

**T.C.
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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN
ENGLISH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE FOR THE
CULTURE, PERSONALITY, IDENTITY OF BLACK AMERICANS**

M.A THESIS

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KABUL VE ONAY

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(YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ)
VAN YÜZÜNCÜ YIL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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**Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesinin Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Dilin Siyah Amerikalıların
Kültürü, Kişiliği, Kimliği Açısından Önemi**

ÖZET

Dil, sadece bir iletişim aracı olmaktan daha fazlasıdır. İnsanların duygularını, deneyimlerini ve fikirlerini ifade edebilmelerinin yanı sıra, dilin hayatın çeşitli alanlarına açılan başka pencereleri de vardır. Bir dilden bahsettiğimizde, o dilin konuşulduğu toplumun kültüründe ve onu konuşanların kişiliklerinde kilit bir role sahip olduğu gerçeğini göz ardı edemeyiz. Kullandığınız dil, kimliğiniz ve sahip olduğunuz geçmişiniz hakkında birçok ipucu verebilir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma kültür, tarih, kişilik ve kimlik açısından Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesine odaklanmaktadır. Konuştuğunuz dil; kültürünüzü, değerlerinizi, bakış açılarınızı ve kişiliğinizi etkiler. Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesi de diğer tüm diller gibi, Afrikalı-Amerikalı toplumunun gerçeklerini gösterir ve toplumun birçok geleneğini de yeni nesillere aktarır. Bu nedenle, Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesi, Afrikalı Amerikalıların kültürel ve tarihsel gelişimine eşlik etmiştir. Bu çalışma, Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesinin Afrikalı Amerikalılar için ne anlam taşıdığını ve onların belirli geleneklerini, değerlerini ve karakteristik özelliklerini nasıl yansıttığını tartışıyor. Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesi, Afro Amerikalıların çoğunun kullandığı dil olduğundan, ABD'deki Afro-Amerikalılar hakkında bize birçok ipucu sunar. Buna göre, bu çalışma aynı zamanda dil ve Afro- Amerikalılar arasındaki güçlü ilişkiyi ve siyah Amerikalıların kültürel değerlerini konuştukları dil ile nasıl ifade ettiklerini de irdelemektedir. Bu bakımdan, Afro-Amerikan İngilizcesi, Afrika kökenli Amerikalılar toplumunu bir bütün olarak temsil eder. Kısacası, bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Afrikalı Amerikalıların dilini, kültürünü ve edebi türlerini inceleyerek siyah toplumun kültür, kimlik, kişilik ve tarih gibi temel bileşenlerine ışık tutmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerel İngilizce, Kimlik, Kişilik, Kültür, Tarih

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**The Historical Development of African-American English and the Importance
of Language for the Culture, Personality, Identity of Black Americans**

ABSTRACT

Language is more than just being a communicative tool. People can express their feelings, emotions, experiences, and ideas. Furthermore, language has other windows that reflect several walks of life. If we mention a language, we cannot disregard the fact that each language has a key role in the culture of the society where it is spoken and the personalities of those who speak it. Furthermore, the language you use can reveal several clues about your identity and the history you own. In this respect, this study focuses on African American Vernacular English in terms of culture, history, personality, and identity. The language that you speak impacts your culture, values, perspectives, and personality. As to African American Vernacular English, like all other languages across the world, displays the realities of African Americans' society in the USA, as well as transmitting several conventions of society to the new generations. Therefore, African American Vernacular English has always contributed to African Americans' cultural and historical development. The study discusses what AAVE means for African Americans and how the language reflects their certain customs, values, and characteristic features. As African American Vernacular English is the language that most African Americans use, it presents a lot of insight into their society in the USA. Accordingly, this study also presents the strong relationship between the language and the black community and how black Americans incorporate their cultural values into their language. All in all, the goal of this study is to shed light on basic components of African Americans' society such as culture, identity, personality, and history by examining African Americans' language, culture, and literary genres.

Keywords : Vernacular English, Identity, Personality, Culture, History

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INDEX OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The acronyms that have been mentioned in this work, whose details are:

Acronyms

Details

USA

United States of America

AAVE

African American Vernacular English

SAE

Standard American English

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INTRODUCTION

African Americans have a rich and rooted tradition that accounts for African American literature and language. Since Africans place a great deal of importance on their ancestors' cultural heritage, language has always become a highly significant instrument to bridge their past and present. In this respect, African American Vernacular English is the unique language by which most African Americans not only preserve their history and customs but also convey several clues about their identity and personalities.

African American Vernacular English has drawn much interest lately. However, the majority of the studies focus on properties of African American Vernacular language, so there are relatively few studies that approach African American Vernacular language and the other aspects of black society as a whole. That's why this thesis will fulfill this shortage by providing information about language, cultural, and socio-cultural reflections.

Language is not just a tool that helps us communicate with each other as it reflects a myriad of elements about the society in which it is spoken. Accordingly, this thesis will present a distinct perspective by combining the key factors in which African American Vernacular English plays a role. That is, you will both have knowledge about African American English and other traits of Black Americans by means of this study.

The study encompasses both the features of African American Vernacular English and its effects on society in the different realms of life. My intention is to bring together several components of the African Americans community with the help of examining African American Vernacular English. The language you use not only helps you communicate but also carries the heritage and history that you have inherited from your ancestors. In this respect, this thesis will attempt to display the role of African American Vernacular English on African Americans in terms of history, culture, personality, and identity. African American Vernacular English is the language that most African Americans still use in the USA, therefore we believe that it is worth being studied. The primary goal of this thesis is to analyze the

function of African American English as a means of transmitting culture, history, personality, and identity.

Language is a mirror to society as it reflects a number of aspects of the community. For this reason, if you want to learn about African Americans and their culture, studying their language will be one of the best instrument to make use of. In accordance with this reality, this thesis will help you realize the intertwined relationship between African American Vernacular English and social issues.

To sum up, this thesis aims to bring out a study with a distinctive perspective on African American Vernacular English, and this study will be an encouraging example for those who intend to study this subject in the future.



CHAPTER I

1. WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

The history of languages can be traced back to the dawn of humanity. Namely, language is arguably one of the most fundamental things without which human beings cannot survive. In this respect, language has always been an indispensable part of all the communities around the world. Additionally, language provides the flexibility to the speakers of it to adjust to the new norms. Therefore, we can say that language is one of the keys to the progress of humankind.

As to the definition of language, the common one is that it is a combination of grammar, sounds, and rules that help us communicate. However, language is the thing that distinguishes human beings from other species. In this sense, language makes us what we are. Language creates the base on which civilizations rise.

Each language in the world owns its unique history and features that let them stand out. Likewise, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) reflects the history and culture of the black community in the USA. Even though it has a rich background and long history, most of the studies on this language have been conducted in recent decades. Actually, AAVE was disregarded for a long time before African American slaves began to gain their freedom. In other words, prior to the abolishment of slavery, the use of this language was restricted and there was a prohibitive attitude towards its use.

In modern times, the reality of AAVE has been accepted widely in the USA as well as other parts of the world. It is an undeniable fact that it possesses a rich corpus and long history. Moreover, the features that prevail in this language are distinct. To prove the existence of such a language, several theories have been put forward so far. In general terms, it is regarded as the language of African American society in the USA.

1.1. What is AAVE?

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is the language that African Americans mostly speak in addition to the ones who come from different nationalities and typically belong to the labor class in the USA. Mufwene defines AAVE; "As to the question what AAVE is, it is the language African Americans speak. In fact, this definition is the one that the majority of people think" (Mufwene, 1984, p. 21). However, not all African Americans use AAVE, similarly, all those who speak AAVE are not black Africans.

Despite the fact that there are different names that are used for African American English, the most common term is AAVE. The other names for African American English include Ebonics, Black Vernacular, Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, Negro Dialect, Negro Nonstandard English, Black Communications, Black Dialect, American Negro Speech, Black Street Speech, and Black English.

Even though several people in the USA label it as broken English or bad English, even they consider it as a sign of being ignorant and being illiterate, it actually has distinctive vocabulary, grammar, and accent. A language variety is typically associated with a community of speakers and, in many communities, a language means no more than the particular way its members speak (Mufwene, 1984, p. 21). Yet, the use of AAVE is largely limited to informal environments. Namely, speakers of AAVE tend to use Standard English when they are in the official environments.

1.1.2. The Rise of AAVE

African American Vernacular English is the common name that has long been used even though Ebonics has also been used. Yet, the debate about where AAVE comes from and how the language has emerged as one of the everlasting are the issues on which experts have not agreed. In this respect, most researchers suggest that the earlier periods of immigration from Africa might have been the starting point for the emergence of AAVE. Yet Mufwene opposes the notion that AAVE has evolved from SAE uniformly, in contrast; he maintains that AAVE has

occurred as a consequence of interactions among Africans and local people (Mufwene, 2015, p. 57).

Throughout history, several languages in the world have changed and borrowed structures or words from each other. And this natural process is valid for AAVE and its evolution as Vernacular English emerged by adopting some features of English at the time and African slaves combined these features with the native languages they used while they were the majority on the plantations fields and working for the landlords. Mufwene clarifies this evolution by stating that African slaves formed the basis of AAVE by adding some features that were compatible with their native varieties (Mufwene, 2015, p. 57). The notable places where Africans first arrived include Virginia and South Carolina; thus, both these destinations played a big part in the emergence of AAVE. Especially Virginia and Carolina were the main farmlands for the plantation of cotton, namely they needed African slaves more than any other colony in the USA at that time. As a result, as slaves flocked to these places, the communication problem turned out. Africans were forced to adopt the language the majority used then. However, they did not give up using their mother languages, particularly when they were working in the plantation areas as the majority. As time elapsed, African slaves acquired their freedom, which meant that they also had the freedom to use their native languages. During the first periods of colonization, slaves were not distributed equally across the New World. Naturally, this provided the opportunity to keep using their African languages. Nonetheless, there was not only a common African variety that was spoken by slaves. That's why slaves both borrowed features from each other's language and the landlords'. During the early times, African slaves were the minority, so they had to adopt some features from other African varieties and SAE. Mufwene claims that there was a great demand for tobacco workers across the southern colonies, which led to the slave population dispersing across the southern regions. Yet, in the first place, the ratio of slaves in the total population was relatively small, and thus they had to adopt language of the white community. As a consequence, the conditions during the first periods of slavery were not favorable for AAVE to prevail (Mufwene, 2015, p. 59).

There is almost the same natural process for each unique language to develop as it has happened to AAVE because it has emerged as a consequence of interaction among Africans themselves and other communities throughout history. However, we don't know for sure to what extent and which languages or creoles impacted the evolution of AAVE. One of the notable theories on the emergence of AAVE is that AAVE has risen on its African roots. That is to say, African slaves clung to their native languages in spite of all the oppression against them.

Perhaps the most recurred dilemma about the evolution of AAVE is what percentage of African dialects may be the source for the rise of AAVE or whether SAE takes a greater place in the process. And some features that have survived to this date imply that it shares a lot of similar aspects with some languages from the African continent.

In the course of the slavery period, a large number of Africans arrived in the USA, which resulted in the necessity for them to communicate with the local people. At this point, Africans synthesized their languages with English by blending the features of both languages, namely they created an artificial tool that is called Pidgin. In fact, pidgins are the pioneer process for many languages to emerge as separate ones in time. A pidgin is usually temporary, but as parents pass this pidgin to their children, it becomes a Creole language, after that the creole paves the way to a permanent language. In other words, we can comprehend that AAVE most probably has such a process: from a pidgin to a separate language. Livingston suggests that African slaves brought out AAVE by adopting English, and he mentions this process as the Americanization of the language. However, African dialects play a large part in this process. The current distinct features of AAVE confirm that the slaves' languages provided the basis for the occurrence of AAVE (Livingston, 2005, p. 221).

The probable hypothesis to establish the exact origins of AAVE stresses that African slaves were exposed to discrimination and segregation, which in turn gave rise to the emergence of AAVE as they did not have much conversation with the native speakers of SAE. Namely, the first form of AAVE has mainly been based on slaves' mother languages as well as adopting some features of English. Yet, later periods created circumstances in which this language flourished as a result of

interaction between African slaves and the white population. To sum up, the conditions during and after slavery periods contributed to the rise of Vernacular English.

1.1.3. The Slavery Period

The enslavement of Africans dates back to the late 16th century and the early 17th century. In this respect, a group of 20 Africans was brought to the New World in 1619 marking the beginning of slavery. In the beginning, A few Africans were captured and brought to the New World. However, the main motive behind the occurrence of slavery was the need for laborers who could work in the plantation fields, and of course, the cost should be inexpensive, that's why African slaves were like such a matchless opportunity for landlords at the time. In fact, the large flock of slaves to The USA provided the conditions in which especially southern colonies could flourish.

Although the number of African slaves reached some serious ratio, they had almost no rights that whites enjoyed. And almost all of the slaves were working under inhumane conditions and such rights as education, health and law were beyond their imagination since they were mostly seen as property by their landlords. Moreover, landlords adopted a policy that aimed to control the slaves in every realm of life. To enforce their power, they made up some brutal codes that made life for Africans unbearable. For example, the slaves had no right to read and write and they were supervised by their masters all the time. Namely, the landlord could punish the slaves on arbitrary grounds, and no law or authority was available to protect the slaves from the wrath of their masters. The culture of African people has survived all the oppression thanks to the fact that Africans have been able to preserve their language, namely AAVE because the language is quite dynamic and AAVE contains the basic codes of Africans' culture and manners. Williams summarizes the function of the language during this hard time by stating that the communication through their language helped the slaves survive the inhumane circumstances they were exposed to. Thus, the conversation among slaves who came from different parts of Africa with distinct languages created an atmosphere in which AAVE emerged (Williams, 2014, p. 90).

AAVE had rich content such as proverbs, morals values, and ethics as it has now. Particularly, African oral tradition and storytelling were the basic means that gave rise to the emergence of AAVE. In addition, music and folk dances were indispensable components of African culture. During the time slaves worked and were at home, they preferred to speak their native languages despite all the bans that were implemented to restrict the use of any languages other than English. Williams notes that although slaves had to adopt English while they laboring for whites, most of the young slaves should be bilingual and even some multilingual, but they often used AAVE at home (Williams, 2014, p. 92). Thus, the slaves' families played a vital role in preserving and passing AAVE to the new generations.

As Africans have never given up their traditions, they have preserved their language despite all the hardship that they experienced during the early periods of slavery. Williams contends that as Africans borrowed words and expressions from each other's dialects along with the languages whites and Native Americans spoke then, the early form of AAVE started to develop on these grounds (Williams, 2014, p. 91). In this respect, indeed the experiences during slavery contributed to the evolution of AAVE even though there were several restrictions against slaves' practices. As well as having a significant impact on the language spoken there, AAVE has contributed to several realms of daily life. Just as Africans have played a crucial role in the economic growth of America, they have also played a key role in the culture of America. Africans have played both a key role in the culture of America and a crucial role in the economic growth of America, too.

To sum up, AAVE had a dynamic process during the early periods of slavery, and as a result of interactions, it has emerged among Blacks who come from different parts of Africa with separate languages.

1.1.4. AAVE and Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance is one of the most significant periods for African Americans in terms of language, literature, and culture. The Harlem Renaissance that is a revival, especially in literature was a movement that contributed to the development of African Americans' culture, social lives, literature, and art. As language and literature are two close realms that nourish one another, the familiarity

Harlem Renaissance got paved the way to the recognition of AAVE across the USA and the rest of the World.

Harlem is the name of the place where some black people who had relatively satisfactory economic conditions migrated. Howes suggests that Harlem was a prosperous and rewarding place, which is why, a lot of Africans who migrated to Manhattan gathered this small district (Howes, 2001, p. 11). However, it was not easy for them to convince the majority who were dominantly white Americans as whites opposed to the moving of black to their neighbor. In spite of all the impediments by whites, African Americans managed to move from the south to the north and got a permanent dwell there. Consequently, there was a great migration among blacks thanks to the encouragement by the notable pioneer W.E.B Du Bois. Howes states that; “Perhaps the most significant of these older figures was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who was then (and is now) recognized as the leading black intellectual of the early twentieth century” (Howes, 2001, p. 13).

Due to uncomfortable circumstances World War I brought about, a large number of blacks who resided in the southern states at that time headed for the northern states that were better than the former in terms of economy and social life. And, most of these immigrants gathered in Harlem, which naturally provided an environment where the blacks could speak and use their language and perform some artistic practices. Harlem district was the most prominent one that drew black immigrants from the southern colonies, yet it was not the only place that witnessed such a movement as people from Africa and Europe were influenced by this cultural movement. Hutchinson states that the Harlem Renaissance was predominantly in Harlem as well as Lagos, Paris, Marseille, and Kingston. Actually, one could see the effect of the Harlem Renaissance at the time (Hutchinson, 2007, p. 4).

Harlem Renaissance has contributed to several realms of the black community in education, economy, literature, and language. Belonging to this movement, Africans had the opportunity to make their literature and language known both in the USA and worldwide. Despite the negative image against AAVE and its speakers, the movement helped break taboos towards Africans.

1.1.5. The Speakers of AAVE

Most African-Americans speak AAVE even though there are some exceptions, for instance, some members of other communities who reside next to black people can also use AAVE. Yet, it is commonly labeled as the language of Africans. According to Smitherman; the answer to the question of who speaks this language may be African Americans from all walks of life. Namely, Africans who maybe preachers, politicians, musicians, or lay people usually speak AAVE (Geneva, 2006, p. 18). Nevertheless, not all African Americans speak AAVE, as some of the Africans have adopted SAE and generally avoid speaking their language since it may lead to some negative implications in society. Actually, this negative image has been established by the mainstream American white people.

The speakers usually acquire it by their peer influence as AAVE is often spoken at home and across the neighborhood, but especially African parents struggle to make their children speak SAE since speaking AAVE at school may hinder their education process. Yet anyway, it seems to be impossible to ignore AAVE because most of the black youth usually express themselves in this language, and even at school when they are together, they prefer to use AAVE rather than SAE. However, some may abstain from using it for the sake of their academic career or formal education. Black people sometimes may hesitate about whether they should speak AAVE or SAE, Smitherman calls this “push and pull” (Geneva, 2006, p. 6).

Another factor, which compels African young teenagers to speak AAVE by their black mates, is to be frequently humiliated by their friends if someone from their kin tries to speak SAE like a native white speaker. And this naturally has paved the way for the acquisition of AAVE among African children despite all the negative attitudes towards AAVE speakers.

1.1.6. The Names for AAVE

The naming of the language of African Americans has gone through a long process, that is; AAVE did not turn up instantly because before the term “AAVE” there were some other names scholars used while debating the language issue. As a matter of fact, the periods in which AAVE was being debated also determined the name for Africans’ language, to illustrate; throughout the early periods of slavery,

Africans were often labeled as negro, therefore their language was called “Negro English”. Green suggests that early names for AAVE stress the link between age and the general perception towards Africans (Green L. , 2002, p. 6).

The names for AAVE also hint some clues about the development of Vernacular language, in other words; we can realize whether AAVE has emerged as a result of English impact or African native dialects. For example, if the word does not include English roots or affixes, it means that the period and the word imply that it is different from SAE, and has been developed out of African origins. Green lists such names as follows; “Negro Dialect, American Negro Speech, Black Communications, Black Folk Speech, Black street speech, and Black dialect” (Green L. , 2002, p. 7). If the name for African language contains the words such as Black or Negro, it means that the name was used for a period in which there was racism and segregation against African Americans.

Some names that were used for Africans’ language include “English”, which means that African Vernacular language has stemmed from English, that is; Vernacular Language is a dialect of SAE. Such names are listed by Green as follows;

Negro English
Nonstandard Negro English
Negro English
American Negro speech
Black English
Black English Vernacular
Black Vernacular English
Afro American English
African American English
African American Language
African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Green L. , 2002, p. 7).

Perhaps one of the most familiar names for African American Vernacular English is the term *Ebonics*. The term has been coined to impede the negative connotations that are related to the words in the listed names above. John R. Rickford describes the use of *Ebonics* as follows:

The term was created in 1973 by a group of black scholars who disliked the negative connotations of terms like 'Nonstandard Negro English' that had been coined in the 1960s when the first modern large-scale linguistic studies of African American speech-communities began. However, the term Ebonics never caught on among linguists, much less among the general public. That all changed with the 'Ebonics' controversy of December 1996 when the Oakland (CA) School Board recognized it as the 'primary' language of its majority African American students and resolved to take it into account in teaching them standard or academic English. Most linguists refer to the distinctive speech of African

Americans as 'Black English' or African American English (AAE) or, if they want to emphasize that this doesn't include the standard English usage of African Americans, as 'African American Vernacular English' (AAVE). In theory, scholars who prefer the term Ebonics (or alternatives like African American language) wish to highlight the African roots of African American speech and its connections with languages spoken elsewhere in the Black Diaspora, e.g. Jamaica or Nigeria. But in practice, AAVE and Ebonics essentially refer to the same sets of speech forms. (Rickford J. R., 2022)

More or less, the names that have been in use for AAVE mention about the same thing, namely AAVE. However, each name for AAVE signifies the soul of the period in which it arose. And some names may indicate the varieties of this language since it may differ according the region where it is spoken.

1.1.7. Dialect, Slang or Vernacular

AAVE has been the subject of several studies recently partly due to the fact it influences almost all walks of African Americans' lives. Moreover, as well as old African generations, AAVE is quite popular among young African Americans and even non- African communities. AAVE both includes the features of African languages and SAE, that's why; it has always caught the attention of people who are interested in studying languages. Naturally, AAVE has passed through several phases, each of which has added some new features to it. And, the names that have been in use for this language have varied in the course of history. The reason for this variance is the fact that each period had a different political and social atmosphere. For instance, the slavery period was the hardest time for the speakers of AAVE as there were strict restrictions on African culture, language, and rights. After the slavery period, much as there was relatively less oppression towards African Americans, they still had difficulty in getting their language accepted.

The question of whether AAVE is a distinct language, dialect, vernacular, or slang is still being debated. AAVE cannot be regarded as Slang, because it owns authentic features in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. Rickford describes Slang vocabulary as follows; "Slang is a collection of newly coined and short-lived words existing within a dialect or language" (Rickford J. , 1997, p. 1).

As for dialect, it is defined as a variation of SAE and it is regarded as informal language. There may be differences between dialects of SAE depending on the region where the dialect is used. In this respect, with an attempt to clarify the distinction between a language and a dialect, Wolfram and Shillings suggest that;

The dialect can be defined as a form speech which is different from the standard language or can be a variety of standard language but with some altered features. Lastly; dialect may be regarded as an imperfect and corrupted version of standard language by deviating (Wolfram & Schilling, 2006, p. 4).

Perhaps, the best term to describe the status of AAVE has been “Vernacular” as it is widely used with the language African Americans speak nowadays. A vernacular language means that the mentioned language is spoken in a certain or narrow community. Furthermore, Vernacular with its literal meaning emphasizes the fact that the role of native languages in shaping the contemporary form of language is more prevalent. In this sense, Vernacular is a term for a type of speech, generally used to refer to a local language or dialect. Another definition of vernacular language is that a vernacular language has nothing to do with deviation from a standard language.

Despite all efforts, there is no consensus on what the status of AAVE should be. However, linguist Chomsky advocates the idea that AAVE is not a variety of SAE but a distinct language that has its own unique features. And this perspective is getting more and more ground these days as African American Vernacular English has become the common name for the language that is spoken by Africans since the second half of the 20th century.

CHAPTER II

2. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

When people move to other parts of the world, they also take their languages with them. Similarly, the first African American slaves communicated with each other through their native languages. Yet, as people change and adapt to new places, their languages undergo some change as well. Thus, AAVE carries both its roots from the African continent and the New World.

Language is a dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, the language development of AAVE is still in progress. Nevertheless, several hypotheses have been put forward with the aim of tracing the roots of the language. In fact, each of the hypotheses has some credible points that shed light on the development of AAVE. Yet, African Americans did not have access to education in their language and the freedom to use it. As a result, even though AAVE has long been a part of American society, only recently, serious attempts have been observed in terms of the recognition of this language.

2.1. The History of African American Vernacular English

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is one of the most debated languages with regard to its history and development. Wolfram and Thomas suggest; "Since the second half of 19th century, the hypotheses on the early development of AAVE have changed dramatically" (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002, p. 25). Although the question of how and where AAVE originated still remains controversial, scholars have put forward a few possible hypotheses to shed light on the historical development of AAVE. Accordingly, one of the claims is that it has emerged as a result of the contact between West Africans and speakers of AAVE. According to Green; "AAVE has similar patterns with early forms of English" (Green L. J., 2002, p. 9). The ones who support this hypothesis contend that AAVE has stemmed from Creole Origin Hypothesis. Green argues that its origins date back to the periods in which African slaves were compelled to learn the language of their masters and white servants with whom they worked. Some historical accounts of early AAVE shows that AVVE has distinctive patterns that are common in the Niger-Congo languages such as Kikongo, Mande, and Kwa. Namely, this view suggests that

AAVE shares structural patterns with West African Languages; but it has only some superficial similarities to general English (Green L. J., 2002, pp. 8-9)

The other common hypothesis that critics advocate is Dialect Divergence Hypothesis that maintains that AAVE has diverged from Southern American English between the 17th and 18th centuries. However, neither the Dialectologist nor Creolist Hypothesis has established the issue satisfactorily. That's why, as has been the case in the last century, the attempts to clarify the origins of AAVE seem to never slow down until scholars have grounded the matter convincingly.

In order to provide a comprehensible explanation of the origins of AAVE, some experts take socio-historical and linguistic fields into consideration. One prevalent theory on the reconstruction of the early development of AAVE states that the early socio-historical experiences of slaves who were brought to the new world are essential to establishing the early genesis of AAVE. Notably, the socio-historical background of AAVE offers some plausible clues that mostly assert that the British settlers' dialect was one of the main sources in the evolution of this language. Nevertheless, the proof that early British settlers had an impact on the dawn of AAVE is a bit weak even though there is some truth as to the inputs that it borrowed from these early British settlers. Yet, to what extent British settlers impacted AAVE needs further study. Unfortunately, not having adequate records of early forms of AAVE between the 17th and 18th centuries creates an impediment to proving this task. Thomas and Wolfram contend that as the recorded speech of African Americans is mainly based upon the written version, particularly the written accounts between the 17th and 19th centuries are problematic in terms of historical linguistics. In fact, the writers of Vernacular English mostly had difficulty in this variety. The major problem is that since the writing has been done in formal language, it might suppress the use of Vernacular English. Moreover, being literate was rare for African slaves due to the fact that literacy was prohibited for the majority of black slaves. And also, only the most educated Africans could read and write at the time; that's why it was less likely to use Vernacular variety as educated ones mostly preferred Standard English in writing. (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002, p. 15)

Where the earlier forms of AAVE were seen could help trace back the origins of AAVE. As it is generally known, the earliest forms of AAVE were seen in the South of American Colonies, such as Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina. Researchers mostly agree that the main early places in which AAVE was used are The Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, and South Carolina. In this respect, since the Black population was densely spread across the southern colonies and outnumbered the whites, these colonies were the early centers that gave rise to the development of AAVE in the 17th and 18th centuries. The number of slaves increased incessantly, until the American Revolution and in 1790 the majority of the slaves were working in the tobacco fields, particularly in places such as Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina (Lanehart S. L., 1984, p. 77).

In the earlier of the 17th century, while colonies in the South were settling, Africans accounted for a small portion of the population. However, in the years of the second half of the 17th century, the number of black immigrants and slaves rose, and as they worked with white servants at the time, they began to pick up their dialects. As of the late of the 17th century, a large number of African slaves were brought to America from notably the Caribbean and Africa, as a result, the population started to increase naturally, thus this provided a convenient environment for AAVE to emerge.

Another place, which attracted African servants, was Virginia. In addition to the slaves who were brought to the USA, Africans migrated to this colony largely from the beginning of the 17th century. Apart from Virginia, Maryland was one of the centers in which the number of black servants rose significantly. In the first place, as Africans were outnumbered by white servants, there was a must for them to embrace the language of white settlers. Additionally, Africans adopted some customs of white people because they contacted them frequently as a part of their work. In the following years after the first African settlers, as the development in these places was fast and dynamic, the need for a workforce was vital, namely, this demand speeded up the flood of African servants, and the arrival of African slaves speeded. Naturally, this led to a drastic fluctuation in the population of Africans. Most of the earlier African settlers became rich and got their freedom. Thereby they had a chance to use their language more freely.

The increase in the African population starting in the early the 17th century started to impact the language of white settlers. However, the language that Africans spoke was categorized as broken English or non-standard English. Another claim is that English that they used to be a form of Africanized English that was a mix of local languages and English. Nevertheless, the youth in the Black community in the USA acquired English more easily but the effect of their ancestors' language didn't disappear. Most of the slaves were adults who were imported from Africa, thus the dominant language was the early form of AAVE.

Language shapes people as much as people alter it to meet their needs. Therefore, socio-historical circumstances, which African Americans experienced during the early periods of colonization and slavery, portray how it has evolved in the course of history. However; the claim that the Creole language was the start point that led to AAVE is not convincing for some scholars who are affluent in the study of AAVE. Instead, a more acceptable notion is that AVVE has emerged as a result of convenient conditions that enabled Black Americans to pick up the white settlers' language and reform it by mixing their own language and English. Consequently, the majority of the features that prevail in AAVE are based on British English that is mainly spoken by white settlers in the south of the USA from the 17th to 18th century.

The migration of Africans from the southern colonies to the other states promoted the spread of AAVE. This process began about the third decade of the 18th century when African Americans moved toward some states such as West Virginia and Kentucky, Carolina, and Georgia. Although the impact of this migration event on language has not been studied yet, it is certain that migration played a key role in the historical development of AVVE. A similar example took place when both white and black workers migrated from the Atlantic South to the Gulf States. The main cause of this migration was the demand for workers who would labor in farming. This demand also speeded the transportation of slaves to this area.

The origins of AAVE lie in the records that include slaves' speech in the 19th century. That's why the texts from this period provide a significant source to trace back the origins of AAVE. However, as African Americans headed for the urban

areas in the late years of the 19th century, the development of AAVE accelerated as a result of the influence of SAE.

Naturally, languages affect each other as cultures do. For this reason, it was inevitable for speakers of early AAVE to be influenced by the language and customs of white settlers. Nonetheless, it was quite normal for them to be forced to the common language other than theirs, at first, as the black folk were the minority. However, deciding the extent of the bilateral influence is quite difficult although there have been several attempts by scholars to figure out this issue. As well as British English, some other factors promoted the construction of AAVE, namely African roots and internal elements were among the main components that shaped the reforming of AAVE. In fact, the hypotheses and socio-cultural factors altogether present a comprehensive base for the explanation of AAVE.

As language is dynamic, we can't clarify the origins of AAVE just by analyzing certain periods in history. Hence such an approach excludes many clues about the roots of AAVE. That is, all the socio-cultural elements have something with the reconstruction of AAVE to some extent. For example, religion and interracial marriages have influenced the content and development of AAVE.

2.1.1. Creolist Hypothesis

According to this view, AAVE is a language, which emerged as a result of the contact between Africans and Americans; and the proponents of this hypothesis suggest that a creole language created a base on which AAVE developed. Lanehart states that; "Along the southern colonies, the population of African Americans comprised the majority, which was why a particular interaction between Blacks and Whites came out. Namely, this was a kind of creole language" (Lanehart S. L., 1984, p. 77). When people who belong to different communities reside in the same place and if they don't speak the same language, naturally a creole language comes out. During this process, a pidgin that enables people with different languages to communicate develops. That is, a pidgin is the combination of the languages both sides use. That's why a pidgin is actually a temporary practical tool that helps communication for basic needs. Nevertheless, if a pidgin prevails and becomes a

functional one, it leads to the occurrence of a creole. Charles De Bose remarks on this issue as follows:

As African slaves settled in American colonies, their languages were often unfamiliar to their neighbours. As a result; the limited English they had was the only tool to communicate with Whites. Naturally this language deficit compelled them to use some pidgin languages which served as a tool for daily communication. And as younger generations acquired these pidgins, the process of creolization emerged. (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 101).

Those who advocate the Creolist Hypothesis as the genesis of AAVE claim that it has common features with the creoles that are related to English. Additionally, the advocates of this hypothesis suggest that the development of AAVE began in the southern colonies as a result of interaction between Blacks and Whites.

According to this hypothesis, Gullah, which is still spoken by African Americans in some places in the USA, was the starting point that led to the evolution of AAVE. And there is some evidence that proves this point of view. For example, the speakers of Gullah have preserved the unique aspects of the language thanks to the fact that they have had little contact with the other parts of the country, which most probably helps Gullah keep its original form, and thus Gullah hasn't adopted the features of SAE. Moreover, some linguists claim that the African Americans who were born in the American colonies used the creole language instead of SAE because they had almost no formal education.

As circumstances have compelled the speakers of this creole to contact other people, their creole language has borrowed some features of SAE and other dialects. Moreover, the creole features are seen in the current form of AAVE. Actually, the creolists had both linguistics and historical proofs for supporting their claim. Yet, the records that go back to slaves' experiences do not provide enough evidence to prove the hypothesis. As a result, this view hasn't got sufficient acceptance among contemporary critics.

2.1.2. Anglicist/Dialectologist Hypothesis

African American Vernacular English has a long history, which is why it is challenging to trace back its origins. In an attempt to establish the historical development of AAVE, over the last century, a few hypotheses have prevailed. In this respect, one of the most debated views that have drawn a lot of attention is the Anglicist hypothesis. The proponents of this view suggest that as African Americans

who spoke different languages were exposed to SAE, they gradually picked up English. Consequently, their native languages got some features of English dialects in the course of time. Lanehart remarks on this issue; "Because AAVE has experienced alteration in its linguistic features, some components of AAVE they used have changed over time" (Lanehart S. , 2015, p. 21). Since new African generations mostly spoke Standard English, their native languages lost speakers. Naturally, this process led to the white dialects to becoming the language of African Americans.

The scholars who advocate the Anglicist view have the opinion that English has replaced the native languages of African slaves and immigrants. That's why; many features of AAVE are similar to those of the English dialect from colonial periods. Related to this matter, Wolfram and Thomas argue that this hypothesis is known as the Anglicist hypothesis since AAVE has adopted some features of English dialects that were mostly spoken in colonies. Additionally, this view claims that the language contact between African Americans and settlers was similar to that of other immigrants in the United States. As a result of this contact, Africans brought several distinct African languages to the United States in addition to a few pidgins and creoles spoken by the African diaspora. As the next African generations preferred speaking the English dialects that were spoken by the white speaker, their ancestors' languages lost most of their distinctive features (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002, p. 26).

Perhaps the strongest point of this hypothesis is the reality that AAVE developed from the grammatical core of SAE during colonial times. However, some features that English had at the time have disappeared since then although these features have remained in AAVE. Even so, According to Green "Other English dialects possess the same grammatical patterns as AAVE particularly in the southern states and early forms of English because of the fact that white people in these areas speak a kind of English that is very similar to AAVE" (Green L. J., 2002, p. 10).

2.1.3. Substrate Hypothesis

As speakers of different languages reside in the same place and contact with each other, their languages affect one another and thus the languages may change. In

20 the case of AAVE, another hypothesis that is called the Substrate Hypothesis maintains that the relation between African languages and other languages such as creoles and English may have led to the emergence of early AAVE. In this respect, the Substrate hypothesis states that the distinctive features of AAVE belong to African languages such as Kikongo, Mande, and Kwa. Although these features are not clear, they can give insight into the evolution of AAVE. However, according to the Substrate Hypothesis, AAVE has borrowed several components of other dialects as a result of constant contact with these dialects. And proponents of this hypothesis argue that AAVE has gone through differentiation on account of substrate impact. According to Mufwene, the Grammar of creoles has undergone some grammatical changes as children whose parents speak creoles have altered some features. As a result, some deviation in their language has come out. Namely substrate influence enables those children to make maximum use of language (Mufwene, 1984, p. 13).

This view suggests that even though language transfer ends, the substrate effect may go on influencing the language change. This view also claims that the early contact between African languages and creoles especially in the course of slavery periods might have provided enough content to affect the development of AAVE. Nonetheless, this hypothesis doesn't draw sufficient attention from linguists and scholars who study this issue. The reason why there is little support for the Substrate Hypothesis is that collecting data for this view is highly challenging as the social conditions in which AAVE occurred seem to be quite complex.

2.1.4. The Neo Anglicist Hypothesis

Different views on the historical development of AAVE have prevailed in the course of time although none of them have provided a fulfilling explanation for the exact genesis of AAVE. One of the attempts to trace back the origins of AAVE is the claim that the similarity between early AAVE and post-colonial SAE was more than it had been thought. Given this evidence, the Neo Anglicist Hypothesis has been put forward. This view contends that the British dialects in the USA are the main source on which AAVE originated. Nonetheless, unlike the Anglicist Hypothesis, Neo Anglicist View purports that British dialects may not be the main sources from which AAVE has borrowed some features. In the light of this,

Wolfram and Thomas argue that in the second half of the 20th century, the Neo Anglicist hypothesis has emerged and this view has challenged the Creolist hypothesis. Accordingly, this position maintains that British dialects were the basic sources that led to the development of early AAVE during the colonial periods. Yet, this hypothesis acknowledges that AAVE has since diverged so much that it is now quite distinct from contemporary white vernacular speech (Thomas & Wolfram, 2002, p. 14).

The proponents of this hypothesis maintain that AAVE had a deviation process as a result of which AAVE got a greater diversity. Wolfram and Thomas mention that; "In this hypothesis, the evidence that several features of AAVE come from not the 19th century but the 20th century is stressed" (Thomas & Wolfram, 2002, p. 14). In fact, the divergence of AAVE from British dialects has resulted from the fact that African Americans have created unity in their community and solidified their customs and language. Consequently, AAVE has acquired new features that are unique and don't seem to be similar to those of British dialects. To sum up, this view has a standpoint that ascribes the unique features of AAVE to the new features, which African Americans have innovated and thus these features are not directly the outcome of other dialects in the USA.

2.2. Features of AAVE

Although the question of whether AAVE should be recognized as a language has been debated for decades, it is an undeniable fact that AAVE has features that distinguish it from SAE. As a matter of fact, the features that are present in AAVE show consistency. Yet, a number of these features actually have stemmed from SAE in the course of time even though the usages of them are quite different from those of SAE. The common belief is that the majority of these distinct features of AAVE have roots from the period when the first time African slaves contacted the folks of southern states, but in time these features deviated from their original uses.

One of the most notable of these distinct features is the absence of the copula verb 'be'. Thomas and Wolfram declares that; "Most sociolinguists agree that copula and auxiliary absence has been a prominent trait of African American English for centuries now and that this pattern contrasts with that found for earlier varieties of

English in the British Isles" (Thomas & Wolfram, 2002, p. 78). The speakers of AAVE usually omit the inflection of the verb 'to be'. However, the omitting copula verb is not arbitrary, there are rules that determine whether to omit this verb or not, for example, in some cases, omitting this verb is not preferred if it is stressed or used at the end of the sentence. Another case in which the copula verb cannot be omitted is when it is used with negation. Some examples of copula absence;

-*She my sister.*
"She is my sister."
-*He tall and skinny.*
"He is tall and skinny."
- *They at home.*
"They are at home."
-*We havin a party.*
"We are having a party."

The use of "Habitual be" is one of the distinct features, and this feature is applied when a tense marking is necessary. The way of AAVE speakers signifies a tense differs largely from that of SAE. In this respect, "habitual be" is the common structure, which determines the tense. For instance, if you use "be+verb+ing", such as "She be askin" questions", it means that the action is stressed in terms of duration or regularity. And this usage prevails among African Americans youth and their rap music lyrics. Another feature of AAVE is the use of "been/bin" that signifies that the action happened in the past. To illustrate, the sentence "He been caught the bus" means the action happened in the remote past, more specifically, "been" is actually the tense marking for past perfect.

Auxiliaries also have different usages in AAVE, for example; "verb+ ing" structure means that the action is in progress. Such use is valid for "finna" as in the example "They ain't finna say". Yet, "Finna" mostly is used to mark future tense. And another auxiliary is "done" that is used to state that the mentioned action is finished in the past. For instance, "the city done change" means that the change happened in the past, namely, it can be defined as a tense marker for past tense.

Perhaps the most striking feature of AAVE is the way of negation, for example, double negation is acceptable in AAVE, whereas it is regarded as a false usage in SAE. Green explains this; "This system of negative marking contrasts with the system in mainstream English in that it allows more than one negative element in clauses that are interpreted as negative" (Green L. J., 2002, p. 77). In fact, most of

the dialects of SAE use single negation. As the norm is single negation, double negation is considered to be incorrect or irrational. But, double negation is a kind of habit or tradition for speakers of AAVE. Another implication of double negation is the fact that it is thought to be a sign of being illiterate and ignorant or of lower status. The negation method is based on English dialects in the southern states. For example, the use of “ain’t” is also common in AAVE as it has widespread use in the southern states. Some examples are as follows;

- Nobody don't love me.*
- There isn't nothing to do*
- We didn't ask no question.*
- She ain't want us.*

Words as “come”, “steady”, and “finna” reflect some other distinct features of AAVE. Each of these words has a function to mark the statement. To illustrate, the verb “come” implies anger as Green mentions; "Some lexical items in AAE are described as indicating or reflecting attitude, namely indignation, expressed on the part of the speaker" (Green L. J., 2002, p. 73). The word “steady” means the mentioned action is in progress, and according to Green; "The marker *steady* precedes a verb form in the progressive. *Steady* is used to conveying the meaning that an activity is carried out in an intense or consistent manner " (Green L. J., 2002, p. 84). And “finna” is used to express future plans as Green states "*Finna* (including variants *fixina*, *fixna* and *fitna*) indicates that the event is imminent; it will happen in the immediate future. It precedes non-finite verbs, which are not marked for tense and agreement" (Green L. J., 2002, p. 83). “I don’t know about you, but I’m finna leave” In this example, “finna” means the action is due to happen. Additionally, speakers of AAVE don't prefer using irregular verbs, instead, they use bare infinitives. And, subject-verb agreement is omitted oftentimes.

As to phonology in AAVE, it also differs from SAE in some respects. For example, diphthongs usually turn into mono phones. And if the “r” sound is at the end of a word, it usually remains silent when it is pronounced. Additionally, the “th” sound turns into “d” sound. Another dropping sound is the “g” sound as it is often replaced with the /ŋ/ sound. One of the most recurred pronunciation features may be the reduction of some final consonants as Wolfram and Thomas clarify; "In many respects, the reduction of syllable-coda consonant clusters (CCR) in vernacular

English dialects has been the paradigm case of systematic variability in social dialectology" (Wolfram & Thomas, *The Development of African American English*, 2002, p. 132). For instance;

- Voiceless stop t dropped after voiceless f
- Voiceless stop t (spelled –ed) dropped after voiceless p
- Voiceless stop k dropped after voiceless s
- Voiceless stop t dropped after voiceless k (spelled c)
- Voiceless stop t dropped after voiceless s
- Voiced stop d dropped after voiced l
- Voiced stop d dropped after voiceless n

To sum up, although the debate whether AAVE is a distinct language or not is still ongoing, the unique features of AAVE indicate that it is different from SAE in terms of grammar, pronunciation, and other language items. However, due to its distinct features, AAVE is sometimes called broken or incorrect English. As we have mentioned above, one of the most apparent feature of AAVE is the copula absence. Moreover, tense markers in this language are quite different from those in SAE. Lastly, some phonetic features are prevalent in AAVE. And all these features have some consistent rules as well.

2.2.1. Phonological Features

The phonological features of a language can reveal as much information about the language as the grammatical ones. Although the majority of the studies focused on the grammatical features of AAVE until recently, now more and more people who are studying AAVE are taking the phonological features into consideration. Namely, the phonological features provide a great insight into the core of AAVE.

As for the most common phonological feature, the consonant reduction that is called “Cluster Reduction” is the one, which is often recurrent in daily speech. And usually, the final consonant drops as the word is pronounced. To illustrate;

First string = Firs' string
cold tea = col' tea

Green defines this process as such; "Consonant cluster reduction is a process in which the final consonant group or cluster, composed of two consonant sounds, is reduced to a single consonant sound" (Green L. , 2002, p. 107).

The sounds such as "d" or "t" are the most common examples of reduction. And the cluster reduction implies that AAVE still owns features from African languages. Green claims;

The words such as 'tes' (test), 'kin' (kind) and 'contac' (contact) are the ones that are similar to those of West African languages. In contrast to the belief that these are the result of deletion sounds of English words, cluster reduction shows the fact that West African languages don not have such clusters as -nd or -st (Green L. , 2002, p. 108).

Another feature, which is highly used by AAVE speakers is the substitution of "n" for "ŋ". Although this feature occurs in SAE, the difference is that it is more often seen in AAVE. Some examples of this feature are as follows;

Talking= Talkin'

Rolling= rollin'

Some sounds are silent in AAVE, for example, deletion of "r" sound, but this feature is also valid for SAE, even if its occurrence in AAVE is more prevalent. Some examples of this feature are;

Teacher= teache'

Brother= brothe'

The pronunciation of "th" in AAVE is also quite different from that of SAE since this sound is usually pronounced as "t", "d", "f", or "v". Green gives some examples of this case as follows:

AAVE	IPA	SAE
dese	[diz]	"these"
dat	[dat]	"that"
baf	[baf]	"bath"
mont, monf	[mʌnt], [mʌnf]	"month"

As well as pronunciation, the intonation has some potential to delve into the characteristics of the language. For instance, the intonation of certain words that AAVE and SAE share differs, which means that the distinction between the intonations of the same words indicates the difference between AAVE and SAE. Moreover, both pronunciation and intonation determine your accent to large extent, in this respect, it may be said that these two components are the ones that create the aura and soul of a language as it does in AAVE.

There are certain differences in terms of pronunciation and intonation between AAVE and English. As a result, the recent studies on AAVE have usually included the investigation of pronunciation and intonation. That is; the pronunciation and intonation or stressed syllable of any word may indicate whether the speaker is an African oriented or native speaker of English. That means how you articulate vowels and consonants depend on your language. That's why it is quite understandable that phonological studies on AAVE will be seen more than in the previous periods.

2.2.2. Grammatical Features

When linguists study languages, the first thing they look for is often the grammatical features because grammar is the instrument by which sentences are shaped and ordered. And if someone speaks ungrammatical sentences, people may perceive it as a sign of ignorance and lack of education. Although most of us learn the grammar of our native language through formal education, some can learn it in a natural way as it is valid for the grammar of AAVE. In this respect, it has consistent grammatical patterns that are unique to African speakers. In fact, several studies have largely focused on the grammar of AAVE so far, even if there are recent studies that have taken AAVE as a whole language system with its all properties.

Grammar of any language can reveal more than function as grammar is like the identity of the language. By investigating syntactic features of AAVE, we can get a lot of information about it. In this respect, some distinct features of AAVE such as tense system make it different. The tense markers are arguably the most notable features of languages especially when we are to decide the origin and family of a language.

One of the most known feature of AAVE is the use of “been” to refer to past tense. And “be” is used to express that the action is in the present time. To illustrate; ‘She is often playing’ is equivalent to the sentence “She often plays”. As to the function of “been”, “He been known me for ten years” means He has known me for ten years.

As well as tense markers, it has some other features that allow us to distinguish AAVE from SAE. Using double modals is commonly applied by African

Americans, and this usage is largely attributed to AAVE as we cannot see such sentences in SAE. For instance; “She may could solve this” means “she may be able to solve this”.

As we have mentioned before, distinct features of AAVE indicate its ties with African roots. To support this claim, the omission of “-s” that is used to signify singularity in SAE is another feature and this one shows parallelism with Caribbean languages. For example; “He work at a hospital” is the equivalent of the sentence “He works at a hospital” in SAE.

Each language may have a specific way of expressing possession, but in AAVE we do not see the general possessive suffix “s”. Namely, African Americans get meaning from the context even if the expressed sentence does not include this suffix. To illustrate; “She going to her father house” means that She is going to her father’s house. The next feature is the use of “it” and “they” instead of “there”. Actually, this feature also implies that AAVE bears African origins because we can see such usage in Creole languages. For instance, “They is a nice park in the city” or “it is a lot of mud here” are expressed with “there” in SAE.

Perhaps the most striking feature of AAVE is the copula absence as it is often observed in AAVE. This feature is unique because it reveals a lot about the origins of AAVE. Wolfram and Thomas state that “Most linguists agree that copula absence is a widespread trait of English-based creole and pidgin languages spoken in the African diaspora” (Thomas & Wolfram, 2002, p. 91). That is, the copula absence belongs to African languages although it has impacted other vernacular languages in the USA recently. Thus, nowadays it is pretty normal to hear such sentences “He playing in the yard” or “They waiting us”.

SAE has explicit rules that help speakers make negative sentences. But in AAVE, negation is a bit different, for example; you can see double negation in AAVE. Double negation that is also called multiple negations can be seen quite often in daily conversations. For instance, it is very probable to hear such sentences as “Nothing shouldn’t discourage him” or “Nobody said nothing”. This usage by itself may provide a lot of insight into AAVE. Actually, if you use double negation in SAE, it may give a positive meaning but in AAVE the contrast is the case. Green

explains this process by stating that double negation in SAE is mostly regarded as ungrammatical, yet it makes the statement positive, namely the rule double negation yields an affirmative sentence does not work for AAVE (Green L. , 2002, p. 77). As AAVE speakers do not acquire it by educational process, the only way to get it is the natural environment where they are exposed to AAVE. Therefore, double negation mostly depends on the contextual meaning. Namely, there is never ambiguity in meaning when double negation is used. Another distinct method to make negative statements is the use of “ain’t”. Even though several unique features of AAVE imply the fact that there is a strong link between AAVE and African dialects, the “ain’t” is actually a feature that belongs to old English. However, this negation form was disfavored since it was attributed to being ignored and broken English.

2.2.3. Lexical Features

Lexicons are the words, chunks, and phrases that are used in daily conversations of a language. As it has been the case for other languages, the words, and phrases in AAVE may have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. Lexicons encompass both the literal and figurative meaning. In this respect, studying and knowing the lexicons of AAVE can help comprehend the basics of AAVE and its implications in the real life. Green adds that lexicons in AAVE can reveal a lot of unique meanings and help get the general use and logic of the phrases that are commonly used by African Americans (Green L. , 2002, p. 12) .

The use and functions of the words and phrases that AAVE and SAE share may differ a lot as the contextual meaning occurs naturally by interaction among speakers. Just as the lexical meanings may vary from region to region, so they can change according to age groups. Green states that there is no sheer difference depending on class differences, but the different age groups may sometimes prefer different slangs (Green L. , 2002, p. 13).

What makes AAVE unique as a language lies in the rich vocabulary and slang words in addition to the variety in the use of these properties. Therefore, examining the lexical features of AAVE can shed light on the authentic side of the language corpus. As to the lexical properties that are usually observed in AAVE, Green mentions the uses of “kitchens” and “mannish” as follows;

Although these two words have the same meaning in SAE, they are also used to denote different meanings in AAVE. For example; 'kitchens' may imply that there is hair on your neck. And similarly, 'mannish' means that one is a man rather than a woman in SAE, yet in AAVE it suggests that the way you are behaving is inappropriate for your age (Green L. , 2002, p. 21).

We can conclude that we cannot understand AAVE just by studying superficial features such as grammar and phonology as the deep meaning and the rich language content is actually based on lexical and semantic features as they are the direct reflection of the speakers.

2.3. Speech Events in AAVE

The conversations that occur in AAVE are unique to the language and thus a speech in AAVE may look weird to the ones who are unfamiliar with AAVE. Green states; "Speech events take different forms. In some cases, their content and the way they are delivered may appear to be entertaining to some and caustic and even rude to those who are unfamiliar with them" (Green L. , 2002, p. 134). The community in which one lives impacts one's speech as the speech events are shaped by those who are involved in the speech event. Green stresses that we cannot analyze AAVE just by studying syntax and phonology because African Americans apply several strategies that help interaction and communication. For instance; they comply with the rule-governed speech events such as call and response strategy in both religious and secular conversations. That's why; these speech events are quite significant to understand the nature of AAVE (Green L. , 2002, p. 134).

African Americans apply to speech events in different places in different ways, for example, a speech event at church is different from the one that occurs in daily life. Moreover, these speech events are quite helpful to analyze the properties of AAVE. The examples of the most known speech events are the dozens and signifying since both of these speech events have held an important place in the course of the evolution of AAVE.

The African American tradition of dueling rhymes is evident in many oral art forms. Toasting, rapping, signifying, and playing the dozens are all demonstrations of verbal skill. Today's rapping is closely related to toasting, which in turn has much in common with signifying, an exhibition of aggressive wit and indirect verbal assault on a victim. Signifying and toasting also share elements of the dozens.

Signification is based on rap, and it is a form of indirect communication. The interaction through rap happens by means of conversation between the speaker and listeners. The process comes to light as a result of the calling and responding method that is usually performed by a group. Green maintains that AAVE includes several examples of verbal strategies in daily life conversations, and thus in the recent decades, a number of studies have been conducted on the speech events in AAVE. Although the previous studies relatively included adult speakers of AAVE, the latest ones have added all age groups including children since even African young generations embrace the characteristic speech events in AAVE (Green L. , 2002, p. 162).

Speech events derive from the conversations and dialogues among speakers. In addition, they contain a situation, an event, and an act. Green explains this by expressing that a situation might be a party or ceremony, yet a speech situation is not necessarily rule-governed. In contrast, a speech event is based on rules of speaking (Green L. , 2002, p. 135).

As for how speech event is created in AAVE, we can give several methods on this case. And each strategy has a unique perspective and nature. To illustrate, as we have mentioned before, signification is one of the most common strategies to make speech events. And signification may be defined as a verbal way by which speakers usually have a conversation that includes insult, humor, and vivid gestures.

Another speech event is “Dozens” that has some similarities with “Signification”, but basically Dozens and Signification differ from one another in terms of the content and manners they include. For example; Dozens seem to be more insulting; that is, Significations is a bit milder than Dozens. However; both Dozens and Signification are based on the practice that involves words and phrases in order to insult and humiliate the interlocutor.

“The Dozens” are an elaborate insult contest. Rather than insulting an opponent directly, a contestant derides members of the opponent's family, usually his mother. The dozens have its origins in the slave trade of New Orleans where deformed slaves—generally slaves punished with dismemberment for

disobedience—were grouped in lots of a "cheap dozen" for sale to slave owners. For a Black to be sold as part of the "dozens" was the lowest blow possible.

In an effort to toughen their hearts against the continual verbal assault inflicted on them as part of the "dozens," Blacks practiced insulting each other indirectly by attacking the most sacred "mother" of the other. The person who loses his "cool" and comes to blows loses the contest. The person who outwits and out-insults the other while keeping a "cool" head is the winner. Elements of both signifying and the dozens appear in the toasts tradition.

Rapping is also used in speech events, and Rapping occurs between a man and a woman. This speech event is mainly observed in daily dialogues. Compliments and the effort to catch the attention of the opposite gender are notable characteristics of Rapping. You can obtain a lot of details about the social and cultural values of African American community by studying rapping examples.

As for Marking, it is a method to attract the interlocutor by repeating and imitating. Reciprocal comments in the course of this speech event are quite important to make the interaction flow. Speakers can influence the process effectively by repetitions and imitations.

As it can be inferred from what the name means, loud talking is another strategy that African Americans use in speech events. The main goal of this speech event is to make oneself heard by the target person. Naturally, the volume of the voice in this strategy has an important role in shaping the conversation.

Toasting, which is a modern and primarily urban form speech event, has its roots in older traditions like signifying and playing the dozens. A toast is a lengthy, recited narrative or poem describing a series of exploits by a central character. Focusing on the main character's heroic acts and exercises of wit, the toast presents values through actions.

Toast characters include recognizable and popular figures like Shine, Stackolee, and the Signifying Monkey. Many are Black entrepreneurs pursuing the American Dream and its promise of plenty for those who can achieve entry into mainstream American society. Willing to grab or take their success into their own

hands, these characters announce their intentions to survive in style, which can mean *heroic masculinity* or *conspicuous consumption*.

Toasts are commonly recited on street corners, front porches, prisons, or wherever men and groups of Blacks get together. In the performance of a toast, the "toaster" seems to become the toast character or *big man* and to take on his *style*. Listeners can celebrate their existence through identifying with the success of the hero, whose actions stand in contrast to the reality of their own oppressed circumstances.

The toast is heroic because the chief character will accept death in the face of danger and therefore subjugates him or her to the group. In fighting to the point of death or the possibility of dying, the hero ennoble the group.

2.3.1. Verbal Communication

Each language is unique in that every one of the languages in the world owns original strategies by which speakers interact with each other effectively. Verbal strategies have long been a part of African culture and language. For example, there is evidence that Africans applied verbal strategies during the slavery periods. In this respect, dozens were used at the time in order to label some slaves who were despised in terms of health and age. Moreover, slaves expressed their ideas through dozens so as to criticize or humiliate brutal landlords. Most of the verbal strategies share similarities with those of African languages, namely it means that verbal methods to make speech events come from the native languages of Africa.

As a verbal strategy, marking is one of the most common verbal strategies that resemble mocking. In this strategy, speakers try to tease the listeners as is the case in mocking. Mocking includes repeated statements, while marking is based on the practice in which the interlocutor's personality and manners are targeted. Gestures and mimics hold great importance in this strategy. In marking, the mocking of proper speaking is practiced a lot as proper speaking is seen as a deviation from African culture and values. For instance, speaking in proper English is shown with an exaggerated attitude. The main point in marking is to preserve the vernacular properties. Therefore, if any African American is seen speaking proper English, they are ridiculed in order to be discouraged.

Another outstanding verbal strategy is called “loud talking”. The speakers who use loud talking aim to get the message across to the listeners who are outside of the conversation. Green suggests that those who express their ideas with loud talking do not actually scream or yell, yet they have a bit higher pitches while delivering their speech. The main goal of this practice for performers is to make themselves heard and understood both by direct listeners and indirect ones (Green L. , 2002, p. 142).

The intention in loud talking is not necessarily malicious because the delivery of the message is a priority. All in all, loud talking provides the speaker with a tool to perform an effective speech event without leading to resentment by listeners.

2.3.2. Non-Verbal Communication

Communication is not just limited to verbal statements but non-verbal tools such as body language, gestures, and mimics play an important role in the speech events in AAVE. Green suggests that African Americans benefit from non-verbal strategies while they put across their message, and the non-verbal patterns hold a substantial place in the daily speech events (Green L. , 2002, p. 143) .

African Americans use particularly some eye gestures that are called “cut eye” and “Roll eye”. The cut eye is the way in which the movements of the eye are meant to send the message that is usually related to anger and refusal. Moreover, the cut eye is divided into sub-stages, which are staring at the listener, a sharp eye movement, or a closing eye. As a matter of fact, African languages are rich in terms of gestures and mimics that are the main components of non-verbal communication.

As for eye-rolling; several behaviors and manners are related to eye-rolling, and this non-verbal strategy usually indicates that the one who put eye-rolling into action despises the others there and boasts of oneself. Another function of eye-rolling is that it shows approval or refusal, and sometimes it can be perceived as an indication of surprise. However, non-verbal strategies are not limited to eye movements since there are some gestures that are based on the other body parts such as the head, shoulder, hips, and hands. The mentioned body parts may be used to send a message to the listener. That is, a combination of some gestures may lead to

non-verbal communication. Interestingly those who practice such a combination of gestures are often females rather than males, but not all female African Americans have such a tendency. Green clarifies this issue as follow;

Not all types of notably distinct nonverbal communication in African American communities are identified as female behaviour. A number of gestures and stances are associated specifically with males. African American males have been noted to display different handshakes and hand movements to communicate a range of messages. Handshakes may change almost as often as the types of lexical and slang items. (Green L. , 2002, p. 144)

People show their feelings differently while they celebrate any special moments. In this respect, as you can see from the football and basketball matches, African-oriented players celebrate by chest-touching when they score or share an enjoyable moments. Actually; this strategy seems to be the equivalent of the high five gesture. Although chest-touching is commonly attributed to black culture, it has been performed by several people other than African-oriented ones. As we have mentioned, chest-touching and high five are similar in some ways, yet there are also a few differences between these two gestures. For example; as Green mentions, while the meaning of chest-touching and high five seem to be the same, the situations in which each gesture is used may vary, for example; at work, colleagues can use the high five but chest-touching (Green L. , 2002, p. 144).

Almost every society has some kind of a handshake gesture. Perhaps the handshake gesture is one of the most practical ways to convey a message. Handshakes are mostly regarded as a means of tolerance, acceptance, and collaboration. However, handshake symbolizes several manners in AAVE as Green states; “This type of greeting or salutation is an exchange between men who know each other well, and it may be used in contexts in which friends who may not have seen each other for some period of time get together” (Green L. , 2002, p. 145).

There are numerous kinds of handshakes that are observed in AAVE. In addition, each handshake may symbolize a different meaning. In this respect, it is evident that non-verbal communication accounts for a substantial part of the interactions in AAVE.

CHAPTER III

3. THE USE OF AAVE

African Americans speak their language in several realms that range from literary circles to informal ones. As language is not just limited to being a communicative tool, AAVE impacts a number of components of the black community. For instance, speaking AAVE can reveal a lot of realities of the black society such as identity, personality, and cultural values. In this respect, if one tries to get to know African Americans, one should first start with their language. Namely, AAVE is the story of African Americans.

The recent decades have witnessed a drastic rise of AAVE in popular realms such as music, cinema, and literature. As they have been the case for other languages around the world, AAVE has been the tool by which African Americans have reflected their ideas, feelings, and realities. Thanks to the widespread use of AAVE, people from all around the globe are becoming familiar with this language. For example, on social media, we can see a number of usages that belong to the language. Actually, the language you speak is the mirror of your society in terms of identity, personality, and cultural values.

3.1. AAVE in Literature

Language is a fundamental element of literature as we cannot imagine any literature without language. Therefore, language and literature go hand in hand as they affect one another to a large extent. That is, almost every language across the world has given rise to unique literature in which it is written. In this respect, AAVE has also been used in literature since the slavery period.

From the second half of the 19th century, the use of AAVE in almost all realms of black people has been common as well as literature. Although in the first phases of slavery, the majority of African Americans lacked formal education, this case couldn't prevent them from speaking their own language and using it in their literature. However, apart from their own language, African slaves also borrowed some grammatical features of SAE and combined these features with their native language; thereby they created dialects that were mainly spoken by African Americans at the time. According to Green; the first literary works that were written

in AAVE point to several matters related to African Americans during slavery. Namely, these literary texts actually let black characters speak in their pages (Green L. , 2002, p. 162). In the first place, AAVE was prevalent in the southern states of America, but as African Americans migrated toward the northern states, naturally AAVE became a commonly spoken language in several parts of the USA.

The use of AAVE in literature is common in such literary genres as novels, poems, dramas, short stories, and tales. Nevertheless, some of the early black narratives were usually in SAE. Yet, the features of AAVE were mostly included in literary texts that were written by black authors. In fact, literature had a great effect on the early development of AAVE since the novels that were written during the early years of slavery mostly reflected the realities of the black community. For instance, “The President’s Daughter” by William Wells Brown is one of the first novels in which AAVE is used. Another author who used Black English was Harriet E. Wilson whose book is named *Our Nig*. Indeed, the main reason why writers used AAVE in their texts was the fact that AAVE gave a kind of authenticity to their writings. In this respect, Frances Harper used AAVE in his novel named *Shadows Uplifted* that depicts ordinary black characters. However, the use of AAVE in literature is not just limited to the USA because several authors from Europe have also applied to AAVE in their literary works. For example, Creole culture is apparent in the *Old Creole Days* by George Washington Cable. Similarly, Joel Chandler Harris and Mark Twain included examples of AAVE in their best-known works such as *Uncle Remus* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Unfortunately, there is a strong assumption that the first uses of AAVE by European writers imply racism against Africans. And Green summarizes this;

The literary representation of AAE in some authors’ works is considered to be an accurate and rich representation of folk speech, while that of others is labelled stereotypical renditions of the shiftless Negro. By manipulating the spoken word, manoeuvring the spelling of some and evoking symbolism and imagery, authors are able to mould characters into dialect speakers or make them appear to be dialect speakers (Green L. J., 2002, p. 164).

As to poetry, AAVE was quite common in poems, especially during the second half of the 19th century. To illustrate, some well-known poets who used AAVE at the time were Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Edwin Campbell.

In the course of the 20th century, black authors preferred AAVE to SAE in their writings. Additionally, certain white authors wrote in Vernacular English.

Notably, plays that were written at that time mostly contained features of AAVE. Perhaps the most outstanding examples were *All God's Chillun Got Wings* by Eugene O'Neill and *Appearances* by Garland Anderson. Moreover, the Harlem period paved a new era for AAVE as most black female authors voiced their works in Black English. Particularly, "Undertow" by Eulalie Spence had a special place since it was one of the first examples in the Northern of the United States. In addition, the plays that include AAVE were mainly based on the typical vernacular that African Americans spoke at the time. To clarify this case, Green mentions the representation of AAVE as follows;

Black speech continued to be used in literature by authors such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Joel Chandler Harris. During the Negro renaissance cycle (1920s–1940s), black themes were depicted more and more in literature, and furthermore, scholars were openly addressing the issue of African American speech in writing. Zora Neale Hurston empowered her characters with black language, and she also addressed characteristics of this language in essays. Also during that time, Lorenzo Dow Turner wrote Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect, which provided a data source for those interested in the African element in Gullah and the African origins of AAE. The final cycle is the civil rights period (1945–1970s), during which the American public was reading the stories of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Claude Brown, and LeRoi Jones, all of whom used Black English in their stories of Black life (Green L. J., 2002, p. 166).

As for white playwrights who employed AAVE in their plays, William Faulkner was the most well-known one who focused on black characters. Thus, the characters in Faulkner's plays usually speak AAVE. Apart from Faulkner, Julia Mood was also a popular author who used AAVE in her works. Nonetheless, the most of writers who used AAVE during the 20th century were African Americans.

Harlem Renaissance had a big impact on the use of AAVE in literary cycles. Especially, those who embraced the idea that language is the identity has given priority to AAVE in almost all literary genres even though poetry stood out. Namely, such writers as Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown regarded AAVE as a source of black identity, and hence they tried to plant this notion in their writings. Another important standpoint was that the literary works then were mostly a reflection of the black community. To illustrate, Green maintains that using language in literary texts has some significant goals. For example, a language may be used to reflect characters in a certain area or to describe the members of a specific class. In turn, this raises some emotions within the reader (Green L. J., 2002, p. 164). AAVE was not restricted to non-fictional works because some writers such

as Zora Neale Hurston and Rudolph Fisher reflected African Americans' genuine language in their fictional books and thus paved the way to the cultural recognition of AAVE. For example, Hurston wrote stories that mention the experiences of black folk who migrated to different parts of the USA. And her works *Spunk* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* were based on the social and cultural basics of black society. Green emphasizes Hurston's role in the use of AAVE in literature;

The works of Zora Neale Hurston are particularly noted for the language of the characters and the use of black dialect. Hurston uses a fair amount of phonological, syntactic, semantic and lexical features in her representation of AAE. She does indeed use eye dialect, but not to the exclusion of consistent spellings that are intended to represent the pronunciations of African Americans in her works. Hurston's characters spoke the language of folk. This language can certainly be characterized by its richness, expressiveness and metaphorical properties, but it is important to note the specifically AAE linguistic patterns Hurston used to make the speech appear to be authentic. (Green L. J., 2002, p. 178).

In the course of the second half of the 20th century, AAVE got more and more ground in literature thanks to its being continuously in literary works, particularly by African American authors. In this respect, certain writers continued to use AAVE in a natural way. These writers were Richard Wright, Ann Petry, and Ralph Ellison. Furthermore, playwrights Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin employed black expressions widely in their plays. Another important figure was Chester Himes that was a detective writer. And he used AAVE in his book named *For Love of Imabelle*.

Lastly, the modern era has witnessed a wide use of AAVE in literature as well, and notably, black authors have used modern features of AAVE in the poems. The best-known writers are Don Lee, Gwendolyn Brooks, Jayne Cortez, Amiri Baraka, and Sonia Sanchez. All of them have referred to the contemporary African Americans' society and the language. The language style that authors have used shares some similarities with those that have been popular in jazz music. In addition to poetry, novels that have been written in AAVE have also caught on attention. Examples of these novels include *Sula*, *Beloved* and *Jazz* by Tony Morrison and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. African American playwrights have also contributed to the widespread use of AAVE in literature. The plays during the last few decades give insight into the authentic culture and language of black Africans. In fact, these plays also present the relationship between AAVE and identity.

3.1.1. AAVE in the Early Twentieth Century Literature

As African Americans got more rights such as education, freedom of speech, and other similar political rights, the works by black authors became popular. The majority of the literary works at the time reflected the sorrows of African slaves and the sharp realities of the black community in the USA. Especially, the poet Albery Allson Whitman contributed to the movement of black literature with his poems.

The notable progress in terms of literature in AAVE was achieved through novels by African American writers. Some prominent writers such as Charles W. Chesnutt displayed the experiences of African Americans at that time, and thus created a bridge between the black society and its literature by including mainly the features of the language that the black folk spoke. The main themes were discrimination, social injustice, and oppression against African Americans. Moreover, the black author during this period exploited literature painstakingly to speak out their demands for democracy, freedom, and justice. In the course of this whole process, one effective tool that they used was arguably the language that is AAVE. Among the most influential black writers then, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois played key roles in the rise of African American literature. Their works depict the experiences of African Americans and they defended the importance of their culture and customs. Green states that the use of AAVE was common to see during this period by the following lines;

Particular representations of language are used to identify characters as being black; so their speech is contrasted with the speech of others who are not black. One final point is that even when there did not seem to be differences between pronunciations by black characters and general American English, the author makes distinctions by using eye dialect, setting black speech apart from general American English. Given that the authors in this period converge on a number of patterns, it would appear that they were capturing a number of features that were commonly associated with black speech of the time. (Green L. , 2002, p. 178)

The fact that there were efforts to increase the level of literacy among African Americans also paved the way for the emergence of African American literature as well as the use of AAVE in literary circles. During the early twentieth century, parallel to the rise of African American language and literature, black Africans obtained political rights and enjoyed a more democratic period compared to their previous unpleasant experiences. In this respect, several African Americans had the chance to use their language to defend their right and produce literary works.

As African Americans had a rich cultural heritage from their ancestors in addition to their unique language, they could produce vivid and effective works in terms of novel and poetry genres. For instance, an eminent black author William Wells Brown who wrote about the slaves' experiences and the hardship that slaves had gone through within the early years of slavery presents the real portrayal of the African American community in his novel called *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* that is considered the first black African novel. Green stresses the importance of "Clotel" as follows;

It is appropriate to begin the discussion of the representation of the speech of African Americans in literature with the first African American novel, William Wells Brown's Clotel; or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States (1853). In his introductory notes to a work that contains three novels that represent black fiction from the mid nineteenth to the twentieth century, Henry Louis Gates (1990) credits Clotel as an important work because it is the first novel written by an African American, and because it addresses a number of issues pertaining to the lives of African Americans in slavery. In addition he points out that it is important as well because of its representation of the vernacular English that black people speak in its pages. (Green L. , 2002, p. 167)

Most of the writers of this period included the traditions, customs, and language properties of African American society. That is to say, the distinct features of AAVE prevailed in the writings of this period, thus such literary works appealed to African Americans. To illustrate, the poet; Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote poems that addressed how hard African Americans endeavored to attain their freedom.

3.1.2. AAVE in Harlem Renaissance Literature

Harlem Renaissance that is also called the New Negro Movement is regarded as one of the most important periods in terms of its contributions to African Americans' literature, culture, and language. Green states; "The Harlem Renaissance was an important literary period during which writers used events, experiences, and expressions of black life as their subjects. For some writers during this period, black dialect represented a real part of black life" (Green L. , 2002, p. 178). The movement was commenced by black people who had migrated to the Harlem district in New York. Especially, thanks to their language and rich cultural values, Harlem Renaissance is often associated with black literature. Yet, we can trace the signs from all walks of the black community by analyzing the literary works from the period. In this respect, Harlem Renaissance impacted all segments of the black society from politics to social development even though the most influential

influence was experienced in African American literature. Green suggests that Harlem help African American authors reveal the real soul of black culture and language;

Hurston's characters spoke the language of folk, a language they could use to express their innermost thoughts, growth and connection to the culture. This language can certainly be characterized by its richness, expressiveness and metaphorical properties, but it is important to note the specifically AAE linguistic patterns Hurston used to make the speech appear to be authentic. (Green L. , 2002, p. 179)

African Americans' history is full of unpleasant events such as slavery, discrimination, war, and prejudice against Africans. However, the advent of The Harlem Renaissance made African Americans believe that they could resist all the oppression through their own literature that is the voice of their ancestors and black society. Therefore, it was vital for African Americans to break the bias against their culture, race, and language by exhibiting their demands for freedom and their struggle against discrimination in their works. In this sense, some prominent black authors contributed to African American literature to a great extent. For example; W.E.B Du Bois manifested almost all the desires and outcry that African Americans had at the time with his outstanding work that is called *The Soul of Black Folk*. Likewise, *The New Negro* by Alain Locke depicts all the processes that black folk underwent until Harlem Renaissance. Joicey sums up the importance of this book as follows;

Du Bois made his mark in African American Literature by writing his collection of essays 'The Souls of Black Folk' which later became the defining text of the Negro movement. The impact of this prose was felt on an entire generation belonging to the Harlem Renaissance throughout the twentieth Century. He strongly stated that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line. The statement was an eye opener to the blacks to reflect on their own conditions and the challenges ahead of them. By making the essay autobiographical, Du Bois has shared his personal experiences since his boyhood, namely, the denial of basic rights and recognition. Travelling through such experiences, the readers encounter the reality of their own race. The essay also motivates the African Americans to fight back, resist and redefine their life style. Du Bois had induced his men to think and act for the right cause. By his writing, Du Bois had reminded his readers of their ethical commitment in works of literature, i.e. to write about the conditions of the Blacks and their suppression and the travail to freedom where he can find himself as the "New Negro". (Joicey, 2020, p. 809)

The importance of the Harlem Renaissance is often stressed in historical perspectives in terms of its impact on African Americans' culture, language, and identity. This movement was a direct result of the previous wrongdoings against African Americans. Nonetheless, Harlem Renaissance doesn't encompass just a simple struggle for freedom and speaking up against injustice and discrimination, for

this movement aimed to obtain recognition for African Americans' literature and particularly their language. That is; Harlem Renaissance paved the way for important realms to thrive, for instance; music, poetry, art, literature, and language improved and got recognition altogether. And in the course of all the processes, the most effective instrument that African Americans had and exploited to produce works in their own voice was the language namely AAVE.

Although the scope of the input and impulse behind the movement was confined to African society, Harlem Renaissance got also the attention of the whites. That is to say, this movement enabled African American literature to be considered a part of mainstream American literature. Perhaps, it was for the first time African Americans felt proud enough to express their cultural values and their unique ideas in their language. Accordingly, such a mood helped motivate most of the black writers and also influenced some other communities other than African Americans. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration that African Americans finally found their real soul thanks to Harlem Renaissance. Joicey remarks that African American literature is distinguished by stating the following comments;

The writings of the 'Blacks' were entirely original and creative unlike the white Americans who copied the European models. Thus, Black literature, apart from bringing glory to the Negroes, has enriched American literature. During this time, publication rights were given for the Negroes who were otherwise dependant on the white patrons. Ultimately, Alain Locke's 'The New Negro' has directly influenced Black literature and it has become the first text in history to define and claim for Black Liberation. (Joicey, 2020, p. 808)

Although African Americans had a rich cultural heritage and a distinct language, it was not until Harlem Renaissance took place that African writers could take pride in their cultural values and language. As a result, such notable black figures as W.E.B Du Bois, Alain Locke, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and Marcus Garvey pioneered the advent of magazines, newspapers, and similar propaganda devices to convey the message from the Black community and display their artistic products to the outer world. Joicey states that;

Alain Locke described Harlem as not merely the largest Negro community in the world but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. A writer who propagated Black ideals through his writings was Alain Locke. He coined the term 'New Negro' in his anthology entitled 'The New Negro' which is an important work in African American Literature inspiring Harlem Literature and its writers. The work induced a new kind of spirit in the Blacks. Their attitudes were reshaped to look into their own culture, i.e. Black heritage with new eyes and write about their own African and African American experience. (Joicey, 2020, p. 808)

Certainly, the impact of the Harlem Renaissance is not limited to the time in which it arose and only the black society, because this movement kept on shaping the following periods and generations. For this reason, Harlem possesses historical importance in terms of affecting the subsequent literary style of African Americans. Perhaps, the most apparent outcome of Harlem is the key role it played for the acceptance and recognition of the black identity, language, and literature.

3.2. AAVE in the Media and Social Media

Language is life itself. That's why it affects every part of our daily life. Similarly, technology encompasses almost all walks of life. We live in a digitalized world. As a result, the languages we speak often appear on media or social media. Particularly, social media platforms provide broad access for everyone. Naturally, AAVE has long been prevalent on media notably social media. You can come across numerous examples of AAVE on social media as black people express their notions, interests, and daily life via social media. It seems that social media platforms have given a great deal of room for AAVE speakers. Consequently, AAVE has become popular on social media among African Americans and even white people. With the advent of media, people have been able to see black figures more often on TV or social media since black musicians, actors, actresses, and athletes have often appeared on TV. Green states that; "Since language contributes to the creation of characters, some characters may be assigned specific linguistic features that mark them as "sounding Black". Speech patterns, along with other attributes of characters, are intended to invoke certain images in the minds of viewers" (Green L. , 2002, p. 201). This has led society to create an awareness of AAVE because these people speak AAVE. Probably, one of the most effective factors on AAVE occurrence in media is the popularity of music that is performed by African Americans. For instance, Hip-hop has deeply impacted most folks in America. As some of the hip hop singers are descendent of African Americans, the lyrics of hip-hop songs include several features of AAVE. Over time, more black politicians and influencers have got fame on media, which in turn has given rise to the popularity of AAVE.

Although the use of AAVE on mainstream media is limited, AAVE has become highly apparent on social media. Interestingly, those who use AAVE on

social media include people from all segments of society as well as black Africans. For example, some campaigns against discrimination toward black people have been initiated via social media platforms and mostly advocated by white people. As each language has power, AVVE also motivates black folk to stand up for their rights and official recognition of their language. In this respect, especially Twitter presents good opportunities for African Americans to make themselves heard. Even though AVVE has been regarded as broken English for ages, thanks to social media, a general acceptance of AAVE has become reality.

As AVVE gets a broader space in media, more and more of the public is getting to know the culture and authentic customs of the black community. Yet, when AAVE is used by white folk, it is generally regarded as a cool act; unfortunately, the same case is not valid when black people speak AVVE. However, the situation is making for good despite the bias against AAVE speakers. Green suggests that Language can result in different images in media, for example, in some movies; linguistic features are portrayed intentionally to create positive images of blackness. Yet, these images not only imply blackness, but they also reflect socioeconomic, social, and ethnic class. In this respect, the language that characters use in films or on media includes several elements of AAVE to form the image of blackness (Green L. J., 2002, p. 214). On social media, AVVE slangs are especially popular with young generations from almost all ethnic groups. Nonetheless, some young people are not aware of the fact that the slang they have been using has actually come from Vernacular English. And surely this popularity of AAVE among young generations largely derives from the impact of hip-hop and the use of social media platforms. In this respect, digital media has affected AVVE profoundly.

As to news media in terms of coverage of AAVE, mass media channels usually tend to neglect AAVE, instead, they try to impose SAE on African Americans. As result, mass media advocates the norms of the white community, and naturally, the social reality of the USA is often disregarded while they are broadcasting their programs. In addition, the mass media manipulates the language of the content deliberately since it regards AAVE as a dialect of SAE, not as a distinct language. Therefore, this biased approach leads to a misconception among

Americans towards AAVE speakers and AAVE itself. As Garcia clarifies the argument;

Due to the high percentage of African American citizens in the USA, their presence in mainstream media has increased considerably during the last decades. This phenomenon has forced filmmakers to make a decision on how accurately the language they speak is portrayed. In principle, one would believe they would strive to be as accurate as possible. In contrast, mainstream media tries to cater to the maximum of people, so the use of non-Standard English could be a problem due to lack of understanding from the audience. Even though numerous studies have been conducted in the field of how ethnicity is portrayed in the media and the use of racial stereotypes, not many have focused their attention on the accuracy of the representation of the variety of English that African American communities speak (Garcia, 2016, pp. 1-27)

However, there are also newspapers and televisions that focus on the African American society, through which people can get to know AAVE and thus can get informed about the reality of the black community. Another factor that urges the mainstream media to include AAVE in their coverage is the advertising as the black population constitutes a substantial portion of the total population. Interestingly, both blacks and whites are against the use of AAVE for advertising, for African Americans believe that advertisers create negative impressions by using black slang. Even in some cases, advertisements that contain black slang have been perceived as racist acts. The reason why such a reaction has occurred may be attributed to the producers of these advertisements as most of the producers are white and unaware of the core of the black language. As a result, people label such advertisements as unnatural and artificial.

3.3. AAVE and Education

The issue that SAE creates a barrier for young learners who descend from African ancestors has long been a major debate among linguists and educators. As most young African Americans speak AAVE before they start school, they usually face difficulty in adapting to the formal education that is given in SAE. In addition, the general perception of the citizens toward AAVE is usually negative since AAVE is often portrayed as broken English or an inferior dialect of SAE. Lanehart maintains; "Far too many African American students still suffer the ill effects of an inferior education and scholars" (Lanehart S. L., 1984, p. 319). The language discrimination against Africans has roots that go back to slavery times, and AAVE has been labeled as an inferior language. The prevalent ideology has long seen African Americans as a threat to the white community (Smitherman, 2015, p. 549).

In this respect, the main demand that African Americans speak out is that AAVE should be included in the education process for young African American students. Thus, especially African American experts suggest that if this step has been taken, AAVE will get prestige and the negative perception against AAVE will disappear in time. Nonetheless, educators still tend to disregard the reality of black Africans, they try to suppress the use of AAVE, interestingly, and some African Americans support this view. The proponents of AAVE use in education for African American young learners have demanded several times that African Americans have the right to get an education in their language and a step should be taken urgently. Fortunately, the negative attitude toward AAVE at school has declined in time and new decisions to use AAVE at school have been put into action. Wyatt suggests that;

Teachers should be aware of AAVE when they have African American children in the class. The more educators know about language difference between AAVE and SAE, the better they can give education for all the students who come from different ethnic groups. The awareness toward AAVE entails that curriculums be designed in consideration of AAVE existence. Such an approach will make the education process easier for educators, and provide a chance for both African Americans and white Americans to integrate as a nation. Another benefit would be the cultural awareness that educators can acquire during the process. (Wyatt, 1984, p. 277)

Young African Americans experience trouble at school when they use AAVE even though AAVE is the language they acquire at home. AAVE catches attention particularly in informal cases like internet conversations, whereas state schools and private ones still regard AAVE as unacceptable and incorrect. Mills and Washington suggest that;

Education is given in Mainstream Classroom English (MAE). Thus if African Americans are not exposed to MAE enough before school, they can get stressed when they are instructed in MAE. African American children can learn MAE if they are exposed to MAE through media and internet. Yet this exposure may not be sufficient to help African students adapt to school subjects which are taught in MAE. As a result, African children might experience challenges at school especially in terms of academic progress and social life. (Mills & Washington, 2015, p. 571)

The attempts for the acceptance of AAVE at school resulted in a successful revolution. For example, in 1979, African students won a lawsuit against schools in Michigan, and similarly, Oakland school in California accepted that AAVE was a separate language that owns unique linguistic features. However, in the course of history, the dominant policy tends to disregard this reality, for example, during the first period of slavery; colonies intentionally distributed African slaves to different parts of the USA so that they had to adopt SAE instead of their mother tongue.

During the slavery periods, the language that Africans spoke was disregarded and intentionally no education was provided for Africans, even some laws were enacted to ban speaking AAVE among slaves (Smitherman, 2015, p. 547). Although there is no difference between AAVE and SAE in terms of superiority, there have been attempts to marginalize AAVE and even make AAVE speakers feel ashamed of their language when they speak it. During the slavery periods, the policy was to eliminate AAVE by forcing them to speak SAE. Moreover, the authority did not care about the dynamics of the black community as AAVE was portrayed as a sign of inferiority (Turner & Rose, 2015, pp. 607-608). And similarly, younger generations of Africans are often exposed to SAE in order that they quit using AAVE. Naturally, even though African Americans speak AAVE at home and in their local society, they usually have to use SAE instead of AAVE when they are out of their own community. Yet, in some cases, young African Americans prefer using AAVE to SAE as they believe that they don't have to speak SAE according to the place where they are. In this respect, their resistance to speaking SAE might lead to some problems, especially in formal circumstances. That's why the parents of African Americans often force their children to acquire SAE so that they can avoid language trouble when they start school. And African Americans usually perceive speaking SAE as a sign of prestige and respect.

3.4. The Use of AAVE in Religious Circles

AAVE has been labeled with different names throughout history depending on the era. And the use of AAVE in religious circles is usually called African American Church Language (AACL). Nonetheless, AAVE is the most common name that is applied for the language of African Americans. Debose states that the distinct features of AAVE may sometimes be perceived as broken and improper language, but interestingly the use of these features in religious places is quite acceptable. However, when African Americans speak AAVE in religious places or text, they attach great importance to the language content, and thus they prefer to use the artistic and cultural aspects of AAVE. As it can be seen in several realms of social circles, AAVE has a unique place in religious places (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 678).

AAVE has a vivid character that is present in many walks of daily life such as music, social life, literature, and religious texts. That's why According to Debose, AAVE is sometimes called Negro spirituals (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 679). In this respect, one of the speech events that are pervasive in the church language is the call-response one. The practice of call-response speech act in sacred texts and musical performances for the church is an indispensable part of the church language.

When African slaves arrived in the new world, they had almost nothing but their language. Yet, they were not free to speak the language as they wished because there were strict restrictions by their landlords. After all, African slaves had nothing but religious bases to speak their language. Namely, the church and religious circles provided African slaves relatively comfortable spaces to express their feeling and emotions in AAVE without the time's general restrictions against AAVE. In this respect, it is apparent that religion enabled African slaves to speak their language by providing a safe harbor for them and their existence. That is, Christianity had a vital role in African slaves' search for their freedom. Debose clarifies this process as follows;

*Oh Freedom
Oh Freedom over me
And before I be a slave I'd be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.*

This anonymous song tells about how African slaves felt at the time. And, it implies that African slaves looked for ways to their freedom with the help of religion. Moreover, the church and religion were the main tools that African slaves could exploit to voice the brutal picture of slavery. The religion African slaves performed during the early periods of slavery had a distinct aspect that helped African slaves to combine both the elements of the church and African religious values (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 680). Therefore, it can be said that Africans included God in their endeavor for freedom in order to avoid the sheer opposition from conservative white Americans.

The religion allowed Africans to disguise the goal that they were struggling to achieve. In fact, Africans uttered their true aspirations for freedom through religious contexts. Another benefit was the fact that Africans were able to preserve both their language and identity through the power of the church to eliminate the

opposition that came from white supremacy. Particularly, the language Africans had was the key to paving the way toward freedom and black identity.

The church has had a positive attitude towards the use of AAVE in preaching. In addition, black scholar admits that this reality has resulted in the acceptance of AAVE and black identity. Even preachers who speak SAE have preferred to preach in AAVE to impact Africans in terms of religious beliefs. For this reason, some distinct features of AAVE have been observed in the language and sermons of the church since slavery began in the USA. The specific version of AAVE for the church becomes reality. For example, there is a term “havin church” that signifies the traditions and religious practices of Africans. During religious ceremonies and other special ones, African Americans tend to use AAVE as well as non-verbal communicative tools. Green contends that Black churches may organize such ceremonies as musical devotions, ritual programs and celebrations, dedications, sermons, prayers, testimonials, and weekly announcements. And she adds that such non-verbal strategies as head-nodding, feet-patting, hand-waving and clapping, body-swaying, and standing are the main features that are observed in the course of these ceremonies (Green L. , 2002, p. 146).

The fact that AAVE has risen from the roots that are related to oral traditions cannot be denied. In this respect, one of the main realms that have provided the freedom for Africans to speak their language and perform their rituals is the church. Naturally, AAVE is often used for church ceremonies as is also named AAVE for the church. In other words, the prayers, sermons, religious sayings include the oral treasures of African society. Moreover, the language has got the chance to survive all the oppression and assimilations policies throughout slavery history and onward periods. The prayers that Africans perform give a lot of codes on the culture and language heritage of the black community in the light of oral traditions along with the impromptu skills that are staged by black preachers or ordinary folk. Pinn emphasizes the improvisational power of AAVE speakers by stating that;

“Whether the date is 1928 or 1998 ... one might hear words similar to these.”
Almighty and all wise God
It is once more and again that a few of your hand made children
Are gathered here together to call upon your holy name

*We bow at your footstool Master thanking you for our spared lives
We thank you that we were able
To get up this morning clothed in our right minds
For Master, since we met here
Many have been snatched away from the land of the living
And hurled into eternity
But through Your goodness and mercy we have been spared
To assemble ourselves together one more time
To call upon a captain who has never lost a battle. (Pinn, 2002, p. 69)*

Pinn goes on the discussion "The prayer leader is usually selected because of a special talent for effective praying and that such praying is accomplished through the recitation of images and phrases—religious clichés of sorts—commonly found in public prayers" (Pinn, 2002, p. 69). In this way, AAVE has managed to preserve its rich oral traditions that show the power of religion in the evolution of the language. Although the above extract contains almost no external features that are unique to AAVE, the pronunciation matters a lot as the unique pronunciation in AAVE stands out when you hear that by native a African American who is chosen on the grounds of his improvisational talents.

During the preaching sessions, the speech events contain several features of AAVE. As the sermons continue, Participants take part in the process. Therefore, preachers give great importance to the audience participation, to make their active participation; they especially put an extra effort.

3.5. AAVE in Daily Life

African Americans have a rich and rooted tradition that accounts for African American literature and language. Since Africans place a great deal of importance on their ancestors' cultural heritage, language has always become a highly significant instrument to bridge their past and present. In this respect, African American Vernacular English is the unique language by which most African Americans not only preserve their history and customs but also convey several clues about identity and personality.

Language is not just a tool, which helps us communicate with each other as it reflects a myriad of elements about the society in which it is spoken. Accordingly, there are several factors in which African American Vernacular English plays a role. That is, AAVE encompasses almost all realms of life in black society.

The language is like a mirror to the society in which it is spoken. That is, language is the soul of speakers and the voice of the community. As all other languages are unique and special, AAVE features a number of functions in the black community. Moreover, it has been an indispensable tool for African Americans since they have been able to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage with the help of the language that is AAVE. In this respect, AAVE influences several realms of black society ranging from music to education.

Perhaps the most notable implication of using AAVE is the connotation that AAVE is a part of black identity. Therefore, African Americans have a deep loyalty to preserving their cultural background through language, literature, and music. Although AAVE is regarded as an inferior dialect, the function and meaning it holds creates the base on which Africans' culture and identity are shaped.

AAVE functions as a means of transmitting black Americans' culture, history, personality, and identity. African American Vernacular English should not be regarded as just a communicative tool, as AAVE bears a lot of implications about Africans' culture and literature as well as daily life. In this respect, AAVE impacts a lot on African American society in terms of social and cultural aspects. People can observe the usage and influence of AAVE in many aspects of daily life. In fact, there is an intertwined relationship between black society and the language they use. By analyzing AAVE, we can not only get information about the linguistic properties of AAVE, but we can also find out what this language means for African American community and the extent of its effect on their daily lives.

Africans have passed their customs, stories, and rituals to new generations by means of their language. Especially elderly people have adhered to AAVE in their daily life. Thus, we can exactly say that AAVE has contributed to the development of African culture and the preservation of their unique customs.

As Africans attach great importance to the continuance of their language, they have always kept their language alive among their younger generations. Maybe the most useful and practical way to do so are the songs that are taught to the children by elder parents. They usually try to convey the things they value a lot. Mona explains this in her article as follows:

Verbal artistry among African American children is equally expressive and creative, although the forms are different. Children's lore in New Orleans Black neighbourhoods bears a necessary developmental function. Sidewalk songs pass on attitudes and knowledge of self, imitations of adult life and values, and distinct criticisms of adult life and societal norms. At its core, children's folklore is play as well as a comment on the world. Some attitudes are imposed by race and sex, and family, ethnic and economic situations. New Orleans itself, with its Black majority, imposes a dominant and varied set of adult examples, values, barriers, and opportunities. (Mona, 1998)

Other forms that are prevalent among the Black children are their street games and songs. They share a lot of values through the songs they sing and the games they play. Especially, the songs start to affect them at an early age, namely, Blacks impose their family customs on the songs they teach their children. As Mona states:

The oral songs and rhymes of these sidewalk games are a special part of children's folk life. Black youth typically learn sidewalk songs from other children. But they also learn them from their parents often before they can talk. Once in the children's repertoire, sidewalk songs take the place of nursery rhymes and reflect pre-adult concerns. Children then learn them from each other in the street, on the front porch, on the sidewalk, or in the park. Children's folklore, in general, fulfils certain functions; it reflects and criticizes society and transmits values. For most kids, their lore entertains them, teaches them how to manipulate words, helps to develop their group identity, and creates a bond. It also provides the opportunity to practice "handling" authority and informs them of their sexual roles. The sidewalk-song of children's folklore performs a particularly important role in African American culture. When Black youth perform these sidewalk songs, they practice and learn to contribute to their rich African American verbal culture. (Mona, 1998)

The folklore that Black children have plays a key role in enabling them to adopt some basics values, from this point they begin learning about their identity and their bond with the past. Through the common culture among the children, Blacks can have a chance to transmit several positive attitudes and thoughts to them. AAVE is crucial for African Americans to preserve and pass down their authentic traditions. As we have mentioned, the children's folklore by speaking AAVE keeps a great role for Blacks to know their symbolic values. Moreover, Sidewalk games help Black African children in many ways. For example, these games not only help children socialize, but they enable them to keep their oral traditions as well as acquire AAVE. These sidewalk games and songs involve a lot of the Black community in the USA.

AAVE is the voice of the community through which Black culture thrives. Accordingly, African Americans have brought their indigenous rich background to the land they have settled. Thanks to AAVE, Black people haven't had difficulty in connecting their past and present theatrical customs. Wherever they have gone, they have struggled to preserve AAVE.

3.6. AAVE on TV

Media is an indispensable part of our daily life. Thus, it has naturally changed the course of the development of AAVE. In this respect, the features and usages of AAVE have been observed in media coverage for years now. Particularly, in film, Tv shows, and series, it is not uncommon to see characters who represent the black culture and values. The key feature that stands out is usually the language that these characters use. As well as AAVE, the way these characters get dressed also shows the reality of African Americans' customs and values. The representation of AAVE in the media is not a recent case since it has long been one of the focal points from the time when the first slaves arrived in the new world. Green emphasizes the use of black speech in the media as follows;

Language plays a major role in creating images of blackness so much so that animal characters may even be assigned specific linguistic features that mark them as 'sounding black'. Speech patterns, along with other attributes of characters, are intended to invoke certain images in the minds of viewers. (Green L. , 2002, p. 201)

In recent years, just as the popularity of AAVE has risen on social media, TV programs and series have included a lot more about African Americans than before. In this respect, AAVE has played a vital role in portraying the common values of black people. Black actors and actresses have often been watched and idolized by the young generations. Perhaps, the more important issue is the fact that TV and social media have contributed to the general recognition of AAVE. In other words, AAVE has been the main means by which people of all races have been able to see and learn about the realities of Africans. In daily life, you can come across a lot of coverage of speech events related to AAVE. Likewise, TV series, films, and sitcoms shed light on the daily life of the black community. Moreover, the linguistic features of AAVE are frequently used in the media. Even the use of these features is generally perceived as cool when white people use them.

3.6.1. AAVE in Advertising

Language is one of the main tools of which commercial foundations take advantage to influence people to buy their products. In this sense, AAVE has also caught on a lot of attention since African Americans make up a substantial segment of customers in the USA. Perhaps, language provides the easiest way to connect with these people. That's why, in recent decades, the use of AAVE in

advertisements has been quite common. In particular, the advertisements that aim at black people include distinct features of AAVE. Zeigler emphasizes the importance of AAVE for African Americans by stating the following lines;

AAVE is, indeed, many things. It is a system by which African Americans communicate. It is a medium for African American thought. African American writers use it as a vehicle for literary expression. It is a social institution. AAVE is a persistent means by which the African American community maintains a cultural unity. (Zeigler, 1984, p. 169)

Cultural awareness is important in that it requires advertisers to use the language of the target society. As AAVE is seen in several realms, its coverage in advertising has been on the rise during the latest years. That is, this reality that language is the bridge to its speakers' hearts has forced advertisers to embrace AAVE despite the prevalent negative attitudes against AAVE. AAVE cannot be ignored anymore as it is almost compulsory for every segment of society to accept it.

In addition to other dialects and languages, AAVE has gotten attention from the advertising sector as it is kind of compulsory for advertisers to impact the target groups by including their languages and unique cultural values. Mufwene posits that AAVE has caught on much more than other dialects due to its distinct feature and common use. Indeed, some dialects that are similar to AAVE haven't got as much recognition as AAVE. Perhaps the very apparent reason why AAVE has stood out among other dialects in the USA lies in its rich history and unique corpus (Mufwene, 1984, p. 21). Furthermore, African Americans account for a significant portion of the customers, so AAVE can be seen in several commercial campaigns although there is still a bias against the use of this language. Probably the inevitable reason why AAVE should be included in publicity campaigns is the fact that it is spoken by the majority of African Americans. Another reason is that AAVE has unique features that distinguish it from SAE just as has been proved by some studies in recent decades.

The attitudes toward AAVE are still prejudiced and negative much as the coverage of AAVE has been on the rise during the past decades. For, there is a perception that a standardized language should be present while speaking, and the scale of this standardized speech is mainly based on SAE instead of AAVE. For this reason, the use of AAVE in commercial campaigns or TV shows leads to some

dissatisfaction, especially among those who are less familiar with AAVE. In this respect, when some distinguished features of AAVE such as double negation, cluster reduction, and phonological ones are presented in advertisements, some harsh criticism may arise against the agent of those advertisements. However, those who speak AAVE may resent the use of AAVE in advertisements at times because they consider that AAVE stereotypes are perceived negatively. In addition, the ones who arrange the commercials that include the features of AAVE are usually white producers, not black ones. Thus, naturally, such advertisements may result in dissatisfaction among African Americans as well. Yet, the appearance of black characters in commercials often leads to positive reviews by black people.

The coverage of AAVE in advertisements and TV is relatively low despite the recent increase. Namely, the commercials that include features of AAVE are limited and they generally contain SAE in addition to a few certain features from AAVE. As for the reasons for the limited coverage of AAVE in advertising, there are three main reasons. The first one is the negative perception of AAVE in the USA other than in the black community. The other reason is that the use of AAVE and stereotypes creates an image that is related to racism and discrimination. Therefore, advertisers often avoid using AAVE. Lastly, most advertisers target the total population rather than specific groups, so they prefer the standard language in their advertisements.

3.7. The Use of AAVE in Music

Music has been a distinguished component of African culture as well as their language. Music was the genre by which African slaves uttered their feelings and sufferings during the slavery hardship. In the early period of slavery, music was a part of spiritual and religious performance, and the songs and dances kept hope among slaves. After the abolishment of slavery, their music still focused on their experiences and struggle but this time witnessed the rise of blues in the black community. Although the language of the music remained the same, namely it was AAVE, the musical themes and genres changed over time. For example, following the popularity of blues among black musicians and folk, jazz caught on, especially thanks to Louis Armstrong. Armstrong became a popular musician in African

American society even though he mostly played for the white audience. Another notable jazz musician was John Coltrane who expressed the rebellious side of black folk with his music. Last but not the least, hip-hop music emerged and this genre included lyrics that were written in AAVE. Furthermore, this music was accompanied by rap that is the modern form of African storytelling. The hip-hop content was based on the challenges. African Americans had to put up with it. Even today, hip-hop and rap music are popular and have several proponents from all across the USA as well as the world.

African American language and music are intertwined as they have been the core of African American culture. Therefore, there are many features of AAVE in the lyrics of the songs of African American music. Just as AAVE functions as a communicative tool in daily speech, so it conveys the message of the songs to the listeners. In this sense, the lyrics of African American music provide a great deal of information both about AAVE and African culture. That is to say, AAVE has been studied mostly in the realms of linguistic features and sociolinguistics, but actually, music has been an indispensable component of African culture during the history of African Americans. Therefore, any song African Americans from any period would reflect the black community and African Americans' experiences.

When Africans migrated to the new world or were taken as slaves to the region, they did not cut their ties with their origins and culture because they kept on speaking their language and performing their music. Peretti suggests that during all the challenging periods through which African Americans have gone, music has given the power to African Americans to strive for their own culture, freedom and identity, and thereby they have managed to ensure their rights and status as free citizens (Peretti, 2009, p. 7). In this respect, music and language benefited from one another mutually in order not to die out. What is more, through AAVE and African American music, they have been able to preserve their identity, customs, and cultural heritage.

3.7.1. AAVE in Rap Music

AAVE is the language of African American music as the features of AAVE are included in almost all genres of music by African Americans. When you listen to

a rap song by an African singer, you hear some noticeable features of AAVE. That's why rap music is often associated with African culture and language. Accordingly, rap music can be defined as one of the tools that have helped the spread of African American music, culture and language firstly across the USA and then around the world. Peretti describes rap as follows:

What did distinguish rap from previous black popular musical styles, of course, was its emphasis on non-melodic but highly rhythmic speech. African, Afro-Caribbean, and African American oral traditions evolved in ways that were roughly similar to how black music was shaped. In the United States, slavery and second class citizenship in freedom had forced conversationalists, preachers, and others to mask their meanings, to "signify" creatively to convey and to disguise their messages. Humor, featuring artful insults and intentional absurdity, remained a rich element of oral culture from Africa to the New World. (Peretti, 2009, p. 163)

In the first place, rap was the voice of African Americans to express their emotions, desires, and demands. Nonetheless, the influence of rap music has gotten beyond the African American community because several white musicians have begun to perform this music. Hence, rap functions as a window that opens to the USA and the world. Besides, thanks to rap music, African culture has become popular among the other communities along with African American society since even white rap singers have used the known features of AAVE in their music. Although rap was initially labeled as a pure black music genre, it later turned into a huge success, so white people started to imitate this blackness.

Music has fulfilled an important role in the recognition of AAVE and African American culture and identity. More and more white audiences have paid attention to African American music and language thanks to the popularity of rap music. Thus, rap has provided a great deal of help in the acceptance and appreciation of black culture by the main stream American community. White singers have benefitted from the language and culture of the black community, so they are sort of volunteer ambassadors of African American culture as they have a greater potential audience in contrast to less known black rap singers. Peretti states that:

An inquiry into the musical expression of African Americans, past and present, shows black musicians and audiences constantly redefining the sonic terrain. Rap music reflects the intermarriage of continental music and the constant interaction of black and nonblack cultures. At all times, though, especially in the present, African American music also reveals continuity. The history of black music tells of a heritage preserved across the span of oceans, generations, and centuries. Throughout that history, voices that lift, console, celebrate, and critique will continue to resonate, along the long and hard path to freedom and equality. (Peretti, 2009, p. 170)

Rap music has contributed to African American culture positively as it has helped break the negative perception of blackness to a certain extent. Therefore, the practice of rap by famous white singers has served a critical role in the acceptance of blackness among dominantly white people. The assumption that AAVE is an inferior language and black culture is worthless has been challenged when people have inquired if that assumption is true, why some white people listen to rap music that is mostly a reflection of black culture and language.

The progress in terms of recognition of African culture, language, and music is quite admirable as until recently, anything from African American community was conceived negatively and labeled as inferior to standard American culture. So, what African Americans have achieved through their music is highly important. For, perhaps without such tools as music and language, it would not have been possible for AAVE and black culture to survive all the challenges from the slavery periods to the civil war. Although the discrimination and stereotypes against African Americans are still seen in the USA, the severity and occurrence of these acts have abated recently partly due to the popularity of AAVE, African American music, and literature. Peretti emphasizes the importance of African American music as follows:

In the twentieth century, African Americans migrated north and increased their agitation for legal and social equality. Musicians were highly visible pioneers in black cultural leadership in the United States, even before black people could hope to become political or social leaders. Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, and others, including classical and popular musicians, helped to make music a statement for black recognition in American society at large. The passion of African American gospel music inspired the civil rights movement and shaped soul, the popular music of the Black Power movement. While white co-optation of black music persists, it remains a key indicator of black cultural identity, which African Americans cherish and guard even as they seek to gain access to the opportunities offered by American society at large. (Peretti, 2009, p. 170)

African Americans have a rich oral tradition that traces back to their roots in Africa. And music has never ceased to be a fundamental part of their daily lives. During the whole process, African Americans have preserved their cultural values and roots particularly by sticking to their own language. Definitely, they have recorded their history in their music, stories, and other literary forms through the power of their language. In this respect, the language that is used in rap is like a fountain that springs what African Americans have experienced throughout history.

3.7.2. AAVE and Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-hop was a musical style especially among young African Americans during the 1970s, and this style largely focused on the problems that African Americans had to put up with at the time. The frustration, rebellious manners, and disappointment that most African Americans felt were expressed through the lyrics of hip-hop. The common themes in the early phase of hip-hop were the criticism of the challenges and inequality that African Americans had undergone. Therefore, hip-hop culture was not a choice but a natural reaction to unpleasant social and political circumstances. Although almost all the African Americans suffered from this turbulent period, those who were more stressed were the young ones who could not bear the bad living conditions and spoke up with their rebellious remarks via their music that was initially labeled as ghetto culture. Morgan comments on the emergence of hip-hop culture as follows:

Hip hop has emerged as a cultural, social, and political force, constituted and instantiated through language style, often illustrated in the rap itself. Hip Hop arose as a youth response to the political ideology of the Reagan–Bush era and its promotion of the social and civic abandonment of urban schools and communities in the U.S. The music, sounds, and lyrics from some of Hip Hop's most talented writers and performers has resulted in what has undeniably become the one cultural institution that urban youth rely on for representation. (Morgan, 1984, p. 187)

Although hip-hop is often regarded as a style, it includes several cultural codes of African American society. In addition to blending subcultures in the black community, hip-hop has contributed to the formation of the black identity, because hip-hop singers often limit their interest to black society. Thus, a negative attitude occurred against this musical style since the lyrics of hip-hop often include harsh criticism against the white dominant government. On this issue, Morgan suggests that:

Unlike the music, rhythm, and sounds of Hip Hop, the particular linguistic ideology of the cultural and speech community—the ideology of the Word— is the one aspect which, by definition, remains particularly urban African American. It is the core of the Hip Hop nation, the power, trope, message, and market all in one. The representation of African American culture, popular culture, language, and history as well as social, economic, and political life mediate Hip Hop's notions of reality. Thus, urban African American life is not simply represented in relation to in-group inter subjectivities, but through cultural symbols and sounds, especially linguistic symbols, which signify membership, role, and status. (Morgan, 1984, p. 205)

As to the language that is used in hip-hop, some claim that the language of hip-hop and AAVE is the same, whereas others put forward the fact that hip-hop is a social phenomenon but AAVE owns a historical and ethnic background.

Nonetheless, what is certain is that both AAVE and hip-hop are constructed on African roots. So, it may be plausible to maintain that hip-hop is one of the realms that AAVE has impacted to a large extent. Namely, AAVE and hip-hop might be considered interchangeable, yet AAVE encompasses hip-hop including other subcultures.

The studies on the grammatical features that are seen in hip-hop lyrics have reached the same assumption that the grammar of hip-hop shares the common features of AAVE. For instance, the features that are mostly included in hip-hop lyrics are typically copula absence, double negation, and tense markers that are unique to AAVE. However, it may not be rational to claim that these grammatical features have the same functions as they do in AAVE since these features can function a bit differently and bear some different meanings in hip-hop. Yet, this case does not necessarily mean that the hip-hop performers who apply the features of AAVE are not conscious of the real meanings of the features, as they intentionally alter the functions of the features to fulfill the expectations of the target audience.

The lexicons that are used in hip-hop may seem to be made up in the near past, but actually, most of the words and slang that prevail in hip-hop culture belong to AAVE. Nevertheless, it is quite normal that some of the slang and words have been modified with the aim of creating a language style that is authentic. Some casual slangs and words have a consistent meaning as they have been used by AAVE speakers for ages, but in hip-hop, the words and slang of AAVE may not carry the fixed meanings as they undergo some modifications in terms of meaning and structure.

Perhaps what makes hip-hop culture distinguished is the original style that reflects the realities of African American community. Most of the performers of hip-hop are the ones who speak the authentic language and style of African American culture. That's why the distinct hip-hop culture also helps form unity among the performers in terms of feelings, attitudes, and language. This unique hip-hop culture is not just limited to language and culture since it incorporates some socio-cultural fields of the black community. In this sense, along with AAVE, hip-hop is more than just a music style in that it is kind of simulating subcultures that are present in African American society. Morgan maintains "In Hip-hop culture, language is not

simply a means of communication. Rather, language use is viewed as a series of choices that represent beliefs. Participants in Hip-hop must learn the appropriate language for particular social contexts" (Morgan, 1984, p. 190).



CHAPTER IV

4. THE ROLE OF AAVE

AAVE is a distinctive component of the black community. The role of the language in African American society is far beyond just being a tool to communicate. In this sense, African Americans have regarded their language as a tool to speak out for their rights and express their thoughts. So, we can say this language functions as a reflection of the black community. Language is not just a tool that helps us communicate with each other as it reflects a myriad of elements about the society in which it is spoken. Accordingly, AAVE has a distinct role in shaping the key factors by which African American society can preserve their unique language and culture.

African Americans have a rich language corpus that has contributed to the development of African American literature and language. Since Africans attach a great deal of importance to their ancestors' cultural heritage, language has always become a highly significant instrument to bridge their past and present. In this respect, African American Vernacular English is the unique language by which most African Americans not only preserve their history and customs but also convey several clues about their identity and personalities.

4.1. The Status of AAVE

As AAVE encompasses a lot of realms in African Americans' lives, it has been the core of discussion for a long time. In addition, AAVE includes some unique characteristics as for its grammar and phonetics, for that reason, it differs from SAE. In the course of history, AAVE has been termed with different names that have represented the general perception about the language African Americans speak.

Whether AAVE is a dialect, slang or vernacular has been one of the most debated issues by scholars. However, the term “Vernacular” has been adopted ever since the second half of the 20th century, which signifies the language that African Americans speak may not be necessarily AAVE. As to the question: is AAVE slang vernacular or dialect? The term *vernacular* overweighs the other two terms since slang doesn't have distinct features that AAVE includes. The definition of the term

slang is quite different from that of AAVE as slang is a type of language that is short-termed and prevails in a language. As for dialect, it shows the elements of a distinct region, and a dialect is often non-standard English. Yet, like vernacular, dialect also has some unique grammatical patterns. Another clear distinction between AAVE and a dialect is that while AAVE has a broader use, dialects are usually limited to small communities. Furthermore, dialects are seen as broken forms of a language as well as existing in informal circles, unlike a standard language.

Since AAVE has some distinct features in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, it differs from SAE and thus, according to some linguists, it is a unique language that is commonly used by the black community. However, across the USA, there isn't a consensus on whether AAVE should be accepted as a distinct language or not. AAVE is regarded as bad English or broken English. Besides, those who speak AAVE are often regarded as ignorant and uneducated. Spears states that the use of AAVE reveals some realities of those who speak it, for instance, the speakers of AAVE dominantly belong to a lower status in terms of socio-economy. As a result, for fear of facing segregation, seemingly African Americans don't tend to speak AAVE in situations where predominantly white people are present. In this respect, they apply code-switching while they are talking to the speakers of SAE. Code-switching is adopted particularly when black Africans need to have careers and avoid racism. (Spears, 2015, p. 796)

The debate of whether AAVE could be a standard language like SAE has long been among scholars and linguists. However, as to the status of AAVE, there is not a consensus among them since some regard AAVE as a dialect of Standard English or slang. According to black Africans, in contrast to the claim AAVE is not a distinct language; AAVE includes several features that prove that it should be considered an official language.

The ones who believe that AAVE should have a formal status claim that AAVE as a formal language will benefit Black society in terms of recognition of their culture and identity. Moreover, for AAVE speakers, having a language with status will enable them to get a better education. Another potential benefit of formal recognition of AAVE is the fact that African Americans can get rid of the situations

where they feel compelled to use code-switching. However, those who oppose granting official recognition to AAVE maintain that AAVE is not a unique language but slang that includes some features of Africans' cultural heritage. As a result, they suggest that AAVE with a formal status would not change the current situation of its speakers in the realms such as education, work, and daily life. Additionally, the common justification by opponents is that the black themselves prefer to avoid speaking AAVE when they get higher positions or academic titles. Spears states this issue:

We cannot leave this subject without stressing that language regimentation has not been due solely to the imposition of external norms imposed on the Black community, primarily via the educational system and mainstream media. The externally imposed language (and general cultural) norms were infused with Blackness, so to speak, with the result that Black community-internal norms emerged. These norms were in turn hierarchically imposed by Blacks in the higher echelons of the Black world upon those in the lower ones. Thus, members of the Black elite, many of whom were educators, strictly imposed the standard language ideology and grammatical norms specifically of the elite on lower status members of the elite and those outside the elite (Spears, 2015, p. 797).

An attempt to recognize AAVE as a second language of education for African Americans was that of the Oakland School District, and it was the first official status although it got a lot of criticism. The Oakland school approved the use of AAVE for bilingual students who mainly spoke AAVE in their daily life by declaring AAVE as a distinct language. This decision was pivotal as some educators and politicians advocated it and called it a historical decision. Nonetheless, at the time there were some reservations as well since some claimed that the notion to accept AAVE as a second language lacked educational evidence. The concerns that that decision would not change the educational problem that was prevalent among African Americans were the main points to oppose the recognition of AAVE. Even some experts maintained that that action would affect black students adversely rather than benefit them. And similar decisions were made in Los Angeles and California. In addition, Los Angeles has provided educational programs for those that use AAVE since the late 20th century.

To defend their decision, the Oakland school reported that the curriculum in SAE was not efficient to enable speakers of nonstandard English a satisfying education, therefore most of those students failed due to this language barrier. Accordingly, this decision requires that AAVE be included in the education process as AAVE encompasses the cultural heritage and historical background of its

speakers. For this reason, providing education in their language will not only help them progress in terms of academic success but will also facilitate learning standard English.

Before Oakland School, there were some attempts to recognize AAVE as a distinct language, for example; black people claimed that their children had difficulty in SAE and demanded education for their kids in AAVE. Moreover, they blamed school management for not providing education in their language as they stated that teachers were not competent enough to teach those who spoke AAVE. As a result, some schools decided to train teachers to be able to give education in AAVE.

Another attempt to get recognition for AAVE was in 1979, which is called The Ann Arbor King Case. The parents of African American students sued the Ann Arbor School based on the fact that their children were left behind due to the language barrier, and thus they demanded that AAVE should be confirmed as the language of education for African Americans. As a result, the court gave a verdict that required that the school board take some steps to compensate the education of the loss for black students.

The problem that AAVE is not considered a unique language and not included in education for African Americans has led to several conflicts in the USA. Consequently, the system urges them to assimilate the dominant culture and language of the white people. Naturally, this creates a barrier for those who speak AAVE as their mother language.

Although AAVE is the common language that African Americans use in daily life, they have to speak SAE at schools, colleges, universities, and sometimes workplaces. Unfortunately, the attempts to get the authorities to recognize AAVE as a formal language haven't got enough support across the USA.

4.1.1. Attitudes towards AAVE

In general terms, language is power, but this case is not valid for all languages around the world, especially the ones that are spoken by minorities. Although speaking SAE is associated with prestige, civilization, and literacy, in the case of AAVE, this situation may be vice versa since speaking AAVE has long been

regarded as a sign of inferiority and ignorance in the USA. That is to say, SAE dominates almost all the formal circles and narrows the use of AAVE including languages of other minorities. In this case, speaking AAVE often leads to negative implications for its speakers. Smitherman comments on the roots of the negative perception against AAVE as follows:

Historical imperatives require that we recognize that the racialized language ideology did not emerge full-blown in the mid-twentieth century. Rather, it is rooted in the long history of scientific racism and social pathology whereby African peoples were deemed biologically un/underdeveloped and intellectually inferior to Whites. Further, over the centuries, African slave descendants came to be perceived as a critical social problem for White America. (Smitherman, 2015, p. 548)

Just as there is a linguistic bias against AAVE in social life or workplace other than in black-dominated circles, so is there widespread discrimination against AAVE in official places such as schools. That is, the demands and needs of African Americans are usually disregarded by the authorities who are in charge of education policy. Therefore, most African Americans students have difficulty adapting to schools particularly when young ones begin primary school. So, when African Americans face negative judgments while speaking AAVE, they may feel alienated from that place that may be the workplace or school. Frougt describes the situation as follows:

Attitudes towards AAVE can be described as both very simple and very complex. They are simple in the sense that they follow the all-too familiar pattern in which a non-standard variety is the target of negative prejudices: it's "bad" or "lazy" or a "broken" version of the standard variety; it holds you back; it sounds terrible. (Frougt, 2006, p. 53)

A dramatic result of the bias against AAVE is the fact that most of the students who fail during their education come from the black community. The main reason behind the insufficient academic progress lies in the language barrier, for African Americans are less familiar with SAE that is the main language of education in the USA. Dubois states; "The idea of a language barrier between the dialect spoken in black homes and communities and the Standard English of the schools, that was keeping Black children from achieving their maximum potential" (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 44). Even though some attribute the lower academic success to social class, parents' status, or even genetic factors, the reality is that there is a language problem for African Americans and thus they often have difficulty catching up with the speakers of SAE. Another issue that affects the education process adversely is that African American has a powerful oral tradition, so they can express themselves

fluently in their language while speaking, yet as to reading and writing, AAVE does not have a satisfying aspect since it has been ignored and restricted from the time of slavery.

There is still systemic discrimination against AAVE and other dialects that are spoken by minorities despite the fact that the speakers of AAVE have proved the power of their language with numerous successful works in literature, poetry, and music. Some call this discrimination as linguistic prejudice that is mostly related to AAVE. However, AAVE has been proved to have consistent rules and distinct features as well as a rich culture and history. In addition, in spite of all the challenges, the speakers of AAVE have managed to keep their culture, customs, and historical heritage through their language.

This linguistic prejudice against AAVE leads to adverse in daily life, for example, the one who is speaking AAVE may be found less credible compared to the one who uses SAE. In this respect, some even claim that such prejudice is actually another form of racism. The negative perception of AAVE stems from the systemic bias that has prevailed for ages. It is undeniable that negative attitudes towards AAVE still exist and make life harder for African Americans.

4.2.2. AAVE and Code-Switching

Code-switching is quite common among African Americans. It is the process in which African Americans shift from AAVE to SAE particularly when they contact white people in formal places. Namely, Code-switching changes according to the social context. Code-switching is kind of a natural process that mostly functions as a bridge for African Americans to get a sense of identity when they want to be a part of the community.

In contrast to code-switching that belongs to the linguistics realm, the shifting from AAVE to SAE results from the need of being a part of the larger community and feeling a sense of their identity. Another important element that triggers code-switching is the generally negative image of AAVE as AAVE is often labeled as broken and inappropriate dialect. As it is stated by Barret, there is a dominant ideology that makes people be monolingual. So, people are inclined to judge those who speak languages other than English as a threat to society.

Accordingly, the dominant ideology leads to negative perceptions about AAVE speakers (Barrett, 2014, p. 27). Therefore, in several social contexts, not only do African Americans feel compelled to correct themselves when they speak AAVE, but the authority of the white interlocutors often tends to correct the language that African Americans speak.

No matter how natural code-switching may seem to African Americans, it is complicated how they feel when they apply code-switching. They may experience a dilemma about their original identity and culture. According to Smitherman, "Blacks have believed that the price of the ticket for Black education and survival and success in White America is the eradication of Black Talk. On the other hand, Blacks also recognize that language is bound up with Black identity and culture" (Smitherman, 2006, p. 129). However; most African Americans still prefer to apply code-switching since it facilitates their communication with the other groups. Naturally, this code-switching leads African Americans to display two different identities according to the conversation they need to take part in. For instance, if they have a conversation within their community, they do not need code-switching, but if not; it seems natural that African Americans tend to shift from AAVE to SAE. As a matter of fact; code-switching presents a survival function for African Americans when they feel compelled to be a part of the dominant culture.

A place where African Americans feel that they have to apply code-switching is the workplace or when they apply for a job because there is a widespread opinion among African Americans that if they want to keep their job or to be hired, they should adjust to the common norm that speaking SAE is one of the necessities that everyone has to comply with. As a result, most African Americans have nothing but to switch codes according to their expectations. For example, the way people greet each other changes, when they are at work, they use the standard salutations, yet at home, they speak in AAVE. Namely, *wassup* turns into, *how are you?* if they are out of their community. However, Young argues whether it is worth using code-switching to escape from the prejudice against AAVE. He says that African Americans are aware of the fact that they would be judged unfairly if they spoke AAVE during job interviews (Young, 2014, p. 57).

African Americans may confront with negative judgments from their community as some believe that code-switching is a subtle way of assimilation. Therefore, especially the members who are educated or in process of education may hear critical remarks from their families or friends when they keep speaking SAE at home since it is thought that the case results from code-switching. The process of switching to SAE is called *talking white*. And justifiably, they assume that one may lose one's identity and personality if one breaks away from one's own language. Barrett claims that:

Although the code-switching approach claims to avoid negative attitudes by using terms like inappropriate and informal rather than wrong or incorrect, the end result does not seem to be very different. Given the close relationship between language and identity, terms like inappropriate simply reinforce the view that expressions of African American identity are unwelcome in public settings that are dominated by Whites. (Barrett, 2014, p. 51)

The claim that code-switching is a form of camouflage has drawn considerable attention as some believe that the process harms the speakers' mental and spiritual states. The debate is based on the fact that you cannot feel happy and be healthy mentally if you cannot be yourself because those who apply to code-switching have to renounce their values and character traits to adjust to the norms of the dominant culture mainly out of obligation rather than willingness. The main reason why African Americans use the code-switching strategy stems from the reality that they are exposed to prejudice if they speak AAVE in situations where SAE is regarded as the only official and acceptable medium. Of course, the process is not as easy as it seems to be, since the majority of those who switch from AAVE to SAE undergo a stressful mood and feel uncomfortable for not being able to be themselves.

As a consequence of the pressure and discrimination against AAVE and its speakers, naturally, most African American parents tend to encourage their children to practice SAE instead of AAVE. The apparent reason behind this behavior is the fear that their children will not be able to progress at school or may have difficulty in finding jobs or having careers. Moreover, justifiably parents do not want their children to be ridiculed just because of their language as unfortunately; it is not uncommon to witness such situations in which African kids are humiliated because speaking AAVE is labeled as a sign of inferiority and ignorance. Therefore, African

American children are aware of the fact that they have to assimilate now that AAVE is considered a broken and bad language.

As regards the cost of code switching, while some claim that it helps create a social uniformity and standard communication, others contend that it affects the speakers adversely and makes the discrimination practice justifiable. In addition, the opponents of code-switching allege that this strategy urges African Americans to sacrifice some of their values; in this case, a peaceful and productive atmosphere cannot be created in workplaces and educational circles. Therefore, code-switching makes life even harder for African Americans who are already going through hard times socially and economically.

4.1.3. The Acquisition of AAVE

Language acquisition is a natural process, that's why children start to acquire the language the moment they are exposed to their mother language. Although the studies on AAVE have usually focused on the origins of AAVE, another actual issue should be the question of how African American children acquire AAVE. In this respect, those who advocate the use of AAVE have mainly demanded that AAVE should be included in the school's formal syllabus, but in fact, the more important issue is to be aware of the fact that AAVE provides a natural environment for African young and children to acquire the language, that is, the acquisition of AAVE among young Africans is more important.

Social interactions have a key role in the acquisition of the language. But the amount of language exposure that African children experience during their early ages may differ depending on the region where they live. If there is a crowded African population, children can relatively learn several features of AAVE. However, as the social status of Africans rises or they move to more white-dominated areas, the chance that their children can acquire AAVE is more likely to drop.

As to how the acquisition of AAVE in the family or neighborhood comes true, we can mention several theories. For instance, some claim that the basic source of language acquisition is the interaction that is often nurtured by parental language input. In this respect, Wyatt stresses the fact that parental correction, feedback,

modeling, and dictation create the basis on which a child's language acquisition becomes real. Furthermore, in the mentioned process, children also pick up several grammatical, phonological and semantic features of AAVE (Wyatt, 1984, p. 262). In addition, some scholars maintain that language is an innate skill. Therefore, there is a universal pattern that leads to language acquisition that is valid for AAVE. This theory ignores the main role of the family and neighborhood effect on language acquisition. Another theory is based on the belief that there is a critical age by which time enough language exposure and input should be provided for the children so that they can acquire the language. To clarify this theory, Wyatt suggests "It has often been observed that children who are initially exposed to input after this critical age period display lasting cognitive and linguistic deficits that ultimately impact on their ability to acquire advanced language skills" (Wyatt, 1984, p. 263).

Language acquisition starts in the family. However, the impact of social circles on this process cannot be denied since not all languages have the same circumstances to be acquired. For example, almost the only way for African children to pick up AAVE is through the interaction to which they are exposed mainly in the family as well as the social circles such as peer influence, siblings, and caregivers. In this respect, Wyatt summarizes the language acquisition process as follows;

Social theories emphasize the sociolinguistic bases of language learning. Like behavioural theories, social theories of language learning view parental modelling and feedback as key to children's language learning. Social theorists, for example, focus on the social exchanges that occur between caregivers and their infants during certain joint routines. These exchanges can be seen during daily parent-child feeding, verbal game-playing, and book reading activities. In spite of the differences, each acknowledges, at least to some degree, the importance of significant others in a child's eventual development of language. For African American children, these significant others can extend beyond parents to include peers, siblings, and teachers as well as extended family and community members. (Wyatt, 1984, p. 263)

All in all, there are some universal realities that help the children acquire the language of their community. Therefore, African young children go through approximately the same processes while they are becoming familiar with AAVE. Moreover, African children's language process is quite similar to that of SAE particularly, during early childhood. Nonetheless, like African children age, they pick up some specific features of AAVE, which make the process differ from that of SAE. The reason why the process differs depends largely on the input that African children get from their social environment.

4.1.4. The Variations in AAVE

Language is a dynamic system that changes and progresses depending on the period and society in which it is spoken. Similarly, AAVE has undergone some changes due to socio-cultural influences. That's why AAVE has also a few dialects that differ from each other according to the regions and communities. AAVE roots stem from more than one African language, thus in time, some variations among the dialects are understandable. As Bonomo states;

Indeed, the African American speech community is a rich one, in terms of cultures and sub-internal varieties. Oddly enough, the AAE shows internal, say, regional variation to some extent: we may distinguish between northern metropolitan versions and southern rural ones, or, even more, between the South Atlantic coastal varieties which are different from those found in the Gulf region. (Bonomo, 2017, p. 63)

The main source of the variations in AAVE today goes back to the time of slavery. As there were several African dialects at the time, these distinct dialects created the base for AAVE to emerge. However, African slaves usually moved to different places and lost contact with each other, so naturally, each new click spoke AAVE by adding the features of other languages that were spoken in the same circle. The occurrence of variations is not a recent case since dialects or variations in a language are quite normal due to the circumstances that force such a deviation. Wolfram and Thomas comment on the variation process in early AAVE;

Great linguistic diversity existed at the time Africans were brought to North America, both in terms of the ancestral languages of West Africa and the developing English language in the Americas. The earliest waves of slaves from Africa spoke different native languages, represented different levels of proficiency in English, and were placed into quite varied contact situations depending on their geographical location and social situation. There is thus no reason to think that there was a seamless transition to a homogenized variety of English in the United States. (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002, p. 23)

The interactions among slaves as well as with the people of white dominant states during the early years of slavery paved the way for both AAVE and its variations to arise in the USA. Nevertheless, to what degree AAVE was affected by minor languages and SAE is still debatable today.

4.2. The Importance of AAVE for African American Society

The language helps us communicate. Moreover the language we speak also reflects some realities about our history, culture, identity, and personality. Just as all languages are mirrors of the societies in which they are spoken; AAVE carries almost all the components of African American community. For instance, just by

analyzing AAVE, you can obtain information about nearly all walks of African American society such as their experiences during history, their perception of life, their cultural values, and how AAVE has contributed to their survival in terms of culture, identity and personality in the course of history. Zeigler describes the importance of AAVE for African American community with the following remarks:

AAVE is, indeed, many things. It is a system by which African Americans communicate. It is a medium for African American thought. African American writers use it as a vehicle for literary expression. It is a social institution. AAVE is a persistent means by which the African American community maintains a cultural unity. As a language whose origin and development are synchronous with that of a country called America—colonial or postcolonial —AAVE is a factor in nation building. (Zeigler, 1984, p. 169)

If we can talk about a uniquely African American existence in the USA today, absolutely the most powerful tool behind this existence should be the language that is AAVE. Moreover, AAVE has contributed to both the formation of African American reality and the preservation of their culture, identity, and language heritage. Smitherman contends that AAVE is the voice of African Americans' ancestors and the medium of especially the experiences of those who witnessed the cruel practices of slavery. Not only does AAVE help fortify the bond among African Americans, but it also enables solidarity among black people and provides them with a sense of belonging to African American identity. As AAVE helped African slaves keep their unity, today it also functions as a binding force in the black community. As a result, African Americans have managed to eliminate the oppression by dominant white policies (Smitherman, 2006, p. 3). In this respect, the role that AAVE has played in African American community is undeniable since African Americans have been able to keep their unity and power by speaking AAVE. AAVE functions as a bridge between the past and present. In addition, AAVE is probably the most influential tool for the continuity of African American culture. Without studying AAVE, any survey on African American society would be incomplete.

Every language has a story as well as being the story itself. Namely, language sheds light on the perspectives that the speakers of it share. In this respect, AAVE has witnessed and reflected all the processes through which African Americans have gone for generations. That is, does society shape the language? Or does the language shape society? The answer would probably be controversial

because both of them are intertwined. However, AAVE has been the most consistent component of the black community, and thus it has served the continuity of the culture and customs that African Americans have got for centuries. Smitherman suggests that:

African American diversity notwithstanding, there is an underlying commonality among all those with the blood of a slave running in their veins. Culture, history, experience, not just skin colour and race, continue to define African America. And Black Language is all up in this mix. At some point in their lives, in one context or another, some 90 per cent of Black Americans "speak Negro." While Blacks also embrace and speak SAE, as well as other languages, such as Arabic and Spanish, they have held onto Black speech, from its "Negro English" days to African American Language of this period. Despite White America's ambivalence toward the language (borrowing and castigating it at the same time), "speaking Negro" has persisted over generations and decades. The language is bound up with and symbolic of identity, camaraderie, culture, and home. (Smithherman, 2006, p. 19)

Perhaps the most important contribution of AAVE to the black society is the fact that AAVE has played a vital role in the recognition of African Americans' unique aspects such as music, history, cultural values, and language. DeBose states that AAVE has played a crucial role in the practice of arts and music. Thanks to AAVE, African Americans have been able to express their experiences and thoughts through the lyrics of musical genres such as hip-hop (DeBose C. , 2005, p. 142). That is to say, thanks to AAVE, African Americans have had the opportunity to convey their experiences and feelings through their language. For example, hip-hop culture is based on the use of AAVE. Furthermore, the content of hip-hop songs includes whatever African Americans desire to speak out such as discrimination, injustice, freedom, and so on. By using AAVE in several realms of society, African Americans have been able to survive several challenges, especially from the slavery period to the civil war. Otherwise, today we would not be talking about a unique language and culture that belong to African Americans.

Surely the recent century has provided many advances that have paved the way for the development and use of AAVE in different fields from social sciences to linguistics ones. In addition, AAVE has become a part of popular culture, particularly thanks to the success of African Americans in some notable realms such as music, literature, and arts. The other element that has led to the recognition and acceptance of AAVE is closely linked to the technological blessings such as social media since AAVE would not have become popular even among white speakers but for the power of social media.

4.2.1. AAVE and Identity

A language is more than just being a communicative tool. Fought contends that If the speaker is an African American, we may notice the distinct features of AAVE while speaking. That's why it is quite common to assume that speaking AAVE indicates your identity as well. In this respect, AAVE both reflects African American identity and constructs their personality (Fought, 2006, p. 20). The language you speak is the world in which you live. In addition, AAVE seems to be the core of African American culture. Furthermore, AAVE helps create the sense of being a member of the black community, and thus share the identity that is shaped by the unique components of black society. Clark explains the relation between language and identity as follows:

Language, in the sense of what a particular person says or writes, considered from the point of view of both form and content, is central to individual identity. It inscribes the person within national and other corporate identities, including establishing the person's 'rank' within the identity. It constitutes a text, not just of what the person says, but of the person, from which others will read and interpret the person's identity in the richest and most complex of ways. Indeed, the over-readings they produce will be richer than the text itself can sustain. (Clark, 2013, p. 7)

AAVE and identity issues have always been intertwined in that both of them have impacted one another. Namely, as people normally tend to be a part of identity, African Americans have created their identity by sticking to their cultural values, customs, and language. Even though the sense of identity is not just restricted to speaking a common language, the case of AAVE has progressed differently in that African Americans have not owned many tools to create and display their identity apart from the language. As a result, AAVE has always been associated with African American identity. Lanehart states that:

We have ways of speaking and communicating that are derived from our experiences. How that language manifests itself depends more on our degree of identity with particular aspects of our language selves and how we see ourselves in micro and macro ways than it does with the person we may be speaking to at a given moment. How we present ourselves linguistically stems from our identity, but that identity is composed of our past, current, and future possible selves as well as space. We "act" as we see fit; but it is based on a more holistic perspective of how we see ourselves and the world around us. (Lanehart S. , 2015, p. 874)

Sharing a common history and experiences is the basic element that shapes one's identity as well as personality. In this respect, AAVE has played both a role in preserving the black identity and creating a common sense of belonging among African Americans since the dawn of slavery. When African slaves were brought to

the USA, they had no property but for their language, thanks to the language, they were able to communicate and survive the challenges. As a consequence of this common destiny, the African slaves could manage to keep their ties with their ancestors' cultural heritage.

Despite all the negative perceptions against AAVE, African Americans tend to express their feelings through AAVE. Yet, sometimes African Americans are compelled to switch to SAE, for instance, when they desire to advance in a career or get a job, they usually prefer to speak SAE. However, most African Americans hold the opinion that they feel better when speaking their language because using AAVE indicates that they belong to African American community. That is, African Americans regard AAVE as a sign of identity and solidarity with their community. In addition to being an expressive tool of identity, AAVE enables African Americans to keep a balance between their language and SAE. In particular, middle-class African Americans try to keep this balance as it is a must for them to maintain their employment or education. Kirkland suggests that:

The languages of Black people, and particularly of Black males, are firmly rooted in the linguistic ecologies of Black America: in neighbourhoods and schools, play spaces and work sites, and anywhere else we might socially find Black men and boys communicating. Hence, AAVE is not confined to the gendered space that is the Black male body; rather, it is a continuance of African languages inflected by subversive derivatives of mainstream, colonial, hegemonic dialects. (Kirkland, 2015, p. 846)

AAVE has always been associated with African American identity in several realms from politics to literature and music. Most probably the perception that AAVE is sort of an identity indicator has stemmed from the negative attitudes toward white supremacy. As a result, African Americans are inclined to speak AAVE while they are protesting the mainstream policies and demanding their rights. That is to say, AAVE has been a part of every initiative that has been campaigned by African Americans.

CONCLUSION

African Americans have a rich and rooted tradition that accounts for African American literature and language. Since Africans place a great deal of importance on their ancestors' cultural heritage, language has always become a highly significant instrument to bridge their past and present. In this respect, African American Vernacular English is the unique language by which most African Americans not only preserve their history and customs but also convey several clues about their identity and personalities.

Language is not just a tool that helps us communicate with each other as it reflects a myriad of elements about the society in which it is spoken. Accordingly, AAVE plays a key role in combining the basic factors on which African American culture is based. That is, AAVE provides both knowledge about African American English and other traits of Black Americans.

Most societies have reflected their cultures, daily lives, and social issues through their languages. Similarly, AAVE reflects black people's lives in America. Besides, AAVE mostly presents the troubles that black folk experience there. The main challenges that African Americans have often expressed through AAVE are usually segregation, slavery, racism, injustice, and inequality in society. Several components of black society are related to AAVE, and African Americans have benefited from AAVE to voice their problems and their demands from the authority.

African American Vernacular English means more than just a language for African Americans and conveys several implicit and explicit reflections of Black society. Namely, African American Vernacular English functions as a means of transmitting culture, history, personality, and identity. Moreover, AAVE has got a historical background of African Americans, and its features distinguish African American Vernacular English from Standard American English. In this respect, speaking AAVE implies some social reflections such as identity, personality, culture, and history. That is, African American Vernacular English influences African Americans in terms of social life, personal traits, and identity.

People can observe the usage and influence of African American Vernacular English in many aspects of daily life. Therefore, there is an intertwined relationship

between the black society and the language they use. Speaking AAVE not only reflects common features of African Americans but also sheds light on what this language means for African American community and how much it affects their lives. If one intends to understand the role of African American Vernacular English in shaping the black community, the very most influential realm should be the language that African Americans speak.



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Tez Başlığı / Konusu:

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENGLISH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE FOR THE CULTURE, PERSONALITY, IDENTITY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu belirlenen tez çalışmamın Kapak sayfası, Giriş, Ana bölümler ve Sonuç bölümlerinden oluşan toplam 94 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 30/03/2022 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtreleme uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 2 (yüzdeiki) dır.

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