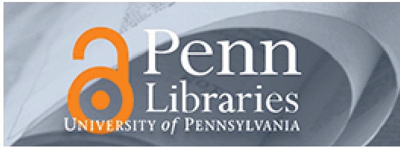

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Trans-Atlantic Connections for Variable Grammatical Features

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Trans-Atlantic Connections for Variable Grammatical Features

Michael Montgomery

The colonial period remains a frontier in the study of American English and is a fertile field for testing many issues of language shift and change, in that it involved diverse cases of language contact.[1] Perhaps because of its complexity, however, or the paucity of contemporary vernacular evidence that is readily accessible, linguists have largely shied away from the period, and little more is understood today about the character and formation of early American English than two decades ago.[2] The sociohistorical approach, so fruitful for investigating other stages and varieties of the language, has rarely been exploited for the English of 17th- or 18th-century America, one notable exception to this being the work of Merja Kytö (1991, etc.)

One broad issue that has attracted recent attention is the transplantation of English from the British Isles to colonial North America and its role in the development of regional and social varieties there. Two initiatives that bring quantitative analysis to the issue may be cited. One of these is my own *The Heritage of Scotch-Irish English* project (Montgomery 1989, forthcoming a, etc.), which assembles material from Scotland and Ulster from the past four centuries and tracks the evolution of grammatical features into American English in general and into Appalachian and Southern varieties of American English in particular (Montgomery 1989, 1994, 1997a, Montgomery & Nagle 1994). Among other things, this project confirms the long-standing hypothesis of Hans Kurath (1928, 1949) that the American Midland speech region is based substantially on the input of 18th-century Ulster emigrants, people who are usually called the 'Scotch-Irish' in the United States (Montgomery forthcoming b).

A second project is one undertaken by Poplack, Tagliamonte, and their students, who through cross-variety comparison seek the roots of what they call 'Early Black English'. Much of their work has focused on commonalities between the language of African-Americans born in the American South in

[1] Many of the ideas in this paper are expanded in Montgomery (forthcoming a). The author is indebted to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Fellowship for University Teachers granted to him in 1991-92, during which much of the material for that essay was gathered.

[2] J. L. Dillard's writing (1975, 1992, etc.) is the only significant work that deals with contact issues during the period.

the mid-19th century (i.e. by analyzing transcripts of ex-slave recordings from Bailey et al. 1991) and English-speaking communities in Nova Scotia and the Dominican Republic whose African-American ancestors left the United States generations ago. Recently this project has turned to trans-Atlantic connections, especially in Tagliamonte (1999) and Tagliamonte & Smith (1998, 2000). From considering patterned variation between *was* and *were*, Tagliamonte and Smith formulate the general hypothesis that emigrant speech from the northern half of Britain formed the foundation for that of the American South and emigrant speech of southern Britain the foundation for the American North. In particular, they propose that a small, conservative 'enclave' community in northeastern Scotland (Buckie, in Banffshire) typifies 'North British' varieties that were brought to southern colonies in the 18th century and served as the linguistic model for African-Americans who subsequently went from there to Nova Scotia. Tagliamonte 1999 has argued that such 'isolated British communities' as Buckie retain 'relic varieties [that] provide the critical time depth for comparison' of emigrant speech to early African-American English.

In making the case that the speech of late-20th century Scotland and Nova Scotia can be tied historically through contact between whites and blacks in the 18th-century American South, Tagliamonte and Smith cite the work of American historian David Hackett Fischer. His *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (1989) posits trans-Atlantic linkages between regions of the British Isles and the United States, based on migration records and affinities shown in twenty-four different cultural 'ways', one of which is speech. According to Fischer, an early, substantial group of emigrants came from each of four British regions to play the formative role in planting American regional cultures:

East Anglia → Massachusetts, 1629-1640
South of England → the Chesapeake, 1642-1675
(esp. Southwest) (Virginia, Maryland)
English North Midlands → Delaware Valley, 1675-1725
(Delaware, eastern Pennsylvania)
Borderlands → Back Country, 1717-1775
(interior from Pennsylvania to South Carolina)

For Fischer, the 'Borderlands' comprise Scotland, much of Ireland (including all of Ulster), and England north of the River Humber, this being a large, if not seemingly heterogeneous, territory. His trans-Atlantic linkages

are for the most part ones proposed by Hans Kurath decades earlier, but differ in two respects. Fischer argues that a fourth British group (English north Midlanders, mainly Quakers) came to the Delaware Valley primarily in the 1680s and founded a regionally distinct culture there. Among the 'Borderers' Fischer assigns prominence to emigrants from northwestern England in the settlement of the American back country, but Kurath believed that it was Ulster emigrants who had the largest and most critical role in that process.

Tagliamonte and Smith modify Fischer's scheme, dividing both Britain and colonial America into a North/South dichotomy, and state that "settlement of the American colonies was actually highly circumscribed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. British southerners went to the northern US and British 'northerners' went to the southern US" (2000: 149). Their ambitious hypothesis, that modern-day British communities preserve quantitatively based language details transported to North America two or more centuries ago and found today on both sides of the Atlantic, draws on both historical and linguistic information, and it has the great virtue of being testable. Tagliamonte and Smith pursue questions of considerable importance to American English, and their use of sophisticated quantitative methodology, which enables researchers to compare figures from other varieties, is particularly welcome. Their hypothesis turns out to be overly broad and open to question on several grounds, however, and their case must be seen as a preliminary and instructive case study. My concerns here are to examine its assumptions, make a partial assessment of it, and consider caveats and principles for the trans-Atlantic reconstruction of varieties of English.

Tagliamonte and Smith's general hypothesis entails five specific ones that involve language and demography and need support:

1) The language of modern-day Buckie, Scotland, represents language found throughout 'North Britain' in the 18th century;
2) The language of modern-day Afro-Nova Scotian communities represents language brought to Canada from the American South (especially from South Carolina) in the 18th century;
3) There was such a cultural or linguistic region as 'North Britain';
4) There was such a cultural or linguistic region as the 'American South' in the colonial period;
5) Significant contact took place between Africans and northern British emigrants in the colonial American South.

These hypotheses deserve detailed investigation much beyond the scope of this paper. I can consider them only briefly by way of outlining some evidence necessary to test and refine them. I make two general assumptions: that research on trans-Atlantic connections must take into account an 18th-century perspective on language and cultural geography, and that internal reconstruction of language patterns should, when possible, precede comparative reconstruction, i.e. that 18th-century data should be employed. It is tempting, but often misleading, to apply 20th-century distinctions and constructs to earlier times. An 18th-century perspective requires careful attention to historical realities on the ground and analysis of colloquial documents contemporaneous to the period. Primary sources include letters and other manuscripts written by semi-literate individuals, in contrast to such secondary sources as plays, works of fiction, or other material having representations of dialect and intended for publication.[3] Because surviving documents are of genres having different types of linguistic contexts (e.g. public records are usually written entirely in the third person), they are not always directly comparable to one another or to data from modern-day sociolinguistic interviews.

The validity of written documents for quantitative analysis involves issues that immediately arise for the researcher. Are they not inevitably slanted toward standard or formal English? Does not the use of literary formulas in semi-literate documents indicate that a writer is using non-native speech patterns? Do seemingly erratic and unsystematic writing habits not obscure speech patterns and prevent orderly variation from being discerned? Is data from semi-literate documents representative of the spoken language variety of the larger community in which their writers lived? These matters, which must always be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, are considered in

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[3] Such documents have routinely been neglected by researchers exploring the earlier history of African-American Vernacular English. For instance, Rickford (1995/1998) cites seven types of information for assessing to what extent earlier AAVE exhibited creole features: sociohistorical conditions; earlier textual attestations of AAVE; diaspora recordings; creole/AAVE similarities; African language/AAVE similarities; English dialect/AAVE differences; and comparisons across age groups of African-American speakers. In 'textual attestations' he includes examples from fiction, drama, poetry, travelers' accounts, and court proceedings, as well as interviews with former slaves (such as the WPA Ex-Slave Narratives) and other African-Americans. Notably absent from this listing are manuscript documents from semiliterate writers.

detail in Montgomery (1999b). Suffice it to say that research analyzing the writing of less-skilled writers has often revealed constraints and patterns of ordered variation that correspond to speech (e.g. Montgomery et al. 1993, Giner & Montgomery 1997, Montgomery 1999a). Suffice it also to say that the documents to be employed here display numerous nonstandard grammatical features that are well known in speech. All strongly evidence, for example, the northern British concord rule (Ihalainen 1994), also known as the NP/Pro constraint, for marking third-person-plural present-tense verbs.

How well does the modern-day speech of Buckie, Scotland, represent language found throughout 'North Britain' in the 18th century? Tagliamonte and Smith acknowledge that few if any people from that part of Scotland went to North America in colonial days, but they argue that, at least for past-tense copula forms and constraints governing their usage, Buckie represents the pattern found throughout Lowland Scotland, the northern half of England, and much of Ireland. They cite Middle English forms from northern England as precursors (2000:152-53, from Forsstrom 1948), but present no quantitative evidence from this large territory for the Early Modern or other historical period. Their claim for Buckie cannot be tested as directly as one might desire, as no 18th-century data from northeastern Scotland is available for comparison. However, 17th- and 18th-century written documents from Ulster and northern England, parts of 'North Britain' and areas well-established as sources of North American colonists, do provide data.

Tagliamonte and Smith's 'very similar hierarchy' of constraints on *was* and *were* between Buckie and Afro-Nova Scotia involves two implicational relationships.[4] In pronoun contexts *were* is most likely to occur in the third-person plural, less likely in the first plural, least likely in the second person. Further, third-plural contexts are ordered: *were* is more likely to occur with personal pronoun subjects than with NP subjects. The latter pattern—the

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[4]Tagliamonte and Smith argue that the ordering or hierarchy of constraints across varieties, not the presence of a feature or even a specific constraint, is the key criterion for establishing a trans-Atlantic connection. Clarke (1997) has tested this argument by examining varieties known to be related (Newfoundland Vernacular English on the one hand and southern Irish English and southwestern British English on the other). Finding different constraint hierarchies on the two sides of the Atlantic, she concludes that criterion may be too high and not able to account for internal changes within one variety or the other. Another case involves *was/were* variation in Southern Appalachian English (Montgomery & Hall forthcoming). This conservative variety has profound Scotch-Irish influence on its grammar, but in it there is no evidence of the NP/Pro constraint on past-tense copula forms.

NP/Pro constraint—was in earlier English followed only in the present-tense (for both the copula and lexical verbs), but it spread to the past-tense copula in the 15th century (Montgomery 1994). Tagliamonte and Smith's figures from modern Scotland and Nova Scotia are presented in table 1.[5]

Location	Linguistic Context	*% were*
Buckie, Scotland	1st plural	27 (36/131)
c1997	2nd singular/plural	9 (4/45)
	3rd plural NP	19 (14/72)
	3rd plural pronoun	100 (118/118)
Afro-Nova Scotian English	1st plural pronoun	43 (53/122)
c1990[6]	2nd person pronoun	24 (11/46)
	3rd plural NP	37 (43/116)
	3rd plural pronoun	57 (80/141)

Table 1: *was/were* Variation in Modern Scotland and Nova Scotia (after Tagliamonte & Smith 1998:158)

Table 2 presents data, mainly in third-plural contexts, from two sets of written documents originating from 17th- and 18th-century Ulster. The two sets of Ulster documents are consistent with the northern concord rule. As in modern-day Buckie, a form ending in -s (i.e. *was*) is preferred with NP subjects in the third plural, while *were* is preferred with a personal pronoun.

[5] This and other tables present *was/were* variation in terms of the occurrence of *were*, whereas Tagliamonte and Smith 1998, 2000 do so in terms of the occurrence of *was*. Also, tables exclude existential contexts; in these *was* is categorical or nearly so in many varieties, including those not showing the NP/Pro constraint, meaning this context is not a good diagnostic tool. From Tagliamonte and Smith's figures, it is interesting to note that, while the four contexts are ordered alike for Buckie and Afro-Nova Scotian varieties, the NP/Pro constraint is much weaker in the latter: *they were* is categorical in Buckie but occurs at only 57% in Afro-Nova Scotian English. If, as Tagliamonte and Smith believe, one reflects the ancestor of the other, Afro-Nova Scotian is seen to be a dynamic variety, with *was* having increased in some contexts and *were* in others. Thus, only some contexts are moving toward 'standard' usage.

[6] Figures for Afro-Nova Scotian English combine data from Guysborough Enclave and North Preston, six speakers from each of which formed the sample whose speech Tagliamonte and Smith analyze.

Collection/Location	Linguistic Context	*% were*
Templepatrick Session Book Ulster 1640s[7] (Latimer 1805/1901)	3rd plural NP	0 (0/7)
Ulster Emigrant Letters 1730s-1800[8]	3rd plural NP	40 (23/58)
	3rd plural pronoun	95 (20/21)
	2nd singular	50 (1/2)
	2nd plural	100 (3/3)
	1st plural	100 (1/1)

Table 2: *was/were* Variation in 17th-/18th-Century Ulster

Ulster English from the Templepatrick Session Book in the 1640s shows only *was* with NP subjects, as in sentences 1-2 (the document lacks contexts with a pronoun subject). On the other hand, letters written a century later by Ulster emigrants to the United States show *were* at a rate of 95 percent with personal pronoun subjects but at only 40 percent with NP subjects (sentences 3-5). This contrast is similar to that found in Buckie, but is not as dramatic. In this case the emigrant letters, which come from a dozen different individuals, can be shown to evidence the standardizing influence of writing, as *were* moved toward increased use with NP subjects in written English; one Ulster emigrant to be cited separately below was categorical in following the NP/Pro constraint in the past tense.

(1) the three sisters was absent all the afternoon
(Templepatrick Session Book, 1642)
(2) Donald O'crielie Rorie O'crielie and Murdoch O'donalie was drunke
(Templepatrick Session Book, 1645)
(3) the troops was then within 3 miles of where the Hinshaws lives
(John Patterson letter, 1770)
(4) his letters was a comfort to me
(Weir family letter, 1774)
(5) They were Very Busie Raising Recruits here
(John Patterson letter, 1770)

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[7] Transcripts of portions of the Templepatrick Session Book are published in Latimer 1895/1901.

[8] This collection comprises letters written to family members in Ulster by emigrants in the eighteenth century and now on deposit in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Since the linguistic influence of Scotland on Ulster from the 17th century is well-established, the figures in Table 2 are not surprising.[9] On the other hand, the language of northern England, the southern part of 'North Britain', presents a different picture in the late-18th century. As seen in the Knaresborough Daybook, a diary kept by a workhouse supervisor in West Yorkshire in 1791-92, the NP/Pro constraint was disappearing for the past-tense copula, if indeed it had been there earlier. *Were* occurred at a rate of no more than 25% for either type of third-plural subject (Giner & Montgomery 1999). This Yorkshire pattern cannot be attributed to a standardizing tendency, as it involved regularization to *was* across persons and numbers away from written practice, producing a pattern with *was* dominant across the paradigm that is documented in many modern-day British and American varieties.[10] Since earlier quantifiable data from northern England is not at present available, the origin and spread of regularization must be left to future scholarship to document. The figures from Knaresborough are in any case consistent with the language two generations later found in letters of Yorkshire emigrants to North America (Giner & Montgomery 1997), as seen in Table 3 and sentences 6-9.

Collection/Location	Linguistic Context	% *were*
Knaresborough Daybook	3rd plural NP	25 (2/8)
Yorkshire c1790[11]	3rd plural pronoun	8 (1/12)
Yorkshire Emigrant Letters	1st plural	89 (17/19)
1850s[12]	3rd plural NP	11 (4/35)
	3rd plural pronoun	18 (3/17)

Table 3: *was/were* Variation in 18th-/19th-Century Yorkshire

(6) my wife and me was as ill as the rest
(Knaresborough Daybook, 1791)

[9] Ulster Scots, the variety of Scots spoken in parts of four counties in Ireland, is classified by the *Scottish National Dictionary* as a branch of 'West-Mid Scots'; both the *SND* and the *Linguistic Survey of Scotland* include material from parts of Ulster; for historical perspective, see Montgomery & Gregg 1997.

[10] Where this leveling occurs in British and American varieties, it affects only the past tense; that is, the NP/Pro constraint in the present tense seems never to erode in the same way.

[11] This manuscript is deposited in the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Leeds, England.

[12] Transcriptions of these letters can be found in Erickson (1972).

(7) they was not so good as they sud a been
(Knaresborough Daybook, 1791)
(8) Sisters and Brothers were all as well as me
(Crawshaw Family Letter)
(9) they was wipt [i.e. whipped]
(Crawshaw Family Letter)

While the material presented here is not voluminous enough for all types of quantitative analysis and comparison, and it awaits the support of more 18th-century evidence, it throws considerable light on the validity of Tagliamonte and Smith's first hypothesis that the late-20th speech of Buckie, Scotland represents the speech of 'North Britain' two centuries earlier. 'North Britain' does not appear to have been a single linguistic territory for variation between *was* and *were*, though it no doubt was for other grammatical features.

The second hypothesis is that the speech of modern-day Afro-Nova Scotian communities represents language brought to Canada from the colonial American South in the 18th century. As Tagliamonte and Smith note, much of the Afro-Nova Scotian population originated from Southern colonies, having been liberated by British forces at the end of the American Revolution. Many of these African-Americans, in fact, went to Canada from South Carolina (Walker 1992, Winks 1971). Evidence for *was/were* variation in documents left behind by freed African-Americans as well as others from 18th-century South Carolina, presented in table 4, suggests that at least three qualitatively different patterns of variation were to be found there:

Collection/Location	Linguistic Context	% were
Galphin Letters	3rd plural NP	0 (0/41)
South Carolina 1740s/50s	3rd plural pronoun	100 (19/19)
(Montgomery 1997b)		
Sierra Leone Documents	1st plural	14 (2/14)
1790s	2nd singular	0 (0/4)
(Montgomery 1999b)	3rd plural NP	27 (3/11)
	3rd plural pronoun	33 (1/3)
Smith Testament	(no plural contexts)	
South Carolina c1790	1st singular	71 (5/7)
(Montgomery & Mishoe 1999)	1st plural	100 (1/1)
	3rd singular	87 (13/15)

Table 4: *was/were* Variation in 18th-Century South Carolina

George Galphin was a county Armagh Irishman who came to back-country South Carolina around 1740 and spent more than forty years there. One of many thousands of settlers of Ulster background who populated the colony, he made a small fortune as a licensed agent trading with the Choctaw and Chickasaw and in the course of this work wrote numerous letters to colonial officials in Charleston (Montgomery 1997b). His use of *was* and *were* in the third plural resembles what was seen in Table 2 for a collection of Ulster emigrant letters, but his usage is invariant: only *were* with personal pronoun subjects, only *was* with NP ones. The lack of punctuation, capitalization, and other formalities in Galphin's letters suggests that they offer a near-transparent view of his speech, as exemplified by 10-11:

(10) The Head Men of the Cussetaws was at the Talk
(George Galphin letter, 1754)
(11) th[e]y ware told there wood be nothing
(George Galphin letter, 1775)

Data from African-Americans emigrating to Nova Scotia in the 1780s is found in letters and petitions written by a number of them who in 1792 left Nova Scotia for Africa and settled in Freetown, Sierra Leone (Montgomery 1999b). These individuals, whose English was learned in the colonial South, display patterns rather different from the modern-day Afro-Nova Scotians reported in Tagliamonte and Smith 1998. For them *were* occurs minimally in the first plural and second singular, but more in the third plural, where the type of subject appears to have little effect (*were* occurs about 30% of the time with both pronoun and NP subjects), suggesting a leveled distribution similar to that of 18th-century Yorkshire. The difference between Galphin's pattern and that in Sierra Leone documents is in one sense easily explainable and is a point to which we will return: Galphin was in the South Carolina interior, as were most of his fellow Ulsterfolk, while African-Americans lived mainly in coastal areas. Sentences 12-13 come from the Sierra Leone documents:

(12) all hopes was taken away by firing
(Sierra Leone letter, 1792)
(13) they was Gentlemans of that character
(Sierra Leone letter, 1792)

A third document complicates the linguistic picture of colonial South Carolina. The remarkable testament of Katherine Smith, written in 1850 by a near-illiterate woman in her eighties, comes from Horry County in eastern South Carolina. Discussed and reproduced in Montgomery & Mishoe 1999, this document is extraordinarily rich in phonetic spellings and colloquial grammar. It reveals what must have been common patterns of speech of some parts of South Carolina and nearby North Carolina two centuries ago. It has no plural contexts, but in first- and third-singular contexts *were* occurs almost exclusively, a finding perhaps not surprising when we consider that Wolfram and his students have found regularization of *were* in nearby Robeson County, North Carolina (although this is mainly in negative environments). The evidence here suggests that general use of *were* in the singular has a long history in American English. Sentences 14–16 come from the Smith testament.

(14) abraham ware hes name
(Katherine Smith testament)
(15) i war ful uf a hope fur more children
(Katherine Smith testament)
(16) it ware on the kold uf winter when he lef me.
(Katherine Smith testament)

In sum, colonial South Carolina appears to have had a diverse linguistic landscape, even in the types of English that were spoken. At least three patterns of past-tense copula usage can be documented, with that of George Galphin being the closest to modern-day Afro-Nova Scotian English, at least for third-plural contexts. The superstrate model of English for African-Americans in 18th-century South Carolina was much more heterogeneous than the one proposed by Tagliamonte and Smith.

The third hypothesis—that there was such a cultural or linguistic region as 'North Britain' (what historian Fischer calls the 'Borderlands')—involves many issues of mapping, ethnic identity, and cultural perception. Statements about the existence of the region must be made with caution, because outsiders (including from southern England) may perceive a region that insiders differentiate in any number of ways. I have already suggested, in examining the first hypothesis, that there was not a monolithic 'North Britain' in the 18th century with respect to *was/were* variation, and other features can be cited of the same kind (e.g. Yorkshire retained the second-singular pronouns *thou* and *thee*, whereas Lowland Scotland employed the

phonological variants *you* and *ye* and only y- forms are attested in Ulster). A careful assessment of the English Dialect Dictionary and other historical sources indicates that a broad dichotomy between northern Britain and southern Britain (the latter comprising the south and Midlands of England) is valid for some grammatical features (such as the NP/Pro constraint on present-tense verbs; see Giner & Montgomery 1997, Montgomery 1997a, forthcoming a), and Lass (1990) has shown the distinction to pertain to vowel systems that were exported. This regional dichotomy must be established on a case-by-case basis, however. Whatever linguistic and other commonalities 'North Britain' may have that distinguish it from the rest of Britain, others cannot be deduced from these without demonstration.

The question of the Humber (where, according to Fischer, 'North Britain' begins) as a major linguistic boundary has a long history, as scholars have traditionally seen it as dividing Mercian from Northumbrian varieties of Old English. The Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English (McIntosh et al. 1986) differentiated the English Midlands from northern England somewhat south of the river, however, for a later period. In modern times the two primary linguistic borders in Britain established empirically are between Scotland and England (e.g. Glauser 1974) and between Highland Scotland and Lowland Scotland (Speitel 1981, Cowan 1991). Trudgill, on the other hand, makes a case that for pronunciation the major division in traditional dialects 'runs from the Lancashire coast down to the mouth of the River Humber' (1999:35).

Also calling into question the dichotomous view of Britain is the extensive internal migration that has taken place in the British Isles in recent centuries (Bailyn 1986a), especially to Ulster. Ulster is properly seen as an Atlantic linguistic bridge between Britain and North America (Montgomery & Robinson 2000), in that the 17th-century plantation of the Irish province brought settlers mainly from Scotland, but also from disparate parts of England. Ulster had a settlement history not unlike parts of North America, a reality that prevents strict, correlational approaches to connecting British and American regions from showing maximum insight.

In sum, the northern half of Britain in the 17th- and 18th century shared some features of language that contrasted with the southern half, but it was also internally complex for other features and its population was fluid. Evidence of regional language varieties from the period is elusive, as they were disappearing under the irresistible pressure of standardization in England and Anglicization in Scotland. We are a long way from stating that Buckie or any other area is linguistically representative of such a large territory.

The fourth hypothesis is that there was such a cultural or linguistic region as the colonial American South in the 18th century. We know what the South is today, but what about in colonial times? Two distinctions are fundamental here. First, American colonies were grouped into three divisions. Below New England were the Middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware and the Southern colonies of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. This division is recognized universally by historians of the colonial period and also by commentators at the time, including those writing on American English. For instance, in one of a 1781 series of essays titled *The Druid*, John Witherspoon, coiner of the term *Americanism*, classified 'local phrases and terms' as prevailing in the South (e.g. *tot* 'carry'), the Middle colonies, or New England. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson recognized the three regions as having distinct settlement profiles. The North vs. South dichotomy has little relevance to colonial America and is a product of later political developments, principally the 19th-century sectional rivalry that led to a civil war.

The second important distinction is that between the coastal and interior South, recognized by cultural geographers as the Upper South vs. the Lower South, by linguistic geographers as the South Midland vs. the Lower South, and by historians as the Upcountry vs. the Lowcountry or the Piedmont/Back County vs. the Tidewater.[13] Each of the five southern colonies and the states that grew from them were split between an eastern coastal region and a western interior one, these subregions having dissimilar settlement histories and linguistic inputs from the British Isles. The founding populations of the coastal South came mainly from southern England and from Africa. The interior region was in many ways produced by the incursion of people of Ulster ancestry into the Carolinas by way of Pennsylvania and Virginia (Leyburn 1963). While the strength and location of the southern boundary of the Midland posited by Kurath 1949 continue to be considered (Ash 2000; Labov, Ash, & Boberg forthcoming; Montgomery forthcoming b), the South Midland/Lower South distinction is supported by a variety of lexical and morphological evidence. Some features of Ulster ancestry that were brought to the Upper South have apparently never been found in the Lower South (e.g. *need* + past participle, *want* + preposition, *you'uns* as second-person plural pronoun; Montgomery forthcoming b). Other Ulster-derived features (e.g. double modals) are found in the Lower South and must have migrated there later from the interior.

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[13] Some historians (e.g. Bridenbaugh 1963) divide the colonial South into three subregions (the Chesapeake, the interior, and the South Carolina lowcountry).

I note these two distinctions on the colonial landscape to underline the need for linguists reconstructing varieties of American English to understand colonial American history and geography on its own terms and appreciate the period's complexities. Only then can they take the founder principles of Mufwene (1996) fully and appropriately into account. Thus, Bernard Bailyn's *Voyagers to the West* (1986b), an authoritative work on emigration to colonial America, is of limited relevance to founder principles because it deals with emigration that occurred in the 1770s, after the founding period. By contrast, David Hackett Fischer is interested not in an account of the number and diversity of English-speaking emigrants in the colonial period, but in identifying and quantifying the founding populations of four American regional cultures.

The fifth hypothesis entailed in Tagliamonte and Smith's case is that significant contact took place between Africans and northern British emigrants in the colonial South. They argue that 'British northerners' were the founding British population of the southern colonies and that they and African-Americans settled there at the same time: "crucially, for our purposes, the geographic regions in which the African populations were most numerous were precisely the same geographic regions in which the immigrants from the north British 'Borderlands' were most numerous" (2000:149-50). They state further that "northern British speakers increased along with the African population during precisely the same period" (2000: 148).

It is true that in the 18th century many of both groups came to South Carolina and that Charleston was the point of entry for forty percent of the Africans who arrived in mainland America during that period. In 1730 South Carolinians of African ancestry outnumbered Europeans nearly two to one, and Africans continued to be brought. However, by 1790 white South Carolinians were in the majority (Wood 1989), due mainly to people of Ulster ancestry coming into the interior. Throughout the century the vast preponderance of African-Americans were found in plantation areas of the coastal lowlands of South Carolina as well as North Carolina and Virginia, all of which were founded in the 17th century by English speakers from southern and southwestern England. This settlement ecology would lessen, if not minimize, the formative linguistic influence of 'British northerners', who came two or more generations later and were a founding population only in the interior, as Fischer recognized. Because their settlement did overlap with that of Africans and the population within South Carolina was often fluid, contact between Africans and northern British no doubt occurred on a local

scale, but broad, intensive contact cannot be presumed, as Tagliamonte and Smith do. The settlement picture that is consistent with linguistic data already cited implies a range of contact situations, rather than a single, overarching contact zone. In colonial times the South Carolina colony had a much more diverse ecology than is often supposed; linguistically and ethnically its complexity was perhaps second only to Pennsylvania.

According to William Labov, "quantitative patterns can apparently preserve linguistic history over several centuries and several continents" (1980: xvii). In recent years linguists have sought to confirm this idea for the trans-Atlantic reconstruction of English, as quantitative analysis of grammatical features has finally come to a field where little but selective lexical items had been used to connect varieties of English between the British Isles and North America (Montgomery forthcoming a). This paper has examined an ambitious effort of this kind, viewing it as a sample case showing the challenges that such scholarship must surmount in order to establish credible historical relationships between language varieties. Relying on comparative research on variation between *was* and *were* and on external historical evidence, Tagliamonte and Smith make the argument that 18th-century northern British speech was the foundation for the speech of the American South, especially of African-Americans who migrated from there to Nova Scotia two centuries ago. Using internal reconstruction (quantitative analysis of patterns in colloquial documents from 17th-19th century) and detailed consideration of historical and demographic factors from the 18th century, this paper evaluates the strength of Tagliamonte and Smith's case by assessing five hypotheses that it entails.

Colloquial documents from the period of British and Irish emigration provide data that are limited, but sufficient to question Tagliamonte and Smith's claim as formulated to date. *Was* and *were* patterned differently between Yorkshire and Ulster, indicating that modern variation in Buckie, Scotland, is unlikely to reflect that of a large, earlier 'North Britain' in a simple or straightforward way. Further, *was/were* variation in 18th-century South Carolina followed several distinct patterns, indicating multiple and diverse dialect contact situations in the colonial South.

The five hypotheses lack sufficient linguistic, historical, or demographic support to establish a direct relation between the speech of Buckie and Nova Scotia. This does not mean that the speech of 18th-century Scotland had no discernible input to colonial South Carolina or that modern Afro-Nova Scotian English had no basis in African-American English of the 18th-century. It means that many factors came into play in the process of language

transplantation. Tagliamonte and Smith's general hypothesis needs refinement and division into smaller, testable parts.

Comparisons of 20th-century varieties alone can miss much of what was going on two centuries earlier, leaving some questions unanswered and others unasked. At the same time, the application of modern-day constructs to an earlier landscape can disguise and distort realities of that period. It is doubtful that, without significant qualification, the language of modern-day 'enclave' communities alone can provide the time depth for positing earlier trans-Atlantic connections. For *was/were* variation and some other grammatical features, linguists are not forced to infer 18th-century connections from 20th-century data, nor posit speech communities that were static for two centuries.

As a sociohistorical issue, the reconstruction of regional and social varieties of American English with respect to their British or Irish antecedents requires a daunting amount of work. Comparing varieties across oceans and centuries is possible only after patient reconstruction of individual features, always with a careful eye for history, the use of contemporary data whenever possible, and appreciation of the complexities involved. Only then can linguists truly conquer this research frontier and understand how the English language was transplanted across the Atlantic and found new homes. In the process linguists can answer questions of considerable importance to both themselves and students of American culture.

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