

The Linguistic Study of African American English

HON 3010.007/EN 4950.002 – Autumn 2008 – T 9:30-Noon – Seton Center 19

Instructor: Benjamin Torbert, UM-Saint Louis
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Office: 422 Lucas Hall, office hours [TBA] (you are encouraged to come visit)

TEXTS:

Lisa Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* ISBN 0521891388 (required)
John Baugh, *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride & Racial Prejudice*, ISBN 0195152891 (required)
Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin & Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, ISBN 0814318053 (required)
Rickford & Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*, ISBN 0471399574 (required)
Lisa Delpit (ed.), *The Skin that We Speak*, ISBN 1565848209 (required)

READING ASSIGNMENTS: Reading assignments are listed on the syllabus. The reading assignment should be completed by the day on which the assignment appears on the syllabus. In other words, have it read **before** the class period in which we are discussing it. **Other short readings outside the 5 texts listed above will be assigned**, distributed electronically or on handouts. We'll deal with those readings mostly in class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: This course approaches the English Variety *African American English* (AAE) primarily from an academic perspective based on the last four decades of sociolinguistic research into the variety. In addition to the scholars whose books you'll purchase, we'll also refer to the work of William Labov, Walt Wolfram, Ralph Fasold, Derek Bickerton, Salikoko Mufwene, Donald Winford, Shana Poplack, & Tracey Weldon, among others. AAE is by far the most-researched American dialect. This linguistics-based approach does not, however, preclude influences from other scholarly traditions. By the end of the class, students should be able (a) to recognize and use basic linguistic terminology describing AAE, (b) to understand varying theories about the genesis of AAE, (c) to understand the rule-governed nature of AAE, especially its morphosyntax, (d) to better understand linguistic facts about AAE that is possible from following mainstream media, and (e) to understand the communicative competence and social value of AAE, and indeed, of all language varieties.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Regular class attendance is both expected and encouraged. Excused absences will only be given in cases of anticipated activities (e.g., university functions, court appearances) or documented emergencies. For any missed classes, students will be expected to obtain reliable notes from someone else in the class.

ASSIGNMENTS: As below. The midterm will be take-home. The final paper will be due during finals, and will be considered to be "the final." (There will be no final exam). I will distribute a robust bibliography on AAE well in advance of when you have to decide on your final paper topic.

Response papers (2) @ 5% each	(about 2 full pages each)
Hip-hop analysis @ 10%	(you linguistically analyze a Hip-Hop/Rap/Blues song of your choice, about 3 pp.)
Midterm @ 30%	
Abstract for Final Paper 10%	(300 words)
Final Paper @ 40%	(10 pages for undergraduates, 12-15 for graduate students)

ACADEMIC HONESTY: As in all classes at UMSL, students must adhere to University policies about cheating and plagiarism—see http://umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/conductcode.htm

CIVILITY: UMSL lists university policies about our shared responsibilities as teachers and as students for creating a positive environment for learning. Our classroom must be an intellectually safe space. Refrain from using your cell phones in any fashion during class. We also need you to display respect for your fellow students. See http://www.umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/positive.htm.

ACCESS/DISABILITY: Students who have special needs must meet with the campus access office in MSC 144. If you require special accommodations, please meet with me to discuss accessibility of disability needs.

MYGATEWAY: I will place supplemental materials on MyGateway throughout the semester.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic(s)</i>	<i>Reading Assignment</i>
<i>A Linguistic Introduction to AAE</i>		
T 8/19	Overview, Goals, Nomenclature	buy the books “When Linguistic Worlds Collide (AAE)” Green, Chapter I pp. 1-11
T 8/26	Lexical Variation in AAE Verbal Markers in AAE	Green, Chapter I, pp. 12-31 Green, Chapter II pp. 32-75
T 9/2	AAE Morphosyntax Optional, supplemental reading	Green, Chapter III pp. 76-105 Rickford & Rickford Chapter VII, pp. 109-28
T 9/9	Overall Summary of AAE Linguistic Features Quantitative Patterns, Implicational Hierarchies	various handouts from Rickford 1999
T 9/16	International Phonetic Alphabet Crash course in American phonological variation	none, but come ready to pay attention <u>Response paper 1 due</u>
T 9/23	AAE Phonology	Rickford & Rickford Chapter VI, pp. 91-108 Green, Chapter IV pp. 106-33
T 9/30	AAE Discourse AAE Style and Style-shifting	Green, Chapter V pp. 134-62 handouts from Rickford 1999, Alim 2004 <i>The Skin That we Speak</i> intro, chs. 1 & 2
T 10/7	AAE Origins debate	handout (Torbert), Smitherman Chapter I, pp. 1-15 Rickford & Rickford Chapter VIII, pp. 129-60 Wolfram & Thomas (handout)
	Other Continuing research issues in AAE	various handouts, Alim Chapter VII, pp. 173-90 <u>HH analysis due</u>
<i>A Cultural Introduction to AAE</i>		
T 10/14	AAE and social issues American Social History Contributing to AAE Ethnicity as a Sociolinguistic Boundary	<i>The Skin that we Speak</i> intro, chapters 3-4, 6 & 8 various handouts handouts from Rickford 1999 &c. <u>midterm due</u>
T 10/21	AAE & Social Identity: Oral Tradition Language Ideology & Prejudice	Smitherman Chapters IV & V, pp. 72-166 Smitherman Chapter VI, pp. 167-199 Handouts from Lippi-Green
T 10/28	AAE in Literature	Green, Chapter VI, pp. 164-199 Rickford & Rickford, Chapter II, pp. 13-38
T 11/4	AAE in Popular Culture Stereotypes of AAE, AAE in the Media	Rickford & Rickford, Chapters II thru IV, pp. 39-88 Rickford & Rickford Chapter XI, pp. 203-18 Baugh, Chapter VII, pp. 87-99 Green, Chapter VII, pp. 200-15 <u>response paper 2 due</u>
T 11/11	The 1997 Oakland Ebonics Controversy	Rickford & Rickford Chapter IX, pp. 163-180 Baugh, Chapters I thru III,
T 11/18	Fallout from the Oakland Controversy Building bridges between vernacular varieties of AAE and “SAE”	Baugh, Chapters IV thru VII <u>abstract due</u> Rickford & Rickford Chapter XII, pp. 221-29 Smitherman, Chapter VII, pp. 200-41 Baugh, Chapter VIII, pp. 101-16
T 11/25	<u>Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS</u>	
T 12/2	AAE (and other varieties) in the Classroom Approaches Educators may take	<i>The Skin that we Speak</i> chapters 9-12 and appendix Green, Chapter VIII, pp. 216-42

T 12/9 Final Paper due at 5:00 PM