Univerzitet u Sarajevu

Filozofski fakultet

Odsjek za anglistiku

Završni magistarski rad

Linguistic Features of African American English and Stereotypes Related to It

Lingvistička obilježja afroameričkog engleskog i stereotipi koji se vezuju za njega

Student: **Mentor:**

Nerma Mehić   **Prof. dr. Merima Osmankadić**

Sarajevo, 2023.

Abstract:

The focus of this paper is the non-standard dialect of American English called African American dialect (AAVE). African-American dialect differs from standard general American English in many ways, but this does not mean that it is an illegitimate or a broken version of the English language. The differences between Standard American and African American dialects are manifested in linguistic characteristics, which include phonetic-phonological and morphological-syntactic characteristics. Different features will be presented in this paper through examples from the corpus of the novel *The Color Purple* by the writer Alice Walker. For the theoretical background, the works of William Labov, Walt Wolfram, and John R. Rickford are primarily used. They are sociolinguists who discovered that the African American dialect is actually a systematic language system with established grammatical rules. The aim of the paper is to determine which characteristics of the African American English dialect can be found in the novel. Furthermore, through a descriptive analysis of the mentioned work, the paper will explain which stereotypes are associated with the African American dialect and how they are manifested in the novel. This primarily refers to the negative attitudes of speakers of the standard language towards the African American dialect, but it will also be explained in particular how African Americans perceive themselves and how they form their racial and ethnic identities through the language they use. This paper will be divided into two main parts. In the first part, the theoretical foundations for the analysis will be presented with the origin and structure of the African American dialect, relying on relevant linguistic studies. On the basis of examples from the corpus, linguistic features specific to the mentioned dialect will be illustrated, by which it departs from Standard American English. The second part will show the social perception of members of the African American linguistic and cultural community. The focus will be on the stereotypes attached to these speakers and how they are manifested in the novel, especially towards African American women, who face double stigmatization in the South of the USA. The paper will show how such marginalization of a nonstandard language can cause linguistic uncertainty in the discriminated speech community, so its members may try to change the way they speak due to the pressure of the dominant speech group.

Sažetak:

U ovom radu, fokus je na nestandardnom dijalektu američkog engleskog jezika zvanom afroamerički dijalekat (AAVE). Afroamerički dijalekat se po mnogim obilježjima razlikuje od standardnog općeg američkog engleskoga, ali to ne znači da je nelegitiman ili iskvaren engleski jezik. Razlike između standardnog američkog i afroameričkog se očituju u lingističkim obilježjima, što uključuje fonetsko-fonološke i morfološko-sintaktičke karatkteristike. Razlikovna obilježja će biti predstavljena u ovom radu kroz primjere iz korpusa kojeg sačinjava roman *The Color Purple* spisateljice Alice Walker. Za teoretsku pozadinu primarno se koriste radove Williama Labova, Walta Wolframa i Johna R. Rickforda, sociolingvista koji su otkrili da je afroamerički dijalekat zapravo sistematičan jezički sistem sa utvrđenim gramatičkim pravilima. Cilj rada je odrediti koje se karakteristike afroameričkog engleskog dijalekta mogu pronaći u romanu. Nadalje, kroz deskriptivnu analizu navedenog djela, rad će objasniti koji se stereotipi vezuju za afroamerički dijalekat i kako se oni manifestuju u romanu. To se prvenstveno odnosi na negativne stavove govornika standardnog jezika prema afroameričkom dijalektu, ali će se i napose objasniti kako Afroamerikanci percipiraju sebe te kako formiraju svoje rasne i etničke identitete u donosu na jezik koji koriste. Ovaj rad će biti podijeljen na dva glavna dijela. U prvom dijelu će se najprije postaviti teorijski temelji za analizu te objasniti porijeklo i struktura afroameričkog dijalekta, oslanjajući se na relevantne lingvističke studije. Zatim, na osnovu primjera iz korpusa, ilustrirat će se jezička obilježja specifična za navedeni dijalekat, a kojima on odmiče od standardnog američkoengleskog. Drugi dio će prikazati društvenu percepciju pripadnika afroameričke jezično-kulturne zajednice. Fokus će biti na stereotipima koji se vezuju za ove govornike i kako se oni ispoljavaju u romanu, posebice prema Afroamerikankama, koje su dvostruko sigmatizirane na Jugu SAD-a. Rad će pokazati kako takva marginalizacija nestandardnog jezika može prouzročiti lingvističku nesigurnost kod diskrimirane govorne zajednice pa te osobe mogu pokušati promijeniti način na koji govore radi pritiska dominantne govorne skupine.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is African American Vernacular English, its linguistic features, and the attitudes towards this dialect's speakers. Studies of AAVE surpass those on other social and regional varieties of American English, as this dialect has received widespread public attention and media exposure since the 1960s (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). Discussions on AAVE continue in the current decade, especially regarding its status as a valid dialect of English, as well as the linguistic prejudice that AAVE speakers still face in everyday situations.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. The first part will deal with the linguistic characteristics of AAVE. For this, it will be useful to discuss several terms and issues in sociolinguistics that are relevant to the development of this paper. This includes definitions of standard and nonstandard English, prestige, and covert prestige. Such explanations will provide insight into why standard dialects such as General American tend to be perceived more favorably than nonstandard dialects, including AAVE. It will be pointed out that such attitudes toward language generate linguistic stereotypes favoring the prestigious speech of the upper classes.

The next section of the first part will provide general facts about AAVE. It will note the various labels attributed to AAVE and explain how they are connected to society's attitudes toward the speakers. Further, the most popular theories on the origin of AAVE will be examined. The important link between language and identity will be explored, as well as how AAVE speakers experience linguistic shame because their dialect is viewed negatively in American society.

Further, the paper discusses how dialect is used in literature to characterize the speakers and portray their class, locality, and identity. A brief overview of *The Color Purple* is provided and it will be explained why the use of AAVE is important for the storytelling effect. Walker outlines the life of an African American family in Georgia in the early 20th century. Her depiction of authentic Black speech received both condemnation and acclaim from the public. It will be argued in the paper that Walker's employment of AAVE, rather than Standard English, was necessary for outlining the protagonist's identity as an oppressed African American woman.

The first practical part of this paper will offer a linguistic study of AAVE in *The Color Purple*. The focus of the analysis will be to examine the character's use of African American Vernacular English through a collection of quotes from the novel. The features of the dialect will be scrutinized on the levels of grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. The analysis will be based on the linguistic features of AAVE outlined by Martin and Wolfram (2022), Green (2002), Thomas (2007), and Fasold (1969). The final part contains the results and a discussion of the findings.

The second part of the thesis will deal with stereotypes related to AAVE. Firstly, a definition of stereotypes will be provided, as well as an overview of negative attitudes toward AAVE speakers. This part will also explain how African Americans view themselves in relation to the dominant standard-speaking American society. Secondly, the analytical part will demonstrate how these stereotypes are manifested in *The Color Purple*, especially towards African American women, who face double oppression in the Deep South. The paper will also show how such marginalization can lead to linguistic insecurity with speakers of a nonstandard dialect, causing them to forsake their vernacular.

The thesis is guided by the following research questions which will be answered in the analysis:

RQ1: "What linguistic features of AAVE found in sociolinguistic literature are present in the novel *The Color Purple*?"

RQ2: "What stereotypes are related to speakers of AAVE and how do they affect the members of this speech community?"

RQ3: "How does dialect in the novel *The Color Purple* delineate characters' cultural and social identity?"

PART I

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A common tendency in communication is to judge and categorize speakers into social groups based on their language output. A salient indicator of a person's background is the way they speak, which leads to assumptions about their profession, social status, ethnic group, and race. Even though attributing traits to the interlocutor is a universal tendency, evaluative attitudes can also serve as a basis for stereotypes and at times give rise to prejudice and discrimination (Lippi-Green, 1997). The stereotypes a listener relates to a particular social group are largely determined by the level of standardization of the dialect they use. That is because dialects do not hold the same level of prestige in society, as the language attitudes are dictated by dominant institutions (e.g. the schools, the media, and the judicial system) that promote the use of a homogenous standard language. According to McWhorter (2001), because people in power speak the standard dialect, it is inherently linked to prestige, success, and education. Thus, a bias is created towards the speech of the typically white middle class, while nonstandard dialects are stigmatized and this connotation of inferiority is carried over to those who speak it (Labov, 2012). This feeling of linguistic shame is evident in *The Color Purple*.

It is important to introduce these concepts since they explain why African American Vernacular English is negatively perceived, as it diverges from Standard English owing to its unique linguistic characteristics. This dialect gained significant attention in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, when linguists such as William Labov and Walt Wolfram rejected the widespread notion that AAVE is illogical, revealing that it is systematic and rule-governed. Despite the scholars' arguments, the speakers of African American Vernacular English are still frequently victims of language prejudice, their speech being equated with "bad, improper English" (Baugh, 2000). Further, as Geneva Smitherman (2006) observes, African Americans might believe that the key to socioeconomic success in White America is the eradication of Black Talk, which is the pressure also imposed on Celie, the heroine of the novel.

An influential book that helps shape the theory of this thesis is Rosina Lippi-Green's *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States* in which the author discusses language attitudes in the U.S. and how linguistic prejudice aids power asymmetries in society.

A comprehensive overview of dialect variation is presented in *American English: Dialects and Variation* by Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling. The book reveals fundamental values about various social groups in the U.S. associated with vernacular varieties. The chapter on African American English has been especially useful for the purpose of this thesis, as it discusses the origin of this dialect.

John McWhorter's two books *Talking Back, Talking Black: Truths About America's Lingua Franca* (2016) and *Word on the Street: Debunking the Myth of "Pure" Standard English* (2001) present AAVE as a legitimate form of speech, rejecting the notion that it is inferior to Standard English. He also explains the various stereotypes associated with the speech of Black Americans, which was used in this thesis to explain how the characters in "The Color Purple" are viewed due to their dialect.

2.1. Standard English

All human languages are necessarily variable and these differences are inevitable in a society that consists of diverse social groups. Dialectal variation is inherent and serves to communicate social, stylistic, and geographic meaning. Despite the fact that such change is natural, the notion of a standard language is imposed on speakers by the schools and promoted by the media because it is deemed desirable. According to Thomas (2003), a comprehensive linguistic description of Standard English does not exist as there are different varieties of it worldwide and it is not clear which norms should apply. The two main standard varieties are standard American English (also termed General American or mainstream U.S. English) and Standard English English.

The variety of Standard English that will be discussed in this thesis is General American. Trudgill (1995) defines Standard English as "that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language" (p. 5). It is also the variety that is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. While the Received Pronunciation is most prestigious in England, in the U.S. the Midwestern dialect is considered to be the "pure" speech. Typically, the standard American dialect is considered to be the speech of educated persons without a regional dialect and who are understood by all. This speech is described as "devoid of both general and local socially stigmatized features, as well as regionally conspicuous phonological and grammatical features" (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015, p. 283).

Lippi-Green (1997) considers the idea of a spoken standardized language to be a hypothetical construct and should not be understood as any specific language. The objective of standardization is to suppress linguistic change, a process that Milroy and Milroy (2012) explained as "the suppression of optional variability" (p. 6). They emphasize that, even though Standard English is merely an abstraction, there is widespread promotion of the ideology of a standard. It is important to note that this dialect is not inherently correct, but can be viewed as a political construct since there is no objective or linguistic justification for its imposition. Linguistic standards are set by higher social groupings, thus the language of speakers with political and economic power is considered the voice of authority. Further, Standard English is

commonly associated with people who are logical, productive, responsible citizens and less likely to commit a crime (Lanehart, 2015).

2.2. Nonstandard English

In American society, certain dialects have become disparaged for various historical and social causes, AAVE being one of the most stigmatized. The term "dialect" is often related to defective varieties of a language but it should be made clear that it is in fact a neutral term. It should not have any negative connotations, as it refers to any variety that represents a group of speakers. Wolfram and Schilling (1998) emphasize that standard varieties are dialects too, just like the speech of socially disfavored groups. Similarly, Thomas (2003) states that the public often forgets that "the selection of one dialect and its forms over others for promotion as the standard is only a result of historical accident, not linguistic superiority" (p. 178).

However, linguistic reality diverges from social reality. The most disenfranchised communities are those who are deemed to speak nonstandard English and are often pressured to adopt the standard variety in order to climb the social ladder. Though linguists acknowledge that all varieties are valid, the standard "has a preferred status; it gives those who use it certain social advantages; and it increases their life chances. Nonstandard varieties tend to produce the opposite effect" (Wardaugh, 2006, p. 335). As noted previously, Standard English is difficult to define so it is usually identified by grammatical features that it does not have. These features are mostly stigmatized, such as the use of multiple negatives or similar characteristics that are typical of AAVE, as will be presented later in the thesis. As a result, the definitions of Standard English come to be lists of grammatical features that nonstandard varieties contain.

Linguistic prejudice is not merely a matter of language. Peterson (2020) explains that it reveals the public attitudes towards people who lack social power, as "marginalization through language becomes a proxy for racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and elitism" (p. 33). The author also uses the term "othering" to refer to actions that divide and dismiss people as outsiders, specifically due to their language. Then, the speech of African Americans, a socially disfavored group, will be interpreted as linguistically deficient when compared with the Anglo-American norm. Milroy and Milroy (2012) note that AAVE is probably the most stigmatized variety of all in the U.S. since there are both negative attitudes to the dialect and prevalent discrimination towards its speakers. In sociolinguistic terms, it can be said that AAVE is a low-prestigious

dialect, in opposition to the standard, which holds a high level of prestige. As Mesthrie (2011) explains, this is "overt prestige", related to high-status speech of the upper class that is regarded as essential for formal settings.

2.3. Covert Prestige

Wardaugh (2006) states that the speakers of AAVE are familiar with Standard English and are aware that it has a prestige that their dialect lacks. This leads to the question of why such speakers continue to use stigmatized speech despite linguistic discrimination. Even if members of a speech community know the high-prestige norms, they might not want to adopt them in their everyday conversations. This is related to an aspect of local pride and expressions of in-group identity which Labov termed "covert prestige" in his research on how the postvocalic /r/ is pronounced in New York City.

Humans greatly appreciate a sense of community and can use language to show that they are members of a particular group. Within that group, the non-standard way of speaking may have covert prestige. Even though such forms may go against the standard variety, they become a symbol of in-group solidarity and help speakers identify with the local community. This explanation is important for the treatment of AAVE because its speakers use and value linguistic elements that are ridiculed by dominant groups. Further, Peter Trudgill (1972) expanded on Labov's findings and revealed in his study that male speakers showed a preference for nonstandard language, as they were more interested in displaying group solidarity than earning high social status. This is because by using nonstandard forms the speaker might seem more casual, masculine, or "street-wise".

Another characteristic of covert prestige is that speakers have two language modes available to them which they can use to address either the local community or the mainstream, more overtly powerful group (Peterson, 2020). This will be relevant to this thesis' later discussion on African Americans' ability to code-switch from AAVE into standardized English.

It is interesting to note that non-African Americans frequently borrow expressions from AAVE to gain social prestige without being subject to discrimination (Bucholtz, 1999; Reyes, 2005). "Adopting the vocabulary of a non-mainstream culture is a way of sharing vicariously in the plusses of that culture without having to experience the minuses associated with it" (Eble,

2004, p. 383). White adolescents, even if they have little contact with African Americans, can become familiar with AAVE through the Internet, hip-hop music, and films on black inner-city life. Because of such media, lower-class forms of AAVE have become associated with toughness and survival and are a means of constructing a "cool" white identity counter to other white mainstream identities (Cutler, 1999). This demonstrates how covertly prestigious varieties are disparaged, but for certain speakers, they are very valuable for shaping their identities and manipulating their public personas.

Finally, it should be mentioned that authors can use various dialects as powerful tools to convey social meaning and shape their characters' identities. In this way, nonstandard speech becomes a vehicle for colorful characterization and presenting the authentic speech of a certain community.

2.4. African American Vernacular Dialect

Morgan (2002) states that African American English is the most studied dialect in the world, which is remarkable because African Americans are only 12% of the US population. The dialect has been studied extensively due to many social, political, and linguistic arguments about its use. AAVE has been made familiar to the world through popular culture, social media, television sitcoms, and rap music.

A broad agreement on the definition of AAVE does not exist. It is difficult to provide one considering its complex political and social history. There is no doubt that speakers of this dialect come from all backgrounds and the community expands across social class and geographic lines. Not all people of African descent speak AAVE and it is not certain what constitutes this speech community because "many theories were based on racial and economic classifications where being African American and having non-middle-class status were synonymous with being an AAE speaker" (Morgan, 2002, p. 65). Even though there are many common features that represent the speech of African Americans, it is not completely homogenous because there is variability in the use of features due to social and regional factors. Thus, Green (2004) writes about African American English as "a linguistic system of communication governed by well defined rules and used by some African Americans (though not all) across different geographical regions of the USA and across a full range of age groups" (p. 77).

There is also the issue regarding the name for this dialect. Numerous terms have been attributed to it and these names have always reflected the social climate of the time. The early 1960s were a period of heightened interest in AAVE. Wolfram and Schilling (2015) outline the labels for AAVE from that period to the present: Negro dialect, Nonstandard Negro English, Negro English, American Negro speech, Black communications, Black dialect, Black folk speech, Black street speech, Black English, Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, Afro American English, African American English, African American Language, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Regardless of which term is used, they all refer to a language variety that has systematic phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical patterns (Lanehart, 2015). In this paper, the term African American Vernacular English will be used, as it indicates the ethnic heritage and cultural identity of many people of African descent in the United States. Here, the term "vernacular" is used as a contrast to the mainstream, dominant tradition (Trudgill, 1992). Additionally, "vernacular is the basic linguistic system that a child learns first, masters perfectly, and uses with unerring skill in later life with family, friends, and peers in intimate situations where minimal attention is given to speech" (Labov, 2012, p. 50). Later in life, the speaker might acquire superposed dialects that they employ in more formal situations.

As labeling practices mirror deeper sociopolitical issues, the term "Ebonics", a portmanteau of "ebony" and "phonics", is often avoided because it carries strong emotional connotations. It is often associated with negative comments and derogatory parodies (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). This is because the term gained notoriety in relation to a resolution by the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education in 1996. In the so-called "Ebonics controversy", the school board concluded that Ebonics was not a dialect of English, but a genetically-based language of its African American students (Baugh, 2000). This event led the American public to associate the term "Ebonics" with AAVE. However, this usage is wrong since it is a label for the language of people of African descent that had its roots in West African languages, and not as a reference to any dialect of English (Green, 2004).

AAVE has often been trivialized as slang, broken English, and lazy speech, and its speakers are characterized as careless. Since the 1960s, linguists have endeavored to validate that AAVE is a rule-governed dialect, a highly-structured system rather than an accumulation of

errors (Labov, 1972). It should be made clear that calling AAVE a dialect does not mean it is less than a standard language variety. Though there is a perception among non-linguists that languages have high status while dialects do not, "dialect" as a neutral label refers to a variety that is different from all others and associated with a particular group of speakers. AAVE does differ from Standard English but it has a degree of regularity and stability due to rules of grammar and pronunciation, and it is a valid dialect of English (Pullum, 1999).

2.5. Origins of AAVE

The issue of the origin of AAVE is a matter of speculation as linguists disagree on how it relates to other dialects of American English. There is no general consensus because written records are incomplete and open to interpretation, and because Africans expressed great variation when brought to colonial America (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002). The two main theories on how AAVE developed are the Anglicist Hypothesis and the Creole Hypothesis.

The Anglicist Hypothesis, prominent until the 1960s, places the beginning of AAVE in the European American dialects rather than African languages. Anglicists insist that all features of AAVE can be found in other dialects of English, especially those spoken in the South (Wardaugh, 2006). According to this theory, slaves brought different languages with them but after time only small traces of those West African languages remained as the speakers adopted the dialects of surrounding white speakers.

The Creole Hypothesis suggests that the dialect developed from a creole language spoken by slaves in the South. This means that it originated independently of Standard English, as enslaved Africans needed to find a lingua franca to communicate with each other. As it adopted more features similar to Standard English, this creole language went through decreolization (Lauture, 2020). This is a process in which creole structures disappear or become replaced by non-creole features. Even though some traits of AAVE can be traced to creole languages, Wolfram and Schilling (2015) write that researchers do not claim that present-day AAVE still qualifies as a creole language.

The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis emerged with a recent examination of written records of ex-slaves. It states that earlier AAVE was not as different from postcolonial European American English varieties as the creolists suggested. Further, an examination of the sociohistorical

situation in the pre-Civil War South shows that a widespread plantation creole could not develop because most slaves lived on smaller farms (Wolfram & Thomas, 2002). The theory also claims that AAVE has diverged and introduced distinct features from European American speech as the African American community solidified.

Even though there is support for the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis, scholars are still not in agreement about the origin of AAVE. What is important, however, is that since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a consensus about the logic and systematic nature of AAVE (Smitherman, 2006). This dialect has been commonly vilified as street slang used by ignorant urban youth. Even though slang is a part of AAVE, the dialect goes beyond that, as it contains words, phrases, and constructions common to generations. Smitherman (2000) explains that "slang refers to language that is transitory and that is generally used by only one group, such as teenagers' slang or musicians' slang" but AAVE is much more expansive because it has "a lexical core of words and phrases that are fairly stable over time and are familiar to and/or used by all groups in the Black community" (p. 2). It is clear that negative characterizations of AAVE reflect preconceptions about its speakers. Even though linguists have been showing evidence of this dialect's regularity for decades, the argument has made not a dent in public feelings about it (McWhorter, 2017).

The first wave of AAVE descriptive studies centered on young urban African American males, who were considered the "real" speakers of the dialect and authentic models for Black culture. Labov countered the argument that the use of AAVE represents deficits in intelligence in his "Language in the Inner City" (1973), but his description of the speakers has been problematic. Morgan (1994) suggests that this presentation establishes the authentic AAVE speaker as "male, adolescent, insular, and trifling" (328), excluding women and the elderly from the conversation. Still, Rickford (1992) explains that those adolescents were a preferred source of data for linguists because they want to talk and act in their "natural way" and are less accommodating to the White norms than their parents. "By contrast, black adults, affected by the demands of the workplace, seem to be impelled away from distinctively black patterns of language and behavior" (p. 190). This does not mean that adults stop speaking AAVE entirely, but in some settings, they avoid using certain features they know to be stigmatized. The

conclusion here is that African Americans should not be treated as a monolithic group. AAVE varies among its speakers regionally, between younger and older, urban and rural speakers.

2.6. AAVE and Identity

Personal identities are multilayered and comprise different social category characteristics. This means that speakers employ certain linguistic features only in a specific situation or when they are deemed appropriate for a topic. African Americans will use elements of AAVE when interacting with their community, using these features to evoke feelings of solidarity and shared cultural experiences (Rahman, 2011). They will switch to Standard English in other contexts. This shift is termed code-switching, which is "the use of linguistic and discourse systems associated with more than one language, dialect and ideology within the same speech exchange and social context" (Morgan, 2002). Code-switching is also often a popular approach in language instruction because students are encouraged to speak one dialect at home and use another version of English appropriate for school. McWhorter (2001) maintains that code-switching is the way most African Americans use AAVE, as they are competent speakers of more than one variety. He also states that dialect features often correlate with the subject as it evolves through conversation, so a speaker can use an AAVE word or construction while speaking largely in the standard dialect. However, it might seem problematic to see code-switching as a goal for African Americans since it means giving up their authentic identity for the socially favored standard. "Code-switching is racially biased, requiring blacks to separate the codes that bespeak their identities from those they use at school" (Young, 2007, p. 7).

Lippi-Green (1997) observes that most African Americans, regardless of their profession, believe that bidalectalism and selective assimilation to the standard are necessary. While some accept it as a fact of life, others respond with justifiable anger. They understand that AAVE is valid but also acknowledge that it will never be fully accepted as a socially viable dialect by the majority of U.S. society.

The shift from a professional environment to a community environment can lead African Americans to experience what Smitherman (2006) calls a "linguistic push-pull". It refers to the feeling of ambivalence about AAVE stemming from conflicting linguistic norms. Namely, African Americans may refuse to abandon AAVE because it is closely connected to Black identity and culture. At the same time, they recognize that this symbol of ethnic identity is often

the target of discrimination in mainstream society. If they do renounce AAVE, they might be described as "talking white" and become ostracized from their community. "According to the sociolinguistic paradigm, those who did not fit the ideal of the vernacular speaker were not African American enough to belong to the speech community or – to put it in modern terms – not the 'authentic Other'" (Morgan, 2002).

2.7. Linguistic Shame

Doss and Gross (1992) write that it was traditionally believed that AAVE was a reference point to which African Americans held a positive regard because its elements were important markers of group identity and solidarity. However, because of the pressure to gain recognition in a White society, African Americans might try to enhance their status by criticizing AAVE. There are conflicting perspectives on AAVE among members of the speech community. As mentioned, AAVE can be seen as a form of resistance to imposed definitions of African American identity, but it also might feel like an acceptance of those definitions. Some middle-class African Americans only use the standard dialect, viewing it as a means to achieve success, and they think that encouraging AAVE only keeps their race down (Speicher & McMahon, 1992). According to this belief, Standard English allows the Other to transcend a marginalized status and become the model of good citizenship. For them, AAVE bears the stigma of inferiority and the idea that African Americans cannot learn to speak the standard dialect. The vernacular then invokes panic because they believe it hinders true equality and success in mainstream culture.

The media is also to blame for this feeling of shame because the representation of African Americans has been biased, which causes stereotyping. "For example, advertisers and television producers have rarely cast African Americans in roles associated with academic, political, social and economic success" (Doss & Gross, 1992, p. 55).

This attitude, however, causes issues in intragroup interactions because rejecting AAVE symbolizes self-hate and the elevation of European values. "Talking proper" within the community is negatively perceived because the speaker is suspected of thinking they are more educated, knowledgeable, or better than other members (Ogbu, 1999). While middle-class speakers might use both AAVE and Standard English, the working class has less chance of renouncing AAVE since the standard may be more productive in specific environments. Contradictory practices can also coexist, as AAVE speakers might deny the efficiency of their

dialect in public while still using it within their community. Thus, linguistic insecurity emerges around when to consider questions of loyalty versus social context. "It suggests that to use GE exclusively is to have no involvement in the black community. The inability to use GE is also stigmatized and exclusive AAE usage suggests that a person has no involvement with education, employment and so on" (Morgan, 2002, p. 68). Further, this conflict affects African American students because those who succeed academically are often ridiculed for "acting white". Standard English is held in low regard by their peers but, at the same time, the so-called "white" behavior is valued by teachers in school (Filmer, 2003). The condemnation, therefore, originates from both inside and outside the speech community.

Considering the linguistic pressure and prejudice towards their vernacular, why do African Americans still refuse to assimilate to Standard English norms? It is difficult to give up one's dialect and, more importantly, not everyone is urged to assimilate. Additionally, eradication of AAVE would most likely not make a difference since, as mentioned, the discrimination is not only aimed at language but race, too. Despite numerous attempts over the years by the societal and educational sectors to eradicate AAVE, it has been passed on from one generation to the next with each new group adding its linguistic mark to the dialect. McWhorter (2017) suggests that AAVE should be presented to the public differently. Instead of focusing on what it leaves out and how it is different from the standard, it should be introduced through the ways it is more complex than the standard. This is because "systematicity will intrigue and stimulate academic linguistic analysis, but the public isn't having it, so we must change the lens" (p. 25).

2.8. Dialect in Literature

Authors might use dialect to impart authenticity to their work. They typically portray naturally occurring speech related to particular groups in order to reveal their social characteristics, such as education, geographic region, occupation, and class. It can also be used to differentiate between characters and depict code-switching if the character is bidialectal. Shorrocks (1996) defines literary dialect as "the representation of nonstandard speech in literature that is otherwise written in Standard English aimed at a general readership" (p. 386). In the language of literature, dialects correspond to the representations of nonstandard speech co-existing with the standard in the same work. Authors can write a conversation in nonstandard

speech and thus set this character apart from the surrounding narrative. This diversity of language allows the readers to understand the link between dialect and class, education, stigmatization, and prestige.

Dialect has been used to mark the separation between the classes, the educated and the uneducated in literary works. Observed in this manner, dialect is the opposite of a prestigious language. It has been mentioned previously that dialect is often used as a way of situating fictional characters in the hierarchy of a social structure. The disparity within the social strata is often depicted by contrasting the standard variety, seen as correct, with regional dialects that are considered incorrect and vulgar.

Zanger (1966) provides the following, more detailed definition: "Literary dialect is the attempt to indicate on the printed page, through spellings and mis-spellings, elisions, apostrophes, syntactical shifts, signals, etc., the speech of an ethnic, regional or racial group" (p. 40). Authors can represent a dialect through vocabulary, grammar, and phonology. Characters who use Standard English typically use perfected grammar, while dialect speakers use double negatives or other forms rejected by prescriptivists. Phonological features are demonstrated by systematic variations from conventional orthography. However, as Ives (1971) observes, it is difficult to accomplish an accurate record of a spoken dialect due to "deficiencies of English spelling as a representation of English pronunciation" (p. 155).

Representations of dialect speech in novels seemingly provide intriguing evidence about the speech habits of certain communities. However, they are not fully reliable. No matter how well a dialect is represented in a literary work, it should not be used as linguistic evidence. Stockwell (2020) points out that "there is little precision, systematicity nor consistency in the representation of accent features of characters, and nor should there be: full phonetic transcription is not an option, and even a near-consistent imitation would be almost unreadable" (p. 363). Instead, the most apparent characteristics of a dialectal variation are selected by authors and used as headings to create a model of that dialect and speech community. Authors need to decide which features they want to portray and which to omit for the sake of legibility and comprehension. This means that the frequency of occurrence of certain forms might be different from how they are used in real life. It is critical to remember that literary representation is an artistic one in which freedom of speech may be allowed. Further, authors can exaggerate

characteristics of regionally or socially diverse characters in order to accentuate dialectal qualities.

This explains why employing dialects in literary works is a challenge for the author. However, if they wrote their stories in accordance with linguistic conventions, they would miss the opportunity to place the characters that spoke a dialect in their actual circumstances and would instead trap them in the normative rules of the standard language. It would not be an accurate portrayal in that case.

In British literature, dialects were typically used to juxtapose a peasant dialect with the upper classes that employed the Received Pronunciation. Conversely, American dialect writing indicated an attempt at the democratization of literature. Authors employed literary dialect to break away from the British literary canon to establish an American literary tradition and express different communities' cultures. It can be observed how American literature often reflects the country's ethnic diversity, the speech of minorities and people of various origins because the authors strived to create realistic characters. "Representations of African American speech by white writers such as Twain began to appear during the latter part of the nineteenth century. And in fact, until quite late in the century, most of the writers who represented African American dialect were white" (Minnick, 2007, p. 10).

When representing African American characters, authors could depict their speech accurately or opt for stereotypical views of their literacy and intelligence. Black characters were often used merely for providing humor, as observed in minstrelsy, shows done by white performers in which caricatures of black culture are used to amuse white audiences and portray African Americans as a threat to society. However, African American writers, including Alice Walker, have made an effort to dispel these myths and challenge preconceived notions about black characters and their language in literature. "They argued against the unrealistic and sneaky previous representations done by white authors who portrayed the black men as lazy, fools and dirty creatures" (Belmerabet, 2018, p. 76).

2.9. Eye Dialect

In order to create a visual representation of a character's dialect, authors might use eye dialect. Eye dialect is "a way to represent pronunciations graphically through nonstandard spelling" (Campbell, 2020, p. 38).

Because phonetic alphabets are incomprehensible to most readers, authors will employ various visual resources to convey nonstandard speech, such as atypical spelling and punctuation. Written descriptions of dialects in literature are merely approximations of the actual sounds that a dialect-speaking person would actually produce. Some examples of eye dialect include *naw* (no) and *git* (get) (Walker, 2019).

Eye-dialect is interesting because it is the most explicit use of dialect and visually shows what the author deems nonstandard about that speech. Orthographic transcriptions are not neutral because they convey closeness or distance from the standard dialect. Jaffe and Walton (2000) explain why this is so: "The form of the written word – like the form of the spoken word – carries a social and symbolic load: that orthography (and orthographies) are conventionally associated with social, cultural and linguistic identities and hierarchies" (p. 562). Accordingly, nonstandard orthographies indicate low social and linguistic status and power.

If a character is from an upper class, his speech will be written with grammatical and orthographical correctness, but if he is considered socially inferior or ill-educated, "his dialogue becomes branded as substandard by the use of colloquialisms, solecisms, and eye dialect" (Hall, 2020, p. 12). Those who are placed in the upper strata, both in fiction and real life, are careful about their language because they do not want to be held in contempt by their peers for their poor pronunciation. Authors then portray vernaculars as subordinate to the standard. However, Lanehart (2015) explains that African American writers, having insider knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions of AAVE, exhibit an understanding of the dialect's more nuanced, less obvious characteristics. In this sense, employing AAVE in literature can potentially create excellent portrayals of African American life on the page.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research methodology and research question

This is a qualitative research study based on excerpts from the corpus, The Color Purple by Alice Walker. The aim of the first study is to determine which features of African American Vernacular English are found in the novel. The analysis will rely on the linguistic characteristics of AAVE described by Martin and Wolfram (2022), Green (2002), Thomas (2007), and Fasold (1969). The most prominent features of AAVE that are noted in sociolinguistic literature include negative concord, negative inversion, aspectual markers, zero copula, subject-verb disagreement, preverbal negative *ain't*, and several phonological features (consonant cluster simplification, r-lessness, consonant replacement, and vowel deletion). This paper aims to find examples of these characteristics in the novel. The goal of research in the first chapter is aimed at answering the following research question:

RQ1: "What linguistic features of AAVE found in sociolinguistic literature are present in the novel *The Color Purple*?"

3.2. Corpus

In order to answer the research questions, Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, has been chosen. Published in 1982, the novel received a Pulitzer Prize in 1983. This made Walker the first black woman to win the award for fiction. The novel was adapted into a film directed by Steven Spielberg and received widespread acclaim. (Harris Abrams, 1985). The story is set in rural Georgia in the early 20th century and depicts the battle for empowerment of a mistreated and illiterate African American woman, Celie. The novel alludes to many situations in Walker's personal life and family history, such as its setting in the Deep South and its focus on African American women. Additionally, Celie's character was partly modeled after Walker's great-grandmother (Roden, 1999). The protagonist, subjected to racist and sexist oppression, uses letter-writing to find her voice and reveal the hardships she has undergone.

It is an epistolary novel, composed of a series of undated letters written by the main heroine to God and her sister Nettie. The intensely intimate style allows the readers to witness the oppressed character's personal transformation and empowerment. Further, Tucker (1988) explains that this form is effective for this novel because it is more informal and was used

primarily by women due to their lower level of education. Letters were a means to describe domestic life and were typically not intended for publishing.

The novel garnered a lot of positive reviews but it also raised some concerns, mainly due to its sexual and graphic language. LaGrone (2009) explains that some called the story maudlin and too unrealistic but critics were mainly offended by the negative depiction of black masculinity and the black family in general. Further, because the story is told from the perspective of an uneducated country woman, critics thought it may inhibit the exploration of racial and class issues (Selzer, 2008). However, "by learning Celie's dialect as employed in these letters (…) and by considering the effects Walker achieves through the development of two distinctly different narrative voices (…) we come to understand Celie's plight within a larger cultural context" (Fifer, 1985, p. 155). Walker uses the story about a family to discuss race and class concerns, especially the treatment of African American women by their close relatives and the wider society. The lack of traditional narration is therefore not constricting but depicts larger issues, marginalization and the lack of opportunities, through Celie's personal account.

This novel has been chosen because one of its most distinctive features is Walker's authentic use of African American dialect. Celie does not write in Standard English but in AAVE, the language that she speaks. It allows the author to convey her worries about racial, sexual, and political issues, notably the spiritual and political survival of black women. The novel has been praised for "the beautiful voice in the book and Walker's ability to capture an authentic black folk speech without all the caricature that usually typifies such efforts" (Harris, 1984, p. 155).

Though Walker received many commendations for using AAVE in the novel, it was also the subject of criticism because the language was thought to perpetuate demeaning racial stereotypes (Roden, 1999). Language is an intrinsic part of every person and their experiences, however, so the novel's message and impact would not be the same if it had been written in Standard English. Employing AAVE supports the overall storytelling effect.

The two sisters employ different varieties of language as means of expression. While Celie writes 70 letters in AAVE, Nettie writes 20 letters in Standard English. This indicates that Walker favors using AAVE as a way to communicate the thematic values of the novel. Further,

according to Hsiao (2008), Celie's letters are distinctive because they resemble spoken language as she captures other characters' dialogues, thus creating a sense of authenticity and rich characterization. This also highlights the importance of oral tradition for African American women who, not having access to education, turned to telling stories as a way to transfer their knowledge and creativity. The vernacular then becomes a vehicle for expressing themselves in opposition to the dominant language variety that is not their own. Celie continues using AAVE throughout the novel and does not change her dialect.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Negative concord

Already at the beginning of the novel, one of the most apparent features of AAVE emerges, which is the use of negative concord, also termed multiple negation and pleonastic negation. "The essential characteristic of negative concord sentences is the use of two or more negative morphemes to communicate a single negation" (Martin & Wolfram, 2022, p. 18). In other words, it implies the use of two or more forms of negation in a sentence but the sentence is understood as being negated once. While AAVE allows more than one negative morpheme in a negative sentence, Standard English employs only one in combination with negative polarity items (e.g. any, ever, anything).

According to the standard, it is ungrammatical to use multiple negation because, in logic, two negatives make a positive, so this would be illogical language use. However, as Pullum (1999) explains the grammar of negation is not the same in all languages and there are other dialects of English, both British and American, that use negative concord. "It is merely an accident that the negative-concord dialects of English today have a low-prestige class background" (Pullum, 1999, p. 49).

But I don't never git used to it (Walker, 2019, p. 3).

4.2. Negative inversion

AAVE allows negative declarative sentences in which the subject and auxiliary swap places, creating negative inversion sentences. As seen in the example below, such sentences begin with a negated auxiliary or modal accompanied by an indefinite subject (e.g. nobody, everybody, anybody). This feature, which bears witness to AAVE's regular syntactic principles, is not present in Standard English. In Standard English, the auxiliary is placed before the subject in interrogatives and not in declaratives. Negative inversion does not appear with all types of subject noun phrases. It is rare when the subject is a proper name or when the subject contains a definite or a possessive article (Pullum, 1999). This construction type is used because it appears more emphatic than non-inverted sentences.

Can't nobody tell 'em nothing even today (Walker, 2019, p. 248)

4.3. Aspectual markers: *be, been, done*

Green (2002) writes that AAVE uses preverbal markers *be*, remote past *been*, and unstressed *done* to talk about events, their beginning, progression, or completion. This means that AAVE has a unique way of expressing tense and aspect. Labov (2022) calls these aspectual markers "invariant forms, which are placed before the main verb of the sentence in the positions reserved for modals or aspectual markers in [other American dialects]" (p. 129). First, one of many examples of aspectual *be* from the novel will be presented:

By time I git back from the well, the water <u>be</u> warm. By time I git the tray ready the food <u>be</u> cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it <u>be</u> dinner time (Walker, 2019, p. 4).

Aspectual *be* or habitual *be* is "probably the most salient grammatical trait of AAVE, to the point of becoming a stereotype" (Wolfram, 2004, p.118). The usage of *be* is very specific, as it indicates that an event happens on a regular basis. This marker shows that AAVE has a way of signaling habituality that Standard English does not contain. In general English, the adverbs *usually* or *always* are employed to convey the same meaning.

The marker *been* places an activity or state in the remote past, thus the "keeping" in the sentence above began at some in the past and continues up to the moment of speaking. This marker can also be used for events that started and ended at some point in the remote past. *Been* is followed by verbs in the *–ing* and *–ed* forms (Green, 2002). Other than verbs, both *be* and *been* can also precede non-verbal predicates.

He <u>been</u> keeping your letters, say Shug (Walker, 2019, p. 109).

The aspectual marker *done* highlights the completed nature of an action. As observed in the example, *done* indicates that an event has ended but is relevant to the present. It precedes a verb in the *–ed* form. This form is pronounced with an unstressed syllable (dən) and is different from the past participle form of the verb *do* (Green, 2002). This aspectual marker is almost equivalent to Standard English forms with *has* or *have* and *already* but, unlike them, *done* cannot be used with negatives (Rickford & Rickford, 2000).

The woman he had helping him <u>done</u> quit. His mammy <u>done</u> said No More (Walker, 2019, p. 12).

4.4. Zero copula

Zero copula refers to the absence of an auxiliary verb. This feature also shows that the grammar of AAVE is systematic and rule-governed. It adds concision to speech. "Copula absence works off of the assumption that the receiver of the speech understands the copula tense is in the present or present progressive" (Lauture, 2020, p. 18). Despite the belief that AAVE involves the misuse of the copula, there are specific rules about when it can be omitted. The past tense copulas *was* and *were* cannot be deleted, as well as the first-person singular form (*I am*). The only copula forms that can be left out are *is* and *are* but there are restrictions for them, too. If these forms bear stress or are placed at the end of a sentence, they cannot be deleted. The contracted form of the copula (*what's, it's, that's*) cannot be deleted. Finally, the copula is not omitted if it is negated (Rickford & Rickford, 2000).

She happy, cause <u>he good</u> to her now (Walker, 2019, p. 3).

4.5. Subject-verb disagreement

Standard English calls for agreement between the subject and the verb in person and number. However, AAVE is different when it comes to the attachment of the verbal suffix –s and the conjugation of past and present *be* forms. Often AAVE speakers will omit the third-person singular suffix –s. Further, as seen in the example above, there is the regularization of present and past forms of conjugated be (Wolfram, 2004). This means that, in the present tense, AAVE uses the form *is* instead of *am* and *are*, while the past tense *be* becomes *was*. Instead of *doesn't*, the form *don't* is used for third person singular. Singular and plural verb forms may be identical. Additionally, stressed emphatic forms *do*, *was*, and *have* are invariant with singular and plural subjects (Green, 2002).

She got my eyes just like <u>they is</u> today (Walker, 2019, p. 15).

4.6. Ain't

In AAVE, *ain't* is a general preverbal negative that corresponds to the present tense of *be* + *not* and *have + not*. Wolfram (2004) states that this feature can be found in other vernacular varieties of English but AAVE is unlike them in generalizing the use of *ain't* for *didn't*, too. It is interesting to note that *ain't* and *don't* can be used with but to mean "only" or "no more than".

Us <u>ain't</u> never spoke. He duck his head. He <u>ain't</u> so bad looking (Walker, 2019, p. 24).

4.7. Phonological features

According to Thomas & Bailey (2015), the most prominent phonological features of AAVE are consonant cluster simplification, r-lessness, consonant replacement, and vowel deletion.

4.7.1. Consonant cluster simplification

This feature includes the loss of the final stop in a cluster of two consonants and the penultimate consonant in a cluster of three consonants. It is more common in unstressed than stressed syllables. Rickford & Rickford (2000) emphasize the rule that simplification can occur only if both (or all three) consonants are voiceless or voiced. If one of the consonants is voiced and the other is voiceless, the cluster cannot be simplified. In the example above, both /n/ and /d/ are voiced so the final consonant /d/ can be deleted from the word *and*. Thomas (2007) points out that final stop deletion when the following word begins with a vowel is more frequent in AAVE than in European American varieties.

She got sicker <u>an'</u> sicker (Walker, 2019, p. 4).

4.7.2. R-lessness

This commonly studied feature is also termed non-rhoticity. It concerns the absence of the sound /r/. It is most commonly omitted in unstressed syllables and in final and preconsonantal positions. The sound is generally retained in stressed positions. Intervocalic r-lessness, though possible, is not as common (Thomas & Biley, 2015). In the quote from the novel, /r/ is absent from the word *sir* so, using eye-dialect, the author has presented it as *suh*. It can also be observed that the word *no* is rendered as *naw*. This is a case when a diphthong is pronounced is a monophthong. This monophthongal pronunciation and r-lessness are also characteristic of southern white speech because of the plantation culture. However, as Thomas (2007) notes, AAVE speakers exhibit greater rates of r-lessness than cohort European Americans. This feature is also used less as social level increases and as the speaker adopts a more formal speaking style. It should also be noted that *linking r*, where the final *r* is pronounced when the following word begins with a vowel, is commonly absent in AAVE.

You want something gal? I say, <u>Naw Suh</u> (Walker, 2019, p. 16).

4.7.3. Consonant replacement

In AAVE, the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are affected by two processes. The first one is termed stopping, in which /θ/ is pronounced as a voiceless dental or alveolar stop and /ð/ as a voiced dental or alveolar stop. This occurs, for example, when *that* is pronounced as [dæt] (Thomas & Bailey, 2015). The second process is shown in the quote, where /θ/ and /ð/ are pronounced as [f] and [v], respectively. In several instances in the novel, *teeth* is rendered as *teefs*. The rules for replacing these sounds also depend on voicing because voiceless /θ/ can be replaced by voiceless sounds and voiced /ð/ with voiced ones.

Consonant replacement also applies to *G-dropping*. This practice refers to leaving out the final /g/ in a word ending in *–ing*. It is depicted in the conventional orthography by using an apostrophe instead of /g/, as in *anythin'*. Rickford & Rickford (2000) point out that this practice does not actually involve deletion but rather the replacement of a sound. A velar nasal [ŋ] is preplaced by an alveolar nasal [n].

Your skin. Your hair; Your <u>teefs</u>. Everyday it something else to make miration over (Walker, 2019, p. 19).

4.7.4 Vowel deletion

Vowels in initial unstressed syllables are often lost, such as in the word *about*. This deletion process can also include consonants in initial unstressed syllables, as in '*spect* instead of *expect* (Thomas & Bailey, 2015).

These phonetic absences, both vowel and consonant loss, add to the rhythmic quality of AAVE speech. Lauture (2020) explains that "These absences in many cases allow for one word to flow into the next without much effort or a chance for slipping up" (p. 19).

She <u>bout</u> ten thousand times more prettier then me (Walker, 2019, p. 8)

5. DISCUSSION

In this analysis, twelve short quotes from the novel have been scrutinized for characteristic features of AAVE. The first research question was answered by describing twelve aspects of AAVE grammar and phonology found in the protagonist's letters. This paper has

sought to include the most commonly studied features that are considered trademarks of AAVE. Walker has included many of the dialectal features. Therefore, the answer to the question "What linguistic features of AAVE found in sociolinguistic literature are present in the novel *The Color Purple*?" includes: negative concord, negative inversion, aspectual markers, zero copula, subject-verb disagreement, preverbal negative *ain't*, consonant cluster simplification, r-lessness, consonant replacement, and vowel deletion. However, it has been noticed that the preverbal marker *finna*, as described in Green (2002), was not present. This author explains that *finna* is short for *fixing to* and indicates an imminent event. Another construction that has not been found in the novel is the use of double and triple modals, as described in Rickford & Rickford (2000). The linguistic elements described in this analysis only scratch the surface of the richness and intricacies of AAVE. Needless to say, there are numerous other dialectal features that are lesser known, such as prosody (word stress, intonation, and rhythm). Such variables were not chosen for this analysis, considering that the corpus is a novel and such features are more difficult to describe and portray authentically in the written word.

There is variation among African Americans and "it should not be assumed that AAVE, or AAE in general, is monolithic for any variable" (Thomas, 2007, p. 451). Numerous pronunciation features in AAVE are regional or coincide with regional pronunciations. There are also certain differences between Southern rural versions of AAVE and urban AAVE. The use of completive *done* with the past tense of the verb is very common for Southern AAVE but rare in the urban version (Wolfram, 2004).

Further, it should be remembered that the features mentioned in the analysis are not always used. Speakers of AAVE might use them in one utterance and then switch dialects in the next. Pullum (1999) emphasizes that not all African Americans know AAVE because "knowing AAVE does not come free with either knowing American English or having African American ethnicity" (p. 53). They might use Standard English more than AAVE depending on their social status and environment. In other words, AAVE speakers are not always consistent with their use of the dialect. Alice Walker, too, does not employ dialectal features wherever possible. For example, in the sentence from the novel "You is a wonder to behold" (p. 219), the copula *is* could be freely omitted according to the rules of AAVE. Instead, Walker included a different

feature to indicate that AAVE speakers sometimes use is for plural or second person singular subjects.

Moreover, the use of certain features is affected by the age of the speaker. Wardaugh (2006) writes that there is a close connection between the use of multiple negation and social class and that the use of vernacular features decreases in formal contexts. These observations are relevant for the exploration of AAVE in "The Color Purple". The novel's protagonist is a poor African American woman living in rural Georgia in the first half of the 20th century. Since she rarely interacts with speakers from the upper class and does not participate in formal settings, she does not switch from the vernacular to Standard English.

It has been mentioned earlier in the paper that AAVE is often mocked in literature and the media. Speakers of other dialects might misunderstand certain features of AAVE, labeling them as ungrammatical and the speakers as unintelligent. They might not know, for example, that habitual *be* is used only in certain contexts and will imitate AAVE speakers inaccurately. However, when African American novelists such as Alice Walker employ AAVE in their work, the readers expect an authentic representation of the dialect since such writers are more likely to be attuned to the speech community's culture.

Campbell (2020) observes that Celie's language develops throughout the novel, which might indicate her increasing experience and linguistic competence. Though the use of AAVE features decreases, it should be stated that Celie does not completely forsake her vernacular in favor of Standard English. It is noticeable that her letters become longer, which means that she is less afraid to take up space and express herself through language. AAVE is the only language she knows and it is very personal to her, which she then utilizes to disclose her trauma and forbidden subjects. It becomes a form of rebellion against her oppressors. If she did not have the letters, Celie would have been rendered voiceless and invisible due to her inferior social and economic status. Already at the beginning of the novel, Celie understands that language and mobility are connected, as she reveals: "us know we got to be smart to git away" (Walker, 2019, p 10). Knowledge and language then become a means to escape from oppression, which was successfully achieved by Celie's sister. Nettie, unlike Celie, continues going to school and, thanks to her education, starts traveling and adopts Standard English. Nettie's letters are longer than her sister's, written in standard orthography, and without features of AAVE. According to

Tucker (1998), Nettie's letters lack intimacy and comfort because her language is dull and too correct. This means that Celie's dialect colors her letters with an authenticity that allows the readers to feel sympathy for the protagonist.

Fifer (1985) further states that one of the dialect's attractions is its ability to communicate primitive and childlike effects. "Language keeps Celie from the destructiveness that would be the natural result of her justified rage at her mistreatment" (p. 161). Even when she is describing terrible situations, her words reveal innocence, as in her using "boohoo" for crying. It is interesting to notice how Celie writes as she speaks, instead of consistently using standard orthography. Some examples of this include *neumonia* (pneumonia), *two berkulosis* (tuberculosis), *migration* (admiration), *spose* (suppose), and *diraer* (dhiarrea).

Thus, it can be said that employing AAVE in the novel contributes to the overall storytelling effect. Walker incorporates numerous dialectal features in this work but neglects others. Even though certain words are presented phonetically with an eye-dialect, it would not have been possible to render all utterances this way. The novelist must be selective with dialectal words for the sake of readability. Readers should also bear in mind that AAVE has not always been what it is today. Because this novel was published in 1982 and its story is set in the early 20th century, the language featured in it will naturally be different from today's version. Each generation of AAVE speakers will bring something different to the dialect and it will inevitably change, as all languages do.

PART II

6. Stereotypes

Stereotypes have a great influence on the perception of people we meet. A speaker will rely on their pre-existing views of social categories to evaluate and form opinions of their interlocutor. Language plays an important role in communicating stereotypes and prejudice. During an interaction, someone can make assumptions about the other person's social class, gender, race, level of education, and line of work simply based on the way they talk.

The act of stereotyping is defined as "attributing traits, characteristics and/or behaviours to a person on the virtue of shared and overgeneralized beliefs regarding the social groups she/he belongs to" (Deutschmann & Steinvall, 2020, p. 651). Further, De Klerk and Bosch (1995) write that a stereotype is "a socially shared belief that describes an attitude object in an oversimplified and undifferentiated manner, that is, the public opinion of society in general as contrasted with the opinion of each individual" (p.18). Though this behavior is natural and partly implicit, it can be the beginning of bias judgments. Stereotypes do not usually result from direct experience with people from a particular group, which means that they are not always based on reality. Instead, they develop from films, the media, and stories that are passed on for generations. When stereotypes become accepted in the mass media and personal interactions, they can morph into prejudice and lead to discrimination. According to Burgers and Beukeboom (2020), stereotypes are generalized impressions because the traits associated with one person are expected to apply to all members of that social category and to last across situations and over time. Therefore, they are commonly inaccurate because they overgeneralize and cause people to misevaluate their interlocutor.

Primary cues for stereotyping are language characteristics. Different language varieties are associated with various levels of social status. Rakić et al. (2011) explain that regional accents and nonstandard dialects are often related to lower socio-intellectual status. They have also found that people with regional accents are perceived as lower in competence and hirability than those who employ the standard language. In addition, people also have stereotyped ideas about voice, intonation, paralinguistic signs, phonology, vocabulary, and style (De Klerk & Bosch, 1995).

Language differences are very natural and bear witness to the multitude of dialects spoken by various cultural groups. However, the problem arises when such groups are unequal in a society. In that case, the stereotypes attributed to the dehumanized group are not harmless but rather maintained deliberately to keep the existing power relations. Giles and Rakić (2014) write that nonstandard speakers can be seen as downgraded compared to standard speakers on confidence, intelligence, and effectiveness as teachers. The authors then explain that such attitudes can be acquired very early in life and that they are based on complex connections among language, dialect, ethnicity, and social class. Further, in her book, Lippi-Green (1997) examines how language attitudes are revealed in children's animated films, with heroes typically employing the standard dialect and villains using some form of a nonstandard dialect. Such portrayals are considered problematic because children will learn to associate such dialects with negative characters and, if not taught otherwise, adopt negative attitudes towards nonstandard speakers.

Why are nonstandard dialects judged less favorably than standard dialects? According to Giles and Rakić (2014), it is not because of incomprehensibility, or the idea that nonstandard speakers are difficult to understand. It has been mentioned earlier that the standard has become associated with social prestige. People who speak differently from the standard are viewed negatively and often encouraged to "fix" their language. "Linguistic discrimination is in effect, but because the elite group perceives their language use as the only way of using language, language-based discrimination goes largely undetected, unaddressed, and dismissed" (Peterson, 2020). That is where the danger lies: a stereotype about someone's way of speaking can grow into language-based discrimination. This can have real-life consequences, as social marginalization and linguistic marginalization are related. Linguistic injustice can be observed in education, the justice system, job opportunities, and the housing market. Often, the dialect that is denigrated the most is AAVE.

7. AAVE Stereotypes

There is a multitude of stereotypes about AAVE speakers that primarily stem from the entertainment industry. Throughout the years, the media has presented this dialect as the slang of criminals or that it is merely the language of the poor who live in large cities. Lippi-Green (1997)

insists that linguists are partly responsible for language-focused stereotypes because since the 1960s most scholarly work on AAVE has centered on the inner-city poor. Accurate media representation is very important because for many people across the world the main or sometimes the only experience of African Americans comes through films and TV shows. Therefore, if only white, standard-speaking characters are presented as successful, the viewers might form negative attitudes about AAVE speakers. Even though the use of stereotypes in the media may sometimes be used for satirical effects, it is often the result of bias or laziness in characterization.

It has been mentioned earlier that judgments about a speaker can be made based on the way they speak. Lippi-Green (1997) expands on this issue by discussing linguistic profiling, which refers to the ability to identify someone's race or ethnicity on the basis of their voice alone. This phenomenon is relevant to AAVE because it can lead to discrimination if the interlocutor draws conclusions and uses ethnic stereotypes to mistreat AAVE speakers because of their race. Middle-class African Americans who are aware of negative perceptions of AAVE might see the vernacular as an obstacle to their success. Rahman (2008) observes that some African American professionals consider it advantageous to use Standard English when conducting business by phone because clients will then form opinions based only on verbal interaction. McWhorter (2017) attempts to explain why AAVE offends people:

> For black people, it's because Black English is so often associated with stupidity that one can't help wanting to disidentify from it. Especially when we are trained to avoid stereotyping, and because black people are often the object lessons, the idea of sounding black can bring minstrelsy and other caricatures to mind (p. 40).

This means that African Americans are aware of the negative stereotypes of AAVE and they know that it is viewed as less attractive and less prestigious than mainstream U.S. dialects. They might want to avoid fitting the ethnic stereotypes by forsaking AAVE to succeed in the larger culture. In this white-dominated culture, AAVE has been seen as an inferior dialect and its speakers are stereotyped as ignorant, lazy, and less sociable (Koch et al., 2001). AAVE is considered linguistically deficient and African American children are "described in the educational literature as 'verbally deprived', 'language impoverished' or 'linguistically retarded'" (Wolfram, 1998, p. 130).

Opinions about speakers of a certain dialect mirror the stereotypes about members of that community. Many of the characteristics associated with AAVE are also attributed to African Americans. It has been emphasized that not all African Americans use the vernacular but stereotypes about African Americans are also typically linked to AAVE speakers. Racist attitudes, individual or culturally centered, will then form negative stereotypes that are evoked by language features associated with African Americans. People implicitly associate weapons more with AAVE speakers than with standard speakers, which indicates common stereotypes about violence and criminality. According to Peterson (2020), African American people are more likely than white people to be arrested, sentenced to time in jail, put on trial, convicted, and punished for crimes in the U.S. This is relevant to the discussion about language because, as the author states, AAVE speakers' language is not understood in places of justice. Baugh (2015) describes such issues as linguistic bigotry because people who lack fluency in Standard English might be disadvantaged educationally, economically, occupationally, and even legally in the U.S. Kurinec and Weaver (2019) have found that dialect has an under-investigated role in the courtroom, as using AAVE is linked to negative evaluations of the speaker. This bias against AAVE speakers can potentially influence juror decision-making, leading to more guilty verdicts.

There are also fewer opportunities in housing and the job market for those who use AAVE. Professor John Baugh, who is African American, explained the overt discrimination he experienced when searching for an apartment in Palo Alto, California. While talking on the phone, he used Standard English and made appointments to see available apartments. However, upon meeting face-to-face with the landlords, they denied that appointments had been made.

> Since I used Standard English during the phone calls, I pondered the prospect that some housing discrimination might not be occurring during telephone conversations to members of ethnic or racial minority groups who could be identified as such by their speech alone. In other words, had I 'sounded black' I felt that I would have been denied an appointment from the outset (Baugh, 1996, p 170).

Many stereotypes attributed to AAVE speakers were created as an excuse to justify people's condemnation of the dialect. Members of the community might be described as lazy and ignorant for not taking the time to learn "proper English". As was noted in the previous chapter of this paper, African Americans might regard AAVE negatively and criticize others for using "bad

English". Garner and Rubin (1986) have found that Black professionals equated AAVE with the language of poor lower socioeconomic Black people who were not educated enough to "know better". Their informants also considered AAVE to lack grammatical rules and structure. Although they appreciated AAVE's expressiveness, they disapproved of those who did not know how to switch from the vernacular to Standard English.

7.1. Women and AAVE

It has been pointed out that an issue in the investigation of AAVE is that, for decades, it focused on data gathered from men and boys from inner cities. The African American male has been often considered the prototypical subject of study of AAVE, while women were seen as more "standard". Trudgill (1972) argues that men typically care more for covert prestige, while women use linguistic forms associated with the prestige standard. One of his explanations for this is that women's position in society is less secure than that of men so women have to signal and secure their social status linguistically. It seems that linguists' explanation for this difference suggests that women tend to be insecure and status-seeking. However, Calder and King (2020) maintain that African American women can outnumber their male counterparts in their degree of vernacular forms.

According to Morgan (2002), African American women and their language were largely ignored and misrepresented in the discourse:

> Scholarly references to the African American women involved in these men's lives, as well as the men's reported philosophies about women, set the stage for a one-dimensional and scathing generalization of black women that persists today. Even more troubling was the linguistic description of black women as surly and flagrant that actually mirrored sociology's relentless attack on black women's role in the black family (p. 85).

The author also writes that, regarding their language, African American women were reported as being overbearing, loud, emasculating, and bad-tempered. In the media, they have often been portrayed as sassy and sharp-tongued, with an exaggerated form of AAVE. Ilbury (2019) observes that society sees the typical African American as working-class, obnoxious, lacking empathy, and using the vernacular as the linguistic vehicle through which these traits can be enacted. This refers to the "angry black woman" stereotype, a well-established racial trope.

Societal attitudes towards African American women are a complex issue. Stereotypes attributed to their way of speaking are based on these women's roles and representations in society. This is also an issue of gender and racial justice since African American women are more impacted by unfavorable attitudes and stereotypes regarding their speech than men. They are "excluded both from the mainstream and from the ethnic centers of power. Some of these women are, moreover, thrice muted, on account of sexism, racism, and a 'tonguelessness' that results from prohibitions or language barriers" (Cheung, 1988, p. 163).

7.2. Men and AAVE

There are also unfavorable stereotypes attributed to men who employ AAVE. These speakers have been associated with organized crime, violence, slang, street talk, ignorance, aggression, and hypersexualization. They are generally perceived as strong but intellectually dull. Since male AAVE is linked to toughness and masculinity, members of other ethnicities may employ features of this dialect to appear more street-wise. This, of course, has adverse effects on AAVE speakers because it portrays them as hyperphysical and intimidating. "This stereotype has a direct effect on the Black community when Black men are killed by police officers who see them as inherently threatening based on these same racial stereotypes" (Petrov, 2021, p.11). It is worth mentioning here that African American men are just under six times more likely to be sentenced to time in jail than white men (Peterson, 2020).

Further, Foster (1995) notes that there are a disproportionate number of black male students assigned to special education, punished for disciplinary issues, and suspended from school. He suggests that this disproportionality happens "when educators use their conscious or unconscious racist or ethnocentric stereotypical beliefs about black males to interpret their black male students' streetcorner language and behavior" (p.40).

8. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this part of the thesis is to determine how stereotypes about African American Vernacular English are manifested in the novel *The Color Purple*. This will be a qualitative research study, with the same corpus as the research in the first chapter. The focus will be especially on attitudes about female AAVE speakers since the protagonist is an oppressed black woman living in the patriarchal South. Male characters will be discussed, as well, particularly regarding the common stereotype about violent AAVE speakers. The goal will be to explore whether Alice Walker perpetuates negative stereotypes in her novel or seeks to challenge the unfavorable attitudes towards African Americans in the U.S.

The following two research questions will be addressed in this analytical part:

RQ2: "What stereotypes are related to speakers of AAVE and how do they affect the members of this speech community?"

RQ3: "How does dialect in the novel *The Color Purple* delineate characters' cultural and social identity?"

9. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (Walker, 2019, p. 213).

Celie's husband, Mr. ___, uses these words to degrade his wife, reducing her existence to "nothing at all". Celie is poor, uneducated, and barely literate at the beginning of the novel. She is unattractive and, since her childhood, mistreated and molested by men in her life. Later, she is trapped in a loveless marriage that confines her to a stereotypical domestic female role. During this time, she seems to embody the "caretaker" stereotype attributed to African American women. This refers to women who are subservient, quiet, and depicted doing housework and taking care of children without any complaints. Celie is a social outcast, "not just a woman, she is a black woman; but she is not just a black woman, she is — as she later learns — a lesbian, and is, therefore, thrice removed from the white male heterosexual norm" (Walton, 1990, p. 65). This means that the protagonist is a victim of multiple hardships: race, class, and gender oppression. Thus, even within her own community, she is not free but burdened with negative stereotypes, dismissed as unintelligent and ugly.

Though largely considered a classic of American literature, the novel and its 1985 movie adaptation received intense opposition for negatively portraying black people in the media. One of the critics, Harris (1984), maintains that the novel is damaging to the African American community, as it reinforces racist stereotypes. She writes:

The book simply added a freshness to many of the ideas circulating in the popular culture and captured in racist literature that suggested that black people have no morality when it comes to sexuality, that black family structure is weak if existent at all, that black men abuse black women, and that black women who may appear to be churchgoers are really lewd and lascivious. The novel gives validity to all the white racist's notions of pathology in black communities. For these spectator readers, black fathers and father-figures are viewed as being immoral, sexually unrestrained (p. 157).

Undoubtedly, there is evidence of Walker's cruel portrayal of men. The novel's male characters, Alphonso, Mr. ___, Harpo, and Celie's stepfather, consider women in the family as their possessions so they treat them with little respect. The beginning of the novel presents the

subjugation of girl children within a family: "a girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker, 2019, p. 42) Readers were alarmed at this stereotypical account of black men as thieves, oppressors, and rapists, which is in line with the negative attitudes outlined in this paper's previous section. In his article, Watkins (1986) criticized Walker for not showing positive images of African Americans and for "exposing aspects of inner-community life that might reinforce damaging racial stereotypes already proffered by racist antagonists". Clearly, there have been worries that upon reading the novel, people outside the community might adopt harmful attitudes towards African Americans and, with that, AAVE since it is linked to the characters. However, the major male characters experience redemption. Celie and Mr.___ become friends towards the end of the novel. Instead of a one-dimensional uncaring villain, he becomes more complex and sensitive, thus ultimately defying the overly-masculine stereotype.

Bobo (1989) disagrees with the novel's critics, stating that black women have mostly defended Alice Walker because they can identify with many of the characters and events in the novel. After all, the author has based her writing on her family's history. Black women have been silenced and denied education so the characters can be connected to black women's history and real-life experiences. With this in mind, the novel helps African American women to break out of the societal mold and reject the stereotype of obedient, silent victims.

The novel also deals with the societal pressure on African Americans to forsake AAVE and adopt Standard English. This is related to the stereotype that the vernacular keeps its speakers low on the social ladder and unable to become successful due to their language. Nettie, who has adopted a new dialect, becomes educated, and independent, then starts a new life abroad. As mentioned previously, Celie recognizes that language and mobility are connected, that she has to study to get away from her home. However, their father forbade Celie from furthering her education, claiming she was not intelligent enough. Later in the story, Celie inherits a house, builds a career, and supports herself as a seamstress, yet still retains her AAVE. She explains how she was urged by another character, Darlene, to adopt a new way of speaking to sound "educated": "She say us not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say us where most folks say we, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse" (Walker, 2019, p. 221). The quote reveals negative attitudes towards the vernacular, coming both from white and black people. White people, as Darlene states, find

AAVE funny. This can be linked to the parodies of AAVE mentioned in the previous chapter. It is a clear demonstration of the stereotype that success and intelligence cannot be attributed to AAVE speakers and that they should feel ashamed of their speech. Ultimately, Celie does not adopt Standard English, reasoning that changing her natural speech would be strange.

Since the novel focuses on Celie and her personal struggles, there is no explicit discussion of race. The novel does highlight the plight of being a black woman under patriarchy but the readers are not shown the relationship between black and white characters. Not many white characters are portrayed, except for the town mayor and his family. "Black culture is presented largely as a closed system, only touching on white culture when absolutely necessary, usually as an unreasonable and unreasoning source of violent authority" (Donnelly, 2009, p. 94). The contact between the two racial groups is illustrated through the descriptions of Sofia's imprisonment. This female character suffers social injustice after refusing to respect the authority of the mayor's wife. Through this event, Walker depicts how those in power require the subjugated to speak and behave in a way that reaffirms the imbalance between the two communities. Morgan (2002) explains that in the South until the 1960s African Americans had to remain respectful while talking to white people and give verbal or physical confirmation, such as bowing their heads or saying "Yes sir/ma'am". Moreover, they could not initiate verbal interactions with white people. Such interactions were regulated and though the policy was unwritten, it was protected by the legal system. This means that an African American had to obey communicative rules that perpetuated the superiority of the white interlocutor. In the following quote, Celie explains what happened to Sofia when she refused to be subservient to the white mayor's wife: "When I see Sofia I don't know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot" (Walker, 2019, p. 92).

In the end, Celie transcends the limitations placed upon her due to her gender and social status. She fights for herself, learns self-acceptance, and retains her natural way of speaking: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Walker, 2019, p. 214).

The second research question "What stereotypes are related to speakers of AAVE and how do they affect the members of this speech community?" was answered in this analysis. The

novel demonstrates that one of the most prevalent stereotypes about AAVE speakers is that they are unintelligent, lazy, and unable to achieve success. Their dialect, deemed inferior to Standard English, is amusing to white people. Further, it has been explained that it is believed that AAVE speakers cannot achieve success if they retain their vernacular, so they are urged to eradicate it. Walker demonstrates how disapproval of AAVE stems even from inside the community. Darlene warns Celie that she will be perceived as "dumb" and urges her to change her way of speaking if she wants to grow her business. Darlene also tells her that she will not feel ashamed to go anywhere if she "talks proper". This is connected to the "linguistic push-pull" mentioned in the theoretical part. Adopting the standard variety is considered the key to upward mobility but, at the same time, it means surrendering one's cultural identity and connection with the community. Walker deconstructs this stereotype, showing how Celie becomes successful and independent while proudly retaining her vernacular.

The third research question was "How does dialect in the novel *The Color Purple* delineate characters' cultural and social identity?". While reading Celie's letters, readers understand her language as a representation of AAVE. It serves to depict her racial and cultural status. "The writing-speech signifies marginality and difference, allowing Celie to describe the oppressive conditions under which she lives and inviting the readers to analyze and interpret those descriptions" (Butler-Evans, 1989, p. 164). Walker adopts AAVE to convey authenticity, to delineate Celie's identity as an African American woman living in Georgia in the early 20th century. It was stated in the theoretical part that the author uses eye dialect and deviant spelling to show Celie's lack of education. The dialect aids the storytelling effect, as the story would not seem as authentic if Celie used Standard English to write her letters. Finally, Celie herself writes that her vernacular is a part of her identity and changing it would not make sense: "Look like to me only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind" (Walker, 2019, p. 223).

Walker does not disparage AAVE in her novel but elevates it. She gives a lot of space to Celie and her AAVE, rather than Standard English. Celie's dialect is the first feature that the readers notice and it is inseparable from her character. Instead of succumbing to external pressure to change it, she prefers her vernacular to the standard until the end. AAVE becomes a vehicle for self-expression and obtaining a voice in an oppressive society. Despite the negative social

connotations of this dialect, the author skillfully demonstrates that it is valuable and powerful, instead of something to be ashamed of. Though Walker's use of language might be difficult to grasp at first, the readers will soon understand that it is indeed necessary for conveying the novel's message. Hsiao (2008) writes that such style "enlivens the reading experience of the novel. Although for the general public's benefit Walker has made some modifications to the dialect, her primary concern is to preserve the black cultural heritage and to challenge the superiority of Standard English" (p. 113) This author further observes that critics generally have a lower opinion of Nettie's letters. Even though her letters adhere to the rules of Standard English, they do not feel as authentic as Celie's letters do. Walker's novel bears witness to the richness of AAVE and challenges the stereotypes that this dialect is merely "broken English". Instead, the readers learn that it is both a rule-governed means of communication and a vibrant literary language. It becomes clear that such works of art are important because they feature the voices of the oppressed, whose speech, downgraded as unimportant and incorrect, has rarely been written about. Because of characters like Celie, the global readership can become more acquainted with AAVE.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the main characteristics of African American Vernacular English and societal attitudes attributed to it through the analysis of Alice Walker's novel "The Color Purple". The first part examined the definition and origin of AAVE, as well as some grammatical and phonological characteristics of the dialect. It was concluded that AAVE is a systematic and rule-governed dialect of English, rather than slang or broken English. It was also explained that language subordination has social connections because speakers of nonstandard dialects are discriminated on the basis of language. They are promised social mobility and success if they assimilate into the standard linguistic norms. This judgment that a nonstandard dialect indicates ignorance is depicted in the novel.

The paper also clarified who the speakers of this dialect are. It should be recognized that AAVE is not spoken by all African Americans. There is regional variation, and the use of the dialect depends on the speaker's age, gender, education, social and economic background. Speakers of AAVE do not employ it in all situations, as they code-switch depending on their interlocutor, level of formality, and the setting.

The second part described the most common stereotypes associated with AAVE. There are many negative attitudes towards its speakers, which are most commonly beliefs about criminality, low social status, and the lack of education. It is mentioned in the novel that because of her speech, the protagonist sounds like a "hick", uneducated and unintelligent. Because she refuses to forsake AAVE and adopt the socially prestigious Standard English, Celie can be understood as an example of linguistic pride and resistance to prejudice. There have been complaints about Walker's portrayal of African American characters and such criticisms will most likely continue in the future. However, it is beyond question that the author has created a convincing protagonist whose speech provides an understanding of the most salient features of AAVE. The dialect becomes a means of empowerment and voicing through which the character communicates her plight. Works like this are also highly relevant due to their social commentary, especially pertaining to the marginalization of African American women by other members of their community and the wider, white-dominated society.

This thesis can serve as a source of information about AAVE and how it is perceived in comparison to Standard English. It may also be used for comparison when investigating

linguistic features or stereotypes in other literary works that include the use of AAVE. An interesting subject for further investigation would be the portrayal of AAVE in shows and movies, particularly in children's cartoons and how dialect-speaking characters are presented. Such studies could explore if any stereotypes are attributed to AAVE speakers. It has been mentioned in this paper that the media is partly responsible for negative views of AAVE not just in the U.S. but also globally. Further, investigating the translation of literary dialect or AAVE in the media could provide helpful solutions for rendering the dialect into a target language.

11. REFERENCES

Baugh, J. (2000). *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bobo, J. (1989). Sifting Through the Controversy: Reading The Color Purple. *Callaloo*, 39, 332–342. https://doi.org/10.2307/2931568

Baugh, J. (1996). Perceptions within a variable paradigm: Black and white detection and identification based on speech. In E.W. Schneider (Ed.), *Focus on the USA* (pp. 169-183). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Baugh, J. (2015). SWB (Speaking while Black): Linguistic Profiling and Discrimination Based on Speech as a Surrogate for Race against Speakers of African American Vernacular English. In S. Lanehart (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* (pp. 755-773). Oxford University Press.

Belmerabet, F. (2018) *Towards a New Representational Linguistic Paradigm: Literary Dialect in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*. PhD thesis. University of Tlemcen. Available at: https://independent.academia.edu/FatihaBelmerabet

Bucholtz, M. (1999). *You da Man: Narrating the Racial Other in the Linguistic Production of White Masculinity*. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 3(4):443-460.

Burgers, C., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2020). How Language Contributes to Stereotype Formation: Combined Effects of Label Types and Negation Use in Behavior Descriptions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 39(4), 438–456. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20933320

Butler-Evans, E. (1989). *Race, Gender, and Desire*. Temple University Press.

Calder, J. & King, S. (2020). Intersections between Race, Place, and Gender in the Production of /s/. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*, 26(2), 28-38.

Campbell, M. R. (2020). *Lavender, Lilac, and Language: A Study of Linguistic Variation in Alice Walker's The Color Purple* [Master's thesis, Sam Houston State University]. SHSU. https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11875/2896

Cheung, K.-K. (1988). "Don't Tell": Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior. *PMLA*, 103(2), 162–174. https://doi.org/10.2307/462432

Cutler, C. A. (1999). Yorkville Crossing: White tens, hip hop and African American English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 3(4): 428-442.

De Klerk, V. & Bosch, B. (1995). Linguistic stereotypes: nice accent — nice person?. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1995(116), 17-38. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1995.116.17

Deutschmann, M. & Steinvall, A. (2020). Combatting Linguistic Stereotyping and Prejudice by Evoking Stereotypes. *Open Linguistics*, 6(1), 651-671. https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2020-0036

Donnelly, M. (2009). *Alice Walker: The Color Purple and Other Works*. Cavendish Square.

Doss, R. C., & Gross, A. M. (1992). The Effects of Black English on Stereotyping in Intraracial Perceptions. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 18(2), 47–58.

Eble, C. (2004). Slang. In E Finegan, & J. R. Rickford (Eds.), *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 375-387). Cambridge University Press.

Fifer, E. (1985). The Dialect & Letters of "The Color Purple". In C. Rainwater & W. J. Scheick (Eds.), *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies* (pp.155-165). The University Press of Kentucky.

Filmer, A.A. (2003). African-American Vernacular English: Ethics, Ideology, and Pedagogy in the Conflict between Identity and Power. *World Englishes*, 22, 253-270.

Foster, H. L. (1995). Educators' and Non-Educators' Perceptions of Black Males: A Survey. *Journal of African American Men*, 1(2), 37–70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819282

Garner, T., & Rubin, D. L. (1986). Middle Class Blacks' Perceptions of Dialect and Style Shifting: The Case of Southern Attorneys. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 5(1), 33–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X8651003

Giles, H. & Rakić, T. (2014). Language Attitudes: Social Determinants and Consequences of Language Variation. In T. M. Holtgraves (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* (pp. 11-26). Oxford University Press.

Green, L. (2002). *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Green, L. (2004). African American English. In E Finegan, & J. R. Rickford (Eds.), *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 76-91). Cambridge University Press.

Hall, H. (2020) *Speaker into Specimen: The Representation of Dialect in Victorian Fiction.* Undergraduate Honors Thesis. Paper 1535. Available at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/1535

Harris Abrams, P. (1985). The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's The Color Purple. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 1, 8.

Harris, T. (1984). On The Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence. *Black American Literature Forum*, 18(4), 155–161.

Hsiao, P. (2008). Language, Gender, and Power in "The Color Purple": Theories and Approaches. *Feng Chia Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 17, 93-120.

Ilbury, C. (2020). "Sassy Queens": Stylistic orthographic variation in Twitter and the enregisterment of AAVE. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24, 245-264.

Ives, S. (1971). A theory of literary dialect. In J. Williamson & V. Burke (Eds.), *A various language* (pp. 145–177). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Jaffe, A., & Walton, S. (2000). The voices people read: Orthography and the representation of non-standard speech. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4 (4), 561-587

Koch, L. M., Gross, A. M., & Kolts, R. (2001). Attitudes Toward Black English and Code Switching. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 27(1), 29–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798401027001002

Kurinec, C.A., & Weaver, C.A. (2019). Dialect on trial: use of African American Vernacular English influences juror appraisals*. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 25, 803 - 828.

Labov, W. (2022). Co-existent systems in African-American vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey & J. Baugh (Eds.). *African-American English: Structure, History, and Use* (pp. 119-169). Routledge.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, W. (2012). *Dialect Diversity in America: The Politics of Language Change*. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press.

LaGrone, K. (2009). Introduction: To Follow the Hero's Journey. In K. LaGrone (Ed.), *Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'* (pp. xii-xxvi). New York: Rodopi.

Lanehart, S. (Ed). (2015). *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*. Oxford University Press.

Lauture, C. (2020). *African American Vernacular English: A Language Necessarily Adorned*. BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects. Item 334. Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/334

Lippi-Green, R. (2011). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States.* London: Routledge.

Martin, S., & Wolfram, W. (2022). The sentence in African-American vernacular English. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey & J. Baugh (Eds.). *African-American English: Structure, History, and Use* (pp. 11-41). Routledge.

McWhorter, J. (2001). *Word On The Street: Debunking The Myth Of A Pure Standard English.* Basic Books.

McWhorter, J. (2016). *Talking Back, Talking Black: Truths About America's Lingua Franca*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press.

Mesthrie, R. (Ed.). (2011). *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press.

Milroy, J. & Milroy, L. (2012). *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*. 4th ed. Routledge.

Minnick, L. C. (2007). *Dialect and Dichotomy: Literary Representations of African American Speech*. University of Alabama Press.

Morgan, M. (2002). *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

Morgan, M. (1994). Theories and Politics in African American English. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23, 325–345.

Ogbu, J. U. (1999). Beyond Language: Ebonics, Proper English, and Identity in a Black-American Speech Community. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 147–184.

Peterson, E. (2020). *Making Sense of "Bad English": An Introduction to Language Attitudes and Ideologies*. Routledge.

Petrov, T. (2021). *Appropriation vs. Authenticity: The Use of Black Vernacular English by White Speakers.* Undergraduate Thesis. Suffolk University. Available at: https://dc.suffolk.edu/undergrad/16/

Pullum, G. (1999). African American vernacular English is not Standard English with mistakes. In R. S. Wheeler (Ed.). *The Workings of Language: From Prescriptions to Perspectives* (pp. 39-58). Westport CT: Praeger.

Rahman, J. (2012). The N Word: Its History and Use in the African American Community. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 40(2), 137–171.

RAHMAN, J. (2008). MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICANS: REACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH. *American speech*, 83(2), 141-176.

Rakić, T., Steffens, M. C., & Mummendey, A. (2011). When it matters how you pronounce it: the influence of regional accents on job interview outcome. *British journal of psychology* (London, England : 1953), 102(4), 868–883.

Reyes, A. (2005). Appropriation of African American slang by Asian American youth. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(4): 509-532.

Rickford, J.R. (1992). Grammatical variation and divergence in Vernacular Black English. In M. Gerritsen & D. Stein (Eds.). *Internal and External Factors in Syntactic Change* (pp. 175-200). Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.

Rickford, J. R. & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English.* Wiley.

Roden, M. (1999). Alice Walker. In E.S. Nelson (Ed.). *Contemporary African American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Selzer, L. (2008). Race and Domesticity in "The Color Purple". In H. Bloom (Ed.). *Alice Walker's "The Color Purple"* (pp. 125-145). Bloom's Literary Criticism.

Shorrocks G. (1996). Non-standard dialect literature and popular culture. In J. Klemola, M. Kyto, & M. Rissanen (Eds.). *Speech Past and Present: Studies in English Dialectology in Memory of Ossi Ihalainen* (pp. 385-411). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Smitherman, G. (2006). *Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans*. London: Routledge.

Speicher, B. L., & Seane M. McMahon. (1992). Some African-American Perspectives on Black English Vernacular. *Language in Society*, 21(3), 383–407. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4168367

Stockwell, P. (2020). Literary dialect as social deixis. *Language and Literature*, 29(4), 358–372.

Thomas, E.R. (2007). Phonological and Phonetic Characteristics of African American Vernacular English. *Lang. Linguistics Compass*, 1, 450-475.

Thomas, E. R. & Bailey, G. (2015). Segmental Phonology of African American English. In S. Lanehart. (Ed). *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language* (pp. 403-420). Oxford University Press.

Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Stilwell Peccei, J., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J. (2004). *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction.* 2nd ed. Routledge.

Trudgill, P. (1995). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. 3rd ed. England: Penguin Books.

Trudgill, P. (1972). Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich. *Language in Society*, 1(2), 179–195. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4166683

Trudgill, P. (1992). *Introducing Language and Society.* Harmondsworth: Penguin English.

Tucker, L. (1988). Alice Walker's The Color Purple: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text. *Black American Literature Forum*, 22(1), 81–95.

Walker, A. (2019). *The Color Purple*. New York: Penguin Books.

Walton, P. L. (1990). "What's She Got to Sing About?": Comedy and "The Color Purple". *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 21(2), 59-75.

Wardaugh, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 5th ed, Blackwell Publishing.

Watking, M. (1986, June 15). *Sexism, racism and black women writers*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/15/books/sexism-racism-and-black-women-writers.html

Wolfram, W. (1998). MYTH 13: Black Children are Verbally Deprived. In L. Bauer & P. Trudgill (Eds.) *Language Myths* (pp.130-140). Penguin Books.

Wolfram, W. (2004). The Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English. In E. W. Schneider & B. Kortmann (Eds.). *A Handbook of Varieties of English: Morphology and syntax* (pp. 111–132). De Gruyter Mouton.

Wolfram, W. & Thomas, E. R. (2002). *The Development of African American English*. 1st ed. Wiley-Blackwell.

Wolfram, H. and Schilling, N. (2015). *American English: Dialects and Variation*. 3rd ed. Wiley-Blackwell.

Young, V. A. (2007). *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*. Wayne State University Press.

Zanger, J. (1966). LITERARY DIALECT AND SOCIAL CHANGE. *American Studies*, 7(2), 40–48. Retrieved from https://journals.ku.edu/amsj/article/view/2203