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THE EFFECTS OF A NEW METHOD OF INSTRUCTION ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF APPALACHIAN ENGLISH

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THE EFFECTS OF A NEW METHOD OF INSTRUCTION ON
THE PERCEPTIONS OF APPALACHIAN ENGLISH

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of
Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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2015

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE EFFECTS OF A NEW METHOD OF INSTRUCTION ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF APPALACHIAN ENGLISH

This paper evaluates whether students' perceptions of Appalachian English improve through a method of instruction that uses dialect literature in the classroom. Most existing methods of instruction tend to portray dialects as wrong, incorrect, or in some way less rule-governed than Standardized English, despite the numerous studies that have demonstrated otherwise (e.g., Labov 1969, Wolfram 1986). The data from this study derives from two groups of students enrolled in introductory composition and communication at the University of Kentucky. Each group is given a pre-test to determine attitudes toward Appalachian English and Standardized English. An experimental group is then exposed to a method that incorporates texts that use Appalachian English features, while no specific dialect literature is included in the control group. After the conclusion of the lessons, students in both groups complete a post-test used to analyze whether their perceptions of Appalachian English changed throughout the study. The experimental method results in significant increases in several of the attitude measures for Appalachian English, while the students that did not receive this method of instruction experienced no increase for the linguistic variety. These results demonstrate that this method has potential for reducing negative perceptions towards speakers of non-standard dialects.

KEYWORDS: Appalachian English, Standardized English, Non-Standard Dialects, Education, Perceptions

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | vii |
| Section 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Section 2: Literature Review | 5 |
| Section 3: What is Appalachian English?..... | 12 |
| Section 4: Methods | 15 |
| Section 5: Results..... | 22 |
| Section 6: Discussion..... | 28 |
| Section 7: Conclusion | 31 |
| Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey..... | 33 |
| REFERENCES | 38 |
| VITA..... | 40 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Appalachian English features from Hazen, Butcher, and King (2010) | 13 |
| Table 2: Mean values for each pre-test attitude measure..... | 22 |
| Table 3: <i>p</i> -values of Appalachian English attitude measures | 26 |
| Table 4: <i>p</i> -values of standardized English attitude measures | 27 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Appalachian Regional Commission Map of Appalachia | 12 |
| Figure 2: Mean changes in perceptions for the Appalachian English Text | 24 |
| Figure 3: Mean changes in perceptions for the standardized English text | 25 |

Section 1: Introduction

The National Council of Teachers of English released the following mission statement several years ago, “The Council promotes the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and public worlds and to achieve full participation in society, through the learning and teaching of English and the related arts and sciences of language” (2015). From this statement, the goals of English education are quite clear. This organization wants to support literacy development, so that individuals are able to participate in all aspects of society through the use of their language. What the statement lacks is any mention of the diversity that is ever-present in any classroom. The mission portrayed here leaves an open concept of language and English, despite the fact that the implementation of such policies has always resulted in a unary notion that there is only one correct form of English.

While having important goals that seek to benefit learners of all ages, the American education system has an unfortunate history of stigmatizing any non-standard dialect. This stigmatization could potentially result in a decrease of linguistic diversity in the classroom and in society. Research has shown that cultural and linguistic diversity is not only a loss of knowledge, but also has negative effects on human biodiversity conservation (UNESCO 2015). Languages also play a vital role in building inclusive societies, preserving cultural heritage and ensuring intercultural dialogue. In addition to reducing diversity, the existing methods of instruction involve strictly correcting students that speak non-standard varieties by telling them that their vernacular English is wrong and that the standardized English counterpart is correct. This constant correction of their

language causes students to feel shame in the way they have grown up speaking, and they and their teachers often doubt the students' intelligence after repeated uses of the vernacular variety. Though it is important for students to learn standardized English for the purpose of upward mobility in both education and society, dialects often form a significant part of speakers' cultural identities, and they can even be useful resources to have in one's linguistic repertoire. As a way to help students maintain their linguistic diversity through formal education, many researchers have attempted to find various methods of instruction that eliminate the shame students are made to feel towards their dialect (Clark 2013, Hazen 1996, Hazen 2005, Reaser 2013, Wheeler & Swords 2006).

This research project involves a discussion of two types of dialects: standardized English and non-standard varieties of the same (specifically, Appalachian English). For this thesis, I will be using the term *standardized English* for the socially preferred style of English. Many terms have been assigned to this concept of a preferred variety of English, such as *Standard American English*, *formal English*, *educated English*, *proper English*, *good English*, and *School English* (Charity Hudley & Mallinson 2011). I chose to use the term *standardized English* in alignment with Charity Hudley and Mallinson and several other scholars (Dunn & Lindblom 2003, Richardson 2003), because it acknowledges that there is a preferred variety of English that is valued in the American education system and other institutions. However, the term standardized English also omits the assumption that there is only one correct version of English. It is important to stress that there is no objective linguistic reason that one variety of English is somehow more correct than another variety (Romaine 1994). If a language variety is labeled in a more prestigious fashion than other varieties, it is because it is typically spoken by socially, economically

or politically powerful individuals in the society. Particular social features often influence this perception; historically, non-southern, white middle-class men have been the face of this variety. Non-standard varieties of English within the United States encompass various dialects that are affected by the speaker's geographic region, age, gender, ethnic background and numerous other factors. For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on one non-standard variety, Appalachian English, and how it interacts with the American education system and standardized English. Section 3 will discuss Appalachian English in more detail.

The objective of this analysis is to determine the effectiveness of a new technique for instruction, which incorporates literary resources written with non-standard dialectal features. The idea behind this method is that non-standard dialects could potentially be useful tools in the classroom in showing students how authors use unique language to develop literary pieces. This study will investigate whether using literary resources written in vernacular English (in the case of this particular study, Appalachian English) during classroom instruction can improve perceptions of the dialect and its speakers. The series of lessons using this experimental method were preceded and followed by an electronic questionnaire, which measured the participants' perceptions towards Appalachian English. The pre- and post-tests asked students questions about their attitudes towards certain texts that reflect different speech varieties; these attitude measures were adapted from Dennis Preston's (1999) work in perceptual dialectology. Any perceptual changes were measured by the recorded values on these two questionnaires.

There are two hypotheses that were tested in this study and will be explained in the contents of this thesis. First, in both the experimental and control groups, I expect the pre-test will reveal low scores for Appalachian English and high scores for standardized English. This is theorized as a result of previous research that has shown that people have lower perceptions towards speakers of non-standard varieties of English (Smitley 2007, Preston 1999). Second, in the experimental group, I expect the post-test will reveal higher scores for Appalachian English and no change for standardized English. The experimental group was only exposed to literature with Appalachian English features; subsequently, only perceptions towards Appalachian English were expected to change, since there was no literature used that was written in primarily standardized English included in their lesson plan. I anticipate that there will be no change for either variety from the pre-test to post-test scores in the control group, because the control group was instructed from lesson plans that adhered to the original course curriculum, containing no experimental methods of instruction. These hypotheses and the methods behind them will be discussed in more detail in following sections of this thesis.

In what follows, I present a review of the pertinent literature in the areas of Appalachian English, dialect in literature, as well as previous studies that discuss pedagogy and language policy. Next, I provide a description of Appalachian English, including where it is primarily spoken and the salient features of the dialect. I then provide a comprehensive overview of the methods employed in this research including the participants, procedures, and the statistics that were used to evaluate results. After recounting the results of the study, I discuss the findings and the implications of this study, indicating directions for future research.

Section 2: Literature Review

Dialects and how they interact with education has been a recurring topic in scholarly research since the 1960s. As stated above, the National Council of Teachers of English (2015) claims that the goal of English education is to promote literacy development so that students can use their language to construct personal and public worlds and participate in society to the fullest extent. However, despite the lack of specificity in their meaning of the term *language*, standardized English is the preferred language variety of the American education system. As a result, teachers constantly correct what they consider incorrect language use when students that natively speak a non-standard variety of English misuse standardized English. Nonetheless, scholars and educators have come a long way from when we began discovering the mismatch between educators and students of non-standard varieties.

Originally in the 1960s and 1970s, many scholars approached this issue of dialect in education with a deficit model (e.g., Bereiter & Engelmann 1966, Deutsch & Associates 1967, Deutsch et al. 1968). The deficit hypothesis argues that lower class children only learn a restricted code, while middle class children learn both restricted and elaborated codes (Bernstein 1971). The difference between these two codes is that the restricted code is very context-dependent and draws on shared experience and knowledge, whereas the elaborated code entails more thorough details and does not rely on the context to convey any information. The authors of these theories attributed children's home input as the deciding factor of which kind of code that child would develop.

Labov (1969) analyzed African American English to dispute the deficit hypothesis and display that African American English is systematic and rule-governed. In relation to African American students, who wider society had viewed as linguistically deficient at the time, Labov states, “[T]hey have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English” (1969:2). He proceeds to support this claim with excerpts of conversations between African American individuals. He further indicates that there is no evidence that supports the belief that non-standard varieties of English are obstacles to learning (1969:34). While his work deals with a specific dialect of English, other scholars have added evidence to this claim (Wolfram 1969, Wolfram 1986).

This notion that non-standard varieties of English are rule-governed and systematic is confirmed in Wolfram (1986), in which features of several varieties of English are examined, including Appalachian English. Wolfram explains that language variation is not random, and that it is as systematic and just as expected as any other cultural display of group differences. These discussions over the validity of dialects arose because there was a wide societal notion that speakers of non-standard varieties were less intelligent than speakers of standardized English. Wolfram speculates about this by stating that the “complex behavior [of linguistic variation] has so often been reduced to simplistic and uniformed explanation, being attributed to ignorance and simplicity” (1986:114). He argues that the speakers who exhibit this diverse behavior are actually showing extremely complex cognitive abilities, rather than showing linguistic deficiencies. Wolfram concludes by arguing that variation through language deserves respect rather than condemnation, since it is a representation of the complex way the

human mind works and the way humans are able to successfully adapt themselves to reflect different social characteristics (1986:114).

In Reaser (2013), the author suggests that there is no reason to believe that the goals of formal education and celebrating linguistic diversity should be incompatible. Teachers are not directly responsible for the stigmatization of non-standard dialectal features; instead, negative perceptions are supported by “a culture of product-oriented pedagogy and quantitative assessment that regards everything but [standardized English] as incorrect” (Clark & Hayward 2013:10). Teachers must often surmount the institutional language policies, while concurrently trying to assist their students in their acquisition of standardized English (Wiley & Lukes 1996).

Educational research has rarely addressed (in a positive way) the reasons for celebrating linguistic diversity in the classroom, and this fact is often clear from teaching practices. As Wheeler and Swords note, “English teachers routinely equate standard English with ‘grammar,’ as if other language varieties lack grammar, the systematic rule-governed backbone of language” (2006:471). What educators perceive as incorrect speech is actually the use of the grammatical structure of the student’s home language. Even worse than the idea of incorrectness, however, is that a speaker of a non-standard variety is classified as “stupid” and incapable of learning at the same level as a speaker of a variety that more closely approximates standardized English. These misconceptions lead to the stigmatization of the dialect. When students pick up on these perceptions of their capabilities, the situation can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the student will do worse in school due to lower expectations (Christian 1987). Rather than risk embarrassment by being corrected in front of their classmates, many students will

become silent and stop participating in class (Wheeler & Swords 2006). This demonstrates a development of negative language ideologies towards their dialect.

Dialect readers were an early attempt to ease the adaptation of standardized English for speakers of nonstandard varieties of English. Dialect readers have mostly been used for K-12 education, and they are tools that incorporate nonstandard dialectal features into stories that children can read throughout the process of acquiring standardized English (Young, et al. 2013). The more standardized English features the teacher has covered in class, the less nonstandard features will be included in the readers. Simpkins and Simpkins (1981) used a program in classroom instruction called *Bridge*, which was made to take the students from where they were (with their native linguistic variety) and get them to where their teachers wanted them to be. Simpkins and Simpkins found that the use of these readers produced better results than the use of traditional methods to teach reading. In Rickford (1995), the author describes studies that were conducted in San Francisco where students were given a story in standardized English and African American English and asked to take a comprehension test, in addition to being asked about their language attitudes towards each language variety. Rickford concludes from these studies that dialect readers are viable alternatives for the use of reading instruction.

Despite the apparent success and potential of dialect readers, they have not been widely accepted primarily as a result of the negative language attitudes about nonstandard English and the prescriptive notion that nonstandard English has no place in classroom instruction (Young et al. 2013). In Cooper (1974), the author also argues against the use of dialect readers due to the fact that there was no evidence that black children's difficulty with learning to read stemmed from their use of nonstandard English.

Contrastive analysis is another one of the primary methods that has been explored as a way to assist in the adaption of standardized English among speakers of non-standard varieties while simultaneously combating negative ideologies. Wheeler and Swords realized that they were teaching the “same way to all the children all year long and [the] White children are passing the tests and [the] Black children are not” (2006:471). They had typically used a correctionist method, where they would explain what the students should and should not say. After a while, the students would realize they were going to be corrected and they would try to ask questions in the correct form for school, except they did not know how. Wheeler and Swords decided to try out contrastive analysis in their own class after taking a class taught on language varieties and different structures of language. The first thing they did was to focus on the notion that language forms are dictated by setting. In order to do so, they explained to students the differences between formal and informal language. Though they were created with good intentions, these labels can still carry very negative connotations of one variety of language dominating the other. The authors, nonetheless, acknowledged that there is a much richer distinction between the two:

Of course, the contrasts of formal/informal...are oversimplifications of the different ways that language is patterned by variety and style, but the key point I wanted to convey was one of contrast—that different language patterns are appropriate to different contexts. (2006:475)

For the purpose of time and higher priorities, Wheeler and Swords could not dwell on such a distinction, and were required to focus more on the students’ analyses of the grammar. After giving several examples of register, the students caught on very quickly

when their teacher wrote two sentences on the board—one in “formal” English and one in “informal”/African American Vernacular English. She asked her students to label each one as formal/informal, and then as a class they analyzed each structure for the grammatical constructions. The students were able to realize that in the standard variety, for example, plurality was marked with a “-s” and in the non-standard variety, it was marked with the word “two”. After only a year of using this method in her classroom, the black and white students were performing equally well on their year-end tests.

One thing to be cautious of, however, is revealed in Young et al. (2014), when the authors reference the study by Wheeler and Swords, but not in such a positive light. The authors mention a teacher named Cassar, who implemented one of Wheeler and Swords’ suggested lesson plans. Cassar (2008) discovered that her students exhibited a marginal increase in their acquisition of standardized English, though they simultaneously exhibited a significant decrease in their self-esteem and racial self-concept. This clearly does not solve the issue of formal education creating negative ideologies about nonstandard dialects in formal education.

Amy D. Clark is a scholar from central Appalachia and is now the director of an organization known as the Appalachian Writing Project, which is dedicated to research-based teaching methods that privilege student voice (2013). She performed a similar study as Wheeler and Swords, but she specifically worked in an Appalachian classroom. Clark’s study aimed to “determine whether teaching the grammar systems of vernacular dialects side by side with the grammar system of [Standardized English] (a method known as contrastive analysis) would improve students’ ability to code-switch” (Clark 2013:116). Her two-year study involved control group classrooms of several age levels

that were taught using the existing teaching methods, and classrooms that used contrastive analysis. Each lesson was developed to suit the individual classroom and the dialectal patterns present, and would involve placing a standardized English sentence next to an Appalachian English sentence with the focus on a particular grammatical feature. Perhaps the most relevant to this thesis, however, is the methods that were used for the high school level. These classes compared prose and poetry written in vernacular dialects with alternate standardized versions, which led to discussions about how dialects are important to build strong fictional characters.

In this high school level, the students are incorporating contrastive analysis but also realizing the significance of their dialect. Like Clark, this thesis project seeks to include literary resources in the classroom that include dialectal features, to determine whether this method could be used to improve perceptions of Appalachian English as a linguistic variety. For this project, then, it is important to understand what kinds of linguistic features of Appalachian English might be found in these pieces.

Section 3: What is Appalachian English?

There are many arguments about what Appalachia consists of, but the Appalachian Regional Commission describes the area as “a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains” including “...all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia” (2015). Figure 1 below shows the Appalachian region.

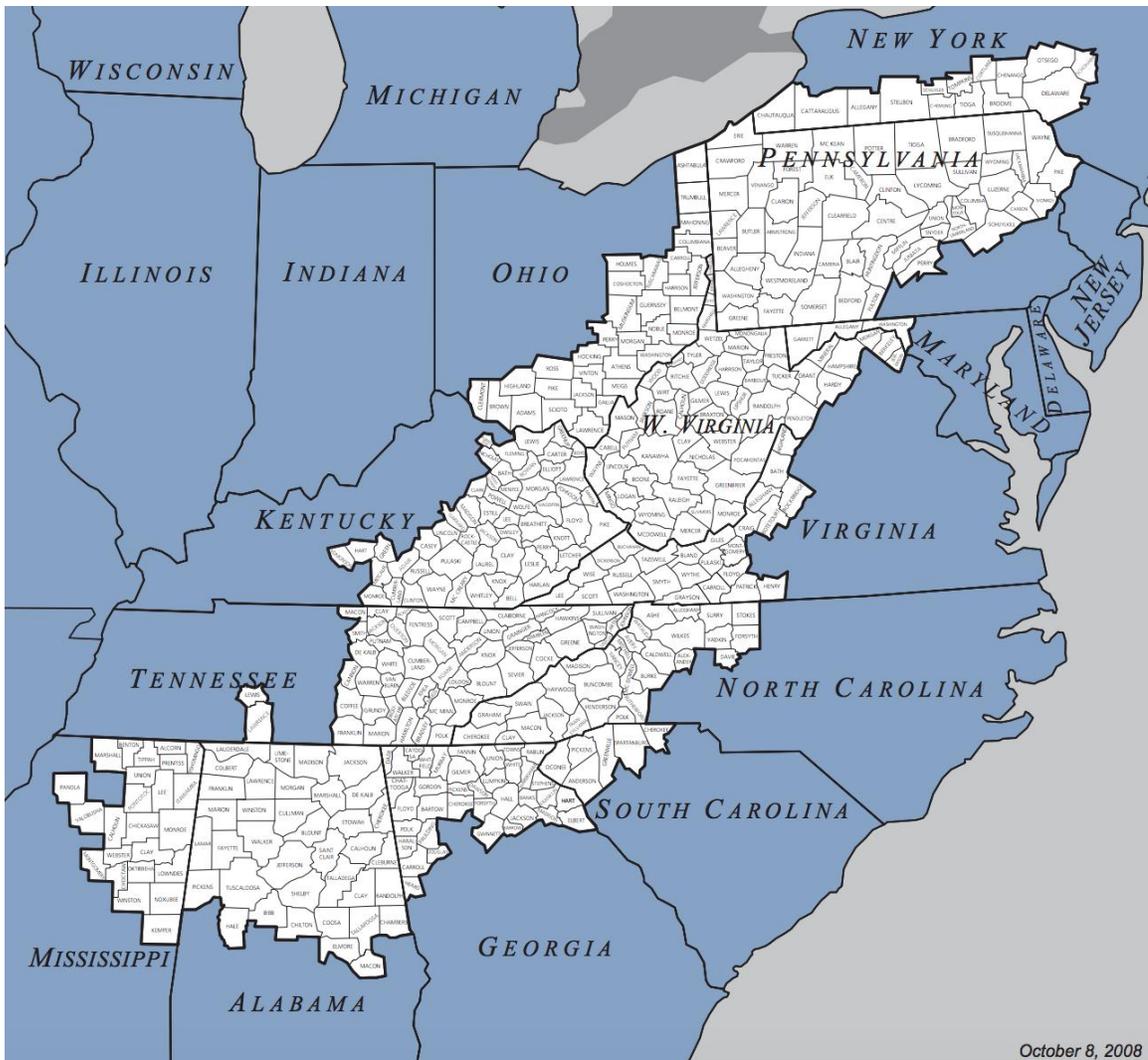


Figure 1: Appalachian Regional Commission Map of Appalachia

The University of Kentucky, where this study was conducted, is located in Fayette County (Lexington), Kentucky, just outside of the Appalachian Region. However, students that attend the university often come from Appalachia to Lexington to study or have otherwise been exposed to the dialect of this region. As a result, it is expected that most students will have firmly established preconceived perceptions about Appalachian English as a language variety, and even social perceptions about those who speak it.

These perceptions are connected to the stigmatized linguistic features of the dialect, which include the production of [f] for [th], *a*-prefixing, and the use of the same form of a verb for past and present tenses (Hazen et al. 2010). Interestingly enough, many of the stigmatized features of Appalachian English are actually fading from the dialect. In their article, Hazen, Butcher, and King (2010) used a corpus of 67 speakers from West Virginia to analyze the usage of 10 dialectal features. These speakers were evenly distributed over a range of ages, regions (in West Virginia), sex, ethnicities, social classes, and education experiences. In total, the corpus contains over 600,000 words. The ten features analyzed are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Appalachian English features from Hazen, Butcher, and King (2010)

| Feature | Example |
|------------------------------|--|
| Leveled <i>was</i> | <i>We was there</i> |
| Demonstrative <i>them</i> | <i>She bought them berries</i> |
| <i>a</i> -prefixing | <i>She's a-working</i> |
| <i>For-to</i> infinitive | <i>It wasn't for me to play sports</i> |
| Perfective <i>done</i> | <i>He done washed the dishes</i> |
| Alveolar form of <i>-ing</i> | <i>We were walkin'</i> |
| Consonant cluster reduction | <i>Past → pas'</i> |
| Vowel mergers | <i>Pin/pen, with the same vowel</i> |
| Pleonastic pronouns | <i>My sister, she is a doctor</i> |
| Quotative <i>like</i> | <i>He was like, "I'm not going"</i> |

Of these features, leveled *was*, demonstrative *them*, *a*-prefixing, the *for-to* infinitive, and perfective *done* seem to be fading. The authors found that the other five features are enduring in the Appalachian English used today. This study has not yet been attempted in Kentucky, so it is not certain whether the same features are fading and enduring in the variety of Appalachian English found here. Nonetheless, I think it is important for perceptual studies to investigate features that are still present in the dialect and also features that are declining in usage. These fading features could be the root of negative perceptions that participants have towards speakers of Appalachian English and could be an important aspect of developing education material.

Section 4: Methods

This study was conducted using two sections of WRD 111 at the University of Kentucky, which is a class on composition and communication. One section was devoted as experimental group, whereas the other section was maintained as a control group. The students did not receive any type of grade for participating or not participating in the study, which became an important factor in data collection. 23 students in total participated, with 14 participants in the experimental group and nine in the control group. Of these students, 13 students identified themselves as female (seven in the experimental group and six in the control group) and 10 students identified themselves as male (seven in the experimental group and three in the control group). Of the 23 students, 12 identified their hometown as somewhere in the U.S. but outside of Kentucky (seven in the experimental group and five in the control group), 10 were born somewhere in Kentucky (six in the experimental group and four in the control), and one person was born inside of the U.S. but did not provide her hometown.

A questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. This survey was used as the pre- and post-test and served as the sole resource for data collection. In this survey, students were first asked to fill out questions pertaining to their demographics, including age, gender, and what they consider to be their hometown. This information was collected for the purpose of future analyses of the data, such as how gender affected the results or whether students raised in Kentucky were more susceptible to a particular reaction than those born or raised in other states. While these questions were not addressed within the scope of this study, future work with this data could

determine interesting correlations with the demographic data and how the participants responded during the questions.

Since the students were enrolled in the class, the lessons were part of all students' curriculum, but filling out the surveys associated with the study was completely voluntary. As a result, several students simply did not start or finish either the pre- or post-test. In order to measure a difference in the attitude measures from before and after the lessons, both questionnaires needed to be filled out. Subsequently, only responses from students who completely finished both the pre- and post-test could be used for this study. In addition to this factor, there were two other criteria for exclusion. First, due to the scope and level of institutional approval for this study, only students over the age of 18 could participate in the data collection portion of this study. Second, since the objective of this study is to test the effectiveness of a method of instruction for the American education system, I did not include students who were born outside of the United States.

The primary focus of the surveys was to determine the participants' attitudes or perceptions of two texts, each representing a different language variety. The survey included an excerpt from *The Dollmaker* by Harriette Arnow (1954), which is a novel about a family living in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky. This novel was chosen as a representation of Appalachian English because Arnow adjusted her orthography to reflect actual phonetic differences in speech. For example, in one portion of the text, she spells "visiting" as "visiten." This allows the vernacular speech variety to be portrayed in text, despite the fact that Appalachian English primarily varies from Standardized English in regards to phonology. In addition to the example just provided, the text includes other

common Appalachian English features such as pleonastic pronouns (e.g., “her baby an him, *they* was together”), a-prefixing (e.g., “when she come *a visiten* my mother”), and leveled *was* (e.g., “they *was* together”). Below is the full text the participants saw on the survey:

She rubbed her bent arm up her forehead, back across her stringing hair. “I disremember what they call it now; used to be they said membranous croup. I thought it was jist plain croup, bad hard croup like he’s had afore, till Aunt Sue Annie come. She told me word come in th mail last night Mealie Sexton’s baby was dead. We thought it had th croup when she come a visiten my mother when she come in frum Cincinnati—her baby an him, they was together.” (Arnow 1954:38).

After reading through this text, participants were asked to rate the language variety in regards to six different attitude measures, several of which were adapted from work by Dennis Preston (1999). The six features that were measured were level of education, wealth, friendliness, politeness, pleasantness, and correctness. The participants were shown a sliding bar scale from 0 to 100, which they could move along a continuum from “Not at all” to “Very,” representing the two polar sides of each feature. Other than these two labels, the participants were not given any other information that could potentially bias their responses, such as numerical values. Though the participants could not see a numerical value, the closer the participant rated the feature to “Not at all,” the closer to zero the value would be. The closer the participant rated the feature to “Very,” the closer the value would be to 100.

In order to have a control for the Appalachian English text, the participants were also asked to rate a Standardized English adaption of the same text from *The Dollmaker* (Arnow 1954). The adaption involved changing any features of Appalachian English into the standardized English counterpart. Using the same example from above, Arnow spelled “visiting” as “visiten” in the text, but for the standardized text, this was changed to “visiting.” Here is the full adaption of the Arnow excerpt that the participants saw:

She rubbed her bent arm across her forehead, and back over her stringing hair. “I don't remember what they call it now; they used to call it membranous croup. I thought it was just normal croup, very bad croup like he's had before, until Aunt Sue Annie came. She told me that word came in the mail last night that Mealie Sexton's baby was dead. We thought it had the croup when she visited my mother when she came in from Cincinnati—her baby and him were together.”

Using an adaption of the Arnow (1954) text rather than an original Standardized English text prevented the chance of participants becoming biased because of the content of the text. The adaption isolates the linguistic features as the only visible difference between the Appalachian English text and the Standardized English text. After reading this text, students were asked to rate the text for the same six attitude measures listed above.

Aside from the demographics and the questions targeted to gauge the language attitudes, there were questions included simply for the purpose of preventing the students from determining what the survey was designed to investigate. These questions were not included in the data analysis at all. While this may seem unnecessary, this was actually an important part of the survey design since the participants were students in my class.

Despite the fact that the students did not receive any course credit for participating, there is always the concern that the students will skew their answers based on what they think their instructor wants to see. To see the full survey, please see appendix A.

After the pre-questionnaire was distributed and the students were given several days to participate, the experimental group was instructed with the method that incorporates literary resources with Appalachian English features. The texts used during these lessons included an additional excerpt from *The Dollmaker* (Arnow 1954), a poem by Anne Shelby (2013), and a novel excerpt by Denise Giardina (2013). The excerpt from Arnow (1954) deliberately did not include the excerpt from the survey, so as to avoid an explicit connection between the two texts. It should also be noted that it would have been more ideal to cover more authors from Appalachian English, but for various reasons including staying on track with the required curriculum of the class, the scope of this study was not able to cover more. If this method is retested in another study, it is advisable that more literary resources be included in the lessons.

The students were given time to read each piece, and afterwards we discussed as a class how the author portrayed characters, the effect certain language choices had on the audience, and how the authors used Appalachian English features to portray their homelands. For instance, in Shelby's (2013) poem *Spellcheck*, she writes, "One spell transformed my taters into tatters, served me subpoenas when I ordered soupbeans" (2013:245). In this excerpt, Shelby uses lexical items relating to food in Appalachian English like "taters" and "soupbeans" and explains how word processors do not recognize the language, which results in a humorous combination. Later in the poem she uses Appalachian lexical items again, but for a more sentimental effect. While the

experimental group underwent lessons with these methods and readings, the control group underwent the traditional curriculum used for the composition and communication classes at the University of Kentucky.

After the experimental group finished the lessons using the three texts mentioned above, the post-questionnaire was distributed. The post-questionnaire included the same questions as the pre-questionnaire to determine whether the lessons with Appalachian English were in fact effective for improving the attitude measures towards the text containing Appalachian English features. The post-questionnaire was distributed at the same time for the control group, though this group's participants' attitude measures were expected to stay the same for the text with Appalachian English and standardized English features.

After collecting the responses to the post-questionnaire from both groups of participants, the results for both questionnaires were compiled in Microsoft Excel. The participants were each given a unique identifier when the survey was distributed to ensure that the students remained anonymous, but with this number I could link their results from the pre-questionnaire to their post-questionnaire. The data that was included in this spreadsheet included the values for each attitude measure (correctness, politeness, etc.) from before and after the lessons, towards both the Appalachian English text and Standardized English text. The pre-questionnaire value for each measure was then subtracted from the post-questionnaire value of the same measure to calculate the change in the attitude measures from before the lessons to after the lessons. A positive number indicated an increase in the attitude measure (i.e., the participant's perception of the linguistic variety improved for that measure), while a negative number indicated a

decrease (i.e., the participant's perception of the linguistic variety worsened for that measure). To make this method more clear, see example (1) below for "Participant 13" from my data:

Pre-Questionnaire value for correctness: 23

Post-Questionnaire value for correctness: 69

Change: 46

In example (1) above, the participant experienced an increase in their perception of the Appalachian English text. Once each of these difference values was calculated, the mean change in perception for each attitude measure was calculated in the experimental and control group. In other words, each of the six attitude measures had a mean value for the standardized English and Appalachian English text. This resulted in twelve mean values for the experimental group and twelve mean values for the control group. The standard deviation of the changes in perceptions was also calculated. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a *t*-test was performed on each set of values to determine if any of the changes in perceptions were statistically significant. A value was considered significant if the *p*-value was less than 0.05. However, the final sample size included 14 participants in the experimental group and nine in the control group; due to this small sample size, it was not expected that any of the changes would be statistically significant. The results section will provide the results of these tests, including surprisingly significant data.

Section 5: Results

In order to discuss the results of this experimental study, I would like to revisit the hypotheses outlined in the introduction of this paper one-by-one. First, in both the experimental and control group set up in this study, I expected the pre-test would reveal low scores for Appalachian English and high scores for standardized English. In order to test this, the mean of all participants' pre-test values were calculated for each attitude measure; this was done with both the control and experimental group. As seen in Table 2, this hypothesis was found to be true with this data. Within the control group, the mean pre-test value for the Appalachian English text was lower than the standardized English text across every attitude measure. The same can be said for the experimental group, where the standardized English text consistently scored higher on average than the Appalachian English text.

Table 2: Mean values for each pre-test attitude measure

| Attitude Measure | Control | | Experimental | |
|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Appalachian English text | Standardized English text | Appalachian English text | Standardized English text |
| Correctness | 14.333 | 59.333 | 15.071 | 51.692 |
| Politeness | 42.333 | 60.111 | 45.857 | 52.357 |
| Wealth | 23.444 | 48.222 | 24.071 | 59.071 |
| Pleasantness | 27.222 | 56.667 | 32.214 | 50.286 |
| Education | 19.889 | 58.333 | 20.000 | 50.786 |
| Friendliness | 49.778 | 61.111 | 51.857 | 54.429 |

In the second hypothesis, I claimed that in the experimental group, I expected the attitudes towards the Appalachian English text to increase from what they were on the pre-test, and I expected no change for standardized English. Additionally, I anticipated that there would be no change for either variety from the pre-test to post-test scores in the control group. In other words, the experimental method was expected to improve the

perceptions towards Appalachian English, but the perceptions should not have changed for the standardized English text. The control group did not receive any experimental method and was expected to feel the same about both language varieties on the pre- and post-tests. As one might expect, the results for this hypothesis were slightly more detailed than the first.

For an initial look at the change in perceptions from the pre-test to post-test, the mean changes for all participants were calculated for both the Appalachian English text and the standardized English text. Below in Figure 2, the average changes are displayed for each attitude measure towards in relation to the Appalachian English text. It is important to note that all of the changes represented in Figure 2 are overall increases, which is apparent from the positive mean value. The blue bar represents the experimental group of participants and the red bar represents the control group. In four out of the six attitude measures (correctness, wealth, pleasantness, and education), the experimental group experienced a greater increase for that particular attitude measure in comparison to the control group. The control group experienced a greater overall increase in perceptions than the experimental group for both politeness and friendliness.

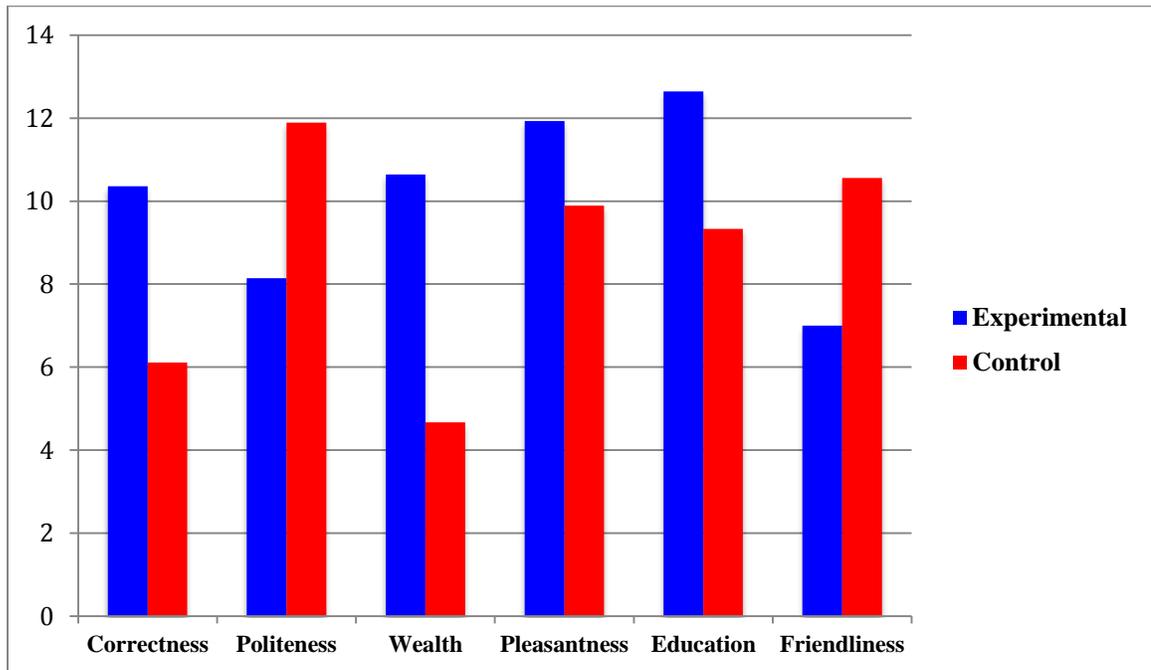


Figure 2: Mean changes in perceptions for the Appalachian English Text

The mean changes for the standardized English text were also calculated, which were exceptionally distinct from the results for the Appalachian English text. Again, the blue bar represents the experimental group of participants and the red bar represents the control group. However, with the exception of one feature from the experimental group, all changes represented in Figure 3 are negative, indicating an overall decrease in perceptions in regards to that particular attitude measure from the pre-test to post-test.

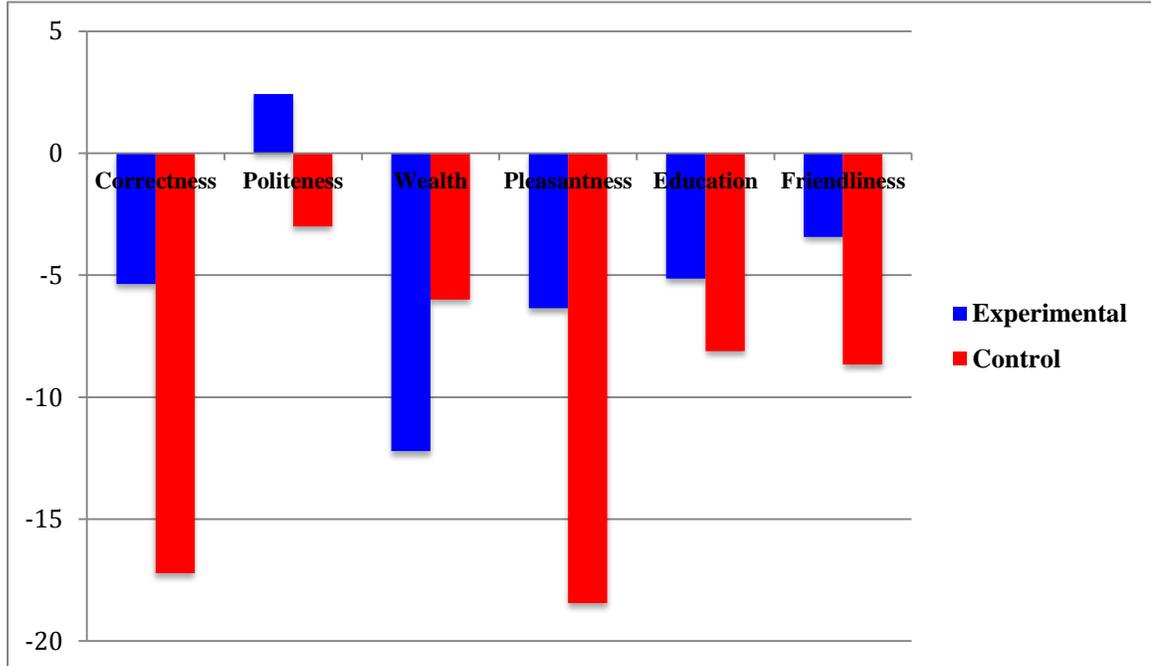


Figure 3: Mean changes in perceptions for the standardized English text

While patterns can begin to be identified with the figures above, it is important to perform a more in-depth statistical analysis to confirm any findings. There are some limitations to this analysis due to the small sample size, which will be addressed in the following discussion. The *t*-test model was used on each set of values for each feature from the pre- to post-test. These values do not take into account the comparison of the control group to experimental group; instead, this shows the significance of the changes in each attitude measure from the pre- to post-test. Numbers with a *p*-value of 0.05 or less are significant and coded in green in the tables below. In Table 3 below, the values for the Appalachian English text are displayed, which shows that there was a statistically significant increase in the experimental group in how the participants perceived the text in relation to wealth ($p = 0.03$). Also, four of the other six features appeared to be

approaching significance, which were shaded in red below. The only feature that did not undergo a significant increase in perception using the experimental method was friendliness ($p = 0.13$). As predicted in the second hypothesis, none of the increases for the attitude measures were significant in the control group, which was expected since those participants did not receive any experimental method.

Table 3: p -values of Appalachian English attitude measures

| Correctness | Politeness | Wealth | Pleasantness | Education | Friendliness |
|--------------|------------|--------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Experimental | | | | | |
| 0.098 | 0.066 | 0.030 | 0.070 | 0.067 | 0.130 |
| Control | | | | | |
| 0.646 | 0.669 | 0.116 | 0.497 | 0.383 | 0.479 |

Table 4 below shows the results for the t -test performed on the data for the standardized English text. Since neither group (the control nor the experimental) received any instruction with targeted at improving perceptions towards standardized English, any changes for this text were not expected to be statistically significant. For the most part this was true, other than a few anomalous exceptions. The control group experienced a decrease in perceptions towards friendliness, which appear to be approaching significance ($p = 0.09$), but this could be attributed to the small sample size. The control group also experienced statistically significant decreases for both pleasantness ($p = 0.05$) and friendliness ($p = 0.04$). This was also not anticipated and will be briefly discussed in the following section of this paper.

Table 4: *p*-values of standardized English attitude measures

| Correctness | Politeness | Wealth | Pleasantness | Education | Friendliness |
|--------------|------------|--------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Experimental | | | | | |
| 0.167 | 0.222 | 0.410 | 0.254 | 0.161 | 0.091 |
| Control | | | | | |
| 0.154 | 0.408 | 0.346 | 0.052 | 0.221 | 0.040 |

Section 6: Discussion

As stated above, the first hypothesis claimed that Appalachian English would be lower than Standardized English across the board on the pre-test. Table 2 displayed the mean values for each attitude measure from the pre-test for the control and experimental group and confirmed this hypothesis; the Appalachian English text was always rated overall lower than the standardized English text. This finding demonstrates that students have a poor perception of Appalachian English, which could result from a number of factors, including the existing education system. There is no reason that linguistic features should lead people to believe that a person speaking with Appalachian English features is less wealthy, pleasant, polite, or that their language is any less correct.

As for the second hypothesis proposed in this paper, I expected the experimental group's attitudes towards the Appalachian English text to increase from what they were on the pre-test and I expected no change for Standardized English. For the most part, this prediction was valid. The participants in the experimental group rated the Appalachian English text for wealth higher in the post-test than they did in the pre-test, which was a statistically significant increase. Four out of the other five features appeared to be approaching significantly higher scores for Appalachian English, and likely would have been statistically significant had the groups in this study included more participants. Friendliness was the only feature in the experimental group that did not undergo a significant increase for Appalachian English, though the p-value for this feature was still relatively low ($p = 0.13$). Since the mean value for this attitude measure still represented an overall increase, I do not believe that the lack of statistical significance is something to worry about in relation to this method of instruction. The control group did have mean

increases for all six features for Appalachian English; however, none of these increases were statistically significant or even approaching significance. These results were expected, since the control group participants did not receive a method of instruction aimed at increasing the perceptions of this language variety. In other words, the experimental method was expected to improve the perceptions towards Appalachian English, but the perceptions should not have changed for the Standardized English text. This helps demonstrate that the dialect literature was the key factor that resulted in the change in perceptions in the experimental group.

Additionally, in my second hypothesis I also anticipated that there would be no change for either group from the pre-test to post-test scores for the Standardized English text. Overall, this prediction was fairly accurate. None of the changes from the pre-test to post-test were statistically significant, except for two features in the control group. For some reason, the control group values for pleasantness and friendliness decreased significantly for Standardized English. This was completely unexpected and remains an anomaly of the data. It may seem as if the existing method of instruction is actually harmful for language ideologies, but a more likely explanation is that the participants were not paying close attention to the survey since it asked the same questions after no change in their lessons. The experimental group also had a decrease in their perception of friendliness in regards to Standardized English, but this decrease was only approaching significance and would likely diminish with a larger number of participants.

Overall, these results indicate that this method of instruction could be a useful tool in classroom instruction. The experimental group's perceptions of Appalachian English increased significantly, which was only after a week of lessons covering three different

texts. If this study had covered more material over a longer period of time, there is reason to believe the increases in perceptions would have been even greater.

Section 7: Conclusion

The findings in this thesis demonstrate that perceptions towards Appalachian English are lower than Standardized English, despite the fact that both language varieties are equally structured and rule-governed. Most language ideologies are developed through existing teaching methods, where students with non-standard dialects are simply told that the way they speak is wrong, and Standardized English is promoted as the only correct way to speak. As a result, most individuals grow up believing that any language other than standardized English is wrong, even if the same individuals grew up speaking a non-standard variety of English. It is clear that something needs to be changed to prevent people from developing negative perceptions towards speakers of Appalachian English, and all other non-standard language varieties. Results from this study indicate that the use of dialect resources in classroom instruction, the method described and evaluated in this study, may be an effective way to help improve and prevent these negative language ideologies.

Nonetheless, this study definitely had its limitations. The control group was only comprised of nine students, and the experimental group had just a few more, with 14 participants. This small sample size of only 23 participants total resulted in difficulty with the statistical analysis, even though the *t*-test results were more significant than originally predicted. In order to feel more confidence in this method of instruction, I would like to see this study replicated using a larger sample size with more participants. This would provide more assurance in the increases in perception towards Appalachian English that were only approaching statistical significance, which could confirm that this method is indeed effective. Another benefit of having a larger sample size would be the ability to

set up different controls. For instance, in this study, one group received the experimental method that utilized dialect literary resources, and the other group was simply taught according to the existing composition and communication curriculum. With more participants, it may also be possible to set up an additional control group that uses the same lesson that the experimental group received, but with the Appalachian English texts translated into standardized English.

Other options for future work could incorporate additional language varieties, as well. Though the focus of this study was Appalachian English, I anticipate that using dialect literature in the classroom could be an effective method for improving the perceptions of all non-standard varieties of English. In order to determine whether this is in fact the case, the study conducted and described in this paper should be replicated using several other non-standard language varieties. Regardless of whether this method is deemed the most effective for increasing people's perceptions of Appalachian English and other dialects, linguists and educators should relentlessly work together to determine methods of instruction that prevent individuals from experiencing negative attitudes about language from their teachers, others around them, and even themselves.

Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey

Q5 Were you born in the United States?

- Yes (9)
- No (10)

Q6 If you selected "yes" for the question above, what city/state do you consider your hometown?

Q9 How old are you?

- Under 18 (1)
- 18 (2)
- 19 (3)
- 20 (4)
- 21 (5)
- 22 (6)
- 23+ (7)

Q4 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Q14 Read the following excerpt and answer the questions below.

Q7 ...She rubbed her bent arm up her forehead, back across her stringing hair. "I disremember what they call it now; used to be they said membranous croup. I thought it was jist plain croup, bad hard croup like he's had afore, till Aunt Sue Annie come. She told me word come in th mail last night Mealie Sexton's baby was dead. We thought it had th croup when she come a visiten my mother when she come in frum Cincinnati—her baby an him, they was together."

Q8 Where do you think the speaker lives?

- Kentucky (1)
- Ohio (2)
- West Virginia (3)
- Other (4)

Q3 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

_____ How friendly is the speaker? (1)

_____ How polite is the speaker? (2)

Q10 How old do you think the speaker is?

- Under 18 (1)
- 18-22 (2)
- 23-30 (3)
- 30-40 (4)
- 40+ (5)

Q30 Which rhetorical strategy is used most in this text?

- Ethos (1)
- Pathos (2)
- Logos (3)

Q13 Have you heard of the illness she speaks of?

- Yes (9)
- No (10)

Q12 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How correct is the speaker's language? (1)
- _____ How educated is the speaker? (2)
- _____ How wealthy is the speaker? (3)
- _____ How pleasant does the speaker sound to you? (4)

Q25 Please read the following excerpt and answer the questions below. “I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mr. Jones—therefore do not be alarmed if you should hear of his having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me.—Yours, etc.”

Q26 Who do you think Mr. Jones is?

- A boyfriend (1)
- A friend (2)
- A doctor (3)
- A banker (4)

Q27 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How friendly is the speaker? (1)
- _____ How polite is the speaker? (2)
- _____ How correct is the speaker's language? (3)

Q28 How old do you think the speaker is?

- 18-22 (1)
- 23-30 (2)
- 31-40 (3)
- 41-50 (4)
- 51+ (5)

Q29 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How educated is the speaker? (1)
- _____ How wealthy is the speaker? (2)
- _____ How pleasant does the speaker sound to you? (3)

Q31 Please read the following excerpt and answer the questions below. "You did it, Tom," she said accusingly. "I know you didn't mean to but you DID do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big hulking physical specimen of a——"

Q33 What do you think the speaker is about to say before she stops speaking?

- Brute (1)
- Man (2)
- Husband (3)
- Boy (4)

Q34 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How friendly is the speaker? (1)
- _____ How polite is the speaker? (2)
- _____ How correct is the speaker's language? (3)
- _____ How educated is the speaker? (4)

Q35 Where do you think the speaker is from?

- Kentucky (1)
- New York (2)
- Boston (3)
- Massachusetts (4)
- Other (5)

Q36 How old do you think the speaker is?

- 0-17 (1)
- 18-22 (2)
- 23-30 (3)
- 31-40 (4)
- 41-50 (5)
- 50+ (6)

Q37 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How wealthy is the speaker? (1)
_____ How pleasant does the speaker sound to you? (2)

Q16 Please read the following excerpt and answer the questions below....She rubbed her bent arm across her forehead, and back over her stringing hair. "I don't remember what they call it now; they used to call it membranous croup. I thought it was just normal croup, very bad croup like he's had before, until Aunt Sue Annie came. She told me that word came in the mail last night that Mealie Sexton's baby was dead. We thought it had the croup when she visited my mother when she came in from Cincinnati—her baby and him were together."

Q17 In the last sentence of the excerpt, who do you think "him" refers to?

- The sick baby's father (1)
- The speaker's son (2)
- The speaker's uncle (3)

Q18 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How educated is the speaker? (1)
_____ How friendly is the speaker? (2)
_____ How polite is the speaker? (3)

Q20 Where do you think the speaker is from?

- Kentucky (1)
- Ohio (2)
- West Virginia (3)
- Other (4)

Q21 Who is Sue Annie the aunt of?

- The speaker (1)
- The baby (2)
- Mealie Sexton (3)
- The speaker's mother (4)

Q19 Click and drag the slider to answer the following questions about the excerpt above:

- _____ How correct is the speaker's language? (1)
_____ How wealthy is the speaker? (2)
_____ How pleasant does the speaker sound to you? (3)

Q22 Who do you think the speaker is talking to?

- A doctor (1)
- Her husband (2)
- A friend (3)
- Other (4)

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