

O CRUZAMENTO DE SABERES NA AULA DE INGLÊS

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AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH: A GRAMMATICAL OUTLINE

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1. Introduction

African American English (AAE) – also called Black English – is a nonstandard variety spoken by the majority of black people in the United States. In 2006 they numbered 38.5 million and made up nearly 13% of the country's population (Wright 2007:698). Many AAE speakers are bidialectal, using standard American English in formal situations to convey the fact that they are educated and using AAE in informal circumstances to convey solidarity with other black people. Many middle-class blacks who use standard English grammar may use AAE phonological features (e.g. word-final nasalized vowels) to convey a positive attitude towards their racial identity. However, President Barack Obama does not usually use these AAE phonological features in speaking standard English, and since his election many prominent AAE speakers have begun following his example.

African American English is seldom written except in dialogue in fiction, but since the middle of the 20th century the concern about disadvantages that children speaking AAE may have in the American educational system has led to a great deal of attention being devoted to the variety by sociolinguists like William Labov, making it one of the world's best documented non-standard language varieties. The fact that AAE involves massive variation between standard and non-standard features led to Labov's development of quantitative methods of measuring the presence of linguistic features. Later research into the origins of AAE features from historical contact with creole and African languages makes the study of AAE a useful bridge to the study of contact linguistics itself.

Until the 1950s the overwhelming majority of white Americans saw their country and its culture as the product of their European roots flourishing in a new land. This ideology allowed very little room for the contribution of other cultures, so that even the distinctiveness of the folk ways and speech of African Americans was attributed to their frequent lack of access to education and general ignorance – if not to their very intelligence. Thus well into the 1950s, Negro Non-Standard English (as AAE was then called) was usually considered bad English in need of eradication rather than study. Insofar as its origins were considered at all, it was assumed to have descended solely from British dialects that had been left untended in America.

In the 1960s, the civil rights movement sharply changed this ideology: equal citizens could not logically be unequal human beings, and there was a new willingness to reconsider African Americans, as well as the development of their language and culture in the United States. By the 1970s, there was widespread agreement – at least among linguists – that the distinctive features of AAE identified it as a post-creole: the descendant of a variety of English that had first been creolized or restructured when it was learned by adult African slaves on plantations (as English had been creolized in Jamaica, for example). Subsequently this speech underwent decreolization, or the loss of many of its distinctive creole features through contact with standard English. Dillard's influential book, *Black English* (1972) popularized this view, convincing many that AAE, like its speakers, was much more African than anyone had realized. This was part of another growing ideology, supported by many blacks, that affirmed a very separate cultural identity for African Americans.

By the end of the 1970s, there was a general assumption that decreolization explained the varying structural distance between different creoles and their lexical source language: Caribbean creoles based on English, for example, were actually post-creoles at different stages of decreolization away from a very early fully creolized variety that may have resembled the modern Surinamese creoles, which were cut off from contact with English in the 17th century. The decreolization theory for the origin of Black English – the “creolist” theory that finally received the imprimatur

of Labov (1982) – was a much more satisfactory explanation for that variety’s creole features than earlier hypotheses that traced its origins solely to British dialects.

More recent work on AAE has focused increasingly on those sociolinguistic factors which have long been considered relevant to the study of full creoles (e.g. demographic figures suggesting the proportion of native versus non-native speakers during the early period of language contact) but which have not been systematically explored for AAE until now. Winford (1997) traces the social histories of Virginia and the Carolinas, citing early demographic figures from Wood (1989), and compares the key structures in Gullah, AAE and Southern White Vernacular English, concluding that “AAVE was never itself a creole, but it was created by Africans, and bears the distinctive mark of that creation.” Rickford (1997, 1999) has followed a similar methodology and reached a similar conclusion; Mufwene also suggests that AAE “may simply have resulted from a restructuring which was not as extensive as what produced Gullah” (2001). In a recent book (Holm 2004), I argue that partial restructuring produced a whole range of semi-creolized languages that includes not only AAE but also Afrikaans, Brazilian vernacular Portuguese, non-standard Caribbean Spanish and Reunionnais vernacular French.

To provide an overview of what kinds of linguistic changes can be produced by partial restructuring, the following sections outline the non-standard features in the AAE verb phrase (section two), the AAE noun phrase (section three) and AAE clauses (section four). The conclusion (section five) discusses the implications of this new way of understanding the origin and development of African American English and other partially restructured vernacular languages.

2. The AAE verb phrase

2.1. AAE verbal morphology

In AAE the simple present tense is usually indicated by the verb stem without any **-s** inflection in the third person singular, e.g.

(1) AAE:

Where Miss Annie...live__ now. (Schneider 1989:65)

Working-class white Americans usually confine such deletion to a single lexical item (“he **don’t**”) and only in the negative (although “he **do**” is found in the dialects of southwestern England according to the *Dictionary of American Regional English*). In contrast, Wolfram (1969:36) found that lower working-class African American males in Detroit deleted the third person present ending 74% of the time.

The **-s** inflection can also occur with other persons in AAE:

(2) AAE:

I **members** de first shoes I ever had. (Labov et al. 1968)

The omission of the third person singular **-s** is highly stigmatized and considered a marker of social class.

In AAE a verb with past reference does not need to be marked for the past tense; speakers may alternate between inflected and uninflected forms:

(3) AAE:

They **taught** me mighty good, they **teach** me good. (Holm 1991:235)

Schneider (1989:81) found that of some 8,000 verbs in a past-tense context in the ex-slave narratives (recordings made between 1935 and 1974 of AAE speakers born before 1861; cf. Bailey et al. eds. 1991), 75% were morphologically marked, indicating that the category of past tense is part of the grammar of AAE, although actual marking of verbs is optional.

2.2. AAE auxiliaries/preverbal markers

Mufwene (1983) shows that the semantics of time reference in the AAE verbal system bears out a kinship to the English-based creoles of the Caribbean. However, the use of **been** as a creole-like preverbal mar-

ker of anterior tense or remote past is relatively rare in AAE, even in the ex-slave recordings, e.g.

(4) AAE:

I got on a cowboy shirt now that I brought from Texas. **Been** have it all my days. (Holm 1991:235)

Decreolizing varieties often replace anterior **been** with **did**, **had** or **was**; these are frequently less deviant from standard usage and thus less stigmatized. AAE **been** plus verb can be made to conform more closely to standard English morphology as an auxiliary in a progressive construction, despite the semantic mismatch:

(5) AAE:

I hear jus' as good now as I ever **been** hearing. (Holm 1991:235)

Some older AAE speakers occasionally use unstressed **did** to mark the past:

(6) AAE:

Let me see how that **did** come up. (Holm 1991:235)

Another remnant of preverbal **been** may be the AAE use of **had** in constructions that do not conform syntactically or semantically to non-AAE usage:

(7) AAE:

Today I **had went** to work. (Cukor-Avila 2001:105)

In Gullah and the Caribbean creoles the completive aspect marker **done** is followed by the uninflected form of the verb, but in the ex-slave narratives it is followed by the past participle:

(8) AAE:

Bout eight o'clock he **done been** all around. (Cukor-Avila 2001:238)

In decreolizing Caribbean varieties, progressive aspect is indicated not by the basilectal preverbal marker **de** but by the English verbal suffix **-ing** (without **be** as an auxiliary verb); this is the construction found throughout the ex-slave recordings, e.g.

(9) AAE:

They all **going** home now. (Cukor-Avila 2001:236)

Although **-ing** is clearly an inflectional morpheme in English, its status in decreolizing varieties is less unambiguous.

In a number of English-based creoles unstressed **does** marks habitual aspect, a dialectal usage also found in England and Ireland. A parallel construction is found in the ex-slave recordings:

(10) AAE:

An' I **does** enjoy certain of his show. (Cukor-Avila 2001:237)

In the Bahamas, this habitual preverbal marker **does** has the reduced forms **is** and **'s**:

(11) Bahamian CE:

They **is be** in the ocean. (Holm with Shilling 1982:111)

Rickford (1980) suggests that the complete loss of these reduced forms left **be** itself with habitual force in some varieties:

(12) Bahamian CE:

Sometimes you **be** lucky. (Holm 1988-89:160)

(13) Bahamian CE:

They just **be playing**. (Holm 1988-89:160)

Invariant **be** has also taken on the force of a habitual marker in modern AAE:

(14) AAE:

Those boys **be** **messing** with me. (Cukor-Avila 2001:105-7)

This usage is not usually found in the speech of whites, and has become much more widespread in AAE as a marker of ethnic identity since the middle of the 20th century (ibid.). The habitual meaning of this construction can be emphasized with **steady**:

(15) AAE:

Them brothers be rappin **steady**. (Baugh 1983:86)

Another apparent AAE innovation is the combination **be done** for the future perfect (Cukor-Avila 2001:104-7):

(16) AAE:

We **be done** washed all the cars by the time JoJo gets back with the cigarettes. (Baugh 1983:78)

2.3. AAE negation

Some nonstandard features of AAE negation, such as most uses of **ain't**, are also found in other nonstandard varieties of British and American English and their origin is not connected to contact with creolized varieties of English. However, AAE **ain't** can also be used to negate verbs understood to refer to past action, such as the following:

(17) AAE:

He **ain't** do it.

'He didn't do it.' (Rickford 1999:8)

Kautzsch (2002:45) notes that AAE "preverbal **ain't** appears to have lost its potential to occur in the present tense and has been restricted to past tense contexts." This use of **ain't** is not found in the speech of

whites in the American South who use **ain't** in other contexts (Cukor-Avila 2001:105-7). Taken together, the AAE uses of **ain't** seem related to the use of **ain't** in decreolizing varieties to replace the preverbal negator **no** found in more basilectal varieties:

(18) Bahamian CE:

Stone at sea bottom **no** know sun hot. (Holm with Shilling 1982:143)

(19) Bahamian CE:

Bookie **ain'** know who do it yet. (Holm with Shilling 1982:3)

This seems likely to have converged with the use of **ain't** in other nonstandard varieties corresponding to standard **haven't** in the present perfect tense (with partially parallel past reference). Similarly, AAE multiple negation or negative concord (negating not only the auxiliary verb but also all the indefinite pronouns in the sentence) is also found in white speech (Cukor-Avila 2001:105-7). However, AAE and creole English can extend negation to noun phrases as definite as proper nouns:

(20) AAE:

We **don'** want **no** six-month investigation! (AAE speaker, Euronews, 11/7/02)

(21) Bahamian CE:

They **can't** sell that in **no** Haiti (Holm with Shilling 1982:143)

For emphasis, AAE can invert the negative auxiliary and the indefinite subject:

(22) AAE:

Don't nobody like him. 'Nobody likes him.' (Sells, Rickford and Wasow 1996)

Negative concord can also be transferred across clauses:

(23) AAE:

It **ain't no** cat **can't** get in **no** coop. (Labov 1972:130)
'There isn't any cat that can get into any coop.'

Howe and Walker (2000:110) point out that such clause-external concord (like negative inversion) is also found in non-AAE varieties of non-standard English but is apparently not documented in any English-based creole. Sentence (23) is particularly difficult for monodialectal speakers of standard English to parse because it also contains a zero subject relative pronoun and AAE **it's** 'there is', also found in Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE). This construction seems likely to be linked to Bahamian CE **it have** idem. via the use of **it's** for both 'it is' and 'it has' (Holm 2000:200). There are parallels in Bantu languages as well as creoles based on French, Spanish and Dutch; among partially restructured varieties, BVP uses **tem** '[it] has' (versus EP **há**) and NSCS uses **tiene** '[it] has' (versus S **hay**) (ibid.).

2.4. AAE non-verbal predicates

Non-verbal AAE predicates have received particular attention in the literature. Labov (1969) did a quantified study of the absence of forms of **be** in certain phonological and syntactic environments, which he related to social variables. Holm (1984) related the AVE patterns to those in Atlantic creoles and the African languages that influenced them to trace the role of restructuring in AAE's genesis and development.

Expressed forms of the copula are normally required in standard English and all British dialects. Poplack (2000:20) concedes that "zero copula is perhaps the only variant studied in this volume which cannot be identified as a legacy of English." Walker (2000:67) implies he has counter evidence regarding this point: "Regardless of the lack of historical examples, zero copula does exist in other nonstandard varieties of English, in locales such as Alabama (Feagin 1979), Mississippi (Wolfram 1974) and Yorkshire (Tagliamonte, p.c.)." Aside from dealing with the

likelihood that zero copulas came into the non-AAE varieties of Alabama and Mississippi through contact with AAE, Walker needs to provide more precise information than reference to a personal communication since many varieties of informal English can omit copulas when they are inverted auxiliaries (e.g. “You going?”).

There is massive variation of the AAE zero form of the copula with the expressed forms; sometimes this variation occurs almost within the same sentence:

(24) AAE:

They ___ all dead. All of them’s dead. (Holm 1991:239)

Where they ___ at...where they **is**.

The Yankee **be** to the landing, they ___ drunk.

The AAE pattern has parallels in Gullah, Jamaican, and ultimately Yoruba (ibid.), providing evidence that AAE resulted from the partial restructuring of English under the influence of similar creole and African languages.

3. The AAE noun phrase

AAE nouns are variably marked for number and possession, although in some varieties the possessive marker is categorically absent. AAE personal pronouns usually mark case.

3.1. Number in the AAE noun phrase

As in many West African languages, Caribbean English Creole nouns are not inflected for number, although when relevant plurality can be indicated by juxtaposing a noun with a morpheme that is homophonous with the pronoun meaning ‘they’:

(25) Yoruba:

àwon okùnrin [literally ‘they men’] i.e., ‘the men’ (Rowlands 1969: 195-7)

(26) Jamaican CE:

dem bwai/de bwai-**dem** ‘the boys’

This plural marking usually implies definiteness and is confined to animate nouns. Of course the form is related to the British and American dialectal demonstrative “**them** boys”, but creoles frequently derived their definite articles not from those of their lexical source languages (which tend not to receive emphasis) but rather from the latter’s demonstratives (Holm 1988-89:191).

Some parallel constructions can be found in the language of the ex-slaves:

(27) AAE:

them wagon (Holm 1991:240)

However, the English **-s** inflection also occurs frequently:

(28) AAE:

two looms (Holm 1991:240)

In quantitative studies of contemporary AAE, the **-s** pluralizer is nearly always present (Wolfram 1969:143). Rickford (1999:7) notes that its absence is “much less frequent” than the absence of the homophonous verbal or possessive inflection. However, in earlier varieties of AAE such as the ex-slave narratives, there is so much variation that it is not always clear that the **-s** morpheme is anything more than a stylistic variant:

(29) AAE:

had hounds...them hound_.....six mens...six mans...six **men** (Holm 1991:240)

Poplack et al. (2000:100) claim that this grammatical approachment of AAE to standard English is not evidence of decreolization since the varieties of English out of which early AAE grew (which they claim were

not influenced by African or creole languages) also had zero marking for some plurals (e.g. “two bushel_”). However, they are unable to offer any evidence that the rate of zero plural marking in these varieties was in any way comparable to that in early AAE. Thus the lower rate of plural **-s** absence in contemporary AAE is indeed evidence of a leveling of features between AAE and other American varieties, particularly in light of the finding of Rickford (1999:273) that his recent studies of this feature in Palo Alto show “no appreciable change” in the rates found by Wolfram (1969) or Labov et al. (1968) that might support a growing divergence between AAE and other varieties.

It has been suggested that such nonstandard forms as **mans** and **childrens** resulted from decreolization, i.e. the acquisition of the English pluralizing morpheme and its use with what were considered monomorphemic lexical items. Schneider (1989:161) rejects this hypothesis, citing such British dialect forms as **foots** and **feets** as likelier sources; however, the burden of proof would seem to be upon him to demonstrate that there were British dialect models for all or even most such AAE forms, and that their use was widespread among southern whites.

In addition to the simple plural, AAE and other varieties of English have an associative plural after names of persons:

(30) AAE:

Felicia **an' them** done gone. (Mufwene 1998:73)

The construction, often pronounced /nɛm/, here means ‘Felicia’s friends or family or associates.’ Mufwene (ibid.) notes that AAE shares this construction “with English creoles, rather than with other varieties of English”, although he adds in a footnote that it is also used by whites in the American South. It does indeed seem to be related to a syntactically and semantically parallel construction in a number of African and Atlantic creole languages of various lexical bases:

(31) Yoruba:

àwon Táíwò [literally ‘**they** Taiwo’], i.e. ‘Taiwo and his family, schoolmates or friends’ (Rowlands 1969:196)

(32) Miskito Coast CE:

di sukya **dem**

[literally ‘the medicine-man **they**’], i.e. ‘the medicine man and his lot’ (Holm 1988-89:193)

Actually the AAE construction is also found in informal use in many parts of the United States (DARE) and England (R. Hudson, p.c.), although it may well have originated in Africa:

(33) non-standard E:

Mary **an’ them** came over yesterday.

The tendency of emphasized and conjoined pronouns to take the object case in informal English (whatever their function in the sentence) probably facilitated the borrowing of the AAE associative plural structure into other varieties of English.

3.2. Gender in AAE

For all practical purposes, standard English lacks grammatical gender; even British bureaucrats are now nervous about calling a ship **she**, let alone a country (Michael Pye, personal communication). For this reason, gender agreement between elements in the verb phrase is as irrelevant to AAE as it is to standard English. Dillard (1972:56) mentions AAE-speaking children occasionally producing sentences like “**He** a nice little girl” but this is not a feature of adult AAE, although *it* can be found in Gullah and other varieties of creole English.

3.3. Possession in the AAE noun phrase

The English-based creoles indicate possession by juxtaposition rather than inflection:

(34) Miskito Coast CE:

di uman_ biebi 'the woman's baby' (Holm 1978:286)

This is also found in AAE:

(35) AAE:

the white folk__ kitchen (Holm 1991:241)

However, Schneider (1989:162) found the possessive morpheme present in over 90% of the 377 cases in which it was possible in the ex-slave narratives. He notes that while there is variable use of the possessive inflection in all northern urban varieties of AAE, there are southern varieties in which the morpheme's absence is categorical, suggesting that the suffix has been gaining ground as a part of decreolization (1989:164). Cukor-Avila (2001:106-7) lists the absence of both plural and possessive **-s** as features found only in AAE, not found in the vernacular speech of whites in the American South.

3.4. Pronouns in AAE

In the original pronominal system of most of the Caribbean creoles, it would appear that no distinction was made for gender or case, and the same form also served as a possessive determiner. Possible remnants of such a system can be found in the language of the ex-slaves, although these usages are less frequent in current AAE:

(36) AAE:

Well the master had promise' to, to give **we** all forty dollars a month in pay. (Holm 1991:241-2)

(37) AAE:

We had **we** own lawyers. (Holm 1991:241-2)

The use of standard English object pronouns in subject position is also encountered in the ex-slave narratives:

(38) AAE:

When **us** all leaves dis old world. (Schneider 1989:66)

Schneider concludes that “there is some evidence that this grammatical variable was more subject to some degree of creolization than others” (1989:177). AAE’s second person plural pronoun, **you all** /yɔ/, is likely to be an innovation. The pronoun of the same person and number is derived from various African languages in Caribbean Creole English (Holm 1988:203-4), probably motivated by the need for a form of **you** that is unambiguously plural (cf. parallel forms in other varieties of English, e.g. **yous**, **you guys**, **you chaps**, etc.). In fact, Eastern Caribbean CE has **all you**; the AAE form, generalized throughout Southern American English, may be a calque on Twi **mó nyina**, literally ‘you all.’ In AAE (but seldom in the speech of Southern whites) there is a corresponding possessive:

(39) AAE:

It’s **y’all** ball. (Rickford 1999:7)

Like other varieties of English including CE, AAE has pleonastic subject pronouns:

(40) AAE:

That teacher, **she** yell at the kids. (Fasold and Wolfram 1970:81)

These pronouns seem likely to facilitate the parsing of AAE sentences containing relative clauses without subject relative pronouns. Their existence in CE may also have facilitated the adoption of the postnominal **dem** pluralizer (cf. Cassidy and Le Page 1980:147). Finally, Wolfram (2008) notes that “The regularization of **mine** to **mines** in ‘The book is **mines**’ is quite robust in most varieties of AAVE, though it appears more typical of preadolescent speakers than older speakers.”

4. The structure of AAE clauses

4.1. AAE word order

African American English has the usual English subject-auxiliary inversion (or lack of it) in questions that can be answered “yes” or “no”, e.g. “Can I go?” (Burling 1973:68). However, unlike standard English, AAE has optional inversion with question words in the main clause, i.e. both of the following occur:

(41) AAE:

Where **can I** go? (Burling 1973:68)

Where **I can** go?

In embedded questions, which have no subject-auxiliary inversion in standard English, inversion is again optional in AAE:

(42) AAE:

I wonder {where **can I** go}.(Burling 1973:68)

I wonder {where **I can** go}.

In embedded yes/no questions, AAE may have no connecting **if** or **whether** but does have inversion:

(43) I wonder {**can I** go}. (Burling 1973:68)

In this respect AAE is unlike English-based creoles, which have no such inversion at all and therefore happen to match standard English word order in embedded questions:

(44) Jamaican CE:

Dem aks mi {if **a want** i}. (Hancock 1979:14)

‘They asked me {if **I wanted** it}.’

A case might be made for AAE being more similar to Irish English, in which direct questions are also embedded:

(45) Irish English:

I don't know {**is that** right or not}. (Barry 1982:108)

While Irish English might well have served as a model for AAE at an earlier period (Rickford 1986), the AAE pattern of subject-auxiliary inversion could also be the result of partial restructuring or decreolization. Bahamian English, which seems to be either more restructured or at an earlier stage of decreolization than AAE (or both), has no subject-auxiliary inversion in the basilect but frequent inversion in the upper mesolect, even in embedded questions. Thus one finds the following variation:

(46) Bahamian CE:

I can go? ~ **Can I** go? (Holm 2000:236)

(47) Bahamian CE:

I don't know {where **I can** go}. ~ I don't know {where **can I** go}.
(Holm 2000:236)

4.2. Dependent clauses in AAE

The structure of many AAE relative clauses is parallel to their equivalents in standard English, but this is not always the case. In AAE the zero form of the relative pronoun can be used not only for the object of the verb as in standard English (e.g. "The man {____ he is hiring} is my uncle") but also for the subject:

(48) AAE:

He got a gun { ____ sound like a bee}. (Dillard 1972:68)

This structure is also found in Creole English, e.g.

(49) Jamaican CE:

De man { ____ owe me money} gone a Cuba. (Cassidy 1961:57)

According to Cassidy, Jamaican CE, “like the Niger-Congo languages... gets along with paratactic constructions” (ibid.). However, Yoruba, which is a Niger-Conger language, does have a relativizer: **tí** ‘who, which’ but in “spoken Yoruba **tí** is often omitted, e.g.

(50) Yoruba:

aṣọ { ____ mo rà lánâ} n`iyí (Rowlands 1969:90)
cloth { ____ I bought yesterday} this-is
‘This is the cloth I bought yesterday.’

However, “It cannot be omitted where its omission would produce ambiguity”, e.g.

(51) Yoruba:

màlùù { **tí** kò ní ìrù} (Rowlands 1969:90)
cow which no has tail
‘a cow which has no tail’

In fact, the Yoruba relativizer **tí** sometimes seems more like a European subordinator than a relative pronoun in that it can introduce a clause which requires its own subject pronoun even though the relativizer itself would have this function in a European language:

(52) Yoruba:

èmi {**tí** mo fún ẹ ní gbogbo owó yǐ} (Rowlands 1969:88)
1s {REL 1s give 2s OBJ all money DEM}
‘I who [I] gave you all this money.’

Bickerton (1981:63) speculates that creoles may have been “born without surface relativizers” and gives examples of zero subject relative pronouns in Guyanese CE, Seychellois CF and Annobón CP (ibid. 62-63).

AAE's zero subject relative pronouns have been used to support its creole history, but Tottie and Harvie (2000) provide convincing evidence that the varieties of English that British settlers brought to the New World also contained this construction. Not only was it the predominant form in Middle English, as in Chaucer's "I saugh a beest ___was lyk an hound" (ibid. 202), but it is also found throughout British regional varieties (Orton et al. 1978, map S5). This construction apparently converged with the zero subject relativizers in African and creole languages to favor the selection of this form in AAE. Although there is a lack of published research in this area, Tottie and Harvie point out that a study of one individual's AAE (McKay 1969) reveals that "zero is the most frequently used relativizer, with 54% of all cases, more than half of which are subjects; *that* comes second with 38%, and *what* accounts for 9%; except for quotations from the Bible, *who* and *which* do not occur" (Tottie and Harvie 2000:200). While zero subject relativizers account for 41% of the tokens in the ex-slave recordings, they account for only 2% and 5% in the modern spoken English of Americans and Britons, respectively (ibid. 224).

However, it is ironic that Tottie and Harvie (2000:223) find the Englishness of AAE confirmed by the fact that "the Gullah relativizers **wuh** and **weh** are totally lacking in our data" since these can be traced to England's Northcountry dialect (Holm with Shilling 1982:218). As a matter of fact, Kautzsch (2002:213) notes that in his early AAE data there are indeed a few sporadic occurrences of "relative clauses introduced by non-spatial **where**, which makes it hard to categorically deny any creole influence on AAE relative constructions."

Dillard notes that some speakers of AAE seem to hypercorrect clauses without relative pronouns, supplying not only an object relative pronoun but also the clause's original non-relative object pronoun:

(53) AAE:

Dem little bitty hat {**what** dey wearin' **dem** now}. (Dillard 1972:68)

In AAE ambiguity in sentences without a subject relative pronoun can often be cleared by a pleonastic subject pronoun marking the verb of the main clause:

(54) AAE:

The boy {___ won} **he** did a three. (Smith 1973:94)

‘The boy who won did a three.’

Regarding subordinate clauses, most in AAE are identical in structure to those in standard English, with the notable exception of the use of **say** to introduce a quotation:

(55) AAE:

They told me {**say** they couldn’t get it}. (Rickford 1977:212)

This construction is also found in a number of English-based creoles:

(56) Krio CE:

Olu tɛl mi **se** a fɔ kam. (Yillah and Corcoran 2007:184)

Olu tell me that I should come

‘Olu told me that I should come.’

(57) Gullah CE:

dɛ lɔ {**sɛ** wi tu ol}. (Turner 1949:211)

‘They admit {**that** we’re too old.’

Turner (1949:201) pointed out the formal and syntactic similarity of Gullah **sɛ** and Twi **sɛ** ‘that, saying’ and English **say**. Cassidy (1961:63) noted that the pronunciation of Jamaican **se** is /sɛ/ when it means ‘that’ rather than /sey/, leading him to support the connection with Akan **se**. Boretzky (1983:177) finds the lexical borrowing of **se** into the creoles an inadequate explanation in light of the fact that the Surinamese creoles have completely different forms, i.e. Sranan **tak(i)** and Saramaccan **táa**,

leading him to believe that the substrate influence on this construction lay in the grammar rather than the lexicon.

(58) Sranan CE:

M sab {**tak** a tru}. (Voorhoeve 1962:26)
'I know that it's true'

The existence of parallel structures in creoles not based on English (Holm 2000:208-209) supports Boretzky's conclusion.

5. AAE grammar: the result of partial restructuring

Many of the morphosyntactic differences between AAE and mainstream (i.e. non-Black) American English can be characterized as structural reduction, as can the differences between the other partially restructured varieties discussed in Holm (2004) and their lexical source languages. This often includes reduction (as opposed to total loss, as in the case of creoles) of morphological marking for person or tense on verbs; for number or possession on nouns; or for case on personal pronouns. Sometimes this reduction means the loss of syntactic complexity, such as subject-auxiliary inversion in questions. However, the loss of these particular features rather than others does not seem to be random: the losses that took place tend to make the partially restructured varieties more like their substrate languages. Of course the fully restructured creoles of the same lexical base with which the partially restructured AAE varieties were in contact bear the mark of their substrates even more strongly. Yet, in the final analysis, there is no question that the partially restructured varieties also bear the stamp of their substrate since they have innovative structures that represent not a reduction of the structure of their superstrate languages but rather an addition to it from their substrate, such as non-verbal predicates as in (24) above, in which the form of the copula is influenced by whether the following structure is a predicate adjective, a noun, or a locative phrase. A comparison of AAE grammar with that

of parallel language varieties based on Dutch (Afrikaans), Portuguese (Brazilian Vernacular Portuguese), Spanish (Non-standard Caribbean Spanish) and French (Reunionnais Vernacular French) clearly indicates that partial restructuring leads to the retention of part of the source languages' morphosyntax but also the introduction of a significant number of substrate and interlanguage features.

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