Making Transatlantic Connections between Varieties of English

The Case of Plural Verbal -*s*

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In recent years, the tracing of varieties of American English back to the British Isles, long a stated goal of American dialectologists, has received attention on a more popular level, especially with the broadcast of the television series *The Story of English* and the ensuing best-selling book (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 1986) and the publication of historian David Hackett Fischer's (1989) magisterial volume *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. Fischer's work represents the most ambitious attempt yet to weave what is known about British and American folklife, social traits, building patterns, speech ways, and many other aspects of culture into an account addressing the question of how American regional cultures originated, at least in the Atlantic states. To draw their linguistic connections, *The Story of English* and Fischer rely heavily on the work of American linguistic geographers from the 1920s to the 1950s, such as Hans Kurath's (1949) classic *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. Since the 1950s, however, American linguists have given little attention to identifying the British and Irish antecedents of American English, with few exceptions such as W. Nelson Francis (1959, 1961) and Kurath's own continuing work (e.g., 1965, 1968, 1970). Dialect geographers have devoted their energies to basic tasks of collecting and editing material rather than following up Kurath's efforts to reconstruct the history of specific features of American English back to the British Isles. As more has been learned about the dynamics of dialect contact (e.g., Trudgill 1986), socially motivated language change, and the quantitative analysis of language variation, even the attempts of

Kurath and Francis to specify transatlantic connections seem piecemeal and lacking in both an adequate underlying theory and a conceptual framework for the task. Other reasons for the lack of progress might also be suggested, but this article argues that transatlantic comparisons have faced one crucial, long-ignored difficulty: the problem of missing links—that is, of inadequate data both from the American colonial period and from earlier regional and social varieties of English, the latter being principal input varieties to Colonial American speech. Sufficient data from these periods, analyzed within a more sophisticated framework, might well enable what Kurath envisaged—the step-by-step tracing of patterns from twentieth-century American English back to colonial days and then along the immigrant trail to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British English. Making historical connections across the Atlantic requires the reconstruction of the speech that colonists brought with them and the speech of their descendants one or more generations later as it came into contact with other languages and other varieties of English.

Reconstructing Colonial American English, especially its grammatical patterns, faces several obvious problems, such as major gaps in the documentary record from the period and untangling the complex matrix of linguistic varieties forming the dialect and language contact situations in most colonial locations. Even if we had plentiful vernacular texts to examine, and we very rarely do, or if we knew which dialect groups were in contact at a particular place and time and which dialect patterns immigrants probably brought to the colonies, specifying what various groups contributed to the formation of colonial linguistic patterns would remain a great challenge.

Colonial American linguistic contexts were complicated ones. No variety of British or Irish English came to American shores without soon changing. No variety of American English escaped contact with others (and, as Bernard Bailyn [1986] has pointed out, regional mobility within Britain meant considerable contact before speakers of British English came to North America). Throughout the colonies new social orders and new varieties of language were created, involving processes that probably took several generations in some places. The heterogeneity of most colonial speech communities, especially along the Atlantic coast, was fostered by the variable social dynamics of each locality and by the contact of many languages and regional and social varieties of English brought by immigrants. It may have led to what has recently been referred to as an American "koiné" (Dillard 1975; Trudgill 1986), although the timing, extent, and details of this development have received more conjecture than demonstration (Montgomery 1995). Trudgill emphasizes the processes involved in dialect contact and the formation of a koiné—dynamic changes such as simplification, mixing, leveling, and reallocation, as well as the more static, direct carryover of linguistic patterns. Trudgill's work in particular has shifted the emphasis away from the attempt to connect individual linguistic forms across varieties of English—most often lexical forms—to processes of phonologi-

cal and grammatical shift. Within this larger, richer, and in many ways more ambitious framework of examining linguistic relationships, retentions of patterns—the main focus of earlier scholars—are still of interest, but they are viewed as only one aspect of dialect evolution.

This article contributes to our knowledge of transatlantic linguistic connections by reconstructing part of one grammatical subsystem—that for subject-verb concord over the past five centuries. More specifically, it examines the extent to which verbs having an -*s* suffix and the copula and auxiliary verb *is* occur with third-person plural subjects in collocations like *Many people knows* and *The trees is all gone*. This feature of marking third-person plural verbs we will call Plural Verbal -*s*.

This reconstruction is part of a larger effort to determine the relationships between twentieth-century American English, in particular Appalachian English, and Scottish English (also called Scots) of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century period. The larger effort seeks to trace the operation of grammatical subsystems—concord, modality, aspect, and others—through the language of the Scots who left Lowland Scotland for the province of Ulster in Ireland in the seventeenth century, many of the descendants of whom immigrated to American colonies during the eighteenth century and became known as the Scotch-Irish (or, as they are usually known in Ireland, as the Ulster Scots; see Montgomery 1992a; Montgomery and Nagle 1993; Montgomery and Robinson 1996). Crucial to this investigation are data from immigrant letters, which represent a missing link between language patterns attested independently on both sides of the Atlantic.

This research seeks to address three evidentiary and substantive questions: (1) What constitutes evidence for a transatlantic connection between varieties of English? (2) How may such a connection be made? (3) How have patterns of Old World English changed in the New World context of dialect contact and mixing?

Answering these questions for grammatical patterns requires three sets of standards—documentary, methodological, and analytical—to be met as well as possible. These are discussed briefly below and in more detail in Montgomery (1989). Several of them, particularly the first methodological standard, have been cited and observed by Kurath in his research and sometimes by other researchers as well. While too ambitious for many transatlantic comparisons of English, given the nature of data often available, these standards represent useful goals for researchers and enable explicit linguistic comparisons.

Documentary Standards

First we cite two documentary standards. One is that a large quantity of valid data is required. Comparison of grammatical features normally presupposes large amounts of written data that most nearly reflect the patterns of the spoken language;

such quantities are necessary to show what variant forms occur and the productivity of given forms in various contexts. The second standard is characterizing the style and sociolinguistic nature of the data being compared as well as possible. The difficulties in meeting these standards derive from the facts that good documents are scarce and disparate, rarely providing information on their author(s), and that most documents are of mixed quality, showing only partial evidence of the vernacular language. What we might call the researcher's paradox comes into play here— that the type of writing most desired is that which is hardest to find, since the majority of settlers were not literate or only barely so (and thus left no documents), and the small number who were highly literate both wrote more and had descendants who more often preserved their writing. Later in this article it will become clear how the data at hand meet these documentary standards.

Methodological Standards

We now mention three important methodological standards and reference them to this study.

The first is that demographic information from the documentary record shows a historical connection between the groups speaking the varieties concerned.

As mentioned, the Scotch-Irish from Ulster descended primarily from Scotland, particularly Lowland areas of the Southwest such as Ayrshire, Wigtonshire, and Kirkcudbrightshire (Robinson 1984) in what was known as the Plantation of Ulster that began around 1610. To Ireland they brought a variety of Scottish English in many ways strikingly different from London English (Robinson 1989). The immigration to North America began in the late 1600s and reached significant numbers after 1717, bringing roughly a quarter million people from Ulster to American shores by 1776 (Dickson 1966). These immigrants formed the fourth settlement movement that historian Fischer (1989, 605ff) deals with under the rubric "Borderlands to the Background: The Flight from North Britain." Roughly half a million Scotch-Irish/Ulster Scots remain in the north of Ireland today.

The great majority of Scotch-Irish immigrants landed in northern Delaware or southeastern Pennsylvania, especially at Philadelphia. Most soon headed westward to frontier areas, pushing across Pennsylvania to the back country and spreading southwestward across Virginia, reaching the mountains of Southern Appalachia and settling in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee within two generations. At roughly the same time, they moved into the Piedmont areas of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, so that settlement of much of the interior Southeast had begun by the time of the American Rebellion. Along with the Germans and the English, the Scotch-Irish were one of the earliest groups, and by most accounts the largest, to populate the colonial back country and then to move into Appalachia (Leyburn 1962; Ford 1915). Appalachia, while certainly not an enclave, is a region

relatively more isolated than most others in the United States, differing from Northern areas in having little contact with non-English-speaking European groups and from Deep South communities in having almost no contact with Africans in the early period. The primary linguistic contact, throughout the history of the region, took place between Scotch-Irish and Southern British English, with the emergence of a variety of English extraordinarily similar across Appalachia and into the Ozark Mountain region of Arkansas and Missouri as well (Christian, Wolfram, and Dube 1988); only later in the period was there significant influence on Appalachian English from a more standardized version of American English.

The second methodological standard is that full, explicit descriptions of the grammatical feature within each variety are made on a quantitative basis, if possible. This assumes we have met the previously mentioned documentary standards.

The third standard is that the existence of the grammatical features in question should be as closely limited to the varieties concerned as possible (the closer in time the connection between varieties being compared, the less relevant this standard is). A variety of dictionaries and commentaries reveal that plural verbal -*s* has in fact been widespread in both British/Irish and American English. The limitations of time prevent a close examination of this evidence, but suffice it to say that there appears to be no other plausible source of plural verbal -*s* in Britain and Ireland than Scottish and Northumbrian English, and the extent to which it occurred in varieties of Middle English and Early Modern English in the Midlands was due to the influence of Northern varieties.[1] According to Barber (1976, 242), "in [Middle English], the use of -*es* (-*is*, -*ys*) as a plural inflection is found in Scots, in Northern England, and in part of the North-East Midlands. . . . Its occasional use in the Southern standard language in [Early Modern English] may be due to the influence of such Northern forms." It was apparently not a feature of Elizabethan English, except very sporadically for some writers. This case for regional demarcation is presented in detail in Montgomery (1989). However, meeting this third methodological standard actually comes down to more specific considerations: whether plural subject-verb concord is governed by the same constraint(s) in the varieties being compared and whether plural verbal -*s* occurs in these varieties at a level significantly different from other varieties.[2]

Analytical Standards

Finally, four analytical standards are proposed that are based on "principles of accountability" (Rickford 1986, 39-40) that establish and control, to the extent possible, the semantic dimensions of grammatical forms and explicitly specify the linguistic contexts in which the forms are expected to occur. Specifying the contexts of grammatical features is necessary to limit, as much as possible, the covariation of form and meaning (Romaine 1983).

1. Identifying the form and meaning of the linguistic feature
2. Specifying the linguistic environment(s) in which the feature occurs
3. Tabulating the frequency with which the feature and its variant forms occur, in terms of a specific, unambiguous context, if possible
4. Considering the interrelation of the feature under study with others in the grammar

This article meets these four analytical standards in various ways—the first and the second by the careful identification and extraction of plural verbal -*s* in a consistent environment (third-person, present-tense contexts), the third by the compilation of plural verbal -*s* into five tables (Tables 5, 7, 9, 10, and 12). The fourth standard, while not a concern of the present analysis, is dealt with in the larger study.[3]

The approach from this point will be a chronological one, examining variation in present-tense verbal concord with third-person plural subjects in sequence for Scottish English, Scotch-Irish English, and then Appalachian English. The concern will be with linguistic variation rather than with social differences between types of speakers or writers and primarily with the level of occurrence of what we will call the subject-type constraint, which involves the differential marking of plural verbal -*s*. According to this constraint, the verb is marked with -*s* (or copula/ auxiliary *is* is used) when the subject is a noun or any pronoun (i.e., a relative, indefinite, or interrogative pronoun) other than an immediately preceding personal pronoun. With this in mind, the occurrence of plural verbal -*s* in five sets of data will be calculated according to different types of subjects and for different types of verbs (copula vs. noncopula) and will be presented in tables.

Of crucial importance in building our case are two recently assembled sets of data, the Duntreath letters bridging Scotland and Ireland in the early seventeenth century and a collection of Ulster immigrant letters bridging Ireland and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Table 1 shows diagrammatically the progression of available data sources and commentaries on the patterning of plural verbal -*s*. Although space prevents us from discussing it, there is plentiful evidence that plural verbal -*s* and the subject-type constraint continue to be prevalent in modern-day varieties of English in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Table 2 presents the inflectional paradigm for the present-tense indicative for Older Scottish English (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries), as adapted from Aitken (1978). It shows that the -*is* inflection prevailed throughout, except for two specific contexts—with a first-person singular subject or with a plural subject, but in both of these cases only when a personal pronoun was adjacent, in which case the verb was marked with zero. Thus, in Scottish English, the suffix marked neither number agreement nor person agreement but historically has been governed by the type of subject (Montgomery [1994] demonstrates this for texts from the fourteenth

TABLE 1
Documentary Sources for the Reconstruction of Plural Verbal -*s*

	Scottish English	Scotch-Irish English	Appalachian English
Century			
14-16	Aitken paradigm		
17	Duntreath letters		
18/19		Ulster immigrant letters	
19/early 20	Murray grammar (1873), Wilson (1915)	Byers (1915)	Smoky Mountain records
Later 20	Macafee (1980)	Milroy (1987)	Hackenberg (1973), Wolfram and Christian (1976)

TABLE 2
Indicative Paradigm: Present-Tense Endings, Fourteenth Century

	Older/Middle Scottish English			
	Adjacent Personal Pronoun	Personal Pronoun Not Adjacent	South Midland	Southern
Singular first	0	-*is*	-*e*	-*e*
Second	-*is*	-*is*	-*est*	-*est*
Third	-*is*	-*is*	-*eth*	-*eth*
Plural	0	-*is*	-*e(n)*	-*eth*

through the seventeenth century, while Wilson [1915] and Macafee [1980] cite it for the modern day). Moreover, the occurrence of this suffix depended on a more specific constraint than whether the subject was a noun versus a pronoun; rather, a verb with any subject other than an immediately adjacent personal pronoun (*I* or *they*) was normally marked with -*is* in Older Scottish English. We see from Table 2 that the typical concord pattern in Older Scottish English differed from that of South Midland and Southern varieties of Late Middle English of the same period.

In point of fact, this paradigm dates back even farther than the fourteenth century; Henry Sweet (1891, 378) states that it was prevalent "already in the [Old English] period." Sir James Murray (1873, 212), in his historical grammar of Scottish English, says that "before the date of the earliest Northern writings of the thirteenth century, the form without the -*s* had been extended to all cases in which the verb was accompanied by its proper pronoun, whether before or after it, leaving the full form in -*s* to be used with other nominatives only." Table 3 shows Murray's comparison of Scottish English and Southern British English concord patterns.

Because quantitative evidence is not yet available from earlier stages of Scottish English, we might doubt whether our first documentary standard, which calls for a large quantity of data, and our second methodological standard, which calls for an explicit, quantitatively based description, can be met. But this is not a problem,

TABLE 3
Comparison of Scottish English and Southern British English

Scottish English	Southern British English Equivalent	Type of Subject
aa cum fyrst	I come first	Adjacent personal pronoun
yt's mey at cums fyrst	It's me that comes first	Relative pronoun
the burds cums an peacks them	The birds come and peak them	Common noun
sum thynks hey was reycht	Some think he was right	Indefinite pronoun

SOURCE: Adapted from Murray (1873, 211-12).

because plural verbal -s had the advantage of stable, paradigmatic status in Middle Scots. In short, plural verbal -s was a feature of Standard Scottish English, a feature of literary usage, in fact, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[4] Given its paradigmatic status, this is why the -s suffix is called plural verbal -s in this article rather than "lack of agreement" (Hackenberg 1973, 33) or "nonconcord" -s (Wolfram and Christian 1976, 77ff.), terms used in other studies of subject-verb concord in modern-day Appalachian English.[5]

Scotland to Ulster

Bridging Scottish English and Scotch-Irish English of the early Ulster Plantation period and representing a sample of the latter are data from selected letters from the Sir Archibald Edmonstone of Duntreath, Baronet, manuscript collection (Historical Manuscripts Commission 1909). These documents, referred to as the "Duntreath Letters," were written between the Edmonstone household of Stirlingshire, Scotland (north of Glasgow), and relatives and associates who had settled in Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland.[6] For this analysis, the twenty-seven private letters written between 1609 and 1631 are used. Some of these are quite informal, discussing intimate family details, while others are relatively formal and discuss business and political affairs. The following is an excerpt from a letter dated 11 June 1628 from Patrick McDowell to the Laird of Duntreath, begging the forbearance of the latter for McDowell's delinquent rent:

> Rycht worthie and most speciall Sir, my deutie remembrithe. I am informed that thair is many misreportis of me in that countrye, bot be God's grace they sall be defeatted that thinkis itt. Nowe, Sir, as tuiching your rent, I am wonderfull sorye that I have bein so far in the wrong to yowe as to have bein ane motioun quhairby ye want your awin; ... (p. 129)

As can be seen from sentences D-1 to D-5 in Table 4, illustrating plural verbal concord with five types of subjects, the language here is clearly Scottish English,

TABLE 4
Examples from Duntreath Letters with Different Types of Subject

(D-1) Conjoined noun phrase: Adam McBurnie and James Morison *sayes yow* have overcharged them in your rentall. . . .

(D-2) Existential *there*: Ye shall wit that their *hes* bin servants of my Lord Cheichesters heir.

(D-3) Common noun: And as hir servandis *shawes* to me. . . .

(D-4) Relative noun: I have this day reseved letters from Scotland quhich *urgis* me to go over with. . . .

(D-5) *They*: But these sort of men will not cease till thai *bring* trouble upon themselfes.

TABLE 5
Plural Subject-Verb Concord in Duntreath Letters (1609-31)

	Type of Plural Subject					
	Conjoined NP____	There____NP	Other NP____	Total NP	They	Total Third-Person Plural
Type of verb						
Copula/auxiliary						
be present						
Is	2	2	2	6	0	6
Are	2	0	12	14	5	19
Total	4	2	14	20	5	25
% is	50.0	100	14.3	30.0	0.0	24.0
Other verbs						
With -*s*	2	1	14	17	1	18
Without -*s*	4	0	28	32	8	40
Total	6	1	42	49	9	58
% -s	33.3	100	33.3	34.7	11.1	31.0
All verbs						
With -*s*	4	3	16	23	1	24
Without -*s*	6	0	40	46	13	59
Total	10	3	56	69	14	83
% -s	40.0	100	28.6	33.3	7.1	28.9

although the letters reveal over the twenty-three-year period a shifting in orthography and morphology toward Southern British English, the language of government and administration and of many of the more prosperous settlers in the Ulster Plantation (see Montgomery 1992b). Morphology accounts for much of the variation in the data.[7] We see from Table 5 that plural verbal -*s* occurs at an overall rate of 33.3 percent (23/69 cases) on verbs having subjects other than *they* but at a 7.1 percent rate (1/14) for *they* (the low number of contexts—eighty-three—derives from the fact that the documents are mainly personal letters with mostly first- and second-person nominals). Although the rate of 33.3 percent is lower than we might expect, it can be explained by contact in Ulster with Southern British English. Of

more crucial concern is the one token in the Duntreath data that apparently violates the subject-type constraint mentioned earlier, the constraint forbidding a plural verbal -*s* with the subject *they*. Together with other apparent exceptions, this case will be discussed later in this article.

Ulster to America

Bridging Ulster and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a collection of forty-seven letters written between 1736 and 1871, between Ulster immigrants to America and family members back in Ireland (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 1736-1871). Of the many hundreds of such letters preserved in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast, only a fraction reveal any evidence of speech patterns, with most being uniformly in standard written English. (This paucity of material motivated the inclusion of letters written as late as 1871; the criterion for inclusion was evidence of some nonstandard linguistic patterns.) One of the earliest was written by James Murray of New York to the Reverend Baptist Boyd of County Tyrone, Ireland, and published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1737. An excerpt of this letter shows that many features of Scottish English, especially morphological ones, were maintained in the colloquial language of the Ulster Scots/Scotch-Irish over a century after the Plantation began:

> There is Servants comes here out of Ereland, and have serv'd their Time here, wha are now Justices of the Piece; I will come to Ereland gin the Lord spare me about Twa Years after this, and I wull bring Rum, and Staves for Barrals, and Firkins, and Tanners Bark for to sell, and mony other Things for this Gentleman, and my Sel, for I wull gang Super Cargo of the Ship, so that if nene of ye come I wull bring ye aw wee my sel, by the Help of the Lord. (Swem 1925, 6)

Sentences E-1 to E-4 in Table 6 illustrate verbal concord with four types of plural subjects in the Ulster immigrant letters.

Table 7 shows that in Scotch-Irish English the overall rate of plural verbal -*s* with subjects other than *they* is 53.3 percent (81/152), higher than the Duntreath letters perhaps because of more casual writing or because of lower, or at least more variable, literacy among the writers. Otherwise, plural verbal -*s* in the Ulster immigrant letters patterns as it does in the Duntreath documents, in that it occurs equally as often for copula/auxiliary *be* as for noncopula verbs, and so on. As with the earlier letters, there is one apparent exception in these data; it will also be discussed later. That the suffix remains a part of Ulster English today is demonstrated by Milroy (1987).

TABLE 6

Examples from Ulster Immigrant Letters with Different Types of Subject

(E-1) Conjoined noun phrase: Mr. Wallace and his wife both *goes* in her. . . .

(E-2) Existential *there*: there *is* Numrs in much better Circumstances. . . .

(E-3) Common noun: . . . aw Things *grows* here that ever I did see grow in England.

(E-4) Relative pronoun: All the young men that *has* come here lately would be glad they had not come.

TABLE 7

Plural Subject-Verb Concord in Ulster Immigrant Letters (1736-1871)

					Total Third-Person	
	Type of Plural Subject					
	Conjoined NP____	There____NP	Other NP____	Total NP	They	Plural
Type of Verb						
Copula/auxiliary						
be present						
Is	2	22	29	53	1	54
Are	7	3	34	44	9	53
Total	9	25	63	97	10	107
% is	22.2	88.0	46.0	54.6	10.0	50.5
Other verbs						
With -*s*	7	1	20	28	0	28
Without -*s*	6	1	20	27	22	49
Total	13	2	40	55	22	77
% with -s	53.8	50.0	50.0	50.9	0.0	36.4
All verbs						
With -*s*	9	23	49	81	1	82
Without -*s*	13	4	54	71	31	102
Total	22	27	103	152	32	184
% with -s	40.9	85.2	47.6	53.3	3.1	44.6

Early Appalachian English

Representing an older generation of Appalachian English speakers are thirty-six men and ten women from the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. Nearly all of these individuals were born before the turn of the twentieth century, some of them as early as the 1840s and many of them grandchildren of the area's original settlers. Forty-one were informants for interviews conducted between 1939 and 1941 by Joseph Sargent Hall, who was commissioned by the National Park Service to record stories, songs, and reminiscences of remaining natives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park area. Data from these interviews, collected on seventy-three phonographic recordings, were analyzed for the phonetics of this variety of speech in Hall (1942). The other five speakers were elderly men interviewed by Great Smoky Mountain National Park Service personnel in the 1950s.

TABLE 8
Examples from Smoky Mountain Data with Different Types of Subject

(S-1) Conjoined noun phrase: Over there where Steve Whaley and them *lives*.
(S-2) Existential *there*: Because *there's* lots of mountains.
(S-3) Common noun: The rocks *is* still there yet.
(S-4) Relative pronoun: This comes from people who *teaches* biology.
(S-5) Indefinite pronoun: Some *thinks* it might be a mineral that causes it.

The speech of these older residents from the Smoky Mountains represents the earliest, and probably the most isolated, variety of Appalachian English to which we have direct access; this variety will thus be referred to as Early Appalachian English here. These people, all subsistence farmers, typically had resided their entire lives in remote coves and isolated homesteads and had very little contact with either formal schooling or life in settlements, which were usually at least a day's hike away. Most interviews comprise stories of bear hunting, panther hunting, moonshining, and the like. As a result, these recordings provide far more past-tense than present-tense verb tokens, yet they do yield 318 third-person plural contexts that can be examined for the occurrence of plural verbal -*s*.

The patterning of plural verbal -*s* in the Smoky Mountain recordings with subjects other than *they* is quite high (90/131, or 68.7 percent), higher than not only later Appalachian English (figures from which are presented below) but also considerably higher than data from the Duntreath and Ulster immigrant letters, presented earlier in Tables 5 and 7. Sentences S-1 to S-5 in Table 8 illustrate verbal concord with four types of plural subjects in the Smoky Mountain data. Table 9 displays the occurrence of plural verbal -*s* with different types of subjects and for different types of verbs. The three cases of -*s* on verbs having the subject *they* will be dealt with shortly.

Contemporary Appalachian English

To examine the patterning of plural verbal -*s* in more recent Appalachian English, we draw on the findings of two studies from West Virginia conducted in the early 1970s: Hackenberg (1973), based on thirty-nine speakers in Nicholas County (in the central part of the state east of Charleston), and Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976), based on research in Mercer and Monroe counties in southernmost West Virginia. Hackenberg's data, taken from the appendix in his dissertation, are partially reanalyzed and presented in Table 10. Wolfram and Christian's (1975, 110) data come from a subset of twenty speakers who represent an even distribution by age and sex for the five different age groups in their study. Tables 10 and 12 indicate that plural verbal -*s* occurred at rates (42.2 percent in Hackenberg, 53.7 percent in Wolfram and Christian) comparable to those for the two sets of letters from Scotland

TABLE 9
Plural Subject-Verb Concord in Smoky Mountain Data

	Type of Plural Subject					
	Conjoined NP____	There____NP	Other NP____	Total NP	They	Total Third-Person Plural
Type of verb						
Copula/auxiliary						
be present						
Is	1	24	24	49	2	51
Are	1	3	9	13	35	48
Total	2	27	33	62	37	99
% *is*	50.0	88.9	72.7	79.0	5.7	51.5
Other verbs						
With -*s*	3	3	35	41	1	42
Without -*s*	1	0	27	28	149	177
Total	4	3	62	69	150	219
% with -*s*	75.0	100	56.5	59.4	0.7	19.2
All verbs						
With -*s*	4	27	59	90	3	93
Without -*s*	2	3	36	41	184	225
Total	6	30	95	131	187	318
% with -*s*	67.0	90.0	62.1	68.7	1.6	29.2

NOTE: Based on data collected for Hall (1942) and other interviews.

TABLE 10
Subject Verb-Concord in Nicholas County, West Virginia

	Type of Plural Subject					
	Conjoined NP____	There____NP	Other NP____	Total NP	They	Total Third-Person Plural
Type of verb						
Copula/auxiliary						
be present						
Is	6	79	37	122	0	122
Are	4	41	53	98	180	278
Total	10	120	90	220	180	400
% *is*	60.0	65.8	41.1	54.5	0.0	30.5
Other verbs						
With -*s*	4	0	52	56	0	56
Without -*s*	11	0	135	146	478	624
Total	15	0	187	202	478	680
% with -*s*	26.7	0.0	27.8	27.7	0.0	8.8
All verbs						
With -*s*	10	79	89	178	0	178
Without -*s*	15	41	188	244	658	902
Total	25	120	277	422	658	1,080
% with -*s*	40.0	65.8	33.3	42.2	0.0	16.5

SOURCE: Adapted from Hackenberg (1973).

TABLE 11
Examples from Wolfram and Christian (1975, 110-11) with Different Types of Subject

(WC-1) Conjoined noun phrase: Me and my sister *gets* in a fight sometimes.
(WC-2) Existential *there*: There'*s* different breeds of 'em.
(WC-3) Collective noun phrase: Some people *makes* it from a fat off a pig.
(WC-4) Other noun phrase: . . . no matter what their parents *has* taught 'em.

TABLE 12
Plural Subject-Verb Concord in Southern West Virginia

| | Type of Plural Subject | | | | | |
| | Conjoined NP___ | There___NP | Other NP___ | Total NP | Total Third-Person | |
					They	Plural
Type of verb						
Copula/auxiliary						
be present						
Is	3	63	44	110	2	112
Are	0	4	42	46	300	346
Total	3	67	86	156	302	458
% *is*	100	94.0	51.2	70.5	0.7	24.5
Other verbs						
With -*s*	10	0	45	55	2	57
Without -*s*	3	0	93	96	1,252	1,348
Total	16	0	138	151	1,254	1,405
% with -*s*	76.9	0.0	32.6	36.4	0.2	4.1
All verbs						
With -*s*	13	63	89	165	4	169
Without -*s*	3	4	135	142	1,552	1,694
Total	16	67	224	307	1,556	1,863
% with -*s*	81.2	94.0	39.7	53.7	0.3	9.1

SOURCE: Adapted from Wolfram and Christian (1975, 113-14).

and Ulster. The rate in the Wolfram and Christian data was not greatly different from the Smoky Mountain data more than a generation earlier. The suffix did not occur on verbs with the personal pronoun *they* in the Hackenberg study but did occur four times in the latter (although Wolfram and Christian do not cite these). In short, the subject-type constraint flourishes in late twentieth-century Appalachian speech.

We now turn to the apparent exceptions to the subject-type constraint that were mentioned earlier; these are given in Table 13. Neither sentence 1 nor 2 turns out to be a violation because the constraint pertains only to an immediately adjacent personal pronoun (cf. the formulation of the constraint as far back as the Older and Middle Scottish English paradigm in Table 2). It is striking that in each of these sentences, *they* occurs adjacent to a present-tense verb (*are, have*) that is not marked with -*s*. The other three cases, all from the Smoky Mountain data, also have a

TABLE 13
Apparent Exceptions to the Subject-Type Constraint

1. Yett they all *professes* that they are not able to give . . . (Duntreath letters)
2. They have behaved well in general and *is* clear of censure. (Immigrant letters)
3. They*'s* said to be the oldest mountains in the world. (Smoky Mountain data)
4. Well they, they'*s* scared of a littler dog. (Smoky Mountain data)
5. They *comes* back and, Scott said, was a comin' over to her house. (Smoky Mountain data)

plausible explanation. Sentences 3 and 4, which have -*s* (contracted *is*) rather than *are*, are most likely influenced by the phonological environment of a following 's.' Sentence 5 shows another overriding consideration—use of the historical present; the verb *comes* clearly occurs in a past-tense context here. Thus, in none of these three sets of data, nor in Hackenberg's, is there one bona fide counterexample to the subject-type constraint on plural verbal -*s*.

Conclusions

This study has examined the patterning of plural verbal -*s* for the data outlined in Table 1 in an effort to document how one aspect of subject-verb concord has evolved from the Old World to the New over a period of more than five centuries. It has cited the concord paradigm for Scottish English and then presented a quantitative description of concord with third-person plural, present-tense verbs in five sets of data, two collections of letters written in or to Ulster from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and three collections of recorded interviews of Appalachian English. This investigation reveals the following:

1. The subject-type constraint operates consistently and strongly for all five sets of data. Plural verbal -*s* does not occur on verbs adjacent to *they* in Scotch-Irish English and at only a very marginal level in Appalachian English (7/2,401, or 0.29 percent), which may in any case be explainable. With other types of subjects, it occurs in Scotch-Irish English 47.1 percent of the time (104/221 instances) and a majority of the time with subjects in Appalachian speech (433/860, or 50.5 percent). Even in Appalachian English its occurrence with *they* is questionable. Given the contact of Scotch-Irish English with other varieties of English beginning in the days of the colonial backcountry, the strength of this subject-type constraint in modern-day Appalachian English is indeed remarkable.

2. For both Scotch-Irish and Appalachian English, there is a hierarchy of subject types that correlates with verbal -*s*, the suffix occurring most often in existential sentences (the "There____NP" category), second most often when the subject is "Other NP" (which includes common, proper, and other

types of nouns), and least when *they* is the subject. In addition, Appalachian English data from Hackenberg (1973) and Wolfram and Christian (1975, 1976) suggest that "Conjoined NP" is an intermediate category between "Existential *there*" and "Other NP," but the Smoky Mountain data are too sparse to compare in this regard.

3.   In Appalachian English, plural verbal -*s* occurs nearly twice as often for the copula verb *be* (281/438, or 64.2 percent) as for other verbs (152/422, or 36.0 percent); although the rates are higher, the ratio for the Smoky Mountain data is somewhat lower than that for the West Virginia studies (79.0 percent to 59.4 percent). This differential patterning appears in the Ulster immigrant letters, indicating that it may not be an American development.

In the larger picture, the findings on subject-verb concord indicate the remarkable retention of linguistic patterns and constraints across more than four centuries and two continents in the evolution of Scottish English into Scotch-Irish English into Appalachian English. Without question, many other grammatical features and systems were leveled out in the formation of Appalachian English, so that it is in many respects either indistinguishable from or only somewhat more archaic than other American varieties. However, the reanalysis in American English of other grammatical patterns that most likely derive from Scotch-Irish English, such as the combination of modal verbs (in *might could* and *might can*) and the occurrence of positive *anymore*, both discussed in detail in Montgomery (1989), suggests that reallocation and other processes distinguished by Trudgill (1986) can be identified in modern-day varieties of American English and make these varieties distinct. It also points up the critical importance of further research on Colonial American English. The equally careful investigation of a range of grammatical patterns, and lexical items as well, will ultimately tell us just how "Elizabethan" and how "Scotch-Irish" Appalachian English is and what exact processes were involved in the formation of the colonial American English of the backcountry that was its predecessor.

Notes

1. Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila (1989) argue that fifteenth-century London English, represented by letters from the Cely merchant family, exhibited plural verbal -*s*. However, a close analysis of the data reveals that only one member of the family, Richard Cely the Younger, used the suffix regularly in nonexistential sentences; since he was reared in Yorkshire, his language most likely followed the Northern British pattern.

2. The "Heavy-NP Constraint," discussed by Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila (1989) for black and white speech in the Lower South and also for Early Modern English, parallels the subject-type constraint examined in this article in some ways. The Heavy-NP Constraint states that the presence of a preceding pronoun strongly favors zero copula and zero auxiliary (including auxiliary *have* and modal verbs) as well the absence of verbal *-s* (for both singular and plural environments). In Scottish, Ulster Scots, and Appalachian varieties of English, variation in verbal *-s* according to the type of subject occurs only in plural environments, never in singular ones. Nor do these varieties show more than quite marginal evidence of zero copula or zero auxiliary.

3. The larger study examines related questions, such as the evidence for the subject-type constraint with past-tense copula verbs (i.e., *was* vs. *were*) and whether the *-s* suffix has any semantic content, as Aitken (1984, 105) and Macafee (1980, 25) indicate modern-day Scottish English has.

4. For example, Proctor (1966, 91) says of the writing of Robert Henryson (1425-1505) that "the tendency is to treat all persons of [nonmodal] verbs, singular and plural, uniformly, that is, to add the *-is* ending to all instances of the verb. This is particularly true when the verb form and the personal pronoun governing it are separated by modifying elements."

5. Verbal *-s* on first-person singular verbs not adjacent to their subject *I* occurs in Scotch-Irish English, but such contexts are rare.

6. These letters are part of the larger collection of manuscripts dating from 1288 (the Charter by Peter de Graden to his eldest daughter Julian) to 1829 (a letter of M. de Lamartine to Sir Archibald Edmonstone).

7. An excellent account of the systematic differences in orthography between Scottish English and Southern British English can be found in Robinson (1989).

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