

Southern Mountain English as a shaper of identity

Bethany Dumas (*University of Tennessee*)

This paper begins by offering historical, cultural, and linguistic reasons for defining Southern Mountain English (SME) as the variety of English spoken, particularly by older speakers in rural areas, in Southern Appalachia and also mountain areas further west to which Southern Appalachians migrated—primarily the Ouachita and Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and Missouri. It thus includes Appalachian and Ozark English. Most features of SME have been documented as far west as Newton County, Arkansas, in the heart of the Arkansas Ozarks; many have been documented as far west as west Texas.

The paper then briefly summarizes representative pronunciation, morphological, and syntactic features of the variety and identifies representative vocabulary items, idioms, and figures of speech. Transcript examples, primarily from personal narratives collected in sociolinguistic interviews, will be included in this form (underlined structures will be commented on):

But now later I, I got a gun to that woman. ... And uh, so she come out there. I mean she was just a-raisin' Cain, just as loud as she could talk around 'ere, and all the neighbors a-hearin'. Jim had a gun—he was a night watchman then—and he had a gun hangin' up on the wall. And I reached up 'ere and got that gun, and I walked out there, and I said, “Listen you get out of this yard, or you’re gonna be findin' yourself a-layin' right where you’re at, woman! You get out of this yard, and right now! You get out of it!” And I had that gun pointed at her. I’s gonna shoot her! ... Well, she didn’t never come back in that yard again.

Drawing on such narrative examples, the paper concludes by suggesting ways in which the representative linguistic features both reflect and shape individual and family/social group identities and prescribe methods of social interactions with other speakers.