

World Englishes

Unit 6 (CL)

Inner Circle Englishes



The Help

- Which characters did you find most likeable and sympathetic?
- To what extent do you think a person's flaws, such as racist attitudes and behaviours, can be forgiven because it is the norm in the surrounding culture?
- Could you sympathize with Miss Hilly? Do you think she can actually be a good mother and example for her children?
- What motivated Aibileen?
- What did you think about Minny's revenge?
- How much do you think the dynamics of relationships between black people and white people have changed?
- Rate the film on a scale from 1 to 5

African American English

definition

- African American English (AAE) is a dialect of American English used by many African Americans in certain settings and circumstances. Like other dialects of English, AAE is a regular, systematic language variety that contrasts with other dialects in terms of its grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
- The terms used by scholars to refer to the unique language variety of many African Americans reflects the changing terms used to refer to African Americans themselves across the decades. Early studies of AAE in the 1960s used the terms *Negro speech*, *Negro English*, or *Negro American dialect*. Starting around 1970 and continuing throughout the decade, the preferred term was *Black English* or *Black English Vernacular* (BEV). In the mid-1980s *African-American* became the preferred term for black Americans, and by 1991 linguists were using the term *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE). Today *African American English* (AAE) is the generally accepted term, although *AAVE* is still used too.

Ebonics

definition

- The term *Ebonics* (a blend of *ebony* and *phonics*) gained recognition in 1996 as a result of the Oakland School Board's use of the term in its proposal to use African American English in teaching Standard English in the Oakland Schools. The term was coined by Robert Williams in 1973, but it wasn't until the Ebonics controversy that *Ebonics* became widely used. Most linguists prefer the term *African American English* as it aligns the variety with regional, national, and sociocultural varieties of English such as British English, Southern English, Cajun English, and so forth. This preference is also linked to the strong emotional reactions and racist parodies sometimes evoked by the use of the term *Ebonics*.

African American English

key concepts

- AAE has a grammatical system that is as systematic as that of Mainstream (Standard) American English. It is not a substandard, uneducated, or lazy way of speaking.
- There is debate about some aspects of the history of AAE, but researchers agree that its roots are as deep as those of other social and regional varieties of American English.
- Despite this history and linguistic standing, there are often negative social consequences to speaking AAE. Speakers of AAE face discrimination because of persistent false stereotypes, for instance about the relation between academic ability and ways of speaking.
- Not all African Americans speak AAE, and not all speakers of AAE are African Americans. Some African Americans may speak Mainstream (Standard) American English, and some non-African Americans may choose to incorporate AAE features into their speech.
- AAE has important social functions: Using AAE features signals solidarity with others who use this dialect.

African American English

origins

- Even after decades of research on African American English (AAE), there is still no consensus as to exactly how it has developed.
- One theory suggests that when slaves of different language backgrounds were transported from Africa to America, they developed a *pidgin*. This language subsequently developed into a full-fledged *creole* language that children acquired in their homes.
- A second theory is that slaves in the South worked alongside indentured servants who spoke non-mainstream varieties of English. African American slaves learned English from these indentured servants (often of Scots-Irish descent).
- It is important to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive. The true history of AAE may lie somewhere in between or in both of these theories.

African American English

today

- Because AAE in all parts of the country has roots ultimately in the American South, we find less regional difference in the speech of African Americans than in that of European Americans—although some regional differences in AAE do exist.
- Although AAE is clearly stigmatized in modern American culture, it continues to be spoken by millions of people. The reasons for this are many. Within the context of the community, AAE is a valuable resource and an important aspect of group identity. Not speaking AAE can lead to being considered an outsider.

African American English

grammatical features

- Many of the features that typify AAE are also found in older Southern White English and in other non-mainstream varieties of American English.
- **Copula absence:** “**They hungry.**” AAE speakers will occasionally omit any form of the verb *to be* in sentences that require a form of *to be* in Standard English.
- **Habitual be:** “**We be playing basketball after school.**” Perhaps the most stereotypical feature of AAE is what linguists refer to as *habitual be*: using the unconjugated form of the verb *to be* to signal a habitual or regularly occurring action, as in sentences like *We be playing basketball* or *She be working late*, which mean “We play basketball from time to time” or “She works late a lot”
- **3rd person singular–s deletion:** “**He jump high.**” Another common feature of AAE is omitting the –s with verbs following a third person singular subject .

African American English

grammatical features

- **Double negatives:** “*Ain’t nobody can beat me.*” Also common in AAE is what is called double negatives, as in *We don’t know nothing bout nobody.*
- ***Ain’t*** as a negative form of be or auxiliary verb have: *I ain’t doing it* or *I ain’t got it* (a regular feature of many non-standard varieties of English).
- ***Ain’t*** for ***didn’t***: *He ain’t do it.*
- **Irregular verbs:** participle as past form: *He seen something there* – bare root as past form: *He come to see me* (a regular feature of many non-standard varieties of American English).
- **Completive done:** *done* used to emphasize that the action has been completed: *I done forgot what you said.*
- **-ly absence:** the –ly adverb ending is dropped: *They answered wrong*
- **Personal dative use of object pronoun form:** *I got me a new car.*
- **Extension of object forms to demonstratives:** *I like them shoes.*

African American English

pronunciation features

- AAE also has distinctive pronunciation features. Perhaps most stereotypical is pronouncing *these*, *with*, and *birthday* with a “d”, “t”, or “f” replacing the “th” sounds of Mainstream English (“dese,” “wit,” and “birfday”).
- Another pronunciation pattern of AAE is “g-dropping” at the end of *-ing* words, as in *fishin* and *fightin*. (It is important to note that this pronunciation is not unique to AAE speakers but is used by speakers of Standard English, as well, in casual speech.)
- AAE speakers often tend to drop the second (or third) consonant sound in a string of consonants occurring at the end of words. For example, the word *mist* may be pronounced as “mis.” Interestingly, *mist* and *missed* are pronounced exactly the same in English, and the same process can make the word *missed* come out as “mis”—thus giving the illusion that it is a present tense verb instead of a past tense verb

Received Pronunciation: a Social Accent of English

- Received Pronunciation, or RP for short, is the instantly recognisable accent often described as 'typically British'.
- RP is an accent, not a dialect, since all RP speakers speak Standard English. In other words, they avoid non-standard grammatical constructions and localised vocabulary characteristic of regional dialects.
- RP is also regionally non-specific, that is it does not contain any clues about a speaker's geographic background. But it does reveal a great deal about their social and/or educational background.

Received Pronunciation: Origins

- We can trace the origins of RP back to the public schools and universities of nineteenth-century Britain - indeed Daniel Jones initially used the term Public School Pronunciation to describe this emerging, socially exclusive accent.
- Over the course of that century, members of the ruling and privileged classes increasingly attended boarding schools such as Winchester, Eton, Harrow and Rugby and graduated from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Their speech patterns - based loosely on the local accent of the south-east Midlands (roughly London, Oxford and Cambridge) - soon came to be associated with 'The Establishment' and therefore gained a unique status, particularly within the middle classes in London.

Received Pronunciation: Definition

- The phrase Received Pronunciation was coined in 1869 by the linguist, A J Ellis, but it only became a widely used term used to describe the accent of the social elite after the phonetician, Daniel Jones, adopted it for the second edition of the English Pronouncing Dictionary (1924).
- The definition of 'received' conveys its original meaning of 'accepted' or 'approved' - as in 'received wisdom'.

RP: BBC English

- RP probably received its greatest impetus, however, when Lord Reith, the first General Manager of the BBC, adopted it in 1922 as a broadcasting standard - hence the origins of the term BBC English.
- Reith believed Standard English, spoken with an RP accent, would be the most widely understood variety of English, both here in the UK and overseas.
- He was also conscious that choosing a regional accent might run the risk of alienating some listeners. But since RP was the preserve of the aristocracy and expensive public schools, it represented only a very small social minority.
- This policy prevailed at the BBC for a considerable time and probably contributed to the sometimes negative perception of regional varieties of English.

Different types of RP

- The various forms of RP can be roughly divided into three categories:
 - Conservative RP refers to a very traditional variety particularly associated with older speakers and the aristocracy.
 - Mainstream RP describes an accent that we might consider extremely neutral in terms of signals regarding age, occupation or lifestyle of the speaker.
 - Contemporary RP refers to speakers using features typical of younger RP speakers.
- All, however, are united by the fact they do not use any pronunciation patterns that allow us to make assumptions about where they are from in the UK

RP Today

- Like any other accent, RP has also changed over the course of time. For much of the twentieth century, RP represented the voice of education, authority, social status and economic power. The period immediately after the Second World War was a time when educational and social advancement suddenly became a possibility for many more people. Those who were able to take advantage of these opportunities often felt under considerable pressure to conform linguistically.
- In recent years, however, as a result of continued social change, virtually every accent is represented in all walks of life to which people aspire - sport, the arts, the media, business, even former strongholds of RP England, such as the City, Civil Service and academia. As a result, fewer younger speakers with regional accents consider it necessary to adapt their speech to the same extent.