



African American women's language: A critical sociolinguistic study

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Black women's language has been largely neglected as a legitimate field of linguistic inquiry (Lanehart 2009). This is due to the fact that historically, Black women's language has been associated with Black men and not considered significantly different in terms of actual language practices (Morgan 2015). Moreover, descriptions and accounts of African American English (AAE) still tend to rely on sociolinguistic works from the 1970s (Morgan 2009). Said studies (e.g. Labov 1972), while contributing a valid perspective on AAE as a full-fledged language variety with its own structure, tended to make generalizations on the whole community of speakers. This has resulted in only partial view on the practices of AAE speakers and obfuscated the Black woman's role in this community of practice – hence a need for addressing the phenomenon of African American women's language (AAWL) and contributing to its empirical linguistic study.

This paper discusses the methodological framework of Black feminist epistemology (Collins 2000) as the central social theory grounding this critical sociolinguistic study, and reports on the field work and preliminary analysis of the data collected from African American female participants. Data sets include two recordings of informal, naturally occurring, everyday conversations of (1) African American female students during a bonding event, and of (2) a church group of African American women, as well as two focus group interviews with Black girls and Black women, followed by feedback sessions conducted with these two participant groups. Preliminary findings have shown interesting differences in the attitudes towards African American English and language behaviour in these two groups of Black female speakers.

References:

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