
2020

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Recommended Citation

Lauture, Christelle (2020). African American Vernacular English: Categories of Necessity in a Language that Refuses to be Standard. *Undergraduate Review*, 15, 166-183.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol15/iss1/16

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African American Vernacular English: Categories of Necessity in a Language that Refuses to be Standard

Christelle Lauture

“A language comes into existence by means of brutal necessity, and the rules of the language are dictated by what the language must convey.”

“The argument has nothing to do with language itself but with the role of language. Language, incontestably, reveals the speaker. Language, also, far more dubiously, is meant to define the other—and, in this case, the other is refusing to be defined by a language that has never been able to recognize him.”

- James Baldwin “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” (1979)

Abstract

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been spoken by African Americans for centuries but has only recently been acknowledged as a distinct dialect. It is often used in tandem with Standard English (SE) by users of SE, through a concept referred to as code-switching. Although linguists have done substantial work to validate AAVE, there is an incomplete understanding of why the dialect developed and, in particular, the functions the dialect

serves for its speakers. In order to begin the work of discovering why AAVE developed the specific features it manifests, I synthesized other linguists’ observations into a taxonomy of five categories that account for most of the dialect’s unique features. My project elaborates on the functions of the categories of tense/mode variation, negation, absence, prosody/pronunciation, and what Zora Neale Hurston calls “the will to adorn” in AAVE, in comparison to SE.

English is the modern world’s lingua franca and has the most second-language learners in the world. It began its journey to succession a little over a thousand years ago. The journey has been a long one with many detours, bumps in the road, and no destination in sight. English as a language was one big accident after another, but its success was no accident. The reason English is so powerful today is due not to any features internal to the language itself, but rather to the power of its users. Britain was the most powerful country at the time of modern English’s conception, and the United States has since become the most powerful. Perhaps it is this political power that gives some users of this language a perception that the language itself is whole and pure. The concept of “broken English” is usually reserved for non-native second language English speakers, but the reality is that English itself is a broken language that people

used enough until it worked for them. English as we know it is a relatively new language, with its first comprehensive dictionary being less than 150 years old (Lerer 236). This relative youth is because this was the first time that English stood still long enough for people to capture it. Before then it was being influenced by other languages and events that changed its face every century.

Events including Viking raids; the influence of the Latin church; the Norman conquest; the immigration of the Anglos, Saxons, and Jutes from modern-day Germany; and the Bubonic plague all led to English becoming the creole that re-creolized itself until it became standard. The act of standardizing English was a relatively arbitrary one. As America was forming Americans were trying to forge an identity with a language that would reflect their values. Puritans used English in a way that rejected England's Renaissance and Restoration period uses of language. By the 18th century, there was a growing concern in both England and America about the fact that English was not standard, so scholars took it upon themselves to publish their own scholarship on how the language should look and sound. As some of these scholars' works became more popular than others, such as

Robert Lowth, Noah Webster, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and Jacob Grimm, these prescriptions and descriptions began to stick among users¹. Today it is commonly held by linguists that language should be what they call descriptive, meaning that as long as it serves its function, then it works. The other camp of thought is that a language should be prescriptive, meaning that the users should strive to regulate it. While some may cling to prescription being necessary as many Early Modern English users did, this view does not allow us to see how English is continuing to change and both influence and be influenced by other languages and cultures (Lerer 178-79). This false pure origin concept held by many first language English users is one that neglects the fact that English has been and will continue to be on a journey.

One of the ways English continues its nonlinear journey is through internal change. English dialects are seen all over the world, but one that began at the same time that English was becoming globalized is African American Vernacular English (AAVE). African American Vernacular English came into being as soon as African Americans came into being (Winford 85). American colonists began capturing Africans and enslaving them in the 1600s

until slavery was abolished in America in the 19th century. The descendants of these people came to be known as African Americans. Linguists have come up with several hypotheses to explain the inception of the dialect as it relates to the inception of African Americans. Part of linguists' efforts in doing so was to validate that AAVE is in fact a dialect and to establish it as an acceptable way of speaking English. Although this dialect has been spoken and changing for the past few centuries, it has only begun to be recognized as such in the past 50 years. Its recognition began in the mid-to-late 1960s, with much credit given to linguist William Labov's work, *Language in the Inner City*. He studied the speech of Black Harlem youth, addressing the structural features, the debate over AAVE's origin, uses, and advocating for the dialect's usage. These topics Labov addressed continued to be at the center of the discussion of AAVE over the decades to come with many other linguists joining the conversation.

The origins of AAVE have been debated, with a number of theories being valid contenders for explaining how the dialect developed. Two main theories are regarded as the most plausible

and accepted by linguists today: the Creole origins hypothesis originally developed by William Stewart and the English Origins Hypothesis developed by Beryl Bailey, both in the 1960s. The first theory is that AAVE resulted from the retention of West African languages that have been creolized (two groups speaking different languages created a common tongue that was sustained through generations) with Standard English (SE) but separate from it, and de-creolized itself into AAVE. It has since been developed by creolists such as John Rickford, who have maintained that there is a creole origin, but that the origins are much more nonlinear and multifaceted than Stewart proposed. The original version of the theory took into account that enslaved Africans spoke their own languages in their home countries and needed to find a common tongue with each other, as well as their captors. The other, more popular theory, known as the English Origins Hypothesis (EOH), maintains that AAVE developed from within English and "the English component of AA[V]E has become obscured over time, as the variety has undergone its own internally driven change, and the relevant linguistic features have disappeared from other varieties, especially from the Standard American English" (Van Herk 23). Other theories fall under two camps

of either monolithic or multivalent approaches with different levels of attention to sociohistorical contexts, ecological factors, second language acquisition, and other factors and sources.²

Linguistic structures have been another popular area for research into AAVE. To prove that AAVE is indeed a dialect, it needs to be clear what its distinctive linguistic features are. Linguistic features like copula absence (i.e. “she talking”), the habitual “be” (i.e. “she be talking”), and familiar markers (i.e. “up in here”), have come to be accepted by linguists as features unique to AAVE, and will be addressed further in the next section. Another area often discussed in the study of AAVE is language learning and education. In the 1990s, the use of AAVE came to the national spotlight with the Oakland Ebonics Controversy. Ebonics is a portmanteau of “ebony and phonics” that was a more commonly used term at the time. In 1996, the school board of Oakland, California, classified Ebonics as a derivation of African languages and asserted that its speakers should be considered English language learners. AAVE is now more accepted by the educated community, with code-switching between two dialects arising as a topic of discussion in turn. Despite the existing study and

legitimizing of the dialect by linguists, there is still more work to be done.

There is still a greater discussion to be had about what the qualities of AAVE mean about its users, and why it developed in the direction that it did. I have developed a taxonomy of five categories that attempt to cover the distinctive qualities of AAVE. Tense/mode variation, Negation, Absence, Prosody/Pronunciation, and The Will to Adorn are five categories in which most of the specific features of AAVE comfortably find a place. These categories are a synthesis of linguists’ findings on the study of AAVE into a taxonomy contextualized by the function for the user. In essence, these are five ways that AAVE continues to separate itself from SE in various differing forms of linguistic functions. I argue that these categories arose from necessity, as implied by my title, but also that the categories are necessary for scholars examining AAVE.

In theory, the taxonomy I created covers all of the features of AAVE and hypothesizes their meanings. The categories are not comprehensive or exhaustive, as it is the categories and not necessarily their content that is essential. Some features could fit under multiple categories, but their qualitative

functions for users will be the deciding factor in their placement, while their other possible placements will be noted. The features explained in these categories are covering a range of uses that are mostly still seen in contemporary AAVE. This deliberate choice to explicate modern features and qualities results from my proximity to and understanding of contemporary usage as a user of AAVE, but it will also allow me to transpose these findings onto earlier vestiges of the dialect. Seeing the language for what it has to offer, observing the language in its natural habitats, will bear more fruit than seeing how it fits into preexisting notions. As Zora Neale Hurston says in her essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934), “If we are to believe the majority of writers of Negro dialect and the burnt-cork artists, Negro speech is a weird thing, full of ‘ams’ and ‘Ises.’ Fortunately, we don’t have to believe them. We may go directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself” (Hurston 1061).

1. Tense/mode variation³:

Tense refers to the time of action, while mode/mood refers to the reality and intention of the verb. These features are variations in tense or mood that do not occur in Standard English

(SE). SE’s uses of tense and mode are flexible because of heavy reliance on auxiliary verbs, such as “be,” “will,” or “might.” AAVE also makes use of this flexibility by changing combinations of compound verbs with mode as well as changing the use of morphological changes to indicate tense.

A. Habitual “be”/ “been”

- the speaker uses “be” as a marker of a habitual activity/ emphasizing how long the subject has been participating in an activity (Cukor-Avila and Bailey, “Grammaticalization in AAVE” 401–404).

Example:

AAVE: “she be dancing”; “she been dancing”

SE: “she dances often”; “she has been dancing”

- The amount of stress and carrying out of the vowel sound in “been” indicates the longevity of the activity

Examples:

- “She bin dancing” suggests

that she has been dancing for a long amount of time, within a specific time frame.

- “She been dancing” suggests she has been dancing for a long amount of time and is thoroughly experienced.
- “She BEEEN dancing” suggests she might as well have walked out her mother’s womb dancing.

B. “a” + present progressive verb

the speaker uses “a” in combination with a verb in the present progressive verb as an indicator of a lack of urgency and likelihood for the action to continue

Example:

AAVE: “just a sittin’ and a rockin’”

SE: “just sitting there and rocking”

C. Existential “it’s”

- the speaker uses it to establish or question the existence or presence of something, making the use of a contraction possible in more scenarios

Example:

AAVE: “it’s a bear over there!”; “it’s gonna be bears there?”

SE: “There is a bear over there!”; “Will there be bears there?”

A. Preterite *had* + verb

- The speaker uses this combination to indicate the simple past as well as the past perfect. In SE, this combination is used in the past perfect to indicate the order of two or more things occurring in the past. In AAVE, however, this form can be used to talk about anything that happened in the past. The use of the SE simple past is also perfectly acceptable in AAVE, but the difference is when they are used. Preterite *had* + *verb* is most often used in narration, as a means to divide action, indicate complicating action, as well as emphasize the subject of the action. When *has* + verb is used, the emphasis of the statement shifts from the action itself onto the subject acting. “Had” acts an audio/visual buffer between the

subject and the action, creating distance between the two parts, allowing them to function separately.

Example:

AAVE: “Then he had walked down the street.”

SE: “Then he walked down the street.”

B. Multiple modal

- The speaker uses multiple modal auxiliaries (can, could, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will, would and need) in succession. In SE, one must choose one of these modes to describe the plausibility of action. However, one auxiliary may not suffice in describing the possibilities or intentions of the speaker (Cukor-Avila and Bailey, “Rural Texas AAVE”). In AAVE ⁴ the ability to both “might” and “could” do one thing exists, as after all, they do exist in reality, as seen in the example below.

Example:

AAVE: “I might could go to the store with you.” Here the speaker uses

“might,” by which they are speaking to their own will to do an action. They also use “could,” which speaks to the possibility of that action occurring.

SE: “I might go to the store with you.”/

“I could go to the store with you.”

2. Negation: Negation refers to making a statement negative rather than affirming it. In English, this is a relatively simple process of adding negation words such as “not” or “never” before or after said verb or with morphological changes (changing a word) such as “nothing” or “disagree.” In Standard English, it is considered wrong to have a double negative as a means of negation. However, language has no obligation to adhere to the laws of logic; even English in its most “refined” version fails to do so. This is because as English developed throughout centuries with influences all over the world, it kept forms from all of its influences and embraced them. Double negatives are only accepted in SE as a means of coded positives, i.e. “you shouldn’t not do that” means that you should not neglect doing it, without the forcefulness that “you should do it” brings. This exception is a glimpse of the binary that exists in human experience, and between positive and negative,

that should be reflected in language, which AAVE does do. Some may also not consider “ain’t” to be “proper” English or even a word (despite it being recognized in dictionaries as such), but the abilities of “ain’t” function beyond the capacities of SE. English makes abundant use of contractions, many of which are used in negation. “Aren’t,” “isn’t,” “didn’t,” “hasn’t,” “haven’t,” as well as “am not” are all able to be expressed through the singular phrase of “ain’t.” If we are speaking strictly for functionality’s sake, “ain’t” is undoubtedly a useful term. Linguist Joan Fickett puts it sensibly when she says of Black English, “It has a system of tenses which indicate degrees of pastness and degrees of futurity, it can talk about how long ago things didn’t happen, or how far ahead they aren’t going to happen” (90).

Double/triple-negative

- The speaker uses a double or triple negative to intensify the negation of the statement as well as to connote the seriousness in the speaker’s statement. Interestingly enough, SE similarly uses double negatives. Take for example, the response “not now, they aren’t,” which establishes that the action is not occurring at

the present, as well as the fact that the subject is not doing it. Either part of the answer would suffice, but the speaker chooses to use double negatives to emphasize the negation of the answer.

Examples:

Double

AAVE: “ain’t never”

SE: literal: “is/has/have/did not never”
received “is/has/have/did not ever”

Triple

AAVE: “can’t nobody tell me nothing”

(From record-breaking Billboard hit, “Old Town Road”– Lil Nas X, 2019)

SE: “nobody can tell me anything”

Other specifications in negation:

- negation in inceptive: “ain’t singing, don’t sing”
- negation in recent: “done sung”
- negation in imminent: “ain’t sung”
- negation in post imminent: “ain’t gonna sing”

3. Absence: Absence refers to the omitting of a feature seen in Standard English. There are many examples of absence in AAVE; below I have listed a few that linguists regularly recognize. The use of absence in AAVE is seen throughout different linguistic categories, including grammar, pronunciation, syntax, etc. The two main purposes of absence seem to be skimming off the unnecessary or adding to/changing the aural aesthetic of speech.

Copula absence/zero copula

- the speaker neglects the copula, a form of the verb to be, adding concision to speech. Copula absence works off of the assumption that the receiver of the speech understands the copula tense is in the present or present progressive. It establishes present as the standard, not needing to be specified, and any other tense should be specified. Copula absence is a contextually driven function depending on how the copula is being used, or not used (Wolfram 502).

Example:

AAVE: “She good.; “They bad.”; “He alright.”; “She doing her homework.”

SE: “She is good.”; “They are bad.”;

“He is alright. Or, he is doing alright.”;

“She is doing her homework.”

The following examples are of phonetic absences in comparison to their Standard English pronunciations. These features in their essence highlight two facets of AAVE and the progress of a language/dialect in general. Firstly, languages tend to have a “use it or lose it” factor when they are not standardized, and sometimes even when they are, in more casual speech. Take for example the loss of the initial consonant clusters gn, and kn in English. Up until the time modern English was developing, the words “knight” and “gnaw” would have been pronounced with the initial consonant “k” and “g” sound. But as those sound combinations are not easy or useful in English, they began being used less and less, until they fell out of spoken usage, only remaining in written form.

Secondly, there is a rhythmic quality to AAVE that these absences allow. These absences in many cases allow for one word to flow into the next without much effort or a chance for slipping up. Although these absences may be more prominent in AAVE, they also occur in casual speech by SE speakers.

Examples:

- g-dropping: “talkin”
- r-lessness: “fear/fea”
- s-dropping: “he hear you/he hears you”
- t-dropping: “sof/soft”

4. Prosody/Pronunciation: Prosody refers to the aural and rhythmic qualities in language, including stress and tone. While all languages have prosodic features, English has a relatively low number of prosodic features, especially compared to the level seen in many tonal African languages. This is important to note because the prosody of AAVE is comparable to that of African languages, and some vestiges from African Languages may remain (Thomas 427). Pronunciation refers to how a word or phoneme (the smallest unit of sound in a language) is spoken in regard to sound. Pronunciation in English largely differs by region and by the influence of other languages and accents. Many pronunciation features found in AAVE are regional or overlap with regional pronunciations. For the exploration of pronunciation in AAVE, it is important to make the distinction of whether the feature is of the dialect or of the region.

The difference between prosody and pronunciation is that prosodic features are indicative of meaning while pronunciation and meaning are arbitrary. As both relate to sound, they are categorized together to relate how sound is important to the dialect.

Pronunciation: Similar to the phonological qualities of absence, these are changes occurring in the way speech sounds. Just like the pronunciation changes in English before AAVE, there is no definitive explanation for these changes. What matters most is that they did occur, and they did so naturally. Sound shifts are the speakers’ impositions on what feels most natural in their speech. As linguist John McWhorter says in *Talking Back, Talking Black*, “Your sound holds on tight deep within you” (80). These are examples of such sounds that made their way into AAVE.

Examples:

- interdental fricative: “baf/bath”
- “pin/pen” merger
- L-vocalization: “foo/fool”
- “ar/or”, “car/cor”, “aj/oj”

Prosodic:

A. Front-stressing

- A speaker stresses the front syllable of the word rather than the end, which is more commonly seen in English. This creates asymmetry and angularity to the speech, making the stresses and accents even more accented. When a syllable is stressed after a stressed syllable, the second stress sounds even more stressed. This also emphasizes the subject/s of the statement.

Example:

AAVE: “Look at the **PO-lice** on the **TEE-V**” - trochaic (stressed/unstressed) syllables in nouns, mixed meter with double stresses and unstressed syllables.

SE: “Look at the **po-LICE** on the **T-VEE**” - iambic (unstressed/stressed) syllables in nouns, trochaic (stressed/unstressed) sentence.

B. Double stress

- A speaker repeats a word with extra stress on the first utterance to double the emphasis on that word.

Example:

AAVE: “mad/mad”

SE: “very mad, livid”

5. The Will to Adorn: “The will to adorn” is a description originally coined by author and activist Zora Neale Hurston in the essay “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934). As I use the term, it refers to many features and subcategories, which all fall under this same quality of a need for inventiveness. Hurston writes, “The stark, trimmed phrases of the Occident seem too bare for the voluptuous child of the sun, hence the adornment. It arises out of the same impulse as the wearing of jewelry and the making of sculpture—the urge to adorn...perhaps the [African American’s] idea of ornament does not attempt to meet conventional standards, but it satisfies the soul of its creator” (1051–52). While the features below may seem like a miscellaneous category, these features are all consistent with the will to adorn, to embellish, to add flavor, to a language (Standard English, or SE)

that simply does not do enough for these users. This category may be the most important of the five, as it captures the essence of all of the categories as well as AAVE as a whole. The will to adorn is African Americans' refusal to use a language that does not include their experience and subsequently does not suffice to express their experiences.

A. Familiarity: Hurston contends in this same essay that “this [the absence of privacy] ought not to seem strange when one considers that we are an outdoor people accustomed to communal life.” This sentiment can be seen in linguistic uses and features that indicate familiarity. It is not necessarily that there is no privacy, but that the users are connected on a familial level that they must be able to express.

I. Associative “and them”

The speaker uses “and them” after naming a subject, with whom the “them” are associated. This is a phrase that only works in context if both the recipient of the statement is aware of the “them” and the

subject is familiar to all parties. It is assumed that the “them” is a relatively consistent group of people that the subject is associated with.

Example:

AAVE: “who’s going to be there?”/ “Ricky and them.”

SE: “who’s going to be there?”/ “Ricky and his friends.”/ “Which ones?”

“who’s going to be there?”/ “Ricky and his group of friends.”

Other Familiarity Examples:

- “up in there/their/her/his”- “he be up in his boy’s house”
- “peoples”- “Me and my peoples going out”

B. Metaphor & Simile: Metaphors are paradoxical by nature; they are false statements, and in their falseness bring truth. This occurs when two things that are not alike share a likeness. It is as much on the speaker of the metaphor as the receiver to understand all of these working parts

to make meaning of the metaphor. Standard English often makes use of metaphors that are regularly seen and reused, with invention usually reserved for more illustrious speech, rather than everyday use. African Americans' metaphor or simile is dually simple and complex. The simplicity lies in the fact that anything can be a metaphor, but so does the complexity. Each new metaphor must be deciphered by someone who has the context to understand it. One of the most current expressions of vernacular, the musical genre of hip-hop, is built off of the will to adorn through metaphor. Whether it's Big Boi being "as cold as a polar bears toenails" or all of Smino's enemies "friending up like Monica and Chandler," adornment through metaphor will always be a part of hip-hop.

C. Interjections: Standard English has plenty of interjections, which are sounds that carry meaning but are not able to be clearly defined. Interjections are highly contextual prosodic features, as their intonation and placement in use can indicate further meaning. "Wow," "hmm," or "gee" are all forms of interjections, as well as greetings.

AAVE has added to the list of English interjections by way of adopting some that are diasporic and used by Black people all around the world including African Americans, and others that were born from the dialect itself.

- mtchew (teeth sucking): a speaker uses this sound to indicate distaste, disagreement, contempt, and the like. The length, volume, and dramatization of this sound correlate to the severity of feeling.
- aht aht: the speaker uses this to say indicate a negative reaction with the connotation of annoyance or irritation.
- yo/yer: the speaker usually uses this to get someone's attention or as a greeting, but it may be used in relatively any context as a buffering sound.
- "word": the speaker uses this to agree with or acknowledge information, or as a question seeking confirmation. It also can express mild contempt, usually

with an inflection at the end, indicative of a sarcastic tone.

In synthesizing and analyzing this relatively small pool of features from AAVE, we begin to see an important commonality between the features: they all serve to fill a gap of what SE does not provide for African American speakers. English in its entirety has been stripped down in all the years of its development, to something not heavily adorned. If we look at the time of Shakespearean English or Chaucer's English, we can see English was at one point adorned in similar ways that AAVE has been adorned⁵. Take for example, Shakespeare's invention of the word assassination. "Assassin" was originally an Arabic term for "hashish eater" or someone who would smoke hashish before committing heinous acts. It was adopted by English but only in reference to a killer of a public figure. Shakespeare took the word "assassin" and adding the Latin ending "-ion" to make the act itself into a noun. This word was first seen in Macbeth's soliloquy, and served to emphasize the disorderly and unprecedented actions that Macbeth was contemplating and would go on to commit (Lerer 135–136). Black English re-adorns English with its users' new experiences in a similar fashion. For example, the phrase "kill-dead" that Zora Neale Hurston categorizes as a double

descriptive in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression"(1052). This phrase takes an existing English verb "kill" and an existing English adjective "dead" that emphasizes both the action and the state of being resulting in that action simultaneously. American English was intentionally stripped down by both authors of literature and grammarians/lexicographers. The literary movement that began with the birth of America was driven by the Puritans that migrated from Britain. These authors wrote in "Plain Style," an unembellished, direct approach to writing and expression. As expressed before, there was growing anxiety from English speakers to regulate a language that was constantly changing. This concern extended to Americans with the added desire to separate themselves from Britain, for this new use of language to reflect a new identity. Noah Webster, of the now-famed dictionary Merriam-Webster, wrote grammar/spelling books and dictionaries in his time (1758-1843). He was advocating for a "Federal English" that would fit the American identity, one that was unadorned both physically and economically (fewer letters in print costs less money). There was a deliberate intention to simplify spelling, which led to changes seen today such as "colour" to "color" and "cancelled" to "canceled." But for African Americans,

this stripped-down English did not and does not do or say enough. What African Americans did was not much different from what early American settlers did with the language: they made it their own. Their inventiveness in the language represents the fact that they too had to invent and redefine themselves in a language that did not include them. As Zora Neale Hurston says of the musical quality of “Negro Expression,” “Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. But easily workable to a Negro who is accustomed to the break in going from one part to another, so that he adjusts himself to the new tempo” (1054). This sentiment is not only true of music but the Black experience historically, and particularly in language. This ability to adjust within a parameter not set by them and subject to unpredictable changes is the embodiment of the African American experience. The simple and first answer as to why African American Vernacular English developed into what it did, is that it was necessary.

The ways in which English has changed since its Standardization are mostly due to groups upon whom English was imposed. This often results in the creolization of dialectization of the language. These are similar processes, with creoles having a more

obvious appearance as the two distinct languages they come from are easy to recognize. The oppressive powers often ignore/neglect/denounce the experience of the oppressed, using their own language to do so, while the creole captures the collective experience and memory of the oppressed group. English also has many dialects because when people bring their languages from around the world and assimilate, they do not always completely lose their native tongue. African American Vernacular English has a unique distinction among these other dialects and creoles, one that reflects the unique experience of African Americans. African Americans and Americans are both Americans, both speak American English; this is the only dialect that has grown from within the dialect of American English and is continuing to change the usage from the inside. Pop culture website BuzzFeed published an article titled “A 43-Year-Old High School Teacher Has Been Keeping A Personal List Of ‘Gen Z’ Slang Terms He Overhears His Students Using”. It features, entries like “low key”, “big mad”, and “no cap”; these as well as nearly every other entry on the list, is a feature of modern AAVE. African American Vernacular English is the language of the future in America, while SE is a dialect reserved for specific spaces. As for the culture, the youth, and the

community of the United States, AAVE is the favored use of English in everyday speech. Without fully understanding what African American Vernacular English is, where it came from, and where it is going, we cannot fully understand the same for Standard English, and African Americans are once again stripped of the credit of their impact on the world.

Notes

1. See Lerer Chapters 12 and 13.
2. For further reading see Van Herk (23–34).
3. See DeBose (371–386).
4. This feature is also seen in Southern American English. It remains consistent between speakers of AAVE throughout the continent and is considered a distinct feature of the dialect. For more on this discussion see Cukor-Avila and Bailey (181–200).
5. For further reading see Lerer Chapters 5 and 9.

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