Appendix: An Inventory of Distinguishing Dialect Features

The following inventory summarizes many of the dialect features of American English mentioned in the text, as well as some features not covered. It is limited to phonological and grammatical features. For each of the features, a brief general comment is given about the linguistic patterning of the feature, as well as a statement about its dialect distribution. We emphasize items that are socially significant in terms of the standard–vernacular continuum rather than those that are strictly regional, although many of the features are both socially and regionally meaningful. To the extent possible, traditional orthography is used in representing forms, but this is not possible in all cases. Exhaustive descriptions of a full range of North American English dialects are found in Kortman et al. (2004) and Schneider et al. (2004). More comprehensive descriptions of Southern American English vernaculars are found in works such as Bailey (2001) and Cukor-Avila (2001), and more extensive descriptions of Appalachian English are found in Wolfram and Christian (1976) and Montgomery and Hall (2004). Descriptions of African American English (AAE) structures are found in Rickford (1999) and Green (2002). In our discussion of dialect features, we often use the term general American English as a basis of comparison. This term is used simply to refer to varieties of English that are not characterized by the particular dialect trait under discussion. Though this use is related to the term “standard English,” it avoids some of the value judgments often associated with the label “standard.” Furthermore, in many cases, differences between dialects may be equally standard (or nonstandard), so that the distinction between standard and vernacular is not always appropriate.

Phonological Features

Consonants

Final cluster reduction
Word-final consonant clusters ending in a stop can be reduced when both members of the cluster are either voiced (e.g. find, cold) or voiceless (act, test). This process affects both clusters that are a part of the base word (e.g. find, act) and those clusters formed through the addition of an -ed suffix (e.g. guessed, liked). In general American English, this pattern may operate when the following word begins with a consonant (e.g. bes’ kind), but in vernacular dialects, it is extended to include following words beginning with a vowel as well (e.g. bes’ apple). This pattern is quite prominent in AAE and English-based creoles; it is also common in dialects of English that retain influence from other languages, such as Latino English, Vietnamese English, Hmong English, and so forth. It is not particularly noticeable in other American English dialects.

Plurals following clusters
Words ending in -sp (e.g. wasp), -sk (e.g. desk), and -st (e.g. test) may take the “long plural” -es (phonetically [iz]) plural in many vernacular varieties, following the reduction of their final
clusters to -s. Thus, items such as test’ for test and desk’ for desk will be pluralized as tesses and deskes, respectively, just as words ending in -s or other s-like sounds in general American English (e.g., buzz, buzzes) are pluralized with an -es ending (bases,Buzzes).

In some rural varieties of English such as Appalachian and Southeastern coastal varieties, the -es plural may occur even without the reduction of the final cluster to -s, yielding plural forms such as postes and deskes. Such forms are considerably rarer in AAE and seem to be a function of hypercorrection, in which speakers who formerly produced desses for desks simply add the k while retaining the long plural -es, resulting in forms like deskses.

Intrusive t
A small set of items, usually ending in -s and -f in the standard variety, may be produced with a final t. This results in a final consonant cluster. Typical items affected by this process are once [wanst], twice [twast], cliff, and across. Intrusive t is primarily found in Appalachian varieties and other rural varieties characterized by the retention of older forms.

A quite different kind of intrusive t involves the “doubling” of an -ed form. In this instance, speakers add the “long past form” -ed (phonetically [ð]) to verbs that are already marked with an -ed ending pronounced as t (e.g. [lʊkt] “looked”). This process yields forms such as looked for looked and attacked for attacked. In effect, the speaker treats the verb as if its base form ends in a t so that it is eligible for the long past form that regularly is attached to verbs ending in t or d.

th sounds
There are a number of different processes that affect th sounds. The phonetic production of th is sensitive to the position of th in the word and the sounds adjacent to it. At the beginning of the word, th tends to be produced as a corresponding stop, as in dey for they ([d] for [ð]) and ting for thing ([t] for [θ]). These productions are fairly typical of a wide range of vernaculars, although there are some differences in the distribution of stopped variants for voiced vs.

voiceless th ([ð] vs. [θ]). The use of t in thing (voiceless th) tends to be most characteristic of selected European American and second-language-influenced varieties, whereas the use of d in they (voiced th) is spread across the full spectrum of vernacular varieties.

Before nasals (m, n, ng), th participates in a process in which a range of fricatives, including z, th, and v, may also become stops. This results in forms such as aritmetic for arithmetic or headn for heathen, as well as wadn’t for wasn’t, idn’t for isn’t, and sebm for seven. This pattern is typically found in Southern-based vernacular varieties, including Southern European American and African American vernacular varieties.

In word-final position and between vowels within a word (that is, in intervocalic position), th may be produced as f or v, as in efer for ether, toof for tooth, brover for brother, and smoov for smooth. This production is typical of vernacular varieties of AAE, with the v for voiced th [ð] production more typical of Eastern vernacular varieties. Some Southern-based European American dialects, as well as some varieties influenced by other languages in the recent past, also have the f production in tooth.

Some restricted varieties use a stop d for intervocalic voiced th as in oder for other or broder for brother, but this pattern is much less common than the use of a stop for th in word-initial position.

r and l
There are a number of different linguistic contexts in which r and l may be lost or reduced to a vowel-like quality. After a vowel, as in sister or steal, the r and l may be reduced or lost. This feature is quite typical of traditional Southern speech and Eastern New England speech. It is a receding feature of Southern European American English, especially in metropolitan areas.

Between vowels, r also may be lost, as in Ca’ol for Carol or du’ing for during. Intervocalic r loss is more socially stigmatized than postvocalic r loss and is found in rural, Southern-based vernaculars.
Following a consonant, the r may be lost if it precedes a rounded vowel such as u or o, resulting in pronunciations such as thu for through and tho for throw. Postconsonantal r loss may also be found if r occurs in an unstressed syllable, as in p'ofessor for professor or sec'etary for secretary. This type of r-lessness is found primarily in Southern-based varieties. Before a bilabial sound such as p, l may be lost completely, giving pronunciations like woof for wolf or hep for help. Again, this is characteristic only of Southern-based varieties. Other regional dialects (e.g. Pittsburgh, Philadelphia) sometimes vocalize l after a vowel to the point where it is almost indistinguishable from a vowel, thus making the words vow and Val sound the same.

Sometimes r-lessness causes one lexical item to converge with another. Thus, the use of they for their as in theyself or they book apparently derives from the loss of r on their, even though speakers who currently use they in such constructions may no longer associate it with r-less their.

There are also occasional instances in which an intrusive r may occur, so that items such as wash may be pronounced as warsh and idea as idear. Certain instances of intrusive r are the result of a generalized pronunciation process, whereby r can be added on to the ends of vowel-final words (e.g. idear), particularly when these words precede vowel-initial words (the idear of it). Other cases (e.g. warsh) seem to be restricted to particular lexical items and are highly regionally restricted as well.

Initial w reduction
In unstressed positions within a phrase, an initial w may be lost in items such as was and one. This results in items such as She's [ʃiz] here yesterday for She was here yesterday and young 'ans for young ones. This appears to be an extension of the process affecting the initial w of the modals will and would in standard varieties of English (as in he'll for he will, or she'd for she would). This process is found in Southern-based vernaculars.

Unstressed initial syllable loss
The general process of deleting unstressed initial syllables in informal speech styles of general American English (e.g. 'cause for because, 'round for around) is extended in vernacular varieties so that a wider range of word classes, for example, verbs such as 'member for remember or nouns such as 'taters for potatoes, and a wider range of initial syllable types (e.g. re- as in 'member for remember, su- as in 'spect for suspect) are affected by this process.

Initial h retention
The retention of h on the pronoun it [ɪt] and the auxiliary ain't [ənt] is still found in vernacular varieties retaining some older English forms, such as Appalachian English and Outer Banks English. This form is more prominent in stressed positions within a sentence. The pronunciation is fading out among younger speakers.

Nasals
There are a number of processes in vernacular varieties that affect nasal sounds; there are also items that are influenced by the presence of nasals in the surrounding linguistic environment.

One widespread process in vernacular varieties is so-called “g-dropping,” in which the nasal [ŋ], represented as ng in spelling, is pronounced as [n]. This process takes place when the ng occurs in an unstressed syllable, as in swimmin' for swimming or buyin' for buying. Linguists refer to this process as “velar fronting” since it involves the fronting of the velar nasal [ŋ], produced toward the back of the mouth, to [n], a more frontal nasal sound.

A less widespread phenomenon affecting nasals is the deletion of the word-final nasal segment in items such as man, beam, and ring, particularly when the item is in a relatively unstressed position within the sentence. Even though the nasal is deleted, the words still retain their final nasal character, because the vowel preceding the n has been nasalized, through an assimilation process common to all varieties of English. Thus, man, beam, and ring may be pronounced as ma’ [mæ], bea’ [bi], and ri’ [ri], respectively, with the vowel carrying a nasal
quality. Most frequently, this process affects the segment $n$, although all final nasal segments may be affected to some extent. This process is typical of AAE.

The phonetic quality of vowels may be affected before nasal consonants, as in the well-known merger of the contrast between $[i]$ and $[ɛ]$ before nasals as in $pin$ and $pen$. Some Southern dialects restrict this merger to a following $n$, whereas others extend it to following $m$ (e.g. $Kim$ and $chem$) and $[ŋ]$ as well.

**Devoicing**

Consonant devoicing entails the phonetic change of voiced sounds to their voiceless counterparts, as in $[d]$ to $[t]$, or $[z]$ to $[s]$. This pattern is quite prominent in dialects of English that retain influence from other languages, such as varieties like Pennsylvania German English, Wisconsin English, and Jewish English, so that words like $lose$ sound like $loose$. It is especially common in Pennsylvania German English and Jewish English to devoice word-final voiced stops (e.g., $-b$, $-d$, $-g$), so that a word like $bad$ sounds more like $bat$. Word-final $[d]$ devoicing is also common in AAE (although many times the final stop becomes glottalized, so that $wood$ is pronounced more like $[wʊʔ]$).

**Other consonants**

There are a number of other consonantal patterns that affect limited sets of items or single words. For example, speakers have used $aks$ for $ask$ for over a thousand years and still continue to use it in several vernacular varieties, including vernacular AAE. The form $chimley$ or $chimbley$ for $chimney$ is also found in a number of Southern-based vernaculars. The use of $k$ in initial $(s)tr$ clusters as in $skreet$ for $street$ or $skring$ for $string$ is found in vernacular AAE, particularly rural Southern varieties. Such items are usually very noticeable and tend to be socially stigmatized, but they occur with such limited sets of words that they are best considered on an item-by-item basis.

**Vowels**

There are many vowel patterns that differentiate the dialects of English, but the majority of these are more regionally than socially significant. The back vowel THOUGHT and the front vowel TRAP are particularly sensitive to regional variation, as are many vowels before $r$ (e.g. compare pronunciations of $merry$, $marry$, $Mary$, $Murray$) and $l$ (compare wheel, will, well, whale, etc.). Although it is not possible here to indicate all the nuances of phonetic difference reflected in the vowels of American English, several major patterns of pronunciation may be identified.

**Vowel shifts**

There are several shifts in the phonetic values of vowels that are currently taking place in American English. The important aspect of these shifts is the fact that the vowels are not shifting their phonetic values in isolation but as rotating systems of vowels. As noted in the text, one major rotation is the Northern Cities Vowel Shift. In this rotation, the phonetic values of two series of vowels are affected; the low long back vowels are moving forward and upward, and the short front vowels are moving downward and backward. For example, the THOUGHT vowel, as in coffee, is moving forward toward the LOT vowel of lock. The LOT vowel, in turn, moves towards the TRAP vowel, so that outsiders sometimes confuse lock with lack. The TRAP vowel, in turn, moves upward toward the DRESS vowel. At the same time, another rotation moves the KIT vowel toward the DRESS vowel. The DRESS vowel, in turn, moves backward toward the STRUT vowel, which is then pushed back. Short vowels and long vowels tend to rotate as different subsystems within the overall vowel system. Diagrammatically, the shift may be represented as shown in figure A.1. In this chart, front vowels appear to the left of the chart and high vowels towards the top. For convenience, “key
words" in terms of idealized standard American English phonemes are given. The arrows point in the direction of the phonetic rotations taking place in the shift.

Regionally, the pattern of vowel rotation represented in figure A.1 starts in Western New England and proceeds westward into the northern tier of Pennsylvania; the extreme northern portions of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois; Michigan; and Wisconsin. It is concentrated in the larger metropolitan areas. More advanced stages of this change can be found in younger speakers in the largest metropolitan areas in this Northern region, such as Buffalo, Albany, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago. Minority groups in these metropolitan areas tend not to participate in this phonetic shift.

The Southern Vowel Shift is quite different from the Northern Cities Vowel Shift. In this rotation pattern, the short front vowels (DRESS and KIT) are moving upward and taking on the gliding character of long vowels. In general American English, a vowel like FACE actually consists of a vowel nucleus and glide, where the nucleus is like the DRESS vowel and the glide is like the FLEECE vowel, whereas a vowel like DRESS vowel does not have this gliding character, at least not in the idealized standard variety. In the Southern Vowel Shift, DRESS vowel takes on a glide, becoming more like beyd [bɛɪd]. Meanwhile, the long front vowels (FLEECE and FACE) are moving somewhat backward and downward, and the back vowels (GOOSE and GOAT) are moving forward. This phonetic rotation is illustrated in figure A.2.

A third, more recent vowel shift is the Northern California Vowel Shift. Like the Southern Vowel Shift, the back vowels are moving forward, so the GOOSE vowel becomes more like gíws and the GOAT vowel more like gewt. But the front vowels are shifting in quite different directions. The KIT vowel is rising towards the FLEECE vowel before ng and lowering towards the DRESS vowel before other consonants. Meanwhile, the DRESS vowel is lowering towards the trap vowel, which in turn, is shifting in two directions. The TRAP vowel becomes a diphthong like stee-and for stand before nasals, while it shifts towards the LOT vowel elsewhere, so that hat sounds closer to hot. This shift is illustrated in figure A.3.

Low back vowel merger
One of the major regional pronunciation processes affecting vowels is the merger of the low back vowel, THOUGHT, and the low back/central vowel, LOT. This merger means that word pairs like caught and cot or Dawn and Don are pronounced the same. This regional merger radiates from several areas, one in Eastern New England, centered near the Boston area, one centered in Western Pennsylvania in the Ohio Valley, and one covering a large portion of the American West, excluding major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Other vowel mergers
There are a number of vowel mergers or “near mergers” that take place when vowels occur before certain kinds of consonants. The following mergers may occur before r, l, and the nasal segments (m, n, ng).

1. THOUGHT and LOT, as in Dawn and Don (Western Pennsylvania, Eastern New England, much of the Western US)
2. KIT and FLEECE before /l/, as in field and filled (South; sporadically elsewhere)
3. FACE and DRESS before /l/, as in sale and sell (South; sporadically elsewhere)
4. GOOSE and FOOT before /l/, as in pool and pull (South; sporadically elsewhere)
5. FACE, DRESS, TRAP before /r/, as in Mary, merry, marry (many areas of the US, including the South)
6. KIT and DRESS before nasals, as in pin and pen (South)

Different dialects naturally may be distinguished by the kinds of mergers in which they participate. Thus, some varieties in the South and some other areas of the United States merge the vowels of Mary, merry, and marry, while the regional dialect of Southeastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey that encompasses Philadelphia merges merry and Murray at the same time that it keeps these items distinct from Mary and marry.
Other dialects may be characterized by vowel shifts in which a vowel moves so close to another vowel that speakers from other dialect areas may think the two sounds have merged. In reality, a subtle distinction between the two sounds is maintained. For example, the backed and raised PRICE vowel of the Outer Banks of North Carolina in words like tide may seem quite similar to the CHOICE vowel, but it is maintained as distinct. Similarly, the KIT vowel may be raised so that it sounds almost like FLEECE, particularly before palatals such as sh and tch, so that people may hear feesh for fish and reach for rich. Just as with PRICE and CHOICE, though, a distinction between KIT and FLEECE is preserved. This near merger is also found in some mainland Southern varieties, including the Upper Southern variety of Appalachian English. Isolated varieties may also retain a lower vowel production of TRAP before r so that there may sound like thar and bear like bar.

**TRAP (æ) raising**
The vowel of words such as back or bag may be raised from its typical phonetic position so that it is produced closer to the DRESS vowel. The feature is found in a number of Northern areas and is an integral part of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift.

**Variants of MOUTH (au)**
The vowel nucleus of words like out, loud, and down may be produced in a number of different ways. In one pronunciation, which is sometimes referred to as Canadian Raising because of its prominence in certain areas of Canada, the nucleus of MOUTH is pronounced as a mid central (COMMA) rather than low vowel (LOT), so that a phrase such as out and about sounds like oat and about [ɔt n aʊt]. This pronunciation is found in coastal Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, as well as some scattered dialect regions in Northern areas. Other dialect areas (e.g. Philadelphia) pronounce MOUTH with a fronted nucleus [æ], as in [dæn] for down; and there is at least one dialect area (Pittsburgh) where /au/ may be produced with little or no glide as well, as in dahntahn for downtown.

In a somewhat different production, the glide of MOUTH may be fronted as well as the nucleus, so that brown [braɪn] may actually be confused with brain and house [hæs] may be confused with highest. This production is concentrated in the coastal dialects of the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern US, such as those of Smith Island and Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay and the North Carolina Outer Banks.

**Variants of ai**
Several different processes may affect the diphthong PRICE in words such as time, tide, and tight. The FLEECE glide which forms the second half of this PRICE diphthong (made up of [a] + [i]) may be lost, yielding pronunciations such as [tam] for time and [tad] for tide. This glide loss, or ungliding, is characteristic of practically all Southern-based vernaculars and is not particularly socially significant in the South. The absence of the glide is more frequent when the following segment is a voiced sound (e.g. side, time) than when it is a voiceless one (e.g. sight, rice), and only certain European American Southern varieties exhibit extensive ungliding of the PRICE vowel before voiceless sounds.

Another process affecting some varieties of American English involves the pronunciation of the nucleus of the PRICE/ai/ vowel as a mid central (COMMA) rather than low vowel (LOT), so that tide and tight may be produced as [təɪd] and [tɹɪt]. This process often parallels the raising of the nucleus of the MOUTH/MOUTH vowel and is also referred to as Canadian Raising because of its widespread presence in Canada. In the US, this type of PRICE raising is found in the Tidewater Virginia area and other Eastern coastal communities. It is especially common before voiceless sounds (e.g. [tɹɪt] “tight”).

The nucleus of PRICE may also be backed and/or raised (that is, [aɪ] is pronounced as something like [ʌɪ]) so that it sounds quite close to the CHOICE vowel. This backing and raising is associated with the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where speakers are referred to as “hoi toiders” for high tiders. A few other dialects of American English use a backed nucleus
for the PRICE vowel, including New York City English and some mainland Southern varieties. For other differences in vowel nuclei and glides, see chapter 3.

*Final unstressed BOAT (ou)*
In word-final position, general American English ow, as in hollow or yellow, may become r, giving holler or yeller, respectively. This “intrusive r” also occurs when suffixes are attached, as in fellers for fellows or narrers for narrow. This production is characteristic of Southern mountain varieties such as those found in Appalachia or the Ozarks, although it is found to some extent in rural varieties in the lowland South as well.

*Final unstressed COMMA (ə) raising*
Final unstressed a (or the COMMA vowel), as in soda or extra, may be raised to a high vowel (FLEECE/HAPPY) giving productions such as sody (phonetically [sodi]) and extry [ɛkstri]). Again, this production is found in rural Southern vernaculars.

*Other variations of schwa*
In most varieties of English, the vowel in unstressed syllables is reduced to a schwa-like quality, so that, for example, because sounds like bucause [bɔkʌz] and today like tuhday [tədei]. However, speakers of Chicano English are more likely to produce a non-reduced vowel closer to the FLEECE vowel or the GOOSE vowel, as in beecause [bikʌz] or toooday [tudei].

*ire/our collapse*
The sequence spelled ire, usually produced in general American English as a two-syllable sequence which includes the PRICE diphthong (i.e. [əɪ.ɚ] “tire”; [ɔɪ.ɚ] “fire”), can be collapsed into a one-syllable sequence when the PRICE vowel is unglided to the LOT vowel. This process yields pronunciations such as far for fire and tar for tire. It affects not only root words like fire but also the PRICE vowel+er sequences formed by the addition of an -er suffix, as in buyer [bər]. A similar process affects -our/-ower sequences which phonetically consist of a two-syllable sequence involving the MOUTH diphthong and r, as in flower [flaʊ.ɚ] or hour [aʊ.ɚ]. These sequences may be reduced to a single syllable, so that flower sounds like fla’r [flar] and hour like a’r [ar].

**Grammatical Features**

**The verb phrase**

Many of the socially significant grammatical structures in American English varieties involve aspects of the verb phrase. Some of this variation is due to the principles of readjustment discussed in chapter 2, but there are also some items that have their roots in the historical origins of different dialect varieties.

*Irregular verbs*
There are five ways in which irregular verbs pattern differently in standard and vernacular dialects of English. For the most part, these different patterns are the result of analogy, but there are also some retentions of patterns that have become obsolete in standard varieties. These differences are as follows:

1. past as participle form
I had went down there.
He may have took the wagon.

2 participle as past form
He seen something out there.
She done her work.

3 bare root as past form
She come to my house yesterday.
She give him a nice present last year.

4 regularization
Everybody knewed he was late.
They threwed out the old food.

5 different irregular form
I hear something shut the church house door.
Something just rose up right in front of me.

Dialects vary according to which of the above patterns they exhibit. The majority of vernaculars in the North and South indicate patterns 1, 2, and 3. Some rural vernaculars in the South may exhibit pattern 5 in addition to the first three. Varieties subject to the influence of second-language-learning strategies will often reveal a higher incidence of regularization pattern 4 than other varieties.

Co-occurrence relations and meaning changes
There are a number of different types of constructions that can vary from dialect to dialect based on the types of structures that can co-occur with certain verbs. There are also meaning changes that affect particular verbs. These constructions and meaning changes include the following types:

1 shifts in the transitive status of verbs (i.e. whether or not the verb must take an object)
   If we beat, we’ll be champs.

2 types of complement structures co-occurring with particular verbs
   The kitchen needs remodeled.
   The students started to messing around.
   I’ll have him to do it.
   The dog wanted out.
   Walt calls himself dancing.

3 verb plus verb particle formations
   He happened in on the party.
   The coach blessed out [swore at, yelled at] his players.

4 use of progressive with stative verbs
   He was liking the new house.
   She was wanting to get out.

5 verbs derived from other parts of speech (e.g. verbs derived from nouns)
   Our dog treed a coon.
   We doctored the sickness ourselves.

6 broadened, narrowed, or shifted semantic reference for particular verb forms
   He carried her to the movies.
   My kids took the chicken pox when they were young.
   I been aimin’ to [intending] go there.

For the most part, differences related to meaning changes and co-occurrence relations have to be dealt with on an item-by-item basis. All vernaculars, and many regional varieties, indicate meaning shifts and co-occurrence relations not found in standard English to any great extent.
Special auxiliary forms
There are a number of special uses of auxiliary forms that set apart vernacular dialects of English from their standard counterparts. Many of these auxiliaries indicate subtle but significant meanings related to the duration or type of activity indicated by verbs, or “verb aspect.”

Compleitive done
The form done when used with a past tense verb may mark a completed action or event in a way somewhat different from a simple past tense form, as in a sentence such as There was one in there that done rotted away or I done forgot what you wanted. In this use, the emphasis is on the “completive” aspect or the fact that the action has been fully completed. The done form may also add intensification to the activity, as in I done told you not to mess up. This form is typically found in Southern European American and African American vernaculars.

Habitual be
The form be in sentences such as Sometimes my ears be itching or She usually be home in the evening may signify an event or activity distributed intermittently over time or space. Habitual be is most often used in be + verb -ing constructions, as in My ears be itching. The unique aspecual meaning of be is typically associated with AAE, although isolated and restricted constructions with habitual be have been found in some rural European American varieties. In recent stylized uses often associated with hip-hop culture, the form has been extended to refer to intensified stativity or super-real status, as in I be the truth.

Be + s
In some restricted parts of the South (e.g. areas of the Carolinas where the historic influence of Highland Scots and Scots-Irish is evident), be may occur with an -s third-person suffix as in Sometimes it bes like that or I hope it bes a girl. However, bes is not restricted to contexts of habitual activity and thus is different from habitual be in AAE. Bes is also distinguished from be in contemporary AAE by the inflectional -s; further, bes is a receding form, while be in AAE is quite robust and escalating.

Remote time béen
When stressed, béen can serve to mark a special aspecual function, indicating that the event or activity took place in the “distant past” but is still relevant. In structures such as I béen had it there for years or I béen known her, the reference is to an event that took place, literally or figuratively, in some distant time frame. This use, which is associated with vernacular AAE, is dying out in some varieties of this dialect.

Fixin’ to
The use of fixin’ to (also pronounced as fixta, fista, finsta, and finna) may occur with a verb with the meaning of “about to” or “planning to”. Thus, in a sentence such as It’s fixin’ to rain, the occurrence of rain is imminent. In a construction such as I was fixin’ to come but I got held up, the speaker is indicating that he or she had intended to come. This special use of fixin’ to is found only in the South, particularly in the South Atlantic and Gulf states.

Indignant come
The use of the form come as an auxiliary in sentences such as She come acting like she was real mad or He come telling me I didn’t know what I was talking about may convey a special sense of speaker indignation. It is a camouflaged form, in the sense that it appears to be much like a comparable general American English use of come with movement verbs (e.g. She came running home), but it does not function in the same way as its standard counterpart. It is found in AAE.
**A- prefixing**

An a- prefix may occur on -ing forms functioning as verbs or as complements of verbs as in *She was a-comin' home or He made money a-fishin’*. This form cannot occur on -ing forms that function as nouns or adjectives. Thus, it cannot occur in sentences such as *He likes a-sailin’ or *The movie was a-charmin*. The a- is also restricted phonologically, in that it occurs only on forms whose first syllable is accented; thus, it may occur on a-followin’ but not usually on *a-discoverin*. As currently used by some speakers, the a- prefix may be used to indicate intensity, but it does not appear to have any unique aspectual marking analogous to habitual be or completive done. It is associated with vernacular Southern mountain speech but is found in many other rural varieties as well. To a lesser degree, an a- prefix also can be attached to other verb forms, such as participles in She’s a-worked there or even to simple past forms as in She a-wondered what happened.

**Double modals**

Double modals are combinations of two modal verbs, or verbs expressing certain “moods” such as certainty, possibility, obligation, or permission. Possible combinations include might could, useta could, might should, might oughta, and so forth. Sentences such as *I might could go there or You might oughta take it are typically Southern vernacular structures; in Northern varieties, modal clustering occurs only with useta, as in *He useta couldn’t do it*. Double modals tend to lessen the force of the attitude or obligation conveyed by single modals, so that *She might could do it is less forceful than either She might do it or She could do it. In some Southern regions, double modals are quite widespread and not particularly stigmatized.

**Liketa and (su)poseta**

The forms liketa and (su)poseta may be used as special verb modifiers to mark the speaker’s perceptions that a significant event was on the verge of happening. Liketa is an aversive, in that it is used to indicate an impending event that was narrowly avoided. It is often used in a figurative rather than literal sense; for example, in a sentence such as *It was so cold, I liketa froze to death*, the speaker may never have been in any real danger of freezing, but the use of liketa underscores the intensity of the condition. (Su)poseta, in sentences such as *You (su)poseta went there*, parallels the general American English construction supposed to have.

**Quotative be like and go**

Over the past few decades, the use of be like and go to introduce a quote (e.g. So she’s like, “Where are you going?” and I go, “Where do you think?”) has shown phenomenal growth. Once associated with Valley Girl talk in California, it is now used throughout North America, as well as the British Isles, Australia, and New Zealand. It is also now used in a wide variety of vernacular varieties, even some situated in comparative cultural or regional isolation. Because of its relatively recent expansion, it is much more common among speakers born after the 1960s than those born earlier, though it is now even being adopted by some older speakers. Some speakers of AAE may still use say to introduce a quote, as in *I told him, say, “Where you going?"* but its use is rapidly receding. In fact, quotative be like is taking over in AAE as it is in other dialects. Quotative be like can also be used in a somewhat more figurative sense, to introduce an imagined quote, or what the speaker was thinking rather than literally saying at the time, as in *I was like “What is wrong with you?”* A related form is quotative be all, as in a sentence such as *I was all, “What’s going on?”

**Absence of be forms**

Where contracted forms of is or are may occur in general American English, these same forms may be absent in some vernacular varieties. Thus, we get structures such as *You ugly or She taking the dog out corresponding to the general American English structures You’re ugly and She’s taking the dog out, respectively. It is important to note that this absence takes place only on “contractible” forms; thus, it does not affect they are in a construction such as That’s where they are, since they are cannot be contracted to they’re in this instance. Furthermore, the
absence of be does not usually apply to am, so that sentences such as I ugly do not occur. The deletion of are is typical of both Southern European American and African American varieties, although the absence of is is not very extensive in most European American vernaculars. A more general version of be absence – that includes am and past tense – is sometimes found in varieties developed in the process of learning English as a second language.

Subject–verb agreement
There are a number of different subject–verb agreement patterns that enter into the social and regional differentiation of dialects. These include the following:

1 agreement with existential there
   There was five people there.
   There’s two women in the lobby.
2 leveling to was for past tense forms of be
   The cars was out on the street.
   Most of the kids was younger up there.
3 leveling to were with negative past tense be
   It weren’t me that was there last night.
   She weren’t at the creek.
4 leveling to is for present tense forms of be
   The dogs is in the house.
   We is doing it right now.
5 agreement with the form don’t
   She don’t like the cat in the house.
   It don’t seem like a holiday.
6 agreement with have
   My nerves has been on edge.
   My children hasn’t been there much.
7 -s suffix on verbs occurring with third-person plural noun phrase subjects
   Some people likes to talk a lot.
   Me and my brother gets in fights.
8 -s absence on third-person singular forms
   The dog stay outside in the afternoon.
   She usually like the evening news.

Different vernacular varieties exhibit different patterns in terms of the above list. Virtually all vernacular varieties show patterns 1, 2, and 5 above (in fact, MAE varieties are moving towards the pattern found in 1), but in different degrees. The patterns illustrated in 6 and 7 above are most characteristic of rural varieties in the South, and that in 8 is most typical of vernacular AAE. The leveling of past be to weren’t in 3 appears to be regionally restricted to some coastal dialect areas of the Southeast such as the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Maryland, and the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Past tense absence
Many cases of past tense -ed absence on verbs (e.g. Yesterday he mess up) can be accounted for by the phonological process of consonant cluster reduction found in the discussion of phonology. However, there are some instances in which the use of unmarked past tense forms represents a genuine grammatical difference. Such cases are particularly likely to be found in varieties influenced by other languages in their recent past. Thus, structures such as He bring the food yesterday or He play a new song last night may be the result of a grammatical process rather than a phonological one. Grammatically based tense unmarking tends to be more frequent on regular verbs than irregular ones, so that a structure such as Yesterday he play a
new song is more likely than Yesterday he is in a new store, although both may occur. In some cases, both phonological and grammatical processes operate in a convergent way.

Tense unmarking has been found to be prominent in varieties such as Vietnamese English and Native American Indian English in the Southwest. In the latter case, unmarking is favored in habitual contexts (e.g. In those days, we play a different kind of game) as opposed to simple past time (e.g. Yesterday, we play at a friend’s house).

Historical present
In the dramatic recounting of past time events, speakers may use present tense verb forms rather than past tense forms, as in I go down there and this guy comes up to me. . . . In some cases an -s suffix may be added to non-third-person forms, particularly with the first person form of say (e.g. so I says to him . . . ). This structure is more prominent in European American vernaculars than in AAE.

Perfective be
Some isolated varieties of American English may use forms of be rather than have in present perfect constructions, as in I’m been there before for “I’ve been there before” or You’re taken the best medicine for “You have taken the best medicine”. This construction occurs most frequently in first-person singular contexts (e.g. I’m forgot) but can also occur in the first-person plural and in second-person contexts as well (e.g. we’re forgot, you’re been there). Occasionally, the perfect tense can even be formed with invariant be, as in We be come here for nothing or I’ll be went to the post office. Perfective be derives from the earlier English formation of the perfect with be rather than have for certain verbs (e.g. He is risen vs. “He has risen”). In most cases, it is a retention of the older pattern.

Adverbs

Adverb placement
There are several differences in terms of the position of the adverb within the sentence, including the placement of certain time adverbs within the verb phrase, as in We were all the time talking or We watched all the time the news on TV. These cases do not hold great social significance and are not particularly socially stigmatized. More socially marked is the change in order with various forms of ever, as in everwhat, everwho, or everwhich (e.g. Everwho wanted to go could go). These are remnants of older English patterns and are mostly dying out.

Comparatives and superlatives
Most vernacular varieties of English indicate some comparative and superlative adjective and adverb forms that are not found in standard varieties. Some forms involve the regularization of irregular forms, as in badder or mostest, while others involve the use of -er and -est on adjectives of two or more syllables (e.g. beautifulest, awfulest), where the standard variety uses more and most. In some instances, comparatives and superlatives are doubly marked, as in most awfulest or more nicer. As we discuss in chapter 2, both regularization and double marking are highly natural language processes.

-ly absence
In present-day American English, some adverbs that formerly ended in an -ly suffix no longer take -ly. Thus, in informal contexts, most general American English speakers say They
answered wrong instead of They answered wrongly. The range of items affected by -ly absence can be extended in different vernacular dialects. These items may be relatively unobtrusive (e.g. She enjoyed life awful well) or quite obtrusive (e.g. I come from Virginia original). The more stigmatized forms are associated with Southern-based vernacular varieties, particularly Southern mountain varieties such as Appalachian and Ozark English.

Intensifying adverbs
In some Southern-based vernaculars, certain adverbs can be used to intensify particular attributes or activities. In general American English, the adverb right is currently limited to contexts involving location or time (e.g. He lives right around the corner). However, in Southern-based vernaculars, right may be used to intensify the degree of other types of attributes, as in She is right nice. Other adverbs, such as plumb, serve to indicate intensity to the point of totality, as in The students fell plumb asleep. In some parts of the South, slam is used to indicate “totality” rather than plumb, as in The students fell slam asleep; clean may be used in a similar way in other areas, including some Northern dialects (e.g. The hole went clean through the wall). The use of big in big old dog, little in little old dog, and right in It hurts right much also function as intensifiers in these varieties.

A special function of the adverb steady has been described for AAE. In this variety, steady may be used in constructions such as They be steady messing with you to refer to an intense, ongoing activity.

Other adverbial forms
There are a number of other cases in which the adverbial forms of vernacular varieties differ from their standard counterparts. Some of these involve word class changes, as in the use of but as an adverb meaning “only,” as in He ain’t but thirteen years old, or the item all in The corn got all (“The corn is all gone/finished”). In many Midland dialects of American English, anymore may be used in positive constructions with a meaning of “nowadays,” as in She watches a lot of videos anymore.

Some vernacular dialects contain adverbial lexical items not found at all in standard varieties, for example, adverbs of location such as yonder, thisaway, thataway, and so forth (e.g. It’s up yonder; It’s thisaway, not thataway). Other adverbial differences come from the phonological fusion of items, as in t’all from at all (e.g. It’s not coming up t’all), pert’ near (e.g. She’s pert’ near seventy), or druther (e.g. Druther than lose the farm, he fought). In parts of the South historically influenced by Scots-Irish, the adverb whenever may be used to indicate a one-time event (e.g. Whenever he died, we were young) rather than habitually occurring events (e.g. Whenever we dance, he’s my partner), as it does in most general American varieties. Again, such differences must be considered on an item-by-item basis.

Negation
The two major vernacular negation features of American English are the use of so-called “double negatives,” or the marking of negative meaning at more than one point in a sentence, and the use of the lexical item ain’t. Other forms, resulting directly from the acquisition of English as a second language (e.g. He no like the man), are found in the speech of people learning English as a second language, but these do not seem to be perpetuated as a continuing part of the vernacular English variety of such speakers once they have completed their transition to English. An exception may be the negative tag no as found in some Hispanic English varieties, as in They’re going to the store, no?

Multiple negation
There are four different patterns of multiple negative marking found in the vernacular varieties of English:
marking of the negative on the auxiliary verb and the indefinite(s) following the verb
The man wasn’t saying nothing.
He didn’t say nothing about no people bothering him or nothing like that.

negative marking of an indefinite before the verb phrase and of the auxiliary verb
Nobody didn’t like the mess.
Nothing can’t stop him from failing the course.

inversion of the negativized auxiliary verb and the pre-verbal indefinite
Didn’t nobody like the mess. (“Nobody liked the mess”)
Can’t nothing stop him from failing the course.

multiple negative marking across different clauses
There wasn’t much that I couldn’t do (meaning “There wasn’t much I could do”).
I wasn’t sure that nothing wasn’t going to come up (meaning “I wasn’t sure that anything was going to come up”).

Virtually all vernacular varieties of English participate in multiple negation of type 1; restricted Northern and most Southern vernaculars participate in 2; most Southern vernaculars participate in 3; and restricted Southern and African American vernacular varieties participate in 4.

The item ain’t may be used as a variant for certain standard American English forms, including the following:

1 forms of be + not
She ain’t here now.
I ain’t gonna do it.

2 forms of have + not
I ain’t seen her in a long time.
She ain’t gone to the movies in a long time.

3 did + not
He ain’t tell him he was sorry.
I ain’t go to school yesterday.

The first two types are found in most vernacular varieties, but the third type, in which ain’t corresponds with standard didn’t, has only been found in AAE.

Past tense wont
The form wont, pronounced much like the negative modal won’t, may occur as a generalized form for past tense negative be – that is, wasn’t and weren’t. Thus, we may find sentences such as It wont me and My friends wont the ones who ate the food. Although the form probably arose through the application of phonological processes to forms of wasn’t and weren’t, wont now seems to serve as a past tense analogue of ain’t, since both ain’t and wont have a single form for use with all persons and numbers (as opposed to standard forms of be + not, which vary quite a bit by person and number). Its use is restricted to rural Southern varieties, particularly those found in the South Atlantic region.

Nouns and pronouns

Constructions involving nouns and pronouns are often subject to socially significant dialect variation. The major types of differences involve the attachment of various suffixes and the use of particular case markings – that is, inflectional forms that indicate the role which nouns and pronouns play in the particular sentences in which they occur.
Plurals

There are several different ways in which plurals may be formed which differentiate them from plurals found in general American English. These include the following:

1. general absence of plural suffix
   Lots of boy go to the school.
   All the girl liked the movie.

2. restricted absence of plural suffix with measurement nouns
   The station is four mile down the road.
   They hauled in a lotta bushel of corn.

3. regularization of various irregular plural noun forms
   They saw the deers running across the field.
   The firemans liked the convention.

Plural absence of type 1 is found only among varieties where another language was spoken in the recent past and, to a limited degree, in AAE. In category 2, plural suffix absence is limited to nouns of weights (e.g. four pound, three ton) and measures (e.g. two foot, twenty mile) that occur with a “quantifying” word such as a number (e.g. four) or plural modifier (e.g. a lot of, some), including some temporal nouns (e.g. two year, five month); this pattern is found in Southern-based rural vernaculars. Category 3 includes regularization of plurals that are not overtly marked in general American English (e.g. deers, sheeps), forms marked with irregular suffixes in the standard (e.g. oxes), and forms marked by vowel changes (e.g. firemans, snowmans). In the last case, plurals may be double-marked, as in mens or childrens. Some kinds of plurals in category 3 are quite widespread among the vernacular varieties of English (e.g. regularizing non-marked plurals such as deers), whereas others (e.g. double marking in mens) are more limited.

Possessives

There are several patterns involving possessive nouns and pronouns, including the following:

1. the absence of the possessive suffix
   The man hat is on the chair.
   John coat is here.

2. regularization of the possessive pronoun mines, by analogy with yours, his, hers, etc.
   Mines is here.
   It’s mines.

3. the use of possessive forms ending in -n, as in hisn, ourn, or yourn. Such forms can only be found in phrase- or sentence-final position (called absolute position), as in It is hisn or It was yourn that I was talking about; -n forms do not usually occur in structures such as It is hern book.
   Is it yourn?
   I think it’s hisn.

The first two types of possessives are typical of vernacular varieties of AAE, and the third type is found in vernacular Appalachian English and other rural varieties characterized by the retention of relic forms, although it is now restricted to older speakers in these varieties.

Pronouns

Pronoun differences typically involve regularization by analogy and rule extension. The categories of difference include the following:

1. regularization of reflexive forms by analogy with other possessive pronouns such as myself, yourself, ourselves, etc.)
   He hit hisself on the head.
They shaved theirselves with the new razor.

2 extension of object forms with coordinate subjects
   Me and him will do it.
   John and them will be home soon.

3 adoption of a second-person plural form to “fill out” the person–number paradigm (I, you, he/she/it, we, you, they)
   a Y’all won the game.
   I’m going to leave y’all now.
   b Youse won the game.
   I’m going to leave youse now.
   c You’uns won the game.
   I’m going to leave you’uns now.

4 extension of object forms to demonstratives
   Them books are on the shelf.
   She didn’t like them there boys.

5 a special personal dative use of the object pronoun form
   I got me a new car.
   We had us a little old dog.

The first four types of pronominal difference are well represented in most vernacular dialects of English. The particular form used for the second-person plural pronoun (type 3) varies by region: 3a is the Southern form, 3b is the Northern form, and 3c is the form used in an area extending from Southern Appalachia to Pittsburgh. The so-called personal dative illustrated in 5 is a Southern feature that indicates that the subject of the sentence (e.g. we) benefited in some way from the object (e.g. little old dog).

Other pronoun forms, such as the use of an object form with a non-coordinate subject (e.g. Her in the house) and the use of subject or object forms in possessive structures (e.g. It is she book; It is he book), are quite rare in most current vernaculars, except for those still closely related to a prior creole. The use of possessive me, as in It’s me cap, is occasionally found in historically isolated varieties which have some Scots-Irish influence.

Relative pronouns
Differences affecting relative pronouns (e.g. who in She’s the one who gave me the present) include the use of certain relative pronoun forms in contexts where they would not be used in general American English and the absence of relative pronouns under certain conditions. Differences in relative pronoun forms may range from the relatively socially insignificant use of that for human subjects (e.g. The person that I was telling you about is here) to the quite stigmatized use of what, as in The person what I was telling you about is here. One form that is becoming more common, and spreading into informal varieties of general American English, is the use of the relative pronoun which as a coordinating conjunction (i.e. and), as in They gave me this cigar, which they know I don’t smoke cigars.

In general American English, relative pronouns may be deleted if they are the object in the relative clause. For example, That’s the dog that I bought may alternately be produced as That’s the dog I bought. In most cases where the relative pronoun is the subject, however, the pronoun must be retained, as in That’s the dog that bit me. However, a number of Southern-based varieties may sometimes delete relative pronouns in subject position, as in That’s the dog bit me or The man come in here is my father. The absence of the relative pronoun is more common in existential constructions such as There’s a dog bit me than in other constructions.

Existential it/they
As used in sentences such as There are four people in school and There’s a picture on TV, the American English form there is called an existential, since it indicates the mere existence of something rather than specific location (as in Put the book over there). Vernacular varieties may use it or they for there in existential constructions, as in It’s a dog in the yard or They’s a
good show on TV. They for there seems to be found only in Southern-based vernaculars; it is more general in vernacular varieties.

Other grammatical structures

There are a number of additional structures not included in this overview of vernacular grammatical constructions. Some of the excluded forms include those that were once thought to be confined to vernacular varieties but have been shown to be quite common in informal standard varieties. For example, we did not include the structure known as “pronominal apposition,” in which a pronoun is used in addition to a noun in subject position, as in My father, he made my breakfast, because this feature is found in practically all social groups of American English speakers, even though it is often considered to be a vernacular dialect feature. Furthermore, it is not particularly obtrusive in spoken language. It has also been found that the use of inverted word order in indirect questions, as in She asked could she go to the movies, is becoming just as much a part of informal spoken general American English as indirect questions without inverted word order, as in She asked if she could go to the movies. Other differences, such as those affecting prepositions, have to be treated on an item-by-item basis and really qualify as lexical rather than grammatical differences. Thus, forms such as of a evening/of the evening (“in the evening”), upside the head (“on the side of the head”), leave out of there (“leave from there”), the matter of him (“the matter with him”), to for at (e.g. She’s to the store right now), and so forth have to be treated individually. Infinitive constructions such as for to, as in I’d like for you to go vs. I’d like you to go, or even I’d like for to go also constitute a case of a restricted lexical difference. Similarly, cases of article use or non-use, such as the use of articles with certain illnesses and diseases (e.g. She has the colic, He had the earache) affect only certain lexical items in particular dialects. Traditional Linguistic Atlas surveys and the Dictionary of American Regional English give much more adequate detail about these forms than can be given in this overview.

Figure A.1 The Northern Cities Vowel Shift (adapted from Labov 1991)
Figure A.2 The Southern Vowel Shift (adapted from Labov 1991)
Figure A.3 The Northern California Vowel Shift