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"African American English and its Role in Hollywood Movies"

Abstract: African American Vernacular English (hereafter AAVE), also known as Ebonics, is a variant of English spoken in its majority by African American in the United States. This research paper will deal with the use of AAVE in some Hollywood movies. It studies its use by African American characters as a way to classify people into a specific social class. With this in mind, and in order to carry out this study, three African American actors, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman and Samuel L. Jackson, have been chosen. A total of eighteen movies in which the actors play different roles belonging to different social classes, and the specific use of English by the same African American actor, will be analyzed as a way to draw on the association of the use of Ebonics with different roles. Results will reveal the fact that AAVE is used as a degrading characteristic for an uneducated lower social class who belongs to a specific race versus the use of Standard English used for the opposite purpose.
Keywords: AAVE, Ebonics, Language and Social Class, Hollywood Movies, Standard English.

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African American English and its Role in Hollywood Movies

0. Introduction

The use of language, the attitude of the speaker, accent and the linguistic variety used are a traditional topics or psychological research, as it has been demonstrated that these features affect listeners' impressions (Giles, Hewstone, Ryan & Johnson, 1937). Nowadays, standard accents are still accepted and rated more positively than non-standard. We can find studies on how the use of non-standard English has affected even in the legal context (Kalin 1982 or Giles and Coupland 1991), where the jury's decision is significantly influenced by the English variety the defendant uses. Previous research has been done on the use of AAVE in Disney movies as a degrading form of stereotype, where characters were and are normally servants and, in some cases, thieves. It has never been the case of a Disney's princess or prince whose variety of English was AAVE. So far, no studies on the use of AAVE as a degrading stereotype in Hollywood movies have been carried out. Hence, the results of this research will contribute and throw further light on the study and the social development of AAVE as a non very positively accepted variety of English.

Authors like Mary Bucholtz, from the University of California, Santa Barbara, argue that " Hollywood's representations of AAVE do not only reduce the linguistic complexity of the variety, as other researchers have shown, but, thorough non-fluent cross-racial use of stereotypical features of AAVE, perpetuate language ideologies of AAVE as symbolic of coolness, physicality, and authenticity". Many African American writers have made extensive use of it in an attempt to create a unique identity and culture. Black preachers, singers (especially rappers), and comedians also use it for realistic or dramatic effect. Other scholars believe that the use of AAVE by whites reinforces boundaries between races. Nevertheless, for most people, black and white, it is considered as a crucial sign of uneducated lower social classes and a legacy from slavery .In this sense, this analysis proposes, and the results will further show, that the use the Hollywood movie industry does of AAVE is without any doubt that of a degrading stereotype of African American.

The present research paper centers around eighteen movies featuring African American actors, who play different social roles and use AAVE or Standard English depending on the specific role played. The movies have been analyzed from the language point of view and this study has focused only in some of the most relevant phonological and grammar features of AAVE in order to validate the English variety used. By carrying out this analysis, this paper will contribute to the study of AAVE and its use in a contemptuous way, versus Standard English as a positively accepted use connected to higher social classes and, above all, educated ones.

This study will first provide in its theoretical background an overview of AAVE and society analyzed from the sociolinguistic point of view; this will be followed by the different versions of the history of AAVE in order to have a better understanding of its origins, and to finish, a list of the most relevant characteristics of AAVE taken from John R. Rickford's *Phonological and Grammatical Features of African American Vernacular English* will be added. The next step will be to give detail on the methodology used with a list of the actors and movies chosen to carry out the study, followed by the analysis and results with a final conclusion will be included.

1. Theoretical Background/ History

1.1 AAVE and its social context.

Research on sociolinguistics (Lippi-Green 1994, Giles and Powesland 1975) suggests that "accent is an important indicator of one's ethnicity, regional affiliation and social class". Although some accents are almost imperceptible, individuals are still able to perceive and distinguish among different accents" (Cargile 2000; Giles, Williams, Mackie and Rosselli 1995). Some accents are more positively graded than others, based on the prestige of the class or group that possesses it (e.g., sophistication and politeness associated with British accent) (Ladegaard 1998). Besides, people also discriminate against the speakers with foreign accents as it is the case not only with African-American, but also with Indian and Mexican-American. People in general have a tendency to evaluate the speaker more severely upon their accent, when this one belongs to one of the mentioned above (Baugh 2000; Purkiss et al. 2000).

On December18, 1996, there was an attempt to recognize and introduce AAVE as a positive and not degrading variety of English. The Oakland school board stated a controversial resolution by recognizing the "legitimacy of Ebonics". The aim of the school board was to maintain "the legitimacy and richness of such language...and mastery of English language skills". There was a very positive response and resolution on the Oakland "Ebonics" issue, unanimously adopted at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, which stated: "The systematic and expressive nature of the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the AAVE has been established by numerous scientific studies over the past thirty years. Characterizations of Ebonics as 'slang,' 'mutan,' 'lazy,' 'defective,' 'ungrammatical,' or ' broken English' are incorrect and demeaning" (Linguist Society of America, Chicago, Illinois January 3, l997). Nevertheless, the resolution was not welcomed, and AAVE still remains today as a language stereotype referential for African American who are uneducated and belong to a lower class. According to professor Robin Tolmach Lakoff, and as she states on her book "Language an War" (2000. pp 3472), the reason why higher institutions do not want to recognized AAVE as formal dialect of Standard English is as follows: "The majority community is struggling to maintain its right to control language: in this case, to determine what form of the language is 'good' English, the form that is suitable for public discourse. Since the powerful have always had the right to make their form of language standard only publicly valid form, the converse must also hold true: if you can maintain your form of language as the only one that is valid, right, logical, and good, then you will legitimately continue to hold power".

1.2 Origins and History of AAVE.

Williams (1975) "Ebonics" finally gave a definition in 1975, *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks*, in which he classified Ebonics as the:

"linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendant of African origin" (Williams, 1975)

The original Ebonics wanted to reflect the linguistic results of the African slave trade. Before being named "Ebonics", there was no term to refer to this variety of English. It has been coined differently through the years from "Nonstandard Negro English" which was used in the 1960s, followed by "Black English" or "Black English Vernacular" in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally, "African American Vernacular English" (AAVE).

African American Vernacular English and its origins are still nowadays a very controversial issue due to the history of slavery (Wolfram and Torbert 1972, pp228).Yet, there are three theories on the development of AAVE: *the dialect hypothesis, the creole hypothesis* and *the process of second language acquisition.*

On the one hand, *the dialect hypothesis* emphasizes its English origins, providing the fact that most of the vocabulary of AAVE is from English, and its pronunciation and grammar could have come from the nonstandard dialects. Some scholars state that AAVE developed

out of the contact between speakers of West African languages and speakers of vernacular English varieties. According to this view, West Africans learnt English on plantations in the southern Coastal States (Georgia, South Carolina, etc.) from a very small number of native speakers (the indentured laborers, and other workers) (John R. Rickford, 2006)

The creole hypothesis states that AAVE has African origins due to the fact that some of the AAVE phonological and grammatical features also occur in US Ebonics and in West African English varieties spoken in Nigeria and Ghana. Moreover, it is argued that the distinction made between completed actions and habitual actions reflects the same use of these tenses in some African language system (Rickford, 1995).

The process of second language acquisition develops through processes of second language acquisition. This theory explains how West Africans newly arrived on plantations did not have access to learn English grammar because there was not enough native speakers. Thus, this community of second language learners probably acquired the English vocabulary that could be garnered from natives, and mix it with the few grammatical patterns which are common to West African languages. What linguists refer to as universal grammar (the law-like rules and tendencies which apply to all natural human language) surely played a significant role in such processes as well.

1.3 AAVE linguistic features.

AAVE controversy on its origins broke in December 1996; of course, the first thing to be done was to elaborate a list of features in order to prove its differences from Standard English. One of the most prestigious which was done at the time was the one published by Fasold and Wolfram (1970), but for the sake of methodological clarity "Phonological and Grammatical Features of African American Vernacular English" by John R. Rickford, Blackwell. 1999 has been followed, in which he even describes his as a compilation of the most relevant and relatively non-technical description of AAVE's features.

The most important and distinctive features along with the most relevant for this study are included in Rickford's work and listed below.

1.3.1 Distinctive phonological (pronunciation) features of AAVE.

- Reduction of word-final consonant clusters, especially those ending in *t* or *d* as in *"han"* for SE *"hand"* or "*des"* for SE "*desk"*, "*pass*" for "*passed*" (the -ed suffix in "*passed"* is pronounced as [t]).
- Deletion of word -final single consonant (especially nasals) after a vowel, as in *ma'* [mæ] for SE" *man"* or "*ca"* [kæ] for SE "*cat"*.
- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds, eg. *walkin* for SE *walking.*
- Deletion of initial d and g in certain tense aspect auxiliaries, as in" *ah 'on know"* for SE"*I don't know"* or "*an ah'm 'a do it"* for SE "*I'm gonna do it* ".
- Metathesis or transposition of adjacent consonants, as in *"aks"* for SE *"ask"* (one of the biggest shibboleths of AAVE, often referred to by teachers, personnel officers and other gatekeepers in the course of putting down a variety), and " *waps"* for SE "*wasp"*.
- Monophthongal pronunciations of "*ay"* and "*oy"*, as "*ah"* for SE "*I* "and "*boah* "for SE" *boy"*.
- Realization of " *ing"* as "*ang* "and "*ink"* as "*ank"* in some words, as in "*thang"* for SE "*thing"*, "*sang"* for SE "*sing"* and "*drank"* for SE "*drink*".(Smitherman 1986:18, Dandy (1991:46) in Rickford, 1999:203).
- More varied intonation with higher pitch range and more rising and level final contours than other American English varieties. (Wolfram et al, 1993:12;in Rickford 1977:205).
- Realization of voiceless *th* [θ] as *t* or ʃ, as in "*tin"* for SE "*thin"* and "*baʃ"* for SE "*bath".*

- More varied intonation, with "higher pitch range and more rising and level final contours" than other American English varieties (Wolfram et al.1993:12; in Rickford 1977:205).

1.3.2 Pre-verbal markers of tense, mood, and aspect.

- Absence of copula/auxiliary is and are for present tense states and actions, as in *"He Ɵ tall"* for SE *"He's tall"* or *"They Ɵ running"* for SE *"They are running.*(Labov 1969 and Rickford et al. 1988:143).
- Use of unstressed *been* or *bin* for SE *"has/ have been"* (present perfects), as in *"He been sick"* for *" He has been sick".*(Rickford, 1995:210).
- Use of come to express the speaker's indignation about an action or event, as in "*He come walkin in here like he owned the damn place*". (Spears 1982:852 in Rickford, 1999:215).

1.3.3 Other aspects of verbal tense marking.

- Absence of third person singular present tense -s, as in *"He walkƟ"* for SE *"He walks".* The use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* as in *"He don't sing"* or *have* instead or *has,* as in *"She have it"* is related, since *doesn't* and *hasn't* include 3rd person singular.(Fasold 1972:121-49 in Rickford, 1999:220).
- Generalization of *is* and *was* to use with plural and second person subjects (i.e., instead of *are* and *were*) as in *"They is some crazy folk"* for SE *"They are crazy folk"* or *"We was there"* for SE *"We were there".* (Wolfram 1993:14 in Rickford, 1999:221).

1.3.4 Nouns and pronouns.

- Use of y'all and they to mark second person plural and third plural possessive, respectively, as in *"It's y'all ball"* and "*It's they house*" for SE "*It's their house*".(Wolfram et al.1993:13-6 in Rickford, 1999:222).
- Use of object pronouns (me, him, and so on) after a verb as a personal datives *(="for) myself," "for) himself"* and so on) as in "*Ahma git me a gig"* for SE "*I'm going to get myself some support*" (Gumperz 1982b: 31, Wolfram 1993:16 in Rickford, 1999:222).

1.3.5 Negation.

- Use or ain'(t) as a general preverbal negator ,for SE*"am not", "isn't"*, *"aren't"*, *"hasn't", "haven't"* and *"didn't", as in "he ain here"* for SE " *he isn't here",* or "*he ain' do it"* for SE *"he didn't do it ".*
- Multiple negation or negative concord (that is, negating the auxiliary verb and all infinite pronouns in the sentence), as in *"he don' do nothin*" for SE *"he doesn't do anything*" (Labov 1972a, 1972c; 130-96 in Rickford, 1999:223).
- Use of ain't but and don't but for "only", as in "*he ain't but fourteen years old*" for SE "*he sis only fourteen years old*" or *"they didn't take but three dollars"* for *"they only tool three dolars"* (Wolfram et al. 1993:14 in Rickford, 1999:223).

Results from the analysis will further show that this stereotypical representation of AAVE in the selected, spoken especially among African Americans, is interpreted and associated to lower social classes, crime and ignorance. Ogbu (1999) argues that "AAVE carries racially affirmative political undertones as its use allows African Americans to assert their cultural upbringing". Nevertheless, Linnes (1998) observes that most African American speakers of AAVE are bidialectal, since they are able to use Standard American English when a linguistic adaptation is needed, for example: job interview, public speeches (when target audience varies in races), etc. This adaptation is called code-switching, and this adaptation itself proves the speaker's awareness of the negative connotations the use of AAVE carries.

2. Methodology

This study has centered in the linguistic analysis of three different African American actors using AAVE in different social roles and situations, with the purpose to prove that, in spite of

linguist's efforts to prove the contrary, the use of AAVE is still considered by the movie industry as a variety characteristic of a particular stereotype with negative connotations.

The movies selected for the study are as follow:

2.1 Actor Denzel Washington

TITLE OF MOVIE/ ROLE PLAY/AAVE USE	TITLE OF MOVIE/ ROLE PLAY/AAVE USE
Glory, 1989. Pvt. Trip, he is a soldier. AAVE use: Yes	The Pelican Brief, 1993. Gary Grantham, he is a lawyer. AAVE use: No.
He got game, 1990. Jake Shuttlesworth. AAVE use: Yes	Antwone Fisher, 2002. Dr. Jerome Davenport. AAVE use: No.
American Gangster, 2007. Frank Lucas, he is a gangster. AAVE use: Yes	Déjà Vu, 2006. Special Agent Doug Carlin. AAVE use: No.

2.2 Actor Morgan Freeman

TITLE OF MOVIE/ROLE PLAY/AAVE USE	TITLE OF THE MOVIE/ROLE PLAY/AAVE USE
Driving Miss Daisy, 1984. He is chauffeur. AAVE use: Yes	Amistad, 1997. He is a slave. AAVE use: Yes
Glory, 1989. He is a soldier. AAVE use: Yes	Deep Impact, 1998. President of the United States. AAVE use: No
The Shawshank Redemption, 1994. AAVE: Yes (code switching)	Oblivion, 2013. AAVE use: No

2.3 Actor Samuel L. Jackson

TITLE OF MOVIE/ROLE PLAY/ AAVE USE	TITLE OF THE MOVIE/ROLE PLAY/AAVE USE
Pulp Fiction, 1994. He is a murderer. AAVE use: Yes	Shaft, 2000. He is a detective. AAVE use: No
Jackie Brown, 1997. He is a drug dealer. AAVE use: Yes	Coach Carter, 2005. He is a basketball coach. AAVE use: No
Django Unchained, 2013. He is a old slave. AAVE use: Yes	Unthinkable, 2010. He is an FBI agent. AAVE use: No

The phonological and grammar features chosen in order to prove that the variety used by the actors in the different movies is AAVE are:

2.4 Distinctive phonological (pronunciation)

- Reduction of word-final consonant clusters, especially those ending in *t* or *d* as in *"han"* for SE *"hand"* or "*des*" for SE "*desk*","*pass*" for "*passed*"(the -ed suffix in "*passed"* is pronounced as [t]).
- Deletion of word -final single consonant (especially nasals) after a vowel, as in *ma'* [mæ] for SE "*man"* or "*ca"* [kæ] for SE "*cat"*.
- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds, eg. *"walkin"* for SE *"walking".*
- More varied intonation, with "higher pitch range and more rising and level final contours" than other American English varieties (Wolfram et al.1993:12; in Rickford 1977:205).
- Deletion of initial d and g in certain tense aspect auxiliaries, as in "*ah 'on know"* for SE "*I don't know"* or "*an ah'm 'a do it"* for SE "*I'm gonna do it ".*

2.5 Pre-verbal markers of tense, mood, and aspect.

- Absence of copula/auxiliary is and are for present tense states and actions, as in *"He Ɵ tall"* for SE *"He's tall"* or *"They Ɵ running"* for SE *"They are running.*
- Use of unstressed *been* or *bin* for SE *"has/ have been"* (present perfect), as in *"He been sick"* for *"He has been sick".*

2.6 Other aspects of verbal tense marking.

- Absence of third person singular present tense -s, as in *"He walkƟ"* for SE *"He walks".* The use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* as in *"He don't sing"* or *have* instead or *has,* as in *"She have it"* is related, since *doesn't* and *hasn't* include 3rd singular.

2.7 Nouns and pronouns.

- Use of y'all and they to mark second person plural and third plural possessive, respectively, as in *"It's y'all ball"* and "*It's they house*" for SE "*It's their house*".
- Use of object pronouns (me, him, and so on) after a verb as a personal datives *(="for) myself," "for) himself"* and so on) as in "*Ahma git me a gig"* for SE "*I'm going to get myself some support*".

2.8 Negation.

- Use or ain'(t) as a general preverbal negator ,for SE *"am not", " isn't", "aren't", "hasn't", "haven't"* and *"didn't", as in "he ain here*" for SE "*he isn't here",* or "*he ain' do it"* for SE *"he didn't do it ".*

Having explained the methodology to carry out the research, results will support the hypothesis regarding the use of AAVE, which is, as I have mentioned on my introduction, a variety of English that is used in Hollywood movies as a device to create a stereotype normally associated to social lower classes and uneducated African American.

3. Analysis and Results

The following transcriptions from the selected movies contain the phonological and grammar features chosen for this study in order to prove that the variety of English used is AAVE, and will provided enough information to validate the hypothesis of this research. It must be said, though, that according to Rickford, 1999*:* "AAVE is not a group of features put together, but is the used of those features together with distinctive AAVE words, prosodies and rhetorical/expressive styles, to inform, persuade, attract, praise, celebrate, entertain, etc..". Nevertheless, it is necessary to take into account before proceeding with the analysis that as Labov (1972e: 189) pointed out, "*AAVE speakers my alternate between vernacular and mainstream variants many times in the course of even a brief conversation*", this is what is known as "code switching".

3.1 Actor: Denzel Washington

Glory, 1989: Role played: soldier Trip.
The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Reduction of word-final consonant cluster: "han" for S.E "hand".
- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "hollerin', orderin' ", etc…
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Nouns and Pronouns: "y'all's" for S.E "you are".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.

Along with these features one of the most distinctive characteristics used by the character is the intonation and the level of final contours. Some other words are highlighted in red which belong to vocabulary.

Rawlins: Look, goddamn it! The whole world gotta stomp on your face?

Trip: Nigger, you better get your han off me!

Rawlins: Ain't no niggers around here! Understand?

Trip: Oh, Ah see, so the white man give you a couple a stripes, and suddenly you sta hollerin' and orderin' everybody around, like you the massa himself! Nigger, you ain't nothin' but the white man's dog!

Trip: Let me tell you something, boah. You can march like the white man, you can talk like him. You can sing his songs, you can even wear his suits. But, you ain't NEVER gonna be nothin' to him, than an ugly ass chimp… in a blue suit.

Trip: [addressing the 54th the night before battle] I ain't much about no prayin', now. I ain't never had no family, and… killed off my mama. Well, Ah just… Y'all's the onliest family I got. Ah love the 54th. Ain't even much a matter what happens tomorrow, 'cause we men, ain't we?

He Got Game, 1990: Role played: Jake Shuttlesworth, A basketball player's father who is in jail.
The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:
- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "shootin' "
- Nouns and Pronouns: "ya" for S.E "your".
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.
- Other aspects of verbal tense marking: "you's" for S.E "you are".

Something very relevant on this analysis is that, despite of the fact that not many features are used, the pitch intonation and the sermon style used by the character is very noticeable.

Jake Shuttlesworth: Number one, why you gotta use this kinda language? What you some kinda heathen now? You don't make no mistakes? You be out here shootin', but you don't miss no shots ever? EVER? People make mistakes! People veer off the path! God forgives them!

Jesus Shuttlesworth: Has God forgiven you for killing my mother?

Jake Shuttlesworth: Ah pray that he has, Son. Ah believe he has. When will you?

Jake Shuttlesworth: Ah pray you understand why Ah pushed you so hard! It was only to get you to that next level, Son. Ah mean, you's the first Shuttlesworth that's ever gonna make it out of these projects, and ah was the one who put the ball in ya hand, Son! Ah put the ball in your crib!

Jake Shuttlesworth: Ah want you to go to Big State, Son.

Jesus Shuttlesworth: Aw, Man, you just like everybody else.

Jake Shuttlesworth: No I'm not like everyone else, Son. Everyone else ain't your father.

American Gangster, 2007. Role played: Harlem gangster Frank Lucas.

The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "pumpin' "
- Nouns and Pronouns: "ya" for S.E "you".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.
- Other aspects of verbal tense marking: "Lucas don't" for S.E "Lucas doesn't".

An important comment must be said about this character. Although he is a gangster, he seems to be well educated and very intelligent. This is very important to prove the hypothesis of this study; the viewer will automatically classify the character to a lower social status just because the English variety used is not the mainstream one, in this case Standard English, contributing this way to create a stereotype.

Frank Lucas: See, ya are what ya are in this world. That's either one of two things: Either you're somebody, or you ain't nobody.

Frank Lucas: We ain't gon' do shit about it. Close it up. Throw it back in the trunk. Everybody go home. Have some pumpin pie, warm apple cider…

Frank Lucas: This is my home. My country. Frank Lucas don't run from nobody. This is America.

Frank Lucas: It don't mean nothing to me for you to show up tomorrow morning with your head blown off

The Pelican Brief, 1993. Role played: lawyer Gray Grantham.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

Gray Grantham: Do you want to talk about the brief?

Darby Shaw: Everyone I have told about the brief is dead.

Gray Grantham: I take my chances

Gray Grantham: I think that's also a question for Darby Shaw, but I know that she's not available to answer questions as long as this "feed frenzy" continues

Gray Grantham: Well with all due respects sir, that wasn't my line that was a quote.

Antwone Fisher, 2002. Role played: Dr. Jerome Davenport.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

Jerome Davenport: Where'd you spend your childhood?

Antwone Fisher: Cleveland.

Jerome Davenport: Parents still live there?

Antwone Fisher: I never had any parents.

Jerome Davenport: They deceased?

Antwone Fisher: I never - I never had parents.

Jerome Davenport: That would make you a medical miracle, Seaman Fisher. Where you from?

Antwone Fisher: I'm from under a rock.

Jerome Davenport: Okay!

Jerome Davenport: "Who will cry for the little boy, lost and all alone / who will cry for the little boy, abandoned without his own"

Jerome Davenport: "Regard without ill-will despite an offense." That's Webster's definition of forgiveness

Déjà Vu, 2006. Role played: detective Doug Carlin.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

Doug Carlin: What if you had to tell someone the most important thing in the world, but you knew they'd never believe you?

Claire Kuchever: I'd try.

Doug Carlin: For all of my career, I've been trying to catch people after they do something horrible. For once in my life, I'd like to catch somebody BEFORE they do something horrible, all right? Can you understand that?

Doug Carlin: Everything you have, you lose, right? Mother, father -gone. Good looks, Pryzwarra? - gone. Loved ones gone in a second. That's what this job teaches you, isn't it? No matter what, no matter how hard you grab onto something - you still lose it, right?

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3.2 Actor: Morgan Freeman
Driving Miss Daisy, 1989. Role played: chauffer Hoke Colburn.
The features that appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:
- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "drivin' ", etc...
- Reduction of word-final consonant cluster: "an" for S.E "and", etc..
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.
- Other aspects of verbal tense marking: ""ah takes" for S.E "I take".

Along with the features, we can find higher pitch range on his intonation; the southern accent of the character makes this case one of the most stereotypical ones.

Hoke Colburn: [on a pay phone calling Boolie after taking Daisy to the Piggly Wiggly] Hello, Mr. Werthan? Yeah, it's me. Guess where ah ma at? I jus' finished drivin' yo mama to da store.

Hoke Colburn: Oh, yeah, she flap around some, but she's all right, she in da store. Oh, Lord, she jus' looked out da window an' seen me on da phone… prob'ly gonna throw a fit right there at da checkout!

Hoke Colburn: You sho' right about that! Only took me six days. Same time it took the

Hoke Colburn: Hey, there, Oscar, Junior… how you boys doin' this morning?

Hoke Colburn: Lord, Ah tell you one thing… she sho' do know how to throw a fit!

Hoke Colburn: No, sir… it's hard not drivin'. Every now and then Ah takes a taxi cab, but don't too many taxis go out yonder.

Glory, 1989. Role played: Sergeant Rawlins.
The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "dyin' , *axkin' ", etc…
- Reduction of word-final consonant cluster: "hafta *ante*" for S.E "have to *end*", etc..
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.

*"<u>ax</u>kin' "metathesis or transposition of adjacent consonants. (AAVE feature, Rickford,1999).

It is necessary for the sake of the analysis to draw a comparison between the characters of this movie. Sergeant Rawlins uses less AAVE than soldier Trip (played by Denzel Washington), whereas Sergeant Rawlins believes in what they call the "white man" and the cause for fighting in the war, soldier Trip completely disagrees. Once again, those closer to speakers of Standard English are graded better than those who are not.

Rawlins: Ain't no niggers around here! Understand?

Rawlins: And what are you? So full of hate you want to go out and fight everybody! Because you've been whipped and chased by hounds. Well that might not be living, but it sure as hell ain't dyin. And dying's been what these white boys have been doing for going on three years now! Dying by the thousands! Dyin for *you*, fool! I know, 'cause I dug the graves. And all this time I keep askin' myself, when, O Lord, when it's gonna be our time? Gonna come a time when we all gonna hafta ante up. Ante up and kick in like men. LIKE MEN! You watch who you call a nigger! If there's any niggers around here, it's YOU. Just a smart-mouthed, stupid-ass, swamp-runnin' nigger! And if you not careful, that's all you ever gonna be!

John Rawlins: That's right, Hines. Ain't no dream. We runaway slaves but we come back fightin' men. Go tell your folks how kingdom come in the year of jubilee!

The Shawshank Redemption, 1994. Role played: prisoner Ellis Boyd 'Red' Redding. Code Switching.

The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "talkin' ", etc…

- Nouns and Pronouns: "y'all's" for S.E "you are".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.

In this movie we can find what is known as "code switching" where the character uses Standard English when talking to the Parole Hearings and AAVE with the rest of the inmates. The character uses what is socially considered more polite (S.E) when addressing to a group of white and high educated people, and non-polite when speaking to an uneducated group.

1967 Parole Hearings Man: Well, it means that you're ready to rejoin society…

Red: I know what *you* think it means, sonny. To me it's just a made up word. A politician's word, so young fellas like yourself can wear a suit and a tie, and have a job. What do you really want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?

1967 Parole Hearings Man: Well, are you?

Red: There's not a day goes by I don't feel regret. Not because I'm in here, or because you think I should. I look back on the way I was then: a young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I want to talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to

him, tell him the way things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone and this old man is all that's left. I got to live with that. Rehabilitated? It's just a bullshit word. So you go on and stamp your form, sonny, and stop wasting my time. Because

Red: These walls are funny. First you hate 'em, then you get used to 'em. Enough time passes, you get so you depend on them. That's institutionalized.

Red: What're ya'll talkin' about?

Red: The man been in here fifty years, Heywood. Fifty years! This is all he knows. In here, he's an important man. He's an educated man. Outside, he ain't nothin'! Just a used up con with arthritis in both han.

Amistad, 1997. Role played: educated ex-slave Theodore Joadson.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English. It is important to mention the fact that this character was a slave, but has been educated; therefore his English variety used is Standard English.

Theodore Joadson: They were first detained by officers of a brig off Long Island. They were conveyed to New Haven - under what authority, I don't know - and given over to the local constabulary. About forty of them, including four or five children. The arraignment is day after tomorrow. I can only assume that the charge is murder.

Tappan: I'll see what I can do about that

Theodore Joadson: …before their thirteen colonies could precisely be called United States. And that task, Sir, as you well know, is crushing slavery.

Deep Impact, 1998. Role played: President of the United States.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

President Beck: Now listen, young lady. This is a presidential favor. I'm letting you go because I don't want another headache. And I'm trusting you because I know what this can do for your career. Now, it may seem like we have each other over the same barrel but it just seems that way

President Beck: We always thought the deadline for public knowledge was the publication of next year's budget since we've spent more money than we can account for. That won't happen for two weeks. I don't suppose I could prevail upon you to wait two weeks in the name of national security?

Oblivion, 2013. Role played: wise man Bleech.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

Malcolm Beech: I've been watching you, Jack. You're curious. What are you looking for in those books? Do they bring back old memories? Don't ask too many questions. They lied to you.   It's   time   to   learn   the   truth
Malcolm Beech: [*to Jack*] If you're looking for the truth, that's where you'll find it.

Malcolm Beech: You had me worried for a second. I thought you weren't coming back.
Jack   Harper: Well,   I   had   to   prove   him   wrong.
Malcolm   Beech: You   look   like   shit.
Jack   Harper: Oh,   you   should   see   the   other   guy.
Malcolm Beech: If I'd told you what you'd find out there, you would've thought I was crazy.
Jack Harper: Oh, I still do

3.3 Actor: Samuel L. Jackson
Pulp Fiction, 1994. Role played: murderer Jules Winnfield.

The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "havin', eatin' ", etc…
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.

The most relevant characteristic on this character speech is higher pitch range and more rising and level final contours.
Jules: Good. Looks like me an Vincent caught you boys at breakfast. Sorry about that. Whatcha havin'?
Jules: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa… stop right there. Eatin' a bitch out, and givin' a bitch a foot massage ain't even the same fuckin' thin'.
Jules: Hey, sewer rat may taste like pumpkin pie, but Ah never know 'cause Ah wouldn't eat the filthy motherfucker. Pigs sleep and root in shit. That's a filthy animal. I ain't eat nothin' that ain't got sense enough to disregard its own feces.
Jackie Brown, 1997: Role played: drug dealer Ordell Robbie.

The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "getti', givin' ", etc…
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Nouns and Pronouns: "y'all's" for S.E "you are".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.
- Other aspects of verbal tense marking: "she start" for S.E "she starts".

Something relevant to mention about this movie and in relation with my hypothesis is the fact that AAVE is not only considered "bad English and a way to degrade its users" by white people as someone may think. But also by some African American, since the director of this film is Spike Lee who is well known for his continuous defense of African American rights.

Ordell Robbie: Goddamn girl, you gettin' high already? It's just 2 o'clock!

Ordell Robbie: Oh, ya'll a couple Cheech and Chongs, huh?

Ordell Robbie: Ah ain't come here to kill you…

Ordell Robbie: My money's in that office, right? If she start givin' me some bullshit about it ain't there, and we got to go someplace else and get it, Ahm gonna shoot you in the head then and there. Then Ahm gonna shoot that bitch in the kneecaps, find out where my goddamn money is. She gonna tell me too. Hey, look at me when ah talkin' to you, motherfucker. You listen: we go in there, and that nigga Winston or anybody else is in there, you the first motherfucker to get shot. You understand?

Ordell Robbie:. You believe this shit? Ingrate nigga! See? You bring a motherfucker up. Next thing you know, they breakin' ya off some goddamned disrespect.

Django Unchained, 2013. Role played: old slave Stephen.

The features which appear in this extract that determines that the variety used is AAVE are as follow:

- Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds: "doin'," etc…
- Distinctive phonological: "ah" for S.E "I".
- Nouns and Pronouns: "they" for S.E "them".
- Negation: use of "ain't" and double negatives.
- Use of stressed "bin" without "have": "she bin" for S.E "she has been".

This character is an old slave and very cruel, for the sake of space only a short fragment can be written, but for the analysis the whole movie has been taken into account, there is a lot of vocabulary distinctive of AAVE along with the higher pitch range.

Stephen: Uh, Hildi 'in the hot box.

Calvin Candie: Well what's she doin' there?

Stephen: What you think she doin' there, in the hot box? She bin punished!

Calvin Candie: Well what did she do?

Stephen: She run off again.

Calvin Candie: Jesus Christ, Stephen! How many people run away while ah was gone?

Stephen: Two.

Calvin Candie: Well when did she go?

Stephen: Last night. They brung her back this morning.

Calvin Candie: How long she bin in the box?

Stephen: How long you think she bin in there? All damn day!

Calvin Candie: Take her out.

Stephen: Seem like white folk ain't never had a bright idea in they life was comin' up with all kinds of ways to kill your ass. Now, mind you, most of them

Shaft, 2000. Role played: detective Shaft.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English. Although the character does not use any of the features, in some cases, when addressing to

street criminals, some higher pith range is used during his conversation. Another clear example of "code switching":

Peoples Hernandez: This is Egyptian Cotton, motherfucker... two-twenty thread. That's like half your shitty-ass paycheck, okay?

John Shaft: You wouldn't know Egyptian cotton if the Pharaoh himself sent it to you, you knockoff-wearing motherfucker!

John Shaft: I see you someplace I don't think you belong... I will kill you.

John Shaft: I know cats who'd take out whole zipcodes for that kind of cheese.

Coach Carter, 2005. Role played: basketball coach Mr. Carter.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English. One noticeable thing that can be analyzed is to see how he answers the same question he has just been asked, formulated with AAVE features, he responses with more or less the same question but formulated in Standard English, also noticed how the first time he answers with just "sir" pretending he has not understood him.

Kenyon Stone: [running Suicides] Yo, how many we gonna do?

Coach Ken Carter: Sir.

Kenyon Stone: Yo, sir, how many we gonna do?

Coach Ken Carter: Let's see how many you can do in... one hour and seven minutes.

Coach Ken Carter: [to the people in attendance at the board hearing] you really need to consider the message you're sending this boys by ending the lockout. It's the same message that we as a culture send to our professional athletes; and that is that they are above the law. If these boys cannot honor the simple rules of a basketball contract, how long do you think it will be before they're out there breaking the law? I played ball here at Richmond High 30 years ago. It was the same thing then; some of my teammates went to prison, some of them even ended up dead. If you vote to end the lockout, you won't have to terminate me; I'll quit.

Unthinkable, 2010. Role played: FBI agent Henry Harold 'H'.

No AAVE features are found in this movie, the character uses only Standard English.

H: Every man, no matter how strong he is, lies to himself about something. I will find your lie. I will break you

H: You do this and he'll say anything you want, and none of it will be true. Physical torture doesn't work.

H: So, uh, I guess that's why they've been using it since the beginning of human history, huh? For fun?

Agent Helen Brody: That's what makes you so special, is it? Our secret weapon against the enemy?

H: It's not about the enemy. It's about us. Our weakness. We're on the losing side, Helen. We're afraid, they're not. We doubt, they believe.

Agent Helen Brody: We have values.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to prove that, despite the efforts made by linguist and other organizations, such as the Oakland School Board or the Linguistic Society of America, African American English (AAVE or Ebonics) is still nowadays considered as a trade of slavery, and is interpreted by most listeners, at best, as a sign of ignorance.

The reason why this study has centered its research on Hollywood movies is because the movie industry in the United States tries to portray to the rest of the world a wishful society. The results from this study prove that, by reducing the use of AAVE to lower social classes an uneducated African American, Standard English is launched to the variety use by educated higher social classes.

Furthermore, and to add validity to the results, one of the movies analyzed provide a clear example of code-switching, as it is the case for "Shawshank Redemption" in which 'Red', role played by Morgan Freeman, uses AAVE to speak with the rest of the inmates and Standard English when addressing to the parole hearings. It has to be added that, in the movie "Amistad", the character Theodore Joadson, although a slave, has been educated by his master; this fact is very relevant for the results of this study, if it is taken into account the hypothesis of this paper, which is the use of Standard English only by educated people. Another important point that has to be mentioned is that the movie "Jackie Brown" was directed by Spike Lee, who is an African American film director known for his continuous defense of African American rights. In this movie the character chosen (Ordell Robbie) and the rest of the African American characters use AAVE all through the movie. The Linguistic Society of America on its Oakland resolution stated that: "*Characterizations of Ebonics as "slang," "mutant," "lazy," "defective," "ungrammatical," or "broken English" are incorrect and demeaning".* So the question is: Why someone who is an advocate of African American rights makes Ordell Robbie (a drug dealer) use AAVE?

Therefore, the results shown in the previous section, Analysis and Results, is the collected data which demonstrates that the variety of English AAVE is used by the movie industry as a portrayal of uneducated African American with lack of social status.

To conclude, it should be said that during the research process many other questions for future lines of research have arisen regarding AAVE from the linguistic and sociolinguistic point of view. These questions are: Is Standard American English a Variety of British English? Should the" black preaching style" be included on the list of AAVE features? Is African American voice and pitch intonation considered exclusive of AAVE users?

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