

## A diachronic shift in the expression of person

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A striking fact about Appalachian English is that in addition to singular lexical subjects, plural lexical subjects co-occur with verbal *-s*, unlike the pattern found in standard English:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. All preachers *likes* fried chicken. (DOH)  
b. Them gals *is* purty, but they're crazy as Junebugs. (M&H)

In contrast, pronominal subjects (with the exception of *he, she, it*) in Appalachian English do not co-occur with verbal *-s*, matching the pattern of standard English:

- (2) a. I *go* down there sometimes and that's about as far as I go anymore.  
b. You *see* 'em coming in here every evening.  
c. We *go* up in West Virginia a lot a-train-riding and stuff.  
d. They *live* in Pennsylvania.

We argue that verbal agreement in Appalachian English is not sensitive to the number of the subject, but rather to its person feature: verbal *-s* is expressed when the DP subject fails to express person, typically with lexical subjects (Zanuttini & Bernstein 2009).

An ancestor of Appalachian English, older Scots (beginning in the 1400s) displayed verbal *-s* throughout the paradigm, as in (3), unless a pronominal subject was adjacent to the verb (with two exceptions), as in (4) (Murray 1873):

	<i>sg.</i>		<i>pl.</i>
(3)	1 <sup>st</sup>	leykes/w'reytes ('likes'/'writes')	leykes/w'reytes
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	leykes/w'reytes	leykes/w'reytes
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	leykes/w'reytes	leykes/w'reytes
(4)	aa	ley <u>ke</u> /w'rey <u>te</u>	wey ley <u>ke</u> /w'rey <u>te</u>
	thuw	ley <u>kes</u> /w'rey <u>tes</u>	yee ley <u>ke</u> /w'rey <u>t</u>
	hey,scho,(h)it	ley <u>kes</u> /w'rey <u>tes</u>	thay ley <u>ke</u> /w'rey <u>te</u>

Montgomery's (1994) corpus analysis of seven texts (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) confirms Murray's descriptions of the older Scots verbal paradigms: table 1 shows the rate of verbal *-s* with plural lexical subjects and table 2 shows the rate of verbal *-s* with non-adjacent personal pronouns:

*Rate of -s marking for 3<sup>rd</sup>-person plural subject types (N=527)*

	<i>conjoined Ns</i>	<i>rel. pronouns</i>	<i>common Ns</i>	<i>total nouns</i>
% -s	92%	95%	91%	93%

Table 1 (from Montgomery 1994, p. 88)

*Rate of -s marking with non-adjacent personal pronoun subjects (N=170)*

	<i>they</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>ye</i>	<i>total</i>
% -s	90%	94%	94%	100%	94%

Table 2 (from Montgomery 1994, p. 89)

<sup>1</sup>DOH = Dante Oral History Project; M&H = Montgomery and Hall (2004); the Appalachian English examples in (2) come from our own fieldwork.

Although no table is provided for the pattern with adjacent personal pronouns, Montgomery states that the  $\emptyset$ -marked verb was found at “greater than 90%” in all but one document source, where it was 82% (Montgomery 1994: 88). Based on these facts, we hypothesize that in older Scots, verbal *-s* is a generalized person marker expressed only when a person-bearing form (pronoun) is not cliticized to T (an intuition also found in Börjars & Chapman 1998 for some contemporary non-standard varieties of UK English; see also Roberts 1993). This means that in older Scots, personal pronouns could either be clitic forms (expressed with the verb in T) or full-fledged DP pronominal subjects, in which case generalized *-s* is spelled out in T. Under this analysis, T always expresses person in older Scots.

How does the older Scots pattern of generalized *-s* compare with the more limited verbal *-s* found in the contemporary variety, Appalachian English? We propose that in Appalachian English, verbal *-s* is expressed only in the limited contexts where the subject does not express person, as with lexical subjects. This suggests that in this language, T probes the DP subject and when it finds a person feature (as with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and some 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns), it spells out as  $\emptyset$ ; when no person feature is found (as with lexical subjects), T spells out as *-s*.

If this is correct, then the person feature is always expressed in T in older Scots (either with an incorporated pronoun or with *-s*). In contrast, in Appalachian English, the person feature is spelled out only if a person feature is missing from the subject, as in the case of lexical subjects. We propose that the difference between the two languages can be viewed as follows: T is insensitive to the nature of the unincorporated subject in older Scots, in the sense that it expresses person regardless of whether the subject does or not; in contrast, T is sensitive to the nature of the subject in Appalachian English, in the sense that it expresses person only if the subject does not. We can implement this idea by saying that T does not probe the person feature of the subject in older Scots, while it does in Appalachian English; this is why the person marker *-s* co-occurs with all unincorporated subjects in older Scots, but only co-occurs with those that do not express person in Appalachian English.

The examination of two historically related languages suggests that the robust expression of the person feature in the verbal domain, that is, in T, in older Scots has given way to a very restricted expression of the feature in T in Appalachian English, where the expression has shifted overwhelmingly to the DP subject. A subsequent stage would be a system where the person feature in T is not present at all. This, we argue, is the case in present-day standard English, where person is marked only on the DP subject, never in T (which is marked only for number, Kayne 1989). The same contrast would also distinguish Mainland Scandinavian languages like Swedish and Norwegian, lacking person in T, from Insular Scandinavian languages like Icelandic and Faroese, which still contain a person feature in T (Holmberg & Platzack 1995).

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