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# LANGUAGE USE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

## *An Introduction*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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RESEARCH on language use in African American communities began as early as 1920 with a few preliminary investigations into the variety, known then as “Negro non-standard English” (Krapp 1924, 1925), followed later by Lorenzo Dow Turner’s influential work, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949). However, research did not truly escalate until the 1960s and 1970s with the work of linguists such as Robbins Burling (1973), Joey L. Dillard (1972, 1977), Ralph Fasold (1972), William Labov and colleagues (1968, 1972), Geneva Smitherman (1977), William Stewart (1967), and Walt Wolfram (1969). As the body of work developed, three very broad categories emerged: linguistic structure and description, origins and development, and language use and attitudes—especially in education.

Since the 1996–97 Ebonics controversy, the number of books about language use in African American communities has grown significantly to meet the demand for information. There are now publications that not only address the Ebonics controversy (see Baugh 2000; Perry and Delpit 1998) and related areas such as classroom pedagogy (Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011, 2014; Gilyard 2011), education and literacy (Kinloch 2011; Kirkland 2013; Richardson 2003; Young et al. 2014), and education and policy (Alim and Baugh 2007; DeBose 2005), but also publications that provide new insights into past research (see Baugh 1999; Green 2002; Lanehart 2001; Mufwene et al. 1998; Rickford 1999; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 2000). The conversation has broadened to include new arenas and understudied areas such as Hip Hop language and culture (Alim 2004, 2006; Morgan 2002, 2009; Richardson

2006; Smitherman 2006), African American Women's Language (Houston and Davis 2001; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Lanehart 2002, 2009), child language acquisition and development (Green 2011), multimedia (Banks 2011; Bloomquist, forthcoming), regional variation (Wolfram and Thomas 2002), and Critical Race Theory (Alim and Smitherman 2012).

Research on language use in African American communities has also been a fruitful area of inquiry in related fields such as education, anthropology, sociology, communication, and popular culture. Not only have questions about its validity and characterization in relation to what to call it and what it is been both politically and ideologically fraught—and continue to be so today (for a more complete discussion, see Smitherman 1977 and Mufwene 2001)—but there also have been other issues: How is it a distinct, rule-governed, systematic linguistic system? What is its origin and history and how does it continue to evolve? How do speakers acquire it? How do speakers use it as a source of identity? What is its relevance? How can linguistic description of the variety be extended to real-world issues in education, society, and language policy and planning?

The goal of the *Oxford Handbook of African American Language (OHAAL)* is to provide readers with a wide range of analyses of both traditional and contemporary work on language use in African American communities in a broad collective. *OHAAL* offers a survey of language and its uses in African American communities from a wide range of contexts. It is a handbook of research on *African American Language (AAL)* and, as such, it provides a variety of scholarly perspectives that may not align with each other—as is indicative of most scholarly research. The chapters in this book “interact” with one another, as contributors frequently refer the reader to further elaboration on related issues within the book. Contributors connecting their ~~own~~ research to other chapters in various parts of the *Handbook* creates dialogue about AAL, thus supporting the need for collaborative thinking about the issues in AAL research. This interconnectedness between chapters affirms the idea that the body of AAL research is living and continuously growing. Research on AAL should not be considered stagnant, as new areas of study constantly emerge. As such, *OHAAL*'s goal is also to showcase and celebrate this body of work. Though *OHAAL* does not and cannot include every area of research, it is meant to provide suggestions for future work on lesser-studied areas (e.g., variation/heterogeneity in regional, social, and ethnic communities) by highlighting a need for collaborative perspectives and innovative thinking while reasserting the need for better research and communication in areas thought to be resolved.

As a handbook for the field, the chapters were aimed at a broad readership in general; however, some chapters with a narrower focus on language structure and description may be better suited for an audience with a background in linguistics whereas other chapters and sections more focused on language use (e.g., education) are more accessible and provide the reader with the range of complexity of research.

## 2 WHAT SHOULD WE CALL IT AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

From the mid to late 1960s, the initial period of heightened interest in language use in African American communities, to the present, many different labels have been used to refer to AAL, and the label has often been related to the social climate (see Baugh 1991 and Smitherman 1991). To some extent, the labels have been used to link the variety to those who speak it; for example, when African Americans were referred to as *Negroes*, AAL was called *Negro English* or *Negro dialect*. As such, the labels have changed over the years, spanning a range from *Negro*, to *Black*, to *African American English*. (For a roughly chronological list of terminology used in linguistic descriptions over the years, see Wolfram, this volume.) Because of the various labels for AAL and the varied definitions (see Mufwene 2001 on defining language use in African American communities), we asked contributors to provide their own labels and definition for what they mean when they refer to language in African American communities. The reader will notice similarities and differences in labels and definitions. Some contributors use *African American English* (AAE) or *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE), some use *African American Language* (AAL) and *African American Vernacular Language* (AAVL), and some use a variety of other terms. Furthermore, some definitions refer more broadly to ways of speaking among some African Americans, and others refer to more narrow components of grammar used by those who are members of homogeneous speech communities. The point is that each contributor does not assume we all mean the same thing.

### 2.1 Why We Use AAL

As is clear from the title of *OHAAL*, we have chosen to use the term *African American Language* to refer to all variations of language use in African American communities, recognizing that there are many variations within the umbrella term, which includes Gullah and AAVL (or English for those who prefer that term) as well as varieties that reflect differences in age/generation, sex, gender, sexuality, social and socioeconomic class, region, education, religion, and other affiliations and identities that intersect with one's ethnicity/race and nationality. Our preference to use AAL, as opposed to AAE, is to bypass some of the problematic implications of "English" within the socioculture and history of African slave descendants in the United States and the contested connections of their language variety to the motherland and colonization and encompass rhetorical and pragmatic strategies that might not be associated with English. In other words, the use of the term AAL is more neutral and, therefore, less marked.

Regardless of which term researchers use—AAE or AAL, AAVE or AAVL—they all refer to a language variety that has systematic phonological (system of sounds),

morphological (system of structure of words and relationship among words), syntactic (system of sentence structure), semantic (system of meaning), and lexical (structural organization of vocabulary items and other information) patterns. So, when speakers know AAL, they know a system of sounds, word and sentence structure, meaning and structural organization of vocabulary items, and other linguistic and metalinguistic information about their language, such as pragmatic rules and the social function of AAL. Indeed the linguistic variety also has a slang component for specialized words and phrases that might be more closely associated with the language of popular culture and used by speakers of a certain age group—but not exclusively. However, AAE is not slang. “Broken English,” “bad English,” and the like will not work as labels for language use in African American communities because they do not characterize the variety of those who speak AAL, or any variety. Such labels only serve to diminish the language and its speakers.

## 2.2 A Note on Ebonics

The term “Ebonics,” which was coined by Robert Williams in 1973, but which received considerable attention in 1997 during the Oakland School Board case, has been left off the list of labels of AAL listed above, as Williams intended the term to cover the multitude of languages spoken by Black people not just in the United States but also those spoken throughout the African Diaspora, for example. In the introduction to *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* (1975), Williams defined Ebonics as:

“the linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represents the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendant of African origin. It includes the various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of [B]lack people,” especially those who have been forced to adapt to colonial circumstances. Ebonics derives its form from ebony (black) and phonics (sound, the study of sound) and refers to the study of the language of Black people in all its cultural uniqueness. (vi)

The view of Williams and other Black scholars included in the 1973 conference was that the language of Black people had its roots in Niger-Congo languages of Africa, not in Indo-European languages. However, during the Oakland School Board controversy, the media and general public adopted the term “Ebonics,” using it interchangeably with the labels accepted by linguists, thus not using the terms as it was intended.

Further explaining the term, Smith (1998) notes that “when the term *Ebonics* was coined it was not as a mere synonym for the more commonly used appellation Black English” (55). He points out that a number of scholars

have consistently maintained that in the hybridization process, it was the grammar of Niger-Congo African languages that was dominant and that the extensive word borrowing from the English stock does not make Ebonics a dialect of English. In fact,

they argue, because it is an African Language System, it is improper to apply terminology that has been devised to describe the grammar of English to describe African American linguistic structures. (55–56)

In commenting on the misuse of the term “Ebonics,” Smith explains:

In sum, Ebonics is not a dialect of English. The term Ebonics and other Afrocentric appellations such as Pan African Language and African Language Systems all refer to the linguistic continuity of Africa in Black America. Eurocentric scholars use the term Ebonics as a synonym for ‘Black English.’ In so doing, they reveal an ignorance of the origin and meaning of the terms Ebonics that is so profound that their confusion is pathetic. (57)

Smith cautions against (over-)emphasizing English similarities and overlooking or de-emphasizing the African structure of AAE, and his points are well taken. The ongoing research on the origin of AAL is evidence that those working in this area are not oblivious to claims about African and creole contributions. The precise nature of the relationship between AAL and African languages and creoles is a topic of continued investigation. In addition to appropriate naming and delineation, scholars continue to engage in rigorous research that presents accurate descriptions and that provide further insight into the origins of language in African American communities.

### 3 ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION

The nearly fifty chapters of *OHAAL* are organized into seven parts. The seven sections of *OHAAL* start with history and structure, which includes Part I: “Origins and Historical Perspectives,” Part II: “Lects and Variation,” and Part III: “Structure and Description.” Part IV: “Child Language Acquisition and Development” transitions to the sections of *OHAAL* that address language use: Part V: “Education,” Part VI: “Language in Society,” and Part VII: “Language and Identity.”

#### 3.1 Origins and Historical Perspectives

Part I: “Origins and Historical Perspectives” focuses on historical accounts of the origins and development of AAL, which is one of the most hotly debated issues in the field. Viewpoints about the historical origins of AAL are directly related to some accounts of the structure of AAL and variable constructions. In examining the origins of AAL, linguists have approached the historical origins of AAL from different angles, including considerations of Anglicist origins espoused by dialectologists and variationists

(Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972; Poplack 2000; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001; Schneider 1989), creolist origins (Rickford 1998, 1999; Weldon 2003, 2007), substratist connections (Dalby 1972; DeBose and Faraclas 1993; Dunn 1976), and ecological and restructuralist factors (Mufwene 2000; Winford 1998). Proponents of monolithic origins hypotheses (e.g., Anglicist, creolist, and substratist) have compared morphosyntactic and syntactic features in creoles (Rickford 1998), early varieties of English (Poplack 2000; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001), and (to a limited extent) African languages to those in AAL as a means of determining the origins, development, and classification of AAL (DeBose and Faraclas 1993). Restructuralist and ecological theorists have also considered factors such as social dynamics and contact effects (Mufwene 2000; Winford 1997, 1998) in explaining the evolution of AAL.

Part I not only addresses traditional monolithic views about the origins of AAL, but also includes authors who approach theorizing about the history and development of the variety from different perspectives. It begins with Gerard Van Herk's discussion of Anglicist perspectives in which he postulates that the distinctive features of AAL originate from early nonstandard dialects of English that have since disappeared. Though modern "monolithic" interpretations of origins are less inflexible than traditional positions (in which historical or counterevidence was dismissed as marginal or non-representative), Van Herk states that the origins debate is still very heated with strong personalities, claims, and counterclaims.

In chapter 2, John Rickford suggests a modern take on the early creolist origins view, which was fairly inflexible. While early creolist positions believed that AAL evolved from a widespread creole, Rickford's creolist position disavows the possibility of a widespread creole and instead asserts that AAL was influenced by the importation of creole features from Caribbean slaves. Rickford investigates the sociohistory of African slave descendants, differences from English dialects, and similarities to the surrounding creoles of slaves.

Following discussions on the Anglicist and creolist origins perspectives, Salikoko Mufwene argues that the development of the language of most African slaves and their descendants, as well as Gullah, were influenced most by local ecological factors, establishing that neither variety evolved uniformly. According to Mufwene, this differential language evolution was the product of variance in the population structures and comparative histories. Additionally, he considers the role that racial segregation during Jim Crow played in the evolution and variation of AAL.

In chapter 4, Donald Winford takes a non-monolithic creolist perspective that underscores the way in which second language acquisition and settler principles influenced the development of AAL. He discusses the importation of African slaves in colonial America and their contact with English-speaking settlers and suggests that this contact allowed for the conditions in which Africans could acquire a dialect similar to the English-speaking settlers. Winford suggests the need for future research in studying sociohistoric patterns of interaction between Scotch-Irish and other English-speaking settlers with Africans and reciprocal influence of Southern White vernaculars.

In chapter 5, John Singler discusses the sociohistory and language of the African Americans who left the slavery of the United States for presumed freedom in Liberia and Sinoe County. In doing so, he raises questions about the continued similarities between the language of the Liberian and Sinoe County Settlers and that of the African Americans who remained in the United States, considering the ecological and political constraints for both, and the incorporation of local languages the Settlers are in contact with. He addresses the internal and external linguistic change factors of the Settlers' English in the nearly two centuries since the beginning of their time in their resettled African context.

In chapter 6, Edgar Schneider takes a slightly different approach, surveying different text types and sources that document early AAL. He discusses the contribution of textual evidence—which is dependent on the kinds of texts available, their quality, and their representativeness—in investigating the origins and development of AAL. Having examined the Works Progress Administration (WPA) ex-slave narratives, ex-slave recordings, Hoodoo transcripts, studies of diaspora varieties, a corpus of letters by semi-literate writers, and transcripts of early blues lyrics, Schneider calls attention to the heterogeneity of AAL and the need for further research in AAL variation.

Part I concludes with chapter 7 by Walt Wolfram and Mary Kohn, providing a transition from sociohistoric origin to variation, while highlighting the forces of temporality and regionality in the development of AAL and dispelling the myth of a homogenous AAL based on early studies that focused on basilectal features. Wolfram and Kohn assert that regionality deserves attention in variationist research if we are to understand the trajectory of AAL development. This thought sets the stage for Part II, which includes descriptions of variation across the United States.

### 3.2 Lects and Variation

Part II: "Lects and Variation" considers AAL in frameworks of general linguistic description and current linguistic theory. Research presented in Part II builds on features that have been commonly associated with AAL and expands the geographical range of work on AAL—heretofore limited to the southeastern United States and urban centers in the north. Chapters in Part II include ongoing research by linguists who focus on long established AAL regional centers, such as Tracey Weldon and Simanique Moody on Gullah, William Labov and Sabriya Fisher in Philadelphia, William Kretzschmar, Jr. in Atlanta and surrounding suburban areas, Walter Edwards in Detroit, and Renée Blake, Cara Shousterman, and Luiza Newlin-Lukowicz in New York City. The section also includes understudied areas, with research on the Mississippi Delta by Rose Wilkerson, rural Texas by Patricia Cukor-Avila and Guy Bailey, and central and western Pennsylvania by Jennifer Bloomquist and Shelome Gooden, as well as an overview by John Rickford on the important work that has been done in California. Additionally, Joseph Hill, Carolyn McCaskill, Robert Bayley examine Black American Sign Language (ASL). The section concludes with Walt Wolfram's discussion

AQ:  
Should  
"Ceil  
Lucas"  
also be  
included in  
this list?

of the influence of regionality and temporality in AAL variation. The authors in Part II present ways that AAL speakers interact with other local and regional dialect speakers, and they also address the contribution of settlement history, community development, and identity (both individual and collective) to language use by AAL speakers in those areas.

Part II begins with a sociohistorical overview of Gullah by Tracey Weldon and Simanique Moody. Weldon and Moody assert that Gullah emerged as a creole variety in the context of the slave trade and, as a result, is a regional variety of AAL used in coastal Georgia and South Carolina.

In chapter 9, Patricia Cukor-Avila and Guy Bailey draw our attention to the incongruity between the origins of AAL (i.e., rural areas of southern and southeastern United States) and where most of the research on AAL has been conducted (i.e., urban environments in the northern United States). They examine how rural AAL influences urban AAL and vice versa by surveying the speech of residents in the small, rural town of Springville, Texas. Cukor-Avila and Bailey show how older features are either obsolete or disappearing, as well as how urban innovations have made their way into rural speech.

Rural AAL is further explored in chapter 10 with Rose Wilkerson's chapter on copula absence and r-lessness in language use by women in Coahoma County in the Mississippi Delta. In addition to her focus on women, her research is unique in its location. Wilkerson provides a rich overview of the sociohistory and culture of the Mississippi Delta, as well as current political and social issues in the region.

Still in the South, but moving to a metropolitan area, in chapter 11, William Kretzschmar, Jr. surveys African American voices in Atlanta, Georgia. Kretzschmar focuses on a model of complex systems (as opposed to closed and separate) and the frequencies of linguistic features in different communities, adding that we do violence to the study of variation if we view communities too separate from one another.

Shifting from the language in the South to the North in chapter 12, Jennifer Bloomquist and Shelome Gooden investigate phonological, lexical, and syntactic variation in AAL in (urban) Pittsburgh and the (rural) Lower Susquehanna Valley. Bloomquist and Gooden draw attention to the fact that AAL is evolving because of distinct regional ecologies that simultaneously include and disregard the participation and history of African Americans. The authors also highlight views of identity held by local African Americans, as well as beliefs White locals have about what the "true" identity of a regional speaker is, which often does not include African Americans. The authors provide an intricate case study of what Smitherman (1977) calls the "push-pull syndrome" and what W. E. B. Du Bois ([1903] 1994) calls "double consciousness."

In chapter 13, William Labov and Sabriya Fisher compare and contrast White mainstream Philadelphia phonology to Philadelphian AAL vowel systems. While the study of large urban speech communities such as Philadelphia began with an emphasis on linguistic differentiation, they find that social stratification is a better standard by which to examine language variation. And contrary to some research, but in line with the previous chapter by Bloomquist and Gooden, Labov and Fisher examine how African

Americans in Philadelphia exert a regional identity that is similar to and different from local White Philadelphians (again, push-pull/double consciousness).

Next, in chapter 14, Renée Blake, Cara Shousterman, and Luiza Newlin-Łukowicz present sociolinguistic work in an early site in AAL research: New York City. West Indian immigration to the Big Apple caused a shift in the ethnic landscape and subsequently, a linguistic shift in AAL. Even though New York City has been studied extensively, the authors recognize a need to study language variation and change in regional centers of Black populations where the rate of ethnic demographic change over time contributes to complex identities that, inevitably, relate to complex linguistic practices.

In chapter 15, John Rickford takes us to the West Coast with a focus on the rich history of research on AAL in California. Rickford notes the importance of this research area through his discussion of California's role in studies of African American child language, social class variability, identity, perception, and style-shifting, as well as the Oakland Ebonics Controversy.

In chapter 16, Joseph Hill, Carolyn McCaskill, Robert Bayley, and Ceil Lucas introduce us to the distinct use of ASL by Blacks, which they define as a variety of AAL. Hill, McCaskill, Bayley, and Lucas examine linguistic and discourse features of Black ASL in the South, identifying handedness, location of the sign, size of the signing space, the use of repetition, lexical differences, and the incorporation of spoken AAL, while examining the historical factors that contributed to the development and rich distinctiveness of Black ASL.

While the authors of chapters 8 through 16 acknowledge that there are certain linguistic features shared across varieties of AAL, they present ways in which local regional dialects have shaped varieties of AAL in different parts of the country and suggest the ways in which settlement history, community development, and identity (both individual and collective) contribute to language variation and use by AAL speakers in those areas. Hence, AAL may appear homogeneous when African Americans are not included in linguistic research of local or regional use by Whites when, in fact, AAL is simultaneously local and not local; in other words, AAL is heterogeneous, just as its speakers are.

Walt Wolfram provides a fitting end to Part II in chapter 17 by explaining the ways in which the myth of a supraregional AAL has hindered variationist work and the potential implications of such work. He argues that regional dialects have been mistakenly analyzed as White varieties, despite the presence and influence of African Americans in these regions (as shown in the previous chapters in Part II).

### 3.3 Structure and Description

Some early descriptions of AAL were motivated by questions about its legitimacy and the extent to which it was different from Mainstream American English (MAE). One approach to describing AAL was to highlight surface features that were maximally different from morphological, phonological, and syntactic structures in MAE. However, some early approaches moved away from listing superficial features of AAL

and expanded descriptions of the linguistic variety that took into consideration patterns of grammar and rules and principles for generating grammatical structures. The tense/aspect system has been the topic of some of the earliest descriptions of AAL, in which there have been goals to explain the relation between meaning and structure of constructions that convey information about times and events. Current research has built on this work in presenting more articulated structure to account for tense/aspect properties as well as other properties of the AAL grammar. Also, research on AAL has continued to address questions about the sound patterns of AAE ranging from segments of sounds to sound patterns extending over utterances, such as intonation. Current research in these areas of AAL has also begun to include experimental approaches.

Part III: “Structure and Description” considers syntactic, semantic, and phonological properties of AAL in frameworks of general linguistic description and current linguistic theory. Contributors build on the tradition of studying AAL linguistic features while moving to a consideration of AAL linguistic systems, including investigations into interfaces, such as syntax and semantics by Lisa Green and Walter Sistrunk, syntax and phonology by James Walker, tense-modality-aspect systems by Charles DeBose, and understudied areas in segmental phonology by Erik Thomas and Guy Bailey and prosody by Erik Thomas.

First, in chapter 18, Lisa Green and Walter Sistrunk, in presenting an overview of syntactic and semantic properties of certain areas of the grammar of AAL, discuss topics such as the system of tense and aspect marking and the complementizer system. In the section on tense/aspect marking, they discuss meaning associated with preverbal markers syntactic placement, restriction on selection, and morphological properties. In addition, Green and Sistrunk present case studies of embedded question and negation structures in illustrating properties of complex clauses in AAL.

In chapter 19, Charles DeBose highlights generalizations about constructions that convey meaning about tense-mood-aspect in AAL. The goal is to account for constructions, including those in which there is no overt marking that might contribute to tense-aspect meaning. In the overview, DeBose discusses different predicate types and their combination with other structures to give a tense-aspect interpretation.

In chapter 20, James Walker examines the distribution of overt and zero forms of the copula and verbal *-s* from the angle of prosodic structure of the constructions in which these morphological markers occur in two diaspora varieties that are considered to be representative of early AAL. Walker makes a case for considering the influence of prosodic structure, in addition to grammatical and phonological conditioning, on different morphological forms.

In chapter 21, Erik Thomas and Guy Bailey examine segmental phonological features, such as consonant cluster simplification and deletion, r-lessness, interdental fricative mutations, final /d/ devoicing, vocalic mergers, and glide weakening and bring together research on vowel and consonant sounds from the late 1960s to the present. They explain that over the last twenty-five years, acoustic work has played a major role in the study of segmental phonology.

Lastly, in chapter 22, Erik Thomas provides insight on prosodic properties that have been argued to characterize AAL, with emphasis on prosodic features that might distinguish it from European American English. The chapter also articulates that although prosody is difficult to study and little research has been conducted on AAL prosody, some researchers have duplicated findings related to suprasegmental properties of AAL.

### 3.4 Child Language Acquisition and Development

Part IV: “Child Language Acquisition and Development” considers the growing body of research on the language acquisition and development of children in AAL speech communities. The chapters included here provide an overview of different approaches to research and topics in child language in AAL-speaking communities and poses questions about the acquisition path of development of structures used by children in these speech communities. Questions related to patterns in child AAL before four years, developmental AAL and variable structures that are part of the AAL grammar, and rhetorical strategies used in child narratives are raised in this section.

Part IV begins with chapter 23 by Brandi Newkirk-Turner, RaMonda Horton, and Ida Stockman, who acknowledge that studies of language acquisition in the past excluded AAL-speaking children, especially younger children. In reviewing research on developmental AAL prior to age 4, the authors underscore the apparent gaps in the literature that result from lack of research on language patterns in children in this age group.

In chapter 24, Janneke Van Hofwegen continues this study of development of language by examining a corpus of evidence spanning eleven years from pre-kindergarten to mid-adolescence (ages 4 to 15) in about seventy African American children. This longitudinal study shows consistent patterns of AAL usage, style-shifting, and vowel development.

In chapter 25, Lisa Green and Jessica White-Sustaíta focus on the syntactic and morphosyntactic structures of the language of 3- to 7-year-old children to understand their language acquisition and development in AAL speech communities, especially ways of distinguishing developmental patterns from variation and optionality in developmental stages from variation in the grammar.

In chapter 26, Tempii Champion and Allyssa McCabe present child language development and narrative production in children from ages 3 to 11. They explain that narratives serve as part of the rich cultural tradition of storytelling in African American communities, and as children develop them, their story grammar elements, grammatical structures, and cohesion devices evolve.

In chapter 27, Janna Oetting presents research on the similarities and differences between AAL and southern White English in 4- to 6-year-olds in rural southeastern Louisiana. The differences in Oetting’s research are enumerated by children’s production (and the pragmatic functions) of non-mainstream grammatical structures.

Part IV ends with Toya Wyatt’s attention to the link between the over-representation of African American children in special education programs and language use.

African American and minority students who do not speak MAE are disproportionately affected by assessment-based judgments about speech and language therapy, as well as being labeled as “intellectually challenged.” Wyatt provides innumerable ways clinicians can identify dialect from language disorders to minimize misdiagnosis and inaccurate special education referrals, in order to establish best practice with current law.

The information about the properties and patterns of language development of school-aged children and assessment-related issues addressed in Part IV have practical application in some of the types of educational contexts addressed in Part V, which begins our exploration of AAL research as it relates to language use.

### 3.5 Education

Despite the research on the linguistic structure of AAL, the variety is still disparaged as substandard, low-prestige, “ghetto” English in a number of political and intellectual centers in the United States. There have been seemingly cyclical debates about its value and “place” in schools and society. Part V: “Education” focuses on one of the long-standing areas of AAL research application due to the social, political, and policy implications involved in the education of AAL-speaking children. Part V expands educational models to the community, which ultimately impact the lives of AAL speakers in the classroom and in larger institutional contexts.

In chapter 29, Geneva Smitherman provides a historical view of AAL and education controversies, which includes deficit research, the “Black English Case” (*Martin Luther King et al. v. Ann Arbor*), and the Oakland Ebonics controversy.

In chapter 30, Monique Mills and Julie Washington focus on the divide between the home language of AAL and target school language (mainstream American English) through an analysis of code-switching and academic performance.

In chapter 31, Sharroky Hollie, Tamara Butler, and Jamila Gillenwaters provide a close examination of AAL in the classroom and a critique of current language teaching pedagogies and policies. They argue for the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy and the need for professional development based on language affirmation—all inspired by the work of Noma LeMoine. They offer concrete strategies to build validating educational spaces.

The theme of academic performance and pedagogical models continues with the work of K. C. Nat Turner and Tyson Rose in chapter 32. They discuss their support of the incorporation of Hip Hop in education and explicate their concept of multiliteracies, which they believe could contribute to students’ academic and psychological success in the classroom.

In chapter 33, William Labov and Bettina Baker analyze four morphosyntactic structures of AAL in the context of raising the levels of reading achievement in AAL-speaking African American elementary schoolchildren. They assert that instruction in the use of verbal and possessive *-s* (rather than plural *-s*) aimed toward AAL-speaking students

and teachers' familiarity with other widespread features of AAL can have significant success in increasing reading comprehension (lexically and arithmetically).

In chapter 34, J. Michael Terry, Randall Hendrick, Evangelos Evangelou, and Richard Smith measure the effect of language on academic performance through standardized testing. They identify specific structural divergences of AAL from Standard Classroom English (SCE) and suggest ways in which the two varieties are at odds within the assessment paradigm. They attempt to identify the problems generated by teaching and testing in SCE for the AAL-speaking child and adolescent, finding that, if linguistic sources of interference were removed from tests, the average student would correctly answer questions presented to them in an assessment that uses SCE.

In chapter 35, John Baugh concludes Part V with a discussion on language planning and policies in regard to bidialectalism and the controversy surrounding AAL institutionally. He argues for more research on bridging the linguistic and cultural gap between the home and school; increasing teachers' familiarity with AAL that may affect literacy and proficiency with Standard English; and creating a language-affirming environment that may encourage the formation of legal statutes and policy measures.

### 3.6 Language in Society

Part VI: "Language in Society" includes theoretical, empirical, and multimethods research that situates language use in African American communities and American society in general. In chapter 36, Charles DeBose discusses AAL in the social and cultural institution that is "The Black Church." DeBose defines African American Church Language (AACL) as a subvariety of AAL that is used in sacred contexts and is associated with certain linguistic practices. DeBose elaborates on the linguistic aspects of the spiritual and secular range of AACL and other language practices associated with AAL in a spiritual context.

In chapter 37, James Peterson discusses AAL in literature by analyzing orthographical representations of AAL. He outlines the history of orthography in African American novels that are indicative of racial attitudes. Peterson notes that, orally and orthographically, Black voices are best represented by Black voices, suggesting that adjustments toward literary dialect should be made to represent Black linguistic subjectivity.

In chapter 38, Howard Rambsy and Briana Whiteside explain how Black poetry corresponds with spoken practices in AAL. They explore the usage of distinct lexical and verbal practices in the presentation of ideas in poetry. For them, Black poetry is a repository for AAL; AAL is a way for Black poets to express ideas.

In chapter 39, Jacquelyn Rahman examines AAL employed by Black female comedians in a male-dominated context fraught with sexism and harassment. Rahman showcases African American female comedians who use AAL generally but also employ specific strategies that are associated with African American Women's Language (AAWL) as a means of establishing a connection with their predominantly female audiences.

In chapter 40, Jennifer Bloomquist discusses her research on the construction of Blackness through the voicing of African American characters in children's animated film. She demonstrates how representations framed by linguistic manipulations denoting ethnicity reflect historic social and political attitudes about race in general and Blackness in particular. Bloomquist emphasizes that the construction of ethnicity through physical, linguistic, and behavioral representations by animators demands scrutiny because of the impact of these films on children's interpretation of race and themselves.

Part VI ends with chapter 41, John Baugh's research on the pervasiveness and implications of linguistic profiling and bigotry. He presents evidence of racially motivated linguistic discrimination in real-world contexts, such as housing inequity, legal bias, and harassment in employment, and the need for linguistic and legal vigilance as well as judicial and racial equity.

### 3.7 Language and Identity

Part VII: "Language and Identity" discusses connections between language and identity. It begins in chapter 42 with Kate Anderson's research on ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes, which outlines three complementary linguistic approaches between the socialized construction of race and language: sociophonetic, ethnographic, and discursive methodologies. The analysis is based on data from both Black and White participants' views of AAL and their ability to accurately identify African Americans, as gathered by different types of methodologies, and their implications and impact on research results and our understanding of language attitudes and beliefs.

In chapter 43, Arthur Spears discusses distinctively Black grammatical features associated with what he identifies as Standard AAL. Spears introduces African American Standard English (AASE) as a group of varieties of AAL with distinctively Black grammatical features, all of which are considered standard and are not stigmatized. Spears argues that AASE is a product of racial subordination in which AAL was regimented by external norms, but distinctive linguistic behaviors remained. Internal norms, however, established stigma toward certain vernacular language features and, subsequently, a socioeconomic hierarchy of language use. Thus, Spears notes that AASE serves a role as a form of cultural capital.

In chapter 44, Erica Britt and Tracey Weldon present their research on linguistic behavior in African American middle-class communities, which is very much connected to the previous chapter by Spears. Though the bulk of research on AAL has focused on working-class and urban African Americans, Britt and Weldon examine the sociohistoric contexts of the emergence of the African American middle class, as well as usage patterns, variation, and perceptions of AAL among middle-class African Americans. They also draw attention to the high levels of internal variation and internal and external pressures (e.g., audience composition, perception of self, expression or suppression of ethnic orientation) that may affect linguistic choice.

In the next two chapters, Part VII moves its focus to gendered uses of AAL. In chapter 45, Marcyliena Morgan discusses research on African American women's AAL use and the construction of AAWL. Traditionally, AAL research rendered the speech of African American women indistinguishable from men's language simply by incorporating female data into the description of the speech community. Morgan untangles past research and examines the language of African American women as their own community, apart from Black men and White women.

In chapter 46, David Kirkland examines Black Masculine Language and explores its role in identity construction, as a form of resistance and as posture of power. In his analysis, Kirkland refers to the use of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL), which is presented in the following chapter.

In chapter 47, Alim discusses his concept of HHNL and how it reflects and expands on AAL use. He shows how HHNL can be used to subvert dominant language, identity, and power. He also enumerates the tenets of HHNL while analyzing variation within it.

Part VII concludes with chapter 48 by Sonja Lanehart in her explication of the concept of identity and how identity has functioned in AAL communities. She begins with a discussion of difficult terms related to language and identity and the interconnected attitudes, beliefs, practices, and ideologies surrounding AAL by African Americans about African Americans and by White Americans about African Americans—all of which contributes to contradictions and conundrums around AAL. As the concluding chapter for OHAAL, it provides an opportunity for reflecting on research on AAL from the perspective of those in AAL communities and their love-hate relationship with their own language—and themselves.

## 4 CONCLUSION

*OHAAL* was carefully crafted to explicate various aspects of research in AAL. However, simply presenting this research in book form is not the “end of it”—we must continue to push the boundaries of linguistic research in African American communities to fully understand the place of AAL in our history, communities, social and cultural institutions, and our own identities.

While it is arguably still the most studied language variety in the Americas, there are areas that remain neglected in much of AAL research. There has been too little regard or recognition that language use in African American communities includes all demographics. For example, while there have been a number of studies that examine adolescent and working-class language use, there has been very little attention paid to child language acquisition as well as variation with respect to class (e.g., middle class and upper class), sex (e.g., African American women), gender (feminine, transgender), age/generation (e.g., children and the elderly), sexuality (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual), and religion (e.g., Muslim features for followers of Islam, since the default is usually Christianity). The notion that the most authentic AAL is merely a language restricted to

inner-city male teenagers or that it is supraregional has informed linguistic approaches so consistently and for so long that the expansion of contemporary research models, demographic, and communities seems glacial.

Work that includes a broader demographic would provide linguists with a more comprehensive understanding of language use in African American communities. These limitations have been further compounded by the methodological restrictions of the variationist paradigm that has categorized much of the work previously done on AAL. Part of the problem has been the slow evolution of incorporating multimethod, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and allied areas of research, collaborative studies, and applications of research to address complex social, political, and educational issues. As we develop more complex questions surrounding complex dynamics of language, culture, and society, we require more collaborative research that is equally complex to apply to multifaceted social, theoretical, and praxis issues. We hope *OHAAL* has helped to show this and move the conversation forward.

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