

Transcript of Jameis Winston's Post BCS Title Football Game Interview with Tom Rinaldi, 1/6/14. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=047f-0XEV5c>

[**INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:** Jameis Winston, quarterback of Florida State, winner of the BCS title game against Auburn U, was criticized in a tweet by Dee Dee McCarron, mother of Alabama quarterback AJ McCarron, for his English in this interview. "Is it English?" she asked, in a tweet she quickly retracted. <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/01/aj-mccarrons-mom-apologizes-for-tweet-deriding-jameis-winston/>. Others responding to the YouTube excerpt cited above were also critical of Jameis' "diction." But as we noted in our AAVE class [AfAm21/Ling65/Ling265 Stanford 1.9.14], the zero copula and other 'non-standard' features of Jameis' remarks (highlighted in yellow) are regular features of African American Vernacular English [AAVE], just as not pronouncing your "r" after a vowel, as in *ca'* for "car," is a feature of Boston English, or London English, for that matter. (But no one questions the status of Londoner's English as "English" when *they* do it!)

AAVE is a long-standing systematic and rule-governed variety of American English that has been described by linguists since the 1960s, and even before. Of course it also changes over time, as all living languages and dialects do, and it varies to some extent by region, especially in pronunciation and vocabulary, and by the socioeconomic class, gender, social network and style of its speakers, as languages and dialects do. But it is a complex, well-organized and well-established linguistic and communicative system, one of the most distinctive varieties of English in America, and the one that has been more often studied, written about and discussed at scholarly conferences over the past half century than any other variety. To assume that people who speak it are ignorant, uninformed, cannot speak other varieties of English (whether standard or not), or have "no language," is, well, ignorant and uninformed. To diss Jameis' speech because it differs from standard or mainstream English is to diss his family, his peers, and the long line of Black people—stretching back to his enslaved and free Black ancestors in America, and their African and/or Caribbean forebears—from which he inherited this linguistic gift.

Footnotes below are excerpts from descriptions of these features in chapter 1 "Phonological and grammatical features of African American English" in my 1999 book, *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implications* (Malden, MA/Oxford, UK:Blackwell). The chapter can be accessed as a stand-alone article at www.johnrickford.com --John R. Rickford, Professor of Linguistics, Stanford University. Thanks to Gabriella Isabella Johnson, Stanford undergrad and JRR's research assistant, for this transcript.]

TRANSCRIPT:

- 1 *Rinaldi:* Jameis, with 1:15 to go in this game, final drive, what did you tell your teammates
- 2 around you?
- 3
- 4 *Winston:* I said. "Guys **we didn't come here for no reason**".ⁱ I said, "Guys, this **is** ours, man. **This**
- 5 **ø** ours."ⁱⁱ All the adversity we went through the first few quarters, it was ours to take. And **like**
- 6 **I ø been sayin'**,ⁱⁱⁱ we control our own destiny." And those men looked me in my eye and they
- 7 said, "We got this, Jameis" and I said, we said, I said, "**Are** you strong?" They said "I'm strong if
- 8 **you ø strong**" and I said, "**We ø strong den.**"
- 9
- 10 *Rinaldi:* After struggling through the first half what was the biggest adjustment you guys made
- 11 at halftime?

12

13 *Winston*: We had to go back to playin' Florida State football. We came out here--we wasn't--we
14 were--we were lettin' us be bigger than the game. We were bigger than the game. Then we
15 had to say—"Ay, let's play Florida State football because cain't nobody be bigger than this
16 game."^{iv} And we did that, and we came out victorious.

17

18 *Rinaldi*: You had an embrace with your head coach Jimbo Fischer. You been through a lot with
19 him this season. What did you guys share in that moment, Jameis?

20

21 *Winston*: We just, we \emptyset champions. We can share that we are champions together. And
22 through everything that we went through, through all the haters, through every single thing,
23 we came out victorious. And God did this. I'm so blessed. He's [Coach Jimbo Fischer] so
24 blessed. Like all the stuff that he handled with Ethan, then he come \emptyset out here and coach \emptyset us?
25 That touched me, and it's nobody but God. It's nobody.

26

27 *Rinaldi*: Ethan being the reference to Jimbo's son. You said it once, you said it a hundred times
28 this season "If we're gonna do it big, we're gonna do it big then." How big is this moment?

29

30 *Winston*: It's the biggest. Happy birthday. My cousin in Afghanistan \emptyset watchin' this game, T'Ola
31 (T. Ola) Winston. We \emptyset doin' it for everybody. We \emptyset doin' it big all over the country, all over
32 the world, and I'm proud. I'm proud to say I'm a Florida State Seminole.

33

34 *Rinaldi*: Congratulations Jameis.

35

36 *Brett* (Announcer): Thank you Tom, and happy birthday to the 22-year-old who celebrates
37 with a national championship. And of course that ends the run of the SEC.

NOTES [and note that, in the transcript, \emptyset is used to mark the point at which a grammatical form or inflection would occur in equivalent Standard English usage]

ⁱ Feature 22b in Rickford 1999, & line 4 above: "Multiple negation or negative concord (that is, negating the auxiliary verb and all indefinite pronouns in the sentence) as in "He *don'* do *nutten*" for Standard English "He doesn't do anything" (Labov 1972a, 1972c; 130-96)."

ⁱⁱ Feature 19a in Rickford 1999, & line 5 above: "Absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions, as in "He \emptyset tall," for SE "He's tall" or "They \emptyset runnin'" for SE "They are running." (See Labov 1969 and Rickford et al 1991.)" Other examples occur in Jameis' transcript in lines 7, 8, 21, 30 and 31. And note that not all forms of the *be* copula are deleted. Variants that CANNOT be deleted are highlighted in gray. They include first person singular *am* (usually contracted to *I'm* or *Ahm*, but not deleted), past tense *was* and *were*, and infinitive *be*. Other occurrences of the copula that COULD be deleted, but are not, are highlighted in green. Note that two of the three examples in this transcript occur before noun phrases (this *is* ours, we *are* champions), the linguistic environment in which present tense *is* or *are* is most likely to be retained in AAVE, demonstrating once again that AAVE, like other speech varieties, is systematic and rule-governed.

ⁱⁱⁱ Feature 19e in Rickford 1999 & line 6 above: "Use of unstressed *been* or *bin* for SE "has/have been" (present perfects) as in "He *been* sick" for "He has been sick." Unlike stressed BIN . . . unstressed *been* can co-occur with time adverbials (e.g. "since last week"), and does not connote remoteness (Rickford 1975)." See also line 19, in Rinaldi's speech!

iv Feature 22b again, and especially, 22c in Rickford 1999, line 15 above: Negative inversion (inversion of the auxiliary and indefinite pronoun subject, as in “*Can’t nobody* say nothing” (inverted from “Nobody can’t say nothin”) for SE “Nobody can say anything” or “*Ain’t nobody* home” for SE “Nobody is home” (Sells, Rickford and Wasow 1996a, b).”

v Feature 20a, & line 24 above: “Absence of thirs person singular present tense –s, as in “He walk \emptyset ” for SE “He walks.” The use of *don’t* instead of “doesn’t” as in “He *don’t* sing” or *have* instead of “has” as in “She *have* it” is related, since “doesn’t” and “hasn’t” include 3rd singular –s (Fasold 1972:121-49).” [Note that Jameis’ “**he come \emptyset out here and coach \emptyset us**” COULD also be interpreted as past tense—corresponding to feature 20c “Use of verb stem (V) as past tense or preterite form (V-ed), as in “He *come* down here yesterday” for SE “He came down here yesterday.” (Wolfram and Adger 1993:12).” But since zero past marking is much less common in AAVE than zero present tense –s marking is, the zero marking here is more likely to represent the latter than the former feature.

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