What's in a grammar? Microsyntactic variation in American English negative dependencies
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Speakers of different dialects of the same language display substantial overlap in the types of sentences that they produce. In comprehension, this overlap appears even greater: Speakers readily comprehend many sentence types that they would not say themselves. How do we account for such differences between production and comprehension? Does the larger overlap in comprehension reflect broader areas of overlapping linguistic knowledge than can be observed in production, or are speakers of different varieties arriving at the same interpretation by different means? This talk addresses these questions by focusing on Negative Concord sentences (e.g., *I didn't eat nothing*, meaning *I ate nothing*), which are common in vernacular Englishes but absent from mainstream production. We summarize experimental work that suggests mainstream speakers nevertheless readily comprehend and process certain Negative Concord structures, as well as corpus work demonstrating substantial variability in the frequency of negative sentence types from two vernacular corpora (*The Audio-Aligned and Parsed Corpus of Appalachian English*, Tortora et al. 2017; *The Corpus of Regional African American Language*, Kendall & Farrington, 2018). In light of these data, we outline an approach that would inform the question of how different varieties overlap with respect to Negative Concord specifically, and more generally, demonstrate the value of applying different methods to understand the boundaries of grammar in contexts of dialect diversity.