

# **AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH (AAE) AND SLANG USED BY JIM AND HUCK FINN IN *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN***

**Dian Riesti Ningrum, Zuliati Rohmah**

Email: rie\_5t1@yahoo.com; zettira@gmail.com

State Islamic University Sunan Ampel Surabaya

**ABSTRACT:** *African American English and slang are now become interesting topics among linguists for its unique characteristics and usage in daily society as vernacular language. This paper analyses the use of African American English and slang used by an African American and a Caucasian American in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn novel. Findings propose that African American English and slang are particularity used by African American speakers as their daily language, but non African Americans may choose this variety as their language choice.*

**KEY WORDS:** *African American English, slang, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

African American English (henceforth, AAE) constitutes one of non-standard English variety as a vernacular language used by almost all African Americans. The previous study on the use of African American English has provided some evidences that data from phonological and phonetic variables in African American English have been a debatable linguistic concern, especially, related to consonantal variables followed by vowel quality, prosody, and voice quality in African American speeches. Public Broadcasting Service (n.d) states, “Over the past 50 years, linguists have conducted a great deal of scientific research on AAE, but the public has not been well informed about what language features characterize this dialect and where it came from”

Some findings proposed that African American English is developed from the pidgin language brought by slaves from different language who were transported from Africa to America. Over time, this language was increasingly developed as the children acquired in their homes. Afterward, Reaser and Wolfram (in Askin, n.d.) add that though slaves became such a large population, they did not teach English and had limited contact with English speakers, some features of this creole were passed from generation to generation (African American English, n.d., para. 2).

Trudgill (1983) and Wardhaugh (2006) classified the African American English feature based on its grammar and sound. In the form of grammar, they distinguish ten features of African American English as *the absence of –s in third person singular present tense forms, the absence of copula, the use of “invariant be”, special auxiliary verb uses of “been” and “done”, the AAE question inversion, existensial “it” functions as “there”, the use of multiple negations, the use of “ain’t”, the use of AAE pronoun forms, and verb form “is” and “was” replace “are” and “were”*. Whereas in the form of sound, it is classified into five features such as *deletion of “l” and/or “r” after a vowel sound, voiceless “th” sounds pronounced as “t” or “f”, voiced “th” sounds pronounced as “d” or “v”, word final consonant clusters especially those ending in “t” or “d”, also the use of [n] to replace [ŋ]*.

Another feature of non-standard language is slang, which is a non-standard varieties of the language that sounds odd to other people. Slang is usually used by certain group of people or community and it can be understood by the group itself. According to Holmes (2001), “slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older people” (p. 167). Slang language shows the attitudes of the group or sub-culture that uses them. Yourdictionary (2013), argued that “slang can appear as a brand new word, a new meaning for an existing word, an abbreviation for a word, or a word that

becomes more generalized than its former, narrow meaning” (History of American Slang Words, para. 3).

Slang is used for many purposes. Some people use slang or non-standard language to make themselves different from others and look smarter. On the other hand, people who use slang are reputed as uneducational people and often underestimated. According to Coleman (2012), “standard language means socialization and conformity while non-standard language means criminality and rebellion. No wonder slang users are scary” (p. 1).

In relation to literary work, the English language used in the work is not only in the form of standard English but also in the form of non-standard English. This paper will present the results of the investigation on the African American English and slang which, particularly, appear in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* written by Mark Twain.

The investigation of the African American English and slang use concerns with Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* involving Jim and Huck Finn as the main characters in the novel. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was written by Samuel Langhorne Clemens whose pen name is Mark Twain who was born in Florida, Missouri, United States on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1835. His famous novel was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* published in 1867 and its sequel entitled *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885 and it is often called the great American novel. To be more specific, Jim is a unique person who really believes in myths, while Huck Finn is a cunning young boy about thirteen or fourteen years old. He has a strick, scary, big, fifty years old father who has left him after his mother died.

The paper will uncover whether the African American English and slang are used to show the identity of the speakers. This paper, however, does not take the variation of data into account, for the main discussion of this study is to reveal the African American English and slang features used by the main characters in *The Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn* and the reasons of the use of those varieties in the conversation.

## **METHOD**

In conducting this study, the analysis of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was focused on the dialogues between Jim and Huck in this novel. Content Analysis was applied to understand the phenomena of AAE and slang used by Jim and Huck. According to Krippendorff (2004), “Content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessary from an author’s or user’s perspective” (p. 3). The utterances of Jim and Huck from the first until seventeenth chapters were constitute as the data in this study. Krippendorff (2004) also added that the steps to conduct content analysis research are: unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing data, inferring, and narrating the answer to the research questions (p. 83). With content analysis, the African American English (AAE) features that are used by Jim and Huck Finn were uncovered through a close reading to the text and answer the research question by interpreting the text.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In line with the research questions, the findings present the African American English and slang features and function of the use of AAE and slang by Jim and Huck finn.

### **The African American English and Slang Features**

Based on the data collected from the utterances of Jim and Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it was found out ten African American English Features as shown in table 1.

**Table 1. The Use of AAE by Jim and Huck Finn**

The AAE Features	Jim	Huck Finn
Uses of <i>Been</i> and <i>Done</i>	✓	✓
Existensial <i>It</i>	-	✓
Multiple Negations	✓	✓
The Use of <i>Ain't</i>	✓	✓
<i>Is</i> and <i>Was</i> Replace <i>Are</i> and <i>Were</i>	✓	-
Deletion of <i>L</i> and/or <i>R</i>	✓	-
Voiceless <i>TH</i> Sounds are Pronounced as <i>T</i> or <i>F</i>	✓	-
Voiced <i>TH</i> Sounds are Pronounced as <i>D</i> or <i>V</i>	✓	-
Word Final Consonant Clusters	✓	✓
The Use of [n] to Replace [ŋ]	✓	-

To give clearer pictures of the use of AAE by Jim and Huck Finn, examples of their utterances containing AAE are shown below.

### 1. Special Auxiliary Verb Uses of *Been* and *Done*

Jim's utterances:

- "Doan hurt me—don't! I hain't ever **done** no harm to a ghos' . . . . . " (p. 26)
- "No, but I **been** rich wunst, and gwyne to be rich agin . . . . . " (p. 29)
- "So I **done** it. Den I reck'n'd I'd inves' de thirty-five dollars . . . . . " (p. 29)

Huck Finn's utterances:

- "Why, how long you **been** on the island, Jim?" (p. 26)
- "Who **done** it? We've heard considerable about these goings down . . . . . " (p. 36)
- "I hain't **been** doing a single thing, Aunt Sally, I hope to gracious if I have."

## 2. Existential *It* Functions as There

This feature is only applied by Huck Finn. The example is, “Jim! Quick, Jim, **it ain’t no time** for fooling around and moaning” (p. 44). The standard English of the utterances would be, “Jim! Quick, Jim, there’s no time for fooling around and moaning.”

## 3. The Use of Multiple Negations

Multiple negations are used by both Jim and Huck Finn.

Jim’s utterances:

Huck Finn’s utterances:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| - “Mighty few—an’ dey <b>ain’t no use</b> to a body . . . . . “(p. 29)             | - “Well, he did act like he was drunk, but it <b>ain’t no matter</b> now . . . . . “ (p. 39) |
| - “They <b>don’t do nothing!</b> Why, how you talk! They just set around.” (p. 49) | - “Quick, Jim, it <b>ain’t no time</b> for fooling around and moaning . . . . . “ (p. 44)    |

## 4. The Use of *ain’t*

Similar to the previous feature, *ain’t* are also applied by both Jim and Huck Finn.

Jim’s utterances:

Huck Finn’s utterances:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| - “Mighty few—an’ dey <b>ain’t</b> no use to a body . . . . . “(p. 29)                  | - “And <b>ain’t</b> you had nothing but that kind of rubbage to eat?” (p. 27)             |
| - “De man <b>ain’t</b> asleep—he’s dead. You hold still—I’ll go en see.” (p. 32)        | - “Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There <b>ain’t</b> a minute to lose . . . . . “ (p. 40) |
| - “Well, den, dey <b>ain’t</b> no sense in a cat talkin’ like a man . . . . . “ (p. 51) | - “Shucks, it <b>ain’t</b> calling you anything . . . . . ” (p. 51)                       |

## 5. Verb Forms *Is* and *Was* Replace *Are* and *Were*

These features are applied only by Jim, and below are the examples.

- “I doan k’yer what de widder say, **he warn’t** no wise man nuther . . . . . “ (p. 50)
- “ . . . . . En **I warn’t** gwyne to show myself on de bank in de daytime.” (p. 28).

## 6. Deletion of *L* and/or *R* after a Vowel Sound

Similar to the above point, these features are applied only by Jim. The following utterances are the examples.

- “No, I didn’t lose it all. I **on’y** los’ ‘bout nine of it . . . . . “ (p.29).
- “ . . . . . Boun’to git yo’money back a **hund’d** times, de preacher says! . . . . . “ (p. 30)

## 7. Voiceless *TH* Sounds (referred to as *theta* or /θ/) are Pronounced as *T* or *F*

Again, this feature is applied by Jim, not Huck Finn. Two sentences below are the examples.

- “I couldn’ git **nuffn** else.” (p. 26)
- “ . . . . . Huck, tell we could do sumfn—but we’s all right now . . . . . “ (p. 72)

## 8. Voiced *TH* Sounds (*thorn* or /ð/) are Pronounced as *D* or *V*

This feature is pronounced by Jim as appear in the examples below.

- “What’s **de** use er makin’ up **de** camp fire to cook . . . . . “ (p. 26)
- “Ain’ **dat** gay? En what **dey** got to do, Huck?” (p. 49)
- “Why, yes, **dat’s** so; I—I’d done forgot it . . . . . “ (p. 49)

## 9. Word Final Consonant Clusters

This feature is applied by both Jim and Huck Finn.

Jim's utterances:

- "I **couldn'** git nuffn else."
- "What do dey **stan'** for? . . . . .  
my heart wuz **mos'** broke bekase  
you wuz **los'** . . . . ."

Huck Finn's utterances:

- ". . . . . So, now, **le's** know all  
about it."

## 10. The Use of [n] to Replace [ŋ]

This feature is only uttered by Jim as shown below.

- ". . . . . 'Long 'bout six in de **mawnin'** skifts begin to go by . . .  
. . . . . **talkin'** 'bout how yo' pap come over to de town . . . . . " (p.  
28).
- ". . . . . We's **doin'** blame' well, en we better let blame' well  
alone . . . . . " (p. 42)

Among the ten features of AAE, all of them were applied by Jim, the African American. Huck Finn only utilized half of the features. This is probably because he is a white American; his use of the AAE is limited compared to Jim. The fact that Huck Finn as a white American uses AAE is in line with the research findings of Adharini (2006) and Tejo (2011) that African American English is not only spoken by black people, but also white people do as well as the blacks. Marliahadi (2007) also found that a close relationship between black and white people may influence the shiftings on their language use.

In addition to ten AAE features above, slang was also found out in this novel. Slang is a unique, odd, and new words or phrases that made by some particular communities to indicates their existence and being different with others. From five types of slang suggested by Fidayanti (2012), there were only four types of slang used by Jim and Huck Finn, they are: *blending*, *clipping*, *backformation*, and *transformation form*. Table 2 shows this phenomenon.

**Table 2. The Use of Slang Words and Phrases by Jim and Huck Finn**

Types of Slang	Jim	Huck Finn
Blending	✓	-
Clipping	✓	✓
Backformation	✓	-
Transformation Form	✓	✓

### 1. Blending

Blending is one of a slang word formation process that is created by combining two words into one (Fidiyanti, 2012). The example is as follows as applied by Jim, “. . . . . **Lemme** look at you chile, **lemme** feel o’ you.”

### 2. Clipping

Clipping is one of slang word formation which is formed by shortening the words. Clipping was applied by both Jim and Huck Finn.

Jim’s utterances:

Huck Finn’s utterances:

- “De cow up ‘**n**’ died on my han’s.” (p. 29)
- “. . . . . , bekase he says dey warn’t business ‘**nough** for two banks . . . . . .. “ (p. 29)
- “Couldn’t they see better if they was to wait **till** day time?” (p. 37)
- “Buck went off ‘**thout** waking me up.” (p. 73)

### 3. Backformation

Backformation is the word mistakenly assumed to be a derivative of it without changing the meaning. Here are some examples of this type of slang used by Jim.

- “. . . . Well, he sot up a bank, **en** say anybody **dat** put in a dollar . . . . . “ (p. 29).
- “. . . . . I uz hungry, but I warn’t **afeard** . . . . . “ (p. 28)

- “ ..... onless you counts **dem** kings **dat’s** in a pack er k’yards .....  
“ (p. 49)

#### 4. Transformation Form

Transformation form is the way how to create a new word or phrase by changing the meaning rather than the form of the word. The examples are as follows.

Jim’s utterances:

- “Yes. You know that one-laigged **nigger** dat b’longs to old Misto Bradish? (p. 29)
- “. . . . . Dat wuz de smartes’ **dodge!** . . . . .” (p. 59)
- “But looky here, Huck, who wuz it dat ‘uz killed in dat **shanty** ef it warn’t you?” (p. 27)

Huck Finn’s utterances:

- “. . . . . despise me for **keeping mum**—but that don’t make no difference.” (p. 37)
- “Please to don’t **poke fun** at a poor girl like me, mum.” (p. 38)
- “The whole fifteen, **mum.**” (p. 39)

To highlight the abovementioned findings, it is important to note that one of the most frequently used AAE features found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Fin* that is the use of **ain’t**. This feature is excessively used by Jim and Huck Finn to change the term *is not, am not, has not, have not*, and so on. The use of **ain’t** is illustrated as follows.

- 1 Jim : “Is a cat a man, Huck?”
- 2 Huck : “No.”
- 3 Jim : “Well, den, dey **ain’t** no sense in a cat talkin’ like a man. Is a cow a man? —er is a cow a cat?”
- 4 Huck : “No, she **ain’t** either of them.”
- 5 Jim : “Well, den, she **ain’t** got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of ‘em. Is a Frenchman a man?”
- 6 Huck : “Yes.”

(Chapter XIV, p. 51)

This conversation happened when Jim and Huck found boots, blankets, clothes, and all sort of other things, such as, a lot of books, spyglasses,

and three boxes of seegars. Then they had a litle debate about someone's language. The conversation above shows that Jim and Huck Finn usually use **ain't** to refer to *are not*, and *is not*.

### **Reasons of the Use of AAE and Slang by Jim and Huck Finn**

From both tables above, it shows that Jim uses all features of the African American English (AAE) as his daily language. Some slang words and phrases are used in AAE features. The word like *de*, *en*, *killin'*, *mawnin'*, *poke fun*, *keeping mum*, are among the examples. It means that slang can be used in another variety like African American English.

This phenomenon happens because Jim is a black slave or nigger so that he usually uses the AAE. From his social background as a slave, it shows that Jim is from lower class. As an example, it can be seen from his utterances below:

<b>Jim</b>	<b>Standard English</b>
- De man <b>ain't</b> asleep	- The man <b>isn't</b> sleep
- No, but I <b>been</b> rich wunst	- No, but I <b>have been</b> rich
<b>once</b>	
- They <b>don't do nothing!</b>	- They <b>don't do anything!</b>

Trudgill (1983) states that social background is one of the clues which can appear among the language users and it can be seen from their grammatical differences (p. 44). The example above may show the differences between Jim's language and Standard English seen by its grammatical features. People who gain better education will speak properly rather than people who do not get education.

Furthermore, looking at Jim's background, it proves that someone's identity can be seen from his or her linguistic characteristic. Jim, who is African American, is influenced by African American ethnic and culture. His linguistic characteristics show his identity as an African American.

While Huck Finn, who is white American, only uses some features of AAE such as *special auxiliary verb uses of been and done*, *existential it*, *multiple negations*, *the use of ain't* and also *word final consonant clusters*. Looking at his social background, he is a white American teenage boy around thirteen years old. His father is a drunker and he tries to escape from his father's violence. Then Widow Douglas teaches him a slight education such as reading, table manner, and attitude. His language changes when he meets Jim and they finally live together. As shown in the conversation explained above, he usually uses AAE features in chapter 1-17 because in those chapters, he frequently speaks with Jim.

It shows that there is a relationship between social situation and language variety in style-shifting and dialect switching. In addition, Holmes (1992) found the following:

“Certain social factors have been relevant in accounting for the particular variety used. Some relate to the users of language—the participants; others relate to its uses—the social setting and function of the interaction. Who is talking to whom (e.g. wife-husband, customer-shop keeper, boss-worker). The setting or social context (e.g. home, work, school). The aim or purpose of the interaction (e.g. informative, social)” (p. 11)

Hence, the use of AAE and slang by Huck is because he is influenced by the social situation where he has a close friendship with Jim who is an African American slave. This is to show his solidarity to Jim because he had promised that he would not send Jim back to his owner and keep his secret.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The African American English has two basic features, grammar and sound, which are divided into several types. Special auxiliary verb uses of *been* and *done*, existential *it* functions as there, multiple

negations, the use of *ain't*, verb forms *is* and *was* replace *are* and *were* and vice versa, deletion of *l* and/or *r* after a vowel sound, voiceless *th* sounds (referred to as *theta* or /θ/) pronounced as *t* or *f*, voiced *th* sounds (*thorn* or /ð/) pronounced as *d* or *v*, word final consonant clusters, especially, those ending in *t* or *d*, the use of [n] to replace [ŋ] are the AAE features that are usually used by Jim and Huck Finn.

AAE is usually employed by African Americans, lower class people, or uneducated people. *Killin'*, *mawnin'*, *goin'*, *lookin'*, *evenin'*, *en*, *dey*, *dis*, *dem*, *dat's*, *nuffin*, *sumfin*, *los'*, *lan'*, *en'* are the words that have been written in the text. Jim, who is a slave, usually speaks AAE when talking to others. It is one of language phenomenon that ethnic background can easily influence someone's language. While, Huck Finn, who is white American, only occasionally uses AAE to show a close relationship with Jim. Hence, having a close relationship can make someone shift his or her language to show solidarity. Jim and Huck Finn also use slang words or phrases in their conversations. This shows that slang sometimes can be used within the AAE variety.

## REFERENCES

- Adharini. (2006). The African American Vernacular English in Missy Elliot's Supa Dupa Fy. Retrieved from Petra Digital Collections.
- Askin, H. (n.d). African American English. retrieved from <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4816>
- Coleman, J. (2012). The Life of Slang: A History of Slang. Available from <http://www.amazon.com/The-Life-Slang-Julie-Coleman/dp/0199571996>
- Fidiyanti, M. (2012). What is Slangs? [PDF document].
- Holmes, J. (1992). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. England: Longman

- Holmes, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Second edition. England: Longman.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. California: Sage Publications.
- Marliahad, F. (2007). *African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard English (SE) Used in the Future Father In-law and Son In-law \Relationship in "Guess Who"*. Retrieved from Petra University Digital Collections.
- Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d). About the Book: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/aboutbook.html>
- Tejo. (2011). The Features of African American Vernacular English Used by the Black and White Characters in “White Chicks” movie. Retrieved from Petra Digital Collections.
- Trudgill, P. (1983). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. London: Penguin Books.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Blackwell Publishing.
- Yourdictionary. (2013). History of American Slang Words. Retrieved from [http:// grammar.yourdictionary.com/slang/history-of-american-slang-words.html](http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/slang/history-of-american-slang-words.html)