

Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Institute of Philology
Department of English Philology and Intercultural Communication

African American Vernacular English

Bachelor's thesis
written by the 4th year student
3rd English group
of Bachelor's programme
“English Studies and Translation
and Two Western European Languages”
Field of Science – 03 “Humanities”
Specialty – 035 “Philology”
Vladyslava Suvorova

Supervised by:
K.S. Karpova, PhD.

«Допущено до захисту»

Протокол засідання кафедри англійської філології
та міжкультурної комунікації

Протокол № 12 від 27.05.2021

Завідувач кафедри _____ проф. Белова А.Д.

KYIV – 2021

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH.....	6
1.1. African American Vernacular English as a variety of American English.....	6
1.2. Phonological characteristics of African American Vernacular English.....	7
1.3. Grammatical characteristics of African American Vernacular English	11
Conclusion to Chapter I.....	25
II. AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH REPRESENTATION IN STAND UP COMEDY.....	26
2.1. Analysis of the grammatical constraints of African American Vernacular English features.....	26
2.2. The usage of slang in selected data.....	39
Conclusion to Chapter II.....	46
CONCLUSION.....	47
ABSTRACT.....	49
REFERENCES.....	51

INTRODUCTION

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is spoken by the majority of African Americans, mostly in the inner-city areas of New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, but it is also spoken in rural areas in the casual speech of adults [22]. The origin of this English variety is still a quite controversial topic amongst scholars, Rickford [32, p. 154] suggests that it may be “a development of a creole”, while Wolfram [47, p. 12] suggests that it “derived directly from British-based dialects”. Labeling this vernacular has corresponded to the changing terminology for naming African Americans throughout history. Accordingly, other labels used include Nonstandard Negro English, Black English, Black English Vernacular, and Ebonics. However, contemporary linguists choose to call it AAVE. Regardless of the origin and name of the variety, the speech of black Americans carries specific grammatical and phonological features which demonstrate that it is a structured and systematic language variety rather than mere careless speech [26].

The relevance of this research topic is due to the fact that AAVE is still perceived by many as “incorrect” English language or just a “contemporary black accent” despite the numerous linguistic researches attesting it to be a self-contained variety of English with its own unique set of grammatical and phonological features and lexicon, and having been a part of the oral tradition of black Americans for centuries.

The object of this study is African American Vernacular English, and the subject is its peculiar features.

The purpose of this work is to explore the morphological and syntactic properties of AAVE and to observe these features in the speech of black American stand up comedians as representatives of AAVE native speakers. The practical part of this work serves the purpose of analyzing the internal

grammatical conditioning in AAVE. The selected features of AAVE are found in the comedians' performances and include the absence of third-person singular *-s* in present tense singular verb forms, the absence of possessive *-s* in nominal possessive constructions, the absence of plural *-s* in semantically plural forms, and the generalization of copulas *is/are* and *was/were*. The features selected have great relevance as they are typically associated with AAVE. The main goal of this paper is to study AAVE and determine the internal constraints of its features.

This goal makes it necessary to solve the following tasks:

- to make a brief description of the origin and development of AAVE;
- to analyze the previous researches on AAVE and present a sufficient description of its features;
- to employ the previously found information about AAVE structure, to analyze the real AAVE speech via the black stand up performances;
- to search for the selected features in the selected data set, then to present its frequencies of occurrence according to the grammatical environment;
- to interpret the internal grammatical constraints in order to highlight favourable grammatical environments in which a particular feature occurred at the highest rate and compare those results with the results of the previous studies;
- to compile a glossary of the slang used in the selected data set.

The methods used in this research are semantic analysis, observation, contrastive analysis, descriptive method, and quantitative calculation of the units analyzed.

The theoretical basis of this research consists of the works of such prominent scholars that have been pursuing sociolinguistics and dialectology, and AAVE in particular, as William and Teresa Labov, John Rickford, Shana Poplack, Lisa Green, and others. Furthermore, the previous research dealing with

the internal grammatical conditioning in AAVE included the works of Kessler, Feagin, McNair-Know, Alim, and others.

The paper consists of an introduction, theoretical and practical chapters, conclusions, a list of references, and an abstract.

I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

1.1. African American Vernacular English as a variety of American English

AAVE has been a point of linguistic interest since the middle of the last century. Despite decades of study, the questions of origins and evolution of AAVE are still quite controversial as there is still little agreement over the question of whether its distinctive features are just examples of improper English or derivation from other languages (e.g. creole or West African English). Debates over its origins and development produced two opposing hypotheses, namely anglist (also known as dialectologist) and creolist [43].

The former proposes that the grammatical core of modern AAVE came from the earlier English language [28]. Many of those features no longer exist in modern Standard English, yet are still present in several varieties of English language, including AAVE and some varieties of British origin. This hypothesis suggests that unique distinctions between AAVE and SE are somewhat recent developments, that probably appeared after the Civil War due to racial segregation [28]. This theory does not exclude the creole impact on the features of modern AAVE but shows that the very grammatical core of it is obtained from specifically the English language.

The latter one, on the other hand, suggests that AAE could have originated from plantation creole that went through decreolization after slavery ended [43]. This view has been the dominant one until only recently. Later, some scholars discussed the possibility of a certain consensus between the two hypotheses which suggests that some AAVE features could be of creole origin, while the variety as a whole has been decreolized to the extent that it is now considered as a dialect of English [11; 21]. Nevertheless, this opinion has also been questioned

as some scholars argue that AAVE was not moving toward SE through decreolization, but instead it was branching off it as a result of socio-economic circumstances, segregation in particular [3]. This view is known as the divergence hypothesis and has also undergone some criticism for the lack of sufficient linguistic evidence [7]. Yet it was recently revisited by scholars supporting a new consensus-type view, also known as the neo-anglicist hypothesis, and suggesting that AAVE is more likely derived from British English varieties.

Despite the fact that there has not been a general agreement about the AAVE's emergence and formation, most scholars tend to agree that it was probably not a creole itself, but its influence on AAVE's early development cannot be completely dismissed [20, p. 483]. Moreover, some scholars have brought attention to the fact that AAVE might not be necessarily following a unilateral path of change but it might be showing signs of simultaneous convergence and divergence from European American English, depending on the feature and the regional context [2, p. 87; 8]. Most of the time, AAVE is assigned a transregional status, while the earlier urban-rural distinction is now considered weaker and the locus of the main changes is placed in urban centers of the North of America from where they spread to other areas [50]. Therefore, the variety is considered to be growing more uniform, with a common core of features which are said to be found everywhere where it is spoken [48].

1.2. Phonological characteristics of African American Vernacular English

AAVE has a wide range of regional accents that share some common features. Those accents differ in pronunciation and are not invariable throughout all the speakers. Therefore the peculiar differences in pronunciation are not regularised and should be considered rather tendencies, not rules. Besides that, it is important to point out that the following sound behaviors are not exclusive only

to AAVE. For example, some of the AAVE phonological features resemble Southern American dialects [4, p. 87]. Both dialects share consonant cluster reduction. Though it occurs much more frequently in AAVE, for example:

[6, p. 139] /'tesər/ = *tester*

Those examples cannot be found in SE, because southern dialects don't reduce consonant sounds in words if there is a suffix. Therefore it is a reason to single out AAVE from other dialects as a separate one [6, p. 139]. It is widespread throughout the US and varies quite little in its features whether it occurs in New York, California, or Washington [40, p.29].

Nevertheless, the following sound behaviors are characteristic of but not exclusive to AAVE:

Prosodic features

AAVE differs from SE in the way it sounds. The most prominent suprasegmentals of AAVE are its intonation and the shifting of word stress. For example, such words as *police*, *July* and *hotel*, are pronounced with first-syllable stress [10, p. 188]. In this case, AAVE shares its stress patterns with Southern English. Therewith, AAVE has a great intonation range. Utterances usually may have a wider pitch range than white vernaculars with high pitches occurring more frequently. Moreover, the pitch sometimes shifts into a falsetto register for a more dramatic effect. Higher pitches also occur at the end of affirmative sentences (rising final pitch contours). On the other hand, falling final pitch contours are used in asking yes/no questions, which is uncommon in other dialects [40, p. 35-36].

Changes in unstressed syllables

Unstressed syllable deletion occurs in SE as well as many other varieties of English, but is the most recurrent in AAVE and takes place only in the initial and medial position of the word [33, p. 5]. For instance:

[33, p.5] /*freɪd*/ = *afraid*

Furthermore, unstressed reduplicated syllables sometimes are omitted:

[4, p. 88] /*mɪsɪpi*/ = *Mississippi*

Changes in clusters

Consonant sounds often are reduced when they appear at the end of the word after another consonant. For a cluster to happen, both consonants must share voicing. This phenomenon is not unique to AAVE, as it is also present in every other English variety (SE *lamb* - /*læm*/). Moreover, consonant cluster reduction does not occur persistently in AAVE [4, p. 86]. It is more likely to happen:

a) if the word end with t or d:

[10, p. 187] /*lɛf*/ = *left*

b) if the next word begins with a consonant:

[51] /*bes kɪd*/ = *best kid*

[4, p. 87] /*fɜ:rs gɜ:rl*/ = *first girl*

The next predominant AAVE feature is metathesis. One of the most stereotypical metatheses in AAVE is the pronunciation of the word *ask* as /*æks*/ [10, p. 187]. This variation is strongly associated with AAVE and is often thought to be a sign of the speaker's ignorance (there is even a book titled "*Aks or Ask: The African American Guide to Better English*" written by Garrard McClendon). Even though /*æsk*/ is now considered the standard, /*æks*/ was commonly used alongside it in English literature for centuries, for example:

"*Yow loveres axe I now this questioun.*" - Chaucer's "*The Canterbury Tales*" (1400)

"*Axe and it shall be given.*" - *The Coverdale Bible* (1535)

Historically, this variant of the word disappeared from standard vocabulary for unclear reasons. Yet it became accustomed to AAVE and continues to be used nowadays. Other examples of metathesis in AAVE include:

[33, p. 5] /waps/ = *wasp*

[10, p. 187] /græsp/ = *grasp*

Initial-syllable clusters may also be subject to such changes:

- T-velarization. /t/ is substituted with /k/ sound in first-syllable /str/ clusters:

[10, p. 187] /skrit/ = *street*

[24] /skrim/ = *stream*

[51] /skreit/ = *straight*

- Initial cluster reduction of:

/r/ sound - occurs most often in /θr/ or in unstressed syllables:

[10, p. 186] /flo/ = *floor*

/j/ sound - usually occurs in /j/ clusters that are followed by /u/ vowel:

[10, p.187] /kəm 'purə/ = *computer*

Changes in final consonants

Following features are apparently unique to AAVE, they include:

- Final consonant deletion:

[10, p.187] /mæ/ = *man*

- Final devoiced /d/ becomes a glottal stop:

[10, p. 186] /bæ:tʔ/ = *bad*

Features concerning interdentalals

In AAVE, the voiced *th* sound /ð/ is often replaced by /d/ and (less commonly) /v/ sounds. For instance:

[4, p. 89] /doʊz/ = *those*

[10, p. 186] /'mʌvə/ = *mother*

The unvoiced *th* /θ/ is replaced by /t/ and /f/ sounds or even may be deleted:

[10, p. 185] /bæf/ = *bath*

[10, p. 186] /tɪŋk/ = *think*

[51] /tu:f/ = *tooth*

Features involving vowels

In AAVE, diphthongs are often monophthongized. This happens with such sounds as:

- /aɪ/ in open syllables especially before nasals becomes /a:/ :

[10, p. 184] /ma:n/ = *mine*

- /ɔɪ/ before /l/ reduced to /ɔə/ :

[4, p. 89] /ɔəl/ = *oil*

Furthermore, /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasals merge to /ɪ/ which makes the words *pin* and *pen* homonymous also (sounding like /pɪn/) [10, p. 184], also:

[4, p. 89] /wɪnzdi/ = *wednesday*

Merger also takes place between long and short vowels before the /l/ sound:

[4, p. 89] /bɛəl/ = *bale*

The list of phonological features above is not complete nor unexceptional. Those are the most apparent and notable characteristics that portray AAVE as a distinctive dialect of AmE.

1.3. Grammatical characteristics of African American Vernacular English

As a non-standard variety of American English, AAVE has some specific grammatical features. Some of them are used in other varieties of AE as well, yet some of them are completely unique to AAVE. The use of those features differs

among the AAVE-speakers, depending on the area of living, social class, age, gender, and the context of speaking [33, p. 9] Moreover, it is important to remember that AAVE speakers occasionally use SE equivalents alongside the AAVE features.

Zero copula

Zero copula refers to the absence of linking verb *to be*, which joins the subject of the sentence with its predicate.

[49, p. 529] *She nice.* = *She is nice.*

This linguistic phenomenon is relatively uncommon in SE while being quite common in AAVE [30, p. 182]. There are some restrictions concerning it:

A) In AAVE, most copula forms are always used (am, was, were), only the forms *is* and *are* may be omitted. [6, p. 140]

B) Zero copula does not occur in clause-final positions:

[23, p. 36] *He is better than the girls is, now.*

C) Copula is not omitted when it begins a clause:

[23, p. 36] *Is he dead?*

D) Zero copula does not occur after the pronouns *it*, *that* and *what*. In such sentences, it is only contracted:

[23, p. 35] *It's a real light yellow color.*

In addition, the contraction 's often may cause the deletion of the /t/ sound, resulting in the next pronunciations:

[23, p. 35] *I's a real light yellow color.*

E) Copula is not omitted if it is negated (the form ain't is never dropped):

[23, p. 34] *It ain't no cat can't get in no coop.*

F) Copula omission is not allowed in tag questions:

[23 p. 36] *Is that a shock? or is it not?*

G) Copula is not omitted in emphatic sentences:

[23, p. 35] *Allah IS god.*

J) Copula is not omitted when it is infinitival and has the base form *be*:

[23, p. 34] *You got to be good, Rednall!*

H) The present-tense copula is not omitted in a form of the first-person singular:

[23, p. 35] *I'm not no strong drinker.*

The rule of thumb is that wherever the copula cannot be contracted in SE, it cannot be omitted in AAVE, and vice versa.

Invariant *be*

Invariant *be* is different from the copula *be*, because it does not have inflected forms and cannot be omitted [6, p. 140]. It is used only in the present tense, for example:

[16, p. 56] *Becky be watching the basketball game.*

Invariant (habitual) *be* in this case is not the result of contraction nor deletion (such as: he will be -> he'll be -> he be) and therefore does not indicate future tense. Rather, in such cases, it expresses a habitual event. It marks the action that is “distributed intermittently in time” [44]. That is why this kind of copula used to be called “distributive *be*”.

The habitual meaning of action shows us that *be* doesn't appear from the SE copula *to be*, and is not interchangeable with SE *am/is/are*. Therefore, *be* before a verb doesn't indicate present continuous tense but has a particular meaning of habitual action that happens rather often [11, p. 766]. For instance:

He('s) laghin'.

He be laghin'.

There is a significant difference between the sentences above. The first one expresses the action that was happening at the time of utterance, while the second one indicates the action that has occurred many times in the past or started in the distant past and is happening still.

He be laghin'. = He has been laughing for a long time and still is. / He often laughs.

Invariant *be* also is used with the auxiliary verb *do* in negative sentences and questions, including tag questions [33, p. 6].

[33, p. 6] *Do he be walking every day? = Does he walk every day?*

[24] *Do they be playing all day? = Have they been playing all day?*

Tense and aspect

AAVE has several tense forms that differ from SE. Some have distinct structures but share the meaning of SE tenses, yet a few of them bear a particular connotation that does not fully correspond to the SE equivalent. [6, p. 142] The following table illustrates a rough comparison of AAVE and SE tense structure:

	AAVE	Standard English
Present	he cook he cooking he be cooking he handsome	he cooks he is cooking he has been cooking for a long time and still is he is handsome
Past	he had cooked he done cooked he been cooking	he cooked he has cooked he has been cooking
Future	he be there soon he finna cook he gonna cook I'ma cook he be done cooked	he will be there soon he is just about to cook he is going to cook I am going to cook he will have cooked

Present tense forms

In AAVE, verbs in present tense forms often don't conjugate with the subject in number and person. The suffix *-s* used in SE in third person singular is almost completely absent in AAVE. Nevertheless, in some Southern versions of AAVE, the suffix *-s* is sometimes used not only with third-person singular but also with third-person plural [33, p. 7]. For example:

[24] *At least he know you have a phone. = At least he knows you have a phone.*

[49, p. 527] *She run everyday. = She runs everyday.*

[49, p. 521] *The dogs barks a lot. = The dogs bark a lot.*

This also influences the third-person form of the irregular verbs *to do* and *to have*, therefore [13, p. 76]:

AAVE	SE
<i>she do it well</i>	<i>she does it well</i>
<i>she don't eat</i>	<i>she doesn't eat</i>
<i>she have food</i>	<i>she has food</i>

Though, the SE forms are also acceptable in AAVE.

While omission third-person singular suffix *-s* happens quite frequently in AAVE, occasionally hypercorrection takes place and *-s* appears in the verbs conjugated with plural nouns or first person singular [13, p. 77]:

[24] *They gots to be here.*

Moreover, AAVE-speakers use the copulas *is* and *was* in a way that is generalized to plural and second person subjects [5, p. 178], like:

[49, p. 529] *We was there. = We were there.*

[24] *They is some crazy folk. = They are some crazy folks.*

Steady

The marker *steady* indicates a continuative action that is happening persistently and is usually used after habitual *be* [33, p. 6].

[33, p. 6] *Ricky Bell be steady steppin' in them number nines.* = *Ricky Bell is constantly stepping in number nines.*

This marker may resemble SE *steadily* (*He is working steadily*), and though there may be some similarity, as they both express a continuous action, the AAVE *steady* is distinctive in its meaning. *Steadily* is used with an inanimate object and always expresses some gradual, regular, slow, even immovable action (*Somewhere in a forest, a tree is steadily growing*). On the other hand, *steady* expresses an action that is energetic and intensive, and applies only to animate and specific objects.

[24] *They steady be laughing.*

Yet, a sentence like *A boy be steady yelling* is not acceptable in AAVE, because the subject is non-specific.

Indignant *come*

In AAVE, *come* became a semi-auxiliary and expresses the speaker's annoyance and irritation concerning the action [3, p.6]:

[49, p. 521] *He come walkin' in here like he owned the damn place.*

or

[49, p. 527] *They come talkin' that trash.*

This disapproval marker is a great example of a grammatical camouflage because it resembles SE's use of *come* with movement verbs (*she came running*). Yet it is a distinct feature of AAVE, because SE motion verb *come* cannot precede itself nor the verb *be*, while the AAVE *come* can [37, p. 175]:

[37, p. 178] *He come coming in here raising all kind of hell.*

or

She come being angry.

Past tense forms

In AAVE, there is no distinction between the forms of past simple and past perfect. In some cases, the past simple forms of the verbs are used, in others - the past participle. Therefore, only the auxiliary *have* helps us to identify which tense is actually being used [13, p. 75]. In addition, the negation *ain't* can also be used in past tenses in the meaning of SE *has not*, *have not*, and *did not*:

[49, p. 527] *I ain't go yesterday. = I didn't go yesterday.*

The irregular verbs of AAVE include the extension of past as participle (*I had went down there = I went down there*), participle as past (*They seen it*), bare-root as past (*They run there yesterday*), and regularization of past tense (*Everybody knowed him*) [49, p. 521].

Moreover, double tense marking sometimes occurs in AAVE. Meaning, a past participle suffix may be reduplicated [33, p. 7], for example:

[33, p. 7] *likeded = liked*

Completive *done*

In AAVE, *done* precedes a verb and expresses either completion in the recent past or result of an action. It can be used by itself as well as preceding other verbs [6, p. 141]:

[6, p. 141] *I done my homework yesterday. = I completed my homework yesterday.*

[49, p. 519] *They done used all the good ones. = They have already used all the good ones.*

[14, p. 528] *She done did it. = She has already did it.*

Stressed *been*

This stressed remote perfect marker is a unique feature of AAVE and denotes the distant past [29, p. 166]. It may precede either perfect or progressive verbal form, or a nonverbal predicate, and therefore differ in meaning [6, p. 141]. Let's compare:

She been writing it. = *She has been writing it for a long time.*

She been started it = *She started it a long time ago.*

She been a teacher = *She has been a teacher for a long time and still is.*

She been at home = *She has been at home for a long time and still is.*

This structure may confuse a non-AAVE speaker because it resembles a present perfect tense. But *she been a teacher* doesn't mean that *she has been a teacher* because it would imply that *she is not a teacher anymore*. This stative verb expresses a distantly initiated state which is still relevant. The omission of *have* in such sentences can be explained by the common phonological process of contraction and the sibilant deletion [13 p. 74]:

I have been -> *I've been* -> *I been*

John Rickford, Linguistics Professor at Stanford, conducted a survey between AAVE and non-AAVE speakers to find out how they would perceive the phrase "*She been married*". 23 out of 25 AAVE speakers surveyed answered that "*she*" was still married, while only 8 out of 25 non-AAVE speakers thought that way [29, p. 170-171].

Even though stressed *been* may resemble an auxiliary *have been*, it actually does not behave like one syntactically. For example, a yes-no or tag questions cannot be formed by the inversion, as well as a negation:

SE

+ *My parents have been married for a long time.*

? *Have your parents been married for a long time?*

AAVE

+ *My parents been married.*

? *Been your parents married?* - is not accepted.

SE

+ *They have been married for a long time.*

? *They have been married for Gara long time, haven't they?*

AAVE

+ *They been married.*

? *They been married, beenn't they?* - is not accepted.

SE

+ *They have been married for a long time.*

—*They haven't been married for a long time. They got married recently.*

AAVE

+ *They been married.*

—*They been not married.* - is not accepted.

Had + past tense verb form

It is a unique feature of AAVE that has appeared only recently. This structure may resemble the SE past perfect tense, but it actually bears a different meaning. *Had*, in this case, does not indicate a past action happening before another past action, it rather refers to just a simple past tense action [34, p. 54].

For instance:

[49, p. 520] *They had went outside and then they had messed up the yard.*

= *They went outside and then they messed up the yard.*

[49, p. 527] *Thay had tripped.* = *They tripped.*

Future tense forms

In AAVE, future tenses use auxiliary *will* and its negative form *won't* in the same way as SE does. It can be contracted to *'ll*, but it also may be omitted [33, p. 6]. It usually happens when *will* precedes a word starting with a labial consonant. All three variants are possible [13, p. 77]:

She will be there tomorrow.

She'll be there tomorrow.

She be there tomorrow.

The last sentence indicates future tense therefore *be* in this context should be distinguished from habitual (invariant) *be* used in the present tense [6, p. 140]. For example:

She be famous (in the future sometime).

She be famous (she is famous now and has been for a long time).

Gonna and finna

Gonna is frequently used not only in AAVE but also in informal colloquial English, particularly American English, instead of going to and is always preceded by the copula. In AAVE, however, the copula is omitted in the second and third person and is changed in the first person [13, p. 77]:

[24] *I'm gon/gonna fix some grits.*

I'mana/I'mon/I'ma do it.

You/he/she/we/they gon/gonna do it.

The performative modal *finna*, as well as its variations *fitna* and *fitna*, indicate an immediate future or planned event [33, p. 6]:

[24] *He finna go. = He is about to go.*

Sequential be done

A combination of *be* and *done* together here indicates a resultative or a future conditional state. Therefore, it seems to express the future perfect tense [49, p. 519]. For example:

[49, p. 527] *She be done had her baby.* = *She will have already had her baby by that point.*

[49, p. 519] *If you love your enemy, they be done eat you alive in this society.* = *If you love your enemy, they will eat you alive in this society.*

[24] *He be done left by the time we get there.* = *They will have already left by the time we get there.*

Question formation

The direct questions in AAVE are constructed without the subject and auxiliary verb inversion. This always appears in *wh*- questions and syntactically simple questions. Moreover, some questions may be formed without using an auxiliary whatsoever [13, p. 88; 33, p. 8].

[49, p. 526] *What that is?* = *What is that?*

[49, p. 525] *Why I can't go?* = *Why can't I go?*

[24] *Why I can't play?* = *Why can't I play?*

Multiple negation

In AAVE, as opposed to SE negation rules, the indefinite pronouns have to agree with the negations used in the sentence [33, p. 8]. For instance:

[49, p. 523] *It wasn't nothing.* = *It wasn't anything.*

They didn't do nothing about nobody having no money or nothing like that. = *They didn't do anything about somebody having no money or anything like that.*

Nobody don't like him. = *Nobody likes him.*

Negative marker ain't

Ain't is widely used in many non-standard varieties of English in those contexts where SE uses *be+not* and *have+not*, therefore it is used only in the present tense and precedes mostly first, second and third-person plural, and singular forms not as frequently [33, p. 8].

[24] *He ain't here.* = *He isn't here.*

In AAVE, on the other hand, *ain't* is also used in past tenses and replaces *didn't* [15]. For instance:

[24] *He ain't do it.* = *He didn't do it.*

Negative inversion

Negative inversion appears when a negative auxiliary precedes the subject. Sentences with such structure have the inverted form of questions but the meaning and falling intonation of emphatic declaratives [33, p. 8]. For example:

Ain't nobody gonna put me on the screen 'cept for me.

[49, p. 524] *Don't nobody like him.* = *Nobody likes him.*

[49, p. 529] *Didn't nobody like it.* = *Nobody liked it.*

[24] *Can't nobody say nothing.* = *Nobody can say anything.*

Nevertheless, negative inversion is extremely unlikely to appear if the subject has the definite article, a possessive pronoun, or is a name [25, p. 25]:

Ain't John/the teacher/your mother gonna know about it. - not possible

Plural formation

Plural ending *-s* may be absent in AAVE, but this form is not widely used.

[49, p. 525] *I got 50 cent.*

The absence of plural in measure nouns is not unique to AAVE, though a more generalized absence is [13, p. 87]:

[49, p. 525] *There are two boy over there.*

Moreover, irregular plural forms become regularized in AAVE: *gooses, mens, childrens, feets, oxes* [49, p. 525]. Alongside that, AAVE speakers may sometimes ‘hypercorrect’ the pluralization of some words, leading to the next cases:

[13, p. 63] *testes = tests*
deskes = desks

Pronouns

In AAVE, *it* and *they* are often used in affirmative as well as in negative sentences in cases where the pronoun *there* is used in SE [33, p.8]:

[49, p. 530] *It’s a J Street in DC. = There is a J Street in DC.*

[49, p. 530] *They’s a J Street in DC. = There is a J Street in DC.*

[24] *It’s a lot of it in there. = There is a lot of it in there.*

[24] *They got some angry women here. = There are some angry women in here.*

Furthermore, some other pronouns are also used in AAVE in a different way, for instance:

A) *That man, he talk to much.* A noun phrase subject here is followed by an agreeing pronoun for the emphasis [33, p. 7];

B) *He got hissself arrested for the spray-painting and the vandalisms. = He got himself...* In some cases, the possessive pronoun *his* instead of the objective pronoun *him* is used in the formation of the reflexive pronoun [49, p. 526]. Also:
 [24] *They should do it theyselves. = They should do it themselves.*

C) *She likes them apples.* The extension of the objective form *them* for attributive demonstratives [49, p. 526].

Possessives

In AAVE, there often may be an absence of a genitive case. Therefore, possession is often expressed through word order similar to that where SE uses the suffix *-s* [13, p. 85]:

[49, p. 525] *The man hat.* = *The man's hat.*

In the same manner, the third person plural pronoun sometimes is used in the nominative case instead of the possessive pronoun:

[49, p. 530] *It's they book.* = *It's their book.*

[24] *Who want to put on they good clothes looking like that?* = *Who would want to put on their good clothes while looking like that?*

Moreover, *y'all* is used to mark second person plural possessive [33, p. 7]:

[33, p. 7] *It's y'all ball.* = *It's your ball.*

This structure is not obligatory in AAVE, most speakers use both variants [33, p. 7].

Sometimes, the possessive pronoun *mine* may acquire the possessive suffix *-s* [13, p. 85]:

[49, p. 525] *The book is mines.*

Conclusion to Chapter 1

Despite the fact that AAVE has been a topic of research of many scholars, the question about its genesis still remains objectionable. The two main theories about its origin have been anglisist and creolist. Recently, a new view emerged that pieces both theories together and is called the neo-anglicist hypothesis.

Nowadays, AAVE is regarded to be transregional and becoming more uniform, having particular phonological and grammatical features that form a common core of the variety. The phonological features are not universal for all of the speakers, as AAVE has a wide range of unregularised accents. Some of those features resemble Southern American dialects (for example, cluster reduction). Other features include word stress shifting, a great intonation range, other changes in clusters and unstressed syllables, monophthongization of diphthongs, etc.

Grammatical features of AAVE also differ among the speakers. The most widespread of them include copula absence, invariant *be*, completive *done*, stressed *been*, and multiple negation.

Alongside its features, AAVE possesses a wide range of unique vocabulary. The AAVE lexicon becomes more and more popular among non-black Americans because of its being widely used on the Internet.

These factors make AAVE a unique characterization of black American culture. Black preachers and comedians and rappers also use it for dramatic and realistic effect. But many other people, black and white, regard it as a sign of limited education or sophistication, as a legacy of slavery or an impediment to socioeconomic mobility.

II. AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH REPRESENTATION IN STAND UP COMEDY

2.1. Analysis of the grammatical constraints of African American Vernacular English features

In this section, the internal constraints within each of the selected grammatical features will be explored. The quantitative variation of individual variables will be presented by introducing their frequencies of occurrences within the entire database: the data of the study were taken from the selection of stand up comedy specials performed by African American comedians. This source of data has been chosen because of its relevance to the subject that is being considered. African American stand up comedians are native speakers of the vernacular, they use it naturally and therefore can be considered a reliable source of data. Furthermore, black comedy has been a significant part of American pop culture over the course of at least the last 50 years thereby presenting the opportunity to review and examine the development of AAVE in hindsight with the help of corresponding stand up performances of the 1970s and further. The number of standard and vernacular variants across the specials of all the comedians chosen is reported further with the purpose of assessing the quantitative relevance of a particular variable and analyzing the effects of preceding and following grammatical surroundings. Accordingly, the informants who produced an insignificant amount of tokens or who did not employ any cases of vernacular variants are excluded. Those linguistic environments which seem likely to stimulate the occurrence of a particular AAVE variant are then compared and related to previous research. After carrying out this process, ten tables were created so as to observe the difference across speeches and speakers.

Table (1) compares the frequencies of third-person singular *-s* deletion between the selected comedians and shows that only nine speakers displayed the

variation and are therefore to be included in the analysis of environmental conditioning.

	Tokens		Absence of third-person singular - s
	absent	present	%
Richard Pryor - Live and Smokin' (1971)	19	13	59%
Richard Pryor - Live in Concert (1979)	25	10	71%
Eddie Murphy - Delirious (1983)	8	22	27%
Eddie Murphy - Raw (1987)	14	20	41%
Eddie Griffin - The black man' bible (1994)	0	36	0%
Chris Rock - Bring the pain (1996)	0	21	0%
Dave Chappelle - HBO (1998)	15	20	43%
Katt Williams - Live (2006)	3	29	9%
Chris Rock - Kill the messenger (2008)	18	11	62%
Patrice O'Neal - Elephant in the room (2011)	21	5	81%
Hannibal Buress - Comedy Camisado (2016)	0	28	0%

Tiffany Haddish - Black Mitzvah (2019)	31	4	89%
---	----	---	-----

Table (1): The overall frequencies of third-person singular -s absence with individual comedians

According to the previous studies, the absence of third-person singular is affected mostly by the personal pronouns [1]. Rickford and McNair-Knocks [31] also suggest that the verb type (regular verbs, *have*, *do*, *don't*, and *say*) is the most notable grammatical restriction. Moreover, Alim finds parallels with internal restrictions on copula deletion according to subject type, since both AAVE features tend to be more attracted to personal pronouns than to noun phrases and other pronouns [1]. According to the following grammatical category, *don't* and *say* appear to elicit more absence of third person suffix than regular verbs and *have* [33, p. 28]. However, Alim's research [1, p. 163] exposed *want/wanna* as the primary internal factor amongst verb types, followed by *say* in second place.

	Personal pronouns	Other pronouns	Noun phrases
Richard Pryor - Live and Smokin' (1971)	(8/2) 80%	(6/5) 54%	(1/1) 50%
Richard Pryor - Live in Concert (1979)	(5/2) 71%	(3/8) 27%	(2/1) 66%
Eddie Murphy - Delirious (1983)	(3/4) 43%	(2/5) 28%	(0/2) 0%
Eddie Murphy - Raw (1987)	(7/4) 64%	(2/5) 28%	(2/3) 40%
Dave Chappelle - HBO (1998)	(5/12) 29%	(3/6) 33%	(2/2) 50%
Katt Williams - Live	(5/2)	(3/9)	(1/1)

(2006)	71%	25%	50%
Chris Rock - Kill the messenger (2008)	(8/2) 80%	(2/9) 18%	(3/5) 37%
Patrice O'Neal - Elephant in the room (2011)	(3/4) 42%	(3/9) 25%	(4/2) 66%
Tiffany Haddish - Black Mitzvah (2019)	(7/6) 53%	(5/7) 41%	(3/1) 75%
Average absence	59%	31%	48%

Table (2): Third-person singular -s absence with individual comedians according to subject type

NOTE: The numbers in parentheses represent absent/present variants

The favorability of preceding grammatical environments in Table (2) parallels Alim's [1, p. 163] study with Pryor, Murphy, Williams, and Rock in that personal pronouns attract the omission of third-person singular -s more than noun phrases or other pronouns. Although the percentage gaps between the categories of subject types with Pryor do not appear to be vast, personal pronouns indeed show a slightly higher percentage rank of this feature.

On the contrary, Chappelle, O'Neal, and Haddish' frequencies of -s dropping could not confirm the proposed pattern of internal restrictions, since other pronouns and noun phrases exhibit a higher rate of deletion. Nonetheless, the average percentages rather expose the insignificance of internal constraints on third-person -s absence according to subject type, as has been suggested by some previous researches [5].

The next table presents the variability of the feature according to the following grammatical category, the verb type.

	Irregular verbs	Regular verbs	do/don't	say	want/wanna
Richard Pryor - Live and Smokin' (1971)	(9/4) 69%	(1/3) 25%	(11/0) 100%	(1/0) 100%	-
Richard Pryor - Live in Concert (1979)	(7/4) 63%	(4/7) 36%	(3/1) 75%	(0/1) 0%	(2/0) 100%
Eddie Murphy - Delirious (1983)	(5/12) 29%	(1/6) 14%	(1/3) 25%	-	-
Eddie Murphy - Raw (1987)	(0/8) 0%	(1/3) 25%	(0/6) 0%	(3/8) 27%	(1/0) 100%
Dave Chappelle - HBO (1998)	(0/20) 0%	(3/1) 75%	(0/3) 0%	-	(1/1) 50%
Katt Williams - Live (2006)	(3/6) 33%	(1/4) 20%	(3/3) 50%	(1/5) 16%	-
Chris Rock - Kill the messenger (2008)	(6/13) 31%	(1/8) 11%	(2/0) 100%	(1/2) 33%	-
Patrice O'Neal - Elephant in the room (2011)	(5/5) 50%	(1/5) 16%	(1/1) 50%	-	(1/3) 75%
Tiffany Haddish - Black Mitzvah (2019)	(2/6) 25%	(1/3) 25%	(3/2) 60%	(2/6) 25%	-
Average absence	33%	27%	51%	33%	81%

Table (3): Third-person singular -s absence with individual comedians according to verb type

The selection of verb types in Table (3) combines Rickford and McNair-Knox's [31] and Alim's [1] selection with the environments in which the tokens have occurred in data presented in the table. Alim's [1, p. 163] results present *want/wanna* as the most suitable for omission, which could also be noticed in Table (3) according to the average absence. Regarding the individual comedians, however, the results display *do/don't* as the category that favours third-person singular *-s* absence with Williams, Rock, and Haddish. In Murphy's case, *do/don't* forms fell slightly behind irregular verbs. Alim's [1, p. 163] study provides a much lower rate of this AAVE feature with *do/don't*. However, this outcome correlates to Rickford's [33, p. 128] analysis which exposed *don't* and *say* as the following environments that attracted the absence of the suffix more than regular verbs and have.

Overall, the average frequencies in Table (3) coincide with both Alim [1] and Rickford's [33] results, by displaying *want/wanna*, *do/don't*, and arguably *say* as the following environments which elicited higher percentages of third-person *-s* absence than the remaining linguistic categories. Despite the fact that some linguists find environmental constraints on third-person singular *-s* variation rather unimportant or indefinite, the table shows relatively parallel outcomes according to the following grammatical environments: the average results generally confirmed the proposed patterns regarding the verb type, however, the data concerning the preceding linguistic category displayed less reliable results and call for further research.

Previous studies and analysis [1; 20] report that the stylistic variation of possessive *-s* absence has been more or less insignificant according to both external identity constraints and internal grammatical constraints, mostly because of the extreme rarity of the feature's appearances. The latter was also the case in comedians' speech, since only two of twelve speakers exhibited a certain amount of omission, as shown in Table (4).

	absent/present	%
Richard Pryor - Live and Smokin' (1971)	1/0	100
Richard Pryor - Live in Concert (1979)	0/7	0
Eddie Murphy - Delirious (1983)	0/3	0
Eddie Murphy - Raw (1987)	6/4	60
Eddie Griffin - The black man' bible (1994)	0/6	0
Chris Rock - Bring the pain (1996)	0/1	0
Dave Chappelle - HBO (1998)	0/4	0
Katt Williams - Live (2006)	0/7	0
Chris Rock - Kill the messenger (2008)	0/2	0
Patrice O'Neal - Elephant in the room (2011)	0/4	0
Hannibal Buress - Comedy Camisado (2016)	0/3	0
Tiffany Haddish - Black Mitzvah (2019)	0/6	0

Table (4): The overall frequencies of possessive -s absence with individual speakers

Subsequently, the next tables focus on the internal variation in Pryor and Murphy's speech.

<i>Possessive -s</i>	absent/present	Absence
Other pronouns	4/1	80%
Noun phrases	3/3	50%

Table (5): Possessive variation in Pryor and Murphy's speech according to the preceding grammatical environment

<i>Possessive -s</i>	absent/present	Absence
Other pronouns	0/0	0%
Noun phrases	6/3	66%
Adverbs	1/0	100%
No environment	0/1	0%

Table (6): Possessive -s variation in Pryor and Murphy's speech according to the following grammatical environment

The omission of the nominal possessive according to the preceding category shows a preference for other pronouns (relative and indefinite pronouns) while noun phrases display most deletion as the following environment. A hundred percent absence with adverbs should not be considered significant since the result is based on a single token. The respective results are merely a demonstration of internal analysis of the variant since these cases are too few for determining environmental constraints.

Overall, the data confirm the issue that has been put forward by the previous researches: for the most part, the lack of variation and the low frequency of possessive -s omission disabled extended search for favourable grammatical surroundings and therefore prevented considering internal restrictions.

The usage of the plural *-s* absence in AAVE tends to be low [33] since this is not a major variable for speakers of contemporary AAVE in terms of its frequency of occurrences. Accordingly, a similar outcome has been expected which did not allow highlighting any significant internal constraints. Only three cases of plural suffix omission were found in the entire data set, produced by Haddish, Murphy, and O’Neal, as shown in Table (7). The remaining speakers did not exhibit any AAVE variants of the plural *-s* variable.

Plural <i>-s</i>	absent/present	Absence
Haddish	1/61	1.6%
Murphy	1/72	1.3%
O’Neal	1/29	3%

Table (7): The overall frequencies of possessive *-s* absence with individual speakers

The plural marker was deleted in the following cases: “*the last two letter,*” “*many record,*” and “*a lot of the blues singer.*” All the examples follow the principle of non-redundant pluralization where the absence of the plural suffix is preceded by a numeral or other plural determiner [9; 38]. In terms of semantic classification suggested by Poplack [27, p. 80, 86], “*letters,*” “*records,*” and “*singers*” were not listed as lexical preferences for the omission. Nevertheless, certain parallels can be drawn with previous studies analyzing the phonetic conditioning of the variable. Labov [20] found that the following consonant stimulated the omission of the plural suffix, while some researchers suggest that the following vowel prohibits the plural *-s* absence [33, p. 273]. The first example, “*the last two letter,*” is positioned at the end of the sentence and has, therefore,

no following environment. However, the two remaining cases “*many record first...*” and “*a lot of the blues singer when*” are indeed followed by a consonant.

Unfortunately, this outcome could only confirm the results of the previous findings which show low frequencies of this AAVE feature and its distributional insignificance for the analysis of the internal constraints. Apparently, the plural -s suffix is almost always realized in contemporary vernaculars including AAVE [18; 20; 45].

Generalizations of *is* and *tended* to be salient characteristics of contemporary AAVE. However, their usage is not exclusively tied to AAVE only. The proportions of tokens and related frequencies in Table (8) show that six out of twelve speakers used *is* instead of *are*. The following table shows only the speakers who displayed variation in order to present favourable grammatical surroundings for the occurrence of the informal variant.

	is/are	Generalisation of is
Pryor	6/11	35%
Murphy	5/12	41%
Rock	2/28	6%
Williams	8/4	66%
O’Neal	4/16	20%
Haddish	4/19	17%

Table (8): Generalisation of is with individual speakers in the entire data set
The following table presents the speakers’ use of the variant according to the preceding grammatical categories

Generalisa-	Personal	Existential	Relative	Noun	Demonstra
-------------	----------	-------------	----------	------	-----------

tion of is	pronouns	s	pronouns	phrases	tives
Pryor	(0/9) 0%	(1/0) 100%	(5/0) 100%	(0/1) 0%	(0/1) 0%
Murphy	(0/4) 0%	(3/0) 100%	(1/3) 25%	(1/0) 100%	-
Rock	(0/22) 0%	(2/5) 29%	(0/1) 0%	-	-
Williams	-	-	-	(6/1) 86%	(2/3) 40%
O'Neal	(0/9) 0%	(1/2) 33%	(1/0) 100%	(2/3) 40%	(1/1) 50%
Haddish	(0/16) 0%	(4/1) 80%	(0/1) 0%	-	(0/1) 0%
Average	0%	58%	58%	64%	33%

Table (9): Generalization of is with individual speakers according to subject type (the number in parenthesis denote the number of tokens for is/are)

Table (9) shows that nominal phrases, relative pronouns, and plural existentials elicited the highest frequencies of generalization of *is*. These subject types deserve attention in future studies on this variable's grammatical constraints.

As the usage of *is* instead of *are*, the generalisation of *was* is not unique to AAVE but can be observed in English-based creoles, Early English, and as a vernacular characteristic from Middle English [39, p. 155]. Even fewer interlocutors exhibited *was/were* variation than they did with the previous variable. However, the frequencies of the generalization were notably higher with the majority of speakers as is shown in the table below.

	was/were	Generalisation of was
Richard Pryor - Live and Smokin' (1971)	4/0	100%
Richard Pryor - Live in Concert (1979)	3/1	75%
Eddie Murphy - Delirious (1983)	1/15	6%
Eddie Murphy - Raw (1987)	35/1	97%
Eddie Griffin - The black man' bible (1994)	0/7	0%
Chris Rock - Bring the pain (1996)	0/22	0%
Dave Chappelle - HBO (1998)	0/9	0%
Katt Williams - Live (2006)	25/7	78%
Chris Rock - Kill the messenger (2008)	0/8	0%
Patrice O'Neal - Elephant in the room (2011)	0/24	0%
Hannibal Buress - Comedy Camisado (2016)	0/7	0%
Tiffany Haddish - Black Mitzvah (2019)	0/4	0%

Table (10): Generalisation of was with individual comedians in the entire data set

The next table presents the arrangements of was usage according to the preceding grammatical categories with the speakers who employed the respective non-standard variant.

Generalisation of was	Personal pronouns	Existentials	Relative pronouns	Noun phrases	Possessive pronouns	Demonstratives
Pryor (1971)	(2/0) 100%	-	-	(2/0) 100%	-	-
Pryor (1979)	(3/0) 100%	-	-	(0/1) 0%	-	-
Murphy (1983)	(0/12) 0%	(1/0) 100%	(0/2) 0%	-	(0/1) 0%	-
Murphy (1987)	(29/1) 97%	(1/0) 100%	-	(5/0) 100%	-	-
Williams	(14/4) 78%	(5/1) 83%	(0/1) 0%	(4/1) 80%	-	(2/0) 100%
Average	74%	87%	0%	85%	0%	100%

Table (11): Generalisation of was with individual comedians according to subject type (the numbers in parentheses denote the number of tokens for was/were)

Previous studies have proposed two internal factors influencing *was/were* variation: *was* prefers plural noun phrases over pronouns [14, 35, 46] and it is generally favoured in plural existentials [14].

The results in Table (11) clearly show preference of *was* variants with noun phrases, personal pronouns, and existentials. Moreover, noun phrases attract higher percentages of this feature than personal pronouns and relative pronouns, which coincides precisely with the favourable linguistic environments that have been suggested by the researchers.

Contemporary research also suggests that negative contexts attract a stronger realisation of *was*, when compared to affirmative contexts [39]. This is only loosely supported by the data set since there were only two such instances

of negation, the first occurring in Murphy's and the second in Williams' speech ("They wasn't lying," and "They wasn't in it"). Both negatives had no counterparts in the form of weren't, meaning that negation attracted the use of was at a hundred percent, which indicates suggested direction.

2.2. The usage of slang in selected data

AAVE has a broad and unique lexicon and often varies depending on age groups, education status, socioeconomic classes, and geographical location of its users. Moreover, a large number of the lexical items that are found in the AAVE lexicon originate in and are perpetuated through hip-hop culture, including music [17, p. 12]. AAVE has entries for words that sound like words in general American English. However, the meanings will be different from the corresponding homonyms in general American English lexicons. For example, the word *kitchen* is used by African Americans in the same way it is used commonly by other speakers of American English, but it is also used uniquely by African Americans to refer to the hair at the nape of the neck. Other examples would be *mannish* and *womanish* which could be used to refer to characteristics of a man or a woman, respectively, the general American English definitions. However, these words can also be used to refer to boys and girls, who are seen as behaving inappropriately for their young ages. These terms, in the sense of the AAVE lexicon, usually carry negative connotations in that they refer to a type of mature behavior that is unbecoming of children [17, p. 15].

Green [17] categorizes AAVE lexicon into three large groups: general words and phrases, verbal markers, and current slang. The first one is characterized by being cross-generational, reflecting the relationship between AAVE and West African languages [42] and being used in religious and secular environments. For example, *sadditty* (adj.), meaning *conceited*. The words that fall into the second category indicate the way eventuality is carried out, for

example, *bin* (aux. verb) that situates the eventuality or the initiation of the eventuality in the remote past. The last category includes words associated with an age group linked to popular culture or may be associated with a particular region, for example, *whoadie* (n.) meaning *comrade* (New Orleans usage) [17, p. 32].

Slang, which appears to a large part of the AAVE lexicon, is challenging for scholars to give an account of because of its rapidly changing and varying regionally. Nevertheless, some research has been conducted. Teresa Labov, for example, notes three categories of slang: (1) those for labeling people, (2) those for painting people, activities, and places positively or negatively, and (3) those for ways of spending leisure time, focused upon fun [19]. Lisa Green reconsiders the content of such categorisation, and presents the list of modern AAVE slang while following Labov's types of categories [17, p. 32]. Green's list of contemporary AAVE slang includes such examples as:

1. Labeling people

a) terms for women

bopper - a woman who is preoccupied with material gain;

dime - a beautiful woman;

ma - a pretty girl;

wifey - a girlfriend;

b) terms for men

balla - a man who has acquired money and material possessions;

cat - a womanizer;

dawg (also *dog*) - has a negative connotation when it is used to refer to a male who mistreats females, but is also used by males as a term of address, without negative import;

playa (also *player*) - a term of addressing a male.

Another unique feature of AAVE lexicon is *ass*-constructions, meaning using the word *ass* either as an independent word or as a kind of affix, thereby creating intensified adjectives or alternatively [41, p. 30], as Spears argues ‘*ass*, occurring in expressions in which it is preceded by a possessive pronoun, is usually used as the equivalent of the reflexive *self* also used as a substitute for other pronouns’ [36]. For example:

- [41, p. 30] *a. Get your ass around the corner.*
 b. Lucky I signed off on your ass, or you’d be on your way out to boy’s village.
 c. He ain’t no governor, neither, just a weak-ass Mayor of a broke-ass city.

Example (a) clearly represents the case where *ass* substitutes for the word *self*, in (b) the phrase *your ass* would mostly naturally be rendered simply as *you* in SE while in (c) it is used creatively as an intensifying affix in an adjective phrase [41, p. 31].

These examples illustrate how peculiar the AAVE lexicon is, often referring to items and topics that are typically not considered appropriate for polite conversation. Nevertheless, AAVE lexicon and slang have a strong resemblance to many other kinds of slang in general, it can: 1) show solidarity to the in-group, 2) show distance or resistance to the out-group, 3) be used as a code to obscure meaning and 4) be used to cover inappropriate topics [33, p. 31].

While analysing the data set, attention has also been paid to the usage of slang in comedians’ speech. For further analysis, Haddish’s performance [55] has been chosen because of its relevance (specials being shot in 2019).

First of all, the following list presents a number of *ass*-constructions used by Haddish. Examples show how *ass* is used independently or as an affix with

the intention to intensify adjectives. Sometimes, *ass* can also be used in a role of a reflexive pronoun self or other pronouns.

1. Intensified adjectives:

- a. *"I'm a grown-ass woman."*
- b. *"You look like your ugly-ass daddy."*
- c. *"He got a flat-ass belly."*
- d. *"Lazy-ass ain't-doing-shit-ass strippers."*
- e. *"He got a yeasty-ass throat."*
- f. *"I'm bringing the dead back with my bad-ass show?"*
- g. *"They givin' you grape juice and shit and like fake-ass crackers."*
- h. *"We just had one dark-ass line."*
- i. *"That is till you get home in that lonely-ass kitchen."*
- j. *"If you got a crazy-ass baby mama..."*

The examples above show that *ass* bears a meaning which is very close to *very*, yet is marked vulgar and colloquial.

2. Intensified verbs:

- a. *"I was out there partying my ass off."*
- b. *"I worked my ass off."*

Here, the expression *my ass off* expresses that the action (partying or working) is executed with a certain intensity. Meaning, (2a) *I was partying hard*, and (2b) *I worked hard*.

3. Pronouns:

- a. *"I can talk about his ass personally."*
- b. *"Get your ass off the stage."*

(3a) represents the case of using an *ass*-construction as a pronominal phrase, and *his ass* there may be easily replaced by *him*. Whereas in (3b) *ass* substitutes for the word *self* and therefore replaces a reflexing pronoun *yourself*.

Haddish's lexicon also includes a wide variety of words/expressions for referring to other people and/or describing people, places, and activities. The following glossary presents such words using Teresa Labov's system of AAVE slang categorization [19].

1. Slang for labeling people

a. terms for women

- *"So my homegirl's like, "We should go to the gym"."*

homegirl - a female friend, usually young; a member of one's friend group or gang. When addressing a male, *homeboy* is used;

- *"If you got a crazy-ass baby mama..."*

baby mama - a woman who has a child with a man to whom she is not married to;

- *"My sis help me."*

sis (contraction of *sister*) - a term of addressing a black woman by another black person. When addressing a black male, *brother* is used;

- *"She's a trap queen."*

trap queen - a street-smart woman who is loyal to her community, family, and/or man;

b. terms for men

- *"Sit right here, pimpin."*

pimpin - a pimp (procurer); a nicely-dressed man; an attractive man;

- *"She had five kids, four baby daddies."*

baby daddy - a male equivalent of a baby mama;

- *"My man Katt Williams in the house."*

(my) *man* - a term of addressing a male friend;

- *“I appreciate you, dawg.”*

dawg/dog - a term of addressing a close male friend;

- *“A pimp don’t know what to wear in here.”*

pimp - a procurer. This term is not always used to address an actual pimp, but a man who has pimp-like features like expensive and loud clothing or popularity among women. Sometimes this word may be used as an adjective in the meaning of making something more showy, e.g. *to pimp up the car*;

- *“All thugs be ready to die, but not when you get shot.”*

thug - a criminal (especially who commits such violent crimes as robbery and assault); a violent person;

c. terms of unspecified gender

- *“And, by all means, make your paper, boo boo.”*

boo boo - a term of addressing a person you like and care about; also *boo*;

- *“I asked my bae for help.”*

bae - AAVE version of babe, a term of endearment toward a person you like;

- *“That’s my squad.”*

squad - a crew of one’s close friends;

2. Slang for painting people, activities and places

a. positive connotation

- *“Beyoncé is the most dopest person in the world”*

dope - (adj.) great, amazing; (n.) drugs;

- *“And her suit was banging.”*

banging - (adj.) excellent, great;

- *“The party’s gonna be so lit!”*

lit - amazing;

- *“She ready.”*

ready - attractive, sexually aroused;

- “No, they tight. They tight.”

tight - good, fashionable, hip;

- “You ’re gonna knock this out the park.”

to knock something out the park - to do something extremely well;

- “Girl, that boy is popping!”

popping (adj.) - beautiful, attractive, stylish;

- “Her face is on fleek.”

on fleek - perfect, on point;

b. negative connotation

- “Cellphones be snitching.”

snitch (v.) - to inform on someone; Also can be used figuratively meaning bad;

- “Tiffany Haddish bombs in Miami, does a horrible New Year’s Eve show.”

bomb (v.) - in this context means bad performance; when used with a definite pronoun means something great;

- “I’m in the hotel lobby with a fur coat on, some swim trunks, some Timberlands and an umbrella, because I don’t know what may happen in this raggedy b***h this evening.”

raggedy - in poor condition;

- “The place been hella basic.”

basic - not sophisticated nor interesting (about a place, movie, etc.); only interested in popular and trending things (about a person).

Conclusion to Chapter 2

The linguistic patterns and environmental constraints in the use of AAVE features contribute to a better understanding and a wider acknowledgment of the fact that AAVE is a regular and systematic form of vernacular language. Among all the AAVE features, in this chapter the attention is given to such features as the absence of third-person singular *-s* before particular verbs and after personal pronouns, other pronouns, and noun phrases; the absence of possessive *-s* according to following grammatical environment; the absence of plural *-s*; and generalisation of copula.

The results of this research generally confirm the previous findings on grammatical conditioning in AAVE. For example, it was found that the absence of third-person singular *-s* was mostly affected by the personal pronouns as it was previously shown in Alim's research. Internal constraints on the omission of nominal possessive and plural *-s* suffix remain inconclusive and call for further research. In this case, the result appeared such, mostly because this AAVE feature is fraught with its extremely rare appearance in speech. Similarly, a larger amount of data is needed to test the generalisation of *is* (regarding its occurrences with plural existentials and nominal phrases). On the other hand, the data on the generalization of *was* has shown predictable results, as it was mostly occurring with noun phrases as it has been previously suggested by researches. Overall, the usage of such AAVE features as the generalization of *is* and possessive *-s* deserve attention in future studies on this variable's grammatical constraints due to insufficient occurrence in selected data.

CONCLUSION

AAVE is a quite complex topic for conducting profound research as it is:

- a) has an objectionable history and can be characterized as having a lack of overall agreement about its roots;
- b) has a complex system of phonological and grammatical features which vary geographically and in accordance with the gender and age of its speakers;
- c) possesses a vast lexicon consisting of lexical items of specialized and unique meaning, which are often regarded as highly colloquial, informal, and often of offensive nature. Moreover, AAVE slang is rapidly changing, which makes it challenging to research.

Nevertheless, this research paper presents a thorough description of above-mentioned features, using a great amount of previous research. It is shown that AAVE comprises a variety of grammatical and phonological characteristics that form a distinctive dialect. While many of them vary regionally, there is a core of the vernacular that is widespread among all the speakers. Such features include copula absence, invariant *be*, completive *done*, stressed *been*, and multiple negation.

The featured research is hereafter used in analyzing the substantial speech of native AAVE speakers. Consequently, the analysis of utilized AAVE features is made with the purpose of presenting the frequency of their occurrences according to the grammatical environment. To conduct the analysis, such features as the absence of third-person singular *-s*, possessive *-s*, and generalisation of copula were chosen to find out the patterns of their usage by native speakers and corresponding grammatical constraints.

This analysis of internal grammatical constraints on the selected features of AAVE shows the following results:

- the results relatively correlate to the previous research regarding the third-person singular *-s* absence according to the verb type and preceding usage of noun phrases and pronouns;
- *want/wanna*, *do/don't*, and *say* showed higher percentages of third-person *-s* omission than regular and irregular verbs, which confirms Alim and Rickford's findings;
- low frequencies of possessive *-s* absence occurrence have not shown reliable results of such pattern and therefore need an extended research of this feature;
- the data concerning the absence of plural *-s* has also shown low frequencies of usage, yet confirmed the results of previous studies on this matter;
- nominal phrases, relative pronouns, and plural existentials elicited the highest usage of *is/are* generalization;
- personal pronouns, noun phrases, and existentials elicited the highest usage of *was/were* generalization.

Moreover, a glossary of selected lexical items is compiled, showing the wide range of AAVE lexicon. The glossary was composed on the basis of Tiffany Haddish's performance and presents the list of *-ass* constructions used in pronouns, and to intensify adjectives and verbs. Moreover, the list of words and expressions for referring to people, and describing people and things was composed using Teresa Labov's system of AAVE slang categorisation.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Афро-американська англійська - це широко поширений серед афроамериканського населення США діалект англійської мови. Походження цього діалекту все ще залишається доволі протирічним питанням серед вчених, адже до недавнього часу існувало дві гіпотези, що протиставлялися одна одній. Перша полягала в тому, що афро-американська англійська сформувався на базі креольських мов, пізніше зазнавши декрелізації (Rickford, 1998). Представники другої гіпотези дотримуються думки, що він виник безпосередньо на основі британських діалектів (Wolfram, 2002).

Афро-американська англійська довгий час сприймалася суспільством, не як самостійний діалект, а як певна “неправильна” та “неграмотна” англійська мова. Саме наявність упереджень щодо визнання афро-американської англійської за окремий діалект і характеризує актуальність подальших досліджень цієї теми. Тим не менш, афро-американська англійська налічує безліч унікальних граматичних та фонетичних характеристик. Більшість з них використовується носіями діалекту в різному ступені, в залежності від регіону проживання. Тим не менш, деякі граматичні та фонетичні відмінності є дуже широко поширеними серед усіх носіїв, наприклад відсутність копули, подвійне заперечення, тощо.

Мета цього дослідження - це аналіз граматичних, фонетичних та лексичних характеристик афро-американської англійської, на ряду з подальшим аналізом застосування цього діалекту його носіями. Для аналізу було обрано дослідити виступи афро-американських стендап коміків, для яких цей діалект є рідним. Серед завдань цього дослідження було проаналізувати використання обраних відмінностей афро-американської англійської, а саме відсутність закінчення -s у дієсловах третьої особи однини та у іменниках в присвійному відмінку, а також відсутність

узгодження допоміжного дієслова *is/was* з іменниками. Під час аналізу, особлива увага звертається на внутрішні граматичні обмеження появи вищевказаних характеристик, в залежності від певного граматичного середовища, в яких вони вживаються. Аналіз обраних граматичних відмінностей афро-американського діалекту показав, що:

- 1) відсутність закінчення *-s* в дієсловах третьої особи однини корелює з вживанням займенників та іменних фраз
- 2) відсутність закінчення *-s* в дієсловах третьої особи однини, крім того, корелює з тим яке саме дієслово використовується. При цьому, найчастіше саме дієслова *wanna, do, say* лишалися закінчення
- 3) відсутність закінчення *-s* у іменниках в присвійному відмінку не показала закономірності через не часте використання
- 4) узагальнення копули найчастіше відбувалося у реченнях з особовими займенниками та іменними фразами, тощо.

Крім того, під час роботи з обраними виступами носіїв афро-американської англійської, складено словник лексичних одиниць, що демонструє різноманітність афро-американського сленгу.

REFERENCES

- 1) Alim, S. (2004) *You know my steez: an ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of styleshifting in a Black American speech community*. Los Angeles, USA: Duke University Press for the American Dialect Society, 163.
- 2) Anderson, B. (2002) *Dialect leveling and /ai/ monophthongization among African American Detroiters*. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6 (1), 86-98.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9481.00178>
- 3) Ash, S., & Myhill, J. (1986) *Linguistic correlates of inter-ethnic contact. Diversity and diachrony*, ed. by David Sankoff, Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins, 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.53.06ash>
- 4) Bailey, G. & Thomas, E. (1998) *Some aspects of African-American vernacular English phonology*. Mufwene, S., Rickford, J., Bailey, G., & Baugh, J. (Eds.) (1998). *African-American English: structure, history, and use*. London, UK and New York, USA : Routledge, 85-109.
- 5) Baugh, J. (1979) *Linguistic Style-Shifting in Black English*. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- 6) Brown, S., & Attardo, S. (2005) *Understanding Language Structure, Interaction, and Variation*. USA : The University of Michigan Press, 132-148.
- 7) Butters, R. (1989) *The death of Black English: Divergence and convergence in black and white vernaculars*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- 8) Denning, K. (1989) *Convergence and divergence: A sound change in Vernacular Black English*. *Language Variation and Change* 1, 145-167.
- 9) Dillard, J. (1972) *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States*. New York, USA: Random House.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500004656>

- 10) Edwards, W. (2008). *African-American Vernacular English: Phonology*. Schneider, E. (Ed.) (2008) *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean*. Berlin, Germany : Mouton de Gruyter, 181-191. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110208405.1.181>
- 11) Fasold, R. (1969). *Tense and the Form Be in Black English*. *Language*, Vol. 45, No. 4. USA : Linguistic Society of America, 763-776. <https://doi.org/10.2307/412334>
- 12) Fasold, R. (1981) *The relationship between black and white speech in the South*. *American Speech* (56), 163-169.
- 13) Fasold, R. & Wolfram, W. (2003). *Some Linguistic Features of Negro Dialect*. Norment, N. (Ed.) (2003) *Readings in African American Language*. USA : Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 59-92.
- 14) Feagin, C. (1979) *Variation and Change in Alabama English: A Sociolinguistic Study of the White Community*. Washington, DC, USA: Georgetown University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/007542428001400107>
- 15) Fisher, S. (2018) *Change Over Time in the Grammar of African American English*, University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
- 16) Green, L. (1998) *Aspect and predicate phrases in African-American vernacular English*. Mufwene, S., Rickford, J., Bailey, G., & Baugh, J. (Eds.) (1998). *African-American English: structure, history, and use*. London, UK and New York, USA : Routledge, 37-68.
- 17) Green, L. (2002) *African American English, a linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, UK, 12-33. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511800306>
- 18) Kessler, C. (1972) *Noun Plural Absence*. In *Tense Marking in Black English: A Linguistic and Social Analysis*, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 223-237.

- 19) Labov, T. (1992) *Social and language boundaries among adolescents*, in: *American Speech* 67, 339-366.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/455845>
- 20) Labov, W. (1968) *A Study of the Non- Standard English of Negro and Puerto-Rican Speakers in New York City*. Final Report, Cooperative Research Project 3228, vols. I and II. Philadelphia: US Regional Survey.
- 21) Labov, W. (1972) *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia, USA : University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 22) Labov, W. (1972) *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia, USA : University of Pennsylvania Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500004528>
- 23) Labov, W. (1995) *The case of the missing copula: The interpretation of zeroes in African-American English*. Labov, W. In Gleitman, L. R and Liberman, M. (Eds.), *An invitation to cognitive science*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 25-54.
- 24) Lanehart, S. (2017). *Re-writing the origins and history of African American Language*. Bergs, A. & Brinton, L. (Eds.) *The history of English: Varieties of English*. Berlin, Germany : Mouton de Gruyter, chapter 5.
- 25) Martin, S. & Wolfram, W. (1998) *The sentence in African-American vernacular English*. Mufwene, S., Rickford, J., Bailey, G., & Baugh, J. (Eds.) (1998). *African-American English: structure, history, and use*. London, UK and New York, USA : Routledge, 11-36.
- 26) Mufwene, S., & Rickford, J. (1998) *African American English: Structure, History, and Use*. London, UK : Routledge.
- 27) Poplack, S. (2000) *The English History of African American English*. Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers.

- 28) Poplack, S. (2006). *How English Became African American English*. Kernenade, A. & Los, B. (Eds.) (2006) *The handbook of the History of English*. New Jersey, USA : Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 452-453.
- 29) Rickford, J. (1975). *Carrying the new wave into syntax: The case of Black English BIN*. Fasold, R. & Shuy, R. (Eds.) (1975) *Analyzing variation in language: Papers from the second Colloquium on New Ways of Analyzing Variation*. Washington, DC, USA : Georgetown University Press, 162-183.
- 30) Rickford, J. (1992) *Grammatical variation and divergence in Vernacular Black English*. Gerritsen, M. & Stein, D. (Eds.) (1992) *Internal and external factors in syntactic change*. Berlin, New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 174-200.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110886047.175>
- 31) Rickford, J., & McNair-Knocks, F. (1994) *Addressee and Topic-Influenced Style Shift: A Quantitative Sociolinguistic Study*. In Biber, Douglas and Edward Finegan (eds.), *Perspectives on Register: Situating Register Variation Within Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 235-276.
- 32) Rickford, J. (1998) *The creole origins of African-American Vernacular English: Evidence from copula absence*. In G. Bailey, J. Baugh, S.S. Mufwene, J.R. Rickford (Ed.), *African-American English: Structure, History and Use*. Routledge, 154-200.
- 33) Rickford, J. (1999). *African-American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implication*. USA : Blackwell Publishers, Stanford University.
- 34) Rickford, J. (1999). *Preterite Had + Verb -ed in Narratives*. Rickford, J. (1999). *African-American Vernacular English: Features,*

- Evolution, Educational Implication. USA : Blackwell Publishers, Stanford University, 34-60.
- 35) Schilling-Estes, N., & Wolfram, W. (1994) *Convergent explanation and alternative regularization patterns: Were/weren't leveling in a vernacular English variety*. *Language Variation and Change*, 6 (3), 273-302. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394500001691>
- 36) Spears, A. (1998) *African-American language use: Ideology and so-called obscenity*. London, UK: Routledge, 226-250.
- 37) Spears, A. (2003) *The Black English Semi-Auxiliary Come*. Norment, N. (Ed.) (2003) *Readings in African American Language*. USA : Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 173-201.
- 38) Stewart, W. (1966) *Non-standard speech patterns*. *Baltimore Bulletin of Education*, 43, 52-65.
- 39) Tagliamonte, S., & Smith, J. (2000) *Old Was, New Ecology: Viewing English through the Sociolinguistic Filter*. In Poplack, Shana (ed.), *The English History of African American English*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 141-171.
- 40) Tarone, E. (1973). *Aspects of Intonation in Black English*. *American Speech*, Vol. 48, No. 1 / 2 (Spring - Summer, 1973), 29-36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3087890>
- 41) Trotta, J., & Blyahher, O. *Game done changed: A look at selected AAVE features in the TV series The Wire*
- 42) Turner, L. (1949) *Africanisms in the Gullah dialect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2572283>
- 43) Weldon, T. (2005) *Review: The Development of African American English by Walt Wolfram, Erik R. Thomas*. *Language*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2005. New York, USA : Linguistic Society of America, 478-494. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2005.0107>

- 44) Wolford, T. & Evanini, K. (2006). *Features of AAVE as features of PRE: A study of adolescents in Philadelphia*. USA : University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics. Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 18.
- 45) Wolfram, W. (1969) *A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/412325>
- 46) Wolfram, W., & Sellers, J. (2000) *Alternative regularization pattern and ethnic marking in tri-ethnic rural southern community*. Journal of English Linguistics.
- 47) Wolfram, W., & Thomas, E. R. (2002). *The development of African American English*. Oxford, UK : Blackwell.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470690178>
- 48) Wolfram, W., & Schilling-Estes, N. (2006) *American English*. Dialects and Variation. 2nd ed. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047404507260063>
- 49) Wolfram, W. (2008). *Urban African American Vernacular English: morphology and syntax*. Schneider, E. (Ed.) (2008) *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean*. Berlin, Germany : Mouton de Gruyter, 510-533. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110208405.2.510>
- 50) Wolfram, W. (2011) *The African American English Canon in Sociolinguistics*. In Adams, Michael and Curzan, Anne (eds). *Contours of English and English Language Studies*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 34-52.
- 51) Wolfram, W. & Schilling, N. (2015) *American English: Dialects and Variation*. USA : Wiley, chapter 8.

Supporting materials

- 52) Buess, Hannibal (2016) *Comedy Camisado*
- 53) Chappelle, Dave (1998) *HBO*
- 54) Griffin, Eddie (1994) *The black man' bible*
- 55) Haddish, Tiffany (2019) *Black Mitzvah*
- 56) Murphy, Eddie (1983) *Delirious*
- 57) Murphy, Eddie (1987) *Raw*
- 58) O'Neal, Patrice (2011) *Elephant in the room*
- 59) Pryor, Richard (1971) *Live and Smokin'*
- 60) Pryor, Richard (1979) *Live in Concert*
- 61) Rock, Chris (1996) *Bring the pain*
- 62) Rock, Chris (2008) *Kill the messenger*
- 63) Williams, Katt (2006) *Live*