Language Variation and Change

Prof. Dr. Marianne Hundt
Wintersemester 2005/06

Ethnicity

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What we’ll do today:

- linguistic clues to ethnicity
- ethnicity defined
- AAVE as an ethnolect
- crossing and identity construction
- variation and ethnicity
- origin of AAVE
- summary

1. Clues to ethnicity

Lee: *Kia ora* June. Where you been? Not seen you round for a while.

June: *Kia ora*. I’ve just come back from my Nanny’s *tangi* [funeral]. Been up in Rotorua for a week.

Lee: *E ki* [is that so!] a sad time for you, *e hoa* [my friend] and for all your family, ne [isn’t it]

June: *Ae* [yes]. We’ll all miss Nanny. She was a wonderful woman.

Holmes (1992:191)
1. Clues to ethnicity

(1) Yo mama so bowlegged, she looks like the bite out of a donut.
(2) I cannae mind the place where those bairns are from.
(3) Dem want me fi go up dere go tell dem.
(4) Kia ora Hemi. Time to broom the floor eh.
(5) Already you’re discouraged! Goyim like bagels so why not this.
(6) My brother really hungry la. Let’s go for makan.

Holmes (1992:191)

2. Ethnicity defined

- biological
- social construct
- ethnicity vs. race
  - “those individuals who perceive themselves to belong to the same ethnic category” (Giles, 1979:253)
- common ancestry
- ethnicity and language
- ethnicity as an act of identity
2. Ethnicity defined

Ethnicity as **act of identity**: ‘projection model’


“The individual thus creates for himself patterns of linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group or groups which he wishes to be identified [with] at different times.”

Mesthrie and Tabouret-Keller (2001:167)

→ crossing

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2. Ethnicity defined

race – ethnicity

“[…] race as a category is useless to us without an understanding of the construction of ethnicity by individuals and communities.”

Fought (2002:444)
2. Ethnic varieties in the US

- WAVE
- Native American English
- Jewish English
- Italo-English
- Korean English
- Chicano English
- AAVE

3. African American

“A person of African descent, born in and a citizen of the United States, whose U.S. ancestry dates back to the enslavement era – i.e., a Black American, as distinguished from a Jamaican, Haitian, or other Diasporic African. […] Writing it with a hyphen may trigger resentment among some Blacks because other U.S. ethnic group names are now generally represented without a hyphen, such as Asian American, Hispanic (or Latino/Latina) American, Italian American, Polish American, etc.” Smitherman (2000:50)
3. Labelling

Non-Standard Negro English
Black English Vernacular (BEV)
Vernacular Black English
Black English (BE)
African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
African American English (AAE)
Ebonics

3. AAVE as a literary dialect

Zora Neale Hurston (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, quoted from Tottie (2002:219)

“Lawd a’mussy, honey, A sho is glad tuh see mah chile!”

“You ain’t done me no favor by marryin’ me. And if that’s what you call yourself doin’, Ah don’t thank you for it. Youse mad ‘cause Ah’m tellin yuh whut you already knowed.”
3. Ethnolect ‘AAVE’

- general vernacular features
- vs.
- unique features of AAVE
- preferential vs. exclusive features

3. Exclusive features of AAVE

1. [bIt] for *bid*, [bæk] for *bag*
2. *lif’ up* for *lift up*, *bussing* for *busting*
3. *she walk*, *he raise*
4. *four girl*, *some dog*
5. *man hat* for *man’s hat*
6. *she nice*, *he sick*
7. *Sometimes my ears be itching.*
8. *I béen known him a long time.*

Based on Fasold (1981)
3. Lexical features of AAVE

- def, dope
- Parker’s Club
- alley ball
- Old School
- attitude, bad, brother, chill out, cool, dis, gig, hip, jive, mean, rip off, sister, square, threads, uptight


On-line resources:
Black slang dictionary at [http://www.voxcommunications.com/slang15.htm](http://www.voxcommunications.com/slang15.htm)
3. Pragmatic features of AAVE

- sounding, playing the dozens
- rapping
- signifying

Labov (1972)

3. Preferential features of AAVE

- rhoticity
- *pin, pen*
- *high, time*
- *this, that, them, brother*
- steal
- {-ing}
- *ask, grasp*
3. Preferential features of AAVE

- *Ah sho is glad; You looks hard tuh beat; All de cars ... is gone*
- *ain’t*
- *Don’t know nothin’ ‘bout nobody*
- *It’s a boy in my room*
- *a apple, a egg*
- *The teacher, she yell at dem kids.*

4. Ethnicity as identity construction

Crossing: use of language variety that belongs to another group

(a) positive: signal affiliation with group
(b) negative: used to distance oneself (racist)
(c) mitigating discourse strategy
4. Crossing as discourse strategy

Trainee: (somewhat annoyed) *So you’re saying they didn’t install the program properly?*

Trainer: (with an affected Brooklyn working-class accent) *Yea, you gotta problem wit’ that?*

Cecelia Cutler on [http://www.pbs.org/speak/speech/prestige/crossing](http://www.pbs.org/speak/speech/prestige/crossing)

See also: Stubbe&Holmes (2000)

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4. Positive *crossing*

- *Ten things I hate about you*
- *white hip hopper speech (Cutler, 2002)*

  *People — people be callin’ me a wannabe, but I don't know what they Ø talkin’ about, you know. I'm just doing my thing. I'm just handlin’ my business. What I do ain't nobody's business, you know what I'm sayin’, except for mine. I handle my own. That's what I'm about. You know, what I'm about ain't no — but, hey, I'm — I'm handlin’ my own. You know, I'm livin' my life the way I want to live. Ain't nobody got to tell me nothin’, you know what I'm sayin’?*

4. Crossing – Raggastani

“… a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujerati and English. Their ethos, their manifesto, if it could be called that, was equally a hybrid thing: Allah featured, but more as a collective big brother than a supreme being, a hard-as-fuck geezer who would fight in their corner if necessary; Kung Fu and the works of Bruce Lee were also central to the philosophy; added to this was a smattering of Black Power (as embodied in the album Fear of the Black Planet, Public Enemy); but mainly their mission was to put the Invincible back in Indian, the Bad-aaaass back in Bengali, the P-Funk back in Pakistani.


5. Ethnicity and variation

Figure 8.1 Multiple negation in black and white Detroit speech. (This diagram was constructed from data in Shuy, Wolfram and Riley 1967)
5. Ethnicity and variation

Table 7.9 Final cluster simplification among black speakers in Washington, DC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% deleted</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>san(d) castle</td>
<td>after sonorant, before non-vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>fas(t) car</td>
<td>after non-sonorant, before non-vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>wil(d) elephant</td>
<td>after sonorant, before vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>lif(i) it</td>
<td>after non-sonorant, before vowel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on Wolfram and Fasold (1974, p. 102)

Wardaugh (1986:184)

Table 7.10 Final cluster simplification among black speakers in Detroit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper middle</th>
<th>Lower middle</th>
<th>Upper working</th>
<th>Lower working</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>burn(ed) up</td>
<td>-ed, before vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>col(d) out</td>
<td>not -ed, before vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>burn(ed) coal</td>
<td>-ed, before consonant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>col(d) cuts</td>
<td>not -ed, before consonant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on Wolfram (1969, pp. 59–69)

Wardaugh (1986: 185)
6. The origin of AAE

- **The Creolist Hypothesis** (e.g. Dillard)
  AAE developed from a creole (similar to Krio or Gullah) and underwent decreolization.

- **The Anglicist Hypothesis** (e.g. Bailey)
  The roots of AAE can be traced to the same sources as those of Anglo-American dialects.
  AAE and WAVE “and other varieties of English in the United States are outcomes of language contact. They are all outputs of the same restructuring equation; differences among them may be explained by assigning different values to its variables.” (Muwfene, 1996:233)

- **The Substratist Hypothesis**
  AAVE has only superficial similarity to English, but is structurally similar to West African languages (substrate).

- **The Founder Principle Hypothesis**
  African slaves adapted to the norms of the white founders of colonial America.

- **The Settler Principle Hypothesis**
  AAVE developed as a contact variety with Europeans (but not as a creole).

  Green (2004:78f.)
Summary

- Definition (race vs. ethnicity vs. acts of identity)

- ‘Ethnolect’ AAVE

- Linguistic clues

- Origin of AAVE

- Variation

- Exclusive vs preferential features

- Crossing & hybridity

Recommended Reading


Other ethnic varieties


References


