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Paradigm leveling and standardization in West Virginia: a new function for an old variable in the Appalachians

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ABSTRACT

Paradigm leveling and other language processes sometimes clash with social processes of standardization in many rural English-speaking areas. Examining the history of be leveling in Appalachia, a region of the United States, sheds light on the evolution of linguistic and social tensions. To evaluate the relevance of past be in light of economic and educational advancements during the 20th century, a quantitative sociolinguistic study of leveled was (e.g., We was there) was undertaken with 67 native Appalachian speakers. The findings show a drastic decrease in leveled, with more conventional patterns being shown by younger speakers. The rate of was contraction (for example, We's there last night) grew, giving native Appalachians a streamlined variety with which to oppose the social drive toward a completely standardized system, even while the general pace of was leveling dropped over apparent time.

Introduction

This study of English in West Virginia's Appalachian region uses the linguistic variable of past be to inquire into the sociolinguistic struggle between standardization and paradigm leveling. When there used to be many different forms of the verb (like was and were), but now there are just a few, we say that the verb paradigm has "leveled" (e.g., was). One illustration of the profound changes that have occurred in Appalachia in the 20th century is the shift in the patterns of vernacular language diversity. Since the advent of mandatory education, standardization and paradigm leveling have been at conflict in rural regions, but in Appalachia, paradigm leveling has largely won (e.g., Cheshire, Edwards, & Whittle, 1993). It is reasonable to conclude that the use of traditional characteristics of the English language, such as a-prefixes (e.g., She's a-working), demonstrative they (e.g., We observed them kids), and the Northern Subject Rule (e.g., The dog barks), is on the wane as well.

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The topic of whether or not past be variety is still a feasible pattern for social difference in the West Virginia area of Appalachia is an important one for study of vernacular dialect variants.

Examples of *was* paradigm leveling are listed in (1) to (8):

In the first place, there were probably about 900 people living there. (Bonus Company, Number One) Well, no, we didn't attend to church when you were tiny, huh-uh, (2) second person. (Tyler County, Number 1)
Third person plural: We re-caulked the faucets so they wouldn't leak. (Second District of Greenbrier County, Fifth)

They were in our class, and they wasn't really interested in anything, but they were the third-person plural pronoun. (Third Boon Corporation)
Fifth-person plural noun phrase: that's where the rumors first began to spread. (Third District of Logan County)
A member of the family, if they had one, would have woken up by now and be hungry. (Part Nine of Monongalia County)
When she and Dad were still alive (seventh) (joint noun). In the first installment of the Tyler County series,
Eighth form: I'm enrolled in kindergarten. "(Monongalia Co. 8)"
This research illustrates that standardization has decreased the rates of leveled was for the default singular of past

be, but that paradigm leveling now depends on a reduced form to relieve standardizing pressures: contracted was (for example, They's late yesterday). This research explores how the demands of standardization at the end of the twentieth century affected the sociolinguistic variance of this apparently constant characteristic. Extra room for sociolinguistic distinction is provided by the derived variable. Due to the decrease and subsequent invention of the former paradigm leveling, speakers of Appalachian languages now have more flexibility in how they might categorize themselves in social contexts.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON *WAS* PARADIGM LEVELING

In many parts of the world, the past tense of a verb has societal weight since it allows for a variety of linguistic variation patterns. Study of the was paradigm shift is a part of the linguistically rich and socially diagnostic field of sociolinguistic morphological analysis of subject-verb concord. Over the course of the last four decades, researchers have examined past be variation in a wide range of social settings, from urban (e.g., Cheshire, 1982; Cheshire & Fox, 2009; Fasold, 1972; Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Tagliamonte, 1998; Trudgill, 1974; Wolfram, 1969) to rural (e.g., Britain, 2002; Hazen, 2000a; Smith, 2000; Smith &Tagli (e.g., Schreier, 2002, 2008). Kortmann and Szmrecsanyi (2004) discovered past be variation to be a common element in their survey of morphological variation in the British Isles and the Americas. It has also been studied in a wide range of regional Englishes, such as Australian English (Eisikovits, 1991), New Zealand English (Hay &Schreier, 2004), British English (Anderwald, 2001), and Indian South African English (Singh, 2003).

English (Mesthrie, 2004:990). (Mesthrie, 2004:990). The linguistic and social functions served by the past be changeable have been the subject of current research. Evidence from London's youth suggests that ethnic social settings have a significant impact on was/ were variation (Cheshire & Fox, 2009). According to research conducted by Richards (2010), four intermediate forms of was/were are being reallocated according to polarity in a variety spoken in Leeds, England. Tagliamonte and Baayen (2012) utilized was/were variation to demonstrate the value of mixed-effects models and conditional inference trees, while Moore (2011) used past be analysis to investigate how characteristics like socioeconomic position restrict the agency of practice-based social groups.

All of these research have looked at variance by way of various linguistic context factors. Two of the most noticeable are grammatical subjects and polarity.

The Northern Topic Rule is by far the most talked-about grammatical subject patterning (e.g., Smith &Tagliamonte, 1998). The Northern Subject Rule, so-called because of its influence in Scotland and the North of England, functioned for be and all other verbs, and it appears to have been carried over by Scots-Irish migrants to the United States, specifically Appalachia and the Outer Banks (Montgomery, 1989, 2001; Schneider & Montgomery, 2001; Wolfram, Hazen, & Schilling-Estes, 2002).

1999). In essence, this rule states that when the third-person plural subject is not an adjacent they, the -s ending is added to the verb to indicate the present tense. To contrast the Northern

With the Subject Rule in effect, it is very

unlikely that *They will strike at everyone, but it is not unheard of that They will strike at everyone. Likewise, it would not be surprising if -s in The boys draws on the walls. No was used after they, but 81% was used after plural noun phrases, were among the most common examples of the Northern Subject Rule forms discovered by Smith and Tagliamonte (1998:116) in Buckie, Scotland (NPs).

The Southern Subject Rule is in opposition to the Northern Subject Rule (Cheshire & Fox, 2009:7). Was leveling occurs more often with they than with multiple NPs in East Anglian types, as shown by Britain (2002). Though his older listeners were more likely to use the was level with multiple NPs, the subject restriction loosened as younger listeners expanded their use of the was level. This loosening of restrictions is often called "linguistic swamping," since as the occurrence of was leveling increased, the need to maintain linguistic diversity eased. Research into the Appalachian region confirms what has been found elsewhere: no evidence of the Northern Subject Rule.

Some academics have suggested hierarchy of constraints for grammatical topics. You, We, and They are all examples of existentials provided by Britain (2002:26). In contrast to the existentials you and us that Chambers (2004:141) offered, we have the NP form. They are the NP Plural form of the definite article. The subject slot in an existential formulation, such as, consists of a semantically empty word. There were a total of three. In spite of this, the need for granular

It's possible the establishment of hierarchies came too early. There are several possible grammatical subject orders in the many diverse variations of English spoken today. According to Tagliamonte's (2009) examination of 13

English-speaking groups, there aren't many glaring grammatical tendencies. However, existentials do tend to use more was leveling.

"Our study does not give substantial evidence for earlier statements that there is a consistent constraint hierarchy for the influence of the grammatical subject," concluded Cheshire and Fox (2009:31). Nonetheless, patterns did emerge; for instance, they discovered that the use of the second person you was associated with greater rates than it was in the control group.

Many studies have looked at the subject-verb concord of various kinds of collective NPs. Collective NPs, like people and a number of them, are nouns used as single subjects in British English but are considered plural in American English standard speech. Separating apart patterns of US and British language variation, Bock, Butterfield, Cutler, Cutting, Eberhard, and Humphreys (2006) investigated the psycholinguistic processing of collectives. Research conducted in the United States has shown that collective NPs

inextricably linked to increased instances of was leveling (Wolfram et al., 1999). The present investigation of the impact of the grammatical subject on Appalachian was leveling provides further evidence to contribute to the discussion of grammatical subject trends.

Most studies of past be leveling also look at whether or whether the polarity of the verb was reversed. Tagliamonte (2009) used the terminology introduced by Chambers (2004) to classify localities as either Vernacular Pattern I or Vernacular Pattern II. Pattern I in the Vernacular

consists of a general tendency toward equal weighting of positive and negative aspects.

We was there last year, We didn't go last year, and similar expressions. The second vernacular pattern is characterized by the use of the leveling verbs was and weren't for both positive and negative expressions (for example, We was there last year and We weren't there last year). These are the two types of polarity patterns considered by Cheshire and Fox (2009:6).

I was there last year is an example of positive were-leveling in UK English, although negative were-leveling is also common (Britain, 2002:19). Ocracoke English (Wolfram et al., 1999) and Lumbee English (Wolfram et al., 1999) are two examples of East Coast American dialects with Vernacular Pattern II (Wolfram & Sellers, 1999). Vernacular Pattern I has been discovered in other variations as well; for instance, Fasold (1972) discovered that the most common negative form in Washington, DC was Vernacular Pattern I. The phonologically distinct variants of the eastern United States'

from was or were for the negative; in Warren County, North Carolina, wont is the favored form, comparable to Richards' (2010) results for Leeds.

Hazen (1998) and Hazen (2000b).

Christian (1978), Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976), and Christian, Wolfram, and Dube (1989) have all established Vernacular Pattern I for negation within Appalachia (1988). Appalachian speakers are similar to those from Ocracoke and the Outer Banks in terms of subject-verb agreement, among other things (Hazen, 1996).

As a federally designated region of poverty, Appalachia is a prime candidate for increased local government support due to its rich cultural heritage and low economic status. The federal government, however,

Although many counties get funding because of their Appalachian designation, the designation does not reflect the collective vision of the people who live there. Consequently, it seems that these two definitions of "Appalachia" include overlapping but distinct regions. As West Virginia is the only US state to be entirely enclosed inside the federal region, the area under study is a part of both the federal and the regional contexts.

people's ideas on what it means to be from the Appalachian area. The most socially disadvantaged speakers, according to these narratives, speak a unified form of "Appalachian English" that comprises a set of highly vernacular features.

accented speech To the contrary, this research looks at how Appalachian English has evolved through time.

The language and social history of the Appalachian area of West Virginia was rather well recorded in the early 1970s, making it possible to make useful generational comparisons. Previous findings may not have come from the same speakers or the same communities in Appalachia, but they are consistent with having originated in the same sorts of speech communities (Patrick, 2002).

Thus, the discrepancies between the old and new outcomes may be interpreted as shifts in the old be system during the twentieth century. There were a number of studies to use as a basis for comparison, including those by Hackenberg (1972), Blanton (1974), Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976), and Christian (1978).

Both Blanton (1974:41-43) and Hackenberg (1972:37-47) studied the effects of leveled speech on 22 and 39 speakers, respectively, in Breathitt County, Kentucky and Nicholas County, West Virginia. Three separate investigations were released by Wolfram and Christian.

for speakers in Monroe and Mercer Counties, West Virginia: Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976:83) was a study of 52 speakers; Christian, Wolfram, and Dube (1988) reconfigured that dataset and expanded the data to include 62 speakers (47 of whom were part of the original 52). Both sets of recordings were made in the early 1970s. Table 1 summarizes the findings of these research.

There are two results from Table 1 that are applicable to this investigation. In the first place, consistent with previous research on subject-verb agreement, existential there was shown to be a more favorable context for levelling was, with prevalence rates 9–24% greater than those of other topics. To continue, the total rates of leveled was

TABLE 1. *Previous results from studies of leveled* was *in Appalachia*

	Hackenberg (1972)	Blanton (1974) INSTANCES	Wolfram&Christian (1976)	Christian et al. (1988)
Subject types (excluding existentials)	46% 126/276	58% 106/184[a]	78% 828/1062	75% 863/1154
Plural existential	55%	82%[b]	93%	92%

All subject types	29/53 47% 155/329	146/177 —	107/115 79% 935/1177	145/157 77% 1008/1311

a level of vernacularization that, in the early 1970s, marked each of the surveyed villages as exceptionally idiolectal.

EMPIRICAL DESIGN

The West Virginia Dialect Project (WVDP) has conducted sociolinguistic interviews with 183 native Appalachians as part of its research of sociolinguistic variance in the region. The demographics of the 67 interviewees that made up the foundation of the West Virginia Corpus of English in Appalachia (WVCEA) are shown in Table 2. These individuals were selected for their ability to communicate well and in-depth during sociolinguistic interviews, as well as for representing a wide range of demographics in terms of location, age, gender, and parental native-born status in the Appalachian region. 4 These individuals, whose birth years range from 1919 to 1989, may be roughly classified into one of three age brackets. The generation gap between the older and middle-aged speakers of West Virginia may be traced back to World War II, a huge social event that contributed considerably to out-migration both to the military and to cities in the northern states. The economic and educational shifts that began at the decade's close have driven a wedge between the younger speakers. The geographic and gender breakdowns of each age group are rather uniform. 5 Only 6 of the 67 total speakers are people of African descent. 6 All of the interviewees now resided in West Virginia, while the majority (64) were originally from the state or grew up there. There are two aspects of society that need to be clearly defined: geographical location and educational attainment. Following Kurath's (1949:27) regional split between northern and southern West Virginia, a latitudinal line running across the heart of the state from east to west was recognized as the regional dividing line. The study's findings are similar to those of Carver (1987) and Labov, Ash, and

, and Boberg (2006). Additionally, the regional judgment was bolstered by the

TABLE 2. *Speakers in the West Virginia Corpus of English in Appalachia (WVCEA)*

Group	Subgroup	People, n
Age	Group 2: 1919–1947	23
	Group 3: 1950–1979	23
	Group 4: 1980–1989	21
Sex	F	32
	M	35
Region	North	33
	South	34
Educational experience	College (some)	44
	No college	23
Ethnicity	African American	6

	EuropeanAmerican	61
Socialclass	Working	16
	Lowermiddle	32
	Uppermiddle	19

personal reflections of the speakers Everyone we asked in Braxton County, West Virginia, said that there is a geographic separation between the north and south of the state. The second type of socioeconomic difference is educational attainment, with distinctions made between those who have completed some college and those who have not. An associate's degree is a measure of knowledge, but this social category is more about who you are and how you feel about formal education.

Traditional characteristics such as one's employment and living situation were used to create these divisions of social class (Labov, 2001). The WVDP used profession (or that of the subject's parents if the subject was a juvenile), housing circumstances (as known), self-discussion of high school cliques, and living situations to determine social class for this research (e.g., whether they had to work in high school, their hobbies). In addition, these groups were considered when

variables outside than the speakers' own beliefs about their social status, such as the hobbies they choose and the stories they tell about their possessions. These societal stratifications are supported by prior findings from this corpus (Hazen, 2008:128). As predicted, there are considerable disparities across socioeconomic classes, which has historically been associated to ING variation

(Labov, 2001).

Methodological conventions were used for the sociolinguistic variationist analysis (Tagliamonte, 2006, 2011). Researchers from the WVDP utilized orthographic transcriptions of the interviews as guides to find relevant information. The stated linguistic and social characteristics were used to assign codes to each token, such as the past tense be verb form (e.g., contracted or full). To determine whether contraction was limited to conventional were situations, we coded for grammatical subjects in first- and third-person singular.

Speaker was considered a random effect by using Rbrul (Johnson, 2009). Interpreting the factor weights such that values closer to 1 have a gradiently stronger association with leveling levels than ones closer to 0 is correct. Further, the Rbrul outcomes are organized such that the relative strength of each factor group and the ordering of constraints within each factor group are emphasized (see Poplack&Tagliamonte, 2001:94). Specifically, "Constraint ranking... gives a thorough account of the structure of the interaction between variation and linguistic context, or the 'grammar' underpinning the variable surface manifestations," as stated by Tagliamonte (2006:237). The model of the dialect grammar is derived through a comparison of constraint rankings across several sets of linguistic and social parameters.

FINDINGS

Linguisticresults

Thissectionprovideslinguisticresultswithintwoareas.First,therateforjustpluralexistentialsiscomparedwiththetotalratesofleveled*was*.Second,otherlinguistic

TABLE3.*Overallratesof*was*leveling*

	Percentage	*n*
Overall	32	1513
Pluralexistentialsonly	55	240

The relative weights of requirements that go beyond the subject type of multiple existentials are compared. Possible limitations include alternative forms of grammatical-person subjects, condensing the past-tense be form, negating the past-tense be phrase, and intervening items between the subject and verb.

If we just look at Table 3, it's possible that the was leveling rates of these speakers qualify as vernacular: There were 480 instances of was leveled out of a total of 1513, with 132 occurring in existential there formulations and 348 occurring in other subject contexts. However, an unified vernacular title for .

these Appalachian speakers is complicated by two comparisons. We will first explain why this overall rate is much lower than that discovered in previous research of similar kind. Second, the range of variance in the data is concealed in Table 3's summary form. Individual frequencies of was leveling without plural existentials are shown in Figure 1, sorted by age group. Similarly to the wide variety of rates in (ING) variation with these speakers (e.g. Hazen, 2008), the rates of variation in speakers' utterances also span the gamut from one hundred to zero
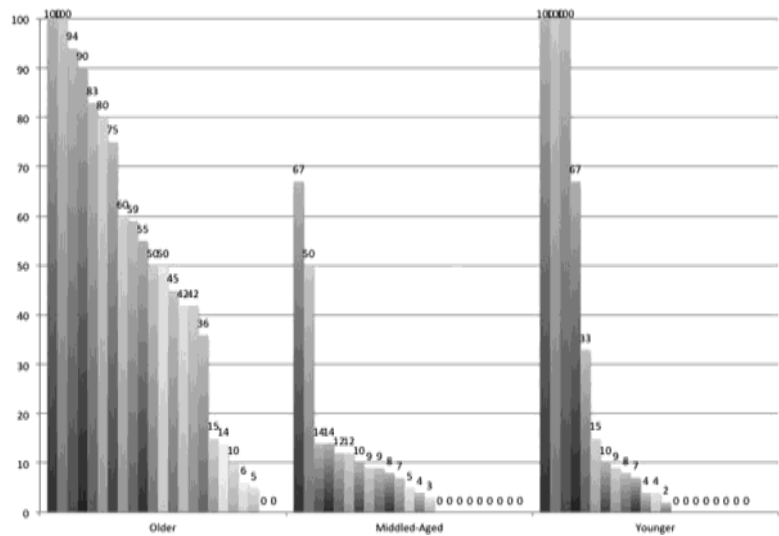

FIGURE 1. Rates of *was* leveling without plural existentials for individual speakers.

variations in coronal stop deletion patterns (e.g., Hazen, 2011). Figure 1 shows a difference between the sexes and ages that cannot be explained by any of these two factors.

The impact of existential there in Appalachia, as in other forms of English, is significant for any conclusions drawn afterwards. Its impact is distinct and must be analyzed independently of other factors. To put it another way, there is a distinct kind of linguistic variation between the singular existential and the plural existential. Strong evidence, including ranking of independent variables, was provided by Walker (2007) that there's indeed a lexicalized form and that existentials in general should be viewed as a linguistic category.

distinct field of study According to Starks and Thompson's (2009:323) analysis of Niuean English, the grammatical construction "existential there" is not used very often. Studies have shown it to be used as often as seven times per speaker in the WVCEA, with interviews averaging over 10,000 words (Hay &Schreier, 2004, as cited in Starks & Thompson, 2009:323). Was leveling alone was 55% prevalent in multiple existential settings (132 of 240). Although not as high as was previously discovered in Appalachia, this rate is still much greater than that for nonexistentials. The rate of was leveling drops to 27% after existential there is removed from the data (348 of 1273).

The overall impact of polarity is evaluated before existential there is removed from further study. It has been discovered that polarity is a significant differentiator across historical be systems, with certain kinds indicating leveled was in both positive and negative paradigms and others demonstrating leveled was in positive situations but not in negative ones. Including plural existentials with all other topics, the results for polarity for these West Virginia speakers are shown in Table 4. Table 4 shows that in typical was settings, the degree of were-leveling is rather low, at only 2% in positive contexts and 3% in negative ones. In contrast to patterns discovered in Ocracoke (Wolfram et al., 1999), London (Cheshire & Fox, 2009), the Fens (Britain), and other British communities, it is evident that weren't leveling is not a part of linguistic variety in this region of Appalachia (Anderwald, 2002). There is no indication from these statistics that we are moving toward a more binary, polarized framework in which positive is opposed to negative is. Table 4 shows that was leveling is more common in standard were settings than were leveling of any sort, with an overall rate of 32%, and that speakers seldom generated were leveling of any kind.

TABLE4.*Polaritywithpast*be*(includingexistential*there*)*

	Negation	Percentage	*n*
*Was*leveling instandard were environments	Positive:*was*	32	1414
	Negative:*wasn*'*t*	30	99
*Were*leveling instandard*was* environments	Positive:*were*	2	5017
	Negative:*weren*'*t*	3	313

TABLE 5. *Rbrul logistic regression analysis of* was *leveling for linguistic factor groups with speaker as a random effect (subjects exclude existential* there*)*

	Significant in Step-Up/Step-Down	Percentage	*n*
Contraction			
Contracted	.65	43	145
Full	.36	25	1128
Intervening word(s)	*n.s.*		
Adjacent subject and verb		28	1136
Nonadjacent subject and verb		24	137
Subject	*n.s.*		
Conjoined: *Sarah and Paige*[a]		49	37
3rd person plural NP: *Brothers*		31	263
3rd person plural pronoun: *They*		28	447
1st person plural: *We*		25	329
2nd person (singular/plural): *You*		24	100
Collective: *All of them*; *People*		20	97

Note: *N* = 1273. *n.s.* = not significant. [a]Of 37 conjoined subjects, 30 (81%) had singular final conjuncts. Practical significance: it was's. Input probabilities for runs with contracts:.296 and runs with other linguistic factors:.178. They mixed contraction and subject first, and then subject, adjacency, and polarity.

By naming this grammatical system of paradigm leveling Vernacular Pattern I, researchers have been able to evaluate the relative impact of different linguistic and social component groups in was leveling (excluding plural existentials). Language and social characteristics were tested independently using Rbrul (Johnson, 2009) with speaker designated as a random effect.

Table 5 shows that the phonological form of was, i.e. whether it is contracted, as in example (8), or not, is the only factor group shown to have a statistically significant impact on the rate of was leveling. It has been maintained by some academics that the past tense of be does not contract in most types (Anderwald 2002:28; Bender 2001:88).

Tagliamonte, 2009:106; Labov, 1972:Chapter 3). Christian et al. (1988:112) noted, however, that "was commonly happened in contracted form with multiple subjects" in Appalachian English. The WVDP has seen, both inside the WVCEA and in our everyday encounters with indigenous, that was is often transmitted.

In light of this, it is fair to wonder how we can be sure that the contracted form is was and not is. We relied on adverbial indicators, surrounding verbs in conversation, and information about the speaker to determine whether tokens should be classified as past tense forms (such as "I's beginning kindergarten") for determining whether or not a given token should be considered a contracted form. The absence of past tense in these forms is another evidence in favor of this conclusion. No lines like "Last Monday, she is chatting about it before she went" were discovered in the WVDP that used complete is to refer to the past. Similarly to what Christian et al. (1988) found, contracted was still present in the WVCEA, accounting for 12% of all tokens (145 of 1273). In contrast to the general population, where only 25% of forms are leveled, 43% of contracted forms are leveled.

formless expressions. The subject factor group was designated as nonsignificant in every Rbrul run, however the multivariate analysis showed that contracted forms support paradigm leveling with a

factor weight of.65. The logic for this trend will be examined. All of the shrunken forms of was are both polarity-positive and adjacency-contiguous. Thus, the Rbrul contraction factor group was not tested for polarity or adjacency. The collinearity with contracted was does not account for its propensity for paradigm leveling, since both polarity and adjacency remain insignificant after excluding the contraction factor group from the analysis. 7

Although there was a large variation in was leveling rates between grammatical subjects, this factor group was not determined to be statistically significant. This result is in keeping with the overall conclusion of Tagliamonte (2009), who argued against any universal hierarchy, but at odds with Cheshire and Fox's (2009:21) discovery of a significant pattern for inner and outer London adolescents. Statistical approaches like mixed models might have altered the course of the quest for a grammatical hierarchy limiting leveled was in the aforementioned literature (Baayen, 2008). Prior to the inclusion of the random effect of speaker in this investigation, the grammatical context had been shown to be statistically significant.

Both the grammatical subject and intervening element factor groups may be underrepresented because of the historical high rates seen in the West Virginia area of Appalachia, where leveling was the norm until the late 1970s before falling out of usage. In two instances, Cheshire and Fox (2009:7) noted, changes in the rates of leveled coincided with changes in constraints: in the East Anglian Fens data (Britain, 2002:38), constraints reversed with an increase in the rates of leveled, and in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence, constraints were lost with the decline of leveled (Nevalainen, 2006).

However, the results found by Cheshire and Fox (2009:32) itself do not support this claim.

There are still differences worth noting within the grammatical subject factor group that should be taken into account when making comparisons with other research.

With 49% of the vote, conjoined NPs were the most advantageous feature. To be more precise, the last conjunct in most studies is singular at least 80% of the time, making conjoined subjects a syntactic trompe l'oeil (or, in this instance, a trompe l'oreille). According to the marking-and-morphing theory of psycholinguistics, where "agreement can originate in notional features but relies on lexical and abstract syntactic features during implementation," it is possible that speakers with the concept of plural would use a grammatically singular final conjunct to express a singular agreement (Bock et al., 2006:73). It is important to differentiate between grammatical and notional agreement. According to Wolfram and Christian (1975), the linguistically singular final NP in the conjoined phrase, rather than the conceptual plurality of the conjoined NP as a unit, is the most likely explanation for the higher rate for conjoined NPs. For

83% of the time, according to Christian et al. (1988:119), the last component of the conjoined NP was single; for Ocracoke, this figure was 90%, according to Hazen (2000a:136). From the WVCEA data, we can see that the last conjunct is singular 81% of the time (30/37).

Collective NPs, including humans and all of them, had the lowest frequency (Anderwald, 2002:172; Bock et al., 2006). Less than half the incidence of conjoined NPs was seen in this topic area. This trend is at odds with data from Ocracoke, North Carolina, where the overall nonstandard concordance rate for conjoined NPs was 27% (6 of 22) and the overall rate for collective NPs was 38% (68 of 179). (Wolfram et al., 1999). It follows that in Ocracoke, these two forms of subjectivity tied for first place as the grammatical subjects most conducive to was leveling. Wolfram and Christian (1976:83) observed that when it came to was leveling and other verb kinds, the use of collective NPs was 23% less common than the use of conjoined

NPs in West Virginia. The Outer Banks' declining similarity to Appalachia is seen by this trend (cf. Hazen, 1996). Pronouns and nonpronominal NPs from the center of the distribution of subjects connected with was leveling. Rates for these subjects do not significantly differ, ranging from 31% for multiple NPs to 24% for you, despite the fact that other varieties have discovered unique hierarchies of these grammatical subjects that support or do not favor was leveling. However, unlike the 15 percentage point discrepancy between pronouns (77%) and the other NPs (62%) identified in Christian et al(1988) .'s data collection, the difference between the rates of third-person plural NPs and the rate of they is just a few percentage points. 8

Positive Social Outcomes

Possible societal limits on development was revealed in this section. Even after controlling for other variables including age, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and racial/ethnic background, only educational attainment was shown to be statistically significant when the speaker was held constant.

Table 6 shows that standardization has made significant progress over the course of the 20th century, even though past-be paradigm leveling is still ongoing. Regression analysis revealed that just one category of social factors was significant: level of education. As we've already established, educational attainment and social status are two sides of the same coin, but in regression analysis, only one of them matters. Both, however, present a ranked list of assessments of social identification along similar axes, and they show that people of lower social standing tend to talk more rapidly and with more leveled was. On the other hand, persons with post-secondary education had lower rates of leveled was across all age groups. 9

Every grammatical category throughout each generation shows a downward trend over perceived time (see Table 7). There seems to be minimal grammatical training within the youngest group apart from the existential context.

TABLE 6. *Rbrul logistic regression analysis of was leveling for social factor groups with speaker as random effect (subjects exclude existential* there)

	Significant in Step-Up/Step-Down	Percentage	n
Educational experience			
No college	.82	57	476
Some college	.18	10	797
Age	n.s.		
Older		54	507
Middle aged		12	385
Younger		8	381
Social class	n.s.		
Working		53	352
Lower-middle		23	587
Upper-middle		8	334
Region	n.s.		
North		30	742
South		24	531
Ethnicity	n.s.		
African American		31	91
European American		27	1182
Sex	n.s.		
Male		29	541
Female		26	732

TABLE 7. *Rate of* was *for grammatical subjects by age*

	Oldest, %(*n*)	Middle Aged, %(*n*)	Youngest, %(*n*)
Plural existential *there*	78(64)	64(81)	32(95)
Conjoined NPs	68(25)	10(10)	0(2)
3rd person plural NPs	56(101)	17(81)	12(81)
They	50(193)	15(123)	7(131)
We	54(119)	9(102)	6(108)
You (singular/plural)	62(37)	0(37)	4(26)
Collective NPs	50(30)	12(33)	0(34)

According to Tagliamonte (2009:125), "default singular use in existential constructions is a changeable linguistic phenomena on the move" when used with existential subjects. Her research shows that although was leveling is decreasing for nonexistential constructions, the rates for plural existentials are either growing or staying the same in most groups. High levels of leveling was with multiple existentials (over 80%) were exhibited by speakers in Arkansas, Kentucky, and West Virginia in the 1970s, as previously observed, while Hackenberg (1972) reported a rate of 55%, the same as the general rate for existential there in this research. When compared to these other groups, however, the proportion of was leveling with existential there is actually decreasing over apparent time, falling from 78% for the

TABLE 8. *Rates of leveled* was *by age for region, sex, and social class*

	North		South	
Age Group	%	*n*	%	*n*
Oldest	60	326	43	180
Middle aged	7	156	16	230
Youngest	6	261	12	121

	Female		Male	
Age Group	%	*n*	%	*n*
Oldest	56	282	51	224
Middle aged	15	188	10	198
Youngest	2	262	19	120

	Uppermiddle		Lowermiddle		Working	
Age Group	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Oldest	22	51	53	178	60	277
Middle aged and youngest	5	284	11	409	25	75

from 68% of the oldest speakers to 32% of the youngest. There is precedence for this kind of deterioration, however. Examining the first and second half of the 18th century, Nevalainen (2009:93) found that the rate of was leveling in existential constructions dropped from 54% to 28% by mining the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension. Table 7 shows a consistent drop across all grammatical categories. Although the number of examples (N) may be small for

certain classes of words (such as conjoined nouns), the relative positions of grammatical subjects remain stable throughout time.

Even though age groups were not statistically significant in the regression analysis, the disparity in the rate of decrease across the different age groups is noticeable. This generational fall holds true for every cross-tabulation on past be, including grammatical topic, area, and sex, in contrast to Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976), where rates of leveling was stay stable over apparent time (Table 8).

The lowest rates of leveling off were seen among the oldest speakers, who were born before World War II, followed by the middle-aged and the youngest speakers, who were born after the war. Although the leveled-was rate among middle-aged and younger West Virginians in the South is consistently double that of Northerners, this more vernacular status is understandable given the substantial socioeconomic gap that separates the two regions of the state. The conventional sociolinguistic indicators have been shown to have higher vernacular rates among speakers from the southern US states (e.g., Labov, 2001).

The gender gap widens in the youngest age group, with men retaining a rate of 19% leveled was and females declining to 2% leveled was from their earlier levels of similarity in the later age groups. Based on the sociolinguistic interviews, it seems that younger participants are conscious of the prescriptivist demands of standardization, while females are less so.

greater adherence to these standards than men. Due to the increasing social stigma of leveling was, it seems that women and people from the North are at the forefront of the movement for standardization. Female conformity to social standards has been shown in sociolinguistic studies for decades (Labov, 2001; Trudgill, 1974).

Final evidence of standardization's success relative to leveling off is provided by the rate of decrease following the oldest age group. Table 8 shows that there is a significant decline throughout the age spectrum for all socioeconomic groups. The gap between the oldest and youngest age groups is 17% for the upper-middle class, 42% for the lower-middle class, and 35% for the working-class. The working class seems to be trailing behind the middle class in its embrace of standardization. Labov's (2006:152) research on social-class crossover patterns associated with R-vocalization in New York City is evocative of this social trend. Table 8 shows a comparison of speakers across age and socioeconomic status. There are fewer members of the older generation among the middle class and the working class, which means less opportunities for them to speak their language. Most persons born in West Virginia and the rest of Appalachia did not have access to opportunities for economic advancement or higher education. In the decades after World War II, the GI Bill and increased government support for higher education made it possible for many more individuals to pursue higher education and better their economic standing. Any representative sample of West Virginians from the last third of the 20th century should show how standardization has affected people's views of stigmatized deviations and standardized standards.

SOCIAL PRESSURES OF STANDARDIZATION

Is it typical for societies to see a drop in leveled forms as they evolve? "Later generations had lower rates, increasingly having were with second singulars and the plural persons," Schreier (2002, 2009:73) wrote of the decline of was leveling on the British island of Tristan da Cunha, "and this can only be interpreted as an adoption of nonlocal features and thus as the

sociolinguistic consequence of the community's opening-up and emergence from endocentricity." Unlike Tristan da Cunha, the Appalachian region of West Virginia has never been completely cut off from the rest of the world. However, the region has undergone socioeconomic shifts and strengthened connections to national norms in the 20th century, both of which contribute to the decline of leveled was.

Mining, migration, and the military are three factors that have shaped the economics and culture of both urban and rural regions throughout the last century. Mining gave stable work, while the military was an option for people who wanted to leave their current location in search of better opportunities. Data from Wolfram and Christian (1976:8) shows that people of working age continue to leave the state on a regular basis. In accordance with
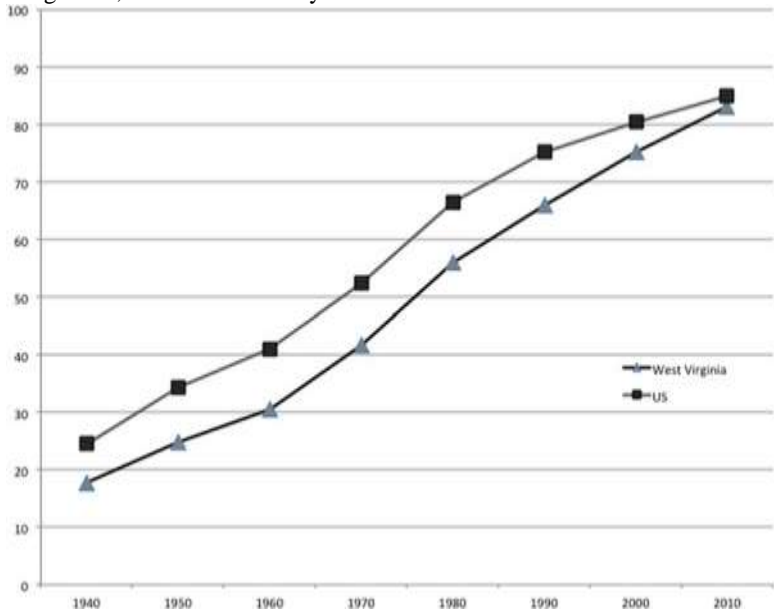

FIGURE 2. Percentage of US and West Virginia population with at least a high school diploma or its equivalent, ages 25 and older, 1940 to 2010 (US Census).

According to Hazen and Hamilton (2008), migration has consistently affected the population of West Virginia over the last century, including the frequent return of elderly migrants after they have retired. The linguistic diversity of a single migrant household was studied by Hazen and Hamilton (2008). Although there were no discernible trends between migrants and nonmigrants, it was obvious that migrants had a heightened awareness of normal norms of linguistic variation upon their return to West Virginia. While some migrants adapted by conforming to conventional standards in more formal settings, others pushed their vernacular patterns to levels not seen even among nonmigrants.

The quality and accessibility of schools in Appalachia is another determinant of social development in the region over the twentieth century that may be traced back to specific events. The percentage of West Virginians over the age of 25 who have completed high school is shown in Figure 2. West Virginia's societal standards may be gauged by looking at the earliest documented proportion (18% from 1940). Traditional dialect study benefited from the absence of institutional standards in the Smoky Mountain area of Appalachia, according to fieldwork

conducted in the first half of the 20th century. "It was remarkable... to locate a speech which does not exhibit the profound stamp of the schoolmaster's influence," Joseph Hall (1942:4) stated. What we have here is a vernacular that developed, at least in part, outside his influence and which exemplifies how a language might

freed from the shackles of tradition, language has a chance to flourish. Given the abundance of options available to you throughout your high school years,

As a result of decades of exposure to institutional norms, which Hall had previously found to be lacking, students' knowledge of prescriptive norms against leveled has grown considerably. At the close of the twentieth century, this idiomatic expression seems to have changed as a result of the rise in educational attainment. High school graduation rates increased from 25% in 1950 (the first year of birth for the middle-aged group) to 75% by the turn of the century. Given that the rate for 2010 is even higher, does this pattern of growing pervasiveness of institutionalized norms portend the prolonged drop for leveled was? This shift aligns well with the reduction of leveled was in the two younger age groups.

UNASSUMING YET INFLUENTIAL: CONTRACTED *WAS*

Table 5 shows a substantial relationship between was contraction and leveled was. Similar to the is contraction, the verb is shortened to an alveolar sibilant in was contractions, with encliticization to the previous or neighboring subject. Last night, we went out, or, to use a plural existential, there were three of them in 2016. Prior research has believed that, for the most part, the past tense of be cannot be contracted. Scholars of the English

language agree that the present tense forms of the verb be are contractible, but the past tense forms are not (e.g., Bender, 2001; Labov, 1972). In a nutshell, "Non-negative contraction is not feasible for was/were," as put out by Anderwald (2002:172).

Different options have been suggested by some research into American accents. The earliest known usage of contracted English was in 1829 in New England, when it was recorded as "He sade no; and then ize up a stump" (Cassidy, 1985:178). There are additional instances of this in African American and Texan and Kentuckyn dialects (Cassidy, 1985:178). According to Tucker (1966), the form is most often seen in Pennsylvania and the rural South, and is associated with the first-person I.

According to Christian et al. (1988:112), "was commonly happened in contracted form with plural subjects" in Appalachian English. What this research further shows is that in cases of contraction (like the recent layoffs at Barbour Co. We were the "involved" ones; just 9% (83 out of 926) of all productions were outsourced to other companies. Similar to the findings for the was contraction, no instances of the past tense usage of are were discovered, and only unequivocal examples of the past tense were marked as were. It seems that the Appalachians have been using this shortened version for some time. For example, "I was... [a•z]; 'Hit was dreadful horrible' [ht z flbaed]" and "[w] commonly vanishes in was, will, would when followed by a personal pronoun," as recorded by Joseph Hall (1942:86) in the Smoky Mountain area of Appalachia. Was contraction is on the decline in the Smoky Mountain area of Appalachia, according to research by Montgomery and Chapman (1992). The oldest generation has 62% was contraction with plural existentials, but the number is dropping among younger generations.

TABLE 9. *Percentage of contraction for leveled was forms*

	Contraction, %(n)
We	31(82)
You	25(24)
There's	23(132)
They	18(124)
3rd plural NPs	11(81)

A decrease of 31% and 7% in size was recorded. The WVDP study team has also noticed that indigenous often shorten was in everyday conversation. According to Christian et al(1988) .'s research, 11% of all previous be forms are still in use now in West Virginia (145 of 1273).

Where does the was contraction appear in language? In spite of the fact that contraction occurs with a somewhat higher frequency following vowels, this is most likely because the contracted form occurs more often after pronouns (see Table 9). The contracted, leveled-off rate is 5% overall (62 of 1273). There were 83 occurrences of contracted were and 145 occurrences of either contracted form in a standard were context. In contexts where contractions are allowed, the rate at which contracted was is used is 43 percent (62 of 145). The paradigm leveling rate is 5% for short forms of the past tense like We were out yesterday night or We were out last night, but it rises to 25% for the lengthy past be forms (286 of 1128). Moreover, the rate of was contraction, 18% (62 of 348), is greater in plural subject contexts (e.g., The women's out yesterday night) than in single subject situations (13%; Lea's out last night) (712 of 5378). The results of this study contradict the

According to the standard interpretation of exemplar theory, the rate of contraction should increase as the number of prospective contraction contexts increases (Bybee, 2007).

Like other versions of English, all of the personal pronouns in the whole set of subjects are vowel final. Nonpersonal pronoun subjects were investigated for their likely phonological influence on was contraction to further investigate the possible effect of preceding phonological environment. Contraction of was for third-person nonpronominal NPs (both single and plural) is shown in Table 10. Following on from the phonological

TABLE 10. *Percentage of contraction for all was forms in third person singular and plural nonpronominal NPs*

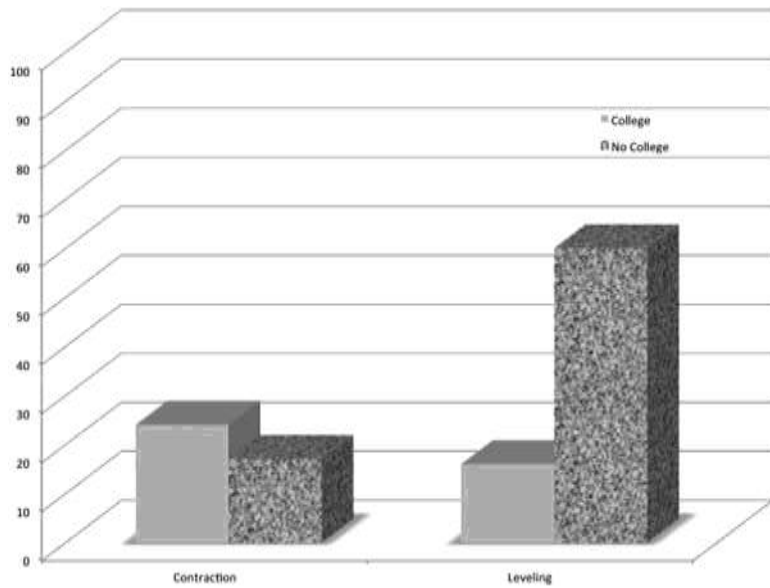|	Preceding Final Consonant. %(n)	Preceding Final Vowel, %(n)
3rd singular NPs	8(1046)	9(269)
3rd plural NPs	11(72)	0(9)
Total 3rd person NPs	8(1118)	9(278)

FIGURE 3. Comparison of contracted leveled *was* and full leveled *was* by educational experience.
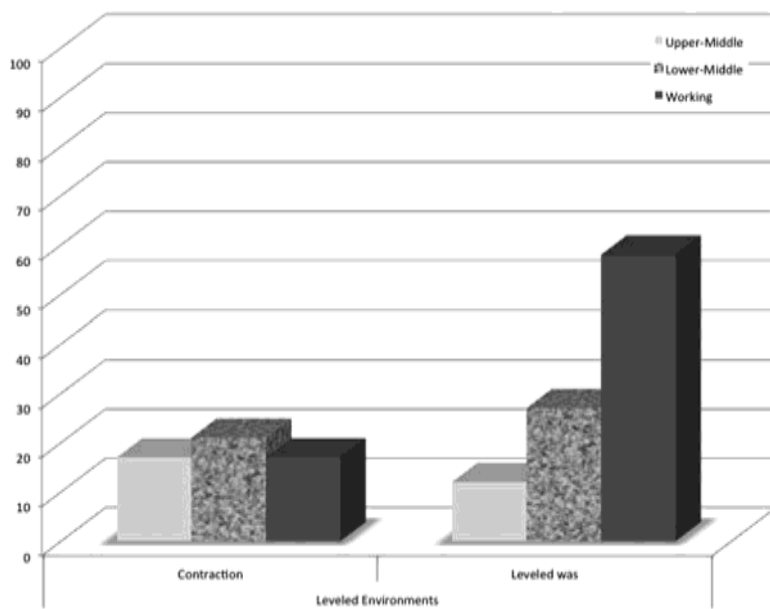

FIGURE 4. Comparison of contracted leveled *was* and full leveled *was* by social class.
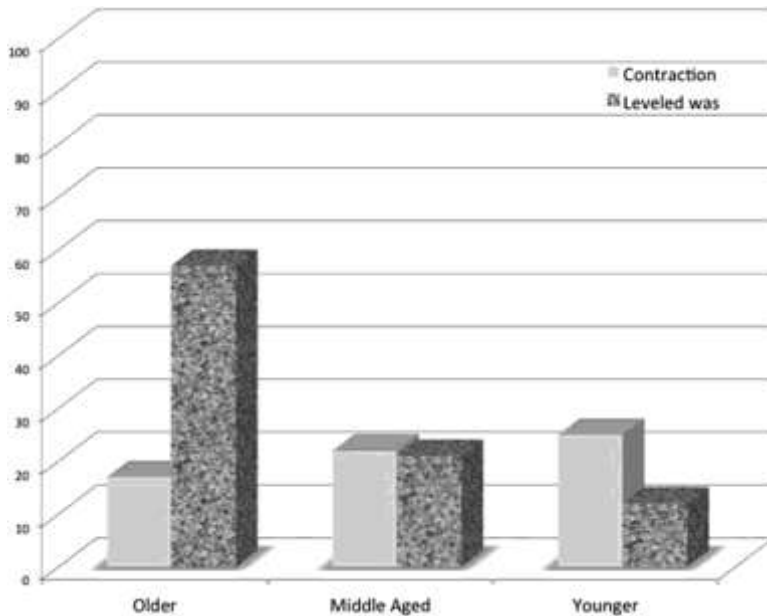
FIGURE 5. Comparison of contracted leveled *was* and full leveled *was* by age group.

Table 10 shows that the environment does not influence the rate of contraction. In addition, if was contraction were only a phonological process, then the rate of contraction would increase as the number of alternative contraction contexts grew (Bybee, 2007), but this is not what the statistics show. These tendencies suggest that the was contraction is more common in contexts with several subjects. 11

There is a clear distinction between the social standings of was contraction and was leveling, as shown by the fact that their connections break apart. Figures 3, 4, and 5 indicate that the contraction rates for social components within the set of leveled was do not correspond to the patterns identified for was leveling as a whole. If the abbreviated form of leveling had the same social stigma as its longer counterpart, similar tendencies would be seen among its users.

Instead, compared to individuals with no college education at all, those with some college experience had a somewhat greater proportion of contracted, leveling

levels (24% vs. 17%) (see Figure 3). And unlike in cases with leveling distributions, there are no consistent patterns between different socioeconomic classes (see Figure 4).

Age is the single most informative social indicator. Contrary to the trend for leveled was, contracted leveled was rates seem to be rising over apparent time (see Figure 5). Although the contracted form seems to be increasing in frequency over time, it does not seem to have a stable social structure as of yet. Younger West Virginians are rejecting the state's historically high vernacular rates and instead adopting the was contraction as an everyday part of their language.

Many academic investigations have been conducted on the topic of leveled was due to its use in analyzing the dynamic relationship between language and society. Most of these studies indicate some kind of statistically significant ordering of favorable and unfavorable subject contexts, with some focusing on language limitations like the grammatical subject (e.g., Cheshire & Fox, 2009:21). Surprisingly, after controlling for speaker, the category of grammatical subject itself was not relevant. It would be interesting to see whether the grammatical topic category continues to be a prominent factor group for leveling was in the 21st century, given the rise in popularity of mixed models. Words used as filler between a subject and a verb have also been studied as a linguistic limitation, with little impact discovered. Adjacent forms have a greater rate of leveling was compared to nonadjacent subject and verbs, against the predicted tendency. Only the use of the contracted form "s" or the extended word "was" posed any kind of meaningful grammatical limitation. This research is the first to my knowledge to show that contracted was is a statistically significant pattern, although it has been acknowledged as a form in Appalachian studies throughout the 20th century.

Many research (e.g., Hazen, 2002; Moore, 2011) have shown that leveled was plays a role in the speaker's identity and social divides, but in this study, when the speaker is treated as a random effect, just one social characteristic interacts significantly with leveled was. The speaker's own network of connections is that social component.

speakers with some college training or schooling had far lower rates of leveled speech than those with no college background did. Other sociological patterns were also visible in the data, the most notable of which were the sharp decline in the incidence of leveled was over apparent time and the correlation between higher rates of leveled was and speakers from the working class. We will be keeping an eye on future comparisons of rural and nonrural places in West Virginia to see whether leveling was is being used to establish social meaning now that it is a socially stigmatized dialect pattern in the 21st century.

This research confirms what many other studies in English-speaking countries have found: existential there follows a distinct pattern that sets it apart from other subjects and the overall leveling process as a whole. Although the prevalence of leveling was in existential there constructions decreased due to the rising impact of standard norms in the latter half of the 20th century, the findings from this research support the idea for there being lexicalized (Cheshire & Fox, 2009:33). Existential rates seem to be rising in line with most other investigated kinds.

Last but not least, contracting was is not a new phenomenon in Appalachia, and the present variation profile suggests that it will continue to be a practical choice in the future. It seems to be the product of a lexical selection process rather of a phonological one since its linguistic properties are unaffected by the context in which it is used.

process of elimination in phonology. From a social perspective, it deviates from the norms of leveling was. There is no discernible racial or socioeconomic divide among speakers, however individuals with advanced degrees are more likely to use it than those with less

schooling. Astonishingly, the use of contracted was is increasing seemingly over time.

CONCLUSION

West Virginia's Appalachian area is still home to leveled levels, but at reduced frequencies and with a constantly evolving pattern of varieties. Contracted was seems to be socially unconditioned not just because of its reduced form, but also because of its closeness to existential, present tense there's, just as new variations of past be in stigmatized spectrums for other vernacular societies (Hazen, 1998; Richards, 2010) do.

One grammatical subject and its position as a contraction in the language

both existential there and contraction preferred levels was and hence sped up the pace at which it occurred. Among students, there was a strong relationship between years spent in college and the speed at which they were able to socially level out. Was leveling was more common among older speakers, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with less education. Rates of leveling was sometimes drop below 10% for individual speakers, especially the youngest speakers. For some, particularly elderly speakers and speakers from working-class backgrounds, the rates were over 50%, coming close to those seen in sociolinguistic studies conducted in the 1970s. Leveled was is still an option for most speakers and a regular feature for others, although its use has decreased over the last few decades when seen through the perspective of apparent time (Bailey, 2002).

Changes in language are analogous to mutations in DNA. While some of these occurrences are allowed to flourish and become standard, the vast majority are eliminated via selective breeding and hence have no impact on the species as a whole. Systemic variation in language variants may be fostered through linguistic innovations such vowel shifts (Labov, 1994) and analogical leveling (McMahon, 1994). Opportunities arise for inventions like this when societal forces align to make it the "right location at the right moment." The Northern Cities Vowel Shift, for instance, has spread thanks to a convergence of gender and socioeconomic developments in the area (Eckert, 2000). One successful example of this sort of shift is the contraction "contracted was," which shields a dialectic form from the forces of standardization. West Virginians are increasingly using contracted was as a result of institutional demands to standardize their language, even though it existed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Although the degree of be variety in Ocracoke, North Carolina, has dropped over the last century (Wolfram et al., 1999), nonstandard were not included into the island's repertory. Trading off one set of traditional beekeeping practices for another is happening in England, as Cheshire and Fox (2009:3) noted. Despite the dramatic drop of leveled was over apparent time, was shrinkage is still occurring in the West Virginia area of Appalachia. The population density of West Virginia is low, and the state's biggest city, Charleston, has a total population of less than 200,000.

metropolis with over 50,000 inhabitants, yet the evaluation of standardizing pressures made by Chambers (2004) is still valid in West Virginia. Its population peaked in 1950, after having increased by 100% since 1900 (Hazen & Hamilton, 2008), and it became more influenced by external standards of linguistic variety following World War II. Although the population has decreased since those high years, the middle-aged and younger speakers have been influenced by the social standards of better schools. Evidently, certain features of leveled was suffered as a result of these uniformizing standards, while contracted was continues with less roadblocks.

As a result, paradigm leveling as a

linguistic process fell behind the complete was form in the 20th century, and the underlying theme of that tendency of linguistic development is standardization. In the 20th century, West Virginians saw significant social shifts, such as more mobility, higher demands for formal education, and a broader exposure to regional and national variations in spoken and written languages. There was no explosion of new dialect traits as a result of this increased sociolinguistic knowledge; rather, the frequency of vernacular features seems to have decreased. Traditional depictions of isolated dialects forming along distinct routes had little relevance for West Virginians towards the end of the 20th century, despite the state still being primarily rural with a low population density. Was leveling is an archaic English linguistic trait with a long and illustrious history of linguistic variety that is still alive and well in Appalachia today. However, the region's sociolinguistic character reveals the persistent tension between the linguistic drive toward paradigm neutrality and the social drive for standardization.

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