

What it Do:

AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH IN HIP-HOP

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The Power of **AND**

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WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING

Scholars have similar goals but maintain different stances on the status of African American English (AAE) and how it best serves the community:

- H. Samy Alim argues that AAE is its own language and is integral to Hip-hop Nation Language and Black identity.
- Geneva Smitherman argues that AAE is its own language due to its linguistic structure and features, thus representative of Black identity and expression.
- Awad Ibrahim believes AAE to be a significant marker in Black identity due to second language acquisition by African students in Canada.

MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What impact does AAE have on the identity of members of the hip-hop community and speakers of AAE?
- How is AAE used in hip-hop music and to what means (i.e. for demographic targeting, acceptance in a community, for identity purpose – such as being considered a member of the hip-hop community, etc.)?
- What features of AAE have the largest impact on hip-hop music and identity?

ABOUT THE FEATURES

- Copula Deletion Absent (MAE): *They are going to the store.*
Copula Deletion Present (AAE): *They going to the store.*
- Habitual *Be* Absent (MAE): *I am usually at the library.*
Habitual *Be* Present (AAE): *I be at the library.*
- Third Person *They* Absent (MAE): *Their cars are nice.*
Third Person *They* Present (AAE): *They cars are nice.*

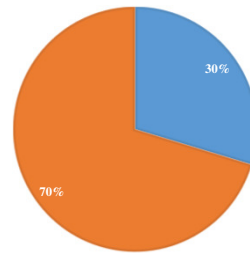
METHODOLOGY

- Build a small corpus containing lyrics from each era as well as from representative regions (East coast, West coast, Midwest, Pacific Northwest and Southern).
- Remain impartial by selecting lyrics from essential list by XXL Magazine and Billboard Top 40 as well as using a random number generator to select lyrics from constructed list.
- Create list of AAE features prominent in hip-hop lyrics.
- Analyze data by coding features and individually marking every instance in corpus tool.

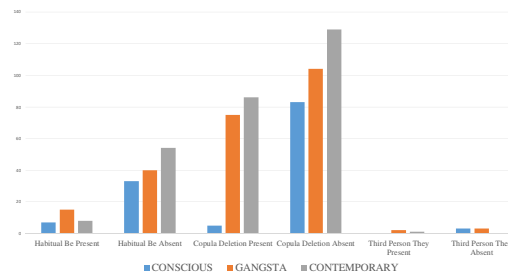
RESULTS

TOTAL FEATURES

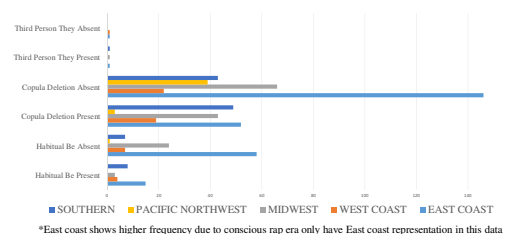
■ Features Present ■ Features Absent



FEATURES BY ERA



FEATURES BY REGION



DATA ANALYSIS

The Data Shows:

- AAE features occur less in conscious rap.
- AAE features occur more in gangsta rap.
- AAE features vary in contemporary rap.
- Overall, artists use AAE (as defined by these features) less frequently than they do Mainstream American English (MAE).

Potential Explanations of Data:

- The differences are likely shaped by political and social factors directly impacting the hip-hop community (e.g. contemporary rap is showing progress in AAE frequency due to a tumultuous racial landscape, a need for identity, and a demanding market).
- Region plays a significant role in how AAE is used (e.g. Midwest appears to utilize AAE less often, likely due to identity, values, and representation).
- Contemporary rap seems to be making a deviation, potentially even shifting toward two different sub-genres (one more concerned with Black identity and one more concerned with commercial viability).

Future Research

- Grow a larger database more representative of hip-hop eras.
- Add more features that appear to show up in hip-hop more often.
- Pursue register analysis of AAE frequency in speech vs hip-hop lyrics.
- Pursue a more rigorous analysis of language and its impact on identity.

Bibliography

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