
Appalachian Englishes in the Twenty-First Century Educational Materials

Chapter 9

Intersections of Literature and Dialect in Appalachia **Isabelle Shepherd & Kirk Hazen**

As students of literature take up their own analyses, there are many possibilities for projects that will fit their particular interests. A few are listed below.

Exercise 1

Students can treat dialogue between characters as discourse and analyze qualities of that discourse using the techniques discussed in Chapter 4. Working from Burkette's discussion of *a*-prefixing (Chapter 4), where she notes who uses what dialect feature, when, and for what purpose, she provides a model for assessing the ebb and flow of identity through language in discourse. For example, what is [Tim Earley](#) developing when he juxtaposes St. Thomas Aquinas with *a*-prefixing in "Country Poem #23": "The blue jays: St. Thomas Aquinas would not have cared for the pantyhose you are *a*-wearing."

Exercise 2

Working from the sound patterns in Reed's Chapter 2 or Hasty's Chapter 1, what representation of sounds come through in characters' speech? Do they utilize more Southern vowels or are there any changes to the spelling to represent different sounds? How would you adjust spelling to fit the sounds patterns described in Chapter 1 and 2?

Exercise 3

On the dialect grammar front, double modals are part of Southern Appalachian varieties but also part of African American Vernacular English ([Montgomery and Reed 2018](#)). In Earley's lines from "Dialect Poem," what effects do the double modals have on rendering meaning and authenticity?

When my body gives out, Lord, it done give out. It done give out.
When my body give out for real, Lord, when my body give up it salt and lightning
I might could lie down in Heaven with you, Lord, I might could.

Exercise 4

Through dialect features shared among stigmatized varieties, [Crystal Wilkinson](#) is able to carry multiple voices in her poems. While looking specifically at these kinds of intersections, Mallinson and Insoe take up the multiplex creation of gender in Chapter 6. Taking up a work of Appalachian literature, how is gender represented through the different levels of language? Is it mostly through vocabulary, or are there patterns in the phrasing? Relatedly, how do those language qualities intersect with other actions to create gender the way the artist intended? By working through the topics and techniques found in the other chapters in this book, students interested in how language works in Appalachian literature have many realms by which they can assess the language patterns of the Appalachian people.

Exercise 5

There are some dialect features that are recognizable but yet may not be considered especially vernacular. Below are two examples of the kinds of variation in language that may not readily be noted as Appalachian but certainly play a role in the region and its literature. What other linguistic qualities in the Appalachian literature that you have read stand out to you as Appalachian?

In the first example, phrases in sentences can be considered to be arranged by either *parataxis* or *hypotaxis*. Over the last few centuries, because of influence from Latin styles in academic and legal writing, people have arranged sentences with more subordinate phrases hanging off main phrases, which is called hypotaxis: *The king, whose sword was forged in the fires of Mount Fuji, fled the battlefield in fear.* Parataxis happens when phrases are arranged in parallel fashion: *The king's sword was forged in the fires of Mount Fuji. He fled the battlefield in fear.* In Appalachian fiction, especially in dialogues, parallel structure set in parataxis appears frequently. From Breece D'J. Pancake's story "[Trilobites](#)" comes these phrases: "I stop my machine. The cane here is just as bad. I rub a sunburn into the back of my neck." The effect is percussive, a steady beat of images, sensations, and ideas.

In the second example, dropping subject pronouns is also utilized in the dialogue of Appalachian characters. Unlike English, some languages like Spanish are able to unambiguously omit pronouns in sentences: *estoy feliz* means 'I am happy' even though the subject pronoun (*yo*) is missing. In such

languages, the verbs have robust enough suffixes that everyone can tell what the subject would be. English no longer has many suffixes for verbs, and English speakers rarely drop pronouns. Yet in Appalachian dialogue, we can find constructions like this one from Pancake's "[Trilobites](#):" "I say, 'Shot to hell, Gin. Can't do nothing right.'" In this sentence, the pronoun *I* is dropped, as is the existential construction *it is*. That second sentence is a good example of a pattern called "diary form," but examples from Appalachian literature can be found with a wider variety of pronouns. In the following bit of dialogue, Pancake is able to drop *she*: "Just like her momma,' Mom says, 'racin' the devil for the beer joints.'" Also consider the following example from [Matthew Neill Null](#)'s novel *Honey from the Lion* (2015: 3), where the pronoun *you* is dropped: "Witch you up a little corn. Won't take cotton nor tobacco nor nothing." [Taylor](#) uses this style in the passage quoted in the chapter from *The Ballad of Trenchmouth Taggart*: One phrase starts without the subject *he* before *claims* in a diary style.