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The Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on African American Vernacular English

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Introduction

African American Vernacular English, a nonstandard variety spoken by many African American communities in the United States, is claimed to be one of the most widely discussed and researched dialects of English. Without a doubt, the amount of literature on it is extensive. The two topics that dominate it are the description of features characteristic of AAVE and the discussion of the origin of this variety. While the first one is less contentious and most often simply attempts to document the grammar and the lexicon of the variety, the latter has sparked many debates over the years. The two opposing views concerning the emergence of AAVE are the anglicist hypothesis, which claims that it originates from vernaculars brought from the British Isles and that all of its features can be traced back to them, and the creolist hypothesis, which postulates that it stems from an earlier, widespread creole spoken by the slaves and that all of its peculiarities are remnants of that. In recent years, many researchers stopped making definitive claims on the origin of AAVE, but rather take intermediate stances, acknowledging that a variety of substrate languages and creoles, as well as European English vernaculars, have shaped it into what it is now. One of the reasons for neither of the theories being universally accepted is that the available evidence is conflicting. This is, in part, due to the interpretation of the data, but also to the methods employed in sourcing it, as well as regional differences and contemporary trends. As many linguists point out, the methodology chosen for a study can greatly influence the outcome. This applies not only to the diachronic but also to the synchronic studies. At the intersection of the two, another issue emerges - that of whether AAVE is diverging or converging with other dialects of English, and the current trends in its development, which often partly overlaps with the discussion of sociolinguistic phenomena. While less contentious than the origin debate, it still sparks some discussion.

While selecting literature for this project, I first focused on the origin debate and the arguments and data that the researchers of opposing views utilize to support their stance, since I found it baffling how practically the same data, such as the ex-slave recordings, lead different teams to reach such vastly different conclusions. I suspected that the research methods and interpretation of the results may play a role here - a topic which was also discussed in multiple sources that I read; I was also curious whether the two views can coexist, or whether they are mutually exclusive. However, understanding the phenomena that were discussed in those chapters and articles required me to familiarize myself with the more general information on the characteristic features of AAVE, as well as the basics of the sociohistorical context of the

development of it. While searching for this information, I also came across chapters on e.g. nonverbal communication in African American communities.

The characteristic features of modern AAVE

1. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 1. Phonological and Grammatical Features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 3-14). Blackwell Publishers.

The first chapter of Rickford's book concerns the features of AAVE. In the beginning, the author presents a quick overview of the literature on the topic, remarking that the majority of comprehensive monographs have been published in the 1970s and 1980s, which not only makes them lack the information about some more recently described phenomena, but, in many cases, also be out of print and thus difficult to access. He then moves on to list the distinctive features of AAVE, beginning with a wide variety of phonological features, which include consonant and vowel changes, consonant insertions and deletions, consonant metathesis, unstressed syllable deletion, and prosodic features. The next two sections include markers of tense, mood, and aspect, including, for example, the deletion of 3rd person markings in the present tense, absence of copula verbs, generalization of the past form of *be,* as well as constructions unique in their use to AAVE, such as the distinction between stressed and unstressed *been, steady, done, come, finna,* and *had* as a marker of simple past. As for nouns and pronouns, Rickford marks the absence of plural and possessive -s, associative plurals, pleonastic pronouns, *y'all* and *they* as 2nd and 3rd person plural possessive pronouns, object pronouns used as reflexive pronouns, and the absence of relative pronouns. Subsequently, he discusses the negation in AAVE, mentioning the use of *ain't,* multiple negations, negative inversions, and *ain't but* or *don't but* for *only.* Speaking of sentence structure, he remarks that questions in AAVE do not always require inversion, and embedded questions can undergo inversion if *if* or *whether* are omitted. Next, Rickford discusses existential and locative constructions, where *here go* is used instead of *here is*, *they got* instead of *there are,* and *it is* instead of *there is.* The final section points out the use of a quotative *say.*

While the bulk of this chapter is devoted to listing and briefly discussing the variety of features typical for AAVE, Rickford also remarks on the fact that this variety of English is not uniform either, and the extent to which these features are used depends on the social class, age, and gender of the speaker, as well as on the immediate context of the conversation, such as who the interlocutor is or what the topic is. He also remarks that not all the listed features are unique

to AAVE and that other American varieties of English may share them, to a varying extent. This chapter is an incredibly useful source of information on what features of pronunciation and grammar are characteristic of AAVE.

2. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 2. Carrying the New Wave into Syntax: The Case of Black English BÍN. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 15-33). Blackwell Publishers.

In this chapter, Rickford discusses the notion of the stressed and unstressed *been* and the difference in the use of these forms in AAVE. He begins by remarking how important methodology is in gathering data for this type of research from interviews, as a variety of factors, including the interviewer's ethnicity, race, age, as well as the topics in the conversation may influence the interviewee's speech. He points out that questionnaires are also a way to gather the information needed. He then moves on to discuss his research on the topic, for which he utilized both methods. His data shows that there is a difference between the use and meaning of the stressed and unstressed *been* in AAVE and that non-AAVE speakers can rarely point out that difference. The unstressed *been* is a marker of progressive past, while the stressed one, which he calls "remote phase" either indicates that an action took place a long time before the time of speaking, or that it began at that point and still continues into the present. It can either be followed by a verb in its past form, past participle, a verb in its -ing form, just by the verb stem, as well as by locatives, adverbs, modals, *done.* There seem to be additional restrictions on the acceptability of phrases in which the stressed *been* is used, but Rickford's research does not shed any light on them. It does, however, show that not all AAVE speakers use and recognize this construction with the same level of fluency. Rickford partly attributes this to there being two competing ways of expressing this distinction, one by the stressed and unstressed *been*, and one by *been* and *done.*

Rickford's research not only provides a valuable insight into the meaning and distribution of the stressed *been* in AAVE, but also points to several other issues, including the intricacies of the methodologies that can be employed in similar research, as well as there being competing systems within the same variety of English. Both of those points are extremely interesting for other research into AAVE, even though they pertain to entirely different aspects thereof.

3. Rickford, J. R. & Théberge-Rafal, C. (1999). 3. Preterite Had + Verb -ed in the Narratives of African American Adolescents. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 34-60). Blackwell Publishers.

The third chapter of Rickford's book is an elaboration on the research that he had conducted together with Théberge-Rafal on the *had*+verb-ed construction in the speech of African American youth from East Palo Alto; those findings are juxtaposed against data from other, in some cases more recent, research. The construction in question, while at first eerily similar to the standard English past perfect (*had*+past participle), varies both in form and in use. The verb which follows the auxiliary *had* usually comes in the past simple (-ed) form. While past perfect is used to refer to events that took place before a specific past reference point, the AAVE *had*+verb-ed appears to simply denote past events in the same way as past simple does in standard English. Nevertheless, Rickford and Théberge-Rafal note that there are some constraints on the distribution of this form in narratives: depending on the speaker, they tend to appear in orientation clauses, right before the evaluation of the narrative, or in landmark clauses. They also point out that a similar use of the pluperfect tense can be observed in some dialects of Spanish to mark surprise. Similarly, they argue, the AAVE use is constrained to marking the narrative or emotional peaks of the narrative. The authors also remark that this use seems to be mostly restricted to younger speakers, and while a trend can be observed where the frequency of use of this construction increases each new generation, some young AAVE speakers do not use it at all. In turn, it has been documented in the speech of young Puerto Ricans in New York, likely as a feature they borrowed from the African American youth there.

This phenomenon appears to be, similar to the stressed and unstressed *been*, another instance of a new structure emerging and gaining ground in the community. While it is not yet common for all AAVE speakers, it seems to be increasing in use and even influencing other linguistic communities. Nevertheless, as it was described only relatively recently, Rickford and Théberge-Rafal argue that there is not enough data to draw definitive conclusions on the usage of this construction, be it with regard to its distribution in speech or among different age groups of speakers. They state that a much larger corpus would be needed in order to confidently answer the remaining questions concerning the *had*+verb-ed construction.

4. Rickford, J. R., Ball, A., Blake, R., Jackson, R., & Martin, N. (1999). 4. Rappin on the Copula Coffin: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Analysis of Copula Variation in African American Vernacular English. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 61-89). Blackwell Publishers.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the discussion of the copula in AAVE. While it is one of the most recognizable features of this dialect, Rickford et al. argue that the abundant research on this topic is riddled with theoretical and methodological issues which make it difficult to draw conclusions from the existing body of research. The authors start by introducing the definition of copula used by them (which includes not only the copula verb *be* but also the auxiliary *be*). Firstly, they point out that the researchers have not come to an agreement as to how to define the variable. Out of all the forms that *be* can take in the present tense, only *am* does not undergo deletion in AAVE. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on whether the remaining two forms - *is* and *are* - should be counted together or separately. Clearly, the decision of how to compute these variables - separately or together - must have an influence on the statistical computation of the data and the results. Another notion that makes it difficult to compare the results is the formulae that the researchers have to choose from when performing the analysis. Rickford et al. list formulae for computing contractions and deletions (Straight Contraction, Straight Deletion, Labov Contraction, Labov Deletion, and Romaine Contraction) and give a comparison of how the choice of the formula affects the results by applying them to the same fictional data set. Then the authors move on to discussing these issues and suggesting their solutions on the basis of their own linguistic data. First, they analyze the occurrences of copula contraction and deletion, taking into account many variables such as the phonological environment of the variable, the surrounding grammatical environment, as well as the age group of the speaker. They argue that the results are similar enough for the two variables (they seem to have the same constraints) to be treated together. Then they test the different formulae on the given data set. They note that in the majority of cases the chosen formula has a significant influence on the reported results due to the differences in how those are calculated. Here the authors seem less convinced of any method's superiority over others. They present arguments in favor of using Romaine's formula, but also acknowledge its flaws. They conclude that not enough is known about how deletion works in AAVE - mainly whether or not it is a result of contraction, or a separate process - for them to assert one position. Finally, the authors point out that conducting research on whether the age-related differences are a sign of a change in progress or age-grading would be very beneficial to the field.

Rickford et al.'s chapter not only familiarizes the reader with the notion of copula absence and its importance in AAVE but also turns the attention to the intricacies of the variety of methodological approaches utilized by other researchers. While they do offer their solutions to these issues, it seems that them simply pointing out the inconsistencies in the body of research on the copula in AAVE is more important.

5. Martin, S. & Wolfram, W. (1998). 1. The Sentence in African American Vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 11-36). Routledge.

Martin's and Wolfram's chapter covers the topic of the differences in sentence structure between AAVE and standard American English. They begin by stating that in many regards the two are very akin, e.g. both are SVO languages or head-first languages. Nevertheless, there are some quite significant differences between the two varieties. For instance, certain verbs that are obligatorily transitive in standard English can become intransitive in AAVE, or undergo other similar functional changes, which also translates to a slight change in meaning and distribution. AAVE also makes use of syntactic structures that, while similar to the standard, have a widely different meaning, such as the stressed *been*, semiauxiliary *come*, or *tell say*. Unlike more standard varieties of English, AAVE permits double negation and utilizes its own set of negative concord rules, it allows for personal pronouns to take the position of the subject in existential sentences, as well as negative inversion in such sentences; AAVE is not as strict when it comes to forming questions either, and does not necessarily require inversion, but the meaning can be conveyed in the tone of the sentence. Additionally, AAVE allows for more relative pronouns to be dropped, and permits the use of double modals, although it can be argued that the first modal in such a combination serves as a premodifier of the main one, as they cannot be swapped around and only one of the modals is used in forming questions.

This chapter does a good job of discussing some of the most prominent features of AAVE when it comes to the sentence structure. While AAVE is still a dialect of English, it has some very unique features that set it apart from standard English and other variations. Interestingly enough, some of those may take a form that looks familiar, but their function is dramatically different from other dialects.

6. Green, L. (1998). 2. Aspect and Predicate Phrases in African-American Vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 37-68). Routledge.

While superficially not too different from the standard American English, AAVE does have its own unique syntactical solutions and manners of expressing meaning different from the standard, or entirely absent from it. In this chapter, Green focuses on how aspect is expressed in AAVE and how these phrases interact with the rest of the sentence structure. She goes into great detail concerning the syntax of AAVE and the types of phrases present in it (verb, noun, adjective, prepositional, and adverb phrases). She then outlines the verb paradigms possible in AAVE, to showcase the material she will be analyzing. She concludes that out of items specific for AAVE are finite auxiliaries *be, do, have,* and aspectual markers *be, been, done.* The difference between the two categories seems to lie within, among others, what positions they can appear in sentences. Due to how they behave in sentences, Green argues that the finite auxiliaries *be, do, have* belong to the AuxP which is made of an auxiliary and a VP, while the aspectual markers *be, been, done* are actually a part of the aforementioned VP, since they cannot be moved around without the rest of the VP. The author also attempts to explore the role of the predicate in such sentences, and tentatively claims that it is the predicate that grants the aspectual markers their grammatical function, but remarks that this requires further study.

Green's chapter goes into much detail concerning how the different kinds of auxiliary and aspectual verbs function in AAVE. Understanding the difference between the two allows for an analysis of their behavior within a sentence, which uncovers further patterns and regularities within these ways of expression unique for AAVE. While the syntactic approach to this topic may seem complicated, the insights that it grants are incredibly valuable.

7. Mufwene, S. S. (1998). 3. The Structure of the Noun Phrase in African-American Vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 69-81). Routledge.

This short chapter is concerned with the similarities and differences between AAVE and other varieties of English in the area of noun phrases. Mufwene claims that overall the AAVE noun phrase does not differ much from what is standard for English. Noun phrases can be headed by a noun, a pronoun, or an interrogative pronoun, although the latter is less prototypical for them. They may or may not include other elements, such as determiners or adjectives, among others. The AAVE NP is missing certain features characteristic of creoles, such as Gullah, e.g. expressing generic reference via a non-individuated noun. Nevertheless, whether a

noun in an NP in AAVE is countable or not is governed by different rules than standard English. In some cases that has an influence on the meaning, where it describes features characteristic of that noun, and in other situations it bears no significant influence on the semantics of the phrase. In AAVE common nouns can be used as proper nouns (e.g. as nicknames), and the other way around (e.g. to denote an item of some brand). In the field of pronouns, AAVE displays an interesting construction known as the associative plural. This phenomenon occurs when talking about a group of people centered around someone, where a phrase *XYZ and them* becomes shortened to *XYZ nem.* This is a feature that AAVE shares with many creoles. Mufwene then moves on to characterizing the NP if it is headed by a countable common noun. He claims that the determiner position can be occupied, similar as in standard English, by an article, a demonstrative, or a possessive. He remarks that the possessive is not always morphologically marked, although the constraints of this are not entirely clear, and can be signified purely by word order. According to him, modifiers in AAVE work the same as in standard English, and the same goes for quantifiers. As far as relative clauses are concerned, he notes that AAVE permits a wider variety of pronouns in certain contexts, as well as the omission thereof in clauses where standard English would not permit that.

It would appear that AAVE noun phrases share some features with both standard English and creoles. While their overall structure is similar to that of other varieties of English, it does possess its unique characteristics. While some of them, like the optional absence of the possessive marking or relative pronouns, are often mentioned in the literature on the topic, Mufwene's approach provides more than just an account of their existence but also places them together with other features of the NP, which facilitates a better understanding of the structure of AAVE and the peculiarities thereof.

8. Bailey, G., & Thomas, E. (1998). 4. Some Aspects of African-American Vernacular English Phonology. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 85-109). Routledge.

As noted by the authors of this chapter, the phonology of AAVE has not received as much spotlight as its morphology and syntax, perhaps due to it being less readily recognizable than some of the grammatical features. Nevertheless, this variety possesses some unique features that can yield insight into its development more easily than its syntax and morphology. Bailey and Thomas begin by listing 25 of the most widely known phonological features of AAVE and providing information on what other varieties of English these phenomena can be found in. The list includes, among others, the final consonant cluster reduction, r-lessness, the

labialization or stopping of interdental fricatives, metathesis, and glide reduction. They group these processes into four categories: ones shared by many varieties of English, ones common for non-standard dialects, ones shared by Southern American English, and ones predominantly restricted to AAVE. They remark that these features are oftentimes variable and subject both to phonological and grammatical constraints, meaning they only occur in certain environments. Subsequently, the authors move on to discussing the vowel system of AAVE. They note that while there are certain attested trends in non-African American varieties of American English, AAVE follows none of them, and instead displays its own trends. Bailey and Thomas group the vowel characteristics of AAVE into ones that it shares with some creoles (e.g. non-front onsets of /au/), which points to a potential common source for them, ones that it shares with Southern American English (e.g. glide-shortened /ai/ before voiced obstruents), and some that seem to be more recent innovations restricted to AAVE (e.g. onset of /o/ lowered and fronted). The authors claim that the phonological data can be very useful in reconstructing the history of AAVE, as even the shortest recordings abound with tokens of vowels, while they may not provide much material for syntactic or morphological analysis. According to them, the pronunciation can also be easily used to recognize a person's ethnicity, and thus be a reason for discrimination against some people.

While, as noted by Bailey and Thomas, there is proportionally not much research on the phonology of AAVE, this chapter does a good work of summarizing the main points. Aside from providing a concise list of phonological features typical for AAVE, it also juxtaposes them against other varieties, which allows for some preliminary conclusions about the relations between AAVE and those varieties to be drawn. While the authors do not devote as much time to the consonants as to the vowels, their analysis of the vowel system does provide some insight into the development of AAVE.

9. Labov, W. (1998). 5. Co-existent Systems in African-American Vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 110-153). Routledge.

Labov's chapter presents a detailed discussion of the possibility of there being co-existent African American and General English systems in AAVE, i.e. elements typical only for AAVE and common for many English dialects, respectively. The author begins with an homage to another researcher, Beryl Bailey, whose work on AAVE and Jamaican Creole is the basis for his inquiry. He then moves on to explaining that surface variation between two dialects or within a dialect may reveal deeper, grammatical patterns that emerge as separate systems.

He points out that the features of AAVE grammar can be grouped into ones typical for other dialects of English, ones present in other dialects but absent in AAVE, and ones present in AAVE but absent in other dialects, and that the common area is the biggest one. This can be subject to different interpretations, e.g. that the two are separate languages or dialects, that they are separate but interdependent systems, or that AAVE is a creole or evolved from one. Labov then moves on to discussing the characteristics of a number of constructions typical for AAVE: the non-finite *be,* perfective *done,* sequential *be done,* and non-recent perfective *been*. He concludes that all of these features evolved from systems analogous to standard English tense and aspectual ones, but gained additional meaning overtime. For instance, he claims that the non-finite *be* evolved from a manner of expressing the present tense into a habitual structure overlapping with the present tense and progressive aspect, and finally into an intensive structure that loses the aspectual characteristic. Labov argues that these elements and the standard English ones are instances of co-existent systems because they are not, to his knowledge, conditioned phonologically, and because, as he claims, all of the African American constructions behave differently from standard American auxiliaries and thus can be grouped into a separate category that co-exists with the standard auxiliaries. The author finally concludes the chapter with a short section on the current trajectory of AAVE. He remarks on the importance of the social environment on the development of this variety, as well as of the so-called camouflaged features which look similar to standard ones but have vastly different meanings. Finally, he acknowledges that most of the discussion on this topic is concerned with whether AAVE converges or diverges with other varieties of English.

Labov's chapter highlights the coexistence of many different structures in AAVE, some unique to this variety and some shared across many dialects. While initially some of them may appear to have the same meaning, oftentimes there are subtle semantic differences that set them apart. He claims that the listed constructions constitute a separate category, co-occurrent with the standard English auxiliaries, and illustrates the characteristics of the African American structures very well, which yields credibility to his theory.

10. Smitherman, G. (1998). 7. Word from the Hood: the Lexicon of African American Vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 203-225). Routledge.

Smitherman's chapter is concerned with the lexical variety of AAVE. While many words in this variety are the same as in other ones, it still possesses a wide selection of unique terms or unconventional uses of conventional words. The author acknowledges that these

lexical innovations have their origin in many African-American sub-communities, and thus reflect various aspects of their everyday experience. They are, however, in many cases, bound to social, historical, and cultural phenomena characteristic of the African-American community. She then begins by discussing the importance of oral culture in AAVE, a cultural feature which she links to African cultures. She claims that phenomena such as *trash talkin* (trying to taunt your opponents to reduce their morale), or rap music, as well as some superstitions, such as that if we talk about bad things, they will happen, emerge from that tradition. Smitherman then moves on to discussing the history of the terms used to describe African-Americans, and what they reflect about the community. It is worth noting that in some cases the community adopted a previously negative term (e.g. *Black*) to reappropriate it and express their pride at being a part of this minority. Next, the author discusses the borrowings from AAVE into other varieties of English and points out that it is not only lexical items that cross over but also culturally specific behaviors, such as playing basketball. She notes that this is not always favorably viewed by the African-American community. Finally, she discusses the importance of hip-hop and rap music in lexical innovation and the spread of new words.

While Smitherman touches upon a variety of important and interesting aspects of the lexicon of AAVE, the chapter seems to be more of a theoretical discussion thereof. The knowledge contained within is undoubtedly of merit, but it concerns more the sociohistorical and cultural conditions in which the unique lexicon of AAVE developed, and less the lexicon itself, as, while she enriches her text with expressions characteristic of AAVE, there is not even an attempt at a list, or an organized classification of the most common terms, e.g. by their semantic field. While it is not necessary in this chapter, the title may be misleading in relation to the content.

11. Spears, A. K. (1998). 8. African-American Language Use: Ideology and So-Called Obscenity. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 226-250). Routledge.

Some of the most recognizable AAVE expressions or cultural texts often feature words that speakers of other varieties of English may consider obscene - for instance, rap music abounds in such terms. This chapter is devoted to the discussion of such terms - “uncensored speech” as the author calls them - and social and ideological consequences or implications thereof. Spears begins by outlining the differences between AAVE and other varieties in terms of these words, as while they may be obscene to people who are not speakers of AAVE, in this variety, they are not necessarily as vulgar, which may lead to quite severe misunderstandings.

He continues by claiming that the use of such words is not universal for every AAVE speaker, and the rates at which they are used differ from person to person. Finally, he formulates four questions which he aims to answer throughout his chapter: whether such words are acceptable, obscene, or if they should be forbidden, whether such language is abnormal, whether the use of such words signifies a moral and cultural decline of African-American communities, and whether it says anything fundamental about the use of language in those communities. Some of these questions may seem controversial, but they seem to be angled towards the conclusions that the author is trying to make, and he is not actually suggesting that an opposing claim may be valid. Spears then moves on to analyzing two expressions, *XYZ-ass* and *nigga.* The first one he approaches from a morphological and syntactic viewpoint. He also addresses its semantics. The word *ass* can perform three main functions: describe the anatomical part, be used as a suffix to form adjectives that require being followed by a noun phrase, and finally to reinforce or replace some personal pronouns. The latter term is more controversial, and in many instances a similar word, when used by a non-African-American person, may be very offensive. Nevertheless, this form is used by African-Americans to refer to each other, and increasingly to refer to any male, regardless of his ethnicity. It has also been adopted by other communities, such as teenagers of other ethnicities, to refer to men or boys. Both of these terms, depending on the context, can be used in a negative, neutral, or positive meaning. Finally, Spears moves on to answering his questions. He concludes that the classification of a term as obscene is subjective, and one cannot forbid the use of a certain range of expressions like this, as well as that expressions considered obscene, can be found in any language and have accompanied all sorts of communities throughout history. He refrains from drawing any definite conclusions concerning his third question but argues that considering the use of such vocabulary as a sign of degeneration illustrates one's ignorance of their meaning and the contexts that they are used in by AAVE speakers. Finally, he claims that his discussion provides important points for the discussion of obscenities not only in AAVE, but in all kinds of dialects or languages, and for a better understanding of misunderstandings that can arise from the use of such words.

While Spears's discussion seems to be predominantly sociological, it does include a linguistic discussion of the two terms that he selected. It also provides some valuable insight into what seems to be obscenities in AAVE, but what from the perspective of the speakers of that variety does not need to be viewed as such, which may cause communication problems with speakers of other varieties of English.

The sociolinguistic dimensions of AAVE

12. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 5. Ethnicity as a Sociolinguistic Boundary. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 90-111). Blackwell Publishers.

This chapter by Rickford tackles the issue of what role ethnicity plays in linguistic boundaries. The content is built around the author's analysis of the speech of two elderly inhabitants of an island in the Sea Islands, one African American and one European American. He compares their pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary, in order to gain insight on how different their speech is and in what aspects, despite them having lived on the same small island all their lives. He also strengthens his points by citing additional resources. Rickford notes that the two have quite similar pronunciation, but vary greatly in plural formation, passivization, and possessive formation. Earlier literature on the topic seems to reinforce the notion that the speech of African Americans and European Americans from the same region can vary greatly in terms of its morphosyntax. The author provides a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon. He begins by laying a claim that it may be a result of a different geographic and social distribution of the two groups, effectively being a reflection of the rural-urban difference. He quickly refutes it by saying that not only does his own data go against it, as his respondents were of the same social status and from the same place, but also other researchers' data does not confirm it. The next explanation he brings up is that the two manners of speech have different origins, and thus, passed from parent to child, they remain different; this too can be refuted by examples of children of creole-speaking parents who learn the standard and do not speak the creole at all. Rickford then mentions the notion that it may simply be a feature of human language that morphosyntactic features do not transfer between varieties as readily as pronunciation does. There is, however, some proof to the contrary from languages spoken in India and Africa. The final two reasons seem to not be as easily refutable: the opportunity for linguistic contact and identity. Rickford claims that in the formative years of their dialect acquisition both of the speakers had very limited contact with the speakers of the other variety and that it is true also for African and European Americans in other parts of the USA due to a long history of racial segregation. He also says that the unique dialects of these two ethnic groups are a part of their identity, and members of a community may consciously avoid using forms characteristic of the other group not to "cross over" from their community to the other one.

Chapter 5 by Rickford is a fascinating insight into the mechanisms behind the clear division between the speech of European Americans and the speech of African Americans.

Based on actual research of two people of different ethnicity coming from the same geographical location, it not only provides a compelling explanation for the differences that can be extended to other communities but also acknowledges other possible explanations and provides appropriate counterarguments.

13. Rickford, J. R. & McNair-Knox, F. (1999). 6. Addressee- and Topic-Influenced Style Shift: A Quantitative Sociolinguistic Study. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 112-153). Blackwell Publishers.

This chapter, co-authored by Rickford and McNair-Knox addresses the issue of style shift depending on the topic and the addressee of the conversation. The source material for their research are linguistic interviews conducted with a certain African American teenager over the years by more than one interviewer. The authors start by giving an overview of the structure of the chapter and move on to a summary of the current trends concerning the study of style in sociolinguistics. They note that there is very little tradition in American linguistics of studying style, and the majority of such research originates from other places, like Great Britain. They recapitulate the main notions in the field of study, such as the difference between situational code-switching, which occurs depending on the addressee, and metaphorical code-switching, which is caused by a shift in the topic of the conversation. The authors then move on to the analysis of the interviews. The main two ones in question were conducted on similar topics but by different interviewers: in one case it was an African American researcher known to the interviewee, accompanied by her daughter, and in the other a European American researcher whom the interviewee had not met before. The categories for comparison of the two interviews include the possessive -s, the plural -s absence, the 3rd person singular -s absence, copula deletion, habitual *be*. While the differences in the first two variables were not statistically significant, they did differ for the 3rd person singular -s, which seems to be supported by other research. There is a statistically significantly higher occurrence of copula deletion as well in the interview conducted by the African American researcher; however, other researchers claim that this feature is not influenced by stylistic shifts in any major way. The use of the habitual *be* also differs between the two interviews, to a higher extent than has previously been reported in any source. By comparing when and to what extent the changes in style occurred, Rickford and McNair-Knox conclude that the interviewee was mostly accommodating to the addressee, but they also note that her style shifts depending on the topic of the conversation, though to a lesser extent. Finally, they address some earlier interviews with the same interviewee, pointing out that her style had fewer features of AAVE when interviewed by an African American after she

had spent some time in a school where she encountered European American varieties of speech, pointing to the fact that there are more variables that can influence one's style than just the topic and the addressee.

This analysis is interesting as it shows how one's speech can vary depending on the interviewer's identity and the topic of the conversation, as well as other factors, variables that have not always been taken into account when conducting linguistic research. Although there are a number of papers that acknowledge the potential effect that the interviewer's ethnicity and the level of familiarity with the interviewee may have, not all do, which makes their results difficult to compare. This effect is certainly important to take into account, not only in research on AAVE but in any kind of sociolinguistic inquiry.

14. Rickford, J. R. & Rickford, A. E. (1999). 7. Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 157-173). Blackwell Publishers.

While, naturally, the linguistic aspects of interpersonal communication are at the center of the study of AAVE, there are also fringe areas that are worth exploring. In this chapter, Rickford and Rickford discuss the use and nomenclature of two gestures: "cut-eye" and "suck-teeth." The authors begin by outlining their method, which consists of comparing the familiarity with the gestures and the names that are assigned to them in AAVE and European American Englishes, as well as a variety of African languages and West Indian languages or dialects. Then they move on to describing these extralinguistic methods of communication together with their nomenclature in the different languages and their recognizability. In both cases, a staggering majority of the African American, West Indian, and African respondents were familiar with the gestures and offered names for them that, in many cases, were very similar when translated; their significance was also comparable. In turn, European American respondents very rarely knew the names of the gestures or were able to reproduce them. Interestingly enough, for the first gesture, it was commonly claimed to be confined to women. The authors also argue that the similarity of the names in African languages to the AAVE one, when translated, could be the result of a loan translation that occurred from an African language into English, and that some of the names used for the gestures in the West Indies could also be a loan from an African language. Finally, the authors note that it is possible that these gestures persisted in the African American culture due to their rather universal meaning in many African cultures, which were forcefully mixed in America, so elements common for them may have had a bigger chance to be preserved.

It is undoubtedly fascinating to see that the research on AAVE extends beyond the grammar and the lexicon, tackling extralinguistic but culturally- or ethnically-specific features such as gestures or body language. While these are not words, they still play a vital role in interpersonal communication, and perhaps deserve more attention from researchers.

15. Morgan, M. (1998). 9. More Than a Mood or an Attitude: Discourse and Genres in African-American Culture. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 251-281). Routledge.

This chapter is concerned with the genres of speech typical for AAVE speakers. Morgan begins by defining a discourse genre as a manner of speaking used in a predefined context, and a verbal genre as a manner of speaking used to construct a context. She states that AAVE features some unique forms of both. She then moves on to discussing the notion of social face, and how important the idea of "keeping cool" is for African Americans. It can be described as an attitude of handling interactions with eloquence, wit, and good timing, and is a very valuable trait. She then moves on to outlining how the history of the African-American community influenced their socially accepted ways of interacting, where they developed systems that would not be understandable to their oppressors. The author discusses indirectness as an example of that. It can be divided into pointed and baited indirectness. In the first case, it consists of using the sociocultural and situational context to convey information in a hidden manner. The latter one means referring to certain features to see if the other person responds; by doing so they admit to possessing these qualities. AAVE speakers also appear to dislike direct discourse, as it is viewed as confrontational or intrusive outside of formal environments. Morgan subsequently discusses the phenomenon of "reading," which is a type of accusatory, directed speech act that needs to be witnessed by some bystanders, and serves as a way to remark on someone's bad qualities or behavior. AAVE speakers are also known to consciously utilize features of their speech unique to the African-American variety, as well as extralinguistic factors such as gesticulation or pitch, in such situations to signify that they are performing an act of reading. Next, the author discusses teenagers' language plays, such as "signifying" or "yo mama" expressions for boys and "instigating" for girls. In the first case, those are not meant to be taken personally and seem to be more of a way of exercising one's linguistic ability for creative insults. The latter are a complex kind of interactions meant to discover who spreads gossip about a particular person and confront them for it. Finally, Morgan mentions two more peculiarities of the speech of adult African-Americans: the fact that some statements, especially with regard to power relations, can have additional meaning in AAVE than they do in standard

English, and may be treated with mistrust, and that African-American women abstain from discussing events unless all their participants are present, likely to avoid accusations of spreading gossip.

While discourse is definitely a complex subject, Morgan does a good job of explaining some of the unique features of AAVE in that regard. Similar to obscenities in this variety, the lack of understanding of what is appropriate for speakers of AAVE may lead to many misunderstandings. Being unaware of other conventions governing their speech may cause the interlocutor to miss out on some key information, or misinterpret it.

The current trends in AAVE and related research

16. Baugh, J. (1983). A Survey of Afro-American English. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 12,* 335-354.

While John Baugh's paper is dated by today's standards, it illustrates well what issues were relevant in the field in the 1980s, and what the state of knowledge and the general consensus on some topics was. The article is divided into several sections: educational research, technical linguistic analyses, anthropological orientations, and emerging topics. In the introduction, the author remarks that while AAVE (which he calls BVE) is a dialect typical for African American communities, not all African American speak it, and the majority of those who do can code-switch to a more standard dialect of English when talking to people outside of their linguistic community. In the first section of the article, Baugh evokes what he calls the *difference versus deficit* debate, which he claims continues resurfacing in discussions on education. The core of this debate is whether AAVE is simply different from standard American English, or whether it is deficient in some significant way, and thus unsuitable for being the language of instruction at school. While most linguists agree that it is simply different, the issue of whether or not it should be used at school or whether children who speak AAVE natively should receive special attention and additional instruction in order to learn standard American remains an unresolved question. In the second section, Baugh summarizes the contemporary state of knowledge about AAVE. He divides the existing research into inquiries into the history of this dialect and synchronic studies of how it is used. He outlines the *creolist versus dialectologist/anglicist* debate and suggests that both of those approaches may have some truth to them, but that research is in no way conclusive. According to him, it is especially difficult to draw parallels between the way that the first African Americans spoke English and how non-English-speaking migrant communities adopted that language due to the different

circumstances under which the first group was brought to America – they were not allowed a transition period but were forced to learn English, were separated from others who spoke their native language, and finally possessed little to no written record of their native language and relied on oral tradition. Subsequently, Baugh moves to the synchronic studies of AAVE, listing features that have undergone research, such as the stressed and unstressed *been,* the semi-auxiliary *come,* or the use of *steady* as an aspectual marker. In the third section, the importance of extralinguistic anthropological research is highlighted. One of the reasons for that is that the language – words specific for AAVE – reflect some behaviors or traditions characteristic for African American communities. Other anthropological research cited in the paper is concerned with nonverbal communication, or with how raising one's voice is perceived much more positively in African American communities (as a sign of enthusiasm, not anger). According to Baugh, the emerging topics in the 1980s AAVE studies include private research by non-profit organizations and companies conducted in order to tailor their products to African American communities or to better cater to their needs. He also suggests that more research could be done on how AAVE is used in mass media, or how the speaker's gender influences their use of that dialect.

While much may have changed since Baugh's overview of the studies on AAVE, his paper still offers a good insight on the history of said studies, and on what the most prominent trends were in his days. It is also an interesting source since not only does it tackle the history and the synchronic features of AAVE, but also the cultural (anthropological) context, as well as the possibilities for real-life application of the discoveries, such as in the field of education or consumer needs.

17. Wolfram, W. & Schilling, N. (2016). 8. African American English. In *American English Dialects and Variation* (pp. 217-244). Wiley Blackwell.

Wolfram and Schilling's book, while in the form of a textbook, offers a very recent overview of the current state of knowledge and scientific consensus concerning AAVE. At the very start, the authors present the wide variety of names that this language variation has been given over the years, and settle on calling it African American English, as that seems to be the most neutral way. They also address the issue of there being a debate as to whether AAVE should be called a dialect or a language, as that distinction can often be very blurry in linguistic terms and sometimes purely political. They then move on to listing some of the most recognizable features of AAVE, such as the habitual *be,* copula absence, 3rd person singular -s absence, possessive -s absence, plural -s absence, stressed *been, had*+verb for simple past, *ain't,*

consonant cluster reduction, *skr* for *str* in initial positions, [f] and [v] for final *th*, as well as mentioning some features present in the mainstream English that gain a special meaning in AAVE, like *come -ing*, *be done*, or *call oneself*. They also acknowledge that AAVE is not homogenous and varies from place to place while still retaining some core common features. The authors then proceed to comment on the history of AAVE, presenting the major hypotheses that have been developed over the years, such as the anglicist hypothesis, the creolist hypothesis, the neo-anglicist hypothesis, and the substrate hypothesis. They remark that while the first two have been widely criticized, the latter two have not been unanimously accepted either, and there is still much debate on the topic. Finally, Wolfram and Schilling discuss the contemporary developments in AAVE. They comment on how population movement, covert social segregation, ethnic identity, the interlocutor's ethnicity, and the media all have an influence on AAVE, basing their claims on data from other studies.

This chapter, similar to Baugh's (1983) article, is an overview of the current knowledge about AAVE. While the authors do not necessarily contribute many new ideas themselves, they collect and compare data from many other sources. It is undoubtedly interesting to compare what they present with what was available to Baugh in the 1980s. Additionally, they present a comprehensive summary of the most recognizable features of the grammar of AAVE, which makes this chapter an excellent introduction to the main characteristics of the variety and concepts researched in the field.

18. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 11. Are Black and White Vernaculars Diverging? In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 252-260). Blackwell Publishers.

This short chapter by Rickford summarizes a number of issues that make it incredibly difficult to answer the eponymous question of whether AAVE and European American Vernaculars are diverging or converging. The author divides the issues into linguistic and social ones. In the first category, he mentions the importance of distinguishing between competence and performance, and that data may be misleading, as not having elicited a certain response from an interviewee does not mean that that person does not use these kinds of responses in other situations. He also remarks that two varieties may converge on some levels while diverging on others, as there are many fields in which they can be compared, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, or syntax. Finally, he elaborates on the notion that a converging or diverging trend does not have to maintain its direction, and dialects may, for instance, grow apart and then grow closer over time. In the second section Rickford points out that physical

factors, such as segregated schools or neighborhoods, may influence the trend; another social aspect that may have a similar effect is identity and attitude towards the other group.

While this chapter does not provide much new information on the features, distribution, or history of AAVE, it points to a number of issues that make the study thereof complex, not only in answering the question of whether AAVE and European American Vernaculars are diverging but in other inquiries relating two varieties to each other.

19. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 12. Grammatical Variation and Divergence in Vernacular Black English. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 261-280). Blackwell Publishers.

While much of the research on AAVE focuses on its origin, there is also some that tackles the current development of this variety. Rickford's chapter is an overview of his inquiry into this issue based on comparing the results from different age groups in East Palo Alto to synchronic and diachronic data from other regions. The author himself admits that it is important not only to compare the language as spoken between different age groups synchronically but also to juxtapose it against diachronic data, as even the older speakers can absorb novel forms into their speech. Rickford analyses six different variables, such as the habitual *be*, copula absence, possessive -s absence, 3rd person singular -s absence, plural -s absence, and past tense marking absence, all known features of AAVE. The first four have also previously been analyzed in similar research for other regions of the USA. In all of these four cases, the data seems to support the divergence of AAVE from the standard English, with Rickford's data additionally showing an unprecedented rise in the use of the habitual *be* by young Palo Alto citizens. Nevertheless, the plural -s absence and past tense marking absence do not follow the same trend; the first variable remains on the same level diachronically, while the second one seems to show a reverse trend, where the speakers tend to use standard English past forms. Rickford does admit that this analysis would be more valuable if he had more diachronic material from Palo Alto, but nevertheless claims that it is a valid contribution. He concludes that AAVE shows various tendencies when it comes to different structures typical for this variety, with many of them diverging from the standard, but some remaining the same or even converging. He also attempts to provide an explanation for the divergence, where, as he claims, social and ethnic identity play a major role - previously AAVE was seen as an inferior form of English, but now it is an expression of cultural belonging, and the young African Americans do not shy away from using it, which strengthens its nonstandard forms.

While it is lacking in its own diachronic data and has to rely on other research for this comparison, Rickford's chapter is not without its own merit. It provides evidence in favor of

AAVE diverging from other varieties of English in the USA, but also some that is contrary to that claim. Clearly, the issue is more complex than simply stating that this variety is diverging. He also attempts to incorporate social reasons as an explanation for the trends visible in AAVE.

20. Wolfram, W. & Thomas, E. R. (2002). 10. Beyond Hyde County: The Past and Present Development of AAVE. *The Development of African American English* (pp. 184-212). Blackwell Publishing.

Wolfram and Thomas's book *The Development of African American English* is concerned with their research on the unique dialectical situation in Hyde County, where an isolated biracial community has survived for decades. Within this chapter, they summarize their findings and draw conclusions about the past and future of AAVE based on them. They begin by stating that no amount of contemporary data will ever allow the experts to draw a definitive conclusion concerning the origins of AAVE and that the written records are too sporadic as well. Nevertheless, they hope to contribute a bit to this dispute. Their sociohistorical research does not provide any support for there having existed any widespread protocreole; however, they do point to the racial divide and the relations between the two groups as one of the most important factors in how AAVE was shaped. Linguistically, they remark that the substrate influence which is often linked with a creole past may simply mean that a few features were adopted from those languages without there being an intermediate system, which they support with evidence from other communities. They also remark that these substrate influences could have originated not only from African languages but also West Indian creoles. They remark that even in closed biracial communities there remains a linguistic divide: while some characteristics, like many phonologic and some morphosyntactic features, are shared by both ethnic groups, there do persist elements specific for the African American communities, which are often shared by other communities of the same ethnicity in other regions. The authors also note that the level of dialect convergence varies with age, and some age groups may be difficult to tell from their European American cohort based on recordings, which they support with experimental evidence. Since it is the younger generations that are easier to tell apart from the European Americans, they suggest that this phenomenon is related to the social changes that occurred in the previous decades, and a growing ethnic identity. They also remark that while different local communities may diverge from it, there is a supraregional norm for AAVE, which is strengthened by high mobility levels of the members of the community, as well as the ethnic divide between African and European American communities, which make it unlikely for them to adopt European American features. Wolfram and Thomas conclude that the history

of AAVE is shaped by a variety of sociohistorical and sociolinguistic components, such as the substrate influence of creoles and African languages, the characteristics of regional European American vernaculars, slavery, and segregation, as well as the modern ethnic divide, and that the persistence of AAVE is a symptom of there being a strong sense of ethnic identity among African Americans.

Wolfram and Thomas present a sensible overview of the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic factors that shaped the development of AAVE, acknowledging the variety of linguistic influences that contributed to the many diverse features of AAVE grammar which set it apart from standard English. While their conclusions are predominantly drawn on their own data from one isolated community, many of them can be extended to the entire vernacular and are supported by data from other researchers.

The creolist approach to the history of AAVE

21. Hannah, D. (1997). Copula Absence in Samaná English: Implications for Research on the Linguistic History of African-American Vernacular English. *American Speech, 72*(4), 339-372.

Hannah's article attempts to shed some light on the origin of AAVE by analyzing the speech of the African American diaspora in Samaná, in the Dominican Republic. The author acknowledges the two dominant theories: that AAVE either diverged from an earlier white vernacular, or that it emerged from an earlier creole source. In order to investigate that, she performs a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the speech of several Samaná English speakers; this variety is spoken by the descendants of black immigrants from the US to the Dominican Republic, who were then isolated from other English-speaking populations. Hannah is aware of the extensive influence that Spanish has had on their linguistic culture, and thus chooses to analyze a feature that is not present in Spanish, such as the frequency of contraction or deletion of the copula verb. She acknowledges the previous research on that trait of Samaná English but argues that both their methodology and their analysis of the results was flawed and should not be considered entirely truthful.

While gathering the data, the author tried to minimize the effect that the ethnic background and the presence of the observer had on the interviewees. While it is impossible to entirely eliminate the standardizing effect of the interviewer, she acknowledges that and attempts to reduce it as much as possible. She also analyzes the gathered data in a number of different ways, so that she can compare it to the results of other previous papers. Overall Hannah's data shows similarities between the frequency of copula deletion in Samaná English

and contemporary AAVE, as well as similarities in the patterns of the aforementioned absence between Samaná English and Atlantic creoles. She argues that this may be an argument in favor of the creolist theory. Hannah's study is not only a comprehensive account of this feature of Samaná English and its implications on the theories of the origin of AAVE but also a valuable commentary on the methodologies employed in similar research.

22. Rickford, J. R. (1997). Prior creolization of African-American Vernacular English? Sociohistorical and textual evidence from the 17th and 18th centuries. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 1*(3), 315-336.

In his paper, Rickford argues for the need to consider the sociohistorical conditions of the early years of the American colonies while trying to determine the origin of modern AAVE. He notes that the majority of research on the topic focuses on more contemporary sources while ignoring the more distant linguistic history of the colonies. He utilizes both census data and historical sources describing the speech of African American slaves in his analysis. He notes that in most areas (especially the New England and middle colonies), the ratio of African Americans to white native speakers of English was likely far too small to facilitate the emergence of a creole, and a more standard version of English would be used. However, the southern colonies had higher numbers of African Americans relative to the white population. He remarks that some areas certainly developed creoles, such as the Gullah speech of the Sea Islands. Rickford also notes the importance of the origin of the African Americans brought to the colonies. According to the sources he cites, in the early years, those were predominantly slaves from the Caribbean, who already spoke different pidgins and creoles characteristic for the West Indies.

What is important to draw from Rickford's paper is that the history of the African Americans in what later became the USA is not uniform, and varies from region to region. There are attested creoles still in use in some places, and Caribbean creoles and pidgins were also undeniably present in the early colonies. While this does not constitute definitive proof that AAVE evolved from a creole, it points to creoles having at least an influence on the speech of African Americans.

23. Wolfram, W., Thomas, E. R., & Green, E. W. (2000). The Regional Context of Earlier African American Speech: Evidence for Reconstructing the Development of AAVE. *Language in Society, 29*(3), 315-355.

Wolfram, Thomas, and Green's article focuses on the linguistic differences between the African American and European American speakers in a relatively isolated community in Hyde County, North Carolina. That region and the surrounding areas are known for their distinct dialects. They are also characterized by the historically low mobility of their population. By performing a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic data from numerous interviews, which includes both phonological and morphosyntactic features, the authors hope to contribute to the long-standing debate on the origins of AAVE. Even though not the same as the pronunciation of European Americans, the phonological features of Hyde County African American English do not share many features with AAVE. As far as the morphosyntax is concerned, more elements typical for AAVE can be found in the speech of African Americans there, that are not shared by European Americans, such as copula absence or 3rd person singular -s absence. Interestingly enough, the features common both for Hyde County AAE and AAVE are increasing in prominence among younger speakers. The authors' conclusion is that while African American communities do share some of the traits of the local European American dialects (especially with regard to the phonology), they maintain features that are unique to them and not shared by other local dialects, which could indicate that they are some of the older or more universal features of African American English. Another point that they make is that the way that a community speaks is also determined by their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identity, which may help maintain these differences between European and African Americans, as well as facilitate the transition of the young people's speech towards the AAVE standard.

The authors present a convincing analysis of the data meticulously gathered from AAVE speakers of different ages and their European American cohort in Hyde County, with their conclusions likely being applicable on a scale wider than just the small community that they researched. While one should be careful with accepting that as a universal truth, the claims of Wolfram, Thomas, and Green could serve as a basis for further research.

24. Mallinson, C., & Wolfram, W. (2002). Dialect Accommodation in a Bi-Ethnic Mountain Enclave Community: More Evidence on the Development of African American English. *Language in Society, 31*(5), 743-775.

Mallinson and Wolfram's article constitutes another contribution to the debate on the history of AAVE by analyzing modern isolated communities' speech for clues on that topic. In

this particular study the speech of the inhabitants of Beech Bottom, a small community in western North Carolina, is analyzed. This community is characterized by a long-term biracial composition as well as a low or non-existent rate of immigration. It is important to note that the authors perceive this piece of research to be a case study, rather than something that can be further extrapolated, due to the small number of inhabitants remaining in Beech Bottom and their unique linguistic situation. Additionally, the non-white inhabitants of Beech Bottom tend to identify themselves as multiethnic, rather than black, although historically they were subject to segregation and the white versus black dichotomy.

The features that were investigated by Mallinson and Wolfram are as follows: 3rd person plural -s attachment, 3rd person singular -s absence, present-tense copula absence, past tense *be* regularization, syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction, rhoticity, and glide reduction. Some of these features are characteristic of the Appalachian dialect of English, some are characteristic of AAVE, and some for both. The findings show some dialect alignment, where both the European American and African American inhabitants of Beech Bottom display in their speech features common for the Appalachian variety of American English, such as glide reduction, marking the -s in 3rd person plural, or rhoticity. Nevertheless, there are some slight differences in the distribution or frequency of these phenomena, as well as processes unique for the African American speakers from Beech Bottom, that resemble those of AAVE, namely 3rd person singular -s absence, copula absence, or consonant cluster reduction. Nevertheless, it seems that the speech of African Americans from Beech Bottom is very similar to that of their European American neighbors. The authors conclude that while there are some remains of a linguistic divide between the two ethnic groups in Beech Bottom, with the African Americans' speech originally displaying features typical for modern AAVE, a significant degree of dialect leveling has occurred.

25. Wolfram, W. (2003). Reexamining the Development of African American English: Evidence from Isolated Communities. *Language,79*(2), 282-316.

This article is a summary of the evidence gathered throughout three different research projects conducted by Walt Wolfram and his associates: that of the speech of African Americans in the Hyde County, Beech Bottom, and Ocracoke, North Carolina. The author notes that most of the evidence for the history of AAVE is taken either from historical sources or from the analyses of modern-day African American diasporas. He argues that isolated African American communities within the US can also provide compelling evidence. All of the analyzed communities are characterized by not having much contact with other communities,

and by a long-term bi-racial situation. A cross-examination of all the findings shows that even in communities where there has been a high level of dialect leveling, such as Beech Bottom, there still remain features that are unique for the speech of African Americans and that do not align with the local European American dialects. Interestingly enough, the features that set apart the vernaculars of European and African American speakers' in those regions seem to be shared across these communities (even though only two of the communities are in the vicinity of each other), and also reminiscent of those typical for modern AAVE, such as copula absence, 3rd person singular -s absence, or consonant cluster reduction.

According to the author, the data does not support the creolist hypothesis, even though the features listed are not uncommon in creoles. He argues that they may have passed from the native languages of the early African Americans into their vernacular without a transition stage of a pidgin or a creole. He does, nevertheless, point out that even in situations of close dialect contact, the speech of African Americans retains some of its unique traits, which may reflect a long history of ethnic divide and separate cultural identities between the two communities. He also remarks that while in many cases African Americans tend to adapt their speech to the modern AAVE, in rare cases they speak increasingly more like their European American cohorts. While this research does not aim to draw any conclusions on the origin of AAVE, it is certainly interesting that all of the communities that were researched shared some of the features of the modern AAVE, which seemed to have been present in their speech for generations.

26. Singler, J. V. (1998). What's Not New in AAVE. *American Speech 73*(3), 227-256.

This article presents convincing arguments for which features of modern AAVE could be found in its 19th-century counterpart, on the basis of the analysis of ex-slave recordings and Liberian Settler English, as well as certain written sources. At the same time, the author criticizes previous research done on the ex-slave recordings and points out the flaws of the source material itself, such as the conditions in which the recordings were made, which were not conducive to the interviewees speaking their vernacular, but would rather have a standardizing effect on them. Singler also argues for the inclusion of one of the two recordings that have been previously excluded on an arguable basis, as well as supports the findings from the recordings with data from LSA, a variety of English that developed in a community that originated from African Americans who settled in Liberia. In order to determine whether that feature was likely brought by them from the USA, Singler compares it to the local creole spoken by the descendants of the indigenous peoples of the region. The features in question are: the omission of verbal -s, the omission of possessive -s, copula deletion, invariant *be*, use of *ain't,*

use of *be done,* semiauxiliary *come,* auxiliary *steady,* stressed *been.* Previous research only reported the omission of verbal -s as a feature present in the ex-slave recordings, and thus argued that the rest of the features are post-Civil War innovations in AAVE. Singler's research on LSE supports a contrary view, where several more features are likely to have been present in antebellum AAVE, such as *be done*, semiauxiliary *come, steady, ain't.* His data is inconclusive on the other features but does not negate the possibility of their presence in earlier stages of AAVE.

Singler's paper is a valuable contribution to the discussion of the development of the AAVE, as he does not solely focus on written sources or ex-slave recordings, or data from modern-day English of African American diasporas, but instead juxtaposes the data from a variety of these sources, accounting for the potential drawbacks that each of them may have. In addition, he refrains from making definitive statements about the lack of something in antebellum AAVE but instead focuses on what features can be argued that were present.

27. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 8. Social Contact and Linguistic Diffusion: Hiberno English and New World Black English. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 174-218). Blackwell Publishers.

Within this chapter, Rickford explores the potential diffusion that might have occurred between the different African American Englishes and Hiberno English, a variety spoken by Irish immigrants. He bases his inquiry on previous research, which claims that the habitual *be* that is found in AAVE and analogous grammatical constructions in other African American English varieties stem from the Hiberno English *does (be).* Rickford considers arguments in favor and against this claim, as well as suggests other explanations of this correlation, such as a revised version of the diffusion hypothesis, which accounts for the fact that AAVE retained *be* while the Caribbean varieties of English kept *does* to perform the same function, a decreolization hypothesis which claims that the structure emerged within a creole and was retained as the variety decreolized, and an independent development hypothesis. The main argument against the diffusion hypothesis is that many of the early Irish immigrants, from whom the feature is claimed to have been absorbed, did not speak Hiberno English; in fact, they predominantly spoke Irish Gaelic. Only the later waves of immigration would have brought Hiberno English to America when the habitual *be* and *does* were likely already established. There is not much evidence in the way of the independent development hypothesis, as it is more likely that the feature emerged due to some influence, such as that of the substratal languages

in the creole. Rickford concludes that the decreolization hypothesis seems the most plausible, but he does not entirely eliminate the possibility of some influence from Hiberno English.

It is interesting to see research into the relationship between African American Englishes and other non-standard varieties that did not come from England, but, in this particular case, Ireland. While much is being said about the potential creole roots of AAVE, not many researchers overtly refer to native African languages or other non-creole varieties such as Hiberno English. Rickford's approach also reminds the reader of the necessity of taking into account not only the linguistic similarities between two languages or varieties but also the socio-historical context that could facilitate or hinder linguistic diffusion between the two.

28. Rickford, J. R. (1999). 9. Copula Variability in Jamaican Creole and African American Vernacular English: a Reanalysis of DeCamp's Texts. In *African American Vernacular English* (pp. 219-232). Blackwell Publishers.

The absence of the copula and auxiliary *be* is one of the most recognizable features of AAVE. In this chapter, it serves as a ground for comparison between AAVE and Jamaican Creole, the results of which can weigh in on the creole theory of the origin of AAVE. At the start, the author remarks that it is not just the rate of the absence that matters, but also the grammatical environment in which it undergoes this process. While there is ample data concerning AAVE in that regard, for Jamaican Creole Rickford found only one source. He does, however, disagree with some choices that were made during that inquiry, and opts to reexamine the same Jamaican Creole resource to obtain his own results. He chooses to exclude other tokens than the author of the original research did and classifies the rest slightly differently. Rickford's obtained results for the following grammatical environments: *be*+NP, *be*+Locative, *be*+Adjective, *be*+Verb(+ed), *be*+Verb(+ing) and *be*+Verb(continuative), *be*+gwain+Verb and *be*+go+Verb. While the initial research did show parallels between Jamaican Creole and AAVE and, for instance, the distribution preceding an adjective, the pattern did not overlap everywhere. Rickford attributes it to methodological mistakes, such as grouping up pre-verbal environments together; when analyzed separately, more similarities can be seen between the creole and the vernacular. Nevertheless, Rickford points out that Jamaican Creole prefers copula deletion after a noun phrase, while AAVE favors it after pronouns. Nevertheless, the correlations in the patterns of copula deletion may point to a creole past of AAVE.

This chapter not only contributes to the dispute on the past of AAVE by supporting the creolist hypothesis but also highlights the importance of methodology in research. A different

classification of tokens from the same source material may yield results that favor vastly different interpretations. Thus, research of this kind should be designed with the utmost care.

29. Rickford, J. R. (1998). 6. The Creole Origins of African-American Vernacular English: Evidence from Copula Absence. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English Structure, History and Use* (pp. 154-200). Routledge.

The dispute on the origin of AAVE goes back and forth between the anglicist and the creolist hypotheses, which postulate that this variety has its roots in European American vernaculars or in some creole languages, respectively. While there is evidence supporting both sides, the issue remains unresolved. Rickford's chapter reviews the available data concerning copula absence in AAVE and other relevant languages or dialects in order to weigh in on this topic. The author begins by outlining seven categories that need to be considered when discussing the potential creole origin of AAVE: the sociohistorical conditions that would facilitate it, historical attestations of older forms of this variety, diaspora recordings, creole similarities, English dialect similarities, and age-group comparisons. He then moves on to discussing copula absence from some of these perspectives. He begins by reviewing the historical attestations, many of which seem to display much higher deletion rates than modern AAVE; however, the ex-slave recordings seem to point to the contrary. Rickford, however, argues that the methodology utilized in their analysis may be faulty. He then reviews diaspora recordings, some of which show high rates of copula deletion which would speak in favor of the creolist theory, but some do not. Again, the methodology may be at fault as many studies do not entirely account for the observer effect. While many creoles feature copula absence, not all of them apply the same rules for this phenomenon. Additionally, it has been argued that some of them could not have sociohistorically had any influence on AAVE; nevertheless, it is worth noting that in the formative years of the American settlement, many slaves that were brought in arrived from the creole-speaking West Indies. It is very difficult to draw any evidence from African languages that may have contributed to the theorized creole, however, some similarities can be seen between the restrictions on copula absence and the categories of copula verbs in languages like Yoruba. Finally, practically no dialects of English display copula absence. The only exceptions to that are some varieties from the Southern States. Nevertheless, since their precursor dialects did not delete the copula, it can be argued that this feature was adopted from the speech of African Americans. Rickford concludes that while the data points to the creolist hypothesis having some validity, there are many issues with drawing a definitive

conclusion based on the evidence. The historical data is scarce, and even in the case of modern-day material, the adopted methodology may yield dramatically different results.

Rickford's chapter, as an overview of the available data on copula absence in AAVE, other dialects of English, and other languages, synchronically and diachronically, is an amazing source of knowledge on what has been discovered on the topic. While the author seems hesitant to draw any assertive conclusions, it is an important contribution that weighs slightly in favor of the creolist hypothesis, or at least of AAVE having some creole elements. Rickford's analysis of other people's research is sensitive to their possible fallacies, and he himself does not seem to selectively choose the data he includes in the chapter, as some of the sources he cites clearly do not support the creolist hypothesis, which makes this overview a very balanced piece of research.

The anglicist approach to the history of AAVE

30. Walker, J. A. (2000). 2. Rephrasing the Copula: Contraction and Zero in Early African American English. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 35-72). Blackwell Publishers.

At the beginning of his chapter Walker remarks on the methodological inconsistencies that plague the research on copula absence in AAVE, claiming that despite it being one of the most recognizable features of that variety, it is also one of the least well understood. He moves on to questioning the claims that copula deletion is proof of a creole origin, pointing out that various creoles and diaspora communities show varying patterns and rates of this phenomenon, making it difficult to draw any definite conclusions, as some comparisons support it and some do not. He states that no comparison of that kind should heavily weigh in on the issue until a comprehensive model of how copula verbs behave in creoles is established. The author then moves on to discussing his explanation for this phenomenon, which is prosody. For his study, he utilizes two diaspora sources and the ex-slave recordings. He outlines the reasons why he excluded some tokens, for example, due to their ambiguity in terms of pronunciation where the next word starts with the sound of the contracted form of the copula. Walker acknowledges the variety of calculation methods for the results and settles on Labov's versions thereof. Based on the results, he claims that in future studies *am* should be excluded, due to how entrenched the form *I'm* is for most speakers of English. He is also in favor of the exclusion of *are* because it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between copula deletion and the loss of the *'re* clitic due to the variety's r-lessness. His data does not seem to support the creolist hypothesis, as it

proves that this phenomenon is either a result of lexicalization or phonotactic processes. Additionally, he claims that longer phrases following the copula favor deletion, which may suggest that it is a process meant to reduce the prosodic complexity. Finally, he distinguishes between the copula and auxiliary *is*, saying that the differences in the rates of deletion between these environments should be attributed to them performing different roles. In his conclusion, Walker calls for more comprehensive studies of the copula in the English language, diachronically and synchronically, in order to support or disprove his research and develop knowledge on the topic.

Walker's chapter presents a convincing analysis of the prosody of phrases with copula verbs in AAVE and related variations of English, which yields merit to his theory. He also outlines the issues surrounding the research on copula absence and suggests what can be done to improve the state of knowledge on the topic.

31. Poplack, S., Tagliamonte, S., & Eze, E. (2000). 3. Reconstructing the Source of Early African American English Plural Marking: a Comparative Study of English and Creole. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 73-105). Blackwell Publishers.

The omission of the plural -s marking is one of the often-cited features of AAVE. Similar as in the case of many other features of this variety of English, its origin is shrouded in mystery. Poplack, Tagliamonte, and Eze attempt to shed some light on this issue by performing a comparative study of Early African American English and Nigerian Pidgin English. The authors remark that since plural -s absence is not a very frequent feature in modern AAVE, it is difficult to draw conclusions on its distribution and the reasons behind it. However, earlier forms of AAVE feature this characteristic more prominently. They also note that zero-marking plural is not a new development in English, as it was present in Old English for some classes of nouns, and is still acceptable in Standard English when talking about animals in some contexts. The authors then move on to describing their methodology. They extracted their tokens from recordings and then marked them for several factors, including the lexical identity of the head noun, semantic classification, phonological conditioning, disambiguation, type of nominal reference, and noun phrase constituency. The authors hypothesize that if the AAVE plural -s omission is of creole origin, it should follow the patterns found in creoles and pidgins. To provide support for the alternative, they list the conditions which would facilitate the loss of this marking in standard English: the definite/indefinite effect, the individuation/saliency effect, the collectivization effect, the lexical effect, and the functional effect. Poplack, Tagliamonte,

and Eze do not find any correlation between the distribution of the unmarked plurals in Nigerian Pidgin English and AAVE. On the contrary, the two varieties of English seem to have developed their systems independently and on differing bases. In the case of the pidgin, it is likely due to the effect of the substratum language, which can be seen, among others, in the effect that the animacy of the noun has on the plural marking. Plural marking in AAVE seems to be motivated by a mix of functional and phonological reasons, such as marking semantically plural individuated nouns with an -s, making the number marked on the noun unless it is otherwise expressed, and the tendency to reduce word-final consonant clusters. The authors conclude that this development is not inconsistent with the trends within the history of English and that the effect can be accounted for by that, and not by a creole origin, which it has little in common with in terms of the distribution.

Poplack, Tagliamonte, and Eze's chapter convincingly argues for an English origin of the plural -s omission. However, the researchers only compare data from one pidgin variety of English, which, while it proves that this effect does not descend from the same source for Nigerian Pidgin English and AAVE, does not fully eliminate the possibility of another creole's contribution to that feature in AAVE.

32. Howe, D. M. & Walker, J. A. (2000). 4. Negation and the Creole-Origins Hypothesis: Evidence from Early African American English. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 109-140). Blackwell Publishers.

According to the authors of this chapter, the non-standard patterns of negation in AAVE have often been used as a diagnostic of its creole origins. They, however, identify only two characteristics of the AAVE negation patterns that are utilized by creoles and nonstandard varieties of English, with three more that are shared by AAVE and nonstandard varieties of English (and, in one case, standard English), but not by creoles. The first group includes *ain't* and clause-internal negative concord, while the other one consists of clause-external negative concord, negative inversion, and negative postponing. Howe and Walker take their data from ex-slave recordings, Samaná English, and African Nova Scotian English, as well as data from a variety of creoles. The authors then discuss the *ain't* negation at length, by comparing its distribution in Early African American English and creoles depending on the standard English negation that they replace, which, among others, illustrates whether the distribution is tense dependent or not. Their results reveal that both early and modern AAVE usually utilize this negation to replace *be+not* or *have+not*, with it replacing *did+not* being a modern development in AAVE, virtually unattested in its earlier forms. This leads them to believe that it is not of

creole origin, as in creoles forms like these do not discriminate based on the tense of the clause, since creoles usually do not have a very complex tense system. Next, the authors discuss the negative concord. According to them, the clause-internal negative concord can be attested for in all forms of English: creole, early and modern AAVE, as well as nonstandard varieties of English and older versions of standard English (stretching from Old English to Early Modern English). They argue that this makes it impossible to use this feature as an argument in favor of the creolist hypothesis and that the simplest explanation is that it is present in creoles due to the influence of English. Clause-external negative concord, on the other hand, is extremely rare, and not at all found in creoles. Both negative postponing and negative inversion do not occur in creoles either but can be found in different varieties of English, and in AAVE. The authors argue that this data proves that the origin of negation patterns in AAVE can be traced to older forms of English, and not to a creole origin.

Howe and Walker's chapter thoroughly examines different patterns of negation present in AAVE, synchronically and diachronically, comparing them to other varieties of English. While comparing synchronic data may suggest a creole origin of some of them, there is no such data from earlier forms of African American English, which invalidates this claim. On the contrary, ample evidence can be found in older and nonstandard varieties of English which display all of these patterns to a varying extent.

33. Tagliamonte, S. & Smith, J. (2000). 5. Old *Was*, New Ecology: Viewing English Through the Sociolinguistic Filter. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 141-171). Blackwell Publishers.

In order to verify the creole hypothesis of the origin of AAVE, Tagliamonte and Smith analyze the distribution and potential origin of *was* in non-standard environments in modern African American enclave communities from Nova Scotia and in a variety potentially related to early American Vernacular English found in the north of Scotland in a town called Buckie. The reason for this selection is that the few communities from Nova Scotia that are taken into account arrived there from the US at different points in time and remained socially isolated until the modern day, so one can assume that their speech did not drastically change as a result of linguistic contact. The authors also argue that the majority of immigrants from the British Isles to the southern states originated from northern England, Scotland, and Ireland, thus making the socially isolated community of Buckie a decent source of information on how the varieties spoken by those immigrants developed in closed communities. Additionally, the authors draw examples from older forms of English, such as Middle and Early Modern English. The

environments they discuss are 2nd person singular, 1st person plural, 3rd person plural, full noun phrase plural, and existential *there.* Tagliamonte and Smith claim that the use of *was* in those environments, especially that it occurred more often with plural noun phrases than with pronouns and that in the northern dialects it was commonly used with 2nd person singular, unlike in the south of England. Their survey of the contemporary nonstandard use of this form in different dialects reveals that it still tends to occur more often with plural NPs than with pronouns, but that it also is favored in plural existential constructions. The analysis of their data from the aforementioned communities reveals similar rates in all the communities, with the exception of one non-African-American Nova Scotian community, which was the only one to contrast between existential and non-existential contexts. Aside from that, the two African-American communities and Buckie showed similar trends. The authors conclude that the patterns of *was* distribution in modern AAVE should not be attributed to a creole past, as they can be attested for in varieties of English that could have given rise to AAVE.

This chapter presents a rather concise and sensible analysis of the distribution of *was* in different varieties of English, with the goal of establishing whether the use thereof in nonstandard environments in AAVE could be traced back to older or less standard varieties of English from the British Isles. They do find evidence for that claim, and their assertion that this feature should not be attributed to a creole origin of AAVE seems reasonable.

34. Van Herk, G. (2000). 6. The Question Question: Auxiliary Inversion in Early African American English. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 175-197). Blackwell Publishers.

Van Herk opens his chapter by stating that while it is not a highly recognizable feature of AAVE, the inversion or lack thereof while forming questions is one of the characteristics that are mentioned when discussing the creole background of AAVE, with some experts claiming that the non-inverted forms stem from a plantation creole. The author aims to analyze the material from ex-slave recordings, Samaná English, and African Nova Scotian English in order to gain a better view of how questions were formed in older versions of AAVE. He then goes into great detail describing the variables he wants to analyze for, settling on an adapted set of Early Modern English ones: whether the question is a negative or affirmative one, whether the question is a yes/no one, an adverbial one, a causative one, a *wh*-object one, whether the subject is a NP or a pronoun, whether the object is a NP, a pronoun, or whether the question is intransitive, and finally whether the auxiliary in the question is a modal verb, a copula verb, *have*, verbal auxiliary *be*, or *do.* He then moves on to discussing the results. Negative questions

seem to favor non-inversion in EModE, as well as in two out of three analyzed varieties of Early African American English, and the same applies to yes/no questions. Causality does not seem to be an important factor when detached from negativity - though many negative questions display causative features. Transitivity of the question favors non-inversion, and so do lexically-charged auxiliaries. There is little evidence of any influence that adverbials may have on inversion. Van Herk concludes that the co-existence of inverted and non-inverted questions in AAVE, as well as the similarity of the grammatical environments they occur in to EModE, invalidates the creole theory.

While Van Herk's analysis is in-depth and does present convincing correlations between Early African American English and Early Modern English, the conclusion drawn from this evidence seems hasty, as the author does not compare this distribution to that found in any English-based creoles. In order for his conclusion to be more valid, it would need to be juxtaposed against them and proven beyond any doubt that the question formation in AAVE resembles that of EModE more than that of creoles.

35. Tottie, G. & Harvie, D. (2000). 7. It's All Relative: Relativization Strategies in Early African American English. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 198-230). Blackwell Publishers.

While the omission of the relative pronoun is often cited as one of the features of AAVE, Tottie and Harvie claim that it has never received much attention as a characteristic element of this variety of English. Earlier research proves that the three most common relative markers in Early African American English were *that*, *what*, and zero. The authors intend to extend that previous research, conducted on ex-slave recordings, to African Nova Scotian English and Samaná English, in order to gain a fuller picture and compare it to data concerning creoles. As for the latter, not much research has been done. Only a small fraction of known creoles, including Gullah and Jamaican Creole, are reported to allow for the zero relative marker, which is of special interest to the authors. English-based creoles seem not to follow a common pattern of relativization, which makes any comparisons between them and older versions of AAVE problematic. The authors point out that both the zero relative pronoun and *what* have been used throughout the history of English, and still are in non-African-American, nonstandard dialects. In their analysis of the material at hand, Tottie and Harvie took into account the following variables: the grammatical category of the antecedent NP head, its adjacency to the relative marker, its humanness, and the category membership of the subject of the relative clause. Their results show that each analyzed variety has a slight preference for one of the three relative

markers, with those three (*that*, *what*, zero) making up the majority of all the markers used. Pronominal antecedents have the highest rate of zero marker, which are also more common in situations where the antecedent NP is close to the relative marker. Personal pronouns in the position of the subject of the relative clause have the same effect, while humanness does not play a significant role at all. The authors also compare their data to that from a study of Appalachian English, where the examples are divided into existential constructions, possessives with *have* and *get*, *it/that* clefts, and "other." All of these examples can be found in Tottie and Harvie's data, with an additional focusing construction that they identified. The authors conclude that while the relativization patterns in early AAVE do not reflect those of English-based creoles, they do not have enough data from either creoles or older variants of vernacular English to draw any definitive conclusions.

This chapter not only presents a comprehensive overview of the relativization strategies in early AAVE but also compares them both to historical English and to English-based creoles. What is especially valuable about this chapter is that the authors do not draw hasty conclusions based on their data, but point to a certain trend that can only be verified by further research.

36. Mufwene, S. S. (2000). 8. Some Sociohistorical Inferences About the Development of African American English. In S. Poplack (Ed.), *The English History of African American English* (pp. 233-263). Blackwell Publishers.

Mufwene's chapter is a discussion of the sociohistorical conditions surrounding the emergence of AAVE. His initial position is that the history of the US does not support the creole hypothesis, but neither does it eliminate the possibility of Caribbean creoles having an influence on the development of this variety. He highlights the notion that it is likely that African languages had an influence as well, and that the central role of vernacular English as spoken in the colonies, and later States, should not be underestimated. The author argues that while some people claim that the Caribbean origin of some of the first black people to have been brought to the colonies means that they spoke a creole which later formed or influenced AAVE, it does not need to be the case, as in most of such situations these people came from smaller, less successful plantations in the Caribbean, where they did not have an opportunity to learn the creole. He also argues that the proportion of the black and white population was not conducive to the development of a Creole on the American soil at the very start. Another argument is that for the first few years black people were treated the same way as white indentured servants, and their status only became worse later, in the 18th century. At that time also Americans turned to importing slaves straight from Africa, instead of the West Indies. Some areas which witnessed

unusually high African to European American ratios facilitated the development of creoles like Gullah, but this cannot be claimed for all of the States. Mufwene claims that the early 19th century is when most of the features of AAVE started to crystallize and that it was also the time when the worst social segregation started, both before the American Civil War and after it (e.g. Jim Crow laws). As for the more recent developments, the author points out that the 20th century saw the end of the influx of people from Africa, but a rise in the African American population, as well as a West- and Northward internal migration. According to him, the social and economic conditions reinforced the separation of AAVE from other variations of English. Mufwene also briefly mentions the evidence from diaspora communities and argues that if AAVE arose via decreolization, the languages of these communities should show more creole-like features than modern AAVE, which they do not. He concluded that it is unlikely that African American English emerged from a prior creole.

While Mufwene's argumentation seems logical, it appears to be quite one-sided. While he does acknowledge the emergence of creoles such as Gullah on American soil, he clearly dismisses the notion of any other creoles potentially having existed or had a significant influence on the language of African Americans. It seems that the very early history of AAVE may be more complicated as presented by him in the example of the state of Virginia. Nevertheless, the picture that he presents is cohesive and functions within his framework. It is possible that more data is needed as to the origins of the slaves brought to America and the internal patterns of their movement from state to state.

Conclusion

While researching the features and history of African American Vernacular English, I have gained a deeper understanding of non-standard varieties of English and the ways in which they can differ from the standard, which includes aspects that are easily noticeable, such as pronunciation and syntax, but also more nuanced aspects, such as entirely new manners of expressing tense and aspect, pragmatics, or camouflaged words which are used in standard varieties too but have a vastly different meaning in the vernacular. I have familiarized myself with how these concepts apply to AAVE, and how language is intertwined with the African American culture. In addition, I have learned about how the sociological and historical conditions are theorized to have shaped the development of this variety, and how it may have interacted with other vernaculars and creoles. I realized that even nowadays, the relationship between AAVE and other varieties of American English fluctuates, converging in some aspects

and diverging in others. By reviewing the arguments of both sides of the origin debate, I understood how important the methodology is in research in this field, and how many factors have to be taken into account when gathering data, processing it, and interpreting the outcomes, as decisions made at each of those stages can lead to a vastly different outcome. I have also learned that often the history of a language or a dialect, even if it is not very old, is not simple, and may be difficult to unravel, which made me appreciate the importance of contemporaneous written sources or recordings. Reviewing the arguments from both sides of this discussion made me also realize that often the emergence of a certain phenomenon can be explained in a variety of ways. I have concluded that neither the anglicist nor the creolist hypothesis is entirely correct, given the bulk of evidence from the other side.

While the body of work on African American Vernacular English is undoubtedly impressive, there definitely are directions in which this research could be continued. Although, as many researchers claim, the origins of AAVE may never be fully unraveled, more comprehensive research could be conducted in that field, including more comprehensive inquiries into the creoles of West Indies and West Africa, as well as native West African languages, in order to compare them with some features of AAVE, as often such comparisons are done only with one creole, and some researchers admit that the information on other ones is scarce. I believe that with the origin debate raging on, many aspects of a synchronic discussion of this variety have been neglected. While it is universally accepted that AAVE has a supraregional standard, I think that more attention should be paid to its regional variation. I also firmly believe that the discussion of the lexicon of AAVE is underrepresented in the research on the variety, which predominantly focuses on morphology and syntax. What might aid that research, as well as further inquiries into the more explored aspects of this variety, is potentially creating a sizable, publicly accessible corpus of contemporary African American Vernacular English, similar to COCA.

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Title of Course: Independent Studies II (Linguistics)

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