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*African American Vernacular English:
History, Structure and Use through
Tupac's Lyrics*

Relatrice

Prof.ssa Dalziel Fiona Clare

Laureanda

Anna De Sandre

n° matr.1228689 / LTLLM

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Introduction

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) corresponds to the linguistic variety of English which African American speakers natively have made use of and have developed since their first approach with the United States: indeed, it derives from the union of Standard English with the local languages and dialects of Africans.

First of all, this dissertation aims at providing a historical, sociological and linguistic background of AAVE, comparing the different hypotheses which have been argued by scholars, dialectologists and sociolinguistics concerning the real origins of this variety of English. The research questions regarding this first part of the analysis are the following: which are the real roots of African American Vernacular English? Which may be considered as the most credible hypothesis related to AAVE and his origins? When did this variety of English originate? Additionally, the various social issues which the African American community faced to throughout their history in the United States have been moreover included.

Secondly, this dissertation aims at asserting that AAVE is a real language in all respects, thus opposing that view considering it as simply an erroneous version of so-called Standard American English (SAE). Indeed, this is something shared among scholars and linguists dealing with AAVE: as affirmed by Mooney and Evans (2015:140), “Labov and many other scholars have described the perception in society that African American English is somehow linguistically deficient; that it is a ‘faulty’ version of standard English (Labov 1972b)”. The analysis will focus on providing the answers for the following research questions: which are the specific linguistic features which actually affirm it is a real language? Are they included also in other Non-Standard varieties of English or are they unique to AAVE? How have these aspects developed throughout the time?

The linguistic features of AAVE will be eventually studied through four lyrics written by the world-renowned rapper Tupac Shakur, observing how this variety of English has been properly used by the rapper with a specific purpose, that one of making everyone get his message of protest against the White community, trying to equally give hope to the "voiceless" African Americans, during a historical period where social injustice, inequality and harsh political and economic conditions had weakened the entire Black

community. Tupac has been considered as one of the most influent and socially aware African American artists and activists throughout the 1980s and the 1990s: thanks to his music and thanks to the use he made of AAVE, indeed, he represented the community he belonged to since his birth. The analysis will aim at answering to the following questions: how Tupac managed to use the features of AAVE to express his art? Why AAVE is considered just as the low- language of the street? How Tupac is able to give hope to the hopeless Black community through his music?

Chapter 1

AAVE: historical, sociological and linguistic context

African American Vernacular English, better known as AAVE, Vernacular Black English or the colloquial, common name of “Ebonics”, although used outside the academic community, is the linguistic variety of English used and spoken by African Americans, most of all in the United States, but also in Canada and in the Caribbean. What is primarily important to point out about AAVE and what is clear from the name of this linguistic variety, is the fact that it owes its name to the way it developed from the earliest contact between African inhabitants and European colonizers, who landed on the coasts of Africa, at the beginning of the 15th century (Sidnell, 2021). The precise development of African American Vernacular English is still a subject of research, but what is sure it that the origins of this full-fledged language are deeply rooted in its historical background.

This chapter will provide an analysis of the four different hypotheses which have been argued about how AAVE originated and has continuing to develop. Moreover, once they will be examined, the analysis will focus on the main sociological reasons why AAVE developed in the whole area of the United States, taking into consideration the social background of the Black community.

1.2 The Anglicist Hypothesis

Different hypotheses concerning the early stages of African American Vernacular English have been asserted. The Anglicist hypothesis was considered the reigning theory until the mid-1960s (Kurath, 1949 in McDavid, 1951). According to this hypothesis, African American Vernacular English has its roots in some European American dialects (Labov, 1998; Poplack, 1999). It is also thought that it has derived from British-based dialects: as stated by Wolfram and Thomas (2002), “present-day African American Language was identical to that of comparable rural Southern white speech”. This leads one to think that the Anglicist hypothesis is based on the theory that AAVE is the result of the contact of Africans with their European colonizers.

To be precise, at the start, when Africans reached American coasts through American ships, they were immediately exposed to this language because it corresponded to the language of their new “home”. This cultural contact was a central and a necessary

phenomenon in favour of the linguistic evolution regarding AAVE, although this symbolized the reason for disappearance of the many linguistic varieties spoken by Africans, once the latter arrived on the New Continent (McDavid and McDavid, 1951). This language diversity involving African dialects was culturally intrinsic to Africans' lifestyles and to their background; however, these were destined to die. When the slaves started to be exposed to English, they began to learn it and partially forgot their linguistic heritage. They mixed the different languages, eventually with a preponderance of the English language: this eventually resulted in the creation African American Vernacular English.

There was a progressive disappearance of African languages because African Americans gradually started to embrace the English language, abandoning those which they had been born and raised with in Africa. The process was similar to that of the children of migrants, who may hardly use their parents' native language: "By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language of the white man of his locality or area and of his education [...] As far as the speech of uneducated Negroes is concerned, it differs little from that of the illiterate white: that is, it exhibits the same regional and local variations of that of the simple white folk" (Kurath, 1949 in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002:13).

1.3 The Creole Hypothesis

The Anglicist hypothesis is not the only theory which scholars, linguists and dialectologists have postulated to discover how AAVE developed. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a new solution was proposed: its name is the Creole - or equally Creolist - hypothesis. This new linguistic point of view basically stated that AAVE had its roots in an expansive creole which developed during the African diaspora and which resulted from an earlier contact between Africans and Europeans (Farrington and Tacata, 2020). In order to be aware of what this hypothesis dealt with, the meaning of "creole" needs to be defined.

When Africans and Americans started to come into contact because of different causes (e.g. of an economic, political and social nature), one of the first difficulties they needed to face to was unavoidably connected to communication. Colonizers were not able to understand Africans and vice versa. Indeed, as Kulikoff (1986:327-28 in Rickford,

2015:40) expressed, communicating was essential between African slaves and their masters and this could be possible by “combining the vocabulary of several African languages, typical among the immigrants, with the few English words needed”.

The formation of a Creole language is a process quite complex, due to the two phases compounding it (Wolfram, Schilling-Estes, 2007). First, as soon as two different cultural groups or two different populations come into contact with one each other, a Pidgin creole is created. It is necessary to clarify, furthermore, that a Pidgin, i.e. a pseudo-language, needs to be generated when commercial or political issues are concerned. Sawant (2011 in Özürçun, 2014), supports the idea that “pidgins were formed because of political, social, and economic situations. Pidgins are called hybrid languages because of the combination of different languages which form them”.

According to Wardhaugh (2006: 61) and Murphy (2012: 62) in Özürçun (2014), secondly, “a Pidgin is the mother tongue of nobody, it does not have any native speakers, it is just used as a contact language for communication purposes. In other words, it is the standard language but with a reduced or simplified grammar structure, vocabulary and phonological variation”. This is an explanation for what we are dealing with now: English colonizers, once in Africa, felt the necessity to communicate with the Africans they met, not for cultural and social reasons, but just to control them, without any optimistic, long-term viewpoint. This may explain why Pidgins are restricted languages, described through the expression of “reduced variety of a normal language” (Özürçun, 2014), without any specific grammatical, syntactic, morphological or phonological rules to follow, although the final goal of this Pidgin involved trade. According to Crystal (2003:11 in Özürçun, 2014), indeed, the reasons for pidgins to occur are generally “for trade matters, when different cultures do not share a common language and when they feel forced to find a way to communicate”.

The following step regarding the formation of the Pidgin language is connected to its functional development and to the people continuing to use and speak it: in this context, “continuing” refers to the new generations, those people growing up listening to this language and who acquire it as mother tongue (Ballister, 2012 in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2007). In agreement with the same authors, once this happens, i.e. when the Pidgin language becomes the next generations’ native language, a fully formed, English-based

Creole is completed. Nevertheless, this Creolist hypothesis fell out of favour and this occurred as soon as additional written records of former African slaves came to light (Mufwene, 2003). Despite this, there may be evidence for this theory in the inner linguistic structure of AAVE (Rickford 2015), by observing the copula absence in the grammar of this English variety, meaning that no zero copula is included in the structures of the language, usually related to the verb “to be”. It is a noteworthy feature, as this does not occur in certain constructions which are instead typically found in Standard English or even in Standard American English.

1.4 The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis

“Neo-Anglicist” is the name of the third hypothesis postulated during the 1990s, since the previous Creolist theory was largely disproven (Sebba, 1999). On one hand, this name is due to its close similarity with the Anglicist hypothesis and because it corresponds to a modification of this latter. This new point of view led scholars to abandon the idea relating to AAVE deriving from a Creole language, by moving to a new perspective concerning the fact that it originated from British dialects which, thus, reached the United States. Even though the two theories are connected, there are some features diverging from one to each other, as stated in Wolfram and Thomas (2002).

Poplack (1999:27 in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002) asserts that “AAVE originated as English, but as the African American community solidified, it innovated specific features” and that “contemporary African American Vernacular English is the result of evolution, by its own unique, internal logic”. This leads to a new perspective, concerning that AAVE is considered as another variety which, unlike the others, diverged on its own, resulting in a changing linguistic process.

1.5 The Substrate Hypothesis

The ideas connected to the birth of AAVE do not finish here, because there is a fourth theory stating a further standpoint explaining how this linguistic variety may have generated: it provides a more compromised approach rather than the previous one. It is named the Substrate hypothesis and it owes this designation to the so-called substrate effect (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002): at first, the etymology of the word “substrate” comes from the Latin “sub-stratum”, meaning “underlying layer”. This clarifies the definition

used in Linguistics of this word: a substrate language lies under a further language (Kusters, 2011). It has been declared that “the sub-stratum theory focuses on influences of different language forms encountering English”.

It may be easy to deduce, at this point, that a substrate is a type of linguistic interference involving two languages, the first one characteristic of a specific territorial area, for example some kinds of linguistic varieties in Africa, which have not been used anymore by the speakers because replaced by the second further language which, additionally, co-existed with the previous one. This is said to have happened to AAVE, according to this fourth hypothesis. Nonetheless, the new shaped language has received a big influence from the one which has disappeared, since in both languages many similar features are noticed. This is the central point of what this new theory proposes to claim how AAVE developed: that is because African American Language came into contact with some creole speakers and, moreover, it is strongly believed that this contact was sufficient to have a concrete effect on the evolution of AAVE, by first considering the passage of slaves from Africa to the United States.

However, there are not any absolute certainties about the origins and the real development of African American Vernacular English. In addition, AAVE is considered as a language in constant evolution, never static and characterized by differences and similarities with Standard European English. Accordingly, as it has been observed, “related to the origins and development of African American Language is the Convergence and Divergence debate, which is concerned with whether African American and European American varieties have become more similar (thus “converging”) or becoming less similar (hence “diverging”) over time” (Farrington and Tacata, 2020). The Convergence and Divergence debate is not such an easy question to draw attention to; it can be considered as one of the few theories which are still valid to explain how AAVE keeps evolving. First, the geographical and physical position of the place where African American Vernacular English has developed is quite important to take into consideration. This linguistic variety started to develop in the American South (Wolfram and Schilling, 2016 in Farrington and Tacata, 2020), the place where it has been rooted since African slaves set foot on the new continent after its colonization, and the progress of AAVE has been also caused by the use of this variety of English in big city areas, throughout the whole territory of the United States.

1.6 Sociolinguistic context

1.6.1 The Great Migration

The main reason why AAVE widely spread and developed quickly is because of what is known in American history as The Great Migration: Gregory (2015) asserts that it has been classified as the reason why “more than seven millions of African Americans left homes in the South to resettle in Northern and Western states”. Historians have long described this exodus “great” not just because of the number of people who moved, but also because of the cultural, social and political consequences which were further caused (Gregory, 2015). As Farrington (2019) declares, “this massive demographic shift is considered to be one of the most important historical and sociological population movements in North America”.

The Great Migration took place throughout the last century, to be precise from the 1910s to the 1970s (Farrington 2019). It refers to those seven million of African Americans who decided to leave the southern country area of the United States in order to reach the wealthy, industrialized and modern North, with the aim of trying to find a better living (Dancis, 2021 in National Archives).

There are many reasons why this huge number of African American inhabitants of the rural South chose to go elsewhere: first, the general living conditions they were forced to live in started to worsen, considering the racial discrimination they were continually subject to. It was necessary for them to find a job, which was however highly required, because of the disasters caused by the First World War: manpower was extremely necessary, considering the numerous catastrophes attributable to the Great War, which not only caused much destruction of buildings, houses of citizens and towns, but also caused a huge number of deaths, among soldiers and civils.

1.6.2 African American social discrimination

Work was not the only motivation which pushed African Americans to leave their houses and to move away towards the towns of northern America: the historical and social harsh background African Americans have been part of is the further reason why they decided to hit the road. As a matter of fact, one of the most meaningful examples about this are the so-called *Jim Crow* segregation laws, corresponding to “any of the laws that enforced

racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction Era during the 1870s and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s” (Urofsky 2014).

The central policy regarding the *Jim Crow* laws had basically the purpose of regulating social, economic and political relationships between Whites and African Americans; however, they were passed principally to penalise and to limit all kinds of opportunities for the southern Black community, because the latter needed to be subordinated to dominant whites (Kousser 2003): with the *Jim Crow* laws, the United States seemed to be become a regime in all respects.

All these unfavourable conditions of violence were worsened by the formation of the notorious society which was christened with the name of *Ku Klux Klan* (better known by the abbreviation of *K.K.K.*). Its origins are partially unsure, even though it has been stated that “it was originally a secret order of confederate veterans from Tennessee” (Onion, Sullivan, Mullen, 2010). In other words, it dealt with a secret and illegal society which operated clandestinely with the purpose of terrorizing the Blacks, through acts of violence and criminality, aimed at arousing distrust in the African American community. Furthermore, according to Bryant (2002), *K.K.K.*’s goals also included “the political defeat of the Republican Party to ensure the maintenance of absolute White Supremacy”. *Ku Klux Klan* members were not only white citizens corrupted and led by hate and resentment towards African Americans; they also belonged to the high levels of government. One of the most famous names is Nathan Bedford Forrest, who started from being a slave trader to eventually become one of the earlier, powerful leaders of the *K.K.K.* ever (Carney 2001).

African Americans felt even more keenly that they needed to change their lives and reaching the northern countries of the United States was the solution to overcome this problem. African Americans’ migration constituted the principal cause for the increase in the population density and for the repopulation in the North of many big northern cities, for instance New York, Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago (National Archives Building, Washington, DC).

Although African Americans tried to escape from the social, political and economic inequality of the South they were victims of, they soon understood that their new lives would not have been precisely as expected: working conditions which African Americans

worked in were dangerous, they were protected neither from the law, nor physically in case of any kind of accidents. African Americans were mostly destined to manual labour, for example in factories, foundries or in slaughterhouses, where their rights were not equal to those of white American workers (National Archives Building, Washington, DC).

1.6.3 The *ghetto* environment

While Southern cities continued to empty, the Northern ones were more available to accept the new people who needed to be helped. However, this brought American society to a new situation which had not been taken into consideration previously: Because of this constant migration, northern cities started to be over-crowded, which is the main reason why the *ghetto* emerged where the members of the African American community started to live. The ghettos were destined to create further division and, consequently, discord between the white inhabitants and the new black migrants from the South.

However, the ghetto environment helped in the development of AAVE; yet, the stereotypes and the linguistic status regarding the African American community, which portrayed African Americans as linguistically and socially inferior individuals, progressively strengthened (Taronna 2016). Indeed, a misconception arose regarding African Americans among the other American white citizens: it has been observed that the Black community – an expression which was commonly replaced with the pejorative term “Negro” - started to be considered biologically incapable of learning the main articulate and persuasive linguistic forms and structures of the English language (Harrison 1984 in Taronna, 2016). Secondly, as Harrison furthermore declares, “the humour and naivety of the Negro are features which must be overlooked, gauging his intellectual calibre and timbre; much of his talk is baby-talk [...] and the slang is an ingrained part of his being as deep-dyed as his skin”. AAVE was not only conceived, as previously said, as a “baby-talk” to adopt while talking to children or as a language characterized by speakers who are unable to learn English; it was seen as full of mistakes and errors, a language which was inevitably inferior to Standard English. Indeed, it was eventually defined as “The English of the Negro” (Krapp, 1924). These conceptions concerning AAVE started to be the cause of a considerable increase in academic and social interest towards this variety of English, the principal source of the various studies by the numerous linguists of the time, for example the names of Smitherman, Labov and Dillard.

The history of African American Vernacular English has never been a simple one to define. Since the beginning of the 1960s, the development of AAVE has encountered further difficulties, also linked to the cultural and historical situation the United States was passing through. Black people and their language were both discriminated, mainly because of southern segregationists, who kept fighting against African American inclusion (Taronna 2016). Additionally, the White community not only aimed at separating African Americans from themselves, but also they wanted to control interactions in the so-called “in-group”, i.e. among the African Americans. Basically, the White community tried to be “among” them, within the group of the Black community.

A political and linguistic line of conduct was later on adopted and approved: it essentially dealt with some expressions and structures belonging to the AAVE, considered as “dangerous”, for instance some parts included in the direct speech. This was due to a commonly shared conviction and fear that African Americans, through some specific oral strategies, could harbour forms of revendication in the attempt to gain the Civil Rights they were trying to aim at (Taronna 2016). This is the factor which many scholars and linguists used as necessary motivation to work on the real systematisation of AAVE, which eventually resulted in the hypotheses presented above.

Chapter 2

Linguistic and grammatical structure of AAVE

Throughout the previous chapter it has been clarified that AAVE has always been associated with a shared commonplace, portraying it as a linguistic variety characterized by divergences, errors and general inaccuracies which, in their turn, derived from other linguistic forms of English spoken in North America, including Standard English (Mufwene and Rickford, 2021). Pullum (1999) declared that “most speakers of Standard English think that African American Vernacular English is just a badly spoken version of this language, marred by a lot of ignorant mistakes in grammar and pronunciation”. Therefore, it would appear that African American Language is considered a linguistic variety which was not originally recognized as such.

The main goal of this second chapter is to prove that this is wrong by asserting that AAVE is, on the contrary, characterised by a precise series of own linguistic and grammatical features, making it a real language and not a distortion of Standard English.

2.1 A selection of the linguistic and grammatical features of AAVE

First of all, it is necessary to focus on how AAVE is structured. What needs to be highlighted is that it would be deeply erroneous to think of AAVE, as a “random or careless speech” (Mufwene and Rickford, 2021). It sometimes happens that the speakers of the numerous English varieties in the United States notice some differences among the other remaining varieties; the same applies, obviously, to the speakers of African American Vernacular English. This is completely noteworthy and justifiable, because distinctiveness corresponds to a property which every language and every linguistic variety enjoys of. Varieties are all unique thanks to the dissimilarities marking them, even though some common features are shared.

A selection of the most important AAVE features will be carried out (respectively sentence structure, copula absence, negative concord and 3rd person singular regularization in present tense), in order to explain how they are used in AAVE linguistic structures and how they have developed so far. This analysis will not be completely thorough, but it will focus on the aspects which are commonly found in AAVE.

2.2 Sentence structure

The important example of a common linguistic aspect found in the different English varieties, including AAVE, relates to the structure of its sentences. For instance, “basic utterance types – e.g. declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences - are all formed essentially in the same way as they are in other dialects. It may explain why those specific syntactic structures purportedly found in AAVE are in fact parts of dialects spoken by other groups, especially but not limited to Anglo-American Vernacular English speakers living in the Southern United States” (Martin and Wolfram 2021 in Mufwene and Rickford, 2021).

In line with this, it may be confirmed, consequently, that one needs to go into greater depth with the structure of African American Language to understand what makes this English variety different from others. It may be enough to imagine the structure of its sentences as a kind of big circle containing, in its turn, further sub-circles, corresponding to the features building up AAVE.

2.3 Copula absence

The first feature deserving attention is the absence of copula verb. As has already been observed, the absence of the copula is one of the most highlighted structures of African American Vernacular English, although its synchronic and diachronic status remains controversial (Labov 1969 et al. in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002). Accordingly, it is furthermore claimed that the copula is probably the most studied but, equally, least understood variable in Sociolinguistics. An example to understand what we are examining may be as follows (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002):

AAVE: “She nice”, standing for SE: “She’s\is nice”;

AAVE: “They acting silly”, standing for SE: “They’re\are acting silly”.

Copula absence is commonly found in AAVE, but nonetheless it is a linguistic feature which is also shared with some “other Southern white rural vernacular varieties of English” (Wolfram, 1974 in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002). Additionally, it may also refer to the absence of the auxiliary in contracted forms of “is” and “are”, as it is possible to notice in the examples above.

However, the central question requiring to be analysed regards the real origins of this aspect of AAVE. In other words, where the historical development of copula absence comes from. Hypotheses are numerous. First, Winford (1998) states that copula absence is a linguistic trait of AAVE which has been questioned for a long time, mostly due to the fact that, through it, this variety seems to be portrayed as a language which has received various influences from English-based creoles in the African diaspora during its formation and its development. Nevertheless, it has also been argued that, despite the common linguistic traits of these linguistic varieties, a few further peculiarities unique to AAVE are in any case present corresponding to linguistic combinations, such as the co-occurrence of copula deletion and habitual “be” (Mooney and Evans, 2015: 139-141). Although the latter has been conceived as one of the principal hypotheses through which copula absence has been explained, it has also been analysed how this trait of AAVE may have originated from a natural, independent development related to a phonological process of contraction (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002).

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the origins and the evolution of this linguistic feature including auxiliary deletion, despite the numerous studies of AAVE, continue to remain unsure. This uncertainty is increased by further research by sociolinguists and dialectologists, discussing what may be considered the most probable hypotheses. According to Wolfram and Thomas (2002), these theories may be connected to one of the four hypotheses which was been presented in the first chapter, i.e. the Creolist one. On one hand, it has been declared that copula and auxiliary absence is a prominent characteristic of AAVE, contrasting with the numerous earlier linguistic English varieties in the British Isles (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002). This is because different kinds of incongruities concerning the copula absence in AAVE, compared to other English varieties, have been found. This led some variationists to question the line of creole ancestry (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 1991; Meechan, 1996; Walker, 1999 in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002).

This perspective is associated with that group of scholars, later on named “creolists”, supporters of the hypothesis considering copula absence as a widespread trait of English-based creole and pidgin languages spoken in the African diaspora: indeed, these observations have led numerous linguists (Bailey, 1965 et al. in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002) to embrace the conclusion that the null copula in AAVE has derived from a Creolist

predecessor. However, taking into consideration various differences between AAVE and other English-based creoles, the possible derivation of African American Vernacular English from a creole predecessor has been strongly argued. In line with Labov (1969 in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002), copula absence appears when contraction occurs in the sentence and, indeed, this does not happen in any creole or any pidgin. To further support this thesis, it is asserted that copula absence in African American Vernacular English is not applied to the 1st person singular “I” and this is, on the contrary, opposed to what happens in English-based creoles and pidgins.

Walker (1999) explains copula and auxiliary variability based on the interaction of syntactic and semantic factors, leading to an independent development within English; it is quite clear, at this point, that such an explanation sharply contrasts the one trying to demonstrate that AAVE derives from a creole substrate with subsequent decreolization.

Indeed, as Winford (1998) declares, “the attribution of copula absence to creole influence does not necessary entail that African American Vernacular English has intrinsically developed from a widespread plantation creole language in the South”. Mufwene and Winford (1997) have strengthened this perspective because of the accumulation of sociohistorical and demographic evidence, going against the idea of the presence of a widespread plantation creole in the South, which lessens the likelihood that copula absence emerged from a direct creole lineage. Nevertheless, these hypotheses continued to be counterattacked by further well documented studies (Winford, 1997 et al., in Wolfram and Thomas, 2002) asserting that “many of the earlier slaves were brought from the Caribbean Islands speaking some forms of creole. It may be happened that influences from a creole converged with African substrate language, resulting in the following development of copula absence in AAVE”. Thus, the copula pattern of African American Vernacular English may be best explained as the result of imperfect second language learning (Winford 1998).

Another important factor to consider concerns the ethnolinguistic distribution of African American Language in the USA. In line with Wimberly and Morris (1997 in Wolfram, 2002), this variety of English is limited to African Americans and, additionally, to some groups of European Africans, living in specific southern rural regions which are, in their turn, characterized by a heavy concentration of African Americans. AAVE is not so

widely spoken in other specific areas where African American speakers are not so concentrated, for instance in some coastal dialect regions (Wolfram, Hazen and Tamburro, 1997).

A further point of view has been proposed by Fasold and Nakano (1996) about copula absence in AAVE, starting from the consideration that it is conceived as a “transferred form”. According to this hypothesis, it underwent a deep modification because of its new integration into a new linguistic variety. It attempts to explain it by claiming that the origins of copula absence have derived from a phonological process which has been empowered from the contraction in contemporary AAVE.

All these divergent perspectives may be simply collected, summarized and eventually concluded to the fact that African American population has spread this trait out from the southern countries. They were mostly concentrated in other American areas, which resulted into a great ethnolinguistic marker over the centuries.

The concept of copula absence as a distinctive feature of African American Vernacular English continued to be examined in depth, especially from the perspective of the present forms which correspond to “is” and “are” of the verb “to be”. Through a comparison between GA (General American) and AAVE, Yule (2014 in Helgotsson, 2020), claims that the absence of the copula is typical of the latter, whereas “in GA the forms are usually contracted”. All these considerations constituted a new perspective which led scholars to realize how AAVE allows its speakers greater linguistic freedom. This is confirmed by the fact that “African American speakers can use this feature in various ways, that is through the verbal full form «is», contracted form «'s» or, eventually, absent form «∅»” (Alim, 2004 in Helgotsoon, 2020), also because “the intention of omitting the copula *be* is to mark ongoing events which are possibly repeated, but of limited duration” (Katz and Seth 2020 in Helgotsson, 2020). She has further asserted that, even though GA and AAVE sentences visibly differ because of a discrepant grammatical structure due to the role of the copula, the meaning remains the same in both cases.

Copula absence in AAVE equally follows some rules unique to this variety of English. As Alim (2004 in Helgotsson, 2020) states, “the copula *be* may be missing before prepositional phrases and locatives (e.g. on the rise), progressive verbs (e.g. he runnin’ scared), adjectives (e.g. we wide awake), negatives and “gon” (e.g. we not just gon lay

down)”. It is interesting to highlight that, however, there are some linguistic contexts where the copula cannot be absent in AAVE. Alim (2004) and Norment (2003) in Helgotsson (2020) declare, as mentioned above, that copula absence cannot be applied to the 1st person-singular form “I am” or be placed in sentence final position.

A further study was conducted by Rickford (1999), who compared his own analyses about copula absence with Wolfram’s (1979), concerning how young people and adults used AAVE. It appeared, as also underlined by Helgotsson (2020), that three out of four black adults omitted the copula *be* 20% of the time in their speech, whereas with teenagers, the percentage amounted to 82%. Thanks to this analysis, Rickford affirms that numerous sociolinguistic and cultural factors may have a huge impact on the language and this is, indeed, the case of AAVE, according to the influence deriving from the age factor.

2.4 Negative concord (NC)

Negative concord (NC), also known as double negation or even multiple negation is another characteristic worth mentioning. In agreement with Robinson and Thoms (2021), “NC is pervasive across the varieties of English: it is attested in 80% of them, even in SE”. Secondly, it may be also defined as a “double attraction”, “neg-incorporation” or “negative attraction” (Klima, 1964; Labov, 1972 in Giannakidou, 2017). Multiple negation is a grammatical aspect “referring to the use of more than one negative morpheme or lexeme in an utterance” (Mooney and Evans, 2015). For instance, SE “I did not say anything” would be replaced by the typical Non-Standard English “I did not say nothing”, corresponding to an ungrammatical sentence in Standard English. As may be noticed, it is made up of the inclusion of a further negative term (in this case, “nothing” has been added to the negation conveyed by “did” + “not”). It should be noted that a group of young boys and girls were the object of Eisokovits’ study (2011 in Mooney and Evans, 2015): he decided to take into consideration the factors of age and sex, by choosing twenty students, 10 girls and 10 boys, further split into two different groups, with the purpose of interviewing them throughout two different stages of their life. To be precise, he did that the first time at the age of thirteen and, the second time, when they turned fifteen, thus two years later.

Table 1: NC in girls and boys according to age (Eisokovits, 2011:41 in Mooney and Evans, 2015:161)

<i>Younger girls</i>	<i>Older girls</i>
56/115; 48.7%	42/192; 21.7%
<i>Younger boys</i>	<i>Older boys</i>
54/107; 50.5%	56/127; 44.1%

As Eisokovits explains that the first number corresponds to how many times multiple negation was used by the people surveyed, compared to the number of times they could have done so. By observing the table above, it may be asserted that, with regard to the older students, discrepancies are present, especially among girls, who use the multiple negation differently from the younger ones.

NC continues to be considered as an interesting feature. First, it is significant to point out that mostly of the speakers of varieties of English, including AAVE, can choose between two ways to shape the negative form, unlike the speakers of Standard English or General American (Winkler 2006). They correspond, on one hand, to the auxiliaries “do” and “does” followed by “not”; on the other hand, there is the colloquial but characteristic “ain’t” form. However, Winkler (2006) observes that different kinds of negative concord can be found in AAVE sentences, with a particular structure and position.

Example 1:

AAVE: “John ain’t got no money”;

SE or GA: “John does not have any money”.

The first type of NC which may be found is when it stands between the auxiliary and the post-verbal negative indefinite (the N-Word, e.g., “nobody”, ”nothing”, ”nowhere”).

Example 2:

AAVE: “Nobody around here ain’t heard of him”;

SE or GA: “Nobody around here has heard of him”.

The second type of NC may happen when it is placed between the preverbal N-Word and the auxiliary within the sentence.

Example 3:

AAVE: “He ain’t say nobody was eating with no college president”;

SE or GA: “He did not say that anyone had eaten with the college president”.

The third type of NC occurs when the same sentence contains a matrix clause, i.e., corresponding to a clause containing a further subordinate clause (Nordquist 2020). The N-Word is placed in the embedded clause. There may also be an inversion between the N-Word and the negative term, as exemplified in “ain’t nobody done nothing”.

2.5 Third person singular regularization in the present tense: deletion of the morpheme “-s” and the concept of hypercorrection

Numerous studies have demonstrated how the absence of the third person singular “-s” may be found in various varieties of English, not only in AAVE: in line with that, it is peculiar of some White American varieties (Ash and Myhill 1986) and of others in the UK (Trudgill 1997). According to Trudgill (1997), African American Vernacular English underwent the loss of the final -s in the present tense in the third person singular because of its presumed Creolist roots. As will be claimed, this feature symbolises a typical case of “regularization” or even of “simplification”, usually occurring in language contact situations.

Further scholars additionally asserted that this feature may find on the contrary its roots in British-based varieties (Poplack and Tagliamonte 1989). Accordingly, a second point of view supported by dialectologists (Kurath, 1928 in Trudgill, 1997) supports this theory, by focusing on the fact that the absence of final “-s” in third person singular present tense was a typical feature of some British-Isles dialects and the explanation was that Black varieties had acquired it, while White dialects mostly had not.

Moreover, in agreement with Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012:3), the deletion of the third person singular “-s” in the present tense is a common aspect to find in English sentences, even though it may happen that it is occasionally added in linguistic or grammatical contexts where it is not needed (for instance: “We gots to do that”). Secondly, according

to Fasold (1972 in Ezgeta, 2012), the absence of the final “-s” in the present tense is an aspect of AAVE which may appear in other contexts. This could be affirmed from what follows: there may be the use of “don’t” replacing “doesn’t”, such as “she don’t cry” or the use of “have” replacing that one of “has”, in “she have it”, for instance.

Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012) asserts, furthermore, that some kinds of irregular forms “may undergo an opposite process of regularization”, so that the results might give rise to a so-called generalization of the first and second person verbal forms onto the third one (e.g. “I see it”, “he see it”, “they see it”; “I was”, “he was”, “they was”, as well “I have”, “he have”, “they have”).

A very meaningful characteristic deserving to be underscored concerns a particular feature which African American speakers sometimes use in specific linguistic environments, named “durative verbal -s” (Alim 2004 in Ezgeta, 2012). In brief, this phenomenon occurs when speakers apply the final “-s” to conjugated verbs which, in Standard English, do not actually require it (e.g. “I hates this place”). At first glance, as Ezgeta (2012) claims, the fact that African American speakers seem to make this choice “on purpose” may be stated: they intentionally make use of the final “-s” in contexts where they, on the contrary, should not do so and, equally, they do not use it when it is necessarily requested.

One of the possible explanations which has been provided portrays this non-standard use of the final -s as a symbol of protest by African American speakers, against the pragmatic norms which Standard English follows. However, this perspective was soon denied by Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012), asserting that it may be instead associated with the phenomenon of the so-called “hypercorrection”, which sheds light on the historical background of AAVE. Unlike Standard English, in African American Vernacular English the third person singular final “-s” is not an included, necessary trait in the grammar. Therefore, the use African American speakers make of it represents an extreme generalization resulting in a random addition of the final “-s” in different linguistic contexts. In order to better define it, some options are provided below.

In line with Labov’s hypothesis (1972) and Wilson’s school of thought (1993), linguistic hypercorrection corresponds to a “non-standard use of language which derived from the over-application of a perceived rule of language-usage prescription; a speaker or a writer

who produces hypercorrection generally believes, through a misunderstanding of such rules, that the form is more correct, standard and preferable, combined with a desire to appear formal and educated” (from Wikipedia). In other words, according to Ezgeta (2012), linguistic hypercorrection occurs when “a speaker tries to correct his linguistic behaviour, but goes too far in terms of overdoing it”.

In conclusion, the results confirm that AAVE has all the characteristics to be eventually considered a true linguistic variety of English, thanks to its structural rules and distinctive features. As anticipated above, those examined so far are just a part of its many features used daily by its speakers. Among them, some of the greatest African American personalities, for instance artists and singers who have been and still can spread this language worldwide need to be included, thanks to their ability to use it as instrument to show artistic creativity.

Chapter 3

Tupac Shakur and the use of AAVE in his Lyrics

“Sociolinguistics of Hip-Hop music is a relatively new field in Sociolinguistics and deals with both social and linguistic aspects of AAVE” (Kazič 2016). African American Vernacular English has been an important and meaningful aspect related to the African American community, partly because, as declared through this Kazič’s statement, it had a great impact on people thanks to its use in the music field, especially in that one of the Hip-Hop genre. AAVE has been an essential tool in favour of the Black community because it symbolises their identity marker (Rickford et al. 2015). The central goal of this chapter is to present the use of the main features of AAVE through the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, one of the most prominent musical figures between the 1980s and the 1990s in the United States. Adopting AAVE in his music, he aimed at giving voice to a community which, on the contrary, was often unable to speak out.

3.1 Tupac’s life

Tupac Shakur, also known by his other stage names *2Pac* and *Makaveli*, was able to see in music a way of globally raising awareness of the social, political and economic background which characterized the Black community. As reported by White (1997 in Edwards, 2002), he is remembered internationally as “a performer with multi-dimensional abilities whose contribution to his art deserves to be studied from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints”. In order to understand this, Tupac’s origins have to be pointed out and brought to attention.

In agreement with Watson (2007), Lesane Parish Crooks – whose name was changed into Tupac Shakur, by his mother Afeni, some days after his birth – was born in the 1970s in East Harlem, New York (2paclegacy, 2019). He was brought up in poor inner-city neighbourhoods where, however, he encountered the political views, militant passion and wider social exposure of his mother, resulting in Tupac’s total immersion in the culture of the African American urban working class (Edwards 2002). What is significant to underline is Tupac’s familiar background. He was son of two former Black Panther members: although he barely knew his father, his roots acted as a springboard which let him become the great artist and activist everyone knows today (Watson 2007). This

explains why racial discrimination, social injustice and social emancipation towards the Black community have been important themes which Tupac has always cared for since his childhood: he himself asserted in a song that “Panther power is running through my arteries” (Tupac Shakur: Panther Power, 1988). He was destined to become a strong revolutionary and this was due to his capability to create a high level of self-empowerment which triggered people to listen to what he had to say (L-Fresh The Lion and Gollan 2017).

Nonetheless, his social and living conditions, especially throughout his early age, were particularly harsh to tolerate; to quote Lazin (2004 in Davis, 2019), “the poverty helped him to relate to everyone’s struggle. Tupac’s witness to it inevitably laid the tracks for his lyrical and literary poetry”. Throughout his adolescence, he had to move three times, together with his younger sister and his mother; when he left New York, he moved to Baltimore to settle eventually in California (Watson 2007), the place where he started to give a more precise shape to his music.

3.2 The power of AAVE in Tupac’s lyrics

There are different features which characterise his music. Naturally, one of them is how Tupac was able to use AAVE in his lyrics (Widyani 2016). At first, according to L-Fresh The Lion and Gollan (2017), “African American Vernacular English confers to Tupac the power of being a story-teller”. He was extremely empathic, because through his words he aimed at directly addressing and speaking to his listeners; L-Fresh The Lion and Gollan (2017) assert, moreover, how noteworthy was “his ability to communicate what was going on around him: it was not necessarily about telling a story in the most intricate and detailed of ways, it was making you feel like there, seeing what he was seeing”.

One of the further main goals Tupac wanted to achieve through his music was linked to the concept of social conscience and moral sense concerning the Black community and the environment they were living in: the ghetto has been a deeply discussed topic he has focused on. In line with Lazin’s perspective (2004 in Davis, 2019), Tupac was progressively becoming the voice of the voiceless, the unheard and the ignored of the African American community. He gave voice to the side of him which was keen to make everyone aware of what was actually happening. As suggested by Davis (2019), his

stories were mostly addressed to the USA, aiming at criticizing how its systemic oppression was the reason why he felt pushed to fight against it. Tupac has been nicknamed “the walking protest”, thanks to his rebellious, unapologetic attitude (Davis 2019) and thanks to AAVE, which let him speak up for the entire Black community he also belonged to.

3.3 Tupac’s social and political protest

A further, important aspect in Tupac’s hip-hop music is its politically charged “rawness” (Bhogal and Gollan, 2017), through which he gained the powerful capability to influence his listeners and to affect people in order to implement empathy. Davis (2019) claims that “the music was the instrument through which Tupac’s protest could reach his audience. He used this medium to his advantage, because he was conscious of whom was listening to him and of whom needed to catch his messages”. He once stated that “our brothers and sisters, our youth and some of our adults, their ear is spinned to rap music right now and if we really want to get our message out, if we really want to start teaching, we need to start doing that: we really need to start our methods” (Tupac Interlude, 2000). Tupac’s protest mainly aimed at reaching younger people, who were perceived as the mobilizers, the loudest and the most effective (Clay 2006 in Davis, 2019). The stories Tupac’s lyrics tell of mainly deal with what happened throughout his childhood and throughout his adolescence, which surely was one of the main causes to arouse interest and curiosity towards his figure.

3.4 The concept of *T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E.*

By using AAVE in his lyrics, Tupac wanted to shed light on one of the most controversial, discussed but symbolic themes he profoundly cared about and which marked his life. This concept may be summed up through the expression of *T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E.* According to a released interview with Tupac (undated in Reid, 2018), it corresponds to an acronym standing for “The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody”. Even though the word *thug* has a negative connotation, Tupac tries to issue a warning to the whole American community: as reported by Reid (2018), Tupac asserted that “if we keep bringing up children in a negative environment surrounded by racism, violence and oppression, then the cycle will just continue”. Tupac summarizes what he tries to convey to his listeners

in this expression: by pronouncing the word *thug* he does not want to mean a criminal or someone who is “ready to beat you over the head”, as he furthermore claimed. As Reid (2018) reported from another undated Tupac’s interview, “he means the *underdog*, someone going out there and succeeds who has overcome all obstacles”. Through his conveyed messages, the African American community in the United States started to see in Tupac the figure of a leader, a man ready to fight for what he strongly believed in and who tried to give hope to the hopeless, together with a voice to the voiceless.

3.5 Hip-Hop music is the Black cultural expression

Everything experienced throughout Tupac’s life years helped him understand how to use AAVE effectively and, therefore, how to know African American working-class speech culture (Edwards 2002), aiming at using it as powerful tool to give shape to his activism. As White (1997 in Edwards, 2002) highlights, “the Tupac Shakur’s tribal activism has become a legend and a legacy”. Indeed, in line with the journalist Ron Howell (in Edwards, 2002), when he turned fifteen, he must have been thoroughly convinced that, to be a Shakur, “was to confront the possibility of death at an early age”. Tupac surely took it literally, by using his provocative and high-powered music considered as a form of “folk-poetry” (Edwards, 2002), i.e. peculiar to his community. Accordingly, Wood (1999 in Edwards, 2002) points out about Hip-Hop music that “it meets most of the criteria normally associated with folk-poetry in English: no formal music or literary training is required, there is a relatively free borrowing of music and words”.

This explains how Hip-Hop music, together with the rap one, has been an important means of communication, not only for Tupac, but also for the entire Black community. In concordance with Rose (1994 in Edwards, 2002), indeed, this musical genre started to emerge at the very beginning of the 1970s, “as a Black cultural expression prioritizing Black voices from the margins of urban America”. This may be moreover due to the fact that Black rappers sing with the voice of personal experience, adopting the identity of the observers or, rather, of the narrators, as reported by Rose (1994 in Edwards, 2002). Tupac wanted to rap about what he saw, what his peers underwent, aiming at telling the others and at raising awareness about the injustice they were surrounded by.

3.6 The concept of realness

Morrison (forthcoming in Edwards, 2002) classifies Tupac's music in the category of "gangsta rap", due to the fact that it portrays itself as "a music of rebellion and anger, which developed in response to a racist and nihilistic society". In addition, rap music was used to convey one of the most well-known and felt values for Tupac: the concept of *realness*, which may be paraphrased as *street credibility*. In agreement with Smithermann (1996), he was able to express this kind of concept thanks to his great ability to "perceive himself as an authentic member of the Black community he rapped about". In other words, Tupac's personal confrontations with the latter strengthened his concept of *keeping it real*. AAVE was what allowed Tupac to communicate to his audience, the same variety which was introduced and conventionalized as a "street vernacular variety of English" (Edwards, 2002).

Tupac narrated stories which were mainly based on true facts with AAVE: it was the medium through which racism, police brutality and further oppressive behaviour against the Black community were expressed. Edwards (2002) declares that the use of AAVE in Tupac's lyrics, together with his great ability to combine political and revolutionary features with dramatic but realistic scenarios, "generously laced with street slang and drips attitude". In concordance with Warner (1999), "Tupac's rap was directly addressed to the so-called Poor Inner-City Youth".

3.7 AAVE features in some Tupac's lyrics

As Morgan (2002 in Edwards, 2002) claims, "Tupac's ability to use AAVE grammar and rhythm, intonation and vocabulary, combined with his use of the typical speech styles of the African American community, let him deliver his messages, making them sound real to the urban Black youth". Morgan (2002 in Edwards, 2002), accordingly, coined the expression *vernacular lyrical fitness*, to explain the linguistic appropriateness recognized by African American Vernacular English speakers and listeners of hip-hop poetry. To understand how actually Tupac made use of AAVE in his lyrics and which kind of common linguistic features are used, an analysis of some of his most meaningful and world-renowned lyrics has been carried out.

3.7.1 Listed features

The most distinctive and linguistic aspects in Tupac's lyrics have been gathered and listed all together. They will be shown as classified starting from those which have already been examined and which are found in Tupac's lyrics. Secondly, the analysis will continue with the remaining features, therefore those which may be typically found in AAVE.

They correspond to the following, according to Pullum (1999) and Ezgeta (2012) in Motavalli (2019):

- The absence of copula;
- Double Negation, also through the negative *ain 't* form, which does not belong to Standard English grammar and which is a feature of Non-Standard varieties of American English, including AAVE (Motavalli 2019);
- The absence of the 3rd person singular -s, in the present tense singular verb forms, which may also be defined as the 3rd person singular regularization;
- The use of the singular verbal forms of *be* with countable plural nouns;
- Negative concord (NC), corresponding to “the phenomenon where two (or more) negative elements expresses negation in isolation yielding a single semantic negation”, as reported by Zeijlstra (2007 in Motavalli, 2019);
- The absence of -s possessive in Noun-Noun possessive constructions (e.g., “Jack Money” instead of SE “Jack's money”);
- The absence of plural -s suffix in semantically plural nouns;
- Habitual *be*, which is called this way because it marks an action done repeatedly. According to Wardhaugh (2017 in Motavalli, 2019), it may be moreover called *invariant be*, due to the fact that “the copula is not conjugated, but used for all subjects in the same manner”.
- The use of *got* instead of *have* or *have got*, in concordance with Trotta and Blyahher (2011 in Motavalli, 2019). This is because the verb *got* denoting “obtaining or gaining possession of something” is used to replace the verb *have* or *have got*, indicating “possession or ownership”;
- The pronoun *y'all*, which is easy to find in the Hip-Hop environment and especially in the oral dimension, according to Trotta and Blyahher (2011 in Motavalli, 2019). It corresponds to the contracted form of *you all*. Interestingly, it

is a typical aspect also found in White Southern American English and therefore not only in AAVE. It is sometimes used to address a single speaker.

3.8 Methodology

This analysis aims at answering to the questions which have been reported at the very beginning of the introduction of the dissertation. It moreover will show the presence of the features in Tupac’s lyrics which are listed above, by comparing them and showing the way they are used.

Secondly, each of Tupac’s lyrics will be presented in a table collecting the most relevant grammatical aspects of AAVE found in the text, together with their corresponding verse in the lyrics, followed by the number of times they occur.

3.8.1 *Trapped*

The first lyrics explored is taken from the song entitled *Trapped*, contained in Tupac’s debut album *2pacalypse Now*, released in 1991. According to Edwards (2002), Tupac personifies “a typical young black male in the ghetto, feeling oppressed and, thus, trapped”, as the title suggests. The main topic deals with the harsh life of a thug and with the “continuous dehumanizing harassment by police” (Edwards 2002).

Table 1.

Features of AAVE in the lyrics (8)	Corresponding verse in the lyrics	Occurrence (21)
<i>got</i> instead of <i>have/have got</i>	“ <i>You know they got me trapped in this prison of seclusion</i> ”; “ <i>[...] They got me trapped [...]</i> ”;	8
Copula absence	“ <i>Niggas comin’ out worse off when they went in</i> ”; “ <i>[...] Tupac sayin’, [...]</i> ” “ <i>Where he at? Where the Rollers at?</i> ”;	3
Future <i>gotta</i> and <i>gonna</i>	“ <i>I’m tellin’ you one day these suckers gotta fall</i> ”; “ <i>One day I’m gonna bust</i> ”;	2

<i>y'all</i> and <i>ya</i>	“ <i>Why did ya lie to me?</i> ”; “ <i>Yo, y'all seen 2Pac, man?</i> ”; <i>Y'all seen 2Pac, man?</i> ”;	3
3 rd person singular regularization	“ <i>Homie don't play that?</i> ”;	1
<i>Ain't</i> negation	“ <i>Ain't scared to use my gat again?</i> ”;	1
Regularization of <i>is</i> and <i>was</i>	“ <i>Girlies was laughin'?</i> ”; “ <i>Damn homies is dissin' you?</i> ”;	2
Double negation	“ <i>Couldn't see nothing but bloody blood?</i> ”	1

These features must be partly discussed. The first example of the presence of AAVE in Tupac's lyrics is the use of *got* replacing the use of *have* or *have got*, which is, on the contrary, typical of Standard English. In agreement with Motavalli (2019), indeed, the use of *got* is frequent among African American speakers. Through it, Tupac tries to emphasize his feeling of oppression, because of *they*, i.e., the society the Black community is victim of, making them feel *trapped* in the environment of the ghetto, as the listener may easily deduce. Moreover, this may be later on noticed in the lyrics when Tupac brings forward his protest against the unfair police harassment which he usually has to face to. It is also emphasized by the successive use of *gotta*.

Although the listener may have difficulties in immediately understanding who (or what) Tupac is referring to, the presence of the *ya* and *y'all* pronouns may help one to clarify it. The first one is considered, indeed, as the further contractive form of the second, i.e. the pronoun *y'all* which may indicate both a singular and a plural object. However, it could be easily found in Standard English as well. This linguistic feature is also used by Tupac at the end of the lyrics, to be precise, at the beginning of the last stanza.

The negative *ain't* form is often found in Tupac's songs, including the remaining ones which will be analysed later on. It is typically used in Non-Standard varieties of English to replace further forms of Standard English which are not always used in AAVE, i.e. *am not*, *are not*, *is not*, *have not* and *has not* (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Almost at the end of the lyrics, two different examples corresponding to the regularization of *is* and *was* are provided. According to Tagliamonte and Smith (2000:143 in Ezgeta,

2012:15), “it appears to be a robust linguistic characteristic of contemporary AAVE”. Additionally, African American speakers frequently employ the use of *is* and *was* “which may be generalized to plural and second person subjects”, as Tupac’s lyrics exemplifies (Wolfram 1993:14 in Ezgeta, 2012).

3.8.2 *Dear Mama*

Released in 1995 in Tupac’s album *Me Against The World*, this song is one of the most powerful lyrics of Tupac’s whole musical career. Through AAVE, Tupac is able to give shape to a kind of motherly anthem, with the lyrics aiming at celebrating the figure of the mother and of the black woman as well, who is daily victim of the society she belongs to. To the Black female community, it is proposed a further option and a further way out to find a temporary shelter, in the attempt to escape from the reality they have been immersed in.

Table 2.

Features of AAVE in the lyrics (6)	Corresponding verse in the lyrics	Occurrence (13)
<i>Ain’t</i> negation	[...] <i>Ain’t a woman alive that could take my mama’s place [...];</i> <i>“For a woman it ain’t easy tryin’ to raise a man”;</i> <i>“I ain’t guilty [...];”</i>	3
Double negation	<i>“Now, ain’t nobody tell us it was fair [...];”</i>	1
Regularization of <i>was</i>	<i>“We was poorer than the other little kids”;</i> <i>“You always was a black queen, Mama”;</i> <i>“You always was committed [...];”</i> <i>“’Cause when I was low you was there for me”;</i> <i>“[...] with the scraps you was given”;</i>	5
3 rd person singular regularization	<i>“Mama catch me, put a whoopin’ to my backside”;</i>	1
Copula absence	<i>“You just workin’ [...];”</i>	1

<i>gotta</i> instead of <i>have got to</i>	<i>"I gotta thank the Lord that you made me";</i> <i>"It's a struggle every day, gotta roll on";</i>	2
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The first feature of AAVE to explore concerns double negation. Joki (2021) states that “double negatives are created by adding a negation to the verbs and to the modifier of the noun (e.g. adjectives, adverbs, etc.), or to the object of the verb”. Indeed, this is what happens precisely in the example reported in the table above. Tupac wants to highlight what he is singing about with the help of the melody he tries to create through the repetition of various negative forms of different genres, used to make a specific sound during the reading and, thus, during the listening of the lyrics.

The feature of AAVE which is used the most frequently corresponds to the regularization of *was*. According to Motavalli (2019), this use of the verb has been further defined as “Non-Standard plural” and will be moreover found in other Tupac’s lyrics.

In line with Pullum (1999) and Ezgeta (2012) in Motavalli (2019), the only example provided for the 3rd person singular regularization helps one better understand the scenario Tupac portrays. He is describing a moment in which his mother scolds him; it is curious which specific words Tupac decides to use in order to depict her. He continues, in the following verse, by expressing the biggest problem his mother struggles with, corresponding to her serious drug addiction. However, she keeps being his “black queen”.

3.8.3 *All Eyez On Me*

“Everybody looking at me now. The police lookin’ at me, the females, my enemies, reporters, people that want me to fall, people that want me to make it. My mama. In jail, the guards. Everybody lookin’ at me. All eyes on me” (Interview with Tupac by Powell, 1995).

All Eyez On Me is the title of the song contained in Tupac’s double-album of the same name, released in 1996. The choice Tupac had of naming both his album and his song in the same manner is due to the last noteworthy events he came across with during the last years of his life. Indeed, according to Seetseng (2019), *All Eyez On Me* has been considered as Tupac’s “comeback album”, which was released immediately when he was set free after his 11-month period of imprisonment. Thanks to the use of AAVE, the

rapper shows his vulnerability, loneliness, regrets and his fears, provoked by those harsh past months (Seetseng 2019). Some of the linguistic features Tupac includes have already been examined in the previous lyrics; nevertheless, some of them are worth discussing.

Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that 3rd person singular regularization is an aspect of AAVE which may occur just in the present tense singular verbal forms. This is, indeed, a typical trait of the Non-Standard varieties of English which Tupac makes wide use of. In both cases, the conjugated verb does not present the usual suffix -s of present tense, which one may expect to find, although subjects are both singular. According to Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012), “black speakers omit the 3rd person singular -s and occasionally add it where it does not belong to”. What is also meaningful to highlight concerns Rickford’s analysis (1999:128 in Ezgeta, 2012:13). He exposes the effect of the verb type, “showing that *don’t* and *say* attract the 3rd person -s absence more than regular verbs [...]”. This matches the examples in the lyrics taken into consideration: the verbs which this feature occurs with are, indeed, respectively *say*, *make* and *go*.

Invariant *be*, also called habitual *be*, corresponds to another significant trait in AAVE, mainly used for habitual or durative aspects (Rickford 1999:263 in Ezgeta, 2012:10). In concordance with Fromkin and Rodman (1998:415 in Ezgeta, 2012:11), this “cannot be found in other American Vernaculars, although it may be occur in other languages, for instance Creole or Irish English”.

Table 3.

Features of AAVE in the lyrics (8)	Corresponding verse in the lyrics	Occurrence (27)
<i>y’all</i>	<i>“Y’all know how this shit go”;</i> <i>“Ay you know what?”;</i> <i>“I know y’all watchin’”;</i> <i>“I know y’all got me in the scopes”;</i> <i>“I know y’all know this Thug Life, baby!”;</i> <i>“Y’all got me under surveillance, huh?”;</i>	6
Copula absence	<i>“Say they ready for the funk [...]”;</i>	6

	<p><i>“ [...] I don’t think they knowin’ ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Straight to the depths of Hell is where thek cowards goin’ ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Where you goin’? ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Givin’ me charges, lawyers makin’ a grip ”;</i></p> <p><i>“They think I’m goin’ back to jail, they really on that dope ”;</i></p> <p><i>“I know y’all watchin’ ”;</i></p>	
got instead of have/have got	<p><i>“I got a caravan of niggaz every time we ride ”;</i></p> <p><i>“We got four niggas in low riders and ski masks ”;</i></p> <p><i>“I got bustas [...] ”;</i></p> <p><i>“I know y’all got me in the scopes ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Y’all got me under surveillance, huh? ”;</i></p>	5
3 rd person singular regularization	<p><i>“Say money bring bitches [...] ”;</i></p> <p><i>“The nervousness neglect make me pack a TEC ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Pay attention, my niggas! See how that shit go? ”;</i></p>	3
Double negation	<p><i>“Can’t nobody feel your pain ”;</i></p>	1
Ain’t negation	<p><i>“It ain’t right [...] ”;</i></p> <p><i>“It ain’t funny [...] ”;</i></p>	2
Generalization of is	<p><i>“The feds is watchin’ [...] ”;</i></p> <p><i>“The money is mandatory, the hoes is for the stress ”;</i></p> <p><i>“Make sure your eyes is on the meal ticket, get your money ”;</i></p>	3
Invariant be	<p><i>“Nigga walk up in this motherfucker and it be like ‘Bing’! ”;</i></p>	1

3.8.4 Changes

Changes is the last meaningful example of this analysis. It is the title of the song contained in the posthumous Tupac’s album *Greatest Hits*, published in 1998. This song has been considered as one of the most popular releases, representing subject matter which is nowadays still relevant (Motavalli 2019). Throughout Tupac’s lyrics, the main social problems involving African American community in the United States, e.g. inequality, street life and police brutality are shown, together with further possible solutions in order to overcome them.

Table 4.

Features of AAVE in the lyrics (6)	Corresponding verse in the lyrics	Occurrence (21)
<i>got</i> instead of <i>have/have got</i>	<i>“I got love for my brother”;</i> <i>“They got a war on drugs so the police can bother me”;</i> <i>“’Cause I always got to worry ‘bout the payback”;</i>	3
Double negation	<i>“But we can never go nowhere unless we share with each other”;</i> <i>“It ain’t a secret, don’t conceal the fact”;</i> <i>“And I ain’t never did a crime I ain’t have to do”;</i> <i>“My mama didn’t raise no fool”</i>	4
Prospective <i>gotta</i>	<i>“We gotta start makin’ changes”;</i> <i>“You gotta operate the easy way”;</i> <i>[...] Selling crack to the kids, I gotta get paid”;</i> <i>“We gotta make a change”;</i> <i>“So it’s on us to do what we gotta do to survive”;</i> <i>“You gotta learn to hold your own”;</i>	8

	<i>“And as long as I stay black, I gotta stay strapped”;</i>	
<i>Ain’t negation</i>	<i>“We ain’t ready to see a Black President, uh”;</i> <i>“It ain’t a secret [...]”;</i> <i>“[...] I ain’t have to do”;</i> <i>“That’s the sound of my tool, you say it ain’t cool”;</i>	4
<i>Copula absence</i>	<i>“Try to show another way, but you stayin’ in the dope game”;</i>	1
<i>3rd person singular regularization</i>	<i>“Bein’ real don’t appeal to the brother in you”;</i>	1

3.8.5 Conclusion

At first, the comparison of the previous four lyrics led to understand how the main linguistic features of AAVE are repeatedly used by Tupac. Secondly, it is noteworthy how Tupac is able to make a distinction between who he is trying to represent through the words of his songs, which are not used randomly. On one hand, he personally wants to speak out for the entire Black community, demonstrating his empathy (for instance, through the use of inclusive personal pronouns, e.g. *we*), trying to convey he is part of it and that he is ready to fight in favour of the Rights they deserve. On the other hand, he wants to highlight the differences with the White community, by taking a certain distance from it (for instance, through the use of exclusive pronouns, e.g. *you* or *they*), portraying it as disinterested, malicious, greedy and uncaring of what African Americans are forced to live day by day.

The final goal of this compared analysis is to underline the power of AAVE and how, through the figure of Tupac, this variety of English has been considered as the medium to make everyone aware of the discrimination the Black community was victim of.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by summing up the main research findings in relation to the research aims and questions. It eventually proposes further opportunities for future research.

The aim of this analysis was to provide a historical and sociological background concerning the origins of AAVE in the United States, trying to answer to the initial questions which have been posed. Comparing different sources, this analysis furthermore aimed at demonstrating how this variety of English has developed and continues to do so, being the language of the African American community.

This dissertation has highlighted the points which needed to be discussed at the very beginning. In the first chapter, it showed how the evolution of AAVE has been strongly argued throughout the past decades, even though there are not any real definite answers to this debate. However, what may be asserted is that, among the numerous hypotheses which have been provided, the idea concerning that African American Vernacular English derives from the encounter of two different populations, corresponding to English colonizers and Africans, is commonly shared. This is due to the historical background which marked the African American evolution, with the beginning of its development in the New Continent (USA), because of Slave Trade. Throughout this dissertation, it has been furthermore claimed that AAVE basically shaped because of economic goals carried out by the British colonizers, who needed to communicate with Africans: indeed, the latter eventually ended up adopting English and partially abandoning their native linguistic varieties. It has been also shown how the social background of the African American community, since its arrival in the United States, has been an essential factor in the development of the AAVE itself: although it represented harsh moments of fear and injustice, they have been particularly significant to give the power to the Black community to gather courage and unify against obstacles. It may be eventually declared that AAVE may be one of the best representative results which African Americans achieved, because language is a symbol of union.

In the second chapter, moreover, the aim was to totally discarding the concept describing AAVE as a low-life ungrammatical language full of errors showing, on the contrary, that it is actually a real language, characterised by own linguistic features and by own

grammatical rules which may be not found in Standard English or rather in other American linguistic varieties. This has been indeed verified through the analysis and the study of the most important and common linguistic features characterising AAVE.

What furthermore resulted from this analysis is how this language allows linguistic freedom and flexibility to African Americans speakers and how AAVE permits to its speakers to have a wider possibility to choose which specific grammar rules, features and sentence structures may be followed to write or to speak which, on the contrary, is not possible with Standard English.

Throughout the third chapter of this dissertation, a linguistic analysis of four lyrics of the rapper Tupac Shakur has been provided. It portrays a clear picture of how the main features of AAVE are used to highlight the most relevant issues regarding the Black community Tupac raps about, as my findings in table 1, 2, 3 and 4 have demonstrated. The results confirmed the realness and the power of the linguistic features of this variety: Tupac is able to effectively use AAVE aiming at making linguistic effects to communicate his messages. Tupac's lyrics are the example reflecting his familiar and social background, considered as an important factor throughout his entire musical career. His music aims at reaching the audience of Standard American English and he does so differently in each lyrics, with the purpose of making everyone aware about the frustration and injustice of African Americans.

Analysing linguistically Tupac's lyrics has shown how complex the main grammatical features of AAVE may appear, together with the overall consideration people have about it and, in this case, about Hip-Hop music, although it nowadays has gained more success rather than during the rapper's golden years.

To conclude, in view of future research, it may be useful to focus on how African American Vernacular English is used by other African American artists, thus, not necessarily only by rappers. It may be significant to highlight the different ways through which AAVE is applicated in the various musical fields, e.g. pop music, and how it is used to convey the messages the singer wants to communicate to the audience. Additionally, it would be interesting to analyse the use of AAVE in music compared to its use in the poetry field.

Italian Summary

L'Inglese Vernacolare Afroamericano (AAVE) corrisponde alla varietà linguistica che i parlanti afroamericani nativi hanno utilizzato e sviluppato fin dal loro primo approccio negli Stati Uniti.

Questa tesi si propone di fornire un inquadramento storico, sociologico e linguistico dell'AAVE, confrontando le diverse ipotesi sostenute da studiosi, dialettologi e sociolinguisti sulle reali origini di questa varietà di inglese. In secondo luogo, questa tesi mira ad affermare che l'AAVE è una vera e propria lingua a tutti gli effetti, opponendosi così all'opinione che sia semplicemente una versione errata del cosiddetto Inglese Americano Standard.

Le caratteristiche linguistiche dell'AAVE saranno infine studiate ed esaminate attraverso quattro testi scritti dal rapper di fama mondiale Tupac Shakur, osservando come questa varietà di inglese sia stata opportunamente utilizzata dal rapper con uno scopo ben preciso, quello di far arrivare a tutti il suo messaggio di protesta a favore della comunità Nera, cercando di dare ugualmente speranza agli afroamericani "senza voce", a causa del periodo storico caratterizzato da una dura ingiustizia sociale, disuguaglianza e sfavorevoli condizioni politiche ed economiche.

L'inglese vernacolare afroamericano deve il suo nome alle sue origini e al modo in cui si è sviluppato a partire dai primi contatti tra gli abitanti africani e i colonizzatori europei, sbarcati sulle coste dell'Africa, all'inizio del XV secolo (Sidnell, 2021). Sono state avanzate diverse ipotesi sulle prime fasi dell'AAVE. L'ipotesi anglista è stata considerata la teoria dominante fino alla metà degli anni Sessanta (Kurath, 1949 in McDavid, 1951). Secondo questa ipotesi, l'AAVE affonda le sue radici in alcuni dialetti europei americani (Labov, 1998; Poplack, 1999). Si pensa anche che sia derivato da dialetti di origine britannica. Nel corso degli anni Sessanta e Settanta è stata proposta una nuova soluzione: il suo nome è ipotesi creola - o ugualmente creolista. Questo nuovo punto di vista linguistico affermava sostanzialmente che l'AAVE derivava da un creolo espansivo che si era sviluppato durante la diaspora africana e che era il risultato di un precedente contatto tra africani ed europei (Farrington e Tacata, 2020). È però essenziale spiegare cosa si intende con questo termine: non appena due gruppi culturali o popolazioni diverse entrano in contatto tra loro, si crea un creolo-pidgin. È necessario precisare, inoltre, che un pidgin,

una pseudo-lingua quindi, deve essere generato per questioni commerciali o politiche. Quando il pidgin diventa la lingua madre delle generazioni successive, si ottiene un creolo completamente formato, basato sull'inglese.

"Neo-anglicista" è il nome della terza ipotesi postulata negli anni Novanta, che portò gli studiosi ad abbandonare l'idea che l'AAVE derivi da una lingua creola, passando a una nuova prospettiva relativa al fatto che esso abbia avuto origine dai dialetti britannici.

Le idee legate alla nascita dell'AAVE non finiscono qui, perché esiste una quarta teoria, denominata ipotesi del substrato, legata al cosiddetto effetto substrato (Wolfram e Thomas, 2002), ovvero un tipo di interferenza linguistica che coinvolge due lingue. Questo sarebbe accaduto all'AAVE, secondo questa quarta ipotesi. Tuttavia, la nuova lingua formata ha ricevuto una grande influenza da quella che è scomparsa, poiché in entrambe le lingue si notano molte caratteristiche simili.

Il motivo principale per cui l'AAVE si è diffuso e sviluppato rapidamente è quello che nella storia americana è noto come la Grande Migrazione: Gregory (2015) afferma che è stata classificata come la ragione per cui più di sette milioni di afroamericani hanno lasciato le loro case nel Sud per stabilirsi negli Stati del Nord e dell'Ovest. Le ragioni sono molteplici: in primo luogo, le condizioni di vita in cui erano costretti a vivere cominciarono a peggiorare, a causa della discriminazione razziale. Il contesto storico e sociale di cui gli afroamericani hanno fatto parte è l'ulteriore motivo; infatti, uno degli esempi più significativi è rappresentato dalle cosiddette leggi di segregazione *Jim Crow*, che sono passate presto alla storia come tutte le leggi che hanno imposto la segregazione razziale nel Sud tra la fine dell'Era della Ricostruzione negli anni Settanta dell'Ottocento e l'inizio del Movimento per i Diritti Civili negli anni Cinquanta del Novecento (Urofsky 2014). Tutte queste condizioni sfavorevoli di violenza furono aggravate dalla formazione della famigerata società del *Ku Klux Klan*, una società segreta e illegale che operava clandestinamente con lo scopo di terrorizzare la comunità afroamericana, attraverso atti di violenza e criminalità, volti a suscitare sfiducia nella comunità nera.

Mentre le città del Sud continuavano a svuotarsi, quelle del Nord erano più disponibili ad accogliere le nuove persone che avevano bisogno di aiuto. A causa di questa costante migrazione, le città del Nord, tuttavia, cominciarono a essere sovraffollate, e questo è il motivo principale per cui nacquero i ghetti, dove iniziarono a vivere i membri della

comunità afroamericana. I ghetti erano destinati a creare ulteriori divisioni e, di conseguenza, discordia tra gli abitanti bianchi e i nuovi immigrati neri del Sud. Ciononostante, l'ambiente del ghetto contribuì allo sviluppo della lingua destinata a diventare l'AAVE.

L'inglese vernacolare afroamericano è sempre stato associato a un luogo comune condiviso, raffigurandolo come una varietà linguistica caratterizzata da errori e imprecisioni. L'obiettivo principale è dimostrare che ciò è sbagliato, affermando che l'AAVE è caratterizzato da una serie precisa di aspetti linguistici e grammaticali propri. Per provare che l'AAVE non sia una distorsione dell'inglese standard, è necessario concentrarsi sulla sua struttura. Verrà effettuata una selezione delle caratteristiche più importanti dell'AAVE (rispettivamente la struttura della frase, l'assenza di copula, la concordia negativa e la regolarizzazione della terza persona singolare al tempo presente), per spiegare come vengono utilizzate nelle strutture linguistiche dell'AAVE e come si sono sviluppate nel corso della storia.

Un esempio importante di aspetto linguistico comune alle diverse varietà di inglese, compreso l'AAVE, riguarda la struttura delle frasi. Ad esempio, "i tipi di enunciati di base - frasi dichiarative, interrogative e imperative - sono tutti formati essenzialmente nello stesso modo in cui lo sono in altri dialetti".

La prima caratteristica che merita attenzione è l'assenza di copula verbale. Come è già stato osservato, l'assenza della copula è una delle strutture più evidenziate dell'inglese vernacolare afroamericano, anche se il suo status sincronico e diacronico rimane controverso (Labov 1969 et al. in Wolfram e Thomas, 2002). Di conseguenza, si sostiene che la copula sia probabilmente la variabile più studiata ma meno compresa della sociolinguistica.

Un'altra caratteristica degna di nota è la concordanza negativa (NC), nota anche come doppia negazione o negazione multipla. Essa è un aspetto grammaticale che si riferisce all'uso di più di un morfema o lessema negativo in un enunciato (Mooney ed Evans, 2015).

Numerosi studi hanno dimostrato come l'assenza della “-s” nella terza persona singolare sia presente in diverse varietà di inglese, non solo nell'AAVE. Inoltre, in accordo con

Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012:3), la cancellazione della “-s” della terza persona singolare nel tempo presente è un aspetto comune da trovare nelle frasi inglesi, anche se può capitare che venga occasionalmente aggiunta in contesti linguistici o grammaticali in cui non è necessaria. Una caratteristica molto significativa che merita di essere sottolineata riguarda una caratteristica che i parlanti afroamericani talvolta utilizzano in specifici ambienti linguistici, denominata “-s verbale durativa” (Alim 2004 in Ezgeta, 2012). Questo fenomeno si verifica quando i parlanti applicano la “-s” finale a verbi coniugati che, nell’inglese standard, non la richiedono (ad esempio, “I hates this place”). A prima vista, come ha sostenuto anche Ezgeta (2012), si può affermare che i parlanti afroamericani sembrano fare questa scelta di proposito: fanno intenzionalmente uso della “-s” finale in contesti in cui, al contrario, non dovrebbero farlo e, allo stesso modo, non la usano quando è necessariamente richiesta. Una delle possibili spiegazioni che sono state fornite ritrae questo uso non standard della -s finale come un simbolo di protesta da parte dei parlanti afroamericani, contro le norme pragmatiche che l’inglese standard segue. Tuttavia, questa prospettiva è stata presto smentita da Burling (1973 in Ezgeta, 2012), affermando che potrebbe essere invece associata al fenomeno della cosiddetta “ipercorrezione”; secondo Ezgeta (2012), l’ipercorrezione linguistica si verifica fondamentalmente quando un parlante cerca di correggere il proprio comportamento linguistico, ma si spinge troppo in là in termini di eccesso.

L’AAVE è stato un aspetto importante e significativo legato alla comunità afroamericana, anche perché ha avuto un grande impatto sulle persone grazie al suo utilizzo nel campo della musica, soprattutto in quello del genere Hip-Hop. L’AAVE è stato uno strumento essenziale a favore della comunità nera, soprattutto perché simboleggia una sorta di marcatore di identità (Rickford et al. 2015). L’obiettivo principale è presentare l’uso delle peculiari caratteristiche dell’AAVE attraverso i testi del grande rapper Tupac Shakur.

In accordo con Watson (2007), Tupac nacque negli anni Settanta a East Harlem, New York (2paclegacy, 2019). Cresciuto in quartieri poveri della città, Tupac ha incontrato le idee politiche, la passione militante e l’ampia esposizione sociale della madre, che gli hanno permesso di immergersi totalmente nella cultura della classe operaia urbana afroamericana (Edwards 2002). Questo spiega perché la discriminazione razziale, l’ingiustizia sociale e l’emancipazione nei confronti della comunità nera sono stati temi importanti che Tupac ha sempre avuto a cuore fin dalla sua infanzia. Tutto ciò che Tupac

ha vissuto negli anni della sua vita lo ha aiutato a capire come usare efficacemente l'AAVE e, quindi, a conoscere la cultura del discorso della classe operaia afroamericana (Edwards 2002), con l'obiettivo di usarla come potente strumento per dare forma al suo attivismo. Questo spiega come la musica Hip-Hop, insieme a quella rap, sia stata un importante mezzo di comunicazione, non solo per Tupac, ma anche per l'intera comunità nera. In accordo con Rose (1994 in Edwards, 2002), infatti, questo genere musicale ha iniziato a emergere proprio all'inizio degli anni Settanta, "come espressione culturale nera che privilegia le voci nere provenienti dai margini dell'America urbana.

Ci sono diversi tratti dell'AAVE che caratterizzano la sua musica. Per capire come Tupac abbia effettivamente fatto uso dell'AAVE nei suoi testi e quali siano le caratteristiche linguistiche comuni, è stata condotta un'analisi dei suoi testi più significativi e conosciuti in tutto il mondo (rispettivamente *Trapped*, *Dear Mama*, *All Eyez On Me* e *Changes*). Inoltre, sono stati raccolti ed elencati gli aspetti linguistici caratteristici e più comuni nei testi di Tupac. Essi corrispondono ai seguenti, secondo alcuni linguisti (Pullum 1999; Ezgeta 2012 in Motavalli, 2019):

- L'assenza di copula;
- la doppia negazione;
- L'assenza della terza persona singolare -s, nelle forme verbali singolari al presente, che può anche essere definita come regolarizzazione della terza persona singolare;
- L'uso delle forme verbali singolari di *be* con i nomi plurali numerabili;
- La concordanza negativa (NC);
- L'assenza del possessivo -s nelle costruzioni possessive sostantivo-sostantivo;
- L'assenza del suffisso plurale -s nei sostantivi semanticamente plurali;
- L'abitudine di essere;
- L'uso di *got* al posto di *have* o *have got*;
- Il pronome *y'all*.

Il confronto dei quattro testi ha portato a comprendere come le principali caratteristiche linguistiche dell'inglese vernacolare afroamericano siano ripetutamente utilizzate da Tupac. È degno di nota il fatto che Tupac sia in grado di fare una sorta di distinzione tra chi sta cercando di rappresentare attraverso le parole delle sue canzoni. L'obiettivo finale

di questa analisi comparata è quello di sottolineare il potere dell'AAVE e di come, attraverso la figura di Tupac, questa varietà di inglese sia stata considerata il mezzo per rendere tutti consapevoli della discriminazione di cui era vittima la comunità nera.

L'obiettivo di questa analisi è stato quello di fornire un quadro storico e sociologico delle origini dell'AAVE negli Stati Uniti, cercando di rispondere alle domande iniziali che sono state poste. Confrontando fonti diverse di vari studi, l'analisi mirava inoltre a dimostrare come questa varietà di inglese si sia sviluppata e continui a farlo.

Questa tesi ha evidenziato i punti che dovevano essere discussi fin dall'inizio. Nel primo capitolo, ha mostrato come l'evoluzione dell'AAVE sia stata fortemente dibattuta negli ultimi decenni, anche se non esistono risposte definitive alla questione. Nel secondo capitolo, inoltre, si è cercato di scardinare totalmente il concetto che descrive l'AAVE come una lingua sgrammaticata e piena di errori dimostrando, al contrario, che si tratta di una vera e propria lingua, con caratteristiche linguistiche proprie e regole grammaticali. Ciò è stato verificato attraverso l'analisi e lo studio dei tratti linguistici più importanti e facili da individuare che caratterizzano l'AAVE.

Nel terzo capitolo di questa tesi è stata fornita un'analisi linguistica di quattro testi del rapper Tupac Shakur. L'analisi mostra un quadro chiaro di come le principali caratteristiche dell'AAVE siano utilizzate per evidenziare le questioni più rilevanti riguardanti la comunità nera. L'analisi linguistica dei testi di Tupac ha mostrato quanto complesse siano le sue principali caratteristiche grammaticali insieme alla considerazione generale che le persone possono avere nei suoi confronti e, in questo caso, nei confronti della musica Hip-Hop, sebbene essa abbia ottenuto un maggiore successo al giorno d'oggi rispetto agli anni d'oro del rapper.

Per concludere, in vista di future ricerche, potrebbe essere utile concentrarsi su come l'inglese vernacolare afroamericano viene utilizzato da altri artisti afroamericani. Inoltre, potrebbe essere interessante analizzare l'uso dell'AAVE nella musica rispetto al suo uso nel campo della poesia.

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