How Does African American Vernacular (AAVE) Affect AAVE Speakers at the University?
Jessica Taylor

EVOKE

About the Ethnographer
I am a middle class African American female from Bellwood a West suburb of Chicago. My major is speech and hearing science.

EXPLORE

Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?

How does African American Vernacular English (AAVE) effect the experiences of African American students who identify as AAVE speakers at the University level (in all settings)?

Subquestions?

- What are the opinions of African Americans who do not identify as AAVE on AAVE and those who speak it?

- What is considered to be AAVE (Ebonics)

- What is demographic background of the students I speak with?

Plan

How will you go about answering your inquiry?
How will you go about answering your inquiry

Interview questions????

What is African American Vernacular English (AAVE) also known as Ebonics to you? (please provide some examples you have heard)

Do you self identify as being an AAVE speaker? If yes when and where do you speak AAVE?

Do you hear people speaking AAVE and if so in what instances?

Does AAVE provide you with a sense of community or connection with others in your cultural when spoken with other AAVE speakers?
When and if do you or should you use AAVE?

Is code switching appropriate in academic surroundings?

Are there any situations in the classroom where you can use AAVE? If so how diverse is the class?

Was or is AAVE commonly spoken in your household? How about at your high school?

Where did you grow up (urban/rural)? What type of high school (private/public and diversity) did you attend?

What is your perception of the AAVE in comparison to Standard American English?

**OBSERVE**

**What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

When looking over my sub questions I realized my intent to gather demographic information on the students in which I have not gather as much useful information as I originally planned. What I have gathered is information about is the area in which the interviewee grew up urban or rural and the name of the town/city if provided along with information regarding the school private/public and diversity of school. Although I would have hope to see if socioeconomic status played apart in the usage of AAVE it is a little out of the scope of my research. However, the information that I did gather in regards to the area in which the interviewees grew up there seems to be the same consensus across the board that it is necessary to code switch and kind of monitor the usage of AAVE. I have not interviewed anyone who grew up in a rural area which may have affect my results although I am unsure if would or not. I really just need to review over all the interviews and make sure there is no connection that I am missing or discrepency in what I have found thus far.

In reviewing my fieldnotes and surveys I have found some various themes throughout my research. The first theme is that the students as well as the faculty at this University understand the need for code switching. All of the interviewees stated in some fashion that in order to be successful in academia as well as the business world that one would need to be able to control their usage of African American Vernacular English. In their opinions using AAVE in such surroundings could be damaging to one’s success or someone’s opinion of you which leads me into the second theme. The second theme that I found while conducting my research was all the interviewees stated that AAVE is not always accepted in the sense that some people in society may think less of someone who uses AAVE. The words that were most commonly used to describe how some would view a person using AVVE were “dumb”, “stupid”, and “ignorant”. Many of the students it was important that you know when and where to use AAVE. The problem was not necessarily that you use AAVE but more so the environment it is used in.

The third theme that I seemed to find was that all of the interviewees did not have an
accurate perception of what AVVE really was. In providing me with examples of AAVE the vast majority used some form of slang and talk in what would probably be considered to most as a “ghetto” tone. In addition to the “ghetto” talking there were some mannerism that were accompanied with it such as head jerking, exaggerated hand movements, and rolling of the neck. However, it the examples of AAVE that I heard there were many who demonstrated the use of the “habitual be” which is an actual governed rule of AAVE.

The misconception of what AAVE really is makes me wonder if one can really have an accurate perception of due to their lack of being able to define it properly. Furthermore, I believe that many of the students as well as faculty have all been in some way touch or tainted by European beliefs that Standard American English is the proper and correct form of speaking. No one referred to AAVE as a dialect which is what AAVE is. There seems to be a disconnect in the idea that AAVE is a dialect the same way we have other various dialects that do not necessarily have the same social stigma.

There was a fourth theme in which AAVE was not consciously used in terms of a person saying 'I am going to speak AAVE now’. It was not as if AAVE was used on purpose and sought to be spoken but however a level of comfort. I noticed it was stated many times that AAVE is spoken when you are in a comfortable setting around people usually friends that you are comfortable with. In the case of African Americans speaking AAVE it isn’t spoken to fit in. Although, the majority of interviewees did state that AAVE is spoken due to comfort level there were 2 people whom I interviewed that discussed speaking AAVE in terms of trying to fit in for both or in order to get a message across and make others comfortable. I t was stated by the one respondent that her beliefs are that a family member speaks AAVE in order to fit in with friends and that whenever the interviewee used to speak AAVE it was to make the person in which she was speaking to mire comfortable. The other interviewee stated the people from other races might speak AAVE in order to be cool.

There was a fifth theme that I also noticed, that interviewees calimed that speaking AAVE did not affect their experiences at the University (primarily because it it monitored and not used certain settings.) I believe that it correlates into the idea of using AAVE with friends and family and the level of comfort with the person who your are engaing in the conversation. I think that the college experience here at the university is not really affected by one's usage of AAVE because many of the students have mastered the art of code switching and stoping their usage of AAVE in certain settings.

In paying close attention to the conversations held amongst African American students in groups ranging from 3 all the way to 9 I have noticed some things. A lot of the conversation is filled with slang and improper usage of grammar. It not so much that the dialect is African American English. I have found that the majority of all of those interviewed have an incorrect understanding of what AAVE is. They tend to associate the tone with African American english. I do not want to make stereotypes of any sort but in asking people to provide me with examples of what AVVE they use slang, improper usage of grammar that do not fall under the rules that govern AAVE, and a tone that they would refer to as ghetto. I noticed that the tone is changed a lot, becoming more harsh and abrupt when describing AAVE.
In one specific event in a lounge at a cultural house on general conversation with friends or peers the majority of the people included in the discussion used AAVE but more so used slang. Everyone seemed to be comfortable and engaged in the conversation that ranged from relationships to class work. I found them to be very engaging and open.

Another side note, I have also discussed my research in saying that I have been conducting interviews on AAVE and it has brought up interesting conversation among students about AAVE and who they feels uses it and so how they might deny it etc.

My interviews are coming along very well. I am finding a similarity among all those that I am interviewing which was somewhat expected. The interviews have been essential to my research in providing me insight on how students and even some faculty at the University of Illinois feel about AAVE. It is also important in determining how the general student body defines AAVE. What I have found that is interesting to note is the usage of AAVE in the interviews. Many of the participants spoke AAVE during the interview. Many of the people I am speaking with do not necessarily find speaking AAVE wrong however, realize there is a time and a place for its usage. Furthermore, it is noted in all of the interviews how speaking AAVE is related to one's comfort level with the person they are engaging in conversation with. What I found more interesting is that one person found their usage of AAVE to be dependent on the other person communication and comfort level; better stated as if proper english were used the other person would not feel comfortable or would have more difficulty comprehending the conversation. I am plan to interview a different target group of students which I believe will add a different outlook and perspective. Listening to the responses of those that I do interview leads me to have further questions that are somewhat within the scope of my research. All in all the interviews have been a great component of the my research thus far.

DISCUSS

Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data

Does your dialect or way of speaking change your experiences or other’s opinion of you? For my research I have chosen to explore African American Vernacular English (AAVE) at the University level. There were many reasons as to why AAVE was my focus however the main motive was, I have not seen any research regarding AAVE speakers and usage in secondary education. Furthermore, I was interested in finding out if and how speaking AAVE could effect the experiences of AAVE speakers at the University of Illinois. There is much discussion and literature of AAVE in childhood or elementary ages and even in the workforce but I haven’t found any regarding AAVE in higher education. The main question that I sought to answer was how does AAVE effect the experiences of African American students who identify as AAVE speakers at the University level, in all settings? I asked three additional subsidiary questions: How do those who do not identify as AAVE speaker feel about AAVE and those who speak it? How do African Americans and staff members define AAVE? What is demographic the background of the students and staff members I speak with? In asking the subsidiary question I hoped to get closer to answering my main question. It is important to
acknowledge that AAVE is present at the university level. Previous studies have shown that society does judge individuals by their accents or dialects that they speak. Furthermore, some dialects such as AAVE are associated with negative assumptions, judgments, and stereotypes. Therefore, it is critical to explore what types of effects speaking AAVE can have on a student at a University.

In reviewing the literature on AAVE I had difficulty finding any articles and studies that pertained specifically to AAVE usage in college or among college students. Therefore, I looked at articles that focused more on AAVE perceptions and stereotypes that discussed AAVE and its users. Carglie, Rich, and Rodriguez (2004) sought to answer if the strength of a speaker’s accent, in particular phonological features AAVE, influence judgments that listeners make about them. The study consisted of brief recorded definition of ‘achievement motivation’ from six female speakers. The amount of phonological features present in each recording was used to categorize the speakers by varying degrees of AAVE such as “strong”, “moderate” and Mainstream U.S English (MUSE). The study recruited 283 undergraduates from Western urban university to participate in the study varying in ethnicity and gender. However, ethnicity was divided into two groups ethnic minority (African Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latino/a) and ethnic majority (Anglos). The articles findings displayed that the heavier the AAVE accent the lower the ratings for both attractiveness and status-possessing. In addition to answering their primary questions other findings were made. The “downgrading” of AAVE was linear in regards to number of phonological features of AAVE and ratings. In addition, listener ethnicity resulted in a bias in which MUSE and AAVE speakers were evaluated more favorable by those within their group. The articles results display how one dialect or accent effects other’s judgment or perception of that person. With prior knowledge of this phenomenon I hoped to see it displayed in my research.

The Treiman’s (2004) article on spelling and dialect examined if the phonological differences (primarily characteristics of AAVE, in particular final obstruent devoicing) spoken by Africans Americans and White speakers lead to different types of spelling errors in adults. The methodology consisted of eighty-seven African American and White college student participants. All were asked to spell a variety of words that were evaluated either an African American experimenter or White experimenter. The results displayed that voicing errors were more common with an African American experimenter rather than White. In addition there was an overall trend in which African American students produced more voicing errors than White students. However, the article mentioned how the African American experimenters were from Detroit and how it is typical of people from Detroit to devoice the final consonant similar to AAVE. It makes the study somewhat invalid due to the fact that the final consonant devoicing may have been a result of regional dialect and not a characteristic of AAVE. Although the article is interesting further research should be conducted within this subject. Acknowledging the study findings that characteristic of AAVE could possibly negatively impact the one’s spelling. It is worth noting if I any occurrence was shown in my research.

Filmer (2003) wrote and article and some of which included an auto/ethnographic account of her experiences. The article discusses how African American students struggle
to find a balance with AAVE and their self identity and power. The article reviews the critical race theory in addition to sociolinguistics and postcolonial studies. The article looks at AAVE and its usage from many different perspectives. Overall it is concluded that bidialectism is appropriate for students who want to succeed and do not speak Standard American English. Filmer believes that the main instruction in class should continue to be Standard American English with AAVE being primarily spoken at home and the community. The article does discuss the marginalization and stigma that is attached to AAVE and racial prejudice that is a result of speaking AAVE. The article provides great insight on AAVE and stigmas and struggles that students face with their dilemma in reference to AAVE. More interesting is that the author is that the author is from the Institute of Communication Research, at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Although most of the ethnographic portion is related to her time spent at UC Berkley it interesting to note that she deals with African Americans students at the University or Illinois and can visual the dilemmas that they may be facing.

As a senior majoring in speech and hearing science I have learned about and researched AAVE and may have knowledge of regarding the dialect that other students on campus may not have acquired. In order to understand the scope of my research, it is necessary to briefly define AAVE. AAVE was formerly known as Black Vernacular English commonly called Ebonics outside of the academic community. AAVE is a dialect of American English, and a rule governed system consisting of eight unique linguistic characteristics two of which are phonological feature and six grammatical features.

The methodology for my research consisted of nine interviews and three observations. The nine interviews were conducted with seven undergraduate students and two university staff. Of the seven undergraduate students two were males and four were with one being a junior and the remaining five were seniors. The staff members were both females. All of the interviewees were African American. I held my observations in one of the four cultural centers on campus. There was generally a crowd of three to nine people varying and gender, mainly upperclassmen including some graduate students.

In conducting my first interview I was nervous and apprehensive I kept thinking to myself to recall all the readings from class. I thought of how to introduce my research being very conscious not to provide more information than need or let on to any of my feelings on the topic. I conducted my interview with Bonita Jackson a senior in journalism. We have common friends and have been out together in rather large groups. Although I was familiar with Bonita I was rather concerned if knowing each other would alter any of her answers to the survey. I happened to see Bonita in one of the cultural centers on campus and asked if she was interested in participating in an interview. Bonita responded energetically saying yes because as a journalism student she understood what it was like to have to do interviews. Bonita asked the topic of the interview. I responded causally saying Ebonics and the university. She eagerly sat down and we began the interview. Bonita was filled with a lot of energy that carried over into her answers to my questions. While conducting the interview I noticed she was speaking AAVE. Bonita was not ashamed or bashful to say what was on her mind stating that she identifies as an AAVE speaker. Bonita explained that AAVE was nothing something you consciously
thought to do, it comes out when one is comfortable. I found her idea of AAVE usage as a matter of comfort to be a common trend among all interviewees. Bonita rambled on and on but one thing in particular caught my attention. She mentioned that she would even speak AAVE in conversation with white people. The idea of comfort was taken to an entirely different aspect. It did not matter to Bonita which ethnic group and individual belonged too, as long as he was comfortable she would speak AAVE.

As I was lingering around in one of the cultural houses I asked one of the staff members Imani Duluth, if I could interview her. Imani responded humorously asking what the interview was pertaining to. Once hearing the subject matter I noticed a serious but slightly disturbed feeling come over her. Immediately I thought that she was against AAVE accompanied with negative stereotypes of AAVE and its usage. Nevertheless, Imani agreed to the interview and schedule a time with me the next day. Entering her office for the interview I noticed the amount of clutter in her office. Papers were everywhere. The room was consumed and seemed smaller because of the larger amounts of paper. I was a little intimidated to sit down in fear that I might not knock something over. However, Imani was very welcoming and set me at ease. I had made so many assumptions of what Imani answers would be to my questions or her feelings in general which were mostly incorrect. Although there was a negative overtone and it was clear that Imani did not completely approve of AAVE she did accept it and its usage. Imani admitted that she has used AAVE but does not self identify as an AAVE speaker. Imani stated very calmly and sincerely of how she used AAVE with certain family members who primarily spoke AAVE. Using AAVE allowed her to effectively communicate with her family. In speaking Standard American English Imani concern was that her there would be miscommunication or her family would uncomfortable. Instantly, I began to look at AAVE a little differently. I never considered the fact that others may speak AAVE in order for communication to be easier or better understood. Imani also stated that her child spoke AAVE with her friends. She allowed it only because it was her child’s way of fitting in with her friends and in other situation her child would be corrected. It was very clear Imani believed AAVE is only acceptable in certain situations. As many others stated in their interviews she believed that in order to succeed in life especially in the professional world it is essential to speak Standard American English. Our interview came to an end and I departed wondering what her opinions are of the students she meets and interacts with who speak AAVE.

As I was working on my research in the cultural center, a student named of Susan asked what I was doing. Explaining that I was working on some research regarding AAVE at the university, I asked if she would be willing to participate in an interview. Susan agreed and we went into a different room to conduct the interview. I have seen Susan at the cultural center many times. She is relatively reserved but once she became comfortable or at ease with you she becomes more talkative and open. At this point in my research I was very aware of how I would speak in my interviews and what role it played in the interviewee’s response. Keeping that I in mind I started my interview speaking Standard American English. I spoke as if I were going on an interview, very well structured, and fluent sentences. I noticed that Susan spoke Standard American English as well. When asked what she considered AAVE Susan responded with “Slang is used by black people, other races use it, but it does not have the same meaning as black people.”
hesitant when saying she did use AAVE. Soon after saying she did use AAVE Susan explained that she did not speak it a lot, mainly at a friend’s house but never in public due to fear of seeming uneducated. Immediately I was shocked at her response, it was as if she were trying to explain her reasoning for using AAVE as if it were a bad thing. I contemplated whether or not it may have been in part by the way I speaking. If possible I may have been cresting some social pressure to speak Standard American English as if it were the “correct” way to speak. I immediately decided to change the style in which I was speaking. Conscious of the fact that it would be way to extreme to switch from Standard American English to AAVE in a second I used a more relaxed casual speech. Although, as I feared the damage had already been done, the interview remained the same. Something inside me said that Susan was holding back and being reserved and I could not help but feel I was o blame. During the remainder of the interview she made more comments regarding AAVE usage not being appropriate to use in the open only in closed settings. Susan stated that AAVE could be used in the classroom if depicting black students or acting out a party skit however not for a formal presentation. Enraged at this comment I pondered over what exactly Susan was trying to say. Is it ok to depict an African American student as using AAVE when depicting our characteristics, or in a party scene but not ok when we present work? I understood her reasoning behind not using AAVE within a presentation. However it is acceptable to depict African Americans as using AAVE when it is not acceptable use during a presentation? The answer to this is one that all of my interviewees touched upon which is related to the negative stereotypes associated with AAVE.

Feeling as though conducting my interview in Standard American English was a failure I decided to incorporate AAVE in my next interview. I interviewed Amber, a very tall, happy individual with a friendly and welcoming smile. Amber had a wide smile as she agreed to participate in the interview. As soon as I describe the topic she sat upright position and said in Standard American English with a slight imitation of a British accent “We are going to talk about Ebonics?” I realized her playful nature and assumed that the interview would go smoothly. I asking how she defined AAVE she replied as all the interviewees did mainly reporting slang instead of characteristics of AAVE. I found it interesting that she did not identify as and AAVE speaker but stated how when she was in Oak Park, Illinois her friends referred to her a spoke country and when in Chicago her family claimed she talked white. She did not elaborate on what “country” or “white” sounds like so I was left wondering what exactly was meant by that comment. I asked if she believed that AAVE speakers felt a connection when speaking AAVE or if it provided a sense of community. Amber replied, “Do people really speak that way all of the time? There comes a point when speaking that way you become unintelligible.” She stated that she speaks slang but not all the time. I followed up with that statement asking if slang was the same as Ebonics. Amber paused and thought for a while I could tell that she never really considered what I had asked her. She replied saying that they were not exactly the same, slang is mainstream and Ebonics is the full language of slang. At this point I began to realize the challenge that I was really up against. The definition of AAVE/Ebonics is incorrect from an academic standpoint. AAVE is a dialect of the English language whereas slang is nothing more than trendy words that come and go. I became confused, how can I research on AAVE when the sample I am studying does not know what AAVE really is?
It is another day at the cultural center and I have started to notice some of the patterns that have recently occurred on one specific day of the week. A group of students sit around a big conference table, eat and talk. I decided to observe and listen in on the conversation. I began to observe the room, there wasn’t much space, and lots of papers mainly reading assignments and homework were skewed across the table. On the perimeter of the table was the lunch the students were eating. The students sat across from each other. There were nine students in the room: three graduate students and the remaining six were undergraduates including two males and 7 females. They were familiar faces and frequent visitors of the cultural center. They engaged in a random mix of conversation ranging from Greek life to relationships and academics. All participants in the conversation seemed very relaxed and comfortable. The room was loud and rambunctious. The room was filled with laughter. I observed everyone’s body language to see hand gestures and slouched but comfortable sitting positions. With the large amount of noise it was difficult for me to hear their speaking styles. Soon I heard characteristics of AAVE, the “habitual be”, final consonant deletion, double negation, and very few missing plurals. I was not able to tell if all of the students were speaking AAVE due to the overlapping in conversation. However, I was in awe and slightly pleased to see AAVE being used so carefree. All the students were comfortable using AAVE and with each other.

Later on the same day I was able to observe some of the same students in particular to of the graduate students interacting with freshman. They discussed coursework and grades, overall how the freshman was doing academically. In the dialogue between the two I noticed the grad students who were care free and spoke AAVE took on a completely new persona. From their transformation came older graduate students who spoke Standard American English and wanted to be taken seriously. They were discussing important subjects that would help the freshman to succeed at the university. This was not an appropriate time to play or joke. Although I would hear the conversation become less and less formal as the time went on, AAVE never seemed to emerge.

At the cultural center again, I am continuing my research. Having completed an interview earlier today my main focus was reviewing the information I had been collecting. It was somewhat daunting and I did not want to see any more research. However, I remembered it was a Tuesday and that one person I was looking for would be in the cultural center. Immediately I prepared my materials to conduct an interview and sure enough Cliff arrived. Cliff is a student leader on campus who has much influence and impact on the community. I believed that he would be a good candidate for my interview. Cliff agreed to complete an interview but we were under a time constraints because he had a meeting to prepare for. So I conducted the interview as quickly as I could. Cliff made some very interesting points that I had never thought about before. The first one was in response to me asking if he identified as an ‘Ebonics’ speaker. Cliff replied, “I do not identify as an Ebonics speaker. It is an unnecessary label. A label is something that defines you. I would identify as Black male not a Black male who speaks Ebonics. Ebonics is not a huge part of me or a huge part of my life. It is an unnecessary label.” Instantly, I appreciated his response. Not so much because I agreed, I am still unsure of how I feel.
about that statement it was more because it provided me with a perspective that I never thought of before. It never occurred to me that saying you identify as being an AAVE speaker is putting your self in a category. It may be a category that some are unwilling to be associated with. I do not necessarily look at AAVE as defining a person although I believe that others, especially people outside the African American races define or pass judgment about one who uses AAVE. From his opinion I began to think about why some of my interviewees might be hesitant to identify as an AAVE speaker. Cliff also commented on the versatility of the dialect. He thinks that AAVE is not as versatile as Standard American English. Cliff provide an example that foreigners and ‘Ebonics’ speakers will all be able to communicate efficiently using Standard American English as opposed to AVVE. However, Cliff stated that he was in no way opposed to AAVE no did he find it inferior to any other dialect. The interview was ended quickly and he rushed off to his meeting.

Unfortunately, my research did not produce the outcome and findings that I hoped would be displayed. However, in reviewing all of the information that I gathered from interviews and observations I have identified some trends and drawn some conclusions. However, before stating my findings, I want to make note of the difficulty in effectively judging if speaking AAVE can affect ones experience at the University of Illinois if the majority of the student body does not know exactly what AAVE is.

After compiling all of my field work and research I was able to identify some common themes throughout my research. In addition I was able to draw some conclusions of the effects of speaking AAVE at the University of Illinois. The students and staff members at this University of Illinois understand the need for code switching. In this case code switching would be the ability to speak AAVE in one setting and switch to Standard American English in another setting or with other individuals. All of the interviewees stated in some fashion that in order to be successful in academia in addition to the professional world that one must be able to conform to the rules and standards of society. Unfortunately, speaking AAVE in the workplace as well as in academia is not considered professional. In order to succeed then one must be able to limit or control their usage of AAVE. The participants of the interviews expressed that using AAVE in such surroundings could be damaging to one’s success or someone’s opinion of you and your capabilities.

All the interviewees stated that AAVE is not fully accepted. Society places negative stereotypes and association with AAVE. The words that were most commonly used to describe how some would view a person using AVVE were “dumb,” “stupid,” “poor,” and “ignorant”. Relating a gain to code switching in order to avoid the negative perceptions that are associated with AAVE one must know when and where to speak AAVE. In every interview it was stated that the problem was not necessarily that you use AAVE but more so the environment it is used in. I wonder why the students and staff do not think that their experience at the university but limiting their ability to fully express themselves through speaking AAVE.

Another theme that was daunting was the inaccurate perception of what AVVE In providing me with examples of AAVE the vast majority used some form of slang naming
things such as “bling bling,” “dub” and other slang words. In addition to providing examples was the tone. Many imitated their rendition of AAVE in what would probably be considered to most as a “ghetto” tone. In addition to the “ghetto” tone were associated mannerisms such as head jerking, exaggerated hand movements, and rolling of the neck. Although, I was disappointed with the examples I received of AAVE I was pleasantly surprised that many of the participants were able to name on of the eight linguistic features which was the “habitant be”.

The misconception of what AAVE really is makes me wonder if one can really have an accurate perception of how AAVE affected their experiences, due to their lack of being able to properly define AAVE. Furthermore, I believe that many of the students as well as staff have been in some way touch or tainted by European beliefs that Standard American English is the proper and correct form of speaking. No one referred to AAVE as a dialect which is what AAVE is. There seems to be a disconnect in the idea that AAVE is a dialect the same way we have other various dialects that do not necessarily have the same social stigma.

The topic of AAVE being a dialect that was consciously spoken was brought up several times within my interviews. The students in particular feel as thought AAVE is not consciously used. A person does not deliberately think to use AAVE in most cases. Many of the students do not speak AAVE on purpose it simply produced with the level of comfort. AAVE is ideally spoken in comfortable environments with friends and families. The majority of the interviewees believe that AAVE is not spoken to fit in with a crowd, instead produced naturally. However, I did interview two individuals who felt had different opinions. Bonita stated that individuals from other races speak AAVE. Other races speaking AAVE was associated with their attempts to be cool and to fit in with their friends. Imani, on the other hand felt as though some African Americans spoke AAVE in order to fit in with their friends. As in her particular experience Bonita spoke AAVE with family members in order to make everyone comfortable and communicate in a way that would be understood.

Every participant claimed that speaking AAVE did not effect their experiences at the University in any setting. None of the students or staff reported any types of discrimination or racial comments in regards to speaking AAVE. Only two interviewees stated that she would speak AAVE in class with classmates outside of their race. I believe that it correlates into the idea of using AAVE with friends and family and the level of comfort with the person who you are engaging in the conversation.

I hypothesis the majority of students on this campus believe AAVE is defined more so relation to slang than a rule governed dialect. Therefore, what was defined to me as AAVE were incorrect from an academic standing. Society has placed a negative connotation on AAVE and those who speak it. Unfortunately African Americans are the primary speakers of AAVE. Being an African American presents its own challenges in being a minority and lacking white privilege. It seems to me that many of the students stay away from speaking AAVE in academia professional surroundings, or outside of close friends in order to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with it. Instead of being able to embrace a dialect that is no less than any other. African American students are forced to slightly reject a dialect that is their own. In addition, I believe that it is due to this very phenomenon that many students will not admit or identify as being an AAVE
speaker in fear of being thought less of. Furthermore, standards that society has made are mainly based around that of a White individual. AAVE is made to out to be inferior to Standard American English. Due to this fact some African Americans may turn away from AAVE totally believing the same stereotypes and misconceptions of AAVE that society has created. Many of the students as well as staff may have been in some way tainted by European beliefs that Standard American English is the proper and correct form of speaking.

The majority of students have mastered the ability to code switch which helps to enable them from facing any negative effects of speaking AAVE. None, of the interviewees felt as though AAVE was something that made a big impact or fostered a real connection or community. My conclusion is that many of the students at the University protect and shield themselves from letting AAVE play a role that could possibly affect any of their experiences at the University of Illinois. Yet, it is also my belief that many of the students have had some experiences in which AAVE did affect them in some way but maybe not a big enough impact to alter their experiences at the university. Finally, it is my belief that when the students have a better understanding of what AAVE really is they may notice how it may impact their experience.

I have many recommendations for continuing research within my topic. My research should have included students that were outside of the African American race. It would have provided a different perspective. In order to see how AAVE can really affect one’s experience I should have see how other in other ethnicities felt about AAVE and its usage. In addition to that I should have looked at younger students in particular incoming freshman who would be adjusting to the new environment to determine if their experiences were different or if they code switched less often then the upperclassmen. I believe that if I would have interviewed more students then I would be able to achieve the true responses that I originally hope to acquire. It may just be that the upperclassmen are more reserved and conscious of what they say and mastered the art of code switching. Research should be conducted regarding the issues of if speaking AAVE and its association with slang usage. From and academic and educational standpoint I believe it is relevant and critical to differentiate slang from AAVE. However, it would be interesting to determine how AAVE usage is accompanied by slang and why that might be and what affects that has on people’s perception of AAVE.

REFLECT

Link
Connect with other resources and materials.
Spelling and dialect: Comparisons between speakers of African American vernacular English and White speakers

The article focuses on AAVE in relation to spelling, paying particular attention to final obstruent devoicing (final consonant pronounced more like /t/ than /d/). In the study African American and White college students where asked to spell a variety of words by both and African American experimenter and a White experimenter. The results showed
that there was more confusion with the words for both African American and white students when the African American experimenter spoke. I believe this is relevant to my topic because many of the AAVE speakers might be faced with the issue of being harder to understand or the people who talk to AAVE speakers may find them difficult to understand.

The article also addresses dialect-related spelling effects. I am not well versed in this area and so it is new to me. It would be a natural assumption that this occurrence would be less at the college level. However, the article states that dialect-related spelling effects occur in college. I am interested in seeing if any of the AAVE speakers I interview mention anything related to spelling effects.

Reactions to African-American Vernacular English:
Do More Phonological Features Matter?

The article is pertinent to my research because it discusses AAVE varying degrees (the article refers to it as the speaker's accent). Speakers with heavier accents were rated the worst in attractiveness and status-possessing. The ratings increased as the AAVE accent diminished. It relates totally to my thought that society moreover many students on the campus still view AAVE speakers as less intelligent or competent than Standard English speakers. The article demonstrates how one's language or dialect affects society's perception of them. Furthermore, the article discusses stereotypes of AAVE and the identification or labels that are placed on individuals because of the dialect they speak.


Files:
Reactions to AAVE.txt (Wed 10/11/2006 0:00)

Implications
Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?
Although my research is intended to look at AAVE speakers experiences at the University of Illinois my findings may have further implications regarding teachers in elementary and secondary education. Their personal opinions or perceptions of AAVE and AAVE speakers can influence the expectations and treatment of the students in the class.