

## CHAPTER 15

.....

# AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH IN CALIFORNIA

*Over Four Decades of Vibrant Variationist Research*

.....

JOHN R. RICKFORD

## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

.....

AFRICAN Americans account for only 6.6 percent of the population of California, about half as much as African Americans do in the United States overall (13.1 percent), about a fifth of what they do in Mississippi (37.4 percent), and less than a seventh of what they do in Washington, DC (hereinafter DC) (50.1 percent).<sup>1</sup> Given its relatively small proportion of African Americans, one might wonder why California merits its own chapter in this Handbook. One answer is that this is because California is the most highly populated US state; 6.6 percent represents a huge number of African Americans (2,507,992), considerably more, for instance, than African Americans in Mississippi (1,116,932) or DC (317,346). A better answer, from the perspective of lects and variation, is that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in California has been the focus of vibrant ethnographic and/or (socio)linguistic study since the years of the earliest community studies in New York City (NYC), Detroit, and DC, and this tradition continues to this day.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, California was the site of the 1996–1997 Oakland Ebonics controversy—the biggest public controversy to date concerning the use of AAVE in US schools—although educational research is outside the purview of this chapter (see, instead, the Part V, this volume). Another distinctive feature of variationist scholarship on AAVE in California is how much of it has been done by African Americans, perhaps more than in any other state.<sup>3</sup> Labov (1982, 165) has emphasized the contributions to the study of AAVE made by “the entrance of [B]lack linguists into the field”; these are especially evident in work done in California.

## 15.2 SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMMUNITY STUDIES OF THE 1970S

The earliest study in this category is Legum et al.'s (1971) 172-page report on *The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles*. Closely modeled in feature coverage on Labov et al.'s (1968) Harlem study, it was listed by Wolfram (1974, 498), along with Labov et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969), and Fasold (1972), as one of the four earliest major studies of “northern” urban Black speech. Because I discuss this report extensively in Rickford (2014), I will only highlight some of its significant features here. First, it was the earliest study of the speech of young Black children (kindergarten to third grade) in the United States, complementing an earlier acquisition study of Black preschoolers (ages 4–5) in the San Francisco Bay Area (Henrie 1969). Legum et al. (1971) also confirmed the findings of Labov et al. (1968) that the simplification of word-final consonant clusters ending in *t* or *d* was much more frequent in words with mono-morphemic clusters like *past* (64 percent in Los Angeles, hereinafter LA) than in words like *passed* where it represented the past tense (32 percent). The LA study also confirmed Wolfram's (1969) finding that *are*-deletion (50/61, or 82 percent, across all age groups in LA) was much more common than *is*-deletion (79/272, or 29 percent). Finally, the LA children used invariant habitual *be* (e.g., “When I *be* appetizing, it *be* a picture on”) much more frequently in third grade (47 examples) than in kindergarten (4 examples), anticipating subsequent evidence (Craig and Washington 2006; Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010) that some vernacular features occur more often as children progress from kindergarten to higher grades.

In 1971, another study of AAVE in California was published—Claudia Mitchell-Kernan's ethnographic study in a low-income West Oakland community. Herself African American, Mitchell-Kernan spent years observing language use and attitudes in her African American neighborhood, and her ethnography is well-known for its insightful analyses of *signifying*, *marking*, and *loud-talking* (see also Mitchell-Kernan 1972). Less familiar are its quantitative studies of present-tense copula absence and auxiliary *have* absence in the speech of two young African American women, Rita (23) and Esther (26). Both were born out of state but “spent the major portion of their lives in the San Francisco Bay Area” (Mitchell-Kernan 1971, 19). Their combined recorded data is not extensive (two hours total), but the copula absence data are presented in detail in her Appendix I, allowing us to reanalyze it to take into account “don't count” cases and other conventions established by later research (see Rickford et al. 1991; Blake 1997).<sup>4</sup> Thus reanalyzed, the data on *is* + *are* absence nicely confirm the evidence of other features (see table 15.1) that Rita is more vernacular than Esther.<sup>5</sup>

Mitchell-Kernan relates this difference between the two women to the fact that they represent different “socio-cultural strands.” Rita earns “below poverty level” and her “interaction network was almost exclusively intra-community.” Esther's earnings were closer to middle class and her were networks broader, involving interactions both inside

**Table 15.1 Contrast between Rita and Esther's use of Canonical AAVE Features**

Speaker	Ø <i>is + are</i> <i>p</i> = .0297*	Invariant habitual <i>be</i> or <i>be</i> <sub>2</sub>	Exis, <i>i</i> 's (vs. there) <i>p</i> = .004*	Ø third sg. -s
Rita	43% (52/120)	16	100% (8/8)	60% (46/77)
Esther	27% (19/71)	0	30% (3/10)	0% (no n's)

\*Significance by Fischer's exact test; significance cannot be calculated for other columns.  
Source: Constructed from data in Mitchell-Kernan 1971, ch. 2 and appendix I.

and outside the community, many with professionals (1971, 20–21). Almost ten years before Milroy's (1980) book on language and social networks, Mitchell-Kernan's insights on this subject are quite striking.

The combined copula absence data from Rita and Esther also confirmed the evidence of other studies that *are*-deletion (39/70, or 56 percent) is more frequent ( $p < .0001$ ) than *is*-deletion (32/121, or 26 percent); that pronoun subjects are more favorable ( $p = .0042$ ) to *is/are* deletion (61/148, or 41 percent) than NP [noun phrase] subjects (10/52, or 19 percent); and that there was a relatively consistent hierarchy ( $p = .0009$ ) of following grammatical environments, with \_\_NP (11/35, or 20 percent) and \_\_Loc (3/16, or 19 percent) least favorable to copula absence; \_\_V-ing (26/40, or 65 percent) and \_\_gonna (12/19, or 63 percent) most favorable; and \_\_Adj in between (19/56, or 34 percent).<sup>6</sup> Together with Legum et al. (1971), Mitchell-Kernan's (1971) California study reinforced the early evidence of Labov et al. (1968) from NYC and Wolfram (1969) from Detroit that AAVE was grammatically similar nationwide. The most likely explanation for this similarity is the common origins of AAVE in the North and West via the Great Migration from the South of the early twentieth century.

The next quantitative community study in California, this time incorporating the variable rule framework of Labov et al. (1968) and Cedergren and Sankoff (1974), was Baugh's (1979) dissertation study of style-shifting in the Black community in Pacoima, greater Los Angeles (see also Baugh 1983). Baugh's fieldwork methods were ethnographic, like Mitchell-Kernan's, involving local residence and work as a lifeguard at a community pool over several summers, but his recorded database was much bigger (eighty-eight hours). At its core were nine primary participants, six men and three women, aged 21 to 54. Innovatively, he distinguished four speech event types or styles (1979, 23) based on interlocutors' familiarity and their ability to speak AAVE: *Type 1, Familiar/Vernacular*, represents interactions between familiars who speak AAVE; *Type 2, Unfamiliar/Vernacular*, represents events in which participants share AAVE but are not well known to each other; *Type 3, Familiar/Nonvernacular*, represents events involving participants who know each other but do not share AAVE; and *Type 4, Unfamiliar/Nonvernacular*, represents events where participants neither know each other nor speak AAVE.

Baugh (1979, 1983) examined many variables, including *be done*, stressed *BIN*, aspectual marking with *steady* (identified as a distinctive AAVE feature for the first time), multiple

negation, *is*-absence, *are*-absence, final *t/d* deletion, post-vocalic *r*-deletion, and absence of third person singular *-s*, possessive *-s*, and plural *-s*. His study confirms and extends our knowledge of the internal constraints on these variables provided by earlier studies, but only the last four features in this list (bolded in table 15.2) showed significant variable rule probability distinctions among his four situational styles.<sup>7</sup> Baugh (1979, 1983) suggested that variables like *is*-absence are primarily constrained by their complex internal constraints.

A fourth California community study of the 1970s (presented out of order because it differs in kind from the others and provides a better geographical link with those in the next section) was Hoover's (1978) survey of attitudes toward "Black English" among sixty-four African American parents of first and sixth graders in East Palo Alto (near Stanford University) and sixteen similar parents in Oakland. Although this was not a study of AAVE usage, it is worth noting in Part II of this book because it consolidated the notion of standard Black English (see Spears, this volume) as a variety with standard English grammar but "Black" pronunciation (cf. Taylor 1971, and see Spears, this volume) and revealed a more complex and positive set of attitudes toward the Black varieties than had previously been reported.<sup>8</sup> As Hoover concluded:

it should be remembered that 85 percent of Black parents interviewed accepted one level of Black English (standard) in all contexts and accepted the vernacular level in many contexts dependent on situation, topic, and person spoken to. This is certainly not the picture of a group rejecting itself. (Hoover 1978, 85)

A final "community" study worth mentioning is Folb's (1980) study of teenage slang in Los Angeles, based on fieldwork done between 1968 and 1976.<sup>9</sup> The book is valuable, not only for the 2,500 slang terms (i.e., fleeting, popular vocabulary among particular groups) the author collected, listed in a thirty-four-page glossary at the end, but also for its analysis by subcategory (e.g., Name Terms, Male Female Interaction, Drugs) in the six preceding chapters. Also striking are the extensive quotes the author provides from her recordings of African American teenagers, in which the vernacular of the time shines through:

Like d' name of d' game down here it be runnin' down some fine lines. Like you talkin' to some young lady, tryin' to catch. Else you be blowin' on d' brother hard, fast and heavy. (Folb 1980, 90)

**Table 15.2 VARBRUL Probabilities, by Style, for Five of Baugh's (1979) AAVE Variables**

Variable Styles	∅ <i>Is</i>	∅ Post-vocalic <i>r</i> -	∅ third sg. <i>-s</i>	∅ Possessive <i>-s</i>	∅ Plural <i>-s</i>
Type 1	.514	.626	.601	.635	.621
Type 2	.489	.489	.443	.421	.488
Type 3	.472	.491	.538	.704	.549
Type 4	.472	.393	.417	.249	.345

### 15.3 EAST PALO ALTO NEIGHBORHOOD STUDIES [EPANS] IN THE 1980S TO 1990S AND BEYOND

In the mid-1980s, assisted by Faye McNair-Knox and several Stanford students, I began recording African American (and some of the few White) residents of the low-income, primarily African American, Latino/a, and Pacific Islander East Palo Alto community adjacent to Stanford and Palo Alto. Eventually, the database from this East Palo Alto Neighborhood Study (EPANS) included recordings from more than eighty men and women, of all ages, and portions of it were used in a variety of studies in the 1980s to 1990s and beyond.

Stanford graduate or undergraduate students pioneered several EPANS projects. For instance, Théberge (1988) first noted the existence of preterit *had* (as in *I had slipped and fell* instead of *I slipped and fell*) in the narratives of 12-year-old, sixth-grade students with whom she had been working in East Palo Alto. In an NWAV conference presentation on this feature, Rickford and Théberge Rafal (1996) provided a detailed analysis of the semantics and discourse significance of the form, noting that it often marked or foreshadowed a narrative or evaluation peak. Drawing on EPANS data from older teenagers and adults, and other studies (see Labov et al. 1968 and Cukor-Avila 1995), we concluded that while preterit *had* was sharply age-graded in East Palo Alto, it might represent change in progress in AAVE elsewhere beginning in narrative orientation clauses and spreading from there to “complicating action clauses and even to single event and unsequenced listings outside of narratives” (Rickford and Théberge Rafal 1996, 247).

The late Keith Denning, using EPANS data from seventeen speakers, eleven Black and six White, showed that younger Black speakers were converging with White speakers in using “higher, fronter realizations of the final /i/ in words like *happy*” (Denning 1989, 145), rather than the lower, laxer, and backer realizations (more southern like) characteristic of their parents and grandparents. His acoustic phonetic evidence challenged the then new and controversial claim (cf. Bailey and Maynor 1989) that AAVE was diverging from White Vernacular American Englishes and showed that convergence and divergence (in grammatical features like invariant *be*) could coexist. This point was reinforced by Rickford (1992), who, using a small cross-section of old, middle, and young speakers in the EPANS corpus, reported that divergence from the norms of standard and vernacular White American Englishes was evident in much higher uses of invariant habitual *be* and zero copula among East Palo Alto teenagers but that stability or convergence was evident in other features, like plural and past tense marking. Rickford (1992) also attributed the divergence between old and young East Palo Alto speakers to differences in their respective attitudes to Black (vs. White) identity and culture but emphasized that we needed further research to explain why particular features diverged and others did not.

Richardson (1991; now Fought) drew on data from three White and twelve Black speakers in the EPANS corpus to investigate variability in the expression of habitual aspect in

the present and the past, beginning with the semantics rather than the forms. She found that, contrary to popular stereotype, the African American speakers did not just depend on invariant *be* for present tense habituais (as in *we be cracking up*, used in 27 percent of the 668 combined present-tense tokens from Foxy Boston and Tinky Gates). The African American speakers also used other strategies, like the simple present verb (as in *we crack up*, used 63 percent of the time) and zero copula (as in *we Ø crack up*, used 4 percent of the time). This range of strategies made them appear similar to Whites in the area, but Richardson showed that there was still a significant difference between Black and White strategies for marking habituality in the present and the past, and she noted other interesting findings, such as co-occurrence between habitual verb forms and frequency adverbials).

Finally, in terms of student-initiated research, Blake (1997) drew on 842 “count” tokens and 1,636 “don’t count” tokens from six African American speakers in the EPANS corpus to provide a thorough review of the diverse decisions made by linguists studying zero copula in AAVE about what to include and exclude in defining the envelope of variation. She ended with clear recommendations for subsequent research, including the suggestion that WIT tokens (*Wha’s*, *I’s*, and *Tha’s*) should be excluded, and negative forms, including *ain’t*, should be included. Some of McWhorter’s (1998) discussion of AAVE was also based on EPANS and his own California research.

Rickford et al. (1991) drew on 1,424 present tense copula “count” tokens from thirty or more speakers in the EPANS corpus to address two significant unresolved theoretical and methodological issues in the study of AAVE zero copula: (1) Whether *is*-contraction and deletion should be tabulated and analyzed separately from that of *are* (recall that Labov et al. [1968] studied only *is*), and (2) whether the different methods used by researchers to compute copula contraction and deletion significantly influenced the results. With respect to (1), Rickford et al. concluded that *is* and *are* should be studied together, facilitating one statement of the very similar conditioning both forms displayed. With respect to (2), they concluded that the different computation methods, which they dubbed “Labov Contraction and Deletion,” “Straight Contraction and Deletion,” and “Romaine Contraction,”<sup>10</sup> made a tremendous difference in the results. For transparency, neutrality, and other reasons, Rickford et al. (1991) recommended that researchers follow the “Straight Contraction and Deletion” method. They also found a hierarchy of following grammatical and subject constraints that strikingly matched the reports of earlier researchers in other communities and a strong apparent time effect (e.g., factor weights of .23, .42, and .82 for old, middle, and young groups, respectively, for Straight Deletion of *is + are*) that could be attributed either to change in progress or age-grading.

Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994) drew on four different recordings with EPANS teenager Foxy Boston to investigate some of Bell’s (1984) hypotheses about style as audience design, as part of a larger interest in reviving the study of style-shifting in sociolinguistics. The pivotal data came from two interviews with Foxy in 1990 and 1991, one with the African American mother (Faye) of a teenage acquaintance from East Palo Alto (Roberta), with Roberta and two other African American neighborhood teenagers as minor participants, the other from a one-on-one interview with an unfamiliar White graduate student (Beth). For three of the five linguistic variables investigated (see



table 15.3), Foxy showed significant variation between the two interviews, using the vernacular variants significantly more often with the familiar Black interviewer.

Had we had only one of these interviews as our data point (the norm in sociolinguistics), our impression of Foxy’s competence and of teenage usage in East Palo Alto would have been dramatically different.

The authors also used Foxy’s data to assess several of Bell’s (1984) hypotheses about stylistic variation. For instance Foxy’s style-shifting by addressee is bigger than by topic, as Bell (1984, 178ff.) predicted, but only if we restrict ourselves to cells with a minimum of thirty tokens, as Guy (1980, 26) had recommended. And among three possibilities raised by Bell (1984, 167), Foxy seems to be responding to her interlocutors’ personal characteristics (e.g., race and familiarity) rather than the general level of their speech or their frequencies for specific linguistic variables.

The most recent publication to draw substantially on the EPANS corpus was Rickford and Price (2013), which benefited from re-interviews with Tinky Gates and Foxy Boston done by RaShida Knox (aka “Roberta”) in 2006 and 2008, when they were about twenty years older than in their first teenage interview. As table 15.4 shows, both women showed significantly lower usage rates of key AAVE features as adults.

**Table 15.3 Significant Contrasts ( $\chi^2$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between Foxy’s Interviews III and IV (1990, 1991)**

Variable	Foxy III (1990, familiar Afr. Am. interviewer)	Foxy IV (1991, unfamiliar Eur. Am. interviewer)
Ø third sg. –s	73% (83/114)	36% (45/124)*
Ø Copula <i>is/are</i>	70% (197/283)	40% (70/176)*
Invariant habitual <i>be</i>	385 (= 241 per hr)	97 (= 78 per hr)*

\* Significant by chi-square test,  $p < .001$ . The difference between the Foxy IV and Foxy III relative frequencies for each feature is statistically significant, by chi-square test.  
 Source: Adapted from Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, table 10.1, 247.

AQ: Please check if newly inserted footnote to table 15.3 is worded correctly.

**Table 15.4 Tinky and Foxy’s Teenager vs. Adult use of Vernacular Features**

Variable	TINKY GATES		FOXY BOSTON	
	Age 15, 1987	Age 35, 2006	Age 13, 1986	Age 34, 2008
Invariant <i>be</i>	50 (25 per hour)	10 (3 per hour)	146 (97 per hour)	27 (10 per hour)
Ø third sg. –s	96% (56)	57% (201)	97% (69)	23% (109)
Ø <i>is + are</i>	81% (256)	54% (464)	90% (154)	35% (376)

Source: Adapted from Rickford and Price 2013, table 4, 154.

However, despite the complicating factor of stylistic variability (which led them to recommend that studies of change in real time utilize at least three data points rather than two), the authors conclude that the contrasts in table 15.4 represent stable age-grading rather than generational change (cf. Sankoff and Blondeau 2007).

## 15.4 OTHER VARIATIONIST STUDIES FROM THE 1990S AND 2000S

Other studies of AAVE in California conducted around the turn of this century extend our understanding of issues raised in the EPANS and earlier community studies, and/or provide new insights. DeBose (1992) wrote an interesting non-quantitative study of code-shifting by one of the ten speakers from Oakland (“P”) that he recorded for the innovative study of AAVE grammar in DeBose and Faraclas (1993).<sup>11</sup> P, a college graduate and a balanced bilingual in AAVE and standard American English (SAE), was born in South Carolina but was “raised, from an early age, in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay area” (DeBose 1992, 161). DeBose (1992) discusses several striking instances of P code-switching between SAE and AAVE, explaining them in terms of addressee characteristics and other factors. DeBose’s larger point is that AAVE is “frequently spoken by middle-class persons” (1992, 165). He relates this in turn to “the fact that many educated, middle-class African Americans begin their lives in predominantly Black urban ghettos or rural southern communities where BE [Black English] is the normal medium of everyday communication.” Other aspects of DeBose’s research on AAVE in California are reflected in his 2005 work.

In 1987, John Baugh re-recorded four African American males—Jojo, Russell, Leon, and Carlos—whom he had first recorded as teenagers for his 1976 dissertation study in Pacoima, Los Angeles. Baugh (1996), comparing their adult and teenage usage, is one of the first (panel) studies of change in AAVE in real time. But like Rickford and Price (2013), Baugh concludes that the variation exhibited by his subjects represents age-grading. Jojo, Russell, and Leon display sharp reductions in vernacular usage as adults, but Baugh attributes this to the demands of their adult middle-class jobs and their ethnically and economically diverse networks. Carlos, by contrast, is in prison, and retains a level of vernacular usage that is more highly valued in his interactional milieu.

Chappel (1999), an unpublished study of variation in AAVE by class and age in Oakland, California, is worth citing because there has been no quantitative study of social class variation in AAVE since Wolfram’s (1969) study of Detroit. (See related discussion by Spears, this volume.) Chappel indeed set out to replicate Wolfram’s study, using a modified Education and Occupation scale to place twelve females she interviewed (each for about two hours) into two socioeconomic status groups: Lower Middle (LM) and Lower Working (LW). The interviewees came from four families, representing three generations: Adolescents (11–16 years old), their mothers (33–41 years old), and their grandmothers (56–76 years old). As table 15.5 shows, copula absence and consonant cluster reduction by social class in



Oakland were remarkably similar to what Wolfram (1969) found in Detroit. The most striking difference was in the lower copula absence rate for LW in Oakland (38.3 percent), which was closer to that of Wolfram’s (1969) *Upper* Working class group in Detroit (37.3 percent).<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Chappel (1999) discussed systematic quantitative variation by age group and several internal linguistic constraints on both variables.

The most substantive variationist study of AAVE in this category is Alim’s (2004) study of AAVE in “Sunnyside,” a community contiguous with East Palo Alto, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Alim’s book is innovative in many respects, but especially in its theoretical and empirical discussion of style-shifting. Among other things, he provides analyses of the use of five grammatical AAVE features in the speech of four 17-year-old Black Sunnyside Hip Hop fans, each recorded talking to eight Stanford students who differed in race, gender, and Hip Hop knowledge. Drawing on VARBRUL results, Alim provides considerable information about linguistic constraints on his most frequent variables, but his most fascinating data involve social and stylistic constraints. Table 15.6, for instance, shows how dramatically the teens vary stylistically by interlocutor, across a range of 67 to 69 percentage points—about twice as much as that exhibited by Foxy in table 15.3.

The high vernacular values (80–85 percent) exhibited by the Sunnysidaz with familiar Black peers also provided key evidence for Rickford and Price’s (2013) argument that AAVE teenage norms for copula and third singular *-s* absence had not changed fundamentally since the 1980s and that the diminution in Foxy and Tinky’s vernacular use

**Table 15.5 Zero Copula and Consonant Cluster Reduction in Oakland AAVE in 1999, Compared with Detroit AAVE Thirty Years Earlier**

Variable	Zero copula		Consonant cluster reduction	
	Lower middle	Lower working	Lower middle	Lower working
Oakland 1999	10.9% (1,204)	38.3% (1,261)	72.4% (2,948)	83.6% (2,428)
Detroit 1969	10.9% (n.d.)	56.9% (n.d.)	65.9% (n.d.)	84.2% (n.d.)

Source: Chappel 1999; Wolfram 1969.

**Table 15.6 Percentage Ø *is/are* and Third Person Singular *-s* by Four Black Sunnyside Teens According to Familiarity and Race of their Interlocutors**

Interlocutor variable	Unfamiliar whites	Unfamiliar blacks	Familiar black peers
Ø Copula <i>is/are</i>	11% (718)	37% (819)	80% (235)
Ø third sg. <i>-s</i>	19% (394)	40% (540)	85% (61)

Source: Alim 2004, 154, 170.

**Table 15.7** AAVE Feature use by Black Sunnysidaz (VARBRUL Factor Weights for  $\emptyset$  *is/are* and Third Person Singular *-s*, *Ns* for *be*), by Interlocutor Characteristics

Interlocutor Variable	Race		Gender		Hip hop knowledge	
	Black	White	Male	Female	Yes	No
$\emptyset$ <i>is/are</i>	.716	.259	.638	.325	.619	.350
$\emptyset$ third sg. <i>-s</i>	.658	.289	.631	.323	.615	.373
Invariant <i>be</i>	56	16	43	29	52	20

Source: Alim 2004, 146, 164, 178.

in 2006–2008 (table 15.4) represented age-grading. Table 15.7 shows that while interlocutor's race remains the primary social constraint, gender and Hip Hop Knowledge (a variable not previously considered in variationist analyses) are significant too. The implications for our field methods and theorizing are enormous.

## 15.5 NEW AAVE FEATURES AND ANALYSES FROM CALIFORNIA

Several new AAVE forms or analyses made their debut in the literature from research done in California. For instance, future perfective *be done* (e.g., “They *be done* spent my money before I even get a chance to look at it”) (151) and aspectual marking with *steady* (e.g., “Ricky Bell *be steady* steppin’ in them number nines”) (165) were first discussed in Baugh’s (1979) dissertation on Pacoima. Spears’s (1982) *Language* article on the *come* of indignation, as in “He *come* walking in here like he owned the damn place,” drew on data from “participant observation in San Francisco and Oakland,” especially “in a hair-care establishment where lively, uninhibited speech prevails” (852). Théberge (1988) provided the earliest discussions of preterit *had*, as in “I was on my way to school and I *had* slipped and fell” (Rickford and Théberge Rafal 1996, 229) based on data from East Palo Alto. And East Palo Alto was also the source of invariant *be*<sub>3</sub>, as in “The Clovers *be* the baddest ones around here” (Alim 2004, 184). Although there is “some semantic overlap between *be*<sub>2</sub> and *be*<sub>3</sub>,” the latter only occurs before noun phrases and has situational and semantic restrictions not shared by the former (ibid., 189–90).

In terms of new analyses, Sells, Rickford, and Wasow (1996), drawing in part on introspection and usage data from East Palo Alto residents, provided a unified Optimality Theoretic analysis of Negative Inversion, as in “Ain’t nothin’ happenin’” and “Can’t nobody beat em” (examples from Labov et al. 1968, 350, 367) as an alternative to the dual analysis of this construction in the latter work. Similarly, Bender (2001, 2005), drawing in part on experimental evidence from speakers in the San Francisco Bay Area, argued

that AAVE variation in copula absence is syntactic rather than phonological (contra Labov 1969), and that its social meaning is modulated by internal constraints. Two other experimental studies conducted in Stanford, California, involving reactions to AAVE vs. non-AAVE features (consonant cluster reduction and/or *th*-fronting) are Staum Casasanto (2009) and King and Sumner (2014).

## 15.6 USE OF AAVE BY ASIAN, MEXICAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER, AND WHITE YOUTH

One interesting aspect of sociolinguistic variation in California is the use of AAVE features—lexical, grammatical, and phonological—by youth from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, usually in school, and as a marker of youth or Hip Hop identity. Kuwahara (1998) was one of the first to study this, focusing on ten adolescents (10 to 12 years old) from Cambodian, Chinese, Mien, Thai, Vietnamese, and Mexican backgrounds in a school in “Cooltown,” in the San Francisco Bay Area. Along with detailed ethnographic discussion of each adolescent’s background, school performance, and language use, she provides quantitative analysis of their usage of various grammatical and lexical features of AAVE. Bucholtz (2011) looks at the youth identity styles of White high schoolers in a multi-ethnic urban high school in the San Francisco Bay Area too, but a significant component of this involves their use of AAVE features.<sup>13</sup> Paris’s (2011) study of African American, Latino/a, and Pacific Islander youth at South Vista High School is also set in the San Francisco Bay Area, but closer to East Palo Alto. In addition to discussing variation in each group’s use of grammatical and lexical features, he examines the positive/negative attitudes of the African American youth to the use of AAVE resources—including non-racialized deployment of the *N*-word—by Latino/a and Pacific Islander youth. Finally, Igoudin (2013) explores the everyday use of AAVE by three Asian American girls in a Southern California high school “as a means to enrich their social personae” (61).

## 15.7 CONCLUSION

Over the past four decades, California has been and continues to be the site of vibrant research on variability in AAVE, much of it by African American researchers. The earliest work (Legum et al. 1971; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Baugh 1979) provided *confirmation* for generalizations emerging from New York City and Detroit research about internal *constraints* on consonant cluster simplification, zero copula, and other variables, and about the *relative* grammatical *uniformity* of AAVE nationwide. Research in California also produced one of the first book-length discussions of the AAVE *lexicon* (Folb 1980),

and two of the earliest studies on AAVE of *young children* (preschoolers and K-third graders) (Henrie 1989 and Legum et al. 1971, respectively). A distinctive feature of California AAVE research, throughout, has been the frequency with which *ethnographic* methods have been employed (see, among others, Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Baugh 1979; Alim 2004; Paris 2011). The focus in many of the California studies (see Baugh 1979; DeBose 1992; Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994; Alim 2004) on a deeper understanding of *stylistic* variation in AAVE—often using innovative approaches—is also striking. *Attitudes* towards AAVE and other varieties, and the role of the vernacular in social *identity*—factors that often influence use by community insiders and outsiders—also received attention in California studies, for instance, in the work of Hoover (1978); Ogbu (1999); Kortenhoven (2008); Bucholtz (2011); Paris (2011); and Igoudin (2013).

Variation studies of AAVE in California have also been important in revealing *new distinctive forms* (e.g., *steady* in Baugh 1979; *come* of indignation in Spears 1982; and preterit *had* in Théberge 1988; Rickford and Théberge Rafal 1996), or in providing *new analyses* of already known features (e.g., invariant *be* and other habitual markers in Richardson 1991; negative inversion in Sells et al. 1996; and copula absence in Bender 2005). California research is also valuable for its *theoretical and methodological contributions to the quantitative study* of zero copula (Rickford et al. 1991; Blake 1997), and to larger issues like the *divergence controversy* (Denning 1989; Rickford 1992), variation by *social class and age* (Rickford et al. 1991; Chappel 1999), and *age-grading vs. generational change* in panel studies (Baugh 1996; Rickford and Price 2013). Finally, California has been the site of innovative *experimental and/or processing studies* of AAVE (Staum Casasanto 2009; King and Sumner 2014), a trend likely to grow stronger in future research.

In these and other respects, the contribution of California research to our larger understanding of variability in AAVE has been substantial and significant, and it shows every sign of continuing.<sup>14</sup>

AQ: In regards to note 3, do you mean “admitted” or “omitted”?

## NOTES

1. US Census Bureau Data from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html> for 2012. These statistics are for “Black or African American alone”; if people representing “Two or More Races” were included (3.6 percent in California in 2012; somewhat less in other states cited), the percentage of “African Americans” would be higher. But the comparison of California to the other states would be essentially the same.
2. By African American Vernacular English (AAVE), I mean the vernacular or nonstandard varieties used by African Americans, as distinct from African American English (AAE), a continuum of English-based varieties spoken by African Americans that would include African American Standard English (see Rickford 1999, xxi; Spears, this volume).
3. The list, for California, includes, alphabetically: H. Alim, A. Ball, J. Baugh, R. Blake, C. DeBose, M. Hoover, R. Jackson, S. King, L. Luster, N. Martin, F. McNair-Knox, J. McWhorter, C. Mitchell-Kernan, J. Ogbu, D. Paris, A. Piestrup, M. Price, A. Rickford, J. Rickford, and A. Spears. If work on AAVE in education or the Ebonics issue were

- included, the list would increase substantially. My apologies to anyone inadvertently admitted.
4. Among the reanalyses required on the basis of their categorical or indeterminate behavior (see Rickford et al. 1991; Blake 1997) were the discounting of tokens with *It* and *That* subjects, tokens in clause final position, and tokens involving embedded sentences, negatives, and questions.
  5. Mitchell-Kernan (1971, 27–28) had also found this to be true of *is-are* absence as calculated by her methods (Rita, 27 percent; Esther, 13 percent), but her deletion rates were lower because she included the very common but categorical *i*'s and *tha*'s tokens.
  6. Significance probabilities here as in table 15.2 were calculated by me using Fischer's exact test. In terms of following grammatical environments, it is noteworthy that Mitchell-Kernan, like Wolfram (1969), separated adjectives and locatives. In studying copula absence, Labov et al. (1968) had calculated \_\_Adj/Loc together, but as Holm (1976, 1984), Baugh (1979, 1980), and Rickford (1998) showed, separating the two environments was important to arguments for the AAVE creole origins hypothesis.
  7. Factors with probabilities over .5 favor rule application; those under .5 disfavor it, and those at or very close to .5 make little difference. Baugh (1979) also found an interesting percentage differentiation for multiple negation by style (from 61 percent to 28 percent, p. 162) but had no corresponding variable rule results (to control for multivariate effects).
  8. Luster (1992) and Ogbu (1999), both ethnographic studies in the San Francisco Bay Area by Black researchers, also reported more complex attitudes toward AAVE and Standard English than Stewart (1970)—singled out by Hoover (1978, 73, 78)—and some other researchers had assumed.
  9. Folb's book includes a long and generally praiseworthy foreword by Claudia Mitchell-Kernan and received a positive review from Baugh (1981).
  10. With F = Full Forms, C = Contractions, and D = deletions, the formulae for Straight Contraction is  $C/F + C + D$ , for Straight Deletion  $D/F + C + D$ , for Labov Contraction  $C + D/F + C + D$ , for Labov Deletion  $D/C + D$ , and for Romaine Contraction  $C/F + C$ . As shown in Rickford et al.'s (1991) table 2, given a data set of ten Full forms, ten contractions and ten deletions, computed "Contraction" rates could vary from 33 percent (Straight), to 50 percent (Romaine) or 67 percent (Labov), and computed "Deletion" rates could range from 33 percent (Straight) to 50 percent (Labov).
  11. "Innovative" because they describe the AAVE Tense-Modality-Aspect system on its own terms and not in contrast with English, more like Green (2002). They do, however, compare it to Nigerian languages to highlight possible Africanist sources.
  12. Wolfram's (1969) results (which did not include Ns) are from Fig. 6, p. 60, and Fig 47, p. 169. Chappel's (1999) results are calculated from class and age group data in Figures 4-1-4-3, pp. 31–34, and Fig. 5-1, p. 46.
  13. Compare Bucholtz (2004) with respect to AAVE use by two Laotian teenage girls in the same high school.
  14. Ongoing research includes work on the linguistic effects of Moving to Opportunity by African American and Latina/o speakers in Los Angeles, compared with their counterparts in other US cities (Rickford and Ludwig 2013), and research on African American speakers in the Voices of California corpus (Merced, Redding, and Bakersfield) at Stanford.

## REFERENCES

- Alim, H. Samy. 2004. *You Know My Steez: An Ethnographic and Sociolinguistic Study of Styleshifting in a Black American Speech Community*. Publication of the American Dialect Society, No. 89. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bailey, Guy, and Natalie Maynor. 1989. "The Divergence Controversy." *American Speech* 64 (1): 12–39.
- Baugh, John. 1979. "Linguistic Style-Shifting in Black English." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- . 1980. "A Re-Examination of the Black English Copula." In *Locating Language in Time and Space*, edited by William Labov, 83–106. New York: Academic.
- . 1981. Review of *Runnin Down Some Lines: The Language and Culture of Black Teenagers*, by Edith A. Folb. *Language in Society* 10: 461–63.
- . 1983. *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure and Survival*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1996. "Dimensions of the Theory of Econolinguistics." In *A Social Science of Language: Papers in Honor of William Labov*, edited by Gregory R. Guy and William Labov, 397–419. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Bell, Allan. 1984. "Language Style as Audience Design." *Language in Society* 13: 145–204.
- Bender, Emily M. 2001. "Syntactic Variation and Linguistic Competence: The Case of AAVE Copula Absence." PhD diss., Stanford University. Available at: <http://faculty.washington.edu/ebender/dissertation/>.
- . 2005. "On the Boundaries of Linguistic Competence: Matched-Guise Experiments as Evidence of Knowledge of Grammar." *Lingua* 115 (11): 1579–98.
- Blake, Renee A. 1997. "Defining the Envelope of Linguistic Variation: The Case of 'Don't Count' Forms in the Copula Analysis of African American Vernacular English." *Language Variation and Change* 9: 57–79.
- Bucholtz, Mary. 2004. "Styles and Stereotypes: The Linguistic Negotiation of Identity among Laotian American Youth." *Pragmatics* 14 (2/3): 127–47.
- . 2011. *White Kids: Language, Race, and Styles of Youth Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cedergren, Henrietta, and David Sankoff. 1974. "Variable Rules: Performance as a Statistical Reflection of Competence." *Language* 50: 333–55.
- Chappel, Catherine A. 1999. "Variation by Class and Age among Oakland Females." Master's thesis, Stanford University.
- Craig, Holly K., and Julie A. Washington. 2006. *Malik Goes to School: Examining the Language Skills of African American Students from Preschool–5th Grade*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cukor-Avila, Patricia. 1995. "The Evolution of AAVE in a Rural Texas Community: An Ethnolinguistic Study." PhD diss., University of Michigan.
- DeBose, Charles E. 1992. "Codeswitching: Black English and Standard English in the African American Linguistic Repertoire." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 13: 157–67.
- . 2005. *The Sociology of African American Language: A Language Planning Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DeBose, Charles E., and Nicholas Faraclas. 1993. "An Africanist Approach to the Linguistic Study of Black English: Getting to the Roots of the Tense-Aspect-Modality and Copula



- Systems in Afro-American.” In *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties*, edited by Salikoko Mufwene, 364–87. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Denning, Keith. 1989. “Convergence with Divergence: A Sound Change in Vernacular Black English.” *Language Variation and Change* 1: 145–67.
- Fasold, Ralph. 1972. *Tense Marking in Black English: A Linguistic and Social Analysis*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Folb, Edith A. 1980. *Runnin Down Some Lines: The Language and Culture of Black Teenagers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Green, Lisa J. 2002. *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guy, Gregory R. 1980. “Variation in the Group and the Individual: The Case of Final Stop Deletion.” In *Locating Language in Time and Space*, edited by William Labov, 1–36. New York: Academic.
- Henrie, Samuel N. 1969. “A Study of Verb Phrases Used by Five Year Old Nonstandard Negro English Speaking Children.” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley.
- Holm, John. 1976. “Copula Variability on the Afro-American Continuum.” Paper presented at the Conference on the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, Guyana.
- . 1984. “Variability of the Copula in Black English and its Creole Kin.” *American Speech* 59 (4): 291–309.
- Hoover, Mary Rhodes. 1978. “Community Attitudes toward Black English.” *Language in Society* 7 (1): 65–87.
- Igoudin, A. Lane. 2013. “Asian American Girls Who Speak African American English: A Subcultural Language Identity.” In *Multilingual Identities: New Global Perspectives*, edited by Inke du Bois and Nicole Baumgarten, 51–65. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- King, Sharese, and Meghan Sumner. 2014. “Voices and Variants: Effects of Voice on the Form-Based Processing of Words with Different Phonological Variants.” In *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, edited by P. Bello, M. Guarini, M. McShane, and B. Scassellati. Quebec City, Canada: Cognitive Science Society.
- Kortenhoven, Andrea. 2008. “You Don’t Know like I Know: Identity Construction in Black Women’s Church Testimonies.” Paper presented at the African American Women’s Language (AAWL) Conference, San Antonio, Texas. March 7–8.
- Kuwahara, Yuri Lea. 1998. “Interactions of Identity: Inner-City Immigrant and Refugee Youths, Language Use, and Schooling.” PhD diss., Stanford University.
- Labov, William. 1969. “Contraction, Deletion and Inherent Variability of the English Copula.” *Language* 45 (4): 715–62.
- . 1982. “Objectivity and Commitment in Linguistic Science: The Case of the Black English Trial in Ann Arbor.” *Language in Society* 11: 165–201.
- Labov, William, Paul Cohen, Clarence Robins, and John Lewis. 1968. *A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto-Rican Speakers in New York City*. Final Report, Research Project No. 3288. Vols. 1 and 2. Philadelphia, PA: U.S. Office of Education, U.S. Regional Survey.
- Legum, Stanley E., Carol Pfaff, Gene Tinnie, and Michael Nicholas. 1971. *The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles*. Technical Report, 33. Inglewood, CA: Southwest Regional Laboratory.
- Luster, Laura. 1992. “Schooling, Survival, and Struggles: Black Women and the GED.” PhD diss., Stanford University.
- McWhorter, John. 1998. *The Word on the Street: Fact and Fable about American English*. New York: Plenum.

- Milroy, Lesley. 1980. *Language and Social Networks*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Mitchell-Kernan, Claudia. 1971. *Language Behavior in a Black Urban Community*. Monographs of the Language-Behavior Research Laboratory, 2. University of California, Berkeley.
- . 1972. "Signifyin and Marking: Two Afro-American Speech Acts. In *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, edited by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, 161–79. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Ogbu, John U. 1999. "Beyond Language: Ebonics, Proper English, and Identity in a Black American Speech Community." *American Educational Research Journal* 36 (2): 147–84.
- Paris, Django. 2011. *Language across Difference; Ethnicity, Communication, and Youth Identities in Changing Urban Schools*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, Carmen. 1991. "Habitual Structures among Blacks and Whites in the 1990s." *American Speech* 66 (3): 292–302.
- Rickford, John R. 1992. "Grammatical Variation and Divergence in Vernacular Black English." In *Internal and External Factors in Syntactic Change*, edited by Marinel Gerritsen and Dieter Stein, 174–200. Berlin: Mouton.
- . 1998. "The Creole Origins of African American Vernacular English: Evidence from Copula Absence." In *African American English: Structure, History and Use*, edited by Salikoko S. Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey, and John Baugh, 154–200. London: Routledge.
- . 2014. "An Early Study of the Speech of Young Black Children in California: Why It Matters." *American Speech* 89 (2): 121–42.
- Rickford, John R., Arnetha Ball, Renee Blake, Raina Jackson, and Nomi Martin. 1991. "Rappin on the Copula Coffin: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Analysis of Copula Variation in African American Vernacular English." *Language Variation and Change* 3: 103–32.
- Rickford, John R., and Jens Ludwig. 2013. "Neighborhood Moves and Sociolinguistic Mobility in Five American Cities." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, Boston, Massachusetts, January 3–6.
- Rickford, John R., and Faye McNair-Knox. 1994. "Addressee- and Topic-Influenced Style Shift: A Quantitative Sociolinguistic Study." In *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*, edited by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan, 235–76. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rickford, John R., and Mackenzie Price. 2013. "Girlz II Women: Age-Grading, Language Change and Stylistic Variation." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17 (2): 143–79.
- Rickford, John R., and Christine Théberge Rafal. 1996. "Preterite *had + V-ed* in the Narratives of African American Preadolescents." *American Speech* 71: 227–54.
- Sankoff, Gillian, and Hélène Blondeau. 2007. "Longitudinal Change across the Lifespan: /r/ in Montreal French." *Language* 83: 560–88.
- Sells, Peter, John R. Rickford, and Thomas Wasow. 1996. "An Optimality Theoretic Approach to Variation in Negative Inversion in AAVE." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 14 (3): 591–627.
- Spears, Arthur K. 1982. "The Black English Semi-Auxiliary *come*." *Language* 58 (4): 850–72.
- Staum Casasanto, Laura. 2009. "What Do Listeners Know about Sociolinguistic Variation?" *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 15 (2): 40–49.
- Stewart, William A. 1970. "Sociopolitical Issues in the Linguistic Treatment of Negro Dialect." In *20th Annual Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*, edited by James Alatis, 215–23. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

- Taylor, Orlando. 1971. "Response to Social Dialects and the Field of Speech. In *Sociolinguistics: A Cross Disciplinary Perspective*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Théberge, Christine. 1988. "Some Sixth Grade Rappers, Readers and Writers." Senior honors essay, Stanford University.
- Van Hofwegen, Janneke, and Walt Wolfram. 2010. "Coming of Age in African American English: A Longitudinal Study." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14 (4): 427–55.
- Wolfram, Walt. 1969. *A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- . 1974. "The Relationship of White Southern Speech to Vernacular Black English." *Language* 50 (3): 498–527.