

ECHO

ECHO: An international e-journal concerning communication and communication disorders within and among the social, cultural and linguistically diverse populations, with an emphasis on those populations who are underserved.

***ECHO is the Official Journal of the
National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing***



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The following individuals served as reviewers or otherwise contributed, editorially, to the journal during 2013. We thank them for their contributions to ECHO (any omissions were certainly unintentional):

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About the Journal

ECHO is a refereed journal that welcomes submissions concerning communication and communication disorders from practitioners, researchers, or scholars that comprise diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as academic orientations.

ECHO welcomes submissions from professionals or scholars interested in communication breakdown and/or communication disorders in the context of the social, cultural, and linguistic diversity within and among countries around the world. ECHO is especially focused on those populations where diagnostic and intervention services are limited and/or are often provided services which are not culturally appropriate. It is expected that scholars in those areas could include, but not limited to, speech-language pathology, audiology, psychology, linguistics, and sociology.”

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Guidelines to Authors

Topics accepted for publication in ECHO could include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Communication breakdowns among persons due to culture, age, race, background, education, or social status
- Use of the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) framework to describe communication use and disorders among the world's populations.
- Communication disorders in underserved or marginalized populations around the world
- Service delivery frameworks for countries' minority populations, including those who are minorities for a variety of reasons including race, religion, or primary language spoken.
- Dialectical differences and their effects on communication among populations
- Evidence base practice research with culturally and linguistic diverse populations
- Provision of communication services in low income/resource countries
- Provision of communication services in middle income/resource countries
- Provision of communication services to immigrant and/or refuge populations
- Effects of poverty on communication development and the provision of services
- Education/training issues in serving diverse populations
- Ethical issues in serving diverse populations
- Role of religion in views of communication disability and its effect on service delivery

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- works using disability frameworks or models
- critical clinical literature reviews
- tutorials
- clinical forums
- description of clinical programs
- scientifically conducted program evaluations demonstrating effectiveness of clinical protocols
- case studies
- letters to the editor.

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All manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover letter (e-mail) in which the corresponding author:

- Requests that the manuscript be considered for publication;
- Affirms that the manuscript has not been published previously, including in an electronic form;
- Affirms that the manuscript is not currently submitted elsewhere;
- Affirms that all applicable research adheres to the basic ethical considerations for the protection of human or animal participants in research;
- Notes the presence or absence of a dual commitment;
- Affirms that permission has been obtained to include any copyrighted material in the paper; and
- Supplies his or her business address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.

All manuscripts must be submitted electronically and should follow the style and preparation presented in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition, 2001; see Journal for exceptions to APA style) Particular attention should be paid to the citing of references, both in the text and on the reference page. Manuscript submissions and inquiries should be addressed to: nbaslh@nbaslh.org.

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Current Issue

DEFINING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SPEECH COMMUNITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (AAE), Yolanda Feimster Holt, PhD, CCC-SLP, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

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DEFINING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SPEECH COMMUNITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (AAE)

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ABSTRACT

There has been much debate on the enduring issue of accurately defining the term “African American Vernacular English,” (AAVE). It has been generally accepted that the definitions, based on only a select set of phonological, morphological, and syntactic features, are inadequate for several reasons. First the definitions do not reconcile the substantial similarities between AAVE and vernacular varieties of White English particularly in communities in the south eastern United States; second the definitions do not address variation in AAVE itself (variation according to region, class, and other social factors); third AAVE speakers themselves may appeal to other criteria such as styles of speaking, conversational strategies and so on to identify themselves as speakers of the dialect. This paper discusses the problem of defining the African American Speech Community, regional variation in AAVE in particular Southern AAVE and establishing the relationship of AAVE both to regional White Vernacular English and General/Standard American English.

KEY WORDS: African American Speech, Speech Community, African American English (AAE)

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DEFINING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SPEECH COMMUNITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (AAE)

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of a speech community is typically associated with aspects of shared geographical location, shared grammar, lexicon and phonology, along with ideas related to shared ways of thinking about the world and the place of the speaker in the world. Attempts to define the African American speech community have been problematic, due in part to early descriptions of African American speech as deficient and sub-standard (cf. Mencken, 1936; Crum, 1940). Following this inglorious start, many African Americans are ambivalent regarding who and what define the African American speech community (e.g., Morgan, 2001)

Research completed on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the 1960's and 1970's associated AAVE with the speaking style of Black youth involved in "street culture" (e.g., Baugh, 1983). This association of AAVE with "street speech"; "ghetto speech"; or "uneducated speech" has proven to be a disincentive for many speakers of the vernacular to be associated with it (e.g., Morgan 2001). Yet the term vernacular implies the existence of some standard. Is there a standard version of African American English (AAE) that is distinct from both a vernacular dialect (AAVE) and from General or Standard American English (G/SAE)? Is it further possible to define a singular internally consistent AAVE separate from regional American vernacular dialects, or are there multiple regional dialects within a hypothesized pan AAE? These are provoking empirical questions which require not only a definition of the "what" of AAE but simultaneously a definition of the "who"; as within the African American community, who are the speakers of AAE, AAVE, and SAE? Who belongs in and whose speech defines the African American speech community? In an attempt to provide a definition of the African American speech community this paper will review definitions of speech community provided by Dell Hymes (1974), William Labov (1972) and Grace Holt (1975). While neither of these scholars come to a definitive description of the African American speech community, they move along a continuum from scholarly outsiders, Hymes (1974) and Labov

(1972) to a scholarly community insider, Holt (1975), defining her perceptions of what is the African American speech community. While many respected researchers including Marcyliena Morgan, Geneva Smitherman, Walt Wolfram and others have written about the African American speech community, this paper will focus on work completed by Hymes(1974), Holt (1975) and Labov (1972) as these works represent three specific points of discussion. Hymes (1974) provides a theoretical description of speech community. Labov (1972) provides a description of African American English from the perspective of a community outsider. Finally Grace Holt (1975) provides a description of African American English from the perspective of a community insider.

In Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach Hymes (1974) provides a definition of a speech community as an organization of linguistic features in terms of ways of speaking. While not addressed specifically to the African American speech community, his definition is instructive in the following broad components necessary to define a speech community:

1. Linguistic theory as theory of language, entailing the organization of speech (not just grammar)
2. Foundations of theory and methodology as entailing questions of function (not just structure)
3. Speech communities as organizations of ways of speaking (not just equivalent to the distribution of the grammar of a language)
4. Competence as personal ability (not just grammatical knowledge, systemic potential of a grammar, super-organic property of a society, or indeed, irrelevant to persons in any other way)

These four constructions address the questions: 1. What constitutes an effective message; 2. How are words and sentences combined to create a particular message with a specifically presented and received meaning from a communicator to the intended audience; 3. What content, syntax, tone of voice, to whom, from whom and in what presented communicative context

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is effective communication defined within the community; 4. What is required in order for the individual communicator to effectively convey a message to the intended audience? Using Hymes' (1974) definition as a reference point there are aspects of communicative competence and membership within the African American speech community that may be more difficult to quantitatively define than an analysis of language structure would provide. For example the speakers knowledge of language function within the community and the individual's competence to linguistically navigate within the community are examples of linguistic knowledge that may prove difficult to quantify. Hymes (1974) definition is relevant to the African American speech community. Members may substantially modify their speech for a variety of reasons in a variety of contexts (e.g., style shifting/code switching to SAE) to the point of using SAE almost exclusively. Yet these speakers may still self-identify membership in the African American speech community. Scholarly outsiders may exclude these speakers when collecting data on AAVE. The speakers failure to use the expected grammatical forms associated with AAVE (e.g. use of copular be; lack of inverted question forms; use of plural /s/; use of /ed/ etc..) may result in their exclusion from the sample of speakers. Using Hymes' (1974) definition this practice of exclusion could result in inaccuracies in descriptions of the African American speech community since community members and relevant speech acts, as opposed to particular grammatical forms, would be excluded. Hymes (1974) provides further information on the attributes of a speech community:

1. Potential - whether and to what extent something is not yet realized, and in a sense not yet known
2. Whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable, effective or the like
3. Whether and to what extent something is done
4. Whether and to what extent something is possible, given the means of implementation available (p. 17).

Hymes (1974), states "members of a speech community are aware of the commonness, rarity, previous occurrence or novelty, of many features of speech, and this knowledge enters into their definitions and evaluations of ways of speaking" (p. 13). Thus the members of the speech community are active participants in defining what is and is not acceptable in the speech community at any particular point in time. The speech community is therefore internally defined from the community acceptance and perpetuation, or presentation and rejection of ways of speaking and speech acts.

The presentation of a particular speech event does not value it as a valid, accepted and expected speech act within the community. A community outsider viewing this event may not recognize its value or lack of value to the speech community. An example of this was illustrated in an episode of the Dave

Chappelle Show. During a staged interaction, an African American community member completed a free style rap (Dave Chappelle Show Season 2 episode 2-3). At the end of the rap the community member exclaimed in a self-congratulatory manner and began giving dap (fist bumping) with Chappelle and other community members. To the average observer the speech event (the free style rap and self congratulation) may have appeared acceptable. However in a following episode Chappelle slowed down and replayed the taped interaction, pointing out the inappropriateness of the words used¹. Listening to the replay it becomes clear that the free style was poorly done and the self-congratulatory exclamation was both inappropriate and neither reciprocated nor affirmatively responded to by the other community members. This example points to the minimal pragmatic and semantic differences between an acceptable and unacceptable presentation of a speech act. The differences in this interaction were so minimal that in order for them to be identified by community outsiders the speech act had to be slowed down and the errors specifically identified by a speech community insider. Although this speech act was feasible and occurred in

03:51	... yeah!
03:56	Yeah! yeah! unh!
03:59	[Audience laughing] ♪♪ play somethin' special, .. ♪♪
04:04	♪♪ yo, yo ♪♪
04:05	♪♪ I'm down with any sex or any race ♪♪
04:07	♪♪ if you were beatin' me, it's like Billy Crystal playin' scarface ♪♪
04:09	♪♪ and I can't see it, blind to the eyes ♪♪
04:12	♪♪ I came up in your face, oops, pow, surprise ♪♪
04:15	oh!
04:17	Yeah, yeah!
04:18	[Music ends] whoo

an appropriate context with systemic potential, the semantic and pragmatic content did not achieve the expected response from the listeners. The rap is presented below:

♪♪ yo, yo ♪♪
 ♪♪ I'm down with any sex or any race ♪♪
 ♪♪ if you were beatin' me, it's like Billy Crystal playin' scarface ♪♪
 ♪♪ and I can't see it, blind to the eyes ♪♪
 ♪♪ I came up in your face, oops, pow, surprise ♪♪

¹ Dave Chappelle Show Season 2 Episode2-3

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The entire rap occurred over a relatively brief period of approximately seven seconds. The rap occurred in a skit involving Dave Chappelle, John Mayer, and Quest Love of the music group The Roots. The skit was a presentation of different music types that Chappelle presented as generally appealing to various ethnic groups; as such the presentation of a rap during the African American scene was not unexpected. In a later episode Chappelle drew direct attention to the performance. He replayed the rap portion of the skit in slow motion. The audience was able to clearly hear the rapper's words. The rapper starts out "I'm down with any sex or any race" this line can be interpreted "I am comfortable in the company of men and women from a variety of racial backgrounds". The next line changes subject from the first, "If you were beatin' me, it's like Billy Crystal playin' scarface" this line could be interpreted "The idea that you are better than me is as ridiculous as the idea of Billy Crystal (a comic actor) portraying a vicious gangster". The rapper uses metaphor (a simile) and hyperbole to boast of his skill however the boast comes with no set-up. The rapper started with a general statement of conviviality "I'm down with any sex or any race", the next statement of boast "If you were beatin' me, it's like Billy Crystal playin' scarface" is made with no context to the first statement. The following line is "and I can't see it, blind to the eyes." This line can be interpreted "I do not believe you could be better than me; I cannot foresee this occurring under any set of circumstances". The third line reinforced the original boast "I am better than you". The final line "I came up in your face, oops, pow, surprise" can be interpreted "I came and said these words to you, face to face, you did not expect this to happen, you did not expect me to have this superior level of skill, I sure surprised you". The problem with this rap is that it does none of the things the rapper implies. It does not illustrate a superior level of skill. It does not illustrate the acerbic word play and lyrical style illustrated in typically accepted rap performances. Chappelle does not evaluate this rap as a demonstration of a superior level of skill. He replays it to draw his audience's attention to the raps comedic potential. It is unlikely the community would value this rap performance as acceptable. Although there was potential here, the community would most likely reject this speech act as unrepresentative of an acceptable rap. As a community insider Chappelle drew attention to the rap performance as a point of humor, although based on the manner of presentation by the rapper in the original skit it is unlikely that humor was his pragmatic intent.

The previous example supports Hymes' (1974) argument that the speech community is defined by a "mode of organization of linguistic features other than that of grammar. [There is] a conception of the speech community not in terms of language alone" (p. 16). Research completed by Herring, Jankowski, and Brown (1999) in a study of the structure of African American group identity found support for the contention that social identity (the psychological intertwining of individual fate to group fate) had more to do with the socializing experiences that

occur within formal and informal Black networks than with outside discrimination. These shared social experiences may be considered an integral part of the insider knowledge of the African American community.

An alternate definition of speech community was proposed by William Labov (1972). In *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, Labov stated,

"Black English Vernacular" ([BEV /AAVE]) is described "... [as the] relatively uniform dialect spoken by the majority of [B] lack [African American] youth in most parts of the United States today, especially in the inner city areas of New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other urban centers. It is also spoken in most rural areas and used in the casual intimate speech of many adults (p. xiii).

Labov separately defines Black English (BE cum AAE) as follows,

"Black English" might best be used to describe the whole range of language forms used by Black people in the United States ... from the Creole grammar of Gullah...to the most formal and accomplished literary style" (Labov 1972, xiii).

Labov further states that BEV [AAVE] is the "relatively uniform grammar found in its most consistent form in the speech of black youth from 8 to 19 years old who participate in the street culture of the inner cities" (Labov 1972, xiii). In this early text, Labov defines the African American speech community in both extraordinarily narrow and overly broad and ultimately quite ambiguous terms.

First, the speech community is specifically defined by its grammar. Secondly, by defining the speech of youth aged 8 to 19 as representative of both Black "youth who participate in the street culture of the inner cities, and the language of African Americans in most rural areas", Labov removes any sense of geographical local community from his definition. Finally, Labov separates BEV (AAVE) from Black English (BE/AAE) indicating that AAVE is a subset of AAE; however in so doing no clear defining characteristics to differentiate BEV (AAVE) from (BE/AAE) are provided. What if anything differentiates AAVE from BE/AAE? Is BE/AAE the use of standard grammar by African American speakers? If so, then is it impossible for African American speakers to be speakers of a Standard English that is not BE/AAE? In either case the question remains, how are the differences defined?

In a separate article *Co-existent Systems in AAVE* (Labov 1998); Labov explores the relationship between AAVE and OAD (Other American Dialects). In this text he defines AAVE and OAD as co-existent systems in which AAVE consists of components of OAD and AA. Labov hypothesizes that the two components are not tightly integrated; that they follow internal patterns of strict co-occurrence; and that the AA component allows AAVE speakers to construct sentence types not available to speakers of OAD. This analysis of AAVE falls short of a more expansive concept of

variation within AAE that allows for a continuum of acceptable grammatical productions between groups of speakers, not solely a range of production types within an individual speaker or within a pan AAVE. More broadly than in Labov (1998) this paper hypothesizes that within AAE definable groups of speakers have inherent rules for acceptable types of production, so that what is a grammatical construction for one group of AAE speakers is unacceptable to another. A hypothesized example could be as follows: a group may not accept the use of the modal **done** in a sentence construction such as *She done finished* as a grammatical construction while accepting a construction with perfective **been** as in *She' been finished*. In the first sentence the AAVE construction uses the word **done** where the OAD construction might use the word **has**. In the first example a word change is present. In the second sentence either the word **has** is absent or the contracted /'s/ is absent/reduced in the AAVE construction. Perhaps a 'minimal' sound change, the absence/reduction of /'s/, is acceptable in this hypothesized community where a word change **done** for **has** is not. There are certainly rules to define why one AAVE production is accepted as grammatical by a group and another production is not (e.g., stigma associated with the production). Regardless of the reasons for acceptance or rejection however, this paper hypothesizes that within AAVE, there are definable differences of acceptable and unacceptable productions in definable groups of AAVE speakers. This paper hypothesizes that this variable acceptance of productions will result in clearly discernible group variation within AAVE.

While Labov's (1998) analysis of the co-existence of both a GE (General English) and AA (African American) component in AAVE would necessarily be an inherent part of the hypothesized dialect variation; it is the distinctive, definable nature of group usage of either specific grammatical constructions or the absence of grammatical constructions in the presence of prosodic features or ways of speaking that would differentiate the groups. For example an AA speaker using GE grammatical constructions along with word choices, speech rate, and prosody consistent with AA speakers from the southern United States as contrastive with the AA speakers from the northern United States. These regional differences are not rule based in the sense that the word choice, rate of speech or prosody is not allowed or renders the speech unintelligible. Instead the use of a particular set of features would be unexpected outside of that particular geographical region.

While Labov's contribution to the linguistic analysis and understanding of AAVE must not be understated, the ambiguity in defining the parameters of AAVE to AAE along with defining the African American speech community remains problematic. Who speaks AAVE, and in what context is it spoken? Who determines what constitutes AAVE versus AAE? Is this a question that can be answered by community insiders? Who is allowed to name and define these concepts? What authority do members of the community have in identifying and defining themselves? These remain open questions for scholarly debate.

Grace Holt (1975) addresses the concept of group self-identification and naming within the African American community. In her essay *Black English: Surviving the Bastardization Process*, Holt initiates her thesis by identifying the main gain from the linguistic movement in defining the African American speech community as convincing Whites that Blacks speak a dialect that has an internal consistency and a grammatical structure. The basis of this identification is a language universal; for a language to exist it must have consistency and structure. Instead Holt (1975) argues that the limited number of unique structural features [used to define AAVE] do not serve as the prime markers of Afro-American cultural distinctiveness. Something is somehow missing. In Holt's view, the identification of Black English grammar is secondary; if cultural identification is dependent upon the use of Black English grammar then what grammar do Standard English (SE) speaking Blacks use to identify with other SE speaking Blacks? Holt's argument parallels Hymes in many ways, but primarily in the assertion that perhaps more than a narrow view of grammar is required for the identification of self and community for the African American speaker.

Holt (1975) and Labov (1972) provide variation in the defining characteristics of AAE. As a community insider, Holt (1975) argues for an evaluation of AAE that goes beyond an analysis of the grammatical structures used by AAE speakers. She draws the logical association that a limited structural analysis of the dialect fails to adequately value the speakers. Holt (1975) notes this type of language analysis excludes the AA speaker that uses GAE. The African American speaker of GAE may use the phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics of English in a manner structurally different that an AA speaker of AAE. There are rules such as discourse topics, turn taking, topic maintenance and other culturally relevant forms which the two AA speakers may share or vary along parameters of region of origin, age group, sex, gender identification, socio-economic status, religious affiliation or membership in other, as yet undefined groups.

Hymes (1974), Labov (1972) and Holt (1975) provide three perspectives in two different time frames on the identification of speech community. In relation to the identification of an African American speech community both Hymes (1974) and Holt (1975) recognize a need to view language in a context beyond its grammar to its functional use within the community based on the rules of language use as defined by the community of speakers. Labov's (1972) definition of speech community relies primarily on the identification of consistency in grammar. Hymes (1974) and Holt (1975) include both grammar and the adaptability of the speakers to internally organize the structure of their speech for functionally similar purposes as necessary components in defining the speech community.

The difficulty in identifying the African American speech community comes both from the external definition of what constitutes the community based on the structural grammar

and from the difficulty in integrating racial/ethnic² identity and linguistic structure. From a scholarly perspective only the linguistic parameters of speech can be quantitatively assessed; however, members of the speech community value speech acts based on insider's knowledge and ways of being. These aspects may be more relevant than the use of a particular grammatical structure in belonging to the speech community. This conflict between structure and content may only be resolved when community insiders work as scholars to more fully identify the varieties and nuances of the African American Speech community (cf. Lanehart, 2001; Troutman, 2001; Bucholtz, 2003).

African American English in the Southern United States

Similarities in the phonology and morphosyntax of vernacular dialects of English as spoken by African Americans and White Americans in the Southern United States is attested by many researchers including Wolfram (2007), Childs and Mallinson (2004), Wolfram and Thomas (2002), Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998). Research conducted by Wolfram and colleagues in the Appalachian Mountains, the North Carolina Coast, and the eastern counties of North Carolina has found many similarities in the speech of African American and White speakers living in the same communities. In the mountain communities where African American speakers have been and remain an extreme minority (less than 2% of the population), Childs and Mallinson (2004) found a change in apparent time (generational comparison of speakers) of increasing alignment to regional phonology while the African American speakers maintained some aspects of AAE phonology and morphosyntax. In the coastal region of Hyde County, Wolfram and Thomas (2002), found differences in the use of phonology and morphosyntax between younger and older African American English (AAE) speakers. The older AAE speakers used aspects of phonology and morphosyntax that were more consistent with the regional vernacular of the Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE) speakers. The younger AAE speakers used phonology and morphosyntax that was different from the older AAE speakers, but also different from the younger SWVE speakers. The differences between the younger and older AAE speakers and the younger SWVE and AAE speakers was identified as evidence of divergence from the regional dialect by the younger AAE speakers. These differences indicate a pattern of decreasing alignment to regional phonology and morphosyntax by the younger AAE speakers. While regional differences are emerging between local vernacular varieties of AAE and SWVE in the southern United States the likelihood of differences between regional varieties of AAE consistent with differences in regional varieties of SWVE remains. It is possible that a regional vernacular AAE could co occur with a standard AAE in the same way a vernacular SWVE can co occur with a standard or General American English (GAE). Questions of how the standard AAE is differentiated from a regional vernacular remains. Additionally the need to differentiate standard AAE

from GAE also remains. Are African American speakers who use GAE grammar speaking standard AAE or GAE and what are the determining characteristics?

The use of standard grammar with prosodic features consistent with African American English has been documented in research completed by Taylor (1971) and Spears (2000, 2001) who deem this type Standard African American English. These researchers posit the existence of both a standard (AAE) and a vernacular dialect (AAVE) of English spoken by Blacks. Earlier research attempted to refute the existence of an ethnically associated Black Dialect. Williamson (1970) collected speech samples from Blacks and Whites in Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Texas, Mississippi, and Missouri to document patterns of similarities in production by both groups of speakers. Farrison (1970) noted no substantial differences between the grammar and the vocabulary of Blacks and the grammar and vocabulary used at one time or another in varieties of English spoken by Whites. Williamson

(1970) and Farrison (1970) sought to dispute the existence of a socio-ethnic dialect of English spoken by Blacks. The rejection of a distinctive Black English dialect by Williamson (1970) and Farrison (1970) is not the same as a claim of a Standard African American English dialect in co-occurrence with a vernacular Black English as proposed by Taylor (1971) and others. It has been empirically established (cf. Wolfram and Thomas 2002) that there are differences in vernacular dialects spoken by Blacks and Whites in the same community. How then can a difference between a standard and a vernacular AAE be defined; and further unless a singular vernacular dialect of AAE is hypothesized, how will regional variation within AAE be identified?

Speaking style and conversational strategies employed by African American speakers as a means to define the boundaries of African American speech from other vernacular dialects is a topic explored by Green (2002). She asserts that it is not the presence or absence of a particular set of linguistic features that represent African American English. She argues instead that AAE is a linguistic system which "cannot be completely defined by the syntactic, phonological semantic and lexical patterns alone, instead speech events that...follow set rules ... used in secular as well as religious contexts" are required to fully describe the variety of English known as AAE. Green's (2002) point is well taken. The speech events completed by speakers of African American English may be events with no corollary in other English dialects, for example the use of ritual insult games such as capping, reading, or playing the dozens, as well as the rhetorical style used in many African American churches and representatively used with the general public by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the "I have a Dream Speech" during the Poor People's March on Washington 1968 and others. However one might argue, if a speaker does not use grammatical, rhetorical or ritual features of speech commonly associated with African American English are African American speakers then, not using

² language, ethnicity, and identity are defined by the circumstances under which they are created (Fishman & Garcia, 2010)

a dialect of African American English? Green (2002) reports that the prosody of African American speakers using standard American grammar has been identified by Wolfram and Fasold (1974) as the “main reasons ... some standard-speaking blacks may be identified ethnically,” in later work Wolfram (2007) cites perceptual studies using African American speech completed by Wolfram and Thomas (2002) and Childs and Mallinson (2006) which found naïve listeners consistently misjudged the ethnic identity of African Americans from Appalachia and the Outer Banks of North Carolina, commonly identifying the African American speakers as White speakers. This is evidence that in these studies familiarity with the local dialect was necessary to differentiate African American from White speakers. While AAE and SWVE can be linguistically defined, there has been less research on identifying regional variation within AAE.

In addition to differentiating a standard from a vernacular AAE there is the issue of defining regional variation within AAE and its relationship to other dialects. This difficulty is directly related to the lack of random sampling by sex, socio-economic status, age, gender identification, education, and even religious affiliation when sampling AA speakers. It is well known that speech variation occurs along these parameters in the languages of the world. Wolfram’s (1969) study of Detroit Negro speech found differences in the rate of post-vocalic /r/ production by socio-economic status within the African American Community. This type stratified random sampling would shift the focus from identifying the features of African American Vernacular English that are different from surrounding White vernaculars to a systematic analysis of internal variation of AAVE. The failure to recognize and sample across groups within the African American community assumes a lack of internal variation in African American English. These three issues, stratified random sampling, regional variation, and internal variation must be resolved in order to effectively assess the status of African American English in relation to other varieties of English spoken by Blacks and Whites in the United States.

Green (2002) recognized that the samples used to define African American English have come primarily from interviews with adolescents and adults. In addition, much of the early work which defined the dialect (e.g., Labov, 1969, 1972; Wolfram, 1969; Baratz and Shuy, 1969; Fasold and Shuy, 1970) was completed with African American transplants from the Southern States to the Northern inner cities of New York City, Detroit, and Washington D.C. While the research itself is foundational to a description of African American English it also is likely to conflate poverty, racism, and vernacular features. The transplanted subjects interviewed in the cities in the 1960’s were more likely to have fled poverty and racism in the Southern States only to be confronted with poverty and racism in the North as they lived in racially segregated areas of these cities. Wolfram’s (1969) study of Detroit speech was one of the few which evaluated class differences in the production of vernacular features of African American English. Wolfram (1969) adapted

a socio-economic scale created by Hollingshead and Redlich (1958) combining scales of education, occupation, and residence. Using this scale to differentiate speakers by class, Wolfram created a four class model of Lower Working Class (LWC), Upper Working Class (UWC), Lower Middle Class (LMC) and Upper Middle Class (UMC). Using this model, Wolfram (1969) found features such as consonant cluster reduction was high across class, LWC productions at 84% and UMC productions at 51% while virtually all other vernacular features were much more present in the speech of LWC than UMC speakers: $\theta \rightarrow f, v$, or \emptyset LWC 71% UMC 12%; multiple negation LWC 78% UMC 8%; Absence of copula/auxiliary is, are; Absence of 3rd present -s LWC 71% UMC 1%; Absence of possessive -s LWC 27% UMC 0%; Absence of plural-s LWC 6% UMC 0%. The listed dialect features showed decreasing distribution in UWC and LMC with increasing class level. Wolfram’s (1969) assessment of production by class illustrated a pattern of difference in productions that to my knowledge has not been fully evaluated in any other context or with any other group of AA speakers. The result of failing to sample from across the social and economic strata of AA’s is data collection from a biased sample. Completing research with a biased sample is likely to create disequilibrium or bias in the descriptions of AAE. It is not surprising therefore that particular aspects of the dialect likely to be found in the poorest, least educated speakers were viewed as highly typical of AAE (e.g. use of habitual be), while others (e.g. use of steady) were virtually overlooked by researchers.

Wolfram (2007) discusses this point at length in detailing the sociolinguistic folklore created around the study of African American English. He cites the desire of sociolinguists to counter the dominant deficit speech model of Black English which viewed the dialect as an “unworthy approximation of Standard English” which needed to be eradicated. In pushing for recognition of AAE as a distinctive variety in such widely publicized cases as the Ann Arbor decision (Center for Applied Linguistics 1979; Farr-Whiteman 1980), the Oakland Ebonics controversy (Rickford 1999; Baugh 2000) and linguistic profiling (Baugh 2003), linguists have created a host of myths about AAE. These myths include the supposed supra-regionality of AAE, the lack of regional diversity in the variety, and the belief in a unilateral path of change in AAE regardless of regional context.

While the attention paid to AAE has resulted in an enormous amount of research on African American English the research has focused outward, comparing AAE to other dialects of English, analyzing the dialect diachronically to determine its relationship to creoles, and to settler English rather than recognizing the variation within the dialect consistent with the variation within African American culture and people. Only recently (e.g. Charity, 2007; Craig and Washington, 2004; Craig, Thompson, Washington and Potter, 2003) have researchers begun to sample child African American speakers. Analysis of representative members of all members of the speech community is necessary to assess how, which, and by whom rules are transmitted, retained,

reanalyzed and transformed as a part of a growing dynamic living body of language.

In order to analyze regional varieties of AAE representative samples of speech from African Americans of all walks of life, ages, incomes and gender identifications must be completed with the same academic rigor as that applied to analysis of other dialects of American English. Without assessing the internal systematicity of the dialect and the use of the dialect across age, class, and gender a comprehensive analysis of the dialect has not been completed. Importantly and perhaps most pertinently, Morgan (2001) writes:

“[t]he tendency of sociolinguists to include some segments of the African American community and exclude others extends beyond class to gender ... research on discourse and verbal genres [tends to highlight] male-centered activities and male sexual exploits; as a consequence, African-American women are ... erased from the urban landscape because of their purported linguistic conservatism...” (p. 84).

A complete analysis of African American English requires the recognition of the dialect as a system in which speakers know set patterns of combining sounds, morphemes and words (Green, 2004). Samples collected from African American speakers are typically analyzed for the presence of particular markers such as the absence of *be* - zero copula (*He coming* vs. *He's coming*); use of aspectual *be* (*She be telling people she eight*) (Green, 2004); use of existential *it* for *there* (*It's a fly messing with me* vs. *There's a fly bothering me.*) (Green, 2004); use of remote past BIN (*They been left*); use of third singular *-s* (*She go there* vs. *She goes there*) (Childs and Mallinson, 2004); presence or absence of post vocalic *-r* (*fo' vs. for*), devoicing of voiced stops in stressed syllables [bɪt for *bid*; bæk for *bag*]; absence of *-s* in 3rd singular present constructions [*she walk*]; plural *-s* absence [*four girl*; *some dog*]; use of remote been (BIN) to mark action completed in the remote past and still relevant in the present [*She been paid her dues*]; possessive *-s* absence [*John hat*]; reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a vowel or vowel suffix [*lif' up* for *lift up* and *bussing* for *bursting*]; copula and auxiliary absence of *is* [*she nice*; *He in the kitchen*]; the use of habitual *be* [*Sometimes my ears be itching*]. Green (2002) adds to this list *come* –used to indicate speaker indignation [*Don't come telling me all those lies.*] (from Spears (1982) and Baugh (1988); *some* –used to indicate very well [*She can cook some good.*]; *stay* –to live; to frequent a location; to engage in activity frequently; to be in some emotional state on most occasions [*I stay on Lincoln Ave*; *She stay in the bathroom*; *She stay running*; *He stay mad*]; *steady* –to indicate an action recurring in an intense, consistent manner (from Baugh 1984) [*Her mouth is steady runnin'*] presented by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998), adapted from Fasold (1981) and the presence or absence of phonological features consistent with those of the local dialect. While it is clear that Black English contains unique features, knowledge and use of these features is not sufficient to have knowledge and use of Black English. It is the systematic knowledge and appropriate use of the features in their social context that defines Black English.

In her argument against a vernacular Black dialect Williamson (1971) collected samples of features produced commonly by Blacks and Whites. She argued her collected samples illustrated that the majority of features commonly associated with African American speakers were also commonly used by White speakers. This argument has been widely explored from early research on folk speech in the South (cf. Kurath, 1949; Atwood 1953) where it was hypothesized the difference between the vernacular speech of African Americans and Whites was primarily a matter of frequency of occurrence in feature use. The theoretical account that AAE can be defined by the quantity or type of features used, does not account for the systematic knowledge required to complete a complex task such as consonant cluster reduction which has both phonological, and morphosyntactic constraints nor does it address the use of camouflaged phonological forms (Wolfram and Thomas 2002) or syntactic structures (Spears, 1982; Baugh, 1994; Wolfram, 1994). Camouflaging is “a form in a vernacular variety that looks like a standard counterpart but is used in a structurally and functionally different way” according to Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998).

As African American English is a rule governed language system it must be defined in relation to other dialects with respect to the application of the rules of the system. Using consonant cluster reduction (CCR) as an example, rather than listing the frequency of occurrence of the feature consonant cluster reduction by ethnicity, gender or age, an analysis should be completed of the constraints surrounding the CCR and an analysis of the constraints used by the independent variables completed. This would provide a more accurate indication of the relationship of gender, ethnicity, age, SES etc. to a particular aspect of the dialect. Simple counts of more/less are convenient but must not be considered exhaustive, even when found to be sharply categorical. It is the knowledge and accurate application of the rules that define dialect use.

The arguments presented here support the general ideas (cf. Green 2002, Baugh 1984) that African American English should be viewed on a continuum in relation to other vernacular dialects and with respect to a hypothesized standard or general American English. Table 1 below A Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard dialects is a schematic drawing intended to represent speech community insider knowledge and use of vernacular and standard dialect. Speaker distribution across this model is predicated on knowledge and use of the local phonology and morphosyntax along with an acknowledgement of the local prosody and the appropriate use of local speech acts. With this information speakers can be identified as conforming to the generalized norms of one or more speech communities. Using the model of A Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard dialects as a template the identification of a speaker as Southern White and or Southern Black could just as easily be listed as Northern White and Northern Black or Southern Black and Northern Black etc., When comparing Northern and Southern Black speech communities ethnic speech acts/ethnic identification would be termed regional speech acts/regional identification; and the mixed used/local identification would become General African American identification.

Table 1 Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard Dialect

In this model phonology is separated from grammar to allow for regional phonotactic constraints of dialect (e.g. Ocracoke English)

Strong Ethnic Identification	Mixed Use	Strong Ethnic Identification
Vernacular Dialects		
<i>Southern African American</i> Vernacular: grammar, phonology, prosody, frequent use of ethnic speech acts.	<i>Mixed Use</i> Vernacular: grammar, local phonology, prosody, frequent use of ethnic and local speech acts.	<i>Southern White</i> Vernacular: grammar, phonology, prosody, frequent use of local speech acts.
Strong Regional and Ethnic Linguistic Identity		
<i>Southern African American</i> Standard grammar; ethnic phonology and prosody; common use of ethnic speech acts	<i>Mixed Use</i> Standard grammar; local phonology and prosody; common use of ethnic and local speech acts	<i>Southern White</i> Standard grammar; ethnic phonology and prosody; common use of local speech acts
Regional/ Local Standard		
<i>Southern African American</i> Standard grammar; ethnic phonology and prosody; occasional use of ethnic speech acts	<i>Mixed Use</i> Standard grammar; local phonology and prosody; occasional use of ethnic and local speech acts	<i>Southern White</i> Standard grammar; ethnic phonology and prosody; occasional use of local speech acts

Standard American Network Speech

In this model the speaker is allowed to mark stronger or weaker local and ethnic ties by use of a variety of linguistic resources. This model allows speakers to identify more strongly to an ethnic identity, a local standard identity, or a general American identity. I propose a model of this type could be used to systematically differentiate and compare a variety of American English dialects including varieties of African American English such as Southern or Northern based on the speaker's use of the regional aspects of phonology and prosody separate from whether or not the speaker uses an ethnically identifiable morphosyntax (e.g. question inversion; habitual be; /-ing/ dropping etc.)

Support for this model is present in the research on AAE. Wolfram's 1969 study of Detroit Negro English found differences in the percent of expected vernacular features by SES with LWC (Lower Working Class) speakers using more expected features than UMC (Upper Middle Class) speakers. Using the model presented in Table 1 Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard Dialect a meta-analysis of studies completed with contemporary speakers of AAE may reveal patterns of differences not previously identified.

One of the differences not consistently recognized in analyses of the African-American speech community is the relative distribution of African Americans in a community,

both historically and during the real time in which a study is conducted. To exemplify the impact of the historical distribution on the development of dialect diversity within the African-American community a map of the percent of enslaved persons in North Carolina in 1860 is provided in Figure 1 Percent of persons enslaved in North Carolina in 1860.

Figure 1. Percent of persons enslaved in North Carolina in (Lunk, 2009)



This figure illustrates the relative population density of African Americans by county in the state of North Carolina in the year 1860. In the eastern half of the state several counties near the Virginia border have African American populations of at least 50%, while most counties in the western half of the state had African American populations that were less than 20%. The ease of land purchase and the need for large numbers of workers to prepare and cultivate the land in the east led to a pattern of population growth that encouraged English plantations. Populated with large numbers (> 25) of slaves, plantations from the eastern Coastal Plain of North Carolina to the eastern Piedmont evolved into small communities with high concentrations of enslaved Africans among smaller populations of English landowners (Inscoc, 1996). By 1800 Blacks outnumbered Whites by a margin of two to one in eastern cities such as Wilmington. While settlements in eastern North Carolina included the development of large plantations, settlements in the west were typically small family farms. Settlement in western North Carolina was actually a secondary migration primarily composed of Scots-Irish farmers moving down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania. These settlers were moving south in search of affordable land for farming. By 1749 the Scots-Irish began seeking land grants for property in western counties at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Later English Quakers and German settlers along with secondary migrants from Maryland and Virginia took up residence in the area (Inscoc, 1996).

These differences in African-American population density in eastern and western North Carolina point to different opportunities for dialect development in each region. The historical and ongoing ability of African-Americans in the eastern counties to develop self contained communities did not exist for African Americans in the western counties. It is likely that African-American speakers in western counties with fewer overall African-American speakers in their communities would have AAE that is more heavily influenced by the surrounding local vernacular dialects. This is not to deny a racial/ethnic dialect differentiation within a community but to recognize that racial/ethnic differences may be minimized while regional aspects of a speaker's dialect are more prominent. Wolfram (2007) discusses regional variation in AAE in North Carolina stating

“In addition to our objective studies of regional AAE, we have recently conducted a series of perceptual experiments to tease out the intersection of ethnicity and regionality in dialect identification (Wolfram and Thomas 2002; Thomas and Reaser 2004; Torbert 2004; Childs and Mallinson 2006). Listeners consistently misjudge the ethnic identity of African Americans from Appalachia and the Outer Banks (Wolfram and Thomas 2002; Childs and Mallinson 2006), showing that regionality may trump ethnicity in listener perception of African Americans in some settings. These perceptual studies clearly support the objective evidence that regional features can take on first-order indexicality (Silverstein 2003; Johnstone Andrus, and Danielson 2006) for African Americans, in which speakers are primarily identified as

being from the coast or the mountains vis-à-vis with being African American. The evidence from speaker identification experiments, along with the cross-generational linguistic analysis of dialect features, supports the contention that both earlier varieties of English spoken by African Americans and contemporary varieties of AAE may indeed be quite regionalized.”

These researchers provide us with evidence of regional variation in AAE in North Carolina. The failure of the listeners in these perceptual experiments to identify the speakers as African-American further questions the construct of a singular African-American Vernacular English that is clearly identifiable based on listener expectations of a broadly identified AAVE phonology and prosody. Instead variation along a continuum as proposed in the model in Table 1 a Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard dialects may be more representative of the actual distribution of dialect variety in AAVE. Use of a model of this type assumes a normal distribution of speakers within a community of strong and weak linguistic affiliates which as Fridland (2003) discovered are not necessarily identifiable by the strength of network ties to an ethnic community. Fridland (2003) completed research in Memphis, Tennessee with White and African American speakers. She found that African American speakers with the strongest network ties to the African American community had the /ai/ vowel productions most similar to the /ai/ productions of White speakers. This finding was unexpected. It would be expected that African American speakers with the weakest ties to the African American community would have /ai/ vowel productions most similar to the /ai/ productions of White speakers. Fridland (2003) hypothesized that /ai/ production by the African American and White speakers was an expression of a local regional affiliation as opposed to a racial affiliation. The model proposed in Table 1 a Systematic Distribution of Vernacular and Standard dialects could be applicable in a community such as Memphis, Tennessee with groups of African American and White speakers. The model could be applicable in a number of bi- and multi-dialectal environments. It would allow speakers to place themselves, or to be placed by listeners along a continuum with strong or weak ethnic, regional or standard dialect uses. From these perceptual identifications acoustic phonetic measures of recorded speech samples could be completed in order to quantitatively identify the phonetic objects (e.g. vowel duration; consonant voicing /k-g/ alternations –bIk for big; rate of speech) that result in the particular perceptual identification.

The model has no numerical or scale correlation associated with positive or negative attributes. Instead the scale shows only a continuum of usage types. Both the African American and Southern White dialects are listed as vernacular on the scale. Movement toward or away from the listed vernacular is not listed as a movement toward ‘Whiteness’, but toward a network standard. There is no listed correlation of gender or socio-economic status with movement toward the standard. There is no listed correlation with urban or rural status, nor with an “urban

speech act” versus a “rural speech act”. I believe a model such as this would provide a framework for the researcher to assess the systematic nature of African American English and a method to systematically assess the use of the dialect and to define AAE regionally and from other dialects of American English.

CONCLUSION

Both the community and the grammar of African American English are widely studied and variably explained. For community insiders the definition of who and what are speakers of African American English may constitute a sense of knowing and a sense of community that are beyond the grammar and the geographical constraints of a typical community. An analysis of AAE as a singular type subsumes the regional variations that must be present in AAE. Although AAE is the most recent example of language contact, genesis and evolution, it is not alone. The same types of language variation and change expected from isolation and innovation in all other dialects of English should be fully expected and fully explored in AAE. Only after an analysis of the fullness of the dialect from acrolect to basilect has been completed by both scholarly community insiders and outsiders will an appreciation of the small and large components of AAE be adequately addressed. The hypothesis of Hymes (1974) provides a theoretical framework on which the construct of community for the African American can be inclusive of the undefined knowing of what is and is not an acceptable speech act in the community. Hymes (1974) expression of the dynamic nature of the speech community; the potentiality, the organization and the speakers communicative competence in the African American speech community provide lines of demarcation to index and define speech acts, speaker relations, communication interactions and their component parts. It is the integration of Labov's (1972) grammatical analysis along with Holt's (1975) insider and innate knowledge of native speaker adaptability that will provide the researcher of African American English with the full complement of perspectives necessary for a deeper analysis of the dialect. Following decades of research on AAE a thorough understanding of the distribution of features by speaker (e.g. which speakers use which forms, in which contexts to convey what meanings), the distribution of regional variation versus general dialect features, and the relationship of these factors to local dialects (SWVE, Chicano English, etc.) and to GAE has not been fully explicated. The research by Green (2002) Wolfram and colleagues and Childs and Mallinson (2004) has initiated an investigation into regional variation in AAE.

The need for African Americans and others to explore African American English continues to be a relevant area of research. Variations in phonology along with the pragmatic and syntactic innovations of young African American speakers and the impact of these linguistic innovations on literacy acquisition are ongoing issues facing speakers of AAE and educators working with AAE speakers in the public education system.

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