Morphosyntactic variation in a primarily Black, Miami middle school October 22, 2021

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Introduction

- Third wave sociolinguistics has successfully associated social group identity with linguistic variation in adolescent and adult speech
- The social variation of African American Language (AAL) and the speech of pre-adolescents are underdescribed

How does social group identity relate to linguistic variation in pre-adolescent speech?

Aims

1. Describe the social group structure
2. Describe the variation of two morphosyntactic features associated with AAL, third-singular-s absence and copula absence
3. Explore any connections between social group identity and linguistic variation

Michael Irvine Middle School

- Services multiple Black and mixed-race neighborhoods in Miami-Dade County public school system

Student body

- Race: 71% Black, 25% Hispanic, 3% Mixed race
- 473 total students, 200 6th graders
- 120 boys, 80 girls

Methodologies

Social Analysis

- Primary data: Participant observation, student-choice interviews, ethnographic interviews
- *"Who are your two best friends"* Social networks were created based on these answers
  - node = student
  - edge = chosen as friend
- Social groups created based on observations and social networks
- Students placed in these groups based on observations, social networks, and student classifications

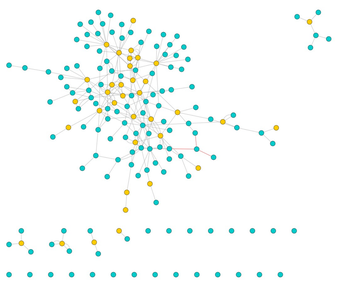

Figure 1: Friendship network for all 6th graders
yellow = participants green= non-participants

Linguistic Analysis

- Extracted and hand coded all tokens of copula and third singular –s from 33 interviews primarily conducted in March 2020
- Third singular –s predicting factors: PRESENCE, FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENT, HABITUALITY, STATIVITY (see results table for levels)
- Copula predicting factors: SUBJECT TYPE, PREDICATE TYPE, PRESENCE, PLACE, among others not shown (see results table for levels)

Social Results

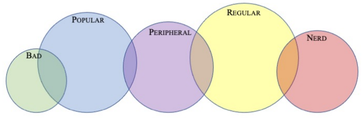

Figure 2: Primary social groups

- Students split themselves into **5 primary social groups** (see Figure 2)
- Each group can be split into closer-knit subgroups
  - E.g., *smart nerd* vs *anime nerd*
- Overall, students were aware of the social splits and where they belonged within the social structure
- About half of the students could categorize others into social groups. The other half categorized mostly based on adjectival descriptor

Me: How 'bout nerd kids. Do you know any nerd kids?
236: @ Yes.
Me: @ @ @
236: Um. It's this girl named 80. She's a nerd.
Me: Okay, what does that mean?
236: Like, she do nerdy stuff. … Read books a lot. Every day. Um. She dress like a nerd.
Me: Okay f-- don't you -- you all have uniforms on. How does she dress like a nerd?
236: @ @ @ @ She don't wear the type of stuff we wear. Like, she just a nerd.

Types of kids at HMMS by 253 (note the repeating numbers)

Haitians: 253, 402	Bad: 253, 252, 186, 125	Annoying: 125, 186, 253, 120
Athletes: 166, 253, 58, 400	Hispanics: 208, 143, 52	Crazy: 253, 65, 363
Boys that look at girls: 111, 402, all 8th graders	Dragonball-Z players: 397, 268, 313	Mixed Emotions: 186, 253, 258
Bahamians: 253, 186, 111	Goofy: 343, 186, 253, 402	Geek: 397, 52
Call of duty: 268, 133, 402	Mixed: 401, 50	Chill: (8th graders) ((smoking))

Linguistic Results

3rd Singular –s Absence (N = 326)

Predicting Factor	Environment	% Absent
PRECEDING ENVIRONMENT	Idiosyncratic	41%
	Consonant	37%
	Sibilant	85%
	Vowel	17%
FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENT	Idiosyncratic	45%
	Consonant	37%
	Sibilant	38%
	Vowel	32%
	Pause	36%
SITUATIONAL HABITUALITY	Habitual	42%
	Non-habitual	27%
VERB STATIVITY	Stative	30%
	Non-stative	38%
	Auxiliary	44%

Table 1: Percentage of 3rd-singular -s absence

- Overall mean: 37% absent
- By participant range: 0% to 100% absent
- Unlike past studies:
  - *-s –marking* does not correlate with habituality

Note: *Idiosyncratic:* stem has different form when inflected
Preceding environment: *do* (/du/, /dʌz/), *have* (/hæv/, /hæz/), and *say* (/se/, /sɛz/)
Following environment: negated *do* (/dʌz nɑt/, /dʌzɪnt/, /du nɑt/, /dont/), and negated *have* (*have not* /hæv nɑt/, /hævɪnt/, /hæz nɑt/, /hæzɪnt/)

Copula Absence (N = 1745)

Predicting Factor	Environment	% Absent
PLACE	Final	0%
	Within	13%
SUBJECT TYPE	Pronoun	16%
	Noun Phrase	18%
PREDICATE TYPE	Gonna	38%
	Adjective	15%
	Locative	29%
	Noun Phrase	9%
	Verb+ing	38%
	Quote Like	19%
	-ed	14%
	Other	0%

Table 2: Percentage of copula absence

- First person singular had 0% absence (not included)
- Overall mean: 14% absent
- By participant range: 0% to 72% absent
- Hierarchy of copula absence
  - Same as past studies (predicate type):
    verb+ing > locative > adj. > noun phrase
  - Different from past studies:
    verb+ing = gonna (predicate type)
    pronoun = noun phrase (subject type)

Sociolinguistic Results

- **Social group affiliation does not correlate with any linguistic variable**
  - Exception: *Nerd* group is associated with low copula absence
    Simple Linear Model: Estimate: 0.167, SE 0.067, t = 2.507, p = 0.018

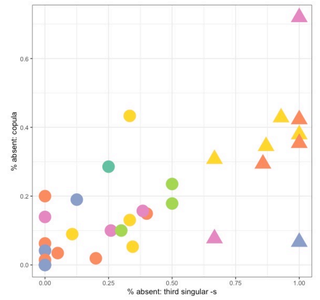

Figure 3: Three-dimensional cluster analysis
Shape = Cluster Color = Social Group

- I ran a K means cluster analysis on 32 participants using copula absence, third singular–s absence, and plural-s absence (not discussed here)
- Yielded 2 clusters that differed primarily based on the rate of third singular–s absence
- Most points are roughly along the same line since copula absence and 3rd singular-s absence highly correlated. Pearson's correlation: 0.716
- Most groups were spread throughout the continuum and clusters
  - All *nerds* but 1 in Group 1 (low absence)
- Other social factors did not fully explain the clusters (e.g., language background, ethnicity, number of honors courses)
- *Popular* social group was the only group with a clear split
  - Sub-groups: *smart popular* (all low absence), *bad popular* (all high absence)
  - They also split based on number of honors classes: *smart popular* (4 to 7 honors classes out of 8 total), *bad popular* (no honors classes)

Smart popular sub-group is more like *nerd* group than like *bad popular* sub-group

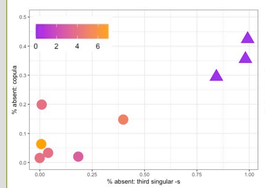

Figure 4: Cluster analysis results. Popular

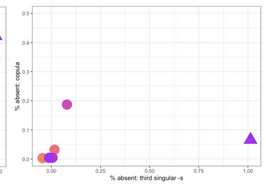

Figure 5: Cluster analysis results. Nerd

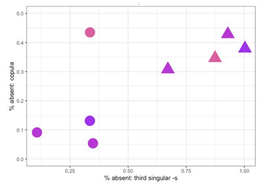

Figure 6: Cluster analysis results. Regular

Conclusions

1. Social group identity was not directly related to morphosyntactic variation
2. Morphosyntactic variation was related to orientation to the educational institution, but only for students for whom this orientation mattered to their identity construction

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