SCiP: the perspective from the loss of grammatical dialect features[1]

INTRODUCTION: In a context where traditional dialects have been attriting due to wide-ranging social and economic developments, Britain (2008: 1) has noted that 'in studying linguistic change, variationist are, naturally perhaps, more in interested in the new, innovative form than the old conservative form'. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram (1999: 487) were one of the first to argue, however, that 'the examination of obsolescing forms in moribund dialects may contribute to our understanding of the processes of language recession' in particular and language change more generally. In this paper, I will present two case studies of obsolescing grammatical dialect features from joint work with Sali Tagliamonte (Rupp and Tagliamonte 2017, 2019, under review): a double demonstrative construction in UK and Northern American English dialects and a zero article in the English variety spoken in York, England.

THE TWO CASE STUDIES: THE DOUBLE DEMONSTRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND THE ZERO ARTICLE
The double demonstrative construction (henceforth DDEMO_NP) consists of a demonstrative determiner, a spatial adverb and a noun. DDEMO_NP is illustrated by data from the Ontario English Dialect project (ODP; Tagliamonte 2013-present) in (1a,b).
(1a)   *I was cooking a bunch up and* **this here fox** *was in the window*. (wshiloh, 77)
(1b)   *... were you ever in* **that there side road** *to Harris-Lake?* (joecartwright, 86)
The zero article is deployed with (bare) definite singular nouns and is illustrated by data from the York English corpus (YEC; Tagliamonte 1996-1998) in (2a,b):
(2a)   *They used to follow* Ø *river I think did bombers*. (mmichaels, 67)
(2b)   *The station got badly damaged. And* Ø *station got fire*. (ajackson, 66)

METHOD
Reports on the occurrence of DDEMO_NP in English are relatively scarce and scattered (Manchester, East Anglia, Appalachia; see Rupp and Tagliamonte (under review) for an overview), and documentation of the zero article has been confined to a few communities in Northern England (e.g. Tagliamonte and Roeder 2009). We examined DDEMO_NP in the ODP (11 million words) which at the time of writing comprised interviews with individuals born between the late 1800's and early 2001's from 20 communities in Ontario, Canada. We examined both DDEMO_NP and the zero article in the YEC (1.2 million words), which comprises people born and raised in the city of York between the ages of 17 and 92. We coded social factors based on the nature of individuals in the sample, including sex, age grouping (young, middle, old), and occupation (student, white- or blue-collar job). We also tested for grammatical factors that we extrapolated from the existing literature on demonstratives (e.g. Diessel 1999) and definite articles (e.g. Jespersen 1954) as possible determinants of the use of the two forms. For DDEMO_NP, we explored: pragmatic function (such as situational and discourse-anaphoric reference, 'indefinite *this*'), grammatical function (subject, existential, etc.), and animacy. For the zero article, the grammatical factors were: type of noun, grammatical function, modification of the noun, and information status.

RESULTS
The use of DDEMO_NP and the zero article is rare. We found just 107 and 16 DDEMO_NPs in the entire ODP and YEC data bases, respectively. Further, in the ODP, 68 DDEMO_NP tokens are in single community. For this reason, we focused on this one community in the ODP and could only conduct a distributional analysis. Because Tagliamonte and Roeder (2009) had previously found the number of zero articles to constitute no more than 3 percent

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[1] I have taken the postponement of the conference as an opportunity to report on work in progress in which the topic originally submitted has become part of a larger project on obsolescing grammatical dialect features.

of all definite nouns in the YEC, we selected 18 of the most frequently occurring nouns in the corpus. In this selection of nouns, the zero article made up 17% (N=225) of the data; these were subject to both a distributional and mixed effects logistic regression analysis (R Development Core team 2018). The results of the social factors add weight to the rarity of the forms to suggest that they are currently in their last stages: DDEMO_NP come virtually all from older men who work in blue-collar jobs, and there is a near-complete absence of the zero article in the middle and the youngest females. The grammatical results show that DDEMO_NP is most frequently deployed in an innovative 'indefinite *this*' usage that is currently associated with the "simple" demonstrative *this* (Prince 1981a). The zero article is favoured with nouns whose referent is 'discourse-new, hearer-old' (Prince 1981b); reference that can be associated with one of Greenberg's (1978) incremental stages in the expansion of the definite article at the expense of zero.

ANALYSIS

We support Wolfram and Schilling-Estes's (1999) position and note that scrutinizing receding forms can expose and differentiate trajectories of loss. In research on the USA islands of Ocracoke and Smith Island, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes have identified a "dissipation model" of obsolescence 'in which distinguishing dialect features are lost or drastically eroded', and a "concentration model" in which speakers are actually 'NOT losing the features of their dialect' but, in an act of identity, 'distinctiveness is heightened among a reduced number of speakers' (1999: 478, 488). In a study of the dialect of the Ottawa Valley, Jankowski and Tagliamonte observed a special realization of the "concentration model" whereby obsolescing dialect forms 'retreat to a restricted set of fossilized context that were once the most favoured locations for the variants in the past' (2017: 268). We have added to this typology by observing that obsolescing dialect forms may not simply fade away and disappear from the grammar. Rather, they may specialize to –and pass down-- innovative usage or embody a particular stage in a grammatical development. Teasing out the intricacies of patterns of demise in this way could complement existing theories of grammatical development towards loss (for example: grammatical cycles, e.g. Vindenes 2018; exaption, Lass 1990). The SCiP workshop aims to stimulate dialogue in theorizing between three traditions of work on syntactic change, and I would be interested to learn about the perspectives of historical linguistics and theoretically-informed research regarding routes of grammatical loss.

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