

African American English

AAE as Entity

What Constitutes “Black” Ethnicity or Race?

- US:
 - Black-white dichotomy, one-drop rule.
 - Susie Phillips: 1986 Supreme Court
 - Difficult for individuals to change ascribed racial status
 - Paradox: “a white woman can give birth to a black child, but a black woman can never give birth to a white child” (Fought, p. 11).
- South Africa: three-part distinction
- Dominican Republic
 - One “can change one’s race with a plane ride between countries” (Bailey, 2000: 556).

English African
American
Black speech
Vernacular
Inner talk
language
Ebonics
Street
bad
jive
City Negro
speech
long
every
ignorance

Naming

- Research titles include, but are not limited to the following works, listed by terms in their title (publishers are listed as well to show the range of influence this variety has on the discussion):
 - *Ebonics: The true language of Black folks* (Williams 1975) and *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice* (Baugh 2000);
 - *A sociolinguistic description of Detroit Negro speech* (Wolfram 1969); *Black English: Its history and usage in the United States* (Dillard 1972), *Talkin and Testifyin: The language of Black America* (Smitherman 1977), *Black Talk: Words and phrases from the hood to the amen corner* (Smitherman 1994), *Black Street Speech* (Baugh 1988) and *You know my steez: An ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of styleshifting in a Black American speech community* (Alim 2004);
 - *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English vernacular* (Labov 1972) and *African American Vernacular English: Features, evolution, educational implications* (Rickford 1999); and
 - *Out of the mouths of slaves: African American language and educational malpractice* (Baugh 1999) and *African American English* (Green 2002).

AAE

- AAE
 - A variety spoken by many African-Americans in the USA which shares a set of grammatical and other linguistic features that distinguish it from various other American dialects. (Fought)
- AAVE
 - Most distant from Mainstream or classroom English (Green)
 - The common dialect of the black street culture (Baugh, *Black Street Speech*)
 - Nonstandard elements (Rickford)
- Dialect of English
 - Dependency on SAE (sharing resources)
 - Mutual intelligibility

AAE Linguistic Features

African-American English past tense

<i>Type of past</i>	<i>Marker and verb form</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Simple past	drunk/ flown	Time before the present
Preterit had	had drunk/ flown	Time before the present, often used in narrative contexts
Remote past	BIN drunk/ flown	Remote past
Past perfect (pluperfect)	had drunk/ flown	Past before the past
Remote past perfect	had BIN drunk/ flown	Past before the remote past
Resultant state	dən drunk/ flown	State of having ended or having been finished, can occur with some states in special contexts

Grammar

- Nouns
 - Existential it
 - Absence of plural, possessive, third person <-s>
- Verb forms
 - Zero copula (no “to be”)
 - Invariant or habitual “to be”
 - Unstressed “been” (perfective without “have”)
 - Stressed “BEEN”
 - Completive “done”
 - Future perfect “be done”
 - Preterit “had”
- Negation
 - Ain’t
 - Negative concord
- Function words
 - Steady
 - Come
 - Finna (approx. “fixing to”)

AAE Lexicon

- African etymology
 - *dig* (Wolof *dega* ‘to understand’); *hip* (Wolof *hepi*, *hipi* ‘to open one’s eyes’)
- Music etymology
 - *jazz* (Mandingo *jasi* ‘to act out of the ordinary’ ??); originally referred to sex; hot; cool; cooking; gig; funky
 - *Hip hop*
- Church etymology
 - *Shout* (out)

Phonological characteristics of AAVE

- **Unique**(ish)
 - Reduction of final nasal to vowel nasalization
 - Final stop devoicing, although there may be glottalization
 - Substitution of /k/ for /t/ in str clusters

Sources: Bailey & Thomas 1998; Fought 2006:50

Phonological characteristics of AAVE

- Shared with **Non-standard dialects**
 - Loss of single final consonants
 - Loss of /r/ after consonants
 - Substitution of labiodentals for interdentalals
 - Stopping of interdental fricatives

Sources: Bailey & Thomas 1998; Fought 2006:50

Phonological characteristics of AAVE

- Shared with Southern American English
 - Metathesis
 - Vocalization or loss of postvocalic /r/
 - Glide reduction of /ai/
 - Glide reduction of /ɔi/
 - Pin/pen merger
 - Merger of tense and lax vowels before /l/
 - Fricative stopping before nasals

Sources: Bailey & Thomas 1998; Fought 2006:50

Phonological characteristics of AAVE

- Shared with other dialects
 - Final consonant cluster reduction
 - Vocalization of postvocalic /l/

Sources: Bailey & Thomas 1998; Fought 2006:50

Prosody

- Stress
 - First syllable (POlice, DEtroit) but on a small set of words and shared with southern white speakers
- Descriptive: Tarone (1972, 1973) studied speech samples in Seattle taken from conversations in a social setting
 - Wider pitch range, including shifting into a falsetto voice
 - More level and rising pitch contours on all sentence types
 - Greater falling final pitch in Yes/No settings when threatening situations, but more level or rising in informal speech
 - Use of non-final contours, without “if”, to mark dependent clauses
- Experimental: Meredith and Henton found wider pitch range
- Experimental: Green (1990)
 - Yes/no questions – final level tone, rise starts earlier

AAE Discourse Tools

- Call and response
 - speaker's solo voice alternates with audience's response
- Rhythmic patterning
 - repetition of vowels or words, tempo
- Improvisation/spontaneity
 - letting the Spirit move, following paths based on response from audience
- Concreteness
 - references to here and now, grounded in experience
- Signifying
 - talking about the audience or part of it; type of reprimand; expected speech act

AAE Adjacency Pairs, Turns

- Co-signing (agreeing with speaker)
 - “Yes, sir!”; “Amen!”
- Encouraging
 - “Preach it!” ; “Tell ‘em about it!”, “Tell it!”
- Repetition
 - MLK: Give us the ballot
 - Audience: [Give us the ballot

 - MLK: Let us march on ballot boxes
 - Audience: [Let us march. March
- Completer
 - Audience completes script begun by speaker
 - MLK: How long?
 - Audience: [Not long

For some good examples, see the sermons of MLK found at:

http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/popular_requests/voice_of_king.htm#call

Comedy of race

White

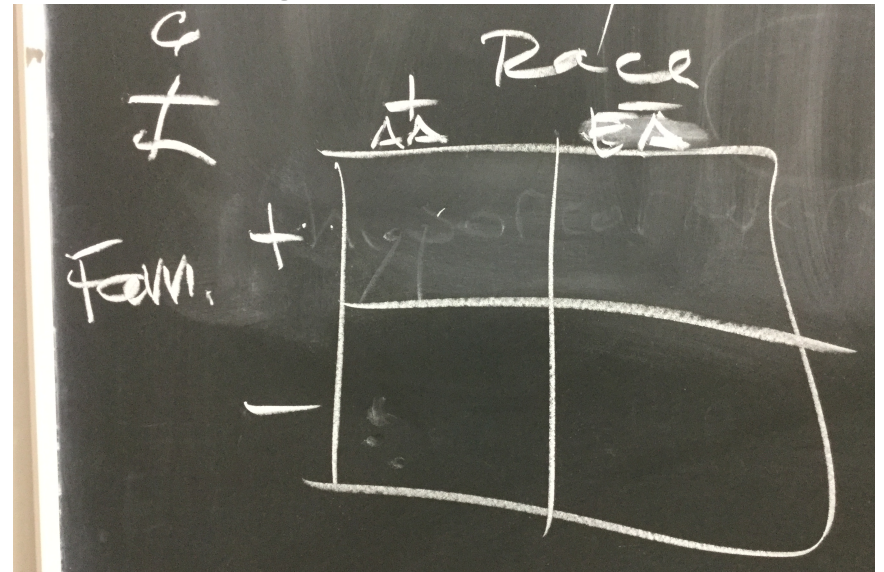
- Sounds
 - Nasality
 - /aj/ with long glide
 - Interdentals
 - Postvocalic r
- Words
 - Corny slang/interjections
 - “Brady Bunch” names
- Phrases
 - Hyperstandard syntax
- Stylistics
 - Hyper polite; happy
 - formality

AAVE

- Sounds
 - Monophthongization of /aj/ as [a:]
 - Interdentals as [d, t]
 - R-lessness
- Words
 - African-American names
- Phrases
 - Nonstandard syntax; ain’t, habitual be, etc.
- Stylistics
 - Defensive
 - informality

AAE Practice & Participation

- /-s/ deletion
 - Familiarity
- /-r/ deletion
 - Ethnicity
- AAE connection to vernacular
 - Matter of degrees



Familiarity: /-s/ Deletion

- % (s):[Ø] in AAE (Baugh, 1988)

Speech Type	3rd person singular	possessive	plural
• Black, Familiar	60.1	63.5	62.1
• Black, Unfamiliar	44.3	42.1	48.8
• Mixed, Familiar	53.8	70.4	54.9
• Mixed, Unfamiliar	41.7	24.9	34.5

Ethnicity: /-r/ Deletion

- % (r):[Ø] in AAE (Baugh, 1988)
- **Speech Type**
 - Black, Familiar 62.6
 - Black, Unfamiliar 48.9
 - Mixed, Familiar 49.1
 - Mixed, Unfamiliar 39.3