

Syntactic Correspondences across Varieties of English

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Appalachian English displays syntactic properties unfamiliar to general American English. In this talk I explore two such properties of Appalachian English, 'split subjects' (see (1)) and so-called 'negative auxiliary inversion' (see (2)).

Appalachian English split subjects

- (1) a. I mean, though, back in them days, *they* didn' *nobody* live up there. (Ida Marshall; Feagin: 238; 1979)
'...nobody lived up there'
b. "He's stubborn and wild," Ephraim said, "*There* can't *nobody* ride him." (Pirtle *Last Man* 48; M&H: 111; 1981)
'nobody can ride him'

Appalachian English negative auxiliary inversion

- (2) a. *Hain't nobody* hardly believed it. (Wolfram & Christian: 113)
'nobody believed it'
b. *Won't nobody* help her. (Myrtice J; Feagin: 241)
'nobody will help her'

The key properties of split subject expressions are: (a) they are quantificational, involving an indefinite, usually negative, subject (e.g., *nobody*); (b) they require a modal or finite auxiliary, typically negated (e.g., *didn't*); and (c) they display a pronoun in sentence-initial position (e.g., *they*). The key properties of negative inversion include (a) and (b) above. The main difference between the two expression types involves property (c), namely, that no sentence-initial pronoun is displayed in the negative inversion cases.

Interestingly, African-American English displays negative inversion but not split subjects. Older Scots, a variety that Montgomery (1989, 1997) has linked to Appalachian English, displays split subjects but not negative inversion. General American English displays neither expression type.

I propose that split subjects and negative inversion are linked and that both involve the raising of a modal or finite auxiliary to a position higher than that of general American English. Building on work by Kayne (2008), Witkos (2004) and Sabel (2000) on expletive subjects in existential clauses, I take the pronoun plus thematic subject to start out as a unit (e.g., *they-nobody*) and then split, the pronoun raising to the specifier of the modal or auxiliary and expressing features of the thematic subject. I explore a connection to residual verb second (V2) effects and transitive expletives, neither of which is typically associated with varieties of American English but which do seem to characterize Older Scots.