



SPECIAL THANKS

Kathy Adamczyk	Sarah Vega-Liros
Susan Bronstein	Rose Wilkerson
France Burns	Erik Thomas
A. Yemisi Jimoh	K. C. Nat Turner
Laura Holland	Tracy Conner
Tom Maxfield	Summer Ellis
Brandi Newkirk	Katie Gartner
Barbara Pearson, Ph. D	Holly Graham
Tom Roeper	J. Anthony Guillory
Jeremy Smith (Du Bois Library)	Tamika LeRay
Peggy Speas	Adrienne R. Washington
	Bonnie Williams

Center for the Study of African American Language (CSAAL)

Dispelling Myths About Language in African American English Speech Communities



The Harry N. Seymour Summer Dialect Research Project Symposium

June 14, 2011

W. E. B. Du Bois Library
University of Massachusetts Amherst

A Message from the Director

For the past two weeks, the SDRP participants have studied African American English (AAE) from different angles and in different contexts: AAE syntax, semantics, and phonology; AAE and literacy, AAE and child language development, AAE and literature, and AAE and language in hip hop. The presentations reflect the SDRP participants' intellectual curiosity, willingness to engage in research and data analysis, and their focus on dispelling myths about language in AAE-speech communities. The presenters have played a major role in shaping the two-week project and engaging the participants in stimulating discussion relating to different research areas in the study of AAE. The SDRP is one of few venues in which linguists, educators, and speech-language pathologists come together to discuss the study of AAE in an environment in which many of those engaged in the discussions have native intuitions about the linguistic variety. Thank you participants and presenters for such a rich experience.

About SDRP

The Summer Dialect Research Project (SDRP) is one of the programs of the CSAAL. The goal of the SDRP is to provide research experiences in linguistics for undergraduates with interests in language-related disciplines and to increase the number of students, particularly those from underrepresented minority groups, who conduct graduate research in those areas.



serve the diversity of their students. To assist the teachers remedy these deleterious attitudes, I proposed the X-model, a two-part model that teaches the phonological system of AAE and AAE phonetic production and provides guided practice in how to act rather than react relative to African-American children's language use. Ultimately, this model will implore educators to embrace AAE, enlivening the advocacy for equal education.

The Evolution of African American English

Keiofiá Mitchell, North Carolina A&T State University

Ex-slave recordings have been used to make claims about the origin of African American English (AAE), but not much attention has been paid to them in the areas of prosody and syntax. Thomas and Carter (2006) note that less stress-timing was used in early AAE as compared to current AAE speakers. The goal of this paper is to compare prosody and syntactic patterns of ex-slaves, Laura Smalley and Celia Black to provide data that will answer questions about the extent to which AAE has changed over time. According to the research by Thomas and Carter, current AAE speakers are converging towards Mainstream American English (MAE). This study will provide more information about whether AAE speakers have converged and/or diverged with respect to AAE and MAE continuum in the areas of syntax and prosody.

The Questionable Presence of African American English in Popular Music

Edika Onubah, Howard University

It is virtually undeniable that rap artists are notorious for their use of African American English (AAE). Pop artists are also infusing AAE into their top ten hits. It is not always clear why mainstream artists are argued to use AAE in their lyrics. The goal of this paper is to provide linguistic evidence that explicitly describes what it means to use AAE. *The Online Journal on African American Music* shares global posts that discuss AAE in popular music but the shared information is not entirely accurate. Furthermore, the blog does not support its claims with quantitative analysis. This paper analyzes the distinctions between AAE, Mainstream American English (MAE), and the intersection of the two languages. AAE is a rule-governed language variety that has set features, patterns, and systems. This study contributes to the emergent data that supports that features alone cannot solely operate to identify the use of AAE.

PROGRAM

How Black People Sound in the Minds of White People

Shayne Kimble, Louisiana State University

Media has a great effect on how society views AAE. My project focuses on the perception of a black character's language in the media being played by a white male. I will review a language sample taken of a character in an episode of *The Cleveland Show* to determine the extent to which the features in it are consistent with features of AAE in terms of syntax, phonetics, and acoustics features. My goal is to investigate how the character on the television show produces AAE patterns. My project can be used to help evaluate whether a certain feature is used to indicate some association with black-ness and if the media shows AAE as being a system. The findings in this study can raise questions about the representation of black-ness and AAE in the media that could be pursued in further research.

Investigating a Child's Mastery of a Variable System: Research on Patterns in *wh*-inversion in African American English

Sharese King, University of Rochester

Auxiliaries are not obligatory in all contexts in African American English (AAE) (Green 2011, White 2011). The goal of this study is to examine language samples in developing AAE-speaking children between ages 3-5, analyzing the occurrence of specific auxiliaries with question words and identifying if there is a correlation between the *wh*-word type and inversion. If AAE-speaking children are acquiring a *wh*-question system that allows them to invert, not invert, or omit an auxiliary, then the instances and frequency in which these patterns occur could reflect the progressive mastery of inversion in this variable system. This study will provide data about patterns in *wh*-inversion in AAE and information about the developmental trajectory of the question system. In addition, this study has practical application in helping to distinguish typically-developing AAE-speaking children from AAE-speaking children with SLI.

'The Persistent Dilemma': Teaching the Teachers How to Act (Not React)

Brittnei N. McKeithen, Hampton University

African American English (AAE), the scapegoat in the discussion of the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites in American education, has been catalyzed by the negative attitudes that teachers possess towards the phonological system and phonetic production of the dialect. Consequently, General American English (GAE) speaking classrooms thwart African-American children into linguistic concavity as their linguistic perspective is notably ostracized. The purpose of this study is to investigate the negative attitudes that teachers possess towards AAE in order to enlighten them regarding the dialect, altogether helping them better

Welcome

Lisa Green, Director

Part One:

Representations Associated with 'Sounds Black'

Ellalicia Bennett, Jackson State University
Carmen Christmas, Jackson State University
Megan McClain, Texas State University, San Marcos

Sounding Black: It's Not What's Said; It's How It's Said

Cierra Love Baker, Tennessee State University

The Questionable Presence of African American English in Popular Music

Edika Onubah, Howard University

Investigating a Child's Mastery of a Variable System: Research on Patterns in *wh*-inversion in African American English

Sharese King, University of Rochester

'The Persistent Dilemma': Teaching the Teachers How to Act (Not React)

Brittnei N. McKeithen, Hampton University

--Break--

Part Two:

Testing the Use of Disapproval Markings In African American English

Donna Kiessling, New York University

The Evolution of African America English

Keiofiá Mitchell, North Carolina A&T University

How Black People Sound in the Minds of White People

Shayne Kimble, Louisiana State University

Education without Denigration: Expanding Educator Approaches to the Acquisition of Mainstream Academic American English by African American English Speakers

Ayeska Baez, New York University

"Wait, Wait, Run That Back!": The Use of African and African American Oral Tradition Rhetoric in Modern Rap Music

Naia H. Ferguson, Washington University in St. Louis

Closing Remarks

ABSTRACTS

Education without Denigration: Expanding Educator Approaches to the Acquisition of Mainstream Academic American English by African American English Speakers

Ayeska Baez, New York University

Data show that teacher attitudes towards African American English (AAE) affect the way teachers help AAE-speaking students acquire Mainstream Academic American English (MAAE) (e.g., Blake and Cutler, 2003). The goal of this study is to increase awareness about the systematic nature of AAE by developing a workshop to train teachers to recognize AAE and to facilitate the instruction of MAAE to AAE-speakers using methods outlined for Standard English Learners (Wilkinson et al., 2011). The workshop has four components: (1) Background: contextualizes attitudes about AAE with a focus on phonological data that triggers negative attitudes; (2) Systems: discusses the AAE rules governing the pattern of the data; (3) Approaches: outlines methods for teaching the MAAE-version of this feature; (4) Culture: emphasizes the relationships between language, culture, identity, and education. Further research can analyze the effectiveness of this workshop in influencing teacher attitudes/teaching styles.

Sounding Black: It's Not What's Said; It's How It's Said

Cierra Love Baker, Tennessee State University

The goal of this study is to extend the study in Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh (1999), bringing clarity to the notion of "sounding black". The hypothesis is that perceptual cues are significantly more distinguishable by region than ethnicity. The study involves recording 5- minute voice samples of spontaneous speech from randomly selected African American and Caucasian speakers in a predominantly black community and a predominantly Caucasian community in the South and Mid-West regions, excluding socioeconomic status as a factor. Racially diverse listeners from each region will provide listener judgments using the voice samples and answer the questions: Which ethnicity do you hear? Which U.S. region are they from? What features influenced your decision? A quantitative analysis will be compiled with that data. The prediction is that there will be more instances of accurate region detection than ethnicity, revealing that there is no racial influence on perceptual cues.

Representations Associated with 'Sounds Black'

Ellalicia Bennett, Jackson State University

Carmen Christmas, Jackson State University

Megan McClain, Texas State University, San Marcos

Studies such as Rickford (1972) show that listeners can identify ethnicity with a high degree of accuracy. The goal of this study is to determine what features are

associated with 'sounding black.' Part one of this study will consist of quantitative analysis to determine the number of times copula and aspectual *be* were present. The second part will consist of linguistic description and environment in which the markers occur. 'Sounding Black' seems to confirm a person can stereotype an individual by the way the speaker talks and sounds. The perception of an individual 'sounding black' causes negative criticisms to the speaker. 'Sounding Black' predisposes white listeners to describe the speaker in stereotypic terms (Johnson and Buttny 1982). The findings in this study can be compared to those in Purnell, Idsard and Baugh's (1999) study in evaluating the extent to which certain features of AAE play a role in perceptions of sounding black.

"Wait, Wait, Run That Back!": The Use of African and African American Oral Tradition Rhetoric in Modern Rap Music

Naia H. Ferguson, Washington University in St. Louis

Rap music is at least partially characterized by the arguments for and against the art form. However, while many negative critiques are well-researched and publicized, academic work that emphasizes the creative ways in which certain rhetoric devices are commonly used in rap and where they came from is severely lacking. The goal of this study is to support my hypothesis that modern rap employs rhetorical devices native to African American oral tradition, especially metaphors, double entendre, and multiple meanings. In this project, I review literature on these rhetorical devices in African American oral tradition, especially Geneva Smitherman's "The Power of the Black Rap" (1973), using it as a platform for a qualitative analysis of the historical and practical purposes of these devices in three songs by Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Lupe Fiasco. My overall goal is to prove that rap is a modern extension of African American oral traditions through music.

Testing the Use of Disapproval Markings In African American English

Donna Kiessling, New York University

Labov (1998) and Spears (1980, 1982) have claimed that markers 'be', 'dɛn', and 'bɪn' are acquiring the tone of disapproval along the lines of the semi-auxiliary 'come' in African American English (AAE). The goal of this study is to test Labov's (1998) theory concerning 'be', 'dɛn', and 'bɪn' and the markers' changing connotations. The results of an original test on the use of these markers by self-identified native speakers of AAE served as the data and determined whether or not the markers 'be', 'dɛn' and 'bɪn' are acquiring more semantic properties of disapproval. The data collected reflects whether or not the "intensive" relationship in constructions with 'be', 'dɛn' and 'bɪn' is similar or distinct from that in constructions with semi-auxiliary 'come'. This study provides insight into the pattern of change and variation in AAE, and it will promote further research into the unique area of "intensive" markers.