Nevins, A., & Parrott, J. K. (2010). Variable rules meet Impoverishment theory: Patterns of agreement leveling in English varieties. *Lingua, 120*, 1135-1159.

-The authors propose that variable Impoverishment is one of the mechanisms responsible for intra-individual 'leveling' variation

-The authors also aimed to add support to the hypothesis that morphological Impoverishment is the result of the markedness of the given morphosyntactic features

-The article focuses on the leveling of patterns of agreement in the English auxiliary and copula verb BE with pronominal subjects across dialects

-The verb BE was chosen due to:

1. It is the only English verb that has allomorphic variants for person and number in both the present and the past tense

2. All paradigms of BE include an 'elsewhere' form

3. Intra-individual variation is common in paradigms of BE in many English varieties

Empirical and Theoretical background:

-Impoverishment rules: deletion rules that operate on morphosyntactic features and cause the loss of 'rich' morphological distinctions

-Morphosyntactic markedness: Cross linguistically, there are fewer morphophonological distinctions in marked inflectional categories

-Elsewhere item: is compatible with any phi feature set or lack thereof, but is blocked when more specific Vocabulary items are compatible

-In the author's mechanistic theory of intra-individual variation:

a)the variant forms are phonological exponents of underspecified Vocabulary items

b)the environment is composed of the phi features and values of terminal nodes

c)the appearance of the forms is probabilistic when phi-feature deletion occurs variably instead of categorically through the application of Impoverishment rules

Be-leveling Monmouthsire: [+author] is marked

I *be* varies with I *am*

Rule: the marked feature [+author] triggers deletion of phi features in the 1st person. This allows for the insertion of the default form *be*.

Was-leveling in Buckie: [+participant] is marked

Was varies with *were* in the 2nd person singular, the 1st person plural, the 2nd person plural, and plural full DPs. Only *were* occurs in the 3rd person plural.

Rule: all phi features at T are deleted when T has a [+participant] feature. This allows the variable insertion of the elsewhere form *was.* But, it does not apply to the 3rd person plural as it specified for [-participant]

Weren't/ain't leveling on Smith Island: [+negation] is marked

Weren't –leveling pattern:

Weren't-leveling occurs in the 1st person singular, 3rd person singular and singular full DPs.

Rule: deletion of phi features at T[+past] when it is part of the same Maximum-Word (M-Word) as [+negation].

Ain't-leveling pattern:

Ain't-leveling occurs with all persons and numbers. It varies with BE and HAVE, but not DO.

Rule: deletion of phi features and [±copula] feature on T[-past] when it is part of the same M-word as [+negation]. This leaves the feature [+auxiliary]. As, both BE and HAVE are specified for [+auxiliary] , and DO is specified [-auxiliary], this explains the variable occurrence of leveling in BE and HAVE.

Discussion questions:

-the authors claim that no English dialect should have *am*-leveling because *am* is not an elsewhere form

→however, this is not completely absent from English dialects. There are no cases of categorical *am*-leveling, and the authors take this and the rarity of the variable leveling as a confirmation that a highly specified form such as *am* cannot occur in leveling

Do you feel that this conclusion can be drawn? Why or why not?

-the authors fail to account for what causes the choice of one variant over another, and stick to a usage-free model

Do you think that an account that ignores sociolinguistic variation can reliably account for intra-personal variation? If so, in your opinion what would cause the choice of one variant over another?