THE USE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE) IN LOGIC'S *EVERYBODY*

PENGGUNAAN BAHASA INGGRIS VERNAKULAR AFRIKA-AMERIKA DALAM ALBUM EVERYBODY KARYA LOGIC

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Abstract

This sociolinguistic study aims to identify the grammatical features of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Logic's *Everybody* and to reveal the underlying factors of this dialect use. This research applied a descriptive-qualitative method. The context of the data in this study was song lyrics. The data were in the form sentences, clauses and phrases. The researcher was the main instrument while the data sheet was the secondary one. Data trustworthiness was based on triangulation. The results are as follows: Logic employs 11 out of 13 grammatical features of AAVE in the entire data. Those are *copula absence, remote been, nominal, future form, non-standard pronoun, use of ain't, subject-verb disagreement, irregular verb, concord negation, negative inversion* and *question form*. Subject-verb disagreement (lack of verbal marker – s) is the most dominant feature. The missing features are *habitual be* and *intensified equative be*. Furthermore, Logic's AAVE use is caused by three underlying factors: (a) authenticity in Hip-Hop: way of establishing himself in the Hip-Hop community,; (b) neighbourhood influence: growing up in an African-American household and neighbourhood,; (c) identity representation tool: a way to prove himself as black. This study has proved that African-American Vernacular English is not a broken English but rather a rule-governed variety of English with a set of fixed rules that appear systematically. Furthermore, it is also revealed that not only is this dialect an important part of Hip-Hop affiliated youth but it also has a role as an identity marker.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), grammatical features, Logic, *Everybody*

Abstrak

Penelitian Sosiolinguistik ini bertujuan untuk mendiskripsikan penggunaan fitur gramatikal bahasa Inggris vernakular Afrika-Amerika dalam album Everybody karya Logic serta mengungkap alasan yang mendasari pengunaan dialek tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif. Konteks data adalah dalam bentuk lirik lagu. Data penelitian ini adalah berupa kalimat, klausa dan frasa. Instrumen utama adalah peneliti, sedangkan tabel data adalah instrumen sekunder. Tingkat kebenaran data didasarkan pada triangulasi. Hasil penelitian ini adalah sebagai berikut: Logic menggunakan 11 dari 13 fitur gramatikal bahasa Inggris vernakular Afrika-Amerika di semua data. Fiture tersebut yaitu pelesapan kopula be, been untuk masa lampau, kata benda, bentuk masa depan, kata ganti tidak standard, pengunaan ain't, ketidaksesuaian subyek-kata kerja, kata kerja tak beraturan, multinegasi, pembalikan negasi dan bentuk pertanyaan. Ketidaksesuaia subyek-kata kerja (pelesapan akhiran –s untuk kata kerja) adalah fitu paling dominan. Fitur yang tidak ditemukan adalah invarian be dan penyamaan be yang menguat. Selain itu, Logic menggunakan dialek ini karena didasari oleh tiga faktor: (a) keaslian dalam Hip-Hop: cara untuk menetapakan dirinya di komunitas Hip-Hop.; (b) pengaruh lingkungan: dibesarkan dalam keluarga dan lingkungan orang Afrika-Amerika.; (c) alat representasi identitas: cara untuk membuktikan dirinya sendiri sebagai orang kulit hitam. Penelitian ini telah membuktikan bahwa bahasa Inggris vernakular Afrika-Amerika bukanlah bahasa Inggris yang rusak, tetapi sebuah variasi bahasa Inggris yang mempunyai aturan baku dan muncul secara sistematis. Selain itu, dialek ini bukan hanya sekedar bagian penting dari pemuda yang bergabung dalam Hip-Hop. Bahasa Inggris vernakular Afrika-Amerika juga memiliki peran sebagai penanda identitas diri.

Kata kunci: *sosiolinguistik, bahasa Inggris vernakular Afrika-Amerika, fitur gramatikal, Logic, Everybody*

BACKGROUND

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relation of language and society (Holmes, 2013: 1). Every language has many variations but it can be broken down into two categories, i.e. the standard variation and the non-standard variation. The latter is what people called dialect even though the standard one is technically a dialect. However, Chaika (1982) suggest a term 'standard dialect' to refer to the standardised variety of a language. Standard American English is considered to be the standard language in the United States of America. Meanwhile, other English variations that do not conform to the vocabulary and grammar of Standard American English are considered as the non-standard variations.

A case in point is African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) which is a social dialect spoken primarily, but not exclusively, by African-Americans in the United States. AAVE used to be seen as broken English and a slang of the lower working-class. The use of AAVE is pervasive in music in one specific genre called rap which is one of the core elements of an African-American culture called Hip-Hop. Despite rap being exclusively a black space, rappers of all race employ AAVE in their rap practice.

A case in point is Logic, who is an American rapper born from an African-American father and a Caucasian mother. Logic's situation is interesting to be analysed regarding his use of AAVE in his lyrics because the case of biracial rappers is still a minority and no one has attempted to study the phenomenon of biracial rappers and their use of AAVE before. The grammatical features of AAVE employed by Logic is fascinating to be investigated to show that this dialect is not a broken English, but rather a ruled-governed variety of English that's structured systematically which also happens to belong to a certain culture.

This research has two objectives: to identify the grammatical features of AAVE in Logic's *Everybody* and to reveal the underlying factors of Logic's AAVE use. In order to answer these objectives, expert theories are used. Wolfram's theory of grammatical features of AAVE is used to answer the first objective while. Wolfram (In Korstman and Schneider, 2004) postulates that there are 13 grammatical features of AAVE. They are *copula absence, non-standard pronoun, use of ain't, negative inversion, negative concord, question form, future form, remote been, invariant be, intensive equative be, nominal, irregular verb,* and *subject verb disagreement*. Meanwhile, in answering the second objective, Cutler's theory is used. Hip-Hop affiliated youth use AAVE because of three underlying reasons: authenticity in Hip-Hop, neighbourhood influence and identity representation tool (Cutler, 2015).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a descriptive-qualitative approach. The form of the data in this study were in the forms of lingual units such as expressions as in phrases, sentences or clauses found in Logic's *Everybody* lyrics. The main instrument was the researcher herself while the secondary instrument was in the form of a data sheet that helped the researcher analyse the data. The data were collected qualitatively by listening to the album and reading the transcribed lyrics carefully and repeatedly. Then, the researcher classified the data into categories as proposed by Wolfram and Cutler. Additionally, triangulation was conducted to gain credibility and validity. This step was done by conducting peer reviews with the help of a consultant and three linguistic students.

DISCUSSIONS

Out of all the 13 grammatical features of AAVE proposed by Wolfram, Logic only employs 11 of them. They are *copula absence, remote been, use of ain't, concord negation, negative inversion, subject verb disagreement, future form, question form, nominal, irregular verb* and *non-standard pronoun.* Subject verb disagreement (lack of verbal marker *–s*) is the most dominating feature. Meanwhile, *intensive equative be* and *invariant be* are the missing features. They are considered as receding features among AAVE speakers.

A. Grammatical Features of AAVE in Logic's *Everybody*

1. Copula Absence

Lack of copula only happens in present tense form where contraction is possible. It can happen in present tense form, present progressive as well as question form. Consider the following extracts:

1) <u>Everybody acting</u> like the brain don't matter (Hallelujah/39)
2) You ain't black, <u>you a mothafucking</u> white boy (Take It Back/18)
3) Man, <u>why you such a hype boy?</u> (Take It Back/20)

These extracts also show a pattern in which copula deletion only occurs in 2nd and 3rd person environment. This shows that AAVE is resistant to the deletion of verb *be* when it is expressed by 1st person singular. Furthermore, when copula absence occurs in *wh*-questions, they all happen in present tense from as well.

2. Use of *Ain't*

In AAVE, *ain't* is used as a negative indicator that corresponds to any present tense of *be + not* and *have + not*. This feature can occur in 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person environment, as in the following:

4) <u>I ain't trying to</u> leave ya name slurred (America/65)
5) <u>We ain't stunting</u> these little stupid ass bitches (Ink Blot/ 44)
6) <u>Ain't it funny</u>, my rainy day would be sunny (Killing Spree/33)
7) <u>You ain't never experienced</u> that shit (Take It Back/ 152)

Examples [(4) – (6)] show how *ain't* corresponds to negative auxiliary in present progressive environment where it replaces *are + not, am + not* and *is + not*. He also employs *ain't* that corresponds to *have + not* in (7). Logic also employs *ain't* in clauses where *do + not* should be used instead as in:

8) **I ain't got a pocketful of money** (Mos Definitely/11)Definitely/11)

Ain't here corresponds to present tense form *do + not*. For the sake of contextualisation, the verb *got* here replaces the verb *have* and both denotes 'obtaining something'. It is not a feature of AAVE, but rather a robust feature in informal spoken English, meaning it is employed by American English speakers and AAVE speakers. Therefore, the use of *ain't* that precedes the present tense *verb* corresponds to *do + not*.

3. Concord Negation

Most of the concord negation incidences involve negation *ain't* in Logic's *Everybody*.

9) Like <u>I ain't got no</u> energy (Confess/57)
10) <u>You ain't gon' be nothing</u> (Take It Back/95)
11) <u>You ain't never</u> experienced that shit (Take It Back/152)

Clauses [(9) – (11)] show the way Logic constructs concord negation in which he uses negative auxiliary with a negative indefinite noun phrase or other negative words like *never* and *no*. Example (10) shows how concord negation is also constructed by

marking a single negative proposition with negative auxiliary *ain't* and postverbal indefinite *nothing*. Logic also uses double negation in a single negative proposition by using negative auxiliary *don't* with negative word *no* as in the following line from Take It Back:

12) **Like bitch, <u>that don't make no sense</u>** (Take It Back/82)

Ignoring the lack of subject-verb disagreement for now (for it will be explained in another section), the negative concord above can be expressed in two ways in SE. One can interpret it as *It doesn't make sense* and omit the word *no*. On the other hand, one can omit the negative auxiliary *doesn't* instead.

4. Negative Inversion

In AAVE, negative auxiliary typically precedes negative indefinite pronoun *nobody* to form negative inversion. However, other negative indefinite pronouns like *none, no one* and *nothing* can occur as well. Negative inversion occurs only once in *Everybody*.

13) **Ain't nobody calling my phone** (1-800-273-8255/23)

In this one and only extract found in the entire album, Logic conforms to the most popular and common way of constructing negative inversion. In this case, negative inversion is constructed by placing negative auxiliary *ain't* in the beginning of the clause which is then followed by a negative indefinite pronoun *nobody*. The reason why Logic employs negative inversion is because

if it were to be expressed in SE, it would not put a sense of emphasis.

5. Non-Standard Pronoun

Non-standard pronoun occurs in several ways in AAVE. One is related to the use of second person plural *y'all* which is short for 'you all'.

14) **Fuck y'all niggas** (Ink Blot/49)

In this case, the pronoun *y'all* is used to address to a large group of people. It can be seen from the noun *niggas* that denotes plurality. Another non-standard pronoun that Logic employs in his lyrics is the objective form *them* for 3rd person plural for the plural demonstrative pronouns *these* or *those*. Consider the example below:

15) **Your music is 20/20 but them political views** (America/64)

The objective case for 3rd person plural *them* replaces the correct demonstrative pronoun *those* in (15). In SE, it is expressed as *those political views*. Since *them* functions as demonstrative pronoun, it precedes a noun. Ergo, it is constructed as: them + noun. Logic also employs a distinct AAVE feature concerning the possessive pronoun. *They* for possessive pronoun is found in three times in his lyrics.

16) **Don't be angry at the colour of they skin**(America/85)

Clause (16) shows how personal pronoun *they* is employed instead of the possessive pronoun *their*. Construction of noun + noun is unseemly in SE but it is correct in AAVE as seen from the examples above.

6. Subject-Verb Disagreement

Subject verb disagreement involves the absent of verbal marker *–s* in 3rd person singular environment for present tense form, the construction of *be* levelling and the rendering of *does + not* to *don't* for 3rd person singular.

17) I believe that <u>everybody feel</u> (Mos Definitely/45
18) <u>Seem</u> like everybody nowadays, Hollywood (Everybody/3)
19) <u>Momma don't</u> love me (Black Spiderman/30)
20) Mothafucka <u>is you ready</u> to ride? (Hallelujah/52)

The lack of inflectional suffix *–s* occurs in verbs that are followed by noun phrases as well as verbs at the end of clauses which precede nothing. This is the most dominant feature in the entire data and it may stem from the fact that it is a matter of topics he talks about in his lyrics that uses 3rd person singular and therefore requires verbal marker *–s*. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of present tense form omits the inflectional *–s* may be caused by neutralisation in that he omits the morpheme *–s* for the sake of removing the constraint that may appear when he raps.

In (19) Logic uses *don't* instead of *does + not.* This construction is also present in other non-standard English dialects like Metropolitan New York English. However, what makes it unique in AAVE is that the

contraction of *don't* does not only occur with a pronoun *she/he/it* but it can also occur with a proper noun and a full noun phrases as in (19). He only employs the *be* levelling in present tense form for 2nd person plural *you* as in (20). In Standard English, the verb *is* correspond to present tense *are.*

7. Nominal

There are several plural marking characteristics in AAVE. While it is possible to omit the plural –*s,* it is also likely to attach the inflectional –*s* where it should not be present. Plural marking in AAVE involves the regularisation of irregular plurals. It has to do with shifting world class status like irregular to regular. This feature occurs once in the data.

21) **With <u>his mans</u>, hammer in his hands, feeling like the man** (10)

The plural form of *man* is *men*. However, Logic shifts the world class status from irregular to regular here, making the irregular plural noun of *man* become *mans* by attaching plural marker –*s*. In this line, he is referring to the social circle he used to be in when he was still poor. This interpretation is supported by the phrase *hammer in his hands*. *Hammer* in this context does not refer to a metal tool that is used for hitting things but rather a slang word for a firearm.

8. Question Formation

There are two question forms that are unique to AAVE and both involves the inversion of subject and auxiliary verb. Non-

inverted forms usually occur in syntactically simple sentences as well as *wh-* questions. The occurrence of non-inverted question involves *wh-* question and syntactically simple sentence.

22) Oh, It's like that now? (Everybody/6)
23) What they said? (Take It Back/93)

Datum (23) occurs in past tense form. The question is not inverted and the auxiliary is omitted. Therefore, the main verb *say* retains its past simple form which is *said*. In this case, question forms that occur with *wh-* questions are constructed like the following: *wh-* questions + Ø + subject + V_2. This extract shows that non-inverted question forms can occur in both present and past tense forms.

9. Irregular Verb

Irregular verb occurs only once in the entire data and it involves the use of participle for past tense form, as in:

24) **Acting like <u>you never seen</u> an ass way fatter** (Hallelujah/40)

This sentence may look ambiguous to casual observers. One may interpret it as an incorrect present perfect form in which it lacks the auxiliary *have*. However, in AAVE this sentence is correct. It falls within irregular verb category in which past participle is used to indicate a simple past tense form. In this case, past participle of *see* is employed instead of the past simple form which is *saw*.

10. **Future Form**

Future form in AAVE occurs in 4 ways, namely *gonna, gon', finna* and *ma.* All of them except for *ma* can occur in any subject. *Ma,* on the other hand, is exclusive to first person singular environment. *Gonna* that is followed by auxiliary *be* is also a prevalent feature of other English dialect. What makes it distinctive in AAVE is that it can occur without the auxiliary *verb*.

> 25) And <u>how the world gonna</u> treat her (AfricAryan/ 32)
> 26) <u>Gon'</u> get up, get up (Anziety/12)
> 27) <u>I'ma</u> be real, I'm the man (Ink Blot/25)
> 28) Fuck that, <u>I'm finna</u> buck back (Most Definitely/37)
> 29) Feeling like <u>the devil finna</u> come and beat her (AfricAryan/29)

Future marker *gon'* is another form of *gonna* and both are the contractions of *going + to* that indicates an action taking place in indefinite time in the future. However, *gon'* naturally does not precede any auxiliary *be.* Since AAVE is resistant to the deletion of verb *be* for 1ˢᵗ person singular, datum (26) that is expressed by 1ˢᵗ person singular omits both the subject and the auxiliary *am.* Datum (27) indicates an action that takes place immediately. Meanwhile, future marker *finna* also precedes auxiliary *be* for 1ˢᵗ person singular but it is omitted when it occurs in 2ⁿᵈ person environment. This further proves that AAVE is resistant to *be* deletion.

11) **Remote *Been***

Remote *been* that indicates remoteness does not occur in the data but Logic employs unstressed *been* as a straightforward result of auxiliary *have* deletion in his lyrics.

> 30) Whole life <u>I been up to</u> no good (Confess/11)
> 31) <u>I been knocking</u> doors like a Jehovah's Witness (Everybody/ 37)

Logic mostly employs the unstressed been with V+ing which conveys the progressive form. These unstressed *been* data found are all the results of *have* deletion which marks for either a present perfect or present perfect progressive. Note that, in (52) there is an adverbial of time *whole life* which serves as a sure-fire sign of unstressed *been*. The fact that Logic does not employs stressed *been* that indicate remoteness confirms Wolfram's theory that this is a receding feature.

B. **Underlying Factors of Logic AAVE use**

1. **Authenticity in Hip-Hop**

Every time Logic employs AAVE in his lyrics, he is conforming to the rule of authenticity in Hip-Hop. Along with the use of AAVE, what constitutes an authentic rapper also lies in the topics a rapper talks about in the lyrics. When a rapper can project poor urban image with rampant gang violence and what background they come from perfectly, he will be deemed as authentic. This includes talking about race and social class as well as the discrimination that often

ensues from them. Logic projects this perfectly in the data below:

1) Skin too white, nigga fuck that! (Take It Back/ 22)
2) *I ain't got a pocket full of money but I'm full of hope (Most Definitely/ 11)*
3) If you're from where I'm from, everyday ain't magic (Confess/46)

In (1) he projects racial status and discrimination that he has experienced through the course of his life. He says exactly what others have always said to him regarding his racial status. He gets discriminated against his skin colour and told that he cannot be black because of his light skin appearance. The image of the underdog or coming from a poor urban terrain is perfectly projected in (2) and (3). Logic states that he is not rich but at least he has not lost hope. This is a characteristic of rappers who are trying to make it in the industry.

2. Neighbourhood Influence

Logic, being born from an African-American father and a Caucasian mother, has without a doubt acquired native-like control of AAVE as he grew up. He shows his upbringing in some songs from his *Everybody* album.

4) *But my beautiful black brothers and sisters*
   Want to act like I'm adopted (AfrcAryan/12-13)

This excerpt shows Logic basically grew up in a household of African-American. He has 7 brothers and sisters who inherit his father's skin colour. He is the only one who does not. Growing up around his father and older brothers and sisters who use AAVE in their everyday speech eventually leads him to obtaining native-like control of AAVE.

3. Identity Representation Tool

AAVE is used as an identity representation tool by Black people in America, including ones born from a biracial or multiracial family that carries African-American lineage and want people to perceive them as black. Logic who is biracial identifies himself as black. Despite his light skin appearance, he feels the African-American lineage runs through his blood and does not associate himself with his Caucasian ancestors. His self-identification is found a couple times in some of his songs:

5) *Identifying as black, looking as white*
   Being told what you can or can't be (Take It Back.85-86)

In datum (5), Logic very explicitly says that he identifies himself as black despite his light skin appearance. People always tells him he cannot be black as shown in the song Take It Back.

6) **You ain't black, you a mothafucking white boy (Take It Back/18)**

This only fuels his determination that he is indeed black. And he further shows his determination that the African-American lineage runs through his blood in Black Spiderman.

7) **I'm black and proud (Black Spiderman/56)**

Therefore, he uses AAVE in his lyrics as a way to further identify himself as black because obviously, African-Americans know how to speak this dialect and do speak it even though not every day and not necessarily employ all the features in their practice. Logic does exactly the same where he does not use all the 13 features proposed by Wolfram but he does use them fairly frequent and correctly.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS
Conclusions

Based on the discussion in previous chapter regarding the AAVE use in Logic's *Everybody,* there are two conclusions that can be drawn. First, Logic only employs 11 out of the 13 features in the entire 222 data. They are *copula deletion, remote been, question formation, subject-verb disagreement, future form, use of ain't, concord negation, negative inversion, irregular verbs, non-standard pronoun* and *nominal.* Lack of subject agreement is the most dominant feature with the lack of verbal marker *–s* for 3rd person singular occurring most often. Features that are not found in the data are habitual *be* and intensified equative *be.* A possible explanation for this is that both are not prevalent features in AAVE so it is not surprising that there is zero datum found in the lyrics.

Second, Logic employs AAVE features as a way to establish himself in the Hip-Hop community for AAVE is an integral part of Hip-Hop which is an African-American culture. The neighbourhood he grew up in may also have played a role in his using AAVE. Having grown up in African-American household with an African-American father and siblings, he has, without a doubt, been exposed to AAVE on a daily basis. Lastly, he uses AAVE as a way to identify himself as black. African-Americans in the US know how to speak AAVE and Logic being a half-black and identifying as one uses this dialect as a representation tool.

Suggestions

This research should be able to suggest readers in general that what they may think as broken English in rap lyrics is actually a dialect of English called AAVE with its own unique rules and system. Readers are expected to understand AAVE is not broken English and that in Hip-Hop it is the primary language variation in rap element. This research focuses on a relatively small scope in a very particular topic in a Sociolinguistics which is AAVE. Linguistic students who plan to conduct a research within the same topic are expected to focus on other important aspects of AAVE such as its phonological or lexical features in order to get a broader and more thorough understanding of this dialect.

It is also expected that other researchers can get inspired by reading this study to conduct their own research on AAVE. This research puts limitation in its grammatical features of AAVE and the

reasons of AAVE use. It is suggested that other researchers who show interest in this topic will focus on different but equally important aspects such as AAVE and education.

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