

Droppings, Addings, And Spelling Deviations In Georgia Doyle Johnson's *Frederick Douglas* And Loraine Hansberry's (*A Raisin In The Sun*)

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Abstract

Language is reflected by pronunciation, syntax, and lexicon. So is the American African English. As it is considered non-standard dialect, the American African English pronunciation is assumed to have its own characteristic different from the standard American English. Furthermore, according to a linguist, pronunciation of a community is clearly patterned and systematic. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe pronunciation of the American African English in Georgia Doyle Johnson's *Frederick Douglas* And Loraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In The Sun*, in the viewpoints of droppings, addings, and spelling derivations.

This paper is descriptive linguistics rather than a stylistic study as it does not focus on literary style. The data taken was classified into linguistic elements and was tested to the theories of informal English in general; African American English in particular and Standard American English rules of pronunciation. The research findings were summarized and discussed to conclude the research.

The result of the research demonstrates that African American English, a variant of informal English, is different from the rules of Standard American English. In terms of pronunciation, African American English speakers tend to pronounce words as they like. Therefore, the pronunciations of words are very different from Standard English. Words maybe dropped or shortened and some additional sounds included or changed. Words such as *jes'*, *fallin'*, *'em*, *fore'*, *mo'*, *yo' cap'n*, *yes'm*, *a-lissenin'*, *figger*, *bleve*, *sho*, *enuf*, *wus*, *whut*, *mek*, *sed*, *agin*, *git*, *lak*, *yaw*, *ur*, *yore*, etc. frequently occur and are common in African American English. Thus, African American English pronunciation is difficult to understand and strange for students of non-English speaking countries.

Keywords: *pronunciation, the African American English*

1. Introduction

The American African English is one of variants of informal English. The term informal refers to non-standard. Therefore, it is different from the standard American English. In other words, the American African English seems to break the rules of standard phonology of American English. The breaking rules that is going to observe in this paper will be categorized into droppings, addings, and spelling derivations.

The focus of the research was Georgia Doyle Johnson's *Frederick Douglas* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. The former is an African American history play taken from *Plays for Reading: Using Drama in EFL*, a compilation of plays edited by Thomas Kral published by United States Information Agency in 1997, page 139-150. The latter is also an African American history drama, published in 1958, page 23-151. The two plays are Dramas Theater containing conversations among characters in the African American society.

2. Discussion

Pronunciation simply refers to how words are pronounced. Sound is a very important part of spoken language. Without sound, meaning cannot be conveyed. Therefore, the way words are pronounced identifies the style of the language as formal or informal.

For the purposes of this paper, formal style, also called standard phonology, refers to one of the widely accepted American accents, Standard American English. Standard American English or General American is primarily used by educated people in the United States (Colin and Mees, 2003:3, 6) and reflects standard phonology used in very formal speech.

Conversely, the forms of sound used in African American English break the rules of standardization and are difficult to understand because the data taken was in the form of conversational scripts; and not by audio recordings of actual conversations, this paper assumes that the scripts symbolize how the words are actually pronounced in African American English.

Following are examples of how the rules of phonology are broken in African American English.

2.1 Droppings

Dropping a phoneme or a syllable at the front or at the back of a word is frequent features of African American English. Three forms of droppings which do not comply with the rules of Standard American English were found in the research. Each will be described consecutively. They are final dental stop consonant droppings, final velar stop consonant droppings, front or the back of the word or both droppings, [th] droppings and shortenings.

The first, the speakers of African American English drop the final dental stop consonant [t] and [d]. It could be assumed that dropping the final dental stop [t] is done because it makes words easier to pronounce, as in the following examples from *Frederick Douglas*:

Honey you jes' like a rock in a weary land...weary land (FD);
I'll do my bes'. You'se lak a son to me, boy! (FD);
I's a-lissenin'. I can't res' in my grave. Till he quits that drinkin' (FD);
Marse Tom's brother, Marse George come in dat las' boat... (FD).

In the examples above, *jes'* refers to *just*; *bes'* to *best*; *res'* to *rest*; and *las'* to *last*. The same assumption could be applied to dropping the final [d], as in the examples below, also taken from *Frederick Douglas* :

Oh, Fred, I hopes he don't fin' out 'bout it 'fore we gits away (FD);
Here I am a talkin' 'bout marryin' an' cake an' such like an' me just a poor slave! (FD);
Tain't fur long, Fred. You boun' to be free I feels it you got them big free ways (FD);
Slaves roun' here can't read nothin', even down to free ones don't know nothin'. Look at me, Bud! (FD);
Tell him to han' it to her quick (FD).

In the examples above, *fin'* refers to *find*; *an'* to *and*; *boun'* to *bound*; *roun'* to *round*; and *han'* to *hand*.

The second, they drop the final velar stop consonant [g] especially in *ing*, changing [ing] to [in]. This type dropping occurs in [ing] verbs form and other words ending in [ing]. The examples below are of verbs ending in [-ing]:

'Twas when I was around six years old. I remember wakin' up long about midnight, I never will forget it. She was huggin' and kissin' me an' her tears was fallin' all down in my face like rain. She said "My poor

baby...my poor baby...I'm your ma, honey". An' she went on callin' me sweet names an' cryin'; then all sudden like, she almost throwed me down on the pallet an' darted out through the door like mad! (FD, 142).

In the examples above, *wakin'* refers to *waking*; *huggin'* to *hugging*; *kissin'* to *kissing*; *fallin'* to *falling*; *callin'* to *calling*; and *cryin'* to *crying*.

Examples of other words ending in [ing] are displayed below:

But look, I got somethin' good fur you (FD);

I do everythin' for him now (FD);

Slaves roun' here can't read nothin', even down to free ones don't know nothin' (FD).

The correct words for *somethin'*, *everythin'*, and *nothin'* are *something*, *everything*, and *nothing*.

The third, droppings at the front or the back of the word or both also happens.

Who at that back door, you reckon? I ain't spectin' nobody but Bud. (FD).

Spectin' is *expecting*. The [ex] in front and [g] at the back of the word are dropped. Additionally, the [ex] is changed to [s], creating *spectin'*.

Another dropping of a letter or a syllable either in front or at the back of a word, or both, occurs repeatedly. Examples of a dropped front syllable are:

How many mo' Saddays 'fore you goin' to have enuff fur us to go on? (FD);

I think it's so sad the way our American Negroes don't know nothing about Africa 'cept Tarzan and all that (ARITS);

I don't 'low no yellin' in this house, Walter Lee, and you know it (ARITS);

Cause I 'bout don't want to hear it (ARITS);

Baby, don't nothing happen for you in this world 'less you pay somebody off (ARITS);

We was going backwards 'stead of forwards talking 'bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead... (ARITS).

'*Fore* is *before* with the front syllable [be] dropped; '*cept* is *except* with the front syllable [ex] dropped; '*low* is *allow* with the front syllable [al] dropped; '*cause* is *because* with the front syllable [be] dropped; '*less* is *unless* without the front syllable [un]; and '*stead* is *instead*, where the front syllable [in] is dropped.

Examples of a dropped front letter are described below:

Go'n. Lemme 'lone! (FD);

Here I'm talking 'bout marryin' an' cake an' such like an' me just a poor slave (FD);

If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people then go be a nurse like other women or just get married and be quiet... (ARITS).

In the examples above, '*lone* comes from *alone*, where the front letter [a] is dropped; '*bout* comes from *about*, where the front letter [a] is dropped; and '*round* comes from *around*, where front the letter [a] is dropped.

The following are examples of dropping letters at the back of a word:

How many mo' Saddays 'fore you goin' to have enouf fur us to go on? (FD);

Father, just gi' ussen de money, fo' God's sake, and we's we's ain't gwine come out deh and dirty up yo' white folks neighborhood... (ARITS).

In the examples, *mo'* is *more* with the back letters [re] dropped; *gi'* comes from *give* with the back letters [ve] dropped and *yo'* comes from *your* with the back letters [ur] dropped.

In African American English, letters can also be dropped from the front and back of one word. For example: *He'll be lon' soon (FD)*. *Lon'* comes from *along*. The front letter [a] and back letter [g] are dropped. In the sentence *Yo' got to learn a lot 'cause yo' got to help me when we get money, honey (FD)* *yo'* comes from *you* with the back letter [u] dropped.

The fourth, dropping [th] is extensively done in the object pronoun *them*, as in the following examples:

'Cause it sounds respectable to 'em. Somethin' white people get, too. They know 'bout the flu. Otherwise they think you been cut up or something when you tell 'em you sick (ARITS);

Yes. But that didn't stop me; I'd got a start an' kept right on picked up scraps of printin' from the streets an' wet gutters, dried 'em, hid 'em, an' kept a-learnin' (FD);

Dropping [th] and replacing it with [d] in *with*, *the*, *that* and *there* is also common, as shown below:

He swore at Marse Tom an' said he wus a-gonner take yo' back wid him in de morning down on de Eastern Shore agin. Sed he was gonner put you back in de field an break yo' damn sperrit! (FD);

Got any leaves in dat mug, Bud? (FD);

Who at that back door, you reckon? I ain't spectin' nobody but Bud. (She goes over to the door and calls). Who dere?" (FD).

Wid refers to *with*, *de* to *the*, *dat* to *that* and *dere* to *there*.

The fifth, the last but not least type of dropping found in the two plays is called sloppy speech, the dropping of a letter or syllable in the middle of a word or phrase, so the words become non-standard. Some examples of dropping a letter in a word are:

I'm miser'ble here twix heben an' earth (FD);

Yes. Ma'am (ARITS).

The word miser'ble comes from miserable and ma'am from madam.

Examples of dropping a syllable in a word are:

The Man like the guys in the streets say the Man. Captain Boss Mistuh Charley...old cap'n please Mr. Bossman... (ARITS).

Cap'n from captain.

An example of dropping a syllable in a phrase follows:

Yes'm finished early. Where did mama go this morning? (ARITS).

Yes'm is from yes ma'am.

The sixth, in the case of making a word easy to pronounce, another phenomenon, shortening, seems to be one more important form of African American English.

I bleve you. You ain't like nobody round here. You so-so wonderful like (FD);

But sho'ly you couldn't read an' learn all by yoreself (FD);

I'll sho be glad when you git to git away, free! (FD);

Tell him I heered his sister ax him fur his pass tonight an' it hurt my soul when he didn't give it (FD).

Bleve is shortened from *believe*, *sho'ly* from *surely*, *sho* from *sure*, and *ax* from *ask*.

2.2 Addings

Another phonological form found in African American English is adding a sound such as [a] in front of a word, as found in *Frederick Douglas*, as seen below:

You see I'm a-workin' for freedom an' you (FD);

I'm scareful. I hides my money an' just brought it along tonight to show you how I'm a-doin' (FD);

I'm a-goin' to that free country, learn all I can an' then I'm a-goin' to help the rest of my poor down-trodden people to get out of under this yoke (FD);

Here I am a-talkin' 'bout marryin' an' cake an' such like an' me just a poor slave! (FD);

I's a-lissenin' (FD);

I can't wait you're worth it. Won't be long now. Look a-here! (FD);

Yes. But that didn't stop me; I'd got a start an' kept right on picked up scraps of printin' from the streets an' wet gutters, dried 'em, hid 'em, an' kept a-learnin' (FD).

In the examples above *a-workin'* is *working*; *a-doin'* is *doing*; *a-goin'* is *going*; *a-talkin'* is *talking*; *a-lissenin'* is *listening*; *a-here* is *here*; and *a-learnin'* is *learning*.

Often [er] replaces other syllables or words as seen below:

Oh, Fred, you so good, teachin' me an' Bud to read an' figger an' ev'rything (FD);

Oh jes since Ma's been dead he kinder hanker after me, but he ain't loved nobody relly but Ma (FD);

When I get away from here up North I'll take charge of Bud for he'll hafter live with you an' me, you know! (FD);

The South boun'! Come look at the lights from the trains winders (FD);

Lawd! Lawd! Don't you fret. We goin' to fin' her one uv these days an' till you do I'm a-gointer make it all up to you I'll be yore wife an' ma all rolled into one (FD);

Yeah, but ef you goin' to ketch de North Boun', you gotter fly (FD).

The examples above demonstrate that the suffix [-er] replaces other syllables or words in *figger*, *kinder*, *hafter*, *winders*, *gointer* and *gotter*. *Figger* is

figure; kinder is kind of; hafter is have to; winders is windows; gointer is going to; and gotter is have to or got to.

Stammering is signified by elongating sounds to give words additional impact. Some examples from *A Raisin in the Sun* follow:

and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods (ARITS);

You all some eeeevil people at eight o'clock in the morning (ARITS);

Gaaaleee! I don't ask her, she just gimme it sometimes (ARITS);

Whoopee (ARITS);

I'm just sooooo happy for y'all (ARITS);

Talk about olddddd-d-fashionedddd Negroes (ARITS);

I done had that laaaast cup of coffee... (ARITS).

2.3 Spelling Deviations

Fifteen additional categories of phenomena were encountered in the plays. Pronunciations are adapted from Standard American English in varying combinations as shown below:

- *gf? f. Enough is pronounced as enuf, for example: How many mo' Saddays 'fore you goin' to have enuf fur us to go on? (FD).*
- *o? u, e, ai. For is pronounced as fer, for example: Whut fer? (FD).*
- *or? aw. Lord is pronounced as Lawd, for example: Jes' one time. Good Lawd! (FD).*
- *ear? eere. Heard is pronounced as heered, for example: Tell him I heered his sister ax him fur his pass tonight an' it hurt my soul when he didn't give it (FD).*
- *a? u, e. Was is pronounced as wus, for example: He swore at Marse Tom an' said he wus a-gonner take you back wid him in de morning down on de Eastern Shore agin (FD); what is pronounced whut, for example: Whut kin you do? (FD); and make is pronounced mek, for example: I'm gonner mek one with white icing fur that (FD).*
- *ai? i, e. Said is pronounced as sed, for example: Sed he was gonner put you back in de field an break yo' damn sperrit! (FD); and again is*

pronounced **agin**, for example: *He swore at Marse Tom an' said he wus a-gonner take you back wid him in de morning down on de Eastern Shore agin (FD).*

- ir? err. **Spirit** is pronounced as **sperrit**, for example: *Wamme to talk with de sperrits in yore leaves? (FD).*
- e? i. **Get** is pronounced as **git**. For example: *You mout hide in de woods till you could git away, mebbe! (FD).*
- ai? a. **Like** is pronounced as **lak**, for example: *You'se lak a son to me, boy! (FD).*
- y?ie. **Sorry** is pronounced as **Sor-i-e-**, for example: *Eugh nhu (meaning no). Sor-i-e, Fred (FD).*
- u?e. **Just** is pronounced as **jest**, for example: *He would always spell it out jest to show off (FD).*
- ca?ki. **Can** is pronounced as **kin**, for example: *Whut kin you do? (FD).*
- i? e. **If** is pronounced as **ef**, for example: *Ef he want't drunk he'd be all right (FD).*
- ou?aw. **You** is pronounced as **yaw**, for example: *Yaw'll wait, I kin git it, watch me! (FD).*
- Miscellaneous. **Of** is pronounced as **uv**, for example: *You cummon an' eat a piece uv cake an' mebbe then Bud'll be here (FD); scared* is pronounced *skeered*, for example: *But wan't you skeered they'd ketch you an' beat you? (FD); your* is pronounced *yore*, for example: *Lemme see, Yes. Bud, yore Ma's sperrit is here (FD); and you're* is pronounced *you'se*, for example: *You'se lak a son to me, boy! (FD).*

3. Conclusion

The results of the research demonstrate that African American English, a variant of informal English, breaks the rules of Standard American English. In terms of pronunciation, African American English speakers tend to pronounce words as they speak their native languages. Additionally, a word maybe dropped or shortened and some additional sounds included or changed. Words such as *jes'*, *fallin'*, *'em*, *fore'*, *mo'*, *yo' cap'n*, *yes'm*, *a-lissenin'*, *figger*, *bleve*, *sho*, *enuf*, *wus*, *whut*, *mek*, *sed*, *agin*, *git*, *lak*, *yaw*, *ur*, *yore*, etc. frequently occur and are common in

African American English. These features demonstrate that when the speakers of the African American speak English, their native languages got in the way. It means there is interference tendency of individuals to make the language they are learning to conform to the sound and structure of their native tongues. Thus, when the African American English speakers pronounce these words, the words will be difficult to be understood by and are strange for students of non-English speaking countries.

Regardless of whether African American English is categorized as a language, a dialect, or simply a deviation of Standard American English, the speakers of African American English created their own language because they needed to communicate in order to survive in a time when they were socially isolated. African American English is affected by social forces, as is any other dialect.

To add further understanding, another axiom must be considered. No one dialect of a language is any more correct, any better, or any more logical than any other dialect. All dialects are equally effective forms of communication. Thus, African American English is as appropriate as any other dialect since correctness cannot be determined by rules of right or wrong for any of them.

The disadvantage to this research is that the two plays were set in slavery times, which ended in 1865. During that time, African American English and its culture have developed and changed. Its evolution is great and receives international attention ranging from rap and hip hop music to the works of Toni Morrison, an African American woman who is a Professor of Humanities at Princeton University, New Jersey and the recipient of the Nobel Literature Prize. Other educated African Americans have prestigious positions in the U.S. government, such as former Minister of Defense Gen. Collin Powell and today's Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Although these people use Standard American English in their daily conversations, they probably understand African American English as well.

Therefore, it would be beneficial for teachers and learners of English to recognize the uniqueness of African American English in order to enjoy literary works such as novels, short stories, dramas, plays and poems, as well as music and films employing African American English.

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