

Homework Assignment #11

Sociolinguistics

Due **M Dec 4 by 10:10am on Canvas** (in “Assignments”). Please answer the questions directly in Canvas, using the information and data provided in this assignment handout. **Late submissions for this assignment are accepted only until M Dec 11 (one week after deadline).**

In certain rural varieties of the United States, including in southern Appalachia, some words that end in *-ing* can take another morpheme *a-*, pronounced as [ə], attached to the word, as in *They were a-fishing this morning.*

Answer the following questions, drawing on your personal language experience for questions (1) and (2), and your knowledge of mental grammar and linguistic analysis for questions (3) and (4). You will discover that this *a-* has systematic morphological properties, even though it is not part of “standard” American English.

- (1) Do you, or a family member, have this *a-* morpheme as part of your mental grammar?
 - If no, you may just answer that way and move on to the next question.
 - If yes, where did you or the family member grow up?
- (2) Have you ever heard speakers, real or fictional, use this *a-* morpheme in movies or TV?
 - If no, you may just answer that way and move on to the next question.
 - If yes, what kind of speakers were they — can you remember anything about the speakers’ place of origin, ethnic background, gender, or age, or the speech situation? If the speakers were fictional, do you think the use of this variety was intended to show something about their background or characteristics?
- (3) Here are some examples of the use of this *a-* morpheme that are judged grammatical and ungrammatical by speakers of relevant varieties of English (according to research by Walt Wolfram in the 1980s). What **linguistic characteristic** distinguishes the examples where attaching *a-* is grammatical from those where attaching it is ungrammatical?

Hint: Thinking about **word-formation rules**, and the types of information that they contain, will be very useful here. What can we determine about requirements on the **base** of *a-*? If you are feeling stumped, try looking for *-ing* in the lists of morphemes of English in *CL* Ch 4, Tables 4.6 (p 131) and 4.15 (p 138).

Grammatical

She was a-building a house.
 They were a-fishing this morning.
 The child was a-charming the adults.
 He went a-hunting.
 He kept a-shocking the children.

Ungrammatical

*A-building is hard work.
 *They thought a-fishing was easy.
 *The child was very a-charming.
 *He likes a-hunting.
 *The story was a-shocking.

- (4) What can you say about the morphological classification of this morpheme *a-*?
 - (a) Is it a **root**, a **prefix**, a **suffix**, or an **infix**?
 - (b) Is this morpheme best classified as **inflectional** or **derivational**?