

AAE Intensifier *Dennamug*: Syntactic Change in Apparent Time

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New Ways of Analyzing Variation 46
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1 The Object of Study

2 Background

3 The Data

4 Findings

5 Grammaticalization

6 Conclusions

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What even is this?

What even is this?

- What is the object of study?

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- What is the object of study?
- What is *dennamug*?

The claim:

Combination of:

The claim:

Combination of:

- 1 an intensifier phrase

The claim:

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- 2 taboo avoidance/minced oaths

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- 3 (under-studied) AAL Phonology

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Combination of:

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- 4 no 'standard' written version of AAL

leads to:

The claim:

Combination of:

- 1 an intensifier phrase
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- 3 (under-studied) AAL Phonology
- 4 no 'standard' written version of AAL

leads to:

Phonetic ambiguity

The claim:

Combination of:

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leads to:

Phonetic ambiguity that feeds phonological reanalysis,

The claim:

Combination of:

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leads to:

Phonetic ambiguity that feeds phonological reanalysis, which feeds syntactic ambiguity

The claim:

Combination of:

- 1 an intensifier phrase
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leads to:

Phonetic ambiguity that feeds phonological reanalysis, which feeds syntactic ambiguity that feeds syntactic reanalysis.

The claim:

The phrase “...than a motherfucker” is the origin of a single lexical item (with multiple phonological representations in the speech community) that has *very* different syntactic properties than its origin.

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Intensifiers



Comparatives

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More X (than Y)

Comparatives

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More X (than Y)

More gregarious (than his friend)

Comparatives

Comparatives:

More X (than Y)

More gregarious (than his friend)

X-er (than Y)

Comparatives

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More X (than Y)

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Dumber than a bag of rocks

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Comparatives:

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Intensifiers

Intensifiers:

- don't modify the propositional meaning of a clause
- add force
- are more-or-less semantically empty

Intensifiers

Intensifiers:

- don't modify the propositional meaning of a clause
- add force
- are more-or-less semantically empty
- ...and come in *two* flavors: attributive and predicative (Tagliamonte 2012)

Intensifiers

Examples:

Intensifiers

Examples:

Attributive:

Intensifiers

Examples:

Attributive:

'A cold-ass day'

Intensifiers

Examples:

Attributive:

'A cold-ass day'
'A *really* cold day'

Intensifiers

Examples:

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Intensifiers

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'She's so fine'

Intensifiers

Examples:

Attributive:

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Predicative:

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Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

pitch black

Comparisons as Intensifiers



Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

pitch black

pitch quiet

Comparisons as Intensifiers



pat 🎃

@pattytsukino

Follow



my fam is driving me to bayview and the car
is pitch quiet all you can here is my loud ass
music through my earphones

6:25 PM - 10 Aug 2017

2 Likes



1



2

Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

pitch black

pitch quiet

Phrases:

Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

pitch black

pitch quiet

Phrases:

hot *as hell*

Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

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Comparisons as Intensifiers

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Comparisons of degree:

Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

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Specific:

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Comparisons as Intensifiers

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Specific: dumber *than a bag of rocks*

Generic:

Comparisons as Intensifiers

Adjectives:

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hot *as hell*

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Comparisons of degree:

Specific: dumber *than a bag of rocks*

Generic: dumber *than a motherfucker*

AAL Phonology

Well known phonological and phonetic variables:

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- Stop devoicing, debuccalization, and deletion (Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1981, Bailey and Thomas 1998, Thomas 2007, Farrington 2011, Farrington (under review))

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Well known phonological and phonetic variables:

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Less well-known, under-researched phonological and phonetic variables:

- Stop devoicing, debuccalization, and deletion (Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1981, Bailey and Thomas 1998, Thomas 2007, Farrington 2011, Farrington (under review))
- postvocalic /v/ deletion (Thomas 2007, Jones 2015)

AAL Phonology and Phonetics

The word *mother* can potentially be subjected to multiple of these processes, and heavily reduced.

/r/ vocalization/deletion:

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/v/ deletion:

AAL Phonology and Phonetics

The word *mother* can potentially be subjected to multiple of these processes, and heavily reduced.

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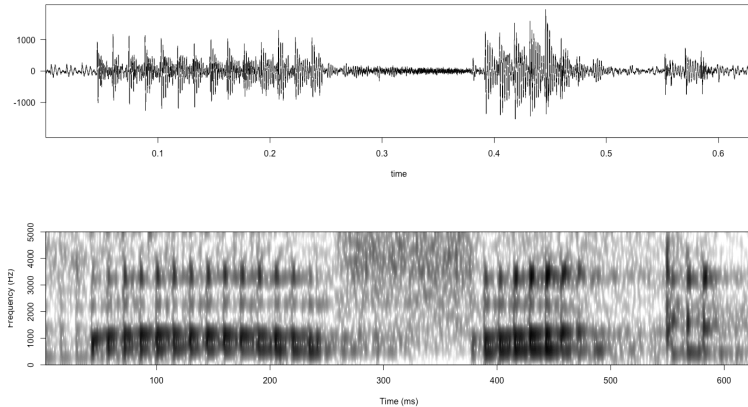
TH-fronting: /mʌðə/ → [mʌnə]

stop deletion: /mʌdə/ → [mʌ:]

/v/ deletion: /mʌnə/ → [mʌ:]

multiple pathways from /mʌðər/ to [mʌ:] (cf. *brother* ~ *brer*, *bruh*,)

Sound example



Play

Taboo avoidance

Forms of taboo avoidance:

Taboo avoidance

Forms of taboo avoidance:

- minced oaths:

Taboo avoidance

Forms of taboo avoidance:

- minced oaths: goddamn it → *gosh darn it*

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Taboo avoidance

Forms of taboo avoidance:

- minced oaths: goddamn it → *gosh darn it*
- rhyme: bloody → *ruddy*
- meter: shut the fuck up → *shut the front door*
- deletion: than a motherfucker → than a *mother*

The Object of Study

The object of study is:

An intensifier

The Object of Study

The object of study is:

A *predicative* intensifier

The Object of Study

The object of study is:

A *predicative* intensifier that follows the adjective it modifies

The Object of Study

The object of study is:

A *predicative* intensifier that follows the adjective it modifies and is generally pronounced [dɪnəml:]

Examples

Video examples

Hypothesis

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis

Hypothesis: *Dennamug* is grammaticalizing, and is no longer interpreted by all speakers as the phrase *than a mother*, but rather a single lexical item that functions as an intensifier.

A Problem

How can we study such a consistently present, but extremely low-frequency phenomenon?

One Solution

Twitter.

One Solution

Twitter.

Massive socialmedia corpora allow for investigation of attested but extremely low-frequency spoken phenomena (cf associative *nem* in Mufwene 1998), and that such corpora yield valid results when compared against other corpora and speech (Doyle 2014; Jones 2015; Austen 2016), and specifically with regards to spoken AAE (Eisenstein 2013, 2015; Stewart 2014; Blodgett et al. 2016; Jones 2016)

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The Data

All tokens on Twitter of all possible spellings of *dennamug*, from all time.

The Data

than a mug than a muh than a muv than a mud thana mug thana muv thana muh thana mud thanna mug thanna
 muv thanna muh thanna mud thanamug thanamuh thanamuv thanamud thannamug thannamuh thannamud
 thannamuv dan a mug dan a muh dan a muv dan a mud dana mug dana muh dana muv dana mud danna mug
 danna muh danna muv danna mud danamug danamuh danamuv danamud dannamug dannamuh dannamuv
 dannamud then a mug then a muh then a muv then a mud thena mug thena muv thena muh thena mud thenna
 mug thenna muv thenna muh thenna mud thenamug thenamuh thenamuv thenamud thennamug thennamuh
 thennamud thennamuv den a mug den a muh den a muv den a mud dena mug dena muh dena muv dena mud
 denna mug denna muh denna muv denna mud denamug denamuh denamuv denamud dennamug dennamuh
 dennamuv dennamud thin a mug thin a muh thin a muv thin a mud thina mug thina muv thina muh thina mud
 thinna mug thinna muv thinna muh thinna mud thinamug thinamuh thinamuv thinamud thinnamug thinnamuh
 thinnamud thinnamuv din a mug din a muh din a muv din a mud dina mug dina muh dina muv dina mud dinna
 dinna muh dinna muv dinna mud dinamug dinamuh dinamuv dinamud dinnamug dinnamuh dinnamuv dinnamud

The Data

297,778 tweets.

After eliminating false positives, 294,363 tweets.

The Data

False positives:

The Data

False positives:

Nothing better than a mug full of Earl Grey for the cold morning.

The Data

False positives:

Nothing better than a mug full of Earl Grey for the cold morning.
my face feels so clean lol I did my regular face wash and then a
mud mask lol

The Data

True positives:

The Data

True positives: i know terence blanchard bouta be playing that
trumpet louder than a mug lol

The Data

True positives: i know terence blanchard bouta be playing that
trumpet louder than a mug lol
back sore dan a mug from rehearsal i could use a back rub

The Data

True positives: i know terence blanchard bouta be playing that
trumpet louder than a mug lol

back sore dan a mug from rehearsal i could use a back rub
man one of my friends is long winded den a mug dawg she can talk
yo fuckin ear off

Pronunciation



Trashaud

@bydie_ching2x

Follow



Dennamug or dennamud ?

9:47 AM - 24 Dec 2014

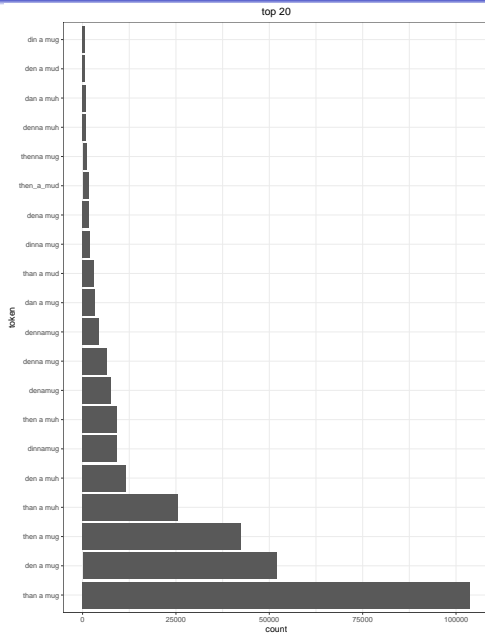


1

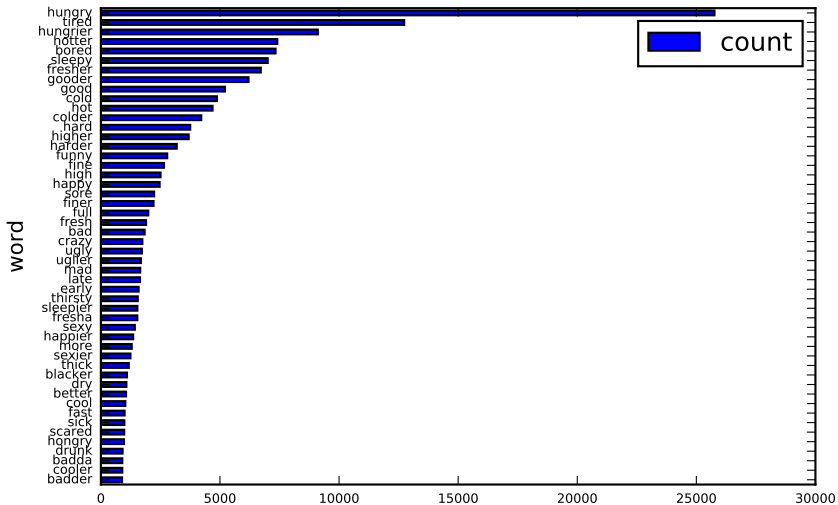


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token	count
than a mug	103781
den a mug	51927
then a mug	42367
than a muh	25617
den a muh	11652
dinnamug	9285
then a muh	9241
denamug	7671
denna mug	6490
dennamug	4384
dan a mug	3313
than a mud	3028
dinna mug	1912
dena mug	1768
then_a_mud	1582
thenna mug	1059
denna muh	960
dan a muh	816
den a mud	756
din a mug	558



word	dnmgfreq
hungry	25761
tired	12733
hungrier	9110
hotter	7407
bored	7333
sleepy	7004
fresher	6713
gooder	6196
good	5209
cold	4871
hot	4688
colder	4214
hard	3751
higher	3686
harder	3184
funny	2784
fine	2646
high	2505
happy	2465
sore	2236
finer	2211
full	1990
fresh	1897
bad	1837
crazy	1741
ugly	1720
uglier	1679
mad	1652
late	1642
early	1585
thirsty	1548
sleepier	1533
sexy	1426
happier	1355
sexier	1241

Bare Adjective

There's a strong preference for a bare adjective, almost across the board:

pair	preference
hungry to hungrier	2.82
sleepy to sleepier	4.57
cold to colder	1.16
hard to harder	1.18
fine to finer	1.20
ugly to uglier	1.02
sexy to sexier	1.15
bad to badder	1.03
cool to cooler	1.14

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fine to finer	1.20
ugly to uglier	1.02
sexy to sexier	1.15
bad to badder	1.03
cool to cooler	1.14
gooder to good	1.19
gooder to better	5.86

SAT words

sluggish

apropos

schadenfreude

temperamental

rhetorical

vomitous

delectable

subpar

lavish

Comparative Adjective

There's a preponderance of adjectives with *-er* that do not allow for comparative *-er* in standard English, and must instead take "more":

antisocialer
catholic
beautifuler
startling
overrateder
sunburnter
negligenter
tirededer

'more'

This ... weather is bipolar dennamug (cf. ?? more bipolar than...)

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only 20% of uses of dennamug make use of comparative morphology, and the vast majority of them are nonstandard comparatives

'more'

This ... weather is bipolar dennamug (cf. ?? more bipolar than...)
only 20% of uses of dennamug make use of comparative morphology, and the vast majority of them are nonstandard comparatives
...a full 20% of which are the enregistered gooder.

Unusual spellings

nekit

tiyurder

booshi

perklemped (*verkleempt?*)

Enregistered forms

/skr/ for /str/:

Enregistered forms

/skr/ for /str/:

Im hongrier than a mug in this class. Lord, please give me skrenf

Hot than a mug out here in these skreets...

I tell you nucca, those skrimps was bigga than a mug

My money skraiter than a muh fxckin perm bih

it's skrowng than a muh

man that game skressful thanamug

Performance

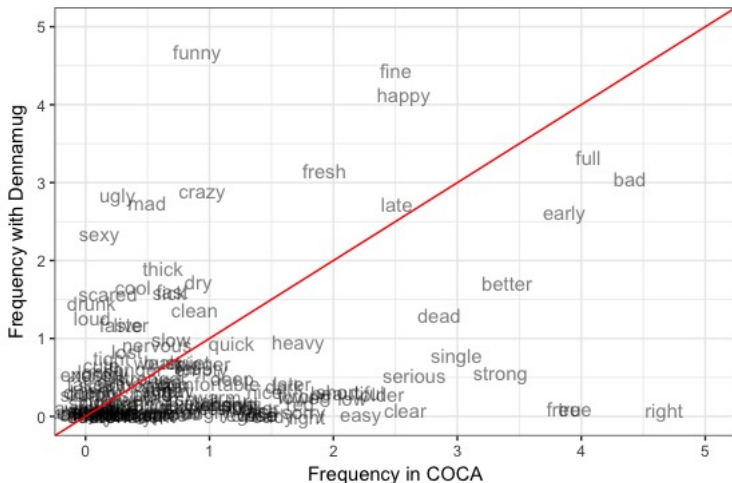
Dennamug is AAE specific. Because of this, much of the material it modifies is also unique to AAE (*fire*, *triflin*), self-consciously orthographically AAE (*fye* 'fire', *smoover* 'smoother', *tiiiiiii'd* 'tired', *fahner* 'finer'), or otherwise culturally related to black America (*militant*, *black*, *gangsta*, *woke*, *trill*, *hood*). That said, the content is not always so (*regal*, *chipper*, *frugal*, *remedial*) and it's probable that at least some portion of those using *dennamug* are doing so in the context of performative blackness, often in conjunction with 'SAT' words: e.g., *counterproductive* dennamug.

Adjective Frequency Comparison between COCA and 'Dennamug' Tweets



Comparison against COCA

Adjective Frequency Comparison between COCA and 'Dennamug' Tweets



Adjective Frequency Comparison between COCA and 'Dennamug' Tweets



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Adverbs

She is driving leisurely than a mug
I am employed....gainfully then a mug too

Noun Phrases

binary thinking dennamug
false advertising
foreshadowing
Power trip

PP

My accent gonna be outchea dennamug because Im going to be
exhausted

Verb Phrases

Procrastinating dennamug
back when Trick was hot I was illegally dl'ing den a mug
That chick is line stepping dennamug.
I'm laughing dennamug cause I'm sure they gone get rid of your
favorite. Trust me
projecting dennamug!!
Tweet watching dennamug.
I be scanning dennamug on a day like this here.
Cramping dennamug.

CP

No weapon formed against me shall prosper. Dennyamug.

CP

**Dream&Create**

@L1LBANG

Follow



"You one of them, or one of us?" That was a loaded question dinamug. [#ShotsFired](#)

5:12 PM - 10 May 2017

1 Retweet 1 Like



Age Grading?

just realized I'm too grown to be saying dennamug

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Conclusions

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Phonetic ambiguity

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Phonetic ambiguity that feeds phonological reanalysis,

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Conclusions

Twitter, and other social media, as a tool for investigating low-frequency phenomena.

Thanks

Thank you!
Tyler Kendall
Christopher Hall

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