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**AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH
ON *THE COCOA LOUNGE*/ DISCUSSION BOARD
AND YOUTUBE COMMENTS ON HIP HOP MUSIC VIDEOS**

GRADUATION THESIS

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Abstract

AAVE is a vernacular that has often been overlooked in the American society because it has often been associated with bad grammar. However, it is a very important dialect of American English with well structured particular grammatical and phonological features, which are strictly followed by its speakers. The internet on the other hand is one of the most universal communication media in the world and it has its own sort of language which makes communication easier, faster and more practical. This thesis examines African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and language on the internet in the same context and for that reason two of the most popular internet situations of today were used: the discussion board or internet forum and YouTube.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a rather uniform dialect spoken by the majority of young black people in most parts of the United States today, especially in the inner city areas of New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other urban centers (Labov, 1972). A *vernacular* is a type of “social dialect, typically spoken by a lower-status group, which is treated as non-standard because of marked differences from the “standard” language” (Yule, 2010:261). Historically, AAVE is the most important of the ethnic varieties of American speech. For almost three hundred years African Americans lived in the rural South as slaves, absorbing the language of that region. In the early and mid-twentieth century, many of them moved to the metropolitan areas in the North and West in search of better jobs in industry and, according to Thomas (2007), to escape Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow laws were legal segregation statues written by the 1890s by white officials and lawmakers throughout the southern states which “regulated almost every aspect of black life” (*Remembering Jim Crow*, 2001:268). They regulated where black people could eat, where they could sit in theaters, on buses and trains, which jobs they could perform, which water fountains they could use, where they could live, which beaches and parks they could

visit, etc. The titles “Miss” and “Mister” were reserved for white people only, while disparaging epithets such as “boy”, “gal”, “auntie” and “nigger” were reserved for black Americans. Black household servants were expected to enter white homes through the back doors, black pedestrians were expected to step off sidewalks when whites passed by and black men were absolutely forbidden from staring at or even glancing at white women (*Remembering Jim Crow*, 2001).

Even after moving to the cities of the North and West, African Americans generally remained separated from Caucasians, partly by choice, but also due to housing policies that kept them confined to their own neighborhoods. There they decided to keep their Southern culture and language. Before that mass migration, African Americans outside the South generally adopted local speech patterns but afterward the Southern style of African-American speech was spread to black American communities across the nation (Metcalf, 2000).

Over the past four decades, AAVE has been called *Negro Dialect*, *Non-standard Negro English*, *Black English*, *Vernacular Black English*, *Black English Vernacular (BEV)*, *Afro-American English*, *African American English*, *African American Language*, *Spoken Soul*, and most commonly and popularly – *Ebonics*. Most linguists abstain from using the label *Ebonics* because the term tends to evoke strong emotional reactions and has been used for various racist parodies in recent years (Wolfram, W. and Schilling-Estes, N., 2006).

Thomas (2007) distinguishes AAVE from *African American English (AAE)* in that AAVE relates specifically to a vernacular form, spoken principally by urban, working-class African American while AAE refers to the speech of all African Americans, including those belonging to the middle class. AAE is spoken by many people of African descent in the US and associated with African American ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Thus that dialect ranges from highly cultivated formal style spoken by educated and older persons such as Reverend Jesse Jackson to earthy street slang spoken by rappers, gangsters, and a great number of other urban young people. AAVE, on the other hand, is spread everywhere in rap and hip-hop music, on television and in the movies, as well as in most rural areas and used in the casual, intimate speech (Metcalf, 2000).

What is so particular about African American Vernacular English? Its speakers tend to use certain words which are not found in other (standard) varieties. Some words found in Standard English may also have their origin in AAVE or at least in the West African

languages that contributed to AAVE's development (Sidnell, 2012). AAVE also has a specific pronunciation which is in many ways similar to Southern English as well as a set of its own grammatical rules.

1.2 English on the internet

Language technologies are invented for people to better express messages and emotion and create social bonds. In face-to-face conversation people express more information than they do through written language because they use paralinguistic cues such as facial expressions, body posture, gestures, physical distance from the interlocutor, intonation patterns, and volume. Forms of communication that are not face-to-face reduce paralinguistic cues. For this reason, in the beginning of e-mail, many users regularly added emotion-markers (so-called *emoticons* or *smileys*) to their messages (Baron, 2000). Other forms used as paralinguistic footnotes to messages include the exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, the use of capitals, spacing and special symbols for emphasis.

Crystal (2001) describes *Netspeak* as internet language, that is, a type of language displaying features that are unique to the internet, and encountered in internet situations, acting as an electronic, global, and interactive medium. *Netspeak* is also most commonly known as *Netlish*, *Weblish*, and *cyberspeak*. It is a hybrid of spoken and written languages which includes listening and reading (Crystal, 2001). Some significant features of *Netspeak* have begun to be used outside of the computer-mediated communications, influencing primarily vocabulary, but also graphology in some written varieties. Thus, terms from computer technology such as *download*, *multitasking*, *offline*, *404*, *spam*, *dot com (.com)*, *at (@)*, etc. are frequently used today in everyday conversation.

Chatgroups are divided into two situations: *synchronous*, one in which the interaction takes place in real time and *asynchronous*, in which the interaction takes place in postponed time. This thesis is focused on asynchronous internet situations, where the interactions are stored in some format and made available to users upon demand so they can catch up with the discussion and/or add to it at any time, even after some time has passed. Among these asynchronous situations are internet forums, otherwise called discussion boards and message boards.

According to Oxforddictionaries.com, an (*internet*) *forum* or *discussion board* or *message board* is “an internet site where users can post comments about a particular issue or topic and reply to other users' postings” (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2014). It allows people from all over the world to talk about their knowledge, experience, expertise, information, suggestions, etc. with each other. Although the communication is usually done through text-style communication, it can also contain other techniques such as video or voice conferencing or chatting. Forums also provide opportunity for people to trade information about various products and services for both personal and business purposes.

YouTube is “a video-sharing service and social-networking site” that allows users to watch videos posted by other users and upload videos of their own” (Chun and Walters, 2011:255). It is designed primarily for ordinary people, or amateurs who want to publish the videos they have created. YouTube also has a comment platform located below the posted video where users can comment that video. This way of sharing thoughts is different from that in discussion boards in that people in the latter actually spend time discussing a specific topic and they tend to come back to see replies to their post while on YouTube, commentators most often leave a single comment under a certain video clip without planning to get into a discussion about the clip. The comments, however, are limited to five hundred characters on YouTube (Chun and Walters, 2011). There is also more anonymity since the commentator on YouTube is not as familiar to other commentators as internet forum members are to each other.

Individuals in these internet situations often talk to each other under nicknames (*nicks*) which may be an assumed first or last name but also any other name or a set of symbols, letters, numbers that a person chooses to use. The status of capitalization varies greatly but there is a strong tendency to use lower case everywhere. This principle is widely found in e-mails, instant messages (IMs), chatgroups and virtual worlds where whole sentences are sometimes produced without capitals (or punctuation). The following are examples of some abbreviations frequently used in Netspeak conversations:

asap (as soon as possible),	fyi (for your information)	lol (laughing out loud)
b4 (before),	idk (I don't know)	np (no problem)
brb (be right back),	imo (in my opinion)	thx/tnx/tx (thanks)
cu (see you),	jk (just kidding)	ttyl (talk to you later)
cul (see you later),	l8r (later)	wb (welcome back)

2 AAVE ON THE INTERNET

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has its many more grammatical and phonological characteristics than is visible in written form and only some of those features appear to be dominant on the internet. For this reason a research has been conducted to discover which AAVE features appear regularly on the internet in its popular web-hosted places such as YouTube and internet forums.

2.1 Aim and scope

The primary aim of this paper is to analyze African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as it appears 1) on the popular internet forum aimed at African Americans, „The Cocoa Lounge“, and 2) in YouTube comments located below three different music videos of African American artists performing hip hop music. In order to do this analysis, a research in four stages has been carried out:

Stage 1 - a research on AAVE and its features,

Stage 2 - a research on Netspeak, the language of the internet,

Stage 3 - an observation of the examples on the mentioned Internet sites, and

Stage 4 - a comparison and analysis of the research.

2.2 Methodology and corpus

YouTube comments

For the part of the research involving YouTube comments, three different music videos of artists performing hip hop music (popular among African Americans) were chosen:

1 Ciara ft. Nicki Minaj „I'm Out“ (Explicit),

2 Chris Brown ft. Nicki Minaj „Love More“ (Explicit), and

3 Beyoncé „Drunk in Love“

These artists were chosen because they are currently among the most up-to-date, popular hip-hop musicians so their newer music videos are likely to have a great number of comments.

***The Cocoa Lounge* – internet forum or discussion board or message board**

For the part of the research involving a discussion board, a forum aimed at African Americans, *The Cocoa Lounge* was chosen because it seemed to show the greatest number of examples of African American Vernacular English when compared to other African-American forums. This large forum consists of 36 subforums, of which the subforum “The Ladies Lounge” was chosen for the research. Examples of AAVE that were used in the research were found in the forum topics “Babydaddy vs. Ex-boyfriend”, “Worst Black Women's Hairstyles”, “My WEIRD crush...”, “Should you dump a guy who....”, and “Why SISTERS Why?”

The examples from both the internet forum and YouTube comments are organized according to the group of AAVE characteristics to which they belong in cases where this type of grouping is possible.

Note: The resources are abbreviated as follows:

YouTube: Ciara ft. Nicki Minaj „I'm Out“ (Explicit) – CIARA; Chris Brown ft. Nicki Minaj „Love More“ (Explicit) – CHRIS; Beyoncé „Drunk in Love“ – BEYONCÉ; and **Forum:** “Babydaddy vs. Ex-boyfriend” – BABYDADDY; “Worst Black Women's Hairstyles” – HAIRSTYLES; “My WEIRD crush...” – CRUSH; “Should you dump a guy who....” – DUMP, and “Why SISTERS Why?” - SISTERS

3 DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 Grammatical features of AAVE:

1 The missing copula/zero copula for present tense states and actions

This is one of the most common grammatical features of AAVE. It refers to the absence of copula - the verb forms of *be* for contracted forms of *is* and *are*. The zero is usually found

where the finite form of *to be* (*is, am, are, was* or *were*) would be used as a main verb in other dialects (Labov, 1995).

YouTube:

i) *She cool and pretty* (CIARA)

ii) *Dis my song bro* (CIARA)

iii) *Y'all just hating that y'all ain't famous but I bet you if nicki minaj came to meet you you be like omg I'm your biggest fan.* (CIARA)

iv) *People just mad cuz they got money, talent and everything they dont have* (CIARA)

v) *He doing the harlem shake* (CHRIS)

vi) *This song doe* (CIARA)

vii) *Ladies this your song...Ciara ft. Nicki Minaj...I'm out.* (CIARA)

viii). *86m already u know this going plat* (BEYONCÉ)

2 Absence of third-person singular present tense –s

The use of *don't* instead of *doesn't* or *have* instead of *has* is also included in this category.

YouTube:

Ciara soon becom a mother (CIARA)

Forum:

...he text me and sumtimes call 2 check up on me but is still with his girl...he says u will always be my baby bt he's telling his girl aka wifey (dhats wat he call her) he love her?... (BABYDADDY)

3 Absence of possessive –s

The absence of the possessive /-s/ is part of the overall simplification pattern frequent in AAVE.

Forum:

Am i suppose to be there for my babydaddy just cause im carrying his child despite his drama? (BABYDADDY)

4 The use of *ain't* as a general preverbal negator for Standard English (SE) “am not”, “isn't”, “aren't”, “hasn't”, “haven't” and “didn't”

YouTube:

Y'all just hating that y'all ain't famous but I bet you if nicki minaj came to meet you you be like omg I'm your biggest fan. (CIARA)

Forum:

...its really gettin to me because he aint being real with me and i cant get mad because we aint together but then on the other hand wen me and him stop talkin i confided my self into someone else...(BABYDADDY)

5 Invariant *be* used for future “will be”

Although one of the most frequent grammatical characteristics of AAVE is the habitual *be* for habitual and intermittent activity, as in the sentence *Sometimes she be crying in her room*, the only example of the invariant *be* characteristic of AAVE found in the present research is the following:

YouTube:

Y'all just hating that y'all ain't famous but I bet you if nicki minaj came to meet you you be like omg I'm your biggest fan. (CIARA)

In this example, the use of *be* has been derived through phonological processes that affect contracted forms of *will* and *would*. In a similar construction *If she comes home, you be happy*, the form is derived from the loss of /d/ (you'd be → you be), since /d/ before a labial may geminate to the /b/ and then be lost in a general phonological process of degemination¹ (e.g. good bye → goob bye → goo 'bye) (Wolfram, 2008).

6 *Y'all* and *they* used to mark second person plural and third plural possessive

YouTube

Y'all just hating that y'all ain't famous but I bet you if nicki minaj came to meet you you be like omg I'm your biggest fan. (CIARA)

7 Verb stem used as past tense or preterite form

Forum

Am i suppose to be there for my babydaddy just cause im carrying his child despite his drama? (BABYDADDY)

The verb stem “suppose” is used instead of the past tense form *supposed*.

3.2 Phonological (pronunciation) features of AAVE:

Although this research did not consist in observation by listening to the actual speech of African Americans but rather in observing their vernacular in written form, pronunciation features were noticeable in the written form as well because, often in AAVE, words are intentionally misspelled, or rather, spelled differently, to put the stress on the actual word or, namely, its meaning.

The following phonological features of AAVE were found in the mentioned YouTube comments and forum:

¹ Degemination – when two similar neighboring consonants are reduced to one single consonant, as in 'immature': the double /m/ in the spelling is pronounced as a single /m/ (Lexicon of Linguistics, 1996-2001).

1 R-lessness or Non-Rhoticity

This systematic consonantal variable occurs when the consonant, the historical /r/ is realized as /ə/ or is deleted, and is therefore, not pronounced in surface forms. This process is called vocalization, and it refers to “the pronunciation as a weak neutral vowel” (Rickford, 1999:5). This feature is common in some varieties of Southern American English and New England English, where words such as *bar* and *hard* are pronounced with a lengthened vowel in place of the "r" while words such as *near* or *bored*, are pronounced with a glided /ə/, in place of the "r". Although this rule applies more often when the r comes in final position, and is followed by a word beginning with a consonant rather than a vowel, it can also apply when a vowel follows within the same word. In some varieties of AAVE (e.g. in the Southern US) „r“ is not pronounced after the vowel *o* and *u*., so words *door* and *doe*, *four* and *foe*, and *sure* and *show* can be pronounced alike (Sidnell, 2012).

American sociolinguistics has found that African Americans show greater rates of r-lessness than European Americans. According to Thomas (2007), R-lessness becomes less frequent as social level increases and as speaking style becomes more formal.

YouTube:

Lmao nicki can get it DAILY if she wanted to nigga. you prolly caint even wake up in the morning without touchin yoself(CIARA)

Forum:

- i) *The wetter da betta.....whoa - wait what did I just say? (HAIRSTYLES)*
- ii) *The fake "Add-On" Ponytail! ("Mane & Tail" was sho nuff right!) (HAIRSTYLES)*
- iii) *...Ihave had my har braided down my back...like some Latino Gangbanger...like uh...jada p smith..does...just from the front of ya head and jsut straight back in many single rows... (HAIRSTYLES)*
- iv) *HOWEVA...This is a big prob.... well, not problem, but "issue" for sistas new on almost any job. (SISTERS)*

v) *Andre 3000...it doesn't even bother me that the brutha (has put on a skirt, or matches plaids with stripes)...he's eclectic, and something very different plus i love his little mo on his face. (CRUSH)*

2 Deletion or vocalization of *l* after a vowel

This feature may have the grammatical effect of deleting the “ll” of contracted *will*.

Forum:

Andre 3000...it doesn't even bother me that the brutha (has put on a skirt, or matches plaids with stripes)...he's eclectic, and something very different plus i love his little mo on his face. (CRUSH)

The deletion of *l* has led to the shortening of the word from “mole” to *mo*.

3 Reduction of word-final consonant clusters (sequences of two or more consonants), especially those ending in *t* or *d*

This feature is also called *consonant cluster simplification* and it refers to the “simplification of consonant clusters in which the second consonant is a stop” (Thomas, 2007). This reduction is more frequent when the next word starts with a consonant than if it starts with a vowel (Sidnell, 2012). The deletion of the stop when the next word begins with a vowel is much more common in AAVE than in Standard English. The following are examples of both of those cases:

YouTube:

i) *jus to let the world know. that swagger dance is from the Bay breh! norf Cali hoe. (CHRIS)*

Just has been reduced to “jus” – This example shows the reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a word beginning with a **consonant**.

ii) *hol'up, sean banhead is here though* (CIARA)

Hold has been reduced to “hol” – This example shows the less common reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a word beginning with a **vowel**.

4 Realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds

YouTube:

i) *Lmao nicki can get it DAILY if she wanted to nigga. you prolly caint even wake up in the morning without touchin yoself* (CIARA)

ii) *every1 go to my page and listen 2 cassidys version its fire! we all no he killed all tramp hoes in that lookin as bitche freestyle this one is dedicated for all good girls out der! make sure u subscribe* (BEYONCÉ)

Forum:

i) *...its really gettin to me because he aint being real with me and i cant get mad because we aint together but then on the other hand wen me and him stop talkin i confided my self into someone else...*(BABYDADDY)

ii) *I'm tryna lose the relaxer as well.* (HAIRSTYLES)

In this last example *tryna* is an informal contraction which stands for “trying to”. However, the *g* first had to be omitted, realizing “trying” as “tryin(’)” and the word “to” was completely omitted.

5 Realization of voiceless *th* [θ] as *t* or *f*

YouTube:

i) *he is so sexy does anyone agree wit meh?* (CHRIS)

– “Wit” has replaced *with*.

ii) *jus to let the world know. that swagger dance is from the Bay breh! norf Cali hoe.*
(CHRIS)

- The word *north* has been replaced by “norf”.

6 Realization of voiced *th* [ð] as *d* or *v*

YouTube:

i) *Dis my song bro* (CIARA)

- *dis* instead of “this”

ii) *I luv dis song.* (CIARA)

- *dis* instead of “this”

iii) *I need to learn dat move* (CHRIS)

- *dat* instead of “that”

iv) *every1 go to my page and listen 2 cassidys version its fire! we all no he killed all tramp hoes in that lookin as bitche freestyle this one is dedicated for all good girls out der! make sure u subscribe* (BEYONCÉ)

- *der* instead of “there”

Forum:

i) *...he says u will always be my baby bt he's telling his girl aka wifey (dhats wat he call her) he love her?* (BABYDADDY)

- *Dhats* has replaced “that’s”.

ii) *The wetter da betta.....whoa - wait what did I just say?* (HAIRSTYLES)

- *da* instead of “the”

iii) *...uh yea Def was a wierd stage for me.* (HAIRSTYLES)

- *Def* instead of “that”

7 Deletion of unstressed initial and medial syllables

This characteristic is strongly age-graded according to Rickford (1999).

Forum

The fake "Add-On" Ponytail! ("Mane & Tail" was sho nuff right!) (HAIRSTYLES)

- The SE word “enough” has been shorted to “nuff”.

8 Compression

YouTube

Lmao nicki can get it DAILY if she wanted to nigga. you prolly caint even wake up in the morning without touchin yoself (CIARA)

- In this case, the word *probably* has been shorted to “prolly”.

3.3 AAVE specific vocabulary and internet slang:

In the present thesis, examples from *The Cocoa Lounge* forum and YouTube comments of AAVE slang and internet slang have been organized and analyzed according to the groups of slang which they belong to.

1 AAVE/ hip hop slang

This slang is specific for its alternative pronunciation, alternative spelling, conjoined words, partial words, the replacement suffix *-izzle*, and entire sets of new words for actions, anatomy, consumer products, drug terms, gang terms, locations, concepts, relationships, phrases, as well as all kinds of miscellaneous terms. Alternative spelling has already been discussed in part, in relation to the phonological features of AAVE, so here it will be used only for examples that do not portray the phonological features mentioned above.

The following are the actual examples found of AAVE/hip hop slang found in the present research:

1

YouTube

bro in

Dis my song bro (CIARA)

Meaning: Although the word *bro* refers to *brother*, here it is used as “a friendly way of addressing a man or boy” (Merriam-Webster Online, 2014).

Forum

brotha in

...it doesn't even bother me that the brutha (has put on a skirt, or matches plaids with stripes...he's eclectic, and something very different plus i love his little mo on his face. (CRUSH)

Meaning: Although *brother* can also mean “a male”, “a friend”, here it is used as a word to refer to “a black male” (Online Slang dictionary, 1999-2014).

2

YouTube

i) *hating in*

Y'all just hating that y'all ain't famous but I bet you if nicki minaj came to meet you you be like omg I'm your biggest fan. (CIARA)

Meaning: putting down the success or fortune of others due to jealousy. UrbanDictionary.com (2014)

ii) *booty pop in*

gurls gurls and booty pop lml 2 funny (CHRIS)

Meaning: The booty pop refers to the situation in which girls (and sometimes men) who are physically capable of separating their butt cheeks shake them without movement in any other body part, including the legs and lower back (UrbanDictionary.com, 2014).

Note: The word “girls” is intentionally spelled *gurls* in the AAVE slang style.

3

YouTube

swagger dance and *hoe* in

...that swagger dance is from the Bay breh! norf Cali hoe. (CHRIS)

Meaning: i) *Swagger dance* is a combination of the words *swagger* and *dance*. *Swagger* refers to one's comfortableness aka confidence, pride, etc., with oneself. Therefore the person doing the swagger dance exhibits self-confidence and pride and is dancing in a cool manner. This person is usually a reserved individual in other environments (UrbanDictionary.com, 2014).

ii) The word *hoe* is a black slang term for “whore” – “a prostitute, a promiscuous person” (The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, 1997:618).

Note: *Ho* is intentionally spelled “hoe” in the AAVE slang style.

4

YouTube

the harlem shake in

He doing the harlem shake (CHRIS)

Meaning: *The Harlem Shake* is “a style of dance that involves pivoting the shoulder out while popping the other shoulder out at the same time” (knowyourmeme.com, 2014).

5

YouTube

doe in

This song doe (CIARA)

Meaning: Since the slang meaning of the word “doe” is not found in any dictionary (otherwise it refers to the “female of a deer, antelope, goat, rabbit, and certain other animals” [The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, 1997:385]), this example is most likely a misspelling of the AAVE slang term “dope”, meaning “excellent; superb” (The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, 1997:390). The word “dope” also refers to “any illicit drug”, as well as “information; news” (The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, 1997:389-390), although these other meanings are not present in this example.

6

YouTube

fire and *killed* in

every1 go to my page and listen 2 cassidys version its fire! we all no he killed all tramp hoes in that lookin as bitche freestyle this one is dedicated for all good girls out der! make sure u subscribe (BEYONCÉ)

Meaning: i) The adjective “fire” used in this example means “very good, excellent, attractive; cool, awesome” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014).

ii) The verb “to kill” can mean “to generally be high performing or do a task well” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014), but in this example it means “to defeat” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014).

Note: The verb “know” is intentionally spelled “no” in the AAVE slang style. “lookin as bitche freestyle” refers to the song “Lookin Ass Bitches” by Cassidy, another hip hop artist. “Freestyle” refers to rapping without preparation (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014).

7

YouTube

nigga in

Lmao nicki can get it DAILY if she wanted to nigga... (CIARA)

Meaning: The otherwise extremely derogatory term *nigger* is used usually by black people in reference to other black people. *Nigger/nigga* can also mean “a friend”, “a good friend”, it can be “a form of address for a person”, and “a male” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014).

8

Forum:

i) *sistas* in

This is a big prob...well, not problem, but "issue" for sistas new on almost any job. (SISTERS)

Meaning: The AAVE slang term *sista* or *sister* usually refers to two things: 1 “a name used between close friends referring to a female” and 2 “a black woman” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014). In this example from *The Cocoa Lounge*, *sistas* means “black women”.

ii) *wifey* in

*...he says u will always be my baby bt he's telling his girl aka *wifey* (dhats wat he call her) he love her?... (BABYDADDY)*

Meaning: The slang word *wifey* can mean “a man's girlfriend, or even actual wife”, but here it is an “affectionate term for a female who is ‘wife-material’ or has the potential to be one's wife” (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996-2014).

3.4 Other examples of alternative spelling specific to AAVE:

YouTube:

1 *he is so sexy does anyone agree wit meh (CHRIS)*

- instead of “with me”

2 *you prolly caint even wake up in the morning without touchin yoself (CIARA)*

- *Can't* is spelled as “caint”.

Forum:

1 *...because he was cheating on me with sumbdy else and couldnt admit to it...he text me and sumtimes call 2 check up on me but is still with his girl..he says u will always be my baby bt he's telling his girl aka wifey (dhats wat he call her) he love her?...but then on the other hand wen me and him stop talkin i confided my self into someone else...so wat am I doing?... (BABYDADDY)*

The words “somebody” and “sometimes” are spelled with a *-u*, so they become *sumbdy* and *sumtimes*. The *-h* is left out of the spelling of “what” and “when” so we get *wat*, and *wen*. The contraction “that’s” has been replaced with *dhats* to emphasize the *d* sound instead of [ð].

2 *I say do what cha lyke... (BABYDADDY)*

The phrase “what ya like” has been spelled “what *cha lyke*” to emphasize the pronunciation of “ya like” after “what”. “Ya” is the non-standard spelling of “you”.

3 *I'm tryna lose the relaxer as well. (HAIRSTYLES)*

- *Tryna* is a contraction and non-standard spelling of “trying to”.

3.5 Internet slang

The examples of internet slang found in the present research consist of cyber acronyms and alternative spellings frequent in internet communication.

Note: Misspellings were found in the research that possibly could have been unintentional. Therefore, they might be either typos or signs of bad grammar. This applies to words such as *har* for “hair”, *jsut* for “just” and *bt* for “but”. That is why this research is focused on those words that belong to either internet slang or AAVE slang respectively.

I Cyber acronyms

YouTube:

i) *Ikr...it's a shame when U kno there r only 4 great real dancers on this list (CIARA)*

This example has three acronyms: 1) *Ikr* stands for the expression "I know, right?" (InternetSlang.com, 2002-2014); 2) *U* is very common in Netspeak and it stands for the word “you”; and 3) *r* (sometimes capitalized) is an acronym for the word “are”.

ii) *gurls gurls and booty pop lml 2 funny (CHRIS)*

1) The acronym *lml* stands for “laughing mad loud” and it is another way of saying “laughing out loud” (UrbanDictionary.com, 1999-2014). However, the same acronym can also stand for “licking my lips” to convey sexual desire (The Online Slang Dictionary, 1996 – 2014), and “love my life” (UrbanDictionary.com, 1999-2014). All three meanings could be used in this sentence although “laughing mad loud” is the most probable for the context of the sentence.

2) The symbol *2* is often used to stand for the words “to” and “too” in internet communication.

iii) *Lmao nicki can get it DAILY if she wanted to nigga...*(CIARA)

The acronym *lmao* stands for "laughing my ass off" and it is used frequently in text-based communication (text messaging, online chat, etc.) when something is particularly funny (ChatSlang.com, 2014).

iv) *every1 go to my page and listen 2 cassidys version its fire!...make sure u subscribe*
(BEYONCÉ)

1) The term *every1* is an abbreviated form of the word "everyone", often used on the internet (Slang.org, 2014), and 2) *U* stands for "you".

v) *86m already u know this going plat* (BEYONCÉ)

The symbol *m* stands for "million" (allacronyms.com, 2014) and *plat* stands for "platinum" (UrbanDictionary.com, 1999-2014).

Forum:

i) *...I used to love and still like cowrie shells...just don't wear'em in my hair anymore...lol*(HAIRSTYLES)

Being probably one of the most frequent cyber acronyms, *lol* stands for "laughing out loud" and it is used "to draw attention to a joke or amusing statement, or to express amusement" (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2014).

ii) *...he text me and sumtimes call 2 check up on me but is still with his girl...he says u will always be my baby bt he's telling his girl aka wifey (dhats wat he call her) he love her?... (BABYDADDY)*

-The number 2 stands for "to" and *u* stands for "you".

II Alternative spelling characteristics of Netspeak

YouTube:

I luv dis song. (CIARA)

Using *luv* instead of the Standard English form “love” is common in text messages and Netspeak.

Forum:

Hell yeah, I'd dump his azz! (DUMP)

The spelling *azz* is a frequent replacement for the word “ass” on the internet as a way to avoid being censured (UrbanDictionary.com, 2014).

4 CONCLUSION

Although the corpus used in the research cannot portray the English of all African Americans using AAVE on the entire internet, it did reveal certain tendencies of using the vernacular on popular web-hosted spaces such as YouTube and internet forums. The first discovery made in the process of this research was that AAVE is strongly linked to Netspeak, namely Netglisch, and sometimes it is hard to discern internet slang from AAVE/hip hop slang on the internet since both are so rooted in text-based communication, especially on the internet. One of the surprising discoveries was that it was actually difficult to find examples of AAVE on the internet, especially in forums. Although it is uncertain why this is so, one probable reason might be that African Americans prefer using Standard English in written communication, including cyber communication because it is more socially acceptable and it presents a good use of grammar. In fact, AAVE has been stigmatized as bad English for years and its cultural aspect has been overlooked. It was also more difficult to find examples of AAVE in internet forums than in YouTube comments, perhaps because people seem to write in a more liberal, relaxed way on YouTube than on forums where they engage in discussions.

As far as the AAVE features are concerned, some of the more dominant grammatical features were missing in the examples from the internet, features such as the use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect, the use of *had* to mark the simple past, generalization of *is* and *was* to use with plural and second person subjects, the absence of plural *-s* for nouns, and the use of double negatives. Of the grammatical AAVE characteristics, the most popular proved to be the missing copula, which was found in eight examples, and of the phonological features, with six examples each, non-rhoticity and the realization of final *ng* as *n* in gerunds proved to be the most frequently used. What is interesting is that African Americans using AAVE intentionally show the uniqueness of their vernacular by spelling the words as they pronounce them, thus making possible the observation of characteristics of their speech by simply reading the text without actually listening to the speech.

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