herself (to maintain the couple's positive face), followed by her forceful assertion that no politeness was due, was regarded as an egregious offense and the apex of impoliteness. This perceived impoliteness was likely intensified by the difference in years between my participant and the older couple in the story.

Other pragmatic features were similarly linked to the understanding of politeness; in particular, I found my conversations with Southerners to feature pause lengths an average of 0.5 seconds longer than conversations with non-Southerners. In addition, I found conversations with non-Southerners to feature twice as many overlapping turns than those with Southerners, even though my conversations with non-Southerners were on average ten minutes shorter than interviews with Southerners. These facts indicate that Southerners wait significantly longer than non-Southerners before speaking, at least in dyadic conversations, while non-Southerners are more likely to determine that a speaker's turn has ended after a relatively less amount of time has passed. Here, one finds another example of a single feature in a given language variety carrying disparate meanings in separate speech communities: In the Southern group, encounters with non-Southerners likely give the impression that non-Southerners

arrogate turns over the Southerner, while the Southerner feels that he or she is being interrupted and not given sufficient time to speak. On the other hand, Southerners who take longer to speak are likely regarded by non- Southerners as slow, which contributes to the notion that Southerners who in general take longer to speak, both before initiating a turn and during it, corresponds to slower cognitive processing speeds.

Humility and Sincerity

More distant associations with Appalachian English were made with more complex semiotic processes. Although few participants directly linked Southern American English to the virtuous sense of humility directly, many made the link through fractal recursivity when discussing stereotypes surrounding "Yankees" and people from the West Coast. "Yankee" can have several meanings, but in the context of my participants its usage was commonly applied to anyone who originated from a very general sense of the northeastern United States. It is most often applied to people from New England and New York, but its usage is also sporadically applied to people from as far south as Washington D.C. and, commonly, to people from as far west as the northern Midwest, including Minnesota and Wisconsin. "Yankee" or "Yank," although often claimed to be a term of endearment, is very rarely a compliment. The most common stereotypes associated with Northerners (frequently attributed to people from the West Coast as well) were, in order of number of occurrences, "abrasive/arrogant" and "liberal," the latter of which, among my predominately conservative participants, was linked to a number of further associations, including atheism and effiteness. While the idea that "Yankees" are liberal was likely transmitted through the media (Very few of my participants provided stories illustrating interactions with liberal Yankees), almost all of my participants were quick to provide examples of personal experiences with arrogant Yankees. In each of the following examples, what the

participant finds offensive is apparently foreign pragmatic rules that are mutually exclusive with their own:

It's hard to have a conversation with them; all they talk about is me, me, me.

They know everything.

They can only talk about how great they are.

I can't stand how they get in your face and tell you how right they are.

They assume you're stupid before they even talk to you.

Dichotomies imposed through semiotic processes abound in the discourses that Northerners and Southerners use to understand their cultural differences, and the notions of arrogance and humility are no exception: Just as Northerners and West Coasters are considered the paradigm of arrogance in the South, so people from the opposite cardinal direction, people from the South, in the context of such conversations, were portrayed as "more humble" or "down-to-earth." After a participant mentioned such an encounter, I would ask him or her what could therefore be assumed about a speaker who spoke in a Southern accent. As one speaker put it, "Well, they're at least going to be more humble than that [in reference to her story regarding what she perceived to be an arrogant Northerner]," but one participant even stated, "When I can tell someone's from around here, they're gonna be plain people." Although the notion of arrogant Yankees is most clearly linked to the content of an exchange, such as the information contributed by a non-Southerner to a conversation, the manner in which it is delivered is more readily analyzable from the perspective of linguistics. Besides the before mentioned tendency for non-Southerners to take shorter turns, Southerners mentioned that non-Southerners were more likely to use "big words" in an effort to "seem smarter than they really are," reminiscent of Bucholz's (2001) account of nerds using Graeco-Latinate words toward the same end.

Predictability

Another association with Appalachian English emerged most readily through depictions of encounters and casual conversations with people who did not speak with a Southern accent. One genre that appeared in conversations with multiple participants was stories about airplane conversations, and the accounts of strangers stuck next to each other for comparatively long periods of time often drew out pragmatic differences between people from different parts of the country. One participant's story went as follows:

I think he just wanted someone to talk to because he was going on non-stop. And then he saw my ring, and he was like, "Why are you getting married? You're too young. Marriage sucks. Why the hell do you want to sleep with one person for the rest of your life?"

She went on to explain that, when one is addressed in a "plain accent," he or she does not know anything about the background of the speaker. Concomitantly, one does not know what to expect in the interaction. Here, sex, a topic that is in general considered taboo in the South, even among close friends, is brought up by a complete stranger, and the Southern participant must deal with the mild trauma of inventing a suitable reaction.

On the other hand, put simply, when one is addressed in a Southern Accent, no one frets about the rules of the conversation. One participant said, "You just know what to expect. There are things that you just don't talk about, but there are things that you don't have to talk about. You just kind of play along with what they expect." Participants listed among the things one should not talk about with (Southern) strangers sex and topics that might be interpreted as disrespectful to religion, especially Christianity. To continue the examples from air traveling, the same participant mentioned above stated, "I was glad that the person on the next flight had a Southern accent because I knew that I wasn't going to get any love advise." In this capacity, the predictable aspect of Southern American English pertains to both the concept of negative face, in the sense that it implies which topics shall not be discussed

during a conversation, and, since it also implies what the speakers mutually expect in the exchange, it also relates to solidarity.

Pragmatism

Once again, Southerners who link the virtue of pragmatism to people from the South and, by extension, to the Southern accent, do so out of fractal recursivity--people from the North and West Coast are generally regarded as effete, especially when stereotyped as holding some professional capacity. Once again, participants offered personal experiences as examples:

I had this one professor, and he was from the North, he was the head of the whole ____ department. He'd talk about all this stuff, but he'd never been outside and done any of it in his life. He was useless, all talk.

The participant was careful to note that the professor was both a Northerner and had little concrete experience in his academic area; the assumption is that something has to be done to be truly known. The opposite of this is given in the participant's last utterance on the subject: "He was... all talk." That is, speech is secondary to action, and an emphasis on careful speech, correlated with Standard American English, will not necessarily merit competence.

The link between Southern American English and pragmatism was weaker than other connections in that it only emerged deeper within a given conversation, but, since it did emerge in multiple conversations, I will describe it briefly. When the concept was applied to Southern American English, the association usually identified Southern American English as language that "got the job done." On the other hand, standard English was associated with people who "put more effort into saying something than doing something." The participants who mentioned this topic all mentioned "pronouncing every letter of a word" as an example of hypercorrect speech. Two participants in

particular mentioned pronouncing final "t's" and final "g's," the latter of which I take to mean final /-ING/ as [-ŋ], as examples of speech that is too careful. Finally, although the participants that discussed this topic considered the division to be North versus South, most of the cited exemplary features were actually standard versus vernacular.

Religiosity

While both groups associated religiosity with stronger Southern accents, the religiosities were of distinctly different flavors. The version of religiosity outlined by the Southern group was one of self-righteousness or over-moralism and was furthermore associated with older generations. This topic was quick to elicit imitations by younger participants, one example of which is provided below:

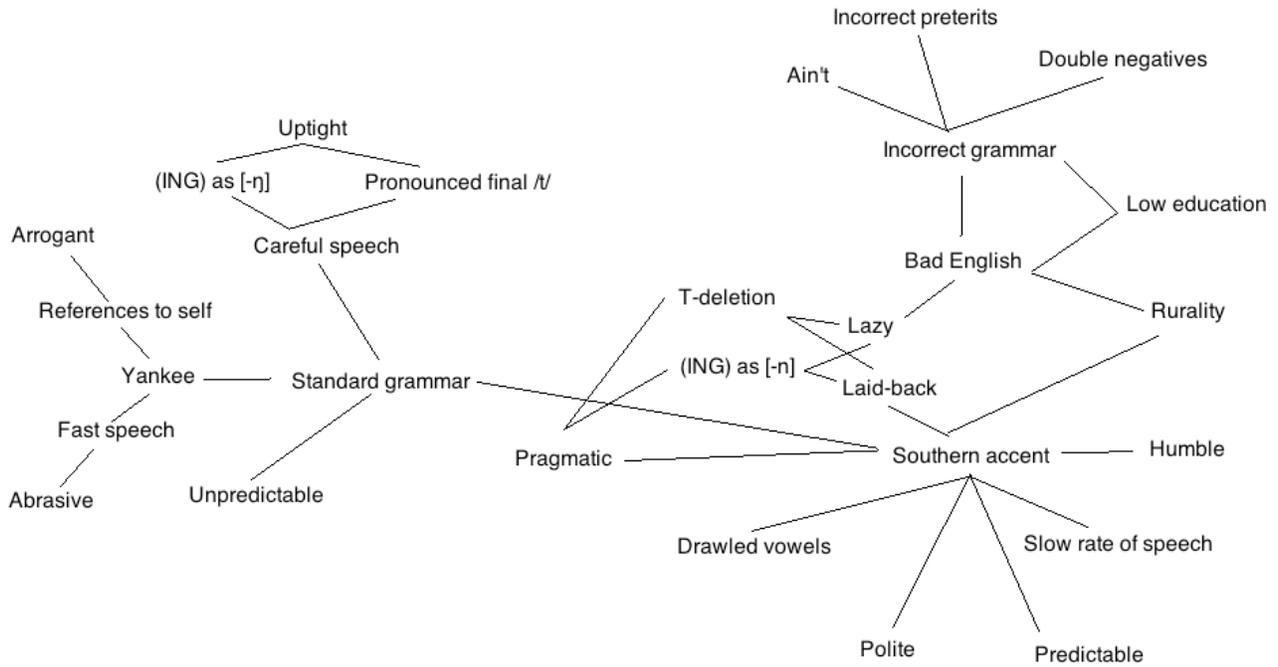
It's all the sin on TV. They's sex everywhere: sex on TV sex in magazines sex in school. You cain't escape from it and it's draggin america down the tube straight to Hell.

This imitation was intended to be humorous, and it was delivered in both a stronger accent and with a quivering voice quality intended to replicate the speech of an older speaker. Note that religiosity was never explicitly linked to stronger Southern accents, but would rather emerge through the content of imitations when I asked a participant to provide an example of a stronger accent. Also, note that most of my Southern participants identified as Christian; the humor in such imitations was due to the amount of fervor in ranting on such religious issues as opposed to any absolute stance; another element of the humor in such imitations was their consistent resemblance to common discourse examples of older speakers. Note, for example, that in the quoted imitation above the participant used the existential construction "they's" instead of "there's"--although the participant was in his early twenties, such usage among my participants was in natural speech restricted to the oldest participants. By using such a construction, my participant was identifying the imitated speaker as someone in his grandparents'

generation. Other features of the imitation were a quivering voice quality and a very slow rate of speech, which I encountered in imitations of older people from both groups of participants. Indeed, the correlation between religiosity and a strong Southern accent was more likely a correlation between religiosity and older people.

Given these data, I propose the following arrangement of associations with Southern American English for the Southern participants as depicted in Figure 1. This figure is based on the ordering of information as it appeared in interviews; each label represents a topic, and lines that connect topics symbolize that at least one participant moved from one topic to the next spontaneously, which I took to indicate an associative link. The figure represents the conglomerate of all interviews included in this study. Although I did not include links for transitions that I myself instigated, the figure is nonetheless not without some possible researcher interference—For example, that interviewees would readily move from talking about a Southern accent to talking about how one could speak in a Southern accent while still using “correct grammar” was likely encouraged by general questions with which I frequently initiated sections of the conversations (“So you think you have an accent, but you still use good English?”). Finally, note that I grouped topics into labels at my own discretion as they fit into my analysis.

Figure 1: Associative Links with Standard and Southern American Englishes for Southern Group of Participants



Chapter 6

The Perception of Southern American English from the Perspective of the Non-Southern Group of Participants

The perception of Southern American English by non-Southerners was largely homogenous despite the diversity of my participants' places of origin. This homogeneity was likely due to all of my participants having had no extensive contact with the South or Southerners besides what contact they had had through various media, which I take to be representative of discourse at the national level. Most of these participants identified television especially as a key source of information about the South, including shows and the news, although some films were also identified. Concomitant with the consistency of what Southern American English implied was a less developed and more unidirectional conception of life in the South in general. While my Southern participants could perceive Southern American English as both positive and negative in different contexts, my group of non-Southerners all heavily associated negative correlations with Southern American English. The dominant trends were associations with rurality and lack of education with concomitant associations with conservatism, stupidity, "trashiness," religiosity, jingoism, and racism. Once again, it is hard to say whether what is represented here is a dichotomy between South and other or between rural and urban; in many cases, as shall likely be evident, what is perceived to pertain to the South is extended from rural areas in the participant's place of origin--Through another example of iconization, the highly homogenous prototypical Southerner as envisioned by my non-Southern participants was indexed to any instance of the language, and one component of this prototype was rurality. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to describing the key traits of a prototypical Southerner as provided by my participants.

Finally, although the following account of a collection of non-Southerners's understanding of

Southern American English is seemingly less developed than that outlined in the previous chapter for a group of Southerners, note that my intention has not been to exhaustively illustrate the understanding of Southern American English for a particular region (For instance, Albuquerque's understanding of SAE is greatly influenced by its proximity to Texas), but rather to highlight ideological trends that appear consistently at the national level-- that is, I intend to illustrate a perception of Southern American English that is perpetuated by national discursive processes.

What is the South?

Within the group of non-Southerners, two participants identified multiple Southern accents (These were both linguists); all others perceived the South as linguistically (and culturally) homogenous. The exposure of the group of non-Southerners to the South was minimal, and their perception of Southern culture was dubiously representative. Indeed, they would even frequently warn me about how little they knew about the South. Three informants had had what they considered extensive contact with Southern professionals working outside of the South, but all others confessed that they were not sure from where they had developed their understanding of Southern American English and Southern culture, although all guessed that television and "common knowledge" were large influences. I will mention specific shows and movies mentioned by my participants as they factor into my discussion.

When asked to describe the South, non-Southerners would introduce two common themes. The first, which occurred with every participant, was an emphasis on poverty. This had a number of associations that would then be emphasized, including poor education, violent behavior, rurality, and others. The second theme, which occurred in half of my interviews, was to contrast this bleak present with notions of the Old South, always equated to slavery and a societal organization that predated the

Civil War. While the Southern group perceived the Deep South as mostly negative, the group of non-Southerners viewed the notion of the "Old South" as invoking mixed feelings. For instance, while the wealth associated with the Old South was produced through slavery and in that respect negatively impacted social structure, it allowed some Southerners to live genteelly, leading to the positively perceived notions of "Southern honor," "Southern comfort," and "Southern hospitality." These attributes were considered (as more than one participant put it) "quaint," but either vanishing or vanished; one participant put it, "I guess it doesn't sound so bad, but people don't really live like that anymore, do they?"

The analogous "New South" or "modern South" was envisioned as it is largely depicted in television. A perhaps classical example is *The Beverly Hillbillies*, to which all of my older participants alluded. This show portrayed a newly wealthy Appalachian family living in Beverly Hills, California, and most of its humor is derived from the family's highly exaggerated backwardness contrasted with culture in California. One of my younger participants, while describing what the "modern South" was like, also alluded to an episode ("Bloody Fermin") of the cartoon *Archer*, in which the show's protagonist goes with a fellow spy to his small, rural hometown in West Virginia, full of farm animals and dirt roads (Notice that the shift in time from the "Old South" to the "New" also requires a change in setting from the Deep South to Appalachia), where he helps his homophobic, religiously hypocritical brother defend his marijuana farm from a corrupt sheriff, who wants the profits from the drugs for himself. While my participant laughed while he described the episode, it was apparent that he did not view the episode entirely as a joke. Another television program that was mentioned by almost all of my participants was *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, which follows a poor family in rural Georgia; once again, the apparent humor of the show is dependent on the mockery of stereotyped white trash. It is perhaps an understatement to say that all of these shows depict the South in a negative light.

Unfortunately, as I will demonstrate, my participants recognized the portrayal of the South in such programs as a humorously exaggerated but nonetheless representative account.

What is the Southern Accent?

As with Southerners, imitations of the Southern accent by non-Southerners were never divorced from a stereotyped context, but consistent changes in phonetic structure did emerge. Notably, participants would attempt to replicate monophthongization of /ai/ and the Southern Vowel Shift. Also, during imitations, non-Southerners would significantly decrease their rate of speech, and the imitator would often also heavily emphasize stress. Overall, as with Southerners, non-Southerners found prosodic features to be the most salient features of the language style, with both intonation and stress consistently altered. In the case of many interviews, imitations and further questions indicated that at least some participants perceived the change in vowel qualities resulting from the Southern monophthongization of /ai/ and the Southern Vowel Shift to be due to the increased duration of vowels, which were in turn perceived to result from differences in stress. While I encountered similar responses among my Southern group, many non-Southerners attributed differences in pronunciation to difficulties in speaking.

As a possible manifestation of this common belief, one feature in imitations effected by non-Southerners but absent in impressions by Southerners was the mispronunciation of words. Many of these mispronunciations occurred with less frequent words, such as "obstacle" as ['ab'stæk], with the first two syllables equally stressed (I recognized this pronunciation to come from the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). Another feature was emphasized rhoticity, with many vowels before /ɹ/ realized as [ɜ] in imitated speech. For example, "beer" was realized as [bɜ] and "America" as [ə'mɜɹkə]. Although

I am not currently aware of any studies that investigate /ɪ/ in Appalachia, I will note that, although /ɪ/ and the bunched /ɪ/ are acoustically quite similar, I and all of my acquaintances from eastern Middle Tennessee use the retroflex, and imitations of effete (non-Southern) men are often accompanied by what I perceive to be a bunched /ɪ/; for the sake of speculation, it is possible that such realizations of /ɪ/ in the examples above are caricatures of how retroflex /ɪ/ would affect the quality of the preceding vowel from the perspective of someone who normally uses /ɪ/.

Imitations of Southern English by non-Southern participants were also characterized by (often inaccurate) representations of nonstandard grammar. While many of these grammatical and lexical features are considered nonstandard, many, such as double negatives and use of "ain't," are not necessarily confined to the South--participants were perhaps offering examples of nonstandard English in general. Indeed, while "ain't" and double negatives were commonly employed ("I ain't got no beer left"), I also encountered such grammatical structures as, for example, "Is you or ain't you a American?" Although Appalachian English is characterized by nonstandard verb conjugations, one still finds the form "are" inflected for "you," for instance. "You is" has evidently been selected as "Southern" simply because it sounds incorrect.

"Drawled vowels," in imitation, would sometimes result in pronunciations that, in the speech of actual Southerners, do not exist. For example, one participant, in his imitation of a racist Southerner, pronounced the racial epithet "Krauts" as two syllables: [kɹæ.uts]. However, my Southern participants realized /aɪ/ as either [ɛɪ] or simply as [aɪ]; the pronunciation provided in the imitation was likely an exaggeration of the stereotyped triphthongal realization of the front vowels as affected by the Southern Vowel Shift (Note that a triphthongal pronunciation of /aɪ/ is attested in Thomas [2003], but I have never encountered it in my area of study). In many cases, the participant would portray a Southern accent by altering the length of vowels but use his or her own usual, non-Southern vowel qualities. For

example, the phrase "You're in trouble boy" was delivered as an imitation of a Southerner by simply holding out each stressed vowel much longer than in natural speech; the effect was reminiscent of John Wayne's attempt at a Texan accent (I should add that John Wayne's performance of a Southern accent, when mentioned in interviews, was whole-heartedly rejected by my Southern participants). In short, my non-Southern participants were apparently aware of differences in the realization of vowels, but could not clearly articulate what that difference was. Also, in the case of some participants, this difference was further regarded as a speech impediment. This was conveyed as follows:

They have trouble getting vowels out.

They can't speak clearly because they have trouble saying the vowels.

Their vowels are all wrong.

They don't say them like they're written.

Just as my Southern group regarded nonstandard grammar as contributing to the degradation of English, so my non-Southern group, at least in the case of one participant, also regarded nonstandard phonetic forms as contributing to the degradation of English. Specifically, she was concerned that, "I don't know how they still understand each other even. That must be why they have to talk slower."

Rurality

When Southern American English was taken as a style, the non-Southern group most often took it to index rurality. While my Southern group perceived the Southern accent to occupy both urban and rural settings (Atlanta and Nashville were both frequently explicitly mentioned), the non-Southern group would not acknowledge an urban South unless spurred; when asked about cities in the South non-Southern participants would usually express confusion. The urban South was irrelevant to the conversation because the South is marked particularly as rural, and Southern cities that are nationally

familiar are simply erased (Irvine and Gal 2000) in the context of the Southern prototype. The Southern group of participants was also familiar with this characterization of the South and related a number of humorous stories in which a non-Southerner attributed erroneous rural characteristics to the participant. These included:

How many guns do you own?

Do you drive a truck?

Do you have cows?

Do you farm?

The prototypical Southerner, as described by many participants, was directly synonymous with the "hillbilly," as, for example, portrayed by *The Beverly Hillbillies*. "Hillbilly" and, less commonly, "hick" were used by three participants as normal epithets for rural Southerners. A participant provides a definition in the following excerpt:

Researcher: What is a hillbilly exactly?

Participant: A hillbilly is a you know a really Southerner like complete white trash.

Researcher: Can you describe one? Don't hold back now.

Participant: Well you know they live in the mountains in the woods and they're like totally uneducated

These terms were used for rural Southerners exclusively, while "redneck" was employed for whites from lower socioeconomic backgrounds throughout the country. However, in the case of one participant, "hillbillies" was used even for historically Southern populations that had left the South, such as in southern Detroit. In such usage, "hillbilly" could even be taken as an ethnic term, since such populations, no longer geographically Southern, can only be referenced according to a number of cultural distinctions besides region of origin. That is, my non-Southern participants perceived differences between themselves and people in the South to be due to more than simply geographic or occupational separation, although the most salient characteristic was at least a historical association

with rurality.

Cuteness

Just as Southerners are expected to have familiarity with a number of rural concepts, so they are inversely expected to have little familiarity with urban concepts and, indeed, concepts generally associated with modernity. Throughout my conversations with non-Southern participants, for example, I encountered the following remarks:

"Wait do you have Starbucks in Tennessee?"

"When do you wear shoes?"

"[A group of Southerners] didn't really seem to know what to do [in a large city]. They were awestruck by how big the buildings were... It was adorable."

Just as the prototypical Southerner comes from a rural area, so he or she is isolated from common consumer items associated with urbanism and even commodities such as shoes (although, admittedly, this is perhaps a stylized association with Southerners or "hillbillies"), as well as the urban landscape.

When I would admit to having had little contact with an urban concept, multiple participants expressed that it was "cute" that I had not, just as the participant in the third example above expressed that the referenced group of Southerners were likewise "adorable." Cuteness was intimately associated with "quaintness" and sometimes even concepts that were considered "antiquated." The word "quaint" was explicitly used to describe me when I opened the door for one participant and, a second time, when another participant noted that I wrote in cursive. "Cute" was also frequently used (although only by female participants) to describe Southern American English among the non-Southern group and often in the same utterance in which it was equated with a lack of education. This was perhaps the only instance in which Southern American English was explicitly regarded as positive by a non-Southern

participant. However, "cuteness" and "quaintness" could be taken as another dimension of "backwardness," since what makes a Southerner cute is his or her imagined quaint lack of contact with ubiquitous features of modernity.

Conservatism

In addition to "Southernness" being equated to "rural," many of my participants treated rurality as equivalent to conservatism. Most participants noted that the South tends to vote Republican, citing the recent election and others, and multiple participants described Southerners as "people who watch *Fox News*." When describing the political environment in the South, one participant stated:

It's kind of like here, but I imagine it on a massive scale. There are a lot of educated people in Albuquerque, so Bernalillo voted blue, but you don't have to drive far to be in like really rural areas, so there are some you know, red counties around here.

While some participants regarded conservatism with neutrality, most were openly critical of it. In three separate interviews, participants introduced the notion of *Fox News* viewers with the phrase "those idiots on *Fox News*." Indeed, just as rurality was considered equivalent to conservatism, so conservatism was, in general, considered equivalent to stupidity. All of my participants openly identified as "liberal," and while all acknowledged the importance of a "political dialogue," more than a majority also stated that "the Republican Party's strength is due to manipulating the uneducated" (This quote was taken from one interview, but it also paraphrases statements made in others).

Among my non-Southern participants, a common genre of imitation was George W. Bush impressions, and this genre included some of my non-Southern participants' most extended imitations. The most salient features of such impressions were disfluencies ("um, uh"), mockery of perceived

(over) elegant phrasing ("It has come to my attention that"), nervous laughing, and hyper-Southern English, especially with infrequent words or phrases that pertained to the political domain (for example, "public policy" as [ˈphʊblikˈpælsi]--Note the altered first vowels in each word and the deleted schwa in "policy." To my ear, this sound more like an imitation of African American Vernacular English). This genre represents an opportunity for imitators to mix Southern language stereotypes with conservatism stereotypes, and the content of such imitations was rarely anything that pertained to what the former president actually advocated, but rather simply what my participants perceived to be extreme conservatism. For example, here are some statements made in such imitations:

"Jesus Christ out of school? What next, Jesus Christ out of church?"

"Having been in the military and being so insecure with my manliness, I can personally contest that the military don't want no homosexuals in the army."

"What is this country gonna do with more education? Education ain't free. You gotta fight for it. How you gonna fight if you ain't got a war?"

George W. Bush impressions serve to demonstrate the prototypical (Southern) conservative in extremes, since it involves a well known conservative political leader who famously spoke with a Texan accent. Finally, in the impressions of two separate speakers, delivered after I asked what made George W. Bush Southern, the participants delivered the impressions with much less effort at replicating a Southern accent when compared to other imitations within the interview, although it was still attempted to some degree--The ultra-conservative content alone was apparently "Southern" enough to identify the region of origin of the speaker.

Lack of education and "white trash"

The perception of nonstandard grammar among non-Southern participants was similar to that of the Southern group in that nonstandard forms were regarded as correlated to poorer education. The

most common features listed were "ain't," double negatives, and "using verbs wrong." That said, the Southern perception of "using verbs wrong" was quite different from the non-Southern perception. For example, as previously stated, non-Southerners included even examples of verb usage that do not appear in actual Southern American English (The example I gave previously was "Is you or ain't you a American?" where "you" would still be conjugated with "are" even in the most isolated regions of Appalachia).

A feature regarded as incorrect by the non-Southern group but considered benign among the Southern group was nonstandard pronunciation. Two participants even used me as an example of "poor pronunciation," by noting that I, for example, "don't pronounce my words clearly" and often "cut off letters." This too, as with nonstandard grammar, was attributed to a lack of education (That I am pursuing a master's degree was apparently ignored through *erasure*). Multiple participants cited the "difficulty Southerners have with vowels" as further evidence of their lack of education. Participants also expressed that these features of Southern American English were a reflection of general unintelligence. The two features most often mentioned were a slower rate of speech and "drawled vowels." As one participant put it, "It takes some of them so long to get their thoughts out, so sometimes you wonder if they have trouble keeping up with you." That is, mental processing is thought to correspond to the rate of language production.

Southern participants were certainly aware of such assumptions made regarding them:

I think they think we're all hicks.

They think we're stupid.

We're all uneducated to them.

They think we're all idiots.

Southerners were also not without their own prejudices against people without education, and they also

made frequent jokes (most often about themselves) about people from rural areas ("us hicks from _____ County" and "When you get out of school, you can always come back and profess to the cows around here"). Southerners also used the terms "hick," "redneck," and "hillbilly," but their usage was directed toward people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, not to all people from within the region (except within the genre of jokes). Of course, it is likely that the non-Southern group is using these terms with the same general meaning, but then the implication is that everyone in the South has lower socioeconomic status, in line with the prototype, while Southerners reserve the same terms for specific socioeconomic and regional subsections of the population.

Although some participants mentioned "incorrect" grammar and pronunciation in particular as evidence of poorer education in the South, most simply referred to "bad English" as a symptom of poor education. Multiple participants stated that Southern American English was "hard to understand," but did not provide specific examples of the features that made it so. That is, these participants explicitly equated Southern American English to "bad English" in its totality.

Jingoism

Besides the associations above, which appeared in all interviews, jingoism was the next most identifying feature of the South among my non-Southern participants. A story by one participant's experience on a subway in Washington D.C. illustrates:

This family was on the train, and they looked really Southern already. And then, they were looking at a sign for a street name that's French, and he was like, 'Why don't they just get American names?' And I was like, 'God, please, there's so many stereotypes against you already. Please don't enforce that stereotype.'

Jingoism was also expressed in imitations, in which I encountered, for example, the phrase, "Is you or ain't you a American?" Just as nonstandard grammar is associated with ignorance and a lack of

education, so the jingoism expressed through such nonstandard (possibly nonexistent) usages is similarly due to ignorance and a lack of education. Another common feature in imitations of jingoist Southerners was increased rhoticity of /ɹ/, which was usually realized by treating the preceding vowel as [ɜ]. For instance, "America" was realized in the preceding example as [əməɹkə]. This realization of "America" in imitations was common enough to constitute its own trope, which would commonly co-occur with "beer" as [bɜ]. The resulting caricature was most often a belligerent, drunk ultra-conservative ranting on killing "rag heads." While this was the most common performance, which appeared in four separate interviews, three others introduced the hyper-rhoticized "beer" and "America" together with overly patriotic themes but without racist implications.

Comical nationalism is furthermore associated with the South in various media. One example is found in *Team America: World Police*, in which a song entitled "Freedom Isn't Free" is sung in an exaggerated Southern accent: "What would you do?" is realized as [wʌʔ wɔdʒju dʊ.u], where the word "do" is realized as two syllables. I have never heard such a pronunciation in natural language--This is an example of the exaggerated Southern Drawl that appeared in national media. The correlation is strong enough that none of my participants provided an imitation of extreme nationalism without some attempt at a Southern accent.

Religiosity

While imitations of religious relatives and acquaintances were common among my Southern participants, the imitations more commonly dealt with issues of moralism, while, among my group of non-Southerners, imitations of Southern religiosity rather emphasized ignorance on both scientific topics and scripture. Also, while Southerners never explicitly linked religiosity to the Southern accent but rather expressed humor in religiosity through the content in imitations of accent, non-Southerners

frequently explicitly linked religiosity to Southerners, although they were no less willing to offer imitations. Here is a section of one such imitation:

It says right there in the Bible that the earth is 4000 years old and God put those dinosaur bones in the ground to test all the sinners.

The joke relies on such stereotyped religious concepts as the "Young Earth Hypothesis." One finds similar portrayals of religion in the South in movies; for instance, in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* the Imperial Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan expresses incredulousness toward Darwinism. In this instance, as in the example provided above, the imitation mocks the caricature's rejection of the theory of natural selection based on his incomplete understanding of the concept. Another prominent complementary joke to the ignorant, religiose Southerner is the hypocritical Southerner. One finds examples of the hypocritical Christian Southerner especially in media. One example is the previously mentioned episode from *Archer*, in which one of the protagonist's brother uses a bible verse to justify sleeping with his brother's wife.

A topic closely linked to religiosity was homophobia. As will be more closely examined in the following section, imitations of homophobic Southerners were frequently accompanied by the use of slang terms; I notably encountered frequent use of such lexemes as "fag" and "queer." One participant even incorrectly assumed that the Westboro Baptist Church, an organization notorious for such slogans as "God hates fags," was located in Alabama (It is actually located in Kansas). The homophobic Southerner is also portrayed in media, including in the same episode of *Archer* mentioned above.

Racism

According to my non-Southern participants, the prototypical Southerner is highly intolerant of social differences. This section could have been entitled "Xenophobia" as easily as "Racism," but, since

most of my participants used the term "racist" in reference to each of the examples provided below, I will follow such usage. Interestingly, racism was taken to encompass ignorance about other countries and cultures, even when no explicit prejudice surfaced, which indicates that it is perceived as closely related to lack of education. A common assumption among my non-Southern participants was that Southerners could not distinguish the difference between other cultures. For example, imitated caricatures often regarded all Latin Americans as "Mexican," all east Asians as "Chinese," all South Asians as "Indian," and all Muslims as "rag heads." The latter example introduces another common theme among impressions of Southerners by non-Southerners: the caricature almost always includes racist epithets, and these are extended to entire world regions, even though they more often originate from specific ethnicities. Since a number of such terms appeared in the imitations of Southerners by non-Southerners in multiple interviews and were indeed a salient feature of such imitations, I will discuss them briefly.

Almost all imitations that included racist epithets at some point used or alluded to the word "nigger." Most participants simply mouthed the word during the imitation, but a minority used it without censorship throughout the imitation. The implication of the word is quite clear: Just as the South is associated especially with the Old South, so Southern whites are perceived as at least distantly tied to historical slavery, and they are presumed to still harbor prejudice against African Americans (or anyone with dark skin). However, imitations of Southerners included racial epithets for non-Anglo whites whose use, to my knowledge, is entirely absent at least in eastern Middle Tennessee, likely owing to the absence of significant populations of multiple European traditions in the area. These include, for instance, "Kraut" and "Kike"; such terms are probably much more common in each participant's place of origin, since rural Southerners very rarely need to differentiate such racial concepts. Interestingly, I encountered no racist epithets in my interviews with Southerners, although

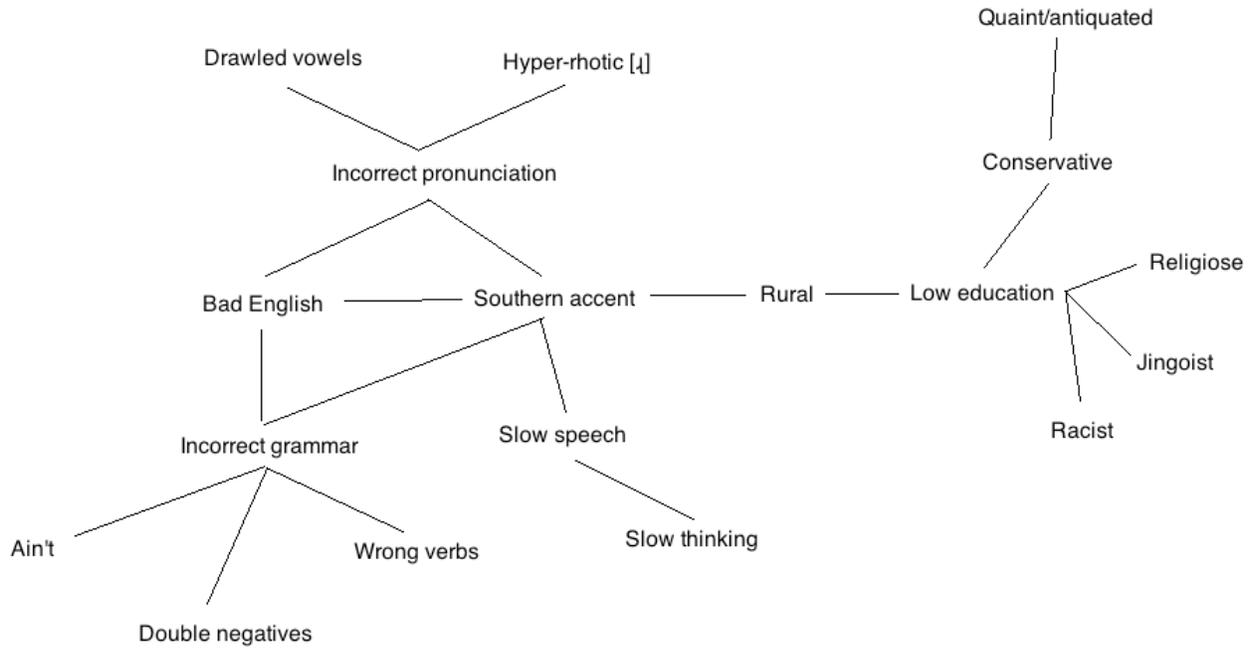
discussions involving race frequently came up.

Non-Southerners also provided anecdotes involving Southern xenophobia. Take, for example, the previous story involving the Southern family on the subway in Washington D.C.-- The father is offended by the presence of a French toponym in his own country's capital. In a separate interview, a participant likewise mocked the "Southern" tendency to refer to French fries as "freedom fries." Another participant, describing her conversation with Southerner, expressed disgust at hearing that the Southerner moved from her neighborhood after a large number of Latinos moved into the area. Finally, in two interviews, the caricatured Southerners in imitations were against bilingualism and stated that "American" should be the only national language and should not have to share this status with "Mexican." Evidently, the stereotyped Southerner is not only prejudiced against almost all alien ethnic categories, but is also opposed even to "un-American" (another common term in imitations) ways of speaking, including all languages besides English. That is, the prototypical Southerner is not only ultra-conservative and jingoism, but also isolationist.

Given these data, I propose the following arrangement of associations with Southern American English for the non-Southern participants as depicted in Figure 2. This figure was constructed using the same criteria as for Figure 1; that is, each label represents a conversation topic, and lines between them represent a conversational transition initiated by the participant. Note that Figure 2 possibly reflects less researcher interference than Figure 1. Regardless of how a conversation was initiated, non-Southerners much more likely touched on all of the same topics and more consistently moved to some topics from particular stepping stones. For instance, all non-Southerners discussed the South as rural before they moved on to discussing the South as uneducated, and they would then move on to a cluster of further associations. I take this to demonstrate that non-Southerners are more heavily relying on more widespread national discursive processes, which results in a more homogenous associative

network. Once again, I grouped conversational data into labeled topics at my own discretion.

Figure 2: Associative Links with Southern American English for Non-Southern Participants



Chapter 7

Conclusions

The clearest differences between the perception of Southern American English by Southern and non-Southern participants was due to the Southerners' distinction between phonetic and grammatical features, which allowed them to perceive a difference between a "Southern accent" and "bad English." This distinction allowed Southerners to attach a number of social functions to the "Southern accent," including marking politeness (including formality) and solidarity. In addition, the concept of a Southern accent allowed Southern participants to attach further positive social stereotypes to the style, especially the notions of being down-to-earth and laid-back. Non-Southern participants, on the other hand, perceived the entire variety as it differed from Standard American English to denote lack of education, with concomitant expectations of the speaker being ultra-conservative, religiously fundamentalist, and xenophobic. In both groups, the most salient phonetic features of Southern American English were taken to be unique intonational patterns in addition to vowel duration and quality, although the interpretation of these features differed depending on the group. Also, grammatical features of Southern speech, such as nonstandard preterits, were regarded as denoting ignorance by both groups regardless of their places of origin. Finally, "letter dropping," including both realizing (ING) as [-m] and t/d-deletion, occupied an intermediate position among Southern participants and could be interpreted as either lazy or laid-back, depending on the context.

The Southern identity as constructed through my analysis of Southern linguistic features differs markedly depending on the place of origin of the participants who identified those features; for the Southern group, Southern American English is of at least two flavors, grammatical and phonetic, and its speakers can therefore come from any socioeconomic background, with wealthier and more

educated speaker more likely to speak with standard grammar and poorer and less educated speaker more likely to speak with nonstandard grammar. However, all speakers, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds, are likely to be perceived with a number positive associations, such as humility and the quality of being laid-back. The most general prototypical Southerner is thus perceived as in essence positive. Inversely, people who speak with noticeable regional accents from, for example, the Northeastern United States are likely to be regarded as exhibiting the negative opposites of these characteristics. On the other hand, the prototypical Southerner according to the non-Southern group was entirely homogenous and perceived as exhibiting almost entirely undesirable social characteristics. The fact that such a homogenous prototype could be construed at all is most likely due to the non-Southern group having had little concrete contact with the South. Instead, the non-Southerners' understanding of the South was derived from the unfavorable portrayal of Southerners in national media; a critical eye toward the representation of the American South in such media would no doubt ameliorate some of the linguistic prejudices exemplified in this study.

Finally, concerning the necessity of future research, a better understanding of dialect perception for any language variety can be possible only with a better understanding of the sociophonetic features that make up the dialect in question. In the case of Southern American English, a number of characteristics of the variety, including intonation patterns, vowel shifts analyzed according to changes in prosodic stress or vowel duration, and hyper-rhoticity, are poorly covered in the academic literature. In all of my participants' imitations, each of these features produced a perceptible change in the realization of, especially, vowels. Since it was the vowels that were in particular indicated by participants to differentiate the Southern accent from other varieties of American English, the understanding of the style of Southern American English can only be advanced through an investigation of the Southern Vowel Shift, which is doubtlessly linked to these previously mentioned

phenomena.

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