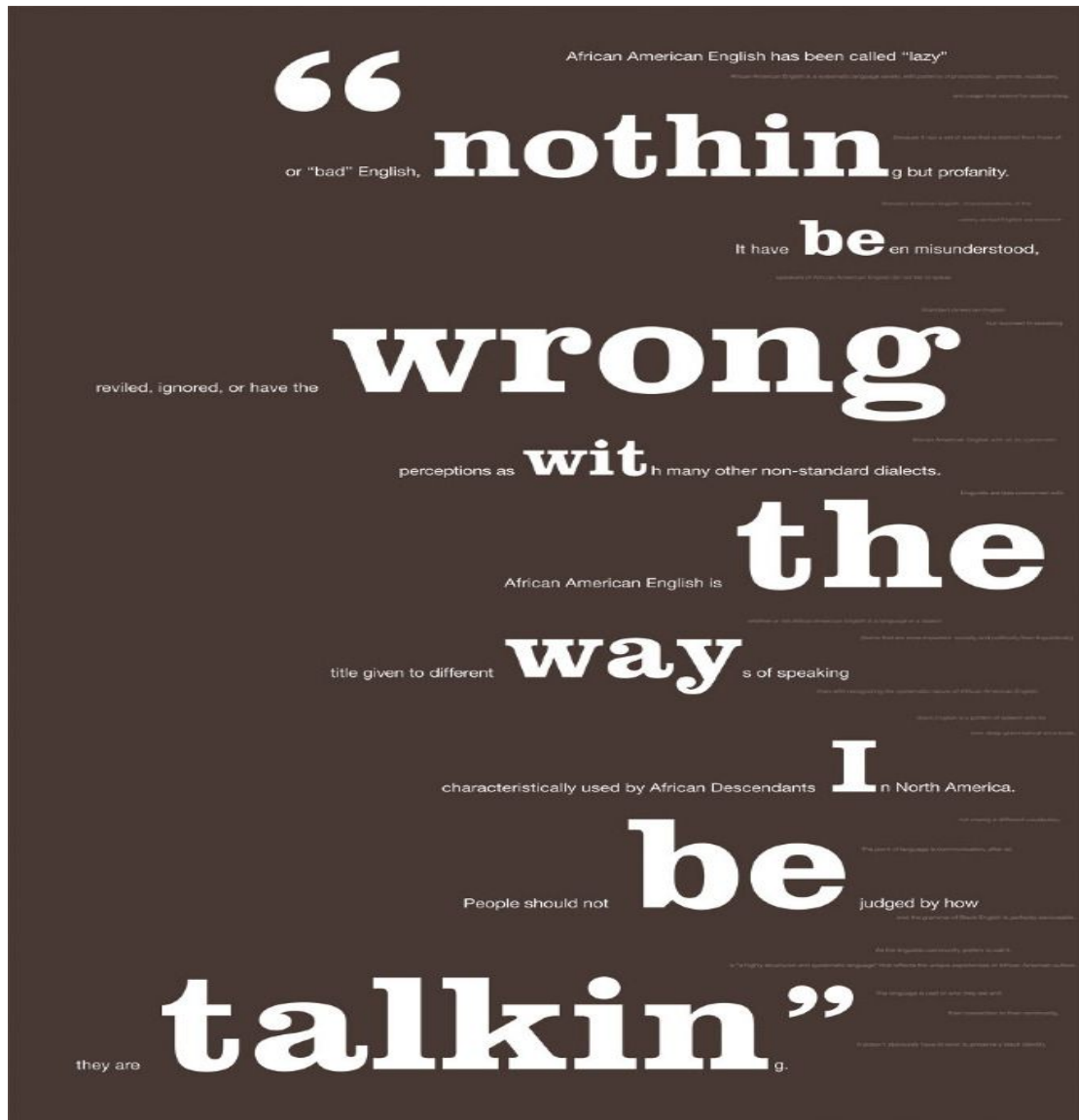




AAVE as a class-marker in American film



BA Thesis

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mees Janssen', written in a cursive style.

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Abstract

This research looks at the representation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in American films released after the year 2000. AAVE is a dialectic variety of American English, as it contains phonetical and grammatical differences compared to the standard. The research question “to what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?” puts a particular focus on social stratification and representation of African Americans speaking AAVE in American film. In order to do so, the four movies *Crash* (2004), *Coach Carter* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Blind Side* (2009) were selected. Speech samples from these movies were then transcribed according to the occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE across positive and negative African American characters. Results from the analyses of the four American movies reveal that a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with AAVE correlates with the representation of negative (low social class) African American characters across the four American movies.

Keywords: African American, AAVE, dialect, representation, social stratification.

1. Introduction

“He strong, he be the champion later.”. “He is strong, he will be the champion later.”. In the event of an exam or an important test at university or high school, it would be self-evident that the second sentence would have to be used in order to gain a positive result. This stems from the fact that the first sentence can be regarded as grammatically incorrect and that the second sentence is an example of correct Standard American English (SAE). However, both sentences can be regarded as varieties of the English language. A language is never used homogeneously across the geographical area in which that particular language is equipped, as there exists diversity between the grammar and the phonology. These differences can be distributed regionally across a certain country, but can also vary within cities. If a group of people speaks a language divergently according to phonologic features, this variety can be regarded as an accent. If this phonologic difference is complemented

by a system of grammatical differences, this variety can be regarded as a dialect. That is why the first sentence is an example of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the dialect that is spoken by a large part of the African American community. The fact that part of the definition of this dialect includes the word “vernacular” alludes to the fact that it is regarded incorrect in relation to the standard. This influences speakers of this dialect, because their speech incorrectness, leads speakers of SAE to regard them as coming from a different socioeconomic class, which is also called social stratification. This negatively effects African Americans in fundamental parts of their lives. As this stigmatized image towards AAVE effects African Americans, it is important to find out where this might come from.

The representation of African Americans in American film is an important part of their position in contemporary US society, as they have historically been portrayed through stereotypical and discriminatory imagery. This image portrayed on screen might also be copied by spectators onto reality. This is why it would be relevant to study how AAVE is represented in American film. It might be the case that AAVE is only linked to characters who play a role in which they, for example, come from a low socioeconomic class, lack proper education, and are involved in criminal activity. If spectators mirror this image on speakers of AAVE in real life, this would explain the negative attitude towards the accent. Therefore the research question will be: to what extend does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?

This current research suggests that, according to four American movies that were released between the years 2000 and 2010, a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with AAVE correlate with the representation of negative (low social class) African American characters in American film. Movie analyses show that positive characters portray significantly less grammatical features of AAVE.

2. Literature review

2.1. Dialects within the United States

A language is a method of human communication using spoken or written words according to the Macmillan dictionary. Languages are spoken all around the world. They can differ in terms of lexicon, sound structures, tone, rhythm, syntax, the social markings of variants, and the meanings assigned to words (Lippi-Green, 1997). A language is not a static entity consisting of a basic set of characteristics and components. A particularly striking component of any distinct language is the diversity in accentual and dialectical variation. The way in which a group of people speaks a language can be described as an accent or a dialect. An accent is a variety of a certain language that diverges from the standard language in terms of phonology. A dialect carries the same characteristics as an accent. However, it also diverges from the standard language in terms of morphological structure, syntax, lexicon, and semantics (Lippi-Green, 1997). Accentual and dialectical variation is caused within the United States because of the country's ethnically heterogeneous society. Most immigrants had one primary challenge when they reached the American shores: learning the new language, American English. It would be an utopian thought to assume that each ethnicity in the United States learned to speak perfect Standard

American English (SAE). Therefore, there are a lot of different forms of American English, varying accentually and dialectically.

The United States only recognizes three main accentual zones, namely Northeastern, Southern, and General American (SAE). The Northeastern accent is spoken mainly in the two states of New England and New York. R-dropping is a key feature of this dialect. This means that in words where we find the /r/ in a final position, the /r/ is not pronounced. This feature is also shared by the second Southern accent. This accent is spoken in large parts of the former Confederate states and speakers are often described as having a ‘‘Southern drawl’’. This term refers to a Southern speaker’s tendency to lengthen vowels in stressed syllables, turning them into diphthongs in words like *pan* /pæɪn/, *trip* /trɪɹəp/, and *your* /joə/. The third and last regional accent is SAE, which is described to be spoken in the largest part of the United States. Since it is referred to as SAE, it is evident that this dialect is spoken most on American television and radio, which is why it is often referred to as ‘‘Network English’’ (Svartvik & Leech, 2016).

The idea that the United States has only three main accentual zones is severely limited as dialects and accents are not strictly regional and can therefore also differ between or even within cities. The United States, despite what some assume, is dialectically rich. Ethnic minority groups within the United States contribute to the United States’ dialectical variation. Large shares of the African American population, for example, make use of their own dialect, which is often referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This dialect is not regionally determined, but it is spoken by roughly eighty percent of the African American community in the United States (Lippi-Green, 1997). Most speakers reside in the country’s urban areas and come from a lower- and working-class background. Although the dialect is

mainly spoken by the lower- and working-class groups of the African American community, it is a fact that the dialect is spoken in all layers of society (Rickford, 1999). AAVE started receiving more attention during the mid-90s, as a lot of forms of media were in need of a detailed description of features of the dialect in order to contrast it to SAE and other American dialects. Scholars had already started putting together lists of AAVE features during the seventies, but these were often labelled outdated. Another shortcoming was the incompleteness of features, like the *had*, *steady*, and *come* features. The division between phonology (pronunciation) and grammar is essential to the right description of the dialect. AAVE is recognizable in the way someone speaks, but also in the way someone uses grammar. Since this research will deal with the representation of grammatical features of AAVE, a detailed description of the grammatical features of AAVE will be provided in the taxonomy of the methodology section.

2.2. Dialectically based social stratification

Language, or more specifically dialects and accents, can influence someone's perception of another individual or group. This is an important research direction in the field of sociolinguistics. The way in which someone judges an individual or group, regarding socio-economic class and intellect, is often referred to as social stratification. William Labov (1966) writes "a prominent figure in sociolinguistics, suggests that social stratification can also be linked to an accent or a dialect" (p. 66). He attempted to prove that social stratification existed by studying the New York accent. He asked five different female speakers to speak with a New York accent and SAE, reading out the same speech sample twice. Listeners were then asked to imagine themselves as being personnel manager, doing a job interview. After this they were asked to link a certain occupation to each speaker. The following

occupations could be chosen: factory worker, salesgirl, switchboard operator, receptionist, executive secretary, television personality and none of these. Factory worker being the occupation with the lowest social prestige and television personality being the one with the highest. Results showed that the New York accent, clearly diverging from SAE, was more often linked to an occupation that would be linked to a low socioeconomic class. With this research Labov (1966) proved that social stratification based on an accent or dialect is truly happening.

2.3. Social stratification and AAVE

Speaking AAVE is very important to a lot of African Americans, as the dialect has become a part of their social identity (Filmer, 2003). This ties into Gumperz' (1982) argument which states that social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language. However, speakers of AAVE are also subjected to social stratification based on their dialect. The African American dialect is described as being a vernacular. The Macmillan dictionary defines a vernacular as "the language spoken by a particular group or in a particular area, when it is different from the formal written language". The last part of this definition is particularly interesting because it carries the suggestion that AAVE is different from the normal language and informal. A lot of people share the opinion that upon hearing the dialect it sounds like a sort of broken slang English, filled with ungrammaticalities and it has been described as sounding 'lazy', 'defective', and 'mutant' (Lippi-Green, 1997). The dialect itself contains a very negative connotation and its speakers are socially stratified based on the usage of features of AAVE (Rickford, 1999). This statement could be debunked by the fact that a lot of attitudes towards AAVE could be influenced by racist tendencies of great shares of the American population towards

African Americans (Lippi-Green, 1997). However Rahman's (2006) study which focused on African American middle class attitudes towards AAVE proves Rickford's (1999) point. African American listeners were asked to socially stratify speakers according to their spoken production ranging from SAE to AAVE. The results consisted of a high tendency by listeners to place speakers with extensive features of AAVE in the lower working class of American society. These speakers were frequently associated with a lack of a formal education and a lack of socioeconomic advancement (Rahman, 2006). We can detect a parallel with Labov's (1966) research on dialectal social stratification, as he proved that speakers of the AAVE dialect are socially stratified solely based on their dialect, even by African Americans themselves.

The attitudes towards AAVE have far reaching consequences for great shares of the African American community. Social stratification based on the usage of features of AAVE can for example negatively influence an African American's employability. Judgements based on spoken production are very important when it comes to the employment process. Kushin's (2014) study suggests that speakers of AAVE experience a disadvantage compared to speakers of SAE when it comes to their employability. He selected three male voices, speaking SAE, AAVE, and Asian English. These speakers were then asked to read out the same speech sample. A number of 52 listeners were asked to rate the speakers on a scale from "likely to be hired" to "not likely to be hired". It turned out that 71.4% of the listeners would consider hiring the SAE speaker. An amount of 85.7% would consider hiring the Asian English speaker. While only 8.2% would consider hiring the AAVE speaker (Kushins, 2014). This means that the AAVE speaker was 8 times less likely to get

hired compared to the SAE speaker. It becomes evident from this research that speaking AAVE can have very negative consequences for someone's job prospects.

Massey and Lundy (2001) have done similar research to Kushins' (2014) study. They focused on the possibility for AAVE speakers to find a residence on the Philadelphian housing market. Speakers of AAVE encounter numerous problems when searching for a proper residence. Discrimination on the urban housing markets does not only happen when there is personal face-to-face contact between housing agents and African American renters. In the first part of their research they attempted to prove that American real estate agents are able to circle out AAVE speakers over the phone, which gives them the possibility to deny an individual the chance of renting or buying a house upon hearing someone's voice (Massey & Lundy, 2001). Consequently they attempted to test this result in the second part of their research. They tried to do so by letting speakers of AAVE and speakers of SAE call landlords that had houses on offer. They asked 4 males and 9 females speaking SAE and AAVE to make phone calls to a total of 79 landlords in both SAE and AAVE. They had the speakers ask for the availability for a certain unit. It turned out that SAE speakers got to hear a certain unit was available 76% of the time, while AAVE speakers only got 42% of the time (Massey & Lundy, 2001). The results are in line with the employability research, which means that speakers of AAVE are more likely to get turned down by landlords over the phone than speakers of SAE.

In both of the cases described above, we can see clear examples of discrimination of African Americans speaking AAVE. The question arises why AAVE speakers are socially stratified and discriminated against based on their dialect? This question could be answered in the light of the cultivation theory, which was invented by Gerbner and Gross (1976). Their theory suggests that exposure to

media cultivates spectators' perception of reality. Their research focused on different forms of mass media, including films. It could, according to the cultivation theory, be possible that people in general build up a certain negative image of AAVE because of its representation in American popular culture. In order to attempt to answer this question, there should first be some information on the representation of African American in American film throughout history.

2.4. African American representation in American film

African Americans do not only experience discrimination in contemporary United States society. They also encounter instances of racial inequality in their representation in American films. Most film productions in the United States come from one centralized entertainment imperium, Hollywood. American movies have been and still are dominated by the ideology of white patriarchal capitalism (Benshoff & Griffin, 2011). Meaning that Hollywood maintains a way of producing movies that is dominantly white. Most actors, producers, and directors remain dominantly white. African Americans, for that matter, are represented in American film in a particular way, as markedly not white, which is an example of racial othering.

Benshoff and Griffin (2011) suggest that African Americans have been subjected to the process of racial othering through stereotypical imagery. They state that racial othering "refers to the way a dominant culture ascribes an undesirable trait (one shared by all humans) onto one specific group of people" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2011, p. 78). Instances of racial othering have become more scarce and subtle in recent years, but they are still evidently present. African Americans have been portrayed on screen through a framework of stereotyped characters in classical Hollywood cinema. The most prominent ones were "the lazy Coon", "the Uncle Tom", "the Mammy", "the Tragic Mulatto", and the "Black Buck" (Bogle, 2001,

p.24). The lazy coon was a foolishly acting African American man who went out of his way to avoid any form of labor. The Uncle Tom stereotype was a house slave who did everything to serve and please his white master. The female counterpart of the Uncle Tom character was "The Mammy". She was typically overweight and took care of the white master's children. These stereotypes all portrayed African Americans as happy and child-like slaves, sketching an image which supported and justified slavery.

Once slavery was put to an end, stereotyped African Americans still emerged. The Tragic Mulatto was a girl born from a mixed-race sexual encounter. She was punished for the sin of being of a mixed-race and mostly died at the end of the story. The Black Buck was an aggressive and muscular African American man who threatened the white establishment (mostly women) with his sexual power. These two stereotypes both include a fear of the concept of miscegenation, the romantic or sexual mixing of races (Benshoff and Griffin, 2011).

It is important to note that these stereotypes appeared mostly in early classical Hollywood film. Throughout history the unjust representation of African Americans has become less obvious and troublesome. However, old stereotypes have in some cases made a transformation into a new-age version (Benshoff and Griffin, 2011). An example of such a transformed stereotype is "the Magical Negro", which has emerged from the old Mammy or Uncle Tom stereotype. This African American character uses his "mystical super powers" to help white people who find themselves in some kind of trouble, like the John Coffey character in *The Green Mile* (1999). The Black Buck stereotype can also be found in more recent Hollywood films. This stereotype is most often used to show the depths of depravity to which white female characters have fallen (mostly because of drug habits) by sleeping with an African

American man. So although times have changed for the better when it comes to the representation of African Americans in American films, there are still controversial representations visible. The controversial representation of African Americans is also often done through the use of the AAVE accent.

2.5. Stereotyped representation through accent and dialect

Stereotypes depicting ethnic minorities which invoke racial inequality or discrimination do not only occur through actions and the physical appearance of a character. Lippi-Green (1997) suggests that the way a character speaks may also contribute to a certain stereotype. This is most often achieved through the use of a certain accent or dialect. Lippi-Green (1997) poses the idea that a movie director might link a certain dialect to a character as a way to characterize them through stereotyping. This idea was tested by analyzing different characters in various animated films produced by Walt Disney. The 24 Disney movies ranged from *Pinocchio* (1940) up to *The Lion King* (1994). In these Disney movies she analyzed which accent (SAE or minority/foreign accent) the protagonist and the antagonist characters equipped. It turned out that characters with strongly positive motivations and actions were mostly speakers of SAE. However, characters with negative motivations or actions often spoke minority or foreign American English accents (Lippi-Green, 1997).

The research also put a particular focus on the distribution of the AAVE accent among Disney characters. Disney has engaged with African American actors to provide the voices of major characters in their animated films on numerous occasions. James Earl Jones, for example, spoke the role of the father in *The Lion King*. Several African American actors made use of the AAVE accent, some spoke

SAE, and some fluctuated between AAVE and SAE. According to Lippi-Green's (1997) study it becomes evident that most AAVE voices in this particular selection of Disney movies were selected to portray certain negatively acting characters. Lippi-Green (1997) states that "'the male characters seem to be unemployed or show no purpose in life beyond the making of music and pleasing themselves, and this is as true for the crows in *Dumbo* as it is for the orangutan King Louie and his crew of primate subjects in *The Jungle book*'" (p.94).

It is problematic that these stereotypical AAVE characters occur in Disney movies, as children make up a great share of the intended audience. The problem is that, according to Gerbner and Gross' (1976) cultivation theory, children who are not in contact with African Americans in real life unconsciously create a distorted view of speakers of AAVE. This view is developed because of characterizations which are primarily based on negative stereotypes in animated Disney movies. So one could argue that these negative reactions to AAVE which were discussed in chapter 2.3 might be developed through watching particular animated movies during childhood (Lippi-Green, 1997).

The findings of the research conducted by Lippi-Green (1997) suggest that Walt Disney movie directors have made dubious decision in their actor voice decision process. However, the research question: "to what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?" cannot be answered solely based on Lippi-Green's (1997) study. The problem is that this research was conducted solely in the field of animated movies. It is necessary to make a selection of non-animated movies, because they are closer to reality. It can

also be argued that, since most of these movies date from the pre-1970's era, the Walt Disney films are outdated.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In order to answer the research question ‘to what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?’, it was important to ensure that a representative sample of movies produced between the years of 2000 and 2018 was selected. This necessitated the selection of four movies that all shared roughly the same genre. The four movies that were selected were *Crash* (2004), *Coach Carter* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Blind Side* (2009). Two characters were selected for each movie, from whom equally big speech samples were taken, which were then transcribed and coded according to the amount of occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE. In order to look at features of AAVE that were represented in the films it was important to know that there are certain grammatical features which are indicative of AAVE that I used for my coding procedure. These grammatical features of AAVE can be found in the following taxonomy section taken from the Rickford (1999) handbook.

3.2. Taxonomy

Below the taxonomy section of grammatical features of AAVE can be found. It is separated into the categories of: ‘pre-verbal markers of tense, mood, and

aspect”, “other aspects of verbal tense marking”, “nouns and pronouns”, “negation”, “questions”, “existential and locative constructions”, and “complementizers/quotative say”. These features were articulated by Rickford (1999) in his handbook on AAVE. It was important to include the full table of features of AAVE, as articulated by Rickford (1999), because it gives the reader of this thesis a full scope of the dialect, and it provides the reader with the opportunity to circle out features of AAVE on his or her own in the future.

1. Pre-verbal markers of tense, mood, and aspect

1a.	Absence of auxiliary <i>is</i> and <i>are</i> for present tense and actions. Example: “he Ø crazy” instead of SE “He is crazy”
1b.	Use of invariant <i>be</i> for habitual situations. Example: “he be walking” instead of SE “he is usually walking”
1c.	Use of invariant <i>be</i> for future “will be”. Example: “he be here in one week” instead of SE “he will be here tomorrow”.
1d.	Use of <i>steady</i> as an intensified continuative marker, usually after invariant habitual <i>be</i> , but before a progressive verb, for actions that occur consistently. Example: “Ricky be steady steppin in them number nines.” instead of SE “Ricky will be stepping in those number nines”.
1e.	Use of unstressed <i>been</i> or <i>bin</i> for SE “has/have been” (present perfect). Example: “he been sick” instead of SE “he has been sick”.
1f.	Use of unstressed BIN to mark remote phase (meaning the action happened or something came into being a long time ago). Example: “she BIN married” instead of SE “she has been married for a long time, and still is”.
1g.	Use of <i>done</i> to emphasize that an action has been completed. Example: “he done did it” instead of SE “he’s already done it”.

1h.	Use of <i>be done</i> for resultatives or the future perfect. Example: “she be done had her baby” instead of SE “she will have had her baby”.
1i.	Use of <i>finna</i> (derived from “fixing to”) to mark the immediate future. Example: “he finna go” instead of SE “he’s about to go”.
1j.	Use of <i>come</i> to express speaker’s indignation with a certain situation. Example: “he come walkin in here like he’s the king” instead of SE “he came walking in here like he’s the king”.
1k.	Use of <i>had</i> to mark the simple past. Example: “then we had went outside” instead of SE “then we went outside”.
1l.	Use of double modals. Example: “might can” instead of SE “he might be able to”.
1m.	Use of quasi modals. Example: “liketa” in “I liketa drowned” instead of SE “nearly” in “I nearly drowned”.

2. Other aspects of verbal tense marking

2a.	Absence of third person singular present tense –s. Example: He walk \emptyset ” instead of SE “he walks”. <i>Don’t</i> instead of <i>doesn’t</i> : “He don’t sing” instead of SE “he doesn’t sing”.
2b.	Generalization of <i>is</i> and <i>was</i> to use with plural and second person subjects (i.e., instead of <i>are</i> and <i>were</i>). Example: “they is some crazy folk” instead of SE “they are crazy folk”.
2c.	Use of past tense (V-ed) as past participle (V-en). Example: “he had bit” instead of SE “he had bitten”.
2d.	Situation in 2c reversed. Example: “she seen him yesterday” instead of SE “she saw him yesterday”.
2e.	Use of stem verb (V) as past tense (V-ed). Example: “he come down here yesterday” instead of SE “he came down here yesterday”.
2f.	Double tense marking. Example: “likeded” instead of SE “liked”.

3. Nouns and pronouns

3a.	Absence of possessive –s. Example: “John \emptyset house” instead of SE “John’s house”.
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3b.	Absence of plural –s. Example: “two carØ” instead of SE “two cars”.
3c.	Use of <i>and (th)em</i> or <i>nem</i> , mostly after a proper name, to mark associative plurals. Example: “Felicia an’ em” instead of SE “Felicia and her friends, or associates, or family.”
3d.	Appositive or pleonastic pronouns. Example: “that teacher, she yell at kids” instead of SE “That teacher Ø yells at the kids”.
3e.	Use of <i>y’all</i> and <i>they</i> to mark second person plural and third plural possessive. Example: “it’s y’all car” instead of SE “it’s your car” and “it’s they car” instead of SE “it’s their car”.
3f.	Use of object pronouns (me, him, etc.) after a verb as personal datives (myself, himself, etc.). Example: “ahma git me a car” instead of SE “I’m going to get myself a car”.
3g.	Absence of relative pronoun (who, which, what, or that). Example: “that’s the man Ø come here” instead of SE “that’s the man who came here”.

4. Negation

4a.	Use of ain’(t) as a general preverbal negator. Example: “he ain’ here” instead of SE “he isn’t here”.
4b.	Multiple negation. Example: “he don’ do nothin’” instead of SE “he doesn’t do anything”.
4c.	Negative inversion. Example: “can’t nobody say nothing” instead of SE “Nobody can say anything”.
4d.	Use of <i>ain’t but</i> and <i>don’t but</i> for “only”. Example: “he ain’t but sixteen years old” instead of SE “he’s only fourteen years old”.

5. Questions

5a.	Formation of direct questions without inversion of the subject and the auxiliary verb. Example: “why I can’t play?” instead of SE “why can’t I play?”.
5b.	Auxiliary verb inversion in embedded questions (without <i>if</i> or <i>whether</i>). Example: “I asked him could he go with me?” instead of SE “I asked him if he could go with me”.

6. Existential and locative constructions

6a.	Use of existential <i>it</i> (is, 's, was, ain't) instead of SE <i>there</i> (is, 's, was, isn't). Example: "it's a school up there" instead of SE "there's a school up there".
6b.	Use of existential <i>they got</i> as a plural equivalent of singular <i>it is</i> , instead of <i>there are</i> . Example: "they got some hungry women here" instead of SE "there are some hungry women here".
6c.	Use of <i>here go</i> as a static locative or presentational form. Example: "here go my own" instead of SE "here is my own".

7. Complementizers/quotative *say*

7a.	Use of <i>say</i> to introduce a quotation or a verb complement. Example: "they told me say they couldn't go" instead of SE "they told me \emptyset they couldn't go".
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3.3. Coding Procedure

It was necessary to analyze non-animated movies that were released in more recent years in order to come up with an answer to the research question: 'to what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?'. In order to do so, four American movies were selected, namely: *Crash* (2004), *Coach Carter* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Blind Side* (2009). The expectations were that an analysis of these movies were in line with the result of Lippi-Green's (1997) research, meaning that in these particular movies only characters with negative motivations and actions spoke AAVE, while characters with overwhelmingly positive motivations and actions spoke SAE.

For the selection procedure the four movies all had to have particular elements in common. First and foremost, these movies had to include multiple African American characters, including protagonists (positive characters) and antagonists (negative characters). The movies should include characters speaking AAVE and SAE. The movies had to be released after the year 2000 in order to come up with results that are more contemporary than the Lippi-Green (1997) research. The movies all had to be of the same genre, and the storylines should be realistic fiction, meaning the events could feasibly have happened in a real-world setting. The four movies all shared roughly the same storylines, as each movie consists of African American main characters who are troubled and who find themselves marginalized by society. These characters, at the beginning of the movie, commence their journey towards progress in their lives. So each case study can be described as a sort of “transitional movie” in which the main characters progress from troubled negative characters towards well-behaved more positively motivated characters (Katz, 2006).

For each movie two African American characters were selected, who find themselves at different sides of the social spectrum. One should be positioned on a lower position on the social ladder, opposed to the other one being positioned higher. One could think of an African American gang member opposed to an African American teacher, someone coming from a wealthy family or not, or someone being educated and someone who is not. For the sake of terminology, characters coming from a low social class, with little education, and poor backgrounds, were called negative characters. On the other hand, characters coming from the (upper) middle class, with proper educations, and wealthy backgrounds, were referred to as positive characters. The positive or negative tag was placed on these characters for the sake of terminology which reflects the prototypical representation of the characters in the

movie. For the next step the way in which these characters speak according to selected speech samples were analyzed, specifically if they speak grammatical SAE or use grammatical features of AAVE. The decision was made to solely focus on the grammatical features of AAVE in monologues and dialogues in the movies, because this provided us with the fundamental and distinctive elements of what constitutes as a dialect.

The speech samples that were selected are all between 180 and 265 words. The lengths of the speech samples had to be roughly the same between the characters that were analyzed. If one speech sample would be much longer than the other one, the results from the analysis would not be justifiable. Also the length of the speech samples had to be at least longer than 150 words because, only then, some proper results could be extracted from the analysis.

The speech samples were directly transcribed from how they can be heard in the movie. Each occurrence of a grammatical feature of AAVE was highlighted using (!) and added up per selected speech sample. Also in the analysis some examples were given of occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE with a direct link to the feature in the taxonomy. In order to get the results, it had to be determined how many occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE appeared in each speech sample per 10 words, because characters do not speak in full sentences. It could for instance be the case that the negative characters spoke in longer sentences, which would provide them with a higher feature number as well. Hypothetically, if a speech sample would contain 200 words, including 14 occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE, the following equation would be made: $200/10=20 \rightarrow 14/20= 0.70$ occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words.

3.4. Film analyses

3.4.1. Crash

Background information

Crash is a movie that was directed by Paul Haggis and it was released in the year 2004. The movie deals with the problem of racial division and conflict in Los Angeles. The cast consists of various ethnicities living in the United States, which in some way or another encounter each other in the movie, resulting in confronting scenes. The story is mainly about acceptance and loving each other, regardless of what color or social class you are. Most characters in the movie find this out at some time during the story.

For the character selection, I selected Peter and Cameron, who are two African American characters from two completely different social classes. Peter is a gangster who is involved in criminal activity. We meet him in the story when he is doing an armed car robbery. Additionally, Peter is from a poor LA neighborhood, which makes him a negative character in the story. His speech sample is taken from a conversation he is having with a white cop, from whom he is getting a lift.

Cameron is an African American upscale TV director. He is portrayed to be intellectual and very wealthy, which makes him the positive character. Cameron's speech sample is taken from a conversation he is having with a white colleague. The speech sample is interesting for analyzing the way Cameron speaks, but it is also very interesting for what the content of the conversation is, which will be included in the discussion section of the methodology.



Peter



Cameron

Analysis

The speech sample of 192 words taken from Peter's conversation contained 5 occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE. The equation that was made is $5/19.2 = 0.26$. This means that Peter, being the negative character in the story, used 0.26 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words in his speech sample. Peter used sentences such as: "This ain't exactly pick up a brother territory", which is the same as example 4a. In this case we see the use of the word "ain't" as a general preverbal negator. Secondly, "When I was a kid I always want to be a goalie", is another example which can be found under 2e, in which the stem verb (V) is used as past tense (V-ed).

The speech sample of 183 words taken from Cameron's speech sample contained one occurrence of a grammatical feature of AAVE. The equation that was made is $1/18.3 = 0.05$ occurrences of a grammatical feature of AAVE per 10 words. At the end of his speech sample, Cameron says: "We're gonna do it one more time". The use of "gonna" to mark future events is an example of AAVE, although it is used in more dialects.

On the basis of the results above, Peter, the negative character, and Cameron, the positive character, turned out to have different usages of grammatical features of AAVE. The positive character used 0.05 and the negative character used 0.26 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words. In the case of *Crash*, the selected speech pattern of Cameron dealt with what this research is all about. Cameron, as a movie director, is corrected by a colleague that one of his African American actors, who was supposed to play the dumb kid, spoke too much like a white person (SAE). We can conclude from this scene that his colleague was of the opinion that for an African American character to portray a uneducated role (negative), he or she has to

speak AAVE instead of SAE. Maybe the director of the movie, Paul Haggis, already encountered this pattern in movies released in the previous years, which could be why he deliberately included this scene in his plot. All in all, the selected speech samples showed that a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English correlates with the representation of the negative character.

3.4.2 Coach Carter Background information

“Coach Carter” is a movie that was directed by Thomas Carter and was released in the year 2005. The film is based on the true story about the lawless Richmond (California) High School basketball players who are in desperate need of a new coach. The team is mainly made up of African American boys, supplemented by one Latino and one white boy. The players are all teenagers whose lives have been controlled by crime, corruption, and lax moral values. The new African American basketball coach, Ken Carter, soon notices the lack of discipline among the players and the numerous fights in the schoolyard and the locker room. It becomes evident soon that the attitudes among students is part of a structural problem of the school to create a suitable learning environment. Coach Carter takes on the job and makes it his life goal to improve the life of his players on the basketball court and off. The players all have to sign contracts at the beginning of the story, in which they declare to maintain a 2.3 GPA average, while attending all of their classes. The contracts are signed without further ado, and the coach starts drafting on his champion team. The team soon gains success and finds itself at the top of the charts in mid-season. Coach Carter decides to lock down the gym all of a sudden after finding out that most of his players have not succeeded in maintaining their 2.3 GPA average. What follows is a

period in which the players are all tutored by fellow students and teachers in order to improve their GPA average, during which there are no trainings and matches. This results in Coach Carter almost getting fired, because the community wants the team to become champions. The team, however, decides to stand behind their coach and each player succeeds in getting their 2.3 GPA average. We find the team reaching the state championships near the end of the movie, in which they lose their first knock-out game, but are described as moral winners above all by Coach Carter (Bulman, 2005).

For the analysis four characters were selected. Two of them being the young African American couple, Kenyon Stone and Kyra, who find themselves in trouble because Kyra is pregnant, and they do not have any income to provide for their child. They also live in a low-end urban neighborhood, which is plagued by poverty. Since Kenyon and Kyra have both attended Richmond High School, they also lack a proper level of education, as the school has been known for its lousy achievements when it comes to educating its students towards college. Kenyon is an important part of the basketball team, which makes him a lead character in the story.

The other two characters that will be analyzed are Coach Ken Carter and his son Damien Carter. Ken and Damien, find themselves at the opposite side of the social hierarchy, as they are upper middle class African Americans. Damien, at the beginning of the story, attends a different high-school, and his GPA scores can get him into any college he wants. Blinded by the desire to play in his father's basketball team, Damien resigns from his former prestige High School, and he decides to continue his education at Richmond High.

The contrast between the two African American couples is clear, Kenyon and Kyra are troubled teenagers who live in poverty and who lack education, making them the negative characters. Ken and Damien are upper middle class citizens,

making them the positive characters.



Kenyon Stone (left) and Kyra (right)



Coach Ken Carter (left) and Damien Carter (right)

Analysis

When comparing the usage of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words for the selected duo's, a considerable difference was detected. The speech sample of 264 words taken from a conversation between Kenyon and Kyra consisted of 16 grammatical occurrences of AAVE. The following equation was made: $16/26.4=0.61$ occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words. The speech sample contains an example like in 2a, in which the absence of the third person singular present tense –s can be detected: ‘‘When your cousin get back’’. The sentence ‘‘don’t be trying do dis her’’ is like example 1h, in which we see the use of *be done* for resultatives or the future perfect. There is also an example of 2b. in which *is* and *was* are used wrong: ‘‘we was gonna be alone’’. Additionally, the use of ain’t (example 4a.) can also be detected: ‘‘you ain’t doing it right’’.

The speech sample taken from a conversation between Ken and Damien Carter consisted of zero occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE. The difference between the two speech samples is striking. Although the speech samples were taken from similar conversations, in which the characters are having a conversation in their home, the usage of grammatical features of AAVE is strongly divergent.

These results above show that, Kenyon and Kyra, being the negative characters (low social class, low education, poor) are more likely to use grammatical features of AAVE than, Ken and Damien, being the positive characters (upper middle class, educated, wealthy), which, for this particular movie, answers our research question, that a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English correlates with the representation of antagonists or negative characters.

3.4.3 Freedom Writers Background information

Freedom writers is a movie that was directed by Richard LaGravenese and it was released in the year 2007. The plot of the movie is based on the true story of a class of troubled teenagers at the Woodrow Wilson High School. The story commences when Erin Gruwell, driven by her idealistic view on education, starts her first teaching job as a freshman and a sophomore class teacher. The school started a voluntary integration program two years before Gruwell's arrival, which means that the build-up of students has drastically changed from mainly outstanding academic students to students who will struggle a lot to even graduate or to be literate. Since the start of the integration program the school experienced an influx of African Americans and other non-white ethnicities. Most of these students come from lower social class backgrounds and have been raised in poor urban neighborhoods, which led them to have lived a life full of violence, corruption, and poverty. Gruwell experiences a lot of difficulties in attempting to teach her class, which is made up of a lot of different cultures that stand head to head with each other. The blacks hate the Cambodians and the Cambodians hate the Latinos and so on. The story makes a turning point when Gruwell asks her students to keep a diary, in which they share their deepest fears and emotions. She links these emotions to the diary of Anne Frank, which brings the class together. When the story comes to a close, most students' academic results have improved drastically and the atmosphere at the Woodrow Wilson High School proves the success of the voluntary integration program.

The characters that were selected are two African American students of the Woodrow Wilson High School, namely Marcus and Victoria. Marcus comes from a

poor background and has lived his life in and out of juvenile detention centers. We encounter Marcus at the beginning of the story as an angry young man, who has suffered poverty his whole life and feels like he does not belong. He belongs to the part of the students who have not had a proper education. This makes him a negative character. Victoria, however, can be described as being the opposite of Marcus. She comes from a higher social class, which is clearly visible in the way she speaks, dresses, and acts (see picture). We meet Victoria in the story when she requests the school board to be transferred from her honors class to Erin Gruwell's class, because she feels she is being judged by the fact that she is one of the few African American students in the honors class. The fact that Victoria initially was part of an honors class implicates her academic excellence. She is thus much more educated than Marcus, which makes her the positive character. These facts combined make an analysis of their speech samples very useful in trying to answer the research question.



Marcus



Victoria

Analysis

The speech sample from Marcus containing 229 words consisted of 16 occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE. The following equation was made: $16/22.9 = 0.70$ occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words. The speech sample consisted of several examples of AAVE, which can be found in the taxonomy. The examples of 4a and 4b are visible in the sentence: "It ain't nothing else", as we see the use of "ain't" combined with a double negation. There were three occurrences of example 1a, meaning that the sentence contains the absence of auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense and actions, which is exemplified in the following sentence: "Lady, stop acting like you trying to understand our situation". The following sentence is an example like 3e, in which the word *they* is used to mark second person plural and third plural possessive: "I don't see nobody that looks like me with they pockets full".

Victoria's speech pattern of 210 words was very different. She only used one example of grammatical AAVE. The following equation was made: $1/21.0 = 0.05$ occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words. She used a feature which can be found in 3f in the following sentence: "That's it, if I don't change classes, ahma hurt this fool".

When comparing the speech samples of Marcus and Victoria, there was a clear difference in the usage of AAVE, Marcus' usage of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words is 14 times as big than Victoria's. The results above show that Marcus, being the negative character, showed far more grammatical features of AAVE in his speech. Marcus is a young man who comes from a low social class, being in and out

of juvenile detention homes. He is also lacking behind in academic terms, because he is more concerned with his self-acclaimed “war” on the streets. Victoria, being the positive character, showed minimal grammatical features of AAVE. She dresses and behaves more polite than Marcus, which alludes to her coming from a higher social class. She was also portrayed as having a higher intellect than Marcus, as she is enrolled in a honors class. These facts extracted from the speech samples show that a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English correlates with the representation of the negative character.

3.4.4. The Blind Side Background information

“The Blind Side” is a movie that was directed by John Lee Hancock in 2009, and the story is based on a book by Michael Lewis. The book mainly deals with the evolution of American football regarding the rising importance of the position of left tackle, whose job it is to prevent the quarterback from being tackled from “the blind side”. Michael Oher, the autobiographical main character in the movie, filled this position in the field and his developments are depicted in the movie. The movie starts off when Michael Oher, an extremely poor African American teenager, is adopted by a white wealthy Southern family. The family attempts to get Michael to college with financial aid and a push towards playing American football for the University of Mississippi. Michael turns out to be exceptionally talented which results in him being drafted for the Baltimore Ravens in the first round of the 2009 National Football League draft (Cochran et al., 2012). The story depicts Michael’s struggle to fit into the white family and the pull towards his “old” friends, who live in low-end neighborhoods and still suffer the poverty that Michael had fled from.

The characters of Michael Oher and Alton were selected in order to do the speech analysis. Michael and Alton were born in the same black neighborhood and suffered from poverty all their lives. Their progress during the movie is very different from each other, as Michael is adopted into the white family and thus rises in social rank and eventually becomes a successful American football player, making him the positive character. Alton's character remains the same throughout the movie, an African American man who is part of a gang and is involved in criminal activities, which makes him the negative character. It is clear to see that both the characters appear on opposite sides of the social spectrum near the end of the movie, namely one being from a higher and one being from a lower social class. These two characters were therefore perfectly suited for a speech analysis, which lead to an answer of the research question. Two speech sample for both characters were selected, and it will be determined how many grammatical features of AAVE appear per 10 words. The results lead to some consensus on the issues raised earlier, namely if a lower social class African American would use more grammatical features of AAVE in his speech compared to a higher social class African American.



Alton



Michael Oher

Analysis

The speech sample of Alton consisted of 241 words and it contained 31 occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE. The following equation was made:

31/24.1= 1.29 occurrences of grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words. Alton's speech sample existed of a lot of examples of AAVE. The example of 2a is visible in the sentence: "she usually stop by for a taste around this time". As you can see there is the absence of third person singular present tense -s. There is one other sentence in which the examples of 3f and 1a are present: "Ahma get you a 40, we gonna chop it up like real folk". The use of *ahma* and the absence of the auxiliary *are* for present tense. Additionally we see the use of *gonna* as a future marker. The sentence: "He done lost his mind" is an example of 1g. In this sentence we see the use of *done* to emphasize that an action has been completed.

Michael's speech sample of 262 words contained not one occurrence of a grammatical feature of AAVE. So what we can see is that the positive character speaks grammatical SAE, while the negative character's speech is filled with grammatical features of AAVE.

Michael and Alton grew up in the same neighborhood when they were little. Up until their high school years they shared the same living conditions and problems. One would expect that these two young men would have developed the same way of speaking. However, when comparing their speech samples, their usage of AAVE is completely divergent. Alton is an African American character from a low social class who is involved in criminal activity, which makes him a negative character. He, therefore, is carefully equipped with an AAVE accent. Michael Oher is an African American man who grew up in the same areas as Alton, but he managed to flee the harsh circumstances he lived in by getting adopted by a wealthy white family. Michael shows minimal grammatical features of AAVE, because he, by getting adopted into a wealthy family, transferred into a high social class, making him a positive character. Therefore, the speech samples show that a high prevalence of

grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English correlates with the representation the negative character.

Table 1: Grammatical features of AAVE occurrences per 10 words in selected speech samples.

<i>Gram. AAVE per 10 words</i>	Good character(s)	Bad character(s)
Crash	0.05	0.26
Coach Carter	0.00	0.61
Freedom Writers	0.05	0.70
The Blind Side	0.00	1.29

3.5. Discussion

The analysis of speech samples of 180 to 265 words from 10 characters across the movies: *Crash*, *Coach Carter*, *Freedom Writers*, and *The Blind Side* answers the research question: To what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000? The results from the analysis show that African American characters in American movies are assigned grammatical features of the AAVE dialect on a structural basis. These type of characters can be divided into two categories, namely the positive and the negative character. The positive character is an African American character who comes from a high social class, is highly educated, and lives a wealthy life. The negative character is an African American who comes from a low social class, is not educated, and is

plagued by poverty. The results show that positive characters exhibit fewer grammatical features of AAVE than do negative characters (see table 1), so the selected four movies show a pattern when it comes to the representation of AAVE.

The fact that the use of grammatical features of AAVE is distributed selectively to only certain kind of negative characters could have some serious consequences for African Americans who equip the dialect in real life. Earlier research from William Labov (1966) suggested that people who equip certain dialects which diverge from SAE were stratified on the basis of their socioeconomic status and intellect. Rahman's (2008) research directly linked Labov's (1966) research to AAVE as he confirmed that the previous outcome also applied to AAVE. Additional research suggested that AAVE could create barriers for African Americans in the search for a job or a house.

Lippi-Green's (1997) research suggested that Disney producers only attached AAVE to certain characters, who carry overwhelmingly negative motivations and actions. In this way, it might contribute to the fact that children might form a sort of image in their head of people who actually do speak like the villain they have seen on their television screens. The question "why AAVE speakers are socially stratified and discriminated against based on their dialect?" was raised in chapter 2.3. The answer to this question could not be answered solely on the Lippi-Green (1997) research as it only focused on animated movies. A study of non-animated movies was necessary in the attempt of answering this question. The study of the representation of African Americans throughout the American film history by Benschhoff and Griffin (2009) contributed to this answer because they showed that African Americans have been and still are depicted on screen through stereotypical characterizations. This

process of defining African Americans through stereotypical imagery and discrimination has often been described as the process of racial othering.

The movie analyses showed that the representation of African Americans who spoke AAVE was systematically negative. This representation of African Americans who speak with high frequencies of grammatical AAVE features in Hollywood televisual representations correlated with negativity, low social class, and low education. This fact has the potential to further stereotype the dialect itself and by virtue of that further stereotyping potentially contributes to the perception of speakers of AAVE as coming from a lower social class and being less educated. These results may provide us with a possible answer to the question why African Americans who speak AAVE are socially stratified and why they experience difficulties because of this in their everyday lives. The cultivation theory of mass media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) backs up the fact that children might create a negative image in their heads of African Americans speaking AAVE by watching Disney movies. The non-animate movies that were analyzed are normally watched by audiences consisting of mainly adults. When the AAVE dialect can almost always be detected in characters that, come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have no proper education, and live in poverty, adult spectators might also link this image to reality. The cultivation theory backs up this suggestion and states that spectators might mirror this stereotypical image of speakers of AAVE on their reality, which might contribute to the social stratification of African Americans. This is why it is important to think about this structure of the equipment of AAVE in American film. Eighty percent of the African American population speaks AAVE, which means this share might encounter problems in their lives.

This is why the speech sample in the movie *Crash* is particularly interesting, not only for the analysis of AAVE occurrences, but also for what the actual conversation is about. This conversation deals with the central issue of the representation of AAVE in American film. We encounter Cameron, who is an African American movie director, on set taking a break after shooting another scene. While pouring a cup of coffee he is disrupted by a white male co-worker, asking if they can redo the scene. Cameron, thinking they did a good job, asks why and the following conversation unfolds:

Colleague: This is gonna sound strange, but is Jamal seeing a speech coach or something?

Cameron: What do you mean?

Colleague: Have you noticed, this is weird for a white guy to say, but have you noticed he's talking a lot less black lately?

Cameron: No I haven't noticed that.

Colleague: Really? Kind of like in this scene, he was supposed to say: "don't be talking about that" and he changed it to "don't talk to me about that".

Cameron: Wait a minute, you think because of that, the audience won't recognize him as being a black man? Come on.

Colleague: Is there a problem Cam?

Cameron: Excuse me?

Colleague: Is there a problem Cam?

Cameron: No, we don't have a problem.

Colleague: I mean, because all I'm saying is that it's not his character. Eddy is supposed to be the smart one, not Jamal right? I mean you're the expert here, but to me it sound false.

Cameron's colleague asks the movie director why Jamal, an African American character who is supposed to be represented as not smart, is not talking black anymore. This inquiry carries the implication that African Americans who are not smart should talk AAVE. This conversation comes from a movie script and thus is part of a piece of fiction, but perhaps Paul Haggis, the director of *Crash*, recognized the pattern in the distribution of AAVE over African American characters, which is why he included this scene in the movie. If talking black is represented in cinemas with being not smart and low-class, why should spectators not mirror this image onto reality, contributing to the social stratification, discrimination, and othering of African Americans?

The results from this research implicated a pattern in the distribution of grammatical features of AAVE to only certain characters in American film. It should be noted, however, that these results were extracted from only four movies, being *Crash* (2004), *Coach Carter* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Blind Side* (2009). It would be very interesting and important to broaden this research and to analyze speech samples from on a larger corpus of American movies of the same genre. This corpus of movies would also have to consist of movies that were released in the years between 2010 up till now. It would be important to establish a pattern over a larger period of time, as it could be the case that the pattern diminished in the years after 2009. Only then could we distinguish a real pattern that AAVE is structurally negatively represented in movies through negative characters who have a low socioeconomic status, are involved in criminal activities, lack education, and live their lives in poverty. If this would be the case, the cultivation theory might be one of the explanations for the negative stance towards AAVE in contemporary United States society.

Although large parts of the African American society are very proud of AAVE as their dialect, reality shows them that they should sometimes speak SAE in order to achieve certain things. Unfortunately, it might also be the case that some African Americans do not have the capacity to speak SAE, as they have spoken AAVE their whole lives. The unfairness of such insights leads me to suggest that for those people speech alteration classes would be very helpful. On the other hand, I hope AAVE remains a large part of the African American identity.

4. Conclusion

Languages are not static entities that exist only in one shape or form. There are also differences or varieties within languages. These differences often relate to grammar and phonetics. When a variety diverges from the standard language according to phonetics, this variety can be described as an accent. If a variety diverges from the standard language phonetically and grammatically, it is a dialect. African American Vernacular English is an example of an American dialect, as it contains differences in pronunciation and grammar. African Americans equip their dialect as they regard it as an important part of their identities. It has however been suggested that using AAVE leads African Americans to be socially stratified. This effects them in fundamental parts of their lives. It negatively influences their employability and their chances on the housing markets.

The expectations were that this negative attitude towards AAVE could stem from the representation of African Americans speaking AAVE in American films. According to the cultivation theory, spectators of films could mirror story lines or plots onto reality. This would mean that AAVE speaking characters who are subscribed with negative traits like a low socioeconomic background, no education,

and poverty, could form a real image in the heads of spectators, giving the accent, and thereby African Americans, a negative and stigmatized image. In order to do research into the representation of AAVE in American film, the following research question was posed: to what extent does a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlate with the representation of positive (high social class) or negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000?

The analyses of speech samples from 10 characters across the four movie *Crash* (2004), *Coach Carter* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Blind Side* (2009), provided an answer to the research question. Two characters (with the exception of *Coach Carter*) were selected for each movie who found themselves at different sides of the social spectrum. Their speech samples were analyzed according to their usage of grammatical features of AAVE, placing them into the categories of a positive and a negative character. For *Crash* it turned out that the positive character used 0.05 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words and that the negative character used 0.26. For *Coach Carter* it turned out that the positive characters used 0.00 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words, while the negative characters used 0.61. *Freedom Writers* shows equal results, as the positive character used 0.05 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words while the negative character used 0.70. *The Blind Side* shows the biggest difference between the characters, as the positive character used 0.00 grammatical features of AAVE per 10 words, while the negative character used 1.29. The results can also be found in table 1 in the methodology section.

These results from the four analyzed movies provide us with an answer to the research question that a high prevalence of grammatical features associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correlates with the representation

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negative (low social class) African American characters in American films after the year 2000.

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6. Appendix

Speech samples Crash

Peter's speech sample

1:28:29- 1:31:00: *'Peter: Really appreciate this.*

Anthony: No problem. So how long have you been out there tonight, it's cold.

Peter: An Hour maybe.

Anthony: Big surprise huh.

Peter: Yeah, this ain't (!) exactly pick up a brother territory.

Anthony: True. So where are you heading?

Peter: Anywhere the other side of the hill.

Anthony: I'm going to El Segundo.

Peter: El Segundo is cool.

Anthony: You've been there?

Peter: Fuck no man. That's some good music, no really. I'm starting to understand it, wrote me a country song myself just yesterday.

Anthony: I bet you did.

Peter: Whatever.

Anthony: So what was going on in the valley tonight?

Peter: Ice skating.

Anthony: Ice skating?

Peter: Love the iceskating, when I was a kid I always want (!) to be a goalie.

Anthony: Come on.

Peter: What, you (!) think that's funny or something?

Anthony: I think you're having fun.

Peter: yeah, whatever.

Anthony: Something else funny?

Peter: Yeah.

Anthony: Yeah, whats that?

Peter: People man, People.

Anthony: Why don't you laugh outside.

Peter: Why (!) you getting al bend out of shape?

Anthony: I'm not getting bend man, just pulling over.

Peter: Come on man keep driving, I said I'm not laughing at you.

Anthony: And I'm not telling you to get the fuck out of my car.

Peter: Why (!) you being a fucking jerk man, just drive the car. '

Cameron's speech sample

45:19- 46:29: *' Colleague: Cam, you got a second?*

Cameron: Yeah, I just want to grab some coffee.

Colleague: Yeah listen I think we need another take buddy.

Cameron: That looked pretty terrific to me.

Colleague: This is gonna sound strange, but is Jamal seeing a speech coach or something?

Cameron: What do you mean?

Colleague: Have you noticed, this is weird for a white guy to say, but have you noticed he's talking a lot less black lately?

Cameron: No I haven't noticed that.

Colleague: Really? Kind of like in this scene, he was supposed to say: "don't be talking about that" and he changed it to "don't talk to me about that"'.

Cameron: Wait a minute, you think because of that, the audience won't recognize him as being a black man? Come on.

Colleague: Is there a problem Cam?

Cameron: Excuse me?

Colleague: Is there a problem Cam?

Cameron: No, we don't have a problem.

Colleague: I mean, because all I'm saying is that it's not his character. Eddy is supposed to be the smart one, not Jamal right? I mean you're the expert here, but to me it sound false.

Cameron: We're gonna(!) do it one more time. "

Speech samples Coach Carter

Kenyon and Kyra's speech sample

37:12 -39:15: '**Kyra:** He'll go back to sleep right after his bottle. Right, boo-boo?

Kenyon: Yeah, probably in time for your mom to get home. Or maybe when your cousin get (!) back from getting her hair fried and dyed, like she can afford all that shit. It's her baby anyway.

Kyra: Well, my mother had to work a double shift, but they cut her overtime. And my cousin, don't be trying (!) to dis her.

Kenyon: You said we was (!) gonna (!) be alone. You call this alone?

Kyra: Well, that's why we need our own spot. Did you turn this off?

Kenyon: Yeah, it was boiling.

Kyra: Oh, come on. Well, turn it down, not off. This is milk, butter and cheese. We can't afford to waste this. And hold him up. Making the baby's bottle for Myles. All right Myles here we go. Gotta (!) cool off a minute.

Kenyon: *Ever think about what (!) you gonna (!) do, before you pregnant?*

Kyra: *What (!) you mean, going to junior college?*

Kenyon: *yeah*

Kyra: *I mean, yeah, I thought about it. I could go later, I guess.*

Kenyon: *You have to get some work after you have the baby. Me too.*

Kyra: *So I'll work.*

Kenyon: *How (!) you gonna (!) go to school?*

Kyra: *Why (!) you asking me all these questions? And you gotta (!) put your hand under his arm. You gotta (!) sit him on your chest. Hold him.*

Kenyon: *I am holding him.*

Kyra: *You ain't (!) doing it right. You gotta (!) soothe him Kenyon.*

Kenyon: *Look, I don't know how to do this.*

Kyra: *You'll get it. Right?*

Kenyon: *Look, I gotta (!) help my mom with some stuff. See you later all right?*

Kyra: *All right. Call me later okay?*

Kenyon: *Later.''*

Ken and Damien's speech sample

'' Damien: It's one of your contracts, sir. I've amended that contract. You require your players to maintain a 2.3 grade point average. I've committed to maintaining a 3.5. You require ten hours of community service, and I've committed to 50. Any unexcused absences, any other disciplinary issues at school, you can nullify this agreement and send me to any school you want.

Ken: *And how many days do I have to consider this offer?*

Damien: *None. The second page is a letter you need to sign that confirms my withdrawal from St. Francis. They know I'm leaving.*

Ken: *What? You withdrew from St. Francis?*

Damien: *I called Richmond. They expect me there in the morning.*

Ken: *You called Richmond? You should have spoken to me about this.*

Damien: *It was a personal choice for me.*

Ken: *Uhu. Well I can fix all that in the morning.*

Damien: *Sir, please listen. All I want to do is play for you. If I'm one of the top students at Richmond, I mean one of the top in the whole school, and I have great SATs, I can go to any college in the country. I'm asking you to trust me.*

Ken: *You really want to do this, huh? Okay. Part of growing up is making your own decisions and living with the consequences. 3.7. And you will earn every minute of playing time. "*

Speech samples Freedom Writers

Marcus' speech samples

34:11- 34:49: *"Lady, stop acting like you (!) trying to understand our situation and just do your little babysitting up there. It ain't nothing (!) else. When I look out in the world, I don't see nobody (!) that looks like me with they (!) pockets full, unless they (!) rapping a lyric or dribbling a ball. So what else you got (!) in here for me? Lady, I'm lucky if I make it to 18. We (!) in a war. We're graduating every day we live, because we ain't (!) afraid to die protecting our own. At least when you die for your own, you die with respect, you die a warrior."*

50:35- 51:35: *"Clive was my boy. He had my back plenty of times. We was (!)*

like one fist, me and him, one army. That's the real shit here. Nobody (!) jump us now. But we got (!) to practice, because this, this (!) got power. You shoot it, it.. I sat there until the police came. But when they come (!), all they see is (!) a dead body, a gun, and a nigga. They took me to juvenile hall. First night was the scariest. Inmates banging on the walls, throwing up their gang signs, yelling out who they were, where they (!) from. I cried my first night. Can't never let nobody (!) know that. I spent the next few years in and out of cells. Everyday I'd worry, "when will I be free?". "

Victoria's speech samples

1:09:24 – 1:09:48: *"Do I have a stamp on my forehead that says, "The National Spokesperson for the Plight of Black People"? How the hell should I know the black perspective on The Color Purple? That's it, if I don't change classes, ahma (!) hurt this fool. Teachers treat me like I'm some kind of Rosetta stone for African Americans. What? Black people learn how to read, and we all miraculously come to the same conclusion? At that point, I decided to check out my friend Brandy's English class."*

1:15:10- 1:15:53: *"It doesn't matter to me. My grades will still be the same. Look, Ms. Campbell. When I first transferred to the school, I had a 4.0 average. But when I applied for advanced placement at English and Math, I was told it would be better for me to be in a class with my own kind. Now, when I did get in, my teacher said, "Victoria, it's not every day one finds an African American student in A.P. and honors courses". As if I didn't notice. And when I asked another honors teacher why we don't read more black literature, she said, "we don't read black literature*

because of all the sex, drugs, cussing, and fornication!’’. I thought a simple ‘‘It’s inappropriate’’ would have sufficed.’’

Speech samples *The Blind Side*

Alton’s speech sample

1:50:07- 1:52:24: *‘‘Yeah, I (!)seen Dee Dee around. As a matter of fact... Oh, yeah, she usually stop (!) by for a taste around this time. Look, I tell you what, why don’t you just come on inside? Ahma(!) get you a 40, we (!) gonna (!) chop it up like real folk. Just until she get (!) here. Come on, now. Ain’t nobody (!) gonna (!) bite you, baby. Hey, Big Mike, go on down there in the living room, man. Have a seat. Liven this bitch up in here, y’all (!). Give me a couple of 40s out that refrigerator. Yeah you (!) looking good too. You (!) looking fit. I heard you (!) playing a little ball. Y’all (!) know that old rick-kid football ain’t (!) got nothing (!) on that public-school league. Niggas (!) packing knives in they (!) socks. Hey, I played a little ball myself. Back in the day. You knew that, right? Little quarterback. Up there at MLK. Yeah. Dave ain’t (!) with that no more. He (!) with me now. As a matter of fact, look, I can open up a spot for you too. Ahh. I heard you (!) staying on the other side of town. Yeah, that (!) what Dee Dee said. Said you (!) got you a new mama now. Yeah, man. She (!) fine too. Hey, she got (!) any other kids? She got (!) a daughter? You (!) tap that? Yeah. Yeah, you (!) tapped that, didn’t you? Yeah. Big Mike done (!) got a little piece, y’all (!)! He can’t stand hisself (!) now. He done (!) lost his mind.’’*

Michael Oher's speech samples:

1:40:17- 1:41:35: *“Courage is a hard thing to figure. You can have courage based on a dumb idea or a mistake but you're not supposed to question adults, or your coach, or your teacher because they make the rules. Maybe they know best, but maybe they don't. It all depends on who you are, where you come from. Didn't at least one of the 600 guys think about giving up and joining with the other side? I mean, valley of Death, that's pretty salty stuff. That's why courage is tricky. Should you always do what others tell you to do? Sometimes you might not even know why you're doing something. I mean, any fool can have courage. But honor, that's the real reason you either do something or you don't. It's who you are and maybe who you want to be. If you die trying for something important then you have both honor and courage, and that's pretty good. I think that's what the writer was saying. That you should hope for courage and try for honor. And maybe even pray that the people telling you what to do have some too.”*

1:56:16 -1:56:42: *“When I was little and something awful was happening my mama would tell me to close my eyes. She was trying to keep me from seeing her do drugs or other bad things. And when she was finished or the bad things were over, she'd say, ‘now when I count to three, you open your eyes. The past is gone, the world is a good place, and it's all gonna be okay’”.*

