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On the Semantics of *dən* in African-American English

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0. Introduction

Recent linguistic interest in African-American English (AAE) has resulted in research that significantly advances what we know about AAE verbal constructions. While most of that research has been sociolinguistic in nature, there has been an increasing interest in the more theoretical approaches to AAE syntax and semantics. Within the Generative Linguistics tradition, some of the most provocative work in AAE is that of Green (1993;1998). One of her many important conclusions is that AAE Auxiliary Phrases (AuxPs) embed Aspectual Phrases (AspPs), thereby making the heads of AspPs, rather than auxiliaries, the carriers of aspect¹. Green argues that uninflected *be*, *BIN*², and *dən*³ comprise the set of AspP heads in AAE.

To date there has been no fully compositional semantic treatment of these markers described by Green. I attempt to build on her work by developing a compositional semantics for AAE sentences such as that in (1a).

- (1) a. I *dən* lost my job. b. I lost my job.

More specifically, this paper is concerned with the contrast in meaning between sentences such as (1a) and (1b), and with the aspectual contribution of the word *dən*. Green argues that as the head of an AspP, *dən* contributes (completive) aspect to the sentence in which it occurs. My investigation leads me to the conclusion that, contrary to her view, *dən* does not contribute aspectual meaning, and thus is not the head of an AspP. Rather, adopting the view that all sentences are marked for both tense and aspect, and that tenses can be expressed either covertly as a zero morpheme or overtly with an auxiliary, I argue that the head of the AspP responsible for the aspect identified with the *dən* construction is the abstract *-ed* morpheme suffixed to the verb in *dən* constructions. This morpheme is most commonly morphophonologically expressed as *-ed/* (e.g. John *dən* walked the dog, John

¹ Support for the Green program of separating auxiliaries from the semantic carriers of aspect is found in the work of Anagnostopoulou et al. (1997), who, based on their work in Greek and Bulgarian, conclude that in languages which distinguish between a Simple Past and a Present Perfect, the morphemes that are often thought to be the carriers of perfect aspect (e.g. *have*, participle morphology) are not themselves aspectual operators, but embed aspect phrases.

² I adopt Green's notation of BIN for stressed *been* which marks the remote past in AAE.

³ I adopt Green's notation of *dən* for *done*, distinguishing it from main verb *done*, as in *John has not done his job*.

dɔn finished the book), though it may be expressed in other ways as well (e.g. John *dɔn* wrote a book, John *dɔn* ate his food). Furthermore, I argue that the *-ed* morpheme in AAE is ambiguous — denoting both perfect and perfective aspect. This contrasts with the *-ed* in SAE, which I take to denote perfective aspect only. Between sentences such as the AAE *I lost my job* and the SAE *I lost my job*, ambiguity resides only in the AAE construction⁴. I argue that the semantic properties of *dɔn* are selectional⁵, with *dɔn* selecting for perfect aspect; and I conclude that in the AAE *I dɔn lost my job*, the role of *dɔn* is to disambiguate between the meanings of *-ed*.

While I do not deal directly with the issue of how similarities and differences between the *dɔn* construction and the SAE present perfect construction might be accounted for, my analysis of *dɔn* has implications for how that issue might be broached.

0.1. Organization of the Paper

In section 1, I briefly discuss previous work on the *dɔn* construction, highlighting what I think is common to the previous analyses, and concentrating on the work of Green to show aspectual marker paradigms which will eventually need to be accounted for. In section 2, I give an informal characterization of the *dɔn* construction and begin building a case for analyzing *dɔn* constructions as perfects. I argue that *dɔn* constructions express three of the four perfects in Comrie's (1976) classification of aspects. They express the perfect of recent past, the perfect of persistent situation and the experiential perfect, but not the perfect of result. In section 3, I argue based on Dahl's cross linguistic work on tense and aspect systems, tag questions, and adverbial data, that it is the *-ed* morpheme that supplies aspect in *dɔn* constructions, and that *-ed* in AAE is ambiguous, denoting both perfect and perfective aspect. The marker *dɔn* only constrains its possible interpretations. In section 4, I discuss more generally aspect in AAE and begin formulating definitions of perfect and perfective aspect. In section 5, I develop a formal analysis of *dɔn* constructions, and discuss how some differences in native speaker judgments can be analyzed. In section 6, I discuss some of the implications of this work; and in section 7, restate its major findings.

1. Previous Work on *dɔn* constructions

Linguists, in general, disagree on how aspect should be characterized, and where the lines between tense, aspect, and Aktionsart should be drawn. (My own view on this issue, inspired by the work of Klein (1994) is spelled out in section 4.) Among researchers in African-American English there is, as one might expect, disagreement on the nomenclature and precise definition of the aspect expressed in *dɔn* constructions. Despite this disagreement most work on *dɔn* constructions contains a common thread; the prevailing view is that *dɔn* supplies the sentence with aspect, and that some notion of completion is a part of that aspect's character. For example, Baugh (1983) uses the term "perfective" to refer to the aspect which he says is supplied by *dɔn* (written as *done*). He defines perfective as an aspect which "indicates *completed* actions" (emphasis mine), and it is not clear whether or not he distinguishes between perfect and perfective aspect, a distinction important to this paper. In support of his claim, Baugh provides examples such as in (2).

⁴ It should be noted that Kratzer (1998) argues that what look like Simple Past sentences in SAE are ambiguous between perfect and perfective readings.

⁵ An argument which poses a serious challenge to this view was recently presented to me by Lisa Green. She notes that while sequences such as *be dɔn ate* are acceptable, sequences such as *be ate* are not. This suggests that properties of *dɔn* are more than simply selectional.

- (2) It don't make no difference, 'cause they done used all the good ones by now.
'It doesn't make any difference because they have used all the good ones'
(Baugh 1983: 76)

Labov (1998) considers *dɔn* (which, like Baugh, he writes as *done*) a "perfect particle", arguing that *dɔn* describes eventualities which have been "completed in the recent past" (emphasis mine). He uses examples such as that in (3) to make his point.

- (3) But you done tol'em you'd --- you have told 'em that
'But you have told them, you'd - you have told them that'
(Labov 1998: 125; gloss mine)

Green (1993; 1998) uses examples such as that in (4) to argue that *dɔn* contributes "completive" aspect to the sentence. She says, of completive aspect, that it marks an eventuality as being "over".

- (4) Don't talk to me like that — after I *dɔn* bought all these groceries.
'Don't talk to me like that — after I have bought all of these groceries'
(Green 1998:47)

Of these three analyses, Green's work is the most formal and most explicit in its spelling out of this view of *dɔn* as a carrier of aspect. It is her work, for the most part, that I will partly build on and partly argue with within this paper. I present in the subsection which follows, that part of her work which is germane to my argument.

1.1. Green's Aspectual Marker Paradigms

Based on a number of syntactic tests, Green distinguishes between auxiliaries and aspectual markers, arguing that inflected *be*, *do* and *have* are auxiliaries in both AAE and SAE, while a separate uninflected form of *be* along with *BIN* and *dɔn* comprise the set of AAE aspectual markers. Semantically, she notes that in (5) - (7), the italicized marker appears to contribute an aspectual meaning:

- (5) I *be* writing my assignments whenever the news come on
'Whenever the new comes on, I am writing my assignments'
- (6) a. I *BIN* writing my assignments
'I have been writing my assignments for a long time (one week, month etc.)'
b. I *BIN* wrote my assignments
'I wrote my assignments a long time ago'
- (7) I *dɔn* wrote my assignments
'I have written my assignments already' (5) - (7) from Green 1993:19

In sentence (5), *be* seems to assign a habitual or iterative meaning to the phrase which it precedes. In (6a) *BIN* appears to place the initiation of a habit in the remote past; and in (6b) it appears to place an entire eventuality in the remote past. The *dɔn* in sentence (7), is taken by Green to supply the sentence with *completive* aspect — providing its particular reading.

Green observes that the markers *be*, *BIN* and *dɔn* can co-occur in the combinations shown in (8a-b), but not those in (8c-f). She notes that the suffix of the verb following such sequences is dictated by the second marker in the sequence. The full paradigm is illustrated using the verb *eat* in (9).

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- (8) a. *be dən* d. **be BIN*
 b. *BIN dən* e. **BIN be*
 c. **dən BIN*⁶ f. **dən be* (Green 1993:31)

- (9) Aspectual Marker Verb
be eating
BIN eating/ ate
dən ate
be dən ate
BIN dən ate (Green 1993:27)

Thus, from the preceding segment of her work, one can see in Green's example that each of the allowable sequences in (8) contains *be* or *BIN* followed by the marker *dən*. The examples in (10a-c) show how these sequences might typically be used.

- (10) a. He *BIN dən* finished his homework
 'He finished his homework a long time ago'
 b. He *be dən* finished his homework when I get home
 'He usually/always has finished his homework when I get home'
 c. (If) you move, you *be dən* lost your seat
 'If you move, you will (certainly) lose your seat'

The meaning components glossed as *a long time ago*, *usually* or *always*, and *certainly*, are likely provided by *BIN*, *be* and the conditional construction in (10c), respectively. While a full semantic analysis of the role of *dən* in *be dən* and *BIN dən* constructions is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require a full analysis of aspectual *be* and the *BIN* marker, the glosses in (10) suggest that these sequences should be approached compositionally, and that the completion discussed in reference to the simpler *dən* constructions is present in these constructions as well.

Thus, it is clear from Green's work that *dən* constructions as *constructions* involve an aspect which in some way relies upon a notion of completion. What is not as clear is that this aspect is contributed by *dən*. For example, the sentence in (10a) is truth-conditionally indistinguishable from that in (11) although there is no *dən* in (11). Were *dən* supplying aspect in (10a), we might expect (10a) and (11) to have demonstrably different interpretations. This gives the idea that *dən* can only constrain the number of already available interpretations some initial plausibility.

- (11) He *BIN* finished his homework.
 'He finished his homework a long time ago'

How best to characterize the completion in the *dən* construction is a topic to be taken up in the sections 2,3, and 4 to follow, and a formal semantics which exploits the idea that *dən*'s properties are only selectional is developed in 5.

⁶ Green (1993) marks this sequence with double question marks, noting that this order may be acceptable for some speakers. In conversation, after the publication of Green (1993), she has noted that even for speakers who accept the sequence phonologically, the remote past reading of *BIN* does not seem to be present.

2.0. An Informal Characterization of the *dɔn* Construction

Consider again the sentence in (1), repeated here as (12).

- (12) I *dɔn* lost my job.
 'I have just lost my job.'
 'I have lost my job already'
 'I have lost my job before.'

This sentence might be spoken, quite naturally, in any of the following scenarios: A worker upon opening an envelope and discovering a pink slip informing him that he has been fired might exclaim "I *dɔn* lost my job". Here the appropriate SAE translation would be *I have just lost my job*, and *dɔn* seems to add a sense of recent completion not necessarily found in the sentence *I lost my job*. That same worker, some hours (or days) later, discussing with a friend whether or not he should tell his former boss exactly what he thinks of him might say "I *dɔn* lost my job. What more can they do to me now?" In this case, the meaning of *I dɔn lost my job* is more like the SAE *I have lost my job already*. Again, the sentence with *dɔn* in this situation is preferred over the sentence without, though it too is possible. Several years in the future, having found another job, when asked by a friend "Have you ever lost your job?", the same worker might answer "Yes, I *dɔn* lost my job (before). Who hasn't at one time or another?" In this circumstance the presence of *dɔn* appears to make plain that the past experience of the speaker is what is being discussed. The translation *I have lost my job before* is the most appropriate. Once again, the sentence without *dɔn* is also a possible response.

The glosses in (12) suggest that the *dɔn* construction and the SAE present perfect construction share something in common. I contend that both of these constructions are *perfects*. This should not be interpreted as saying *has* and *dɔn* have the same meaning in AAE-SAE sentence pairs such as *I dɔn lost my job* and *I have lost my job*; nor should it be taken to mean that these sentences, as wholes, have the same denotation. It is *only* to say that the two constructions have something in common; and I believe that what they share is perfect aspect.

2.1. The *dɔn* Construction as Perfect

To say that *dɔn* constructions are perfect constructions raises the question of what type of 'perfect' they express. Comrie (1976) distinguishes four types of perfects: *the perfect of recent past*, *the experiential perfect*, *the perfect of persistent situation*, and *the perfect of result*. I will argue that the *dɔn* construction expresses all of these types except the last one, the perfect of result.

2.1.1 The Perfect of Recent Past

A perfect of recent past is used to indicate that a past situation is very recent. The gloss *I have just lost my job* in (1) indicates a perfect of recent past interpretation of the *dɔn* construction.

2.1.2 The Experiential Perfect

The experiential perfect indicates that some situation has held at least once in the past. The glosses *I have lost my job already* and *I have lost my job before* indicate an experiential perfect reading of the *dɔn* construction is also available.

2.1.3 The Perfect of Persistent Situation

A perfect of persistent situation is used to describe a situation that started in the past but persists into the present. An SAE example of this is the sentence *We've lived here for ten years* (Comrie 1976) spoken when the speech time is a part of the ten year period the sentence describes. Similar sentences and interpretations occur with the *dɔn* construction: *We dɔn lived here for ten years*. This indicates a perfect of persistent situation reading of the construction.

2.1.4 The Perfect of Result

In Comrie's fourth perfect, *the perfect of result*, some present state is referred to as being the result of a past situation or eventuality. Kratzer (1997) argues for an SAE perfect of result based, in part, on the contrast in acceptability between the sentences in (13a) and (13b) as answers to the question "Where is Mary these days?"

- (13) a. She went to Paris, but she has just come back.
b. *She has gone to Paris, but she has just come back.

She reasons that the first conjunct in (13b) requires that the result of Mary's going to Paris (her being there) still hold, while the second requires that Mary be here (not in Paris). Thus, the sentence is self contradictory. In answer to the same question, "Where is Mary these days?", the AAE sentence in (14a) is preferred to that in (14b).

- (14) a. She went to Paris, but she *dɔn* came back.
b. ??She *dɔn* went to Paris, but she *dɔn* came back. (Kratzer 1997)

There is an oddness to (14b). It is not clear, however, to what extent any resultative reading this might imply is actually semantic rather than pragmatic. It is possible that neither *she dɔn went to Paris* nor *she dɔn came back* refers (in its truth conditions) to any state, and that the state of being in either place must be inferred by the listener. The oddness of (14b), then, could be the result the listener's making contradictory inferences based perhaps on Gricean principles of cooperative interaction — something more pragmatic than semantic. Grice's maxim of quantity states that any contribution to a discourse should be (A) as informative as is required, and (B) no more informative than required. The question *Where is Mary these days?* asks, in part, where Mary is now. If *She dɔn went to Paris, but she dɔn came back* is taken to be a fully informative answer, the listener must infer Mary's present location from one of its two conjuncts. Grice's Relevance maxim states that any contribution to a discourse must be relevant. To be relevant each of the two conjuncts must imply that Mary has been in a particular location at least recently. All of the relevant information in this answer to the question is implied; none of the relevant information is stated, leaving plenty of room for self-contradiction and confusion. This violates Grice's maxim of manner which states that one should be perspicuous by avoiding obscurity of expression and ambiguity, being brief, and being orderly.

The possibility of (15) as an answer to the question "Have Stacey and Robert finished their window chores?" makes a pragmatic explanation for the oddness of (14b) all the more likely.

- (15) Yes; Stacey *dɔn* opened the window and Robert *dɔn* closed it.

If saying that *Stacey dɔn opened the window* committed the speaker to the claim that the window, at the time of speech, were still open, one should not be able to follow it with *and Robert dɔn closed it*.

2.2. Additional Evidence for *dən* Constructions as Perfects

Additional evidence that *dən* constructions are perfects comes from considering Dahl's (1985) survey of tense, mood, and aspect systems. Considering over 60 languages from a variety of language families, Dahl constructs a list of prototypical occurrences (verbs and contexts) of perfect constructions. A *dən* construction can be found to match each of these occurrences, the full list of which, along with possible AAE renditions, is found in Appendix A. For example, according to Dahl's survey, a prototypical occurrence of the perfect construction would be as a substitute for READ in (16).

(16) A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he READ already?)

B: (Yes,) he READ this book.

As with all of Dahl's prototypical occurrences of the perfect, a *dən* construction can quite naturally be used here, as shown in (17).

(17) A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he *dən* read already?)

B: (Yes,) he *dən* read this book.

2.3 Conclusions

The *dən* construction appears to have perfect of recent past, experiential perfect, and perfect of persistent situation readings. It does not appear to behave as a perfect of result. The *dən* construction also fits all of the prototypical occurrences of the perfect found in Dahl's (1985) survey of tense, mood, and aspect systems. I contend that *dən* constructions are perfect constructions, and will assume a minimal definition of perfect (to be discussed further in section 4), which states an eventuality is over before some contextually supplied reference time. While this might not seem consistent with the perfect of persistent situation, these readings rely crucially on the presence of adverbials such as *for ten years*, the semantics of which are notoriously complicated and may themselves be overriding factors in producing the persistent situation readings.

3.0. The Ambiguity of the *-ed* morpheme

While there is considerable evidence in the previous section supporting the claim that *dən* constructions are perfect constructions, the question remains whether or not perfect aspect is supplied by the *dən* marker itself. I argue that perfect aspect is not supplied by the *dən* marker, rather it is supplied by the *-ed* morpheme suffixed to the verb in these constructions. As I take the *-ed* morpheme in what have been called 'simple past' sentences to denote perfective aspect, this claim makes the prediction that *-ed* sentences without *dən* are ambiguous between perfect and perfective aspect. Though the perfect and perfective readings of AAE *-ed* sentences are in most situations very difficult to tease apart, this prediction is supported by the data.

First, AAE *-ed* sentences (without *dən*) can stand in all of Dahl's prototypical perfect environments as in (18) and in the other sentences in Appendix A.

(18) A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he read already?)

B: (Yes,) he read this book.

They can also stand in all of Dahl's prototypical perfective environments. An example of such an environment is given in (19).

- (19) Last year, the boy's father sent him a sum of money
When the boy GET the money, he BUY a present for the girl

According to Dahl's survey, a prototypical use of a perfective verb form would be as substitute for GET or BUY in (19). Both GET and BUY can be replaced by *-ed* forms resulting in a grammatical AAE sentence as shown in (20).

- (20) Last year, the boy's father sent him a sum of money
When the boy got the money, he bought a present for the girl

The use of a *dɔn* construction, however, in either or both spots results in an ungrammatical sentence. This is true of all of Dahl's prototypical occurrences of the perfective. Simple *-ed* forms result in grammatical sentences while *dɔn* constructions result in ungrammatical sentences. This supports the idea that *dɔn* only constrains the number of already available interpretations of simple *-ed* forms, and that *-ed* is ambiguous between a perfect and perfective operator.

Further evidence comes from tag question data. Consider the possible tags for the sentence *John dɔn ate a steak* in (21). Both *haven't he* and *ain't he* are possible tags, while *didn't he* is unacceptable.

- (21) John dɔn ate a steak, *didn't / ain't / haven't he ?

Compare this to the available tags for the sentence *John ate a steak* in (22).

- (22) John ate a steak, didn't / *ain't / *haven't he ?

While *didn't he* is the only tag that can surface in perfective contexts, both *ain't he* and *haven't he* can surface given the proper contextual support. For instance, given a situation in which only people who have eaten a steak at sometime during their lives can judge a particular cooking contest, in answer to the question *Can John judge the contest ?*, speakers will allow both *Yes; John ate a steak (before) ain't he?* and *Yes; John ate a steak (before), haven't he?* as answers. The context helps to support a perfect reading, and the tag required by the perfect *dɔn* construction becomes possible. A perfective response, *John baked a cake didn't he?*, however, is still possible.

Another piece of evidence for the ambiguity of the *-ed* suffix in AAE is the following. Only (23a) is grammatical in SAE under the reading in which *since he was a child* means *since the time he was a child*. The *since*-adverbial (with this meaning) appears to require perfect morphology and meaning.

- (23) a. John has eaten steak since he was a child
'John has eaten steak since the time he was a child'
b. *John ate steak since he was a child.
'John has eaten steak since the time he was a child'
- (24) John ate steak since he was a child
'John has eaten steak since the time he was a child'

In the AAE sentence in (24), on the other hand, the *since*-adverbial is licensed without any additional marking. While this evidence cannot be taken as an argument for an ambiguous *-ed* without a full analysis of *since*-adverbials, it is suggestive.

In this section I have argued that it is the *-ed* morpheme which supplies *d?n* constructions with their perfect aspect, and that the *-ed* morpheme is ambiguous, denoting both perfect and perfective aspect. With respect to aspect, this gives *d?n* the role of disambiguating. The basic form of my argument is that while simple *-ed* constructions in AAE can be used in all the environments in which *d?n* constructions are used, *d?n* constructions cannot be used in all the environments in which simple *-ed* constructions are used. I believe it is precisely because *d?n* constructions are more tightly constrained in their aspectual interpretation than their simple *-ed* counterparts, that this fact has gone for the most part unobserved among AAE researchers, and that *d?n* has been taken to be a carrier of aspect. An approximate analogy is this: If Mary always brings something to the family cookout, sometimes potato salad and sometimes chicken salad when she comes alone, and always chicken salad when her niece comes with her, it is easy to forget that she has brought chicken salad when she was alone and to assume that it is her niece who makes it.

4.0. The Tense Aspect Relation

The ultimate goal of this paper is to develop a formal semantic analysis of AAE *d?n* constructions. To do this, formal definitions of perfect and perfective aspect are needed. As I've noted, researchers vary both in the way they define perfect and perfective (with some not making a distinction at all), and in their approaches to aspect in general. In this section, I first discuss tense and aspect in general, and then perfect and perfective aspect in preparation for developing the formal definitions used in section 5.

In formulating a definition of perfect and perfective aspect, I follow Klein (1994), who argues that aspect is a relation between intervals of time: the running time of an eventuality and the time (interval) about which a sentence makes an assertion. He refers to these time intervals as the situation time (TSit) and topic time (TT), respectively. In this view, aspect relates TTs to TSits, while tense is a relation between TT and the time the sentence is uttered (TU). This is essentially a Reichenbachian (1947) system with Reichenbach's reference time, R, taken to be the time about which a sentence makes an assertion, and aspect being the relation between this time and the event time. This reference or topic time can be linguistically expressed as in *last week I didn't turn off the stove*, where *last week* fixes the topic time, or it can be left implied. Partee (1973;1984) makes essentially this same point in her discussion of nominal and temporal anaphora. She notes the following parallel between the two sentences in (25).

- (25) a. I didn't turn off the stove
b. She left me

Pronouns such as *she* in (25b) can be used without linguistic antecedents when their referent is understood to be salient to the hearer; and though there is no analog to a salient *physical* presence, a particular past time can be presently salient. The sentence in (25a) to use Partee's example, when said traveling by car, halfway down the turnpike, clearly refers to a *particular* interval of time made clear by the context — the time just before leaving the house, not, say, at some time last week. A 'topicalized time', may well be the most likely referent for a temporal anaphor.

It must be noted that this topical time or topic time, to return to Klein's terminology, is not the same as the situation time of an event. Consider the following scenario: I know John to be a practicing Catholic, and so being, it is his practice to abstain from eating meat

on Fridays. I see him on Friday evening, and contrary to his usual practice, he is eating a large steak. I tell a friend the next Tuesday that Friday was a strange night. In answer to his question *What was strange about Friday night?*, I might answer as in (26).

(26) John ate a steak

The question establishes a topic time: last Friday night. My answer asserts something about that same topic time: last Friday night. Both the topic time and the situation time precede the utterance time, but they can be shown to be distinct. When I answer *John ate a steak*, I am not claiming that John was eating a steak the entire evening; I am saying only that the situation time, the time during which John ate a steak, falls within last Friday evening, the topic time. The tense relation here is *TT is before TU* and the aspect relation is *TT contains TSit*. Similarly, when I say *I spoke to Mary last week*, I am not claiming that we had a week-long conversation. My only claim is that my conversation with Mary fits (temporally) somewhere within last week, which is, of course, before my utterance of the sentence.

4.1 Perfect vs. Perfective Aspect

While my views are influenced by Klein, and my definition of perfect aspect is the same as his, my characterization of perfective aspect differs from his. Here I am guided by Kratzer (1998). (My inventory of basic aspects mirrors those in her paper, though there are differences in their eventual implementation). I distinguish between perfect and perfective aspect in the following way: perfective aspect is the relation described in the previous example, i.e., *TSit* is properly contained within *TT*. I claim that in both the SAE and AAE perfective aspect invariably requires past tense. Consider the sentences in (27) as answers to the question *What happened while Margaret was entering the room?*

- (27) a. Jim dropped the cake
 b. Jim started eating the cake
 c. Jim finished eating the cake
 d. ? ate the cake
 e. ??wrote his dissertation

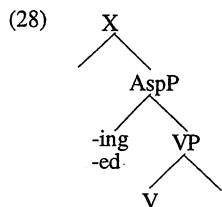
As with *What was strange about last night?*, the question determines the topic time: the short period of time during which Margaret was entering the room. Among the possible answers to this question are: *Jim dropped the cake* (27a), *Jim started eating the cake* (27b), and *Jim finished eating the cake* (27c), all of which describe events that could reasonably occur during a very short period of time. In answer to the same question, (27d), *Jim ate the cake*, is distinctly odd, forcing an interpretation under which Jim ate an entire cake while Margaret was opening the door and walking into the room — surely an exaggeration. This sentence, (27d), cannot mean that Jim started eating, finished eating, or continued eating the cake. The entire cake eating event must be contained within the topic time. More dramatically, (27e), *Jim wrote his dissertation*, forces the pragmatically odd reading under which Jim writes an entire dissertation during what any graduate student knows to be an unreasonably short period of time. The sentence cannot mean that Jim was simply working on his dissertation, writing, for instance, the very first sentence.

Focusing on the perfect of recent past and experiential perfect, I assume a minimal definition of perfect aspect which states that verbs marked for perfect aspect describe eventualities which are “over” or “complete” before the topic time: *TSit* precedes (and does not overlap with) *TT*. This definition is, for the most part, I believe, consistent with attempts to give a unified treatment of the aspect in SAE perfect constructions (e.g. Parsons 1990; Klein 1994) as well as with the prototypical uses in the Dahl survey, and the notions

of perfect, perfective, and completive used by other authors to describe the aspect associated with the $d \langle n \rangle$ construction being studied here.

5. A More Formal Characterization of the $d \langle n \rangle$ construction

In formally describing $d \langle n \rangle$ construction, I assume an interval semantics with the basic types: e (individuals), i (intervals of time), and t (truth values). The Kleinian view of aspect I adopt, that aspect relates the time of an eventuality to the time for which a sentence makes an assertion, assigns aspect the role of temporally partitioning an eventuality by relating its running time to the topic time. Therefore, I take Verb Phrases (VPs) to denote properties of (complete) running times of eventualities. The denotation of the VP *John walk*, for example, is represented in the semantics as λt [walk(j)(t)], where j is the type- e metalanguage translation of *John* and t is the running time of a maximal walking event. In the system for which I am arguing, the verbal affixes *-ing* and *-ed* are the heads of an AspP situated above the VP as shown in the partial structure in (28).



The affix *-ed* is taken to be ambiguous between perfect and perfective aspect, and it should be noted that AAE does not have phonetically distinct verbal past participle and perfective forms. The denotations for *-ed* are given in (29).

- (29) a. $-ed_{\text{perfect}}$: $\lambda P \lambda t \exists t' [P(t) \ \& \ t' < t]$
 b. $-ed_{\text{perfective}}$: $\lambda P \lambda t \exists t' [P(t) \ \& \ t' \subseteq t]$

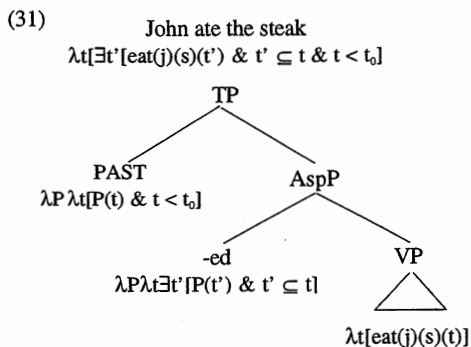
Here the variable t' represents the maximal time interval of the eventuality and the variable t represents the topic time interval. The relation $t' < t$ is one of temporal precedence: all times within the interval t' precede all times within the interval t . The relation $t' \subseteq t$ is one of temporal inclusion: all times within the interval t' are within the interval t . I formulate the past and present tenses as operator heads of a Tense Phrase (TP), which relate topic times to the utterance time. They are treated as zero morphemes or silent adverbials, though they can be overtly marked by auxiliaries. I give no formulation for future tense as it is not directly relevant to simple $d \langle n \rangle$ constructions, and as I believe the future tense in both SAE and AAE has modal qualities the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. The formulation of past and present tense are given in (30).

- (30) a. PAST: $\lambda P_{\langle d, n \rangle} \lambda t [P(t) \ \& \ t < t_0]$
 b. PRES: $\lambda P_{\langle d, n \rangle} \lambda t [P(t) \ \& \ t \subseteq t_0]$

In these formulae, t represents the topic time and t_0 represents the utterance time or now.

In this system, the (perfect) aspect associated with the $d \langle n \rangle$ construction is contributed by the *-ed* affix rather than $d \langle n \rangle$ itself. The role given to $d \langle n \rangle$ is that of selecting for perfect aspect, thus disambiguating the otherwise ambiguous *-ed* morphology. This

claim makes the prediction that AAE *-ed* forms which on the surface appear to mark only the simple past with a single (perfective) aspect, are in fact ambiguous between perfect and perfective aspect. Consider the computation in (31) for the perfective reading of the sentence *John ate the steak*. In (31) as in all the computations which follow, *j* is the metalanguage translation of *John* and *s* is the metalanguage translation of *the steak*.



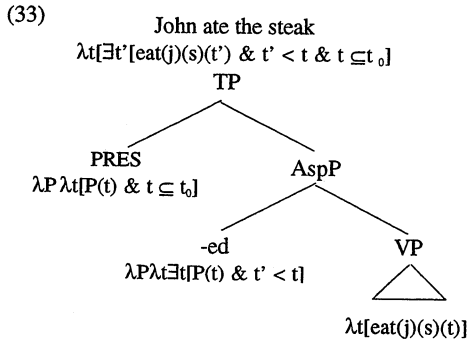
The resulting formula, $\lambda t[\exists t'[\text{eat}(j)(c)(t') \ \& \ t' \subseteq t \ \& \ t < t_0]]$, says that there is a contextually supplied topic time such that the maximal time interval of John's steak eating is contained within it; and it precedes the now. The past tense in (31) is supplied as a default tense. Past tense is supplied as a default here because present tense (and I will assume without argument future tense as well) is unavailable for perfective aspect. The present or now time interval in SAE and AAE is short, relative to the time intervals of eventualities. Graham Katz in unpublished talks has made this point for SAE with something akin to the following argument: It can be said of a still photo "In this picture John is eating the steak", the progressive aspect marking the fact that the eating event spans a time period larger than the short period of time which is captured by the still photo. On the other hand, one cannot say of a similar photo "In this picture John eats the steak". The entire steak eating event is too lengthy to fit within the time captured by the snapshot. In contrast, if one is speaking of a video tape, which can capture much longer periods of time, it is perfectly acceptable to say "In this video John eats the steak." Katz argues that it is for this very reason that speakers of SAE (and I extend his argument to AAE speakers as well) must use the progressive to refer to ongoing events. One cannot see John eating and exclaim "John eats the steak". It is for this reason, too, the shortness of the now, that I argue that perfective aspect in SAE and AAE is restricted to the past tense. Were it applied to present tense sentences, the maximal running time of eventualities would have to be contained within the now. This would be the temporal equivalent of putting a quart in a pint bottle.

Though past tense is the default in (31), expressed by a zero morpheme, past tense can be marked overtly. Consistent with Green's insight that AuxPs imbed AspPs rather than introduce aspect via their heads, I take the primary role of the auxiliary *had* (analyzed here as a single unit) to be that of marking the past tense. In *John had ate the steak*, then, *had* simply denotes past tense. As predicted by this arrangement, this sentence in AAE has both a simple past reading (past tense and perfective aspect) as well as a pluperfect reading (past tense and perfect aspect) as do similar sentences. This simple past or "preterite *had*" reading has been noted by other researchers (e.g. Rickford and Ralfal 1996; Green 1998). An example from Green is given in (32).

- (32) I had got sick when I went to the fair
'I got sick after I went to the fair' (Green 1998)

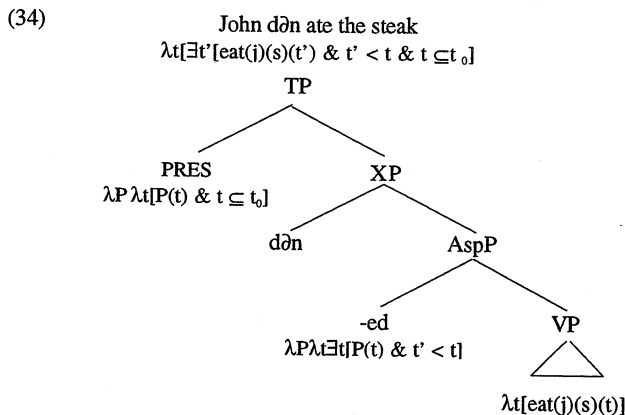
In (32), as Green notes, the event of going to the fair precedes getting sick and, thus, the reading is preterite and not pluperfect.

In addition to the perfective reading of *John ate the steak* in (31), there is a perfect reading, the computation for which is given in (33).



Here the default tense is present, which is available for perfect constructions. Overtly marking the past tense in this case gives rise to the pluperfect reading of *John had ate the steak*, which, as I have noted, is also available to AAE speakers.

The marker $d\bar{n}$, as I have stated, selects for perfect aspect. The computation for the sentence *John $d\bar{n}$ ate the steak* is shown in (34)⁷. This sentence has a perfect reading only.



I have argued that the semantic properties of the marker $d\bar{n}$ are selectional, and stated that $d\bar{n}$ selects for perfect aspect. There is, however, another possibility that must be considered: it might be argued that $d\bar{n}$ selects for present tense, with present tense, in turn,

⁷ I leave as an open question the syntactic category of $d\bar{n}$ and whether or not it is the head of a maximal projection intervening between AspP and TP in the minimal structure given here or between an AspP and VP in Green (1993) syntax.

forcing the perfect reading of *-ed*. But such an hypothesis turns out to be untenable when one considers sentences such as (35).

- (35) John'd dɔn baked a cake.
'John had baked a cake'

Here, '*d*' (which I take to be contracted *had*⁸) overly marks the past tense in the *dɔn* construction. The overt marking of past tense gives rise to a pluperfect reading.

5.1 Adverbial Interaction with the *dɔn* Construction

With the framework developed in the previous section, we can now investigate (and possibly explain) some interesting data regarding adverbial modification of *dɔn* constructions. In this sub-section, I only consider present tense *dɔn* constructions. Green (1993) notes that like the present perfect construction in SAE, the *dɔn* construction is incompatible with adverbials that indicate a past time period:

- (36) I dɔn went back to visit *two months ago / *last weekend / *yesterday

(Green 1993)

While I agree with the judgments in (36) and Green's basic generalization that past time denoting adverbials are incompatible with the *dɔn* construction, there are some situations in which at least some AAE speakers (myself being one) will accept such sentences. I have found it difficult, for example, to get consistent judgments for the sentence *John dɔn ate a steak yesterday*. Crucial to understanding why this might be is investigating the interaction between tense, aspect, and the syntactic position of the modifying adverbial.

Numerous proposals have been advanced in which the ability of adverbials to syntactically adjoin at either the VP-level or some higher level is used to explain the range of meanings of adverbially modified sentences. A very early proposal of this type is that of Haegeman (1984). A more recent proposal of this type is that of Hitzeman (1997), who accounts for the fact that preposed and postposed adverbials are sometimes acceptable and sometimes not in the present perfect construction as illustrated below:

- (37) a. Martha has lived in Boston for five years.
b. For five years Martha has lived in Boston.
- (38) a. Chris has left at midnight.
b. *At midnight Chris has left.
- (39) a. John has been in the bathtub until noon.
b. Until noon John has been in the bathtub.

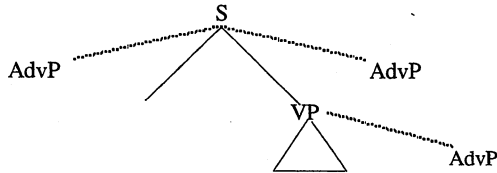
(37 - 39 taken from Hitzeman 1997)

In her proposal, this and other peculiarities of the present perfect construction are explained in part by the adverbial's ability to adjoin at the sentence or the VP-level⁹:

⁸ Although *had* is possible here, it is awkward; and the contracted form '*d*' is much preferred.

⁹ Much of Hitzeman's article is concerned with explaining ambiguities in present perfect constructions modified by for-adverbials. While a great deal of her data have direct AAE *don* construction correlates, explaining these data is beyond the scope of this paper.

(40)



She proposes that preposed adverbials are unambiguously adjoined above the VP (unless they have not been moved through a process of topicalization) whereas postposed adverbial may be sentence-level or VP-level. I adopt this basic idea, and use it in explaining differing judgments for sentences such as *John dɔn ate a steak yesterday*.

Though an adverbial may attach at the VP-level, sentence-level, or a number of places in between, most relevant here is the adverbial's point of attachment with respect to the AspP. A VP-level adverbial is positioned below AspP, and thus must modify a situation time. The application of aspect makes modification of the situation impossible and thus adverbials attached above aspect modify topic times.

As I have suggested, judgments vary as to whether a sentence such as *John dɔn ate a steak yesterday* is completely unacceptable or not. Let us first consider the judgments of an AAE speaker for whom such a sentence is always unacceptable. For such a speaker, modification of *dɔn* sentences by both preposed and postposed past time denoting temporal adverbials such as *yesterday* invariably results in ungrammatical sentences:

- (41) a. *Yesterday/*Last week/ *Last year Jim dɔn baked a cake.
 b. Jim dɔn baked a cake *yesterday/ *last week/ *last year.

There are, however, other adverbials which arguably denote a past time. These are adverbials such as *on Friday*, or *on a Friday*, when said for instance on the following Tuesday; or *at 5:00 p.m.* when said at 6:00 p.m. the same day. These adverbials contrast with those like *yesterday* in terms of their acceptability in the *dɔn* construction (even for the strict speakers being considered now).

- (42) a. *On Friday John dɔn ate a steak
 b. John dɔn ate a steak on Friday
 'John has eaten a steak on a Friday before'

The sentences in (42) show that in the preposed position, where it modifies a topic time, modification by *on Friday* results in unacceptable sentences. In the postposed position, on the other hand, modification by *on Friday* is acceptable. Here it modifies a situation time. The sentence *John dɔn ate a steak on Friday* above is acceptable, but it can only mean that John has eaten a steak on a Friday *before*. That is, it means John has had the experience of eating a steak on a Friday. Imagine that that John is the same John from our previous examples, a practicing Catholic who (normally) does not eat meat on Fridays. The sentence *John dɔn ate a steak on Friday* may be used to contradict the claim that John never eats meat on Friday, or to answer the question *Has John ever eaten meat on Friday?* — a question which fixes the topic time as now, and makes clear that Friday is a part of the situation time. It cannot, in contrast, be used to answer the question *What did John do on Friday?* — a question which fixes the topic time as Friday. In fact, as is predicted by the semantics, the sentence *John dɔn ate a steak* (without *on Friday* in it) is also unacceptable

as an answer to this question. Acceptable sentences of the form in (42b) contain adverbials which modify situation times. The event being talked about in (42b) must be *the eating of meat on a Friday*.

Based on the above, we can separate past time denoting adverbials into two classes: Class I adverbials such as *yesterday* which, for strict speakers, cannot modify topic times or situation times, and Class II adverbials such as *on Friday* which for these same speakers can only modify situation times. Examples from the two classes are in (43):

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| (43) <u>Class I</u> | <u>Class II</u> |
| on Friday | on Friday |
| yesterday | on a Friday |
| last week | on my birthday |
| last year | on Memorial Day |
| two weeks ago | on Tuesday June 13th |

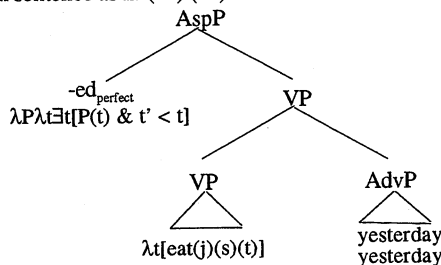
The behaviors of these adverbials can be explained in the following way: I propose that Class I adverbials are treated by strict speakers as referential. The denotation of referential *yesterday* is given in (44).

- (44) [*yesterday*] = yesterday

Class II adverbials on the other hand, are treated by strict speakers as denoting properties of times. The denotation of the non-referential (Class II adverbial) *on Friday*, is given in (45).

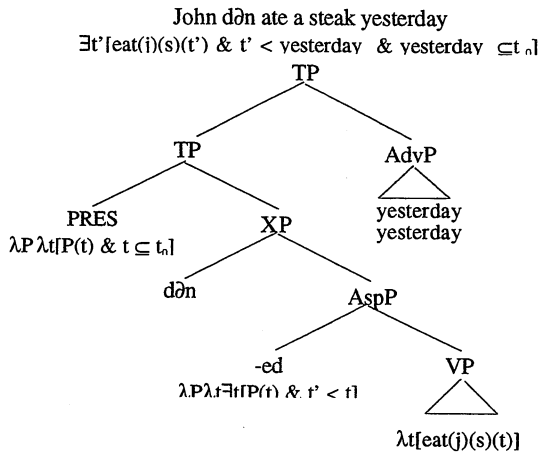
- (45) [*on Friday*] = $\lambda P \lambda t [P(t) \ \& \ t \subseteq \text{Friday}]$

Consider what happens when a Class I adverbial such as *yesterday* is attached at the VP-level in a dðn sentence as in (46) (46)



In (46), *yesterday* saturates the *t* variable in $\lambda t [eat(s)(j)(t)]$ resulting in $[eat(s)(j)(yesterday)]$ which is of the wrong type to combine with the aspectual head above it. The referential adverbial *yesterday* is thus prevented from modifying the situation time of the sentence. If attached above AspP as in (47), no type mismatch error ensues.

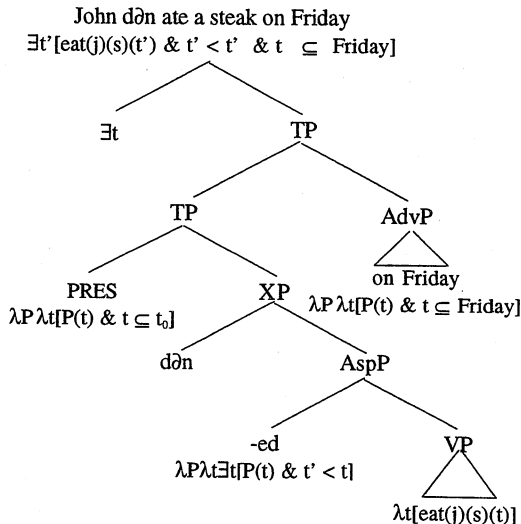
(47)



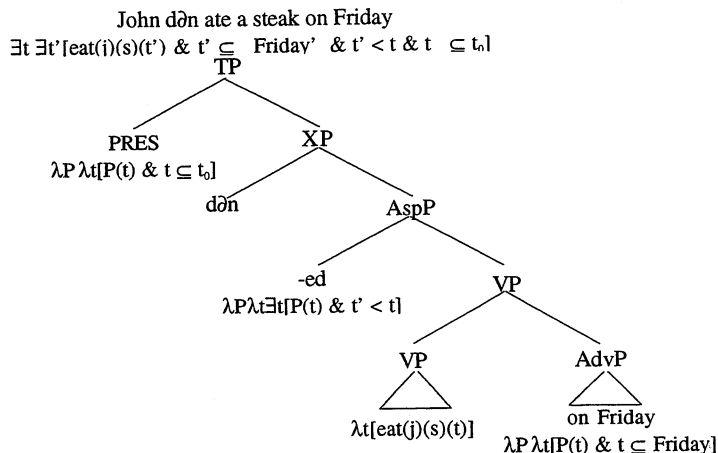
The computation results, however, in the formula $[\exists t' [\text{eat}(j)(s)(t') \ \& \ t' < \text{yesterday} \ \& \ \text{yesterday} \subseteq t_n]]$, which makes the assertion that yesterday is a part of t_n , the now. As this cannot be, the sentence is ungrammatical.

A Class II adverbial such as *on Friday* can, without type mismatch error, attach at the above or below AspP as shown in (48) and (49), respectively. The computation in (48) yields the formula $\exists t [\exists t' [\text{eat}(j)(s)(t') \ \& \ t' < t \ \& \ t \subseteq t_n \ \& \ t \subseteq \text{Friday}]]$, which asserts that the topic time is simultaneously contained within Friday and the now. When said on any day other than Friday, this is not true. When said on Friday, the sentence is pragmatically odd, and would be said as *Today John d?n ate a steak*. When the adverbial is VP-attached, as in (49), no such assertion is made. The resulting formula is $\exists t [\exists t' [\text{eat}(j)(s)(t') \ \& \ t' < \text{Friday} \ \& \ t' < t \ \& \ t \subseteq t_n]]$, in which only the topic time variable, t , is modified.

(48)



(49)



Now let's look at the judgments of speaker for whom sentences such as *John ate a steak yesterday* can be acceptable. For such speakers only the postposed versions of these sentences are acceptable and they are only acceptable given particular contextual constraints such as those in (50) - (52). What the contexts in these examples make clear is that the past denoting adverbial, be it *yesterday*, *last week* or *last year* modifies a situation time. In (50), *yesterday* directly modifies the job that Jim was supposed to do; it is a part of the situation time. The topic time in (50) is the now, and is introduced by reporting on Jim's status (now) of not having done his job. In (51), *last week* is a part of a situation time modifying the baking of the cake, while the topic time is now as the sentence is concerned with the wasting of food that is going on now. In (52), *last year* modifies the situation time, while the topic time is now, the topic of the sentence being the current desire to help the woman in question.

- (50) Jim ain't dðn his job. He was supposed to pick-up his sitter at the airport yesterday, and take her to the train station today. He dðn picked her up yesterday, but its going on 11:30 and he ain't took her to the train station yet.

'Jim has not done his job. He was supposed to pick-up his sister at the airport yesterday and take her to the train station today. He has done the job of picking her up, but it is almost 11:30, and he hasn't taken her to the train station yet.'

- (51) Stop wasting food and eat something; Jim dðn baked a cake last week and it's still here.

'Stop wasting food and eat something; Jim has baked a cake. It was last week when he did, and the cake is still here.'

- (52) Why you want to help her now? She dðn wrote you off last year.

'Why do you want to help her now? She has given up on you, and she did so last year'

That many speakers accept such sentences (in such contexts) while others do not can be explained by positing that speakers for whom (50) - (52) are acceptable do not make

a Class I - Class II adverbial type distinction. That is *yesterday*, *last week*, and *last year* are treated by such speakers as denoting properties of times. It is not clear whether such differences among speakers are individual or regional, but either way this explanation is attractive for this reason: It places the observed variation in lexical items. Lexical items must be learned, and thus we expect their meanings to vary across speakers and dialects. The variation is also expressed in terms of general semantic mechanisms which should be available to all speakers.

I have argued that differences in native speaker judgments with respect to adverbially modified *dən* constructions such as *John dən ate a steak yesterday* can be explained by positing that some speakers treat *yesterday* as referential while others treat it as non-referential, denoting properties of times instead. This same intuition may be recast in an event semantics with the difference being one between adverbials which denote properties of events and adverbials which denote properties of times.

6.0. Theoretical Implications and Questions Raised by this Work

In this section, I highlight some of the implications of this work, and engage in some rather speculative discussion regarding the other markers argued by Green (1993) to supply the sentence with aspect, uninflected *be*, and *BIN*.

If my approach to African-American English aspect and the *dən* marker is on the right track, the syntactic status of *dən* is called into question. In this approach *dən* does not supply the sentence with aspect, and thus should not be the head of an aspect phrase. What, syntactically speaking, then, is *dən*? Is it a light verb? Is it some sort of adverb? These are questions, raised by this analysis, that must ultimately be answered. The implication, however, is that *dən* is not an aspect marker. A more general issue related to the category of *dən* is this: the role I have given to *dən* is one of selecting for aspect. Are *dən*'s semantic properties purely selectional? If so, are there other markers in AAE or other languages which only constrain a number of already possible interpretations?

My approach to *dən* calls into question the syntactic status of Green's other aspectual markers (uninflected *be*, and *BIN*) as well. In my formalism, I allow verbal suffixes such as *-ed* to existentially close situation times, making them unavailable for further modification by markers such as *be* and *BIN* which appear higher in the syntactic tree. Thus, these markers cannot modify situation times; they cannot relate situation times to topic times. As I have adopted Klein's definition of aspect, that aspect relates situation times to topic times, these markers, like *dən*, cannot be "aspectual", and thus should not be the heads of aspectual phrases. Deciding whether or not these markers are in this sense aspectual amounts to more than simply deciding between notational variants. There is a real issue here. Saying that uninflected *be* and *BIN* cannot be carriers of aspect puts very tight constraints on the meanings they may have. The observed meanings of these markers may, however, fall within these constraints. The habitual nature of uninflected *be* might be thought of as quantification over topic times, and the remote 'pastness' of *BIN* seems to relate a topic time to the utterance time, placing the topic time a great (temporal) distance before the utterance time. While perhaps muddying the issues of syntactic category, the approach to AAE aspect that I advance makes clear predictions about the kind of meanings that we should expect from these markers based on their linear order.

7.0. Conclusion

In this paper I have developed a compositional semantics for the AAE *dən* construction. In this account, the semantics of *dən* are primarily if not purely selectional. The marker *dən* selects for perfect aspect, disambiguating what I argue is an ambiguous *-ed* morpheme which denotes both perfect and perfective aspect. It is this morpheme that I

argue contributes the aspect associated with the *dɔn* construction and not *dɔn* itself as has been previously argued. This view makes AAE simple *-ed* sentences more aspectually complex than has previously been assumed.

How similarities and differences between the AAE *dɔn* construction and the SAE present perfect construction might be accounted for is an important issue left untreated here. The analysis of *dɔn* developed, however, has implications for how this issue might be broached. The semantic properties of *dɔn* in AAE seem purely selectional, whereas the properties of *have* in the SAE present perfect construction are most likely not. This and the influence of durational adverbials such as *for three years* on the *dɔn* construction are two important areas for future work.

Appendix A

Dahl's Prototypical Occurrences of the Perfect and Possible AAE renditions

In the examples which follow, a perfect construction is prototypically used in place of the verb in all capital letters.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he READ already?)

B: (Yes,) he READ this book.

Possible AAE renditions:

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he *dɔn* read already?)

B: (Yes,) he *dɔn* read this book.

(A: I want to give your brother a book to read, but I don't know which. Is there any of these books that he read already?)

B: (Yes,) he read this book.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true.) He READ this book (=all of it)

Possible AAE renditions:

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true.) He *dɔn* read this book (=all of it).

A: It seems that your brother never finishes books.
(That is not quite true.) He read this book (=all of it).

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfect:

Q: Is the king still alive? A: (No,) he DIE

Possible AAE renditions:

On the Semantics of d?n in African-American English

Q: Is the king still alive? A: (No,) he d?n died.

Q: Is the king still alive? A. (No,) he died.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Q: You MEET my brother (at any time in you life until now)?

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: You d?n met my brother?

Q: You met my brother?

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Child: Can I go now? Mother: You BRUSH your teeth ?

Possible AAE renditions:

Child: Can I go now? Mother: You d?n brushed your teeth?

Child: Can I go now? Mother: you brushed your teeth?

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday

A: the king DIE.

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday

A: The king d?n died.

Q: What did you find out when you came to town yesterday

A: The king died.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king ARRIVE

Possible AAE renditions:

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king d?n arrived.

A person who has heard but not seen the event says: The king arrived.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfect:

When I COME home (yesterday), he WRITE two letters (- that is what he accomplished during my absence)

Possible AAE renditions:

When I came home yesterday, he had d?n wrote two letters.

When I came home yesterday, he had wrote two letters.

Note: My analysis predicts that without overt tense marking AAE perfect constructions are present tense, and thus the overt *had* is needed above for pluperfect readings

Appendix B

Dahl's Prototypical Occurrences of the Perfective and Possible AAE Renditions

In the examples which follow, a perfective construction is prototypically used in place of the verb in all capital letters.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Do you know what happened to my brother yesterday? I saw it myself. We were walking in the forest. Suddenly he stepped on a snake. It bit him in the leg. He took a stone and threw it at the snake. It DIE

Possible AAE renditions:

It died.

Note: "It dɔn died" is not acceptable.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Do you know what happened to me yesterday? I was walking in the forest. Suddenly I stepped on a snake. It bit me in the leg. I took a stone and threw it at the snake. It DĪE.

Possible AAE renditions:

It died.

Note: "It dɔn died" is not acceptable.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective

Q: What your brother's reaction BE to the medicine (yesterday)?

A: He COUGH

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What was your brother's reaction to the medicine (yesterday)?

Note: "dɔn was" and "dɔn been" are not acceptable.

A: He coughed

Note: "dɔn coughed" is not acceptable.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfective:

Q: How long did it take for your brother to finish the letter

A: He WRITE the letter in an hour

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: How long did it take for your brother to finish the letter

A: He wrote the letter in an hour.

Note: "d?n wrote" here is awkward if acceptable at all.

Prototypical Occurrence of the Perfective:

Last year, the boy's father sent him a sum of money. When the boy GET the money, he BUY a present for the girl

Possible AAE Renditions:

When the boy got the money, he bought a present for the girl.

Note: "d?n got" and "d?n bought" are not acceptable here.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

Q: What your brother's reaction BE to the medicine (yesterday)?

A: He COUGH twice.

Possible AAE renditions:

Q: What was your brother's reaction to the medicine (yesterday)?

A: He coughed twice.

Note: d?n constructions are not acceptable here.

Prototypical Occurrence of Perfective:

The boys father sent him a sum of money some days ago and it arrived yesterday. When the boy GET the money, he BUY a present for the girl

Possible AAE Renditions:

When the boy got the money, he bought a present for the girl

Note: "d?n got" and "d?n bought" are not acceptable here.

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