

Lecture 13

African American Vernacular English. Spanish and English

Language is a dynamic reflection of culture, history, and social interaction, and both African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Spanish-English contact varieties demonstrate this vividly in the United States. AAVE is a distinctive variety of English spoken primarily by African American communities, with roots in West African languages, English dialects of early settlers, and the historical experience of slavery. It features unique patterns of phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse, reflecting both historical development and ongoing cultural identity. AAVE has also significantly influenced mainstream American English, particularly through music, media, and popular culture, contributing words, expressions, and stylistic features that are widely recognized today.

Similarly, Spanish-English contact varieties, often called Spanglish, emerge in communities with strong bilingual interaction, particularly in the Southwestern United States, Florida, and urban centers with large Latino populations. These varieties arise from the blending of Spanish and English vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, reflecting cultural negotiation, bilingualism, and social identity. Spanish-English contact is influenced by factors such as immigration, education, media, and community networks, creating a fluid and adaptable mode of communication.

Studying AAVE and Spanish-English contact varieties provides insight into the complex interplay between language, culture, and social history. Both demonstrate how English evolves in contact with other languages and communities, producing unique linguistic features and expressions of identity, while also shaping broader patterns of American English. Understanding these varieties is essential for appreciating linguistic diversity, sociolinguistic dynamics, and the cultural richness of the United States.

African American Vernacular English (sometimes called Ebonics, and formerly called Black English) is a major social speech type. It refers to the variety of American English most shaped by African American culture. Historically, African American English has probably drawn some features from plantation creoles, but has drawn many more characteristics from the Southern American English associated with plantation culture.

Speakers of African American Vernacular English generally do not pronounce *r* after vowels, so that *door* may sound like *doe*, or *poor* like *Poe*. Words like *this* and *that* may be pronounced *dis* and *dat*. Groups of consonants at the ends of words are often reduced to a single consonant, as for instance in the pronunciation of *sold* as *sole*, or *walked* as *walk*. It is common for the linking verb, usually a form of the verb *to be*, not to appear in such sentences as *He happy* or *She doctor*. The use of *be* in the sentence *He be sick*, on the other hand, means that he has often been sick, or has been sick over a period of time.

During and after the Great Depression of the 1930s, many African Americans left farms in old plantation areas and moved to cities in search of work and opportunity.

They maintained a strong common culture in the cities because of segregated housing, and African American Vernacular English was maintained as well, although some African American communities began to develop more local speech characteristics. As more and more African Americans moved away from segregated housing, they had less connection to the vernacular and more occasion to use other regional or social speech characteristics or to speak standard American English. Experts disagree about whether African American Vernacular English is becoming more different from regional and social varieties of Standard English or more like these varieties. This disagreement stems from differences in which African Americans they count as speakers of African American Vernacular English.

Large communities of Hispanic Americans have developed in the Southwest and in many cities throughout the United States. Spanish and English are both commonly used in these communities, but often for different purposes or in different settings. People sometimes also blend Spanish words into English sentences or English words into Spanish sentences, a process called code-switching. The English of such communities is enriched by many Spanish words, but the practice of code-switching is not the same thing as a social variety of American English.

32. Influence Of American English.

Most people around the world who learn English as a second language learn either American English or British English. The worldwide use of English began when Britain created a worldwide empire. Today, most people who learn English as a foreign language still learn British English. This happens because Britain has had a longstanding interest in teaching English and has publishers and institutions in place to promote it. American English is taught more and more, however, because of the worldwide success of American business and technology. This success also leads speakers of British English—even in England—to adopt many Americanisms. English has truly become a world language in science and business, and over time it will come to have more of an American English sound.

1. Historical Factors

AAVE: Slavery and West African heritage: Enslaved Africans brought linguistic features from West African languages, which influenced pronunciation, grammar, and intonation.

Colonial English dialects: Early English settlers' regional dialects mixed with African speech patterns.

Spanish-English contact:

Immigration: Spanish-speaking immigrants brought their language to English-dominant areas, creating bilingual communities.

Colonial history: Areas formerly under Spanish rule (e.g., Florida, Texas, California) retain Spanish influence.

It's never easy to pinpoint exactly when a specific language began, but in the case of English we can at least say that there is little sense in speaking of the English language as a separate entity before the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain. Little is known of this period with any certainty, but we do know that Germanic invaders came and settled in Britain from the north- western coastline of continental Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries. The invaders all spoke a language that was Germanic (related to what emerged as Dutch, Frisian, German and the Scandinavian languages, and to Gothic), but we'll probably never know how different their speech was from that of their continental neighbours. However it is fairly certain that many of the settlers would have spoken in exactly the same way as some of their north European neighbours, and that not all of the settlers would have spoken in the same way.

2. Social Factors

Community and identity: Both AAVE and Spanish-English reflect social group identity, solidarity, and belonging.

Segregation and social networks: In AAVE, historical and social segregation reinforced distinctive speech patterns within African American communities.

Bilingualism: Spanish-English contact arises in communities where speakers regularly switch between languages.

The reason that we know so little about the linguistic situation in this period is because we do not have much in the way of written records from any of the Germanic languages of north- western Europe until several centuries later. When Old English writings begin to appear in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries there is a good deal of regional variation, but not substantially more than that found in later periods. This was the language that Alfred the Great referred to as 'English' in the ninth century.

3. Linguistic Factors

Phonology: AAVE: consonant cluster reduction ("test" → "tes"), th-fronting ("this" → "dis").

Spanish-English: influence of Spanish vowel and consonant patterns in English words.

Grammar and syntax:

AAVE: habitual "be" ("He be working"), multiple negation ("I don't know nothing").

Spanish-English: code-switching and hybrid structures ("Voy a the store").

Lexical innovation: Borrowing, calques, and new word formation influenced by both social context and bilingualism.

The Celts were already resident in Britain when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, but there are few obvious traces of their language in English today. Some scholars have suggested that the Celtic tongue might have had an underlying influence on the grammatical development of English, particularly in some parts of the country, but this is highly speculative. The number of loanwords known for certain to have entered Old English from this source is very small. Those that survive in modern English include brock (badger), and coomb a type of valley, alongside many place names.

Here's a detailed introduction for a lecture or paper on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Spanish-English contact:

4. Cultural Factors Music, media, and literature:

AAVE has influenced jazz, hip-hop, rap, and literature, spreading its features into mainstream English.

Spanglish is visible in music, television, and social media, reflecting bicultural experiences.

Oral tradition: Storytelling, proverbs, and informal communication preserve and transmit linguistic features.

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5. Technological and Media Influence

Mass media, radio, television, and social media spread AAVE expressions and Spanish-English hybrid forms beyond local communities, influencing popular English usage.

Digital communication encourages creative mixing of English and Spanish, especially in texting, social media, and online content.

Spanish-English contact varieties, often referred to as Spanglish, reflect the linguistic creativity that emerges in bilingual communities. The varieties are shaped by code-switching, borrowings, and hybridization of vocabulary content, grammar, and syntax, allowing speakers to navigate cultural, social, and situational contexts effectively. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Spanish-English contact varieties exemplify the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in multilingual and multicultural societies. AAVE, with its roots in West African languages, English dialects of early settlers, and the historical experience of slavery, has developed distinctive patterns of phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse. It serves not only as a mode of communication but also as a marker of cultural identity, solidarity, and social belonging within African American communities. AAVE has also influenced mainstream American English through music, media, literature, and popular culture, contributing widely recognized lexical items, syntactic patterns, and stylistic features.

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effectively. Spanish-English contact illustrates how languages interact, adapt, and influence one another, producing hybrid forms that are both functional and expressive of bicultural identity.

Both AAVE and Spanish-English contact highlight how social, historical, and cultural factors drive linguistic innovation. They demonstrate that language is not static; instead, it evolves to meet the communicative needs of communities while preserving cultural heritage. Studying these varieties provides critical insight into sociolinguistic dynamics, identity construction, and the broader evolution of American English, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity in society.

Overall, AAVE and Spanish-English contact varieties reveal that language is deeply intertwined with history, culture, and social experience, and that variation within English reflects the rich tapestry of American linguistic life.

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Questions for lecture 12

- 1 What is the origin of African American Vernacular English?
2. What is the role of the African American Variation In American English?
3. How was African American spread?
4. What was the role of Great Depression of the 1930?
5. How is the spoken standard has become associated with education?