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African American Vernacular English: an Analysis of verbs in the film “The Color Purple”.

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Introduction

The aim of my dissertation is to analyse African American Vernacular English (AAVE): a vernacular variety of English. Moreover, this dissertation will investigate the use of AAVE in the film “The Color Purple” by Steven Spielberg. The language that is taken into account will be presented so as to arouse interest towards it and present the unfavourable situations faced by its speakers.

The dissertation is developed in three chapters, each of them covers, discusses and deals with different aspects of the topic. The first discussed aspect will concern theories about the origins of AAVE. Furthermore, some linguistic aspects will be presented: some typical verb structure of AAVE, the characteristics of negative clauses of AAVE and two phonological aspects. AAVE will be also analysed from a social point of view, presenting the implications of AAVE on its speakers’ life.

I will attempt to investigate how important and central the role of language is in daily contexts, highlighting the direct and profound impacts of AAVE on circumstances that its speakers may ordinarily face.

The first chapter will present two of the most spread hypotheses about AAVE origins: the Anglicist-hypothesis and the Creole-hypothesis. Moreover, it will explore some typical AAVE verb forms, highlighting also some differences and discrepancies from the equivalent standard English’s structures. Lastly, the first chapter will concentrate on the characteristics of negative clauses of AAVE and on two phonological aspects.

The second chapter will outline some implications of speaking AAVE, dealing with three contexts in which AAVE has a profound impact on its speakers’ life. The areas that will be taken into account are: the education, the workplace and the justice system. Furthermore, their huge impact on inclusion and acceptance of others will also be presented.

The third and last chapter will deal with an analysis of AAVE and its structures as they emerged from the film “The Color Purple” by Steven Spielberg. In this last section evidence will be given to structures and features presented and in advance analysed in the first chapter. Some space will be devoted and reserved also to standard English, as it will be found in the film. This linguistic choice will be included in order not to totally separate AAVE and its speakers from their knowledge, understanding and use of standard English. Furthermore, as it will be demonstrated in the last chapter, characters speaking AAVE can

also speak standard English, as a demonstration of their ability to adapt to different linguistic circumstances.

1. African American Vernacular English: theories about its origins and development, its grammar and phonology

The English language is nowadays the most spoken language in the world, reaching an amount of speakers that is about 1.452 billion people (Blank 2023). This is no doubt something that unifies and connects different parts of the world, making it possible to share information and to communicate with any part of the world without language barriers. For this reason, many changes in standard English may be the result of geographical as well as social isolation and contact with other minor or local languages. The variety that is going to be analysed is called African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and many debates have taken place in order to identify the origins of this variety, that even in these days continues to have a heavy social impact on its speakers.

The roots of AAVE are dated “in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which primarily involved people from the areas on the central coast of West Africa” (Peterson 2019:100), when African American English developed from speakers of different languages and of different language families as well. Before going deeper into the topic of the effects that AAVE causes in those who talk this variety and interact with speakers of other languages, who are therefore out of this linguistic group, two “dominant perspectives” (Lanehart 2017:86) about the formation, evolution and development of this variety are going to be presented: the Anglicist and Creole hypotheses. They both aim to find the roots of the language in some pre-existing linguistic systems or languages. Nevertheless, they also present some different points of view since the Anglicist one identifies just the base from which AAVE may have been growing, spreading and developing, while the Creole – hypothesis concentrates more on structures and aspects that AAVE may share or have in common with other languages. So, if the first one gives importance to the ability of speakers of AAVE to develop their own linguistic system; the second one could be seen as a denial for speakers of AAVE to be able to create their own linguistic structures according to their needs as well.

1.1 AAVE: theories about its origins and development

The Anglicist – hypothesis has been defined as a linguistic phenomenon that “derived directly from British – base dialects” Wolfram et al. (2002:12). In addition, Wolfram also provides an explanation of why this variety is so called: “because it maintains that the

roots of AAVE can be traced to the same source as European American dialects - the dialects of English spoken in the British Isles” (Wolfram 2002:13). The reliability of this point of view is strengthened by the fact that “slaves brought with them to North America a number of different African languages, as well as some pidgin and creole varieties spoken in the African diaspora” (Wolfram 2002:13). Nevertheless “over the course of a couple of generations, only a few minor traces of these heritage languages remained, as Africans learned the regional and social varieties of surrounding white speakers” (Wolfram 2002:13). Moreover, in support of this hypothesis McDavid and McDavid agreed in some indirect way to this point of view about AAVE development, defining this variety as “derived from British provincial speech” (McDavid and McDavid 1951:6). So these authors could be classified as Anglicists, adding some stereotyped deductions such as the one related to the physical and intellectual skills of speakers of AAVE when improperly reproducing British dialects’ sounds. This hypothesis has also been taken into consideration by Lanehart, who reckons that AAVE speakers created this variety “with little to no influence from their own native languages and cultures” (Lanehart 2017:88), after getting in contact with some local varieties of British English.

On the other hand, in response to these ideas and points of view about development of AAVE, the Creole – hypothesis seems to contrast with what is believed by the supporters of the Anglicist – hypothesis. The Creole – hypothesis reconstructs the history of AAVE analysing those aspects that this variety has in common with a language called creole, giving a particular relevance to the phenomenon of copula absence, or zero copula. It is important to keep in mind that “The creole affinities of AAVE and the creole - like structural properties that we do observe are not to be accounted for by direct transmission, but by the more subtle process of substrate influence and by parallel drift or development” (Labov 2022:130). This quotation explains that similarities between creole and AAVE are not forms that had been directly transported into another linguistic system, they had rather been absorbed by speakers that developed a certain scheme of building sentences and thoughts. Moreover Lanehart (2017) explained that AAVE originated “from a prior US creole developed by slaves that was widespread across the colonies and slave-holding areas” (Lanehart 2017:87).

In support of this hypothesis there are three pieces of evidence highlighted by Rickford: the sociohistorical conditions, textual attestations and “diaspora recordings” (Rickford 2022:176). The first to be listed consists of the idea that “many slaves arrived in the American colonies and the Caribbean already speaking some variety of West African Pidgin English (WAPE) or Guinea Coast Creole English (GCCE)” (Rickford 2022:172-173). Another proof and support to this hypothesis is the “textual attestations” (Rickford 2022:174). These are “divided into two broad categories: (a) literary texts [...]; and (b) interviews with former slaves and other African Americans” (Rickford 2022:174). In spite of that, there are some crucial issues to face when taking into consideration literary texts. These are about the authenticity and reliability of literary texts, but these problems will be faced later and deeper in this chapter. To conclude, the third and last source of evidence is “modern-day recordings from the African-American diaspora or ‘diaspora recordings’ for short. These consist of audio recordings with descendants of African Americans who left the United States for other countries in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century [...]” (Rickford 2022:176). Even though researchers are building new hypotheses, that delete or win over others, “there is still need for more research at the levels of individual colonies or states, counties and districts, and plantations or households.” (Rickford 2022:174).

Written documents and recordings might have a crucial role in order to understand the historical and linguistic phenomena that made it possible for AAVE to develop. Wolfram (2002) establishes four main issues that need to be taken into account when trying to access to different documentations: authorship, models, manipulating and representativeness. These are all related to the marginal involvement of AAVE speakers in activities such as writing and making their voice heard. Starting from authorship, first person written documents may be products of instructed African Americans or dictates made by African Americans to someone else, “given the prohibition against literacy imposed on slaves.” (Wolfram 2002:15). The other three issues are all related to this prohibition and to the social perception of African Americans. The question related to models concerned doubts about structures used in documents: “whether writers are using native speech patterns or literacy, rhetorical forms” (Wolfram 2002:15). The last two problems listed by Wolfram: manipulating and representativeness have to do with modifications to the written code in order to correct the vernacular form as well as underlying those patterns typical of the vernacular, at the same time.

So, if varieties exist and are still used, there may be a reason why they have developed their patterns and structures that are still representative of a specific social and linguistic group today. Elizabeth Peterson (2019) analyses and tries to give more alternative explanations to dialect variation, spreading and existence. She focuses in particular on three factors: “(1) access and isolation, (2) covert prestige, and (3) identity” (Peterson 2019:62). These are considered by Peterson as a guide that explains the existence of different varieties that are characteristic of distinct groups or inner subgroups, and the reason why they are intentionally used. The explanations given by Peterson are four: geographical isolation, social isolation, contact with other languages or varieties, group solidarity/identity. Geographical isolation has to do with the physical isolation naturally imposed to some parts of the world by natural boundaries such as “rivers, inaccessible mountainous areas” (Peterson 2019:63). Social isolation and contact with other languages or varieties might be closely related to AAVE history, development and usage. Therefore, social isolation may be related to geographical isolation, as well as to some ethical and moral distance, because of huge differences between different groups of people. “Dialect differences may coincide with the boundaries of a religious community, with the socioeconomic status of a group of people, or with immigrants from similar area who move to the same place” (Peterson 2019:63). So, even though language might not seem particularly relevant and crucial when defining its speakers’ lifestyle and cultural background, it rather turns out that it shapes in detail how its speakers are perceived by speakers of other languages. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why people move and when they do so, it is natural and quite obvious that they bring with them their cultural background, that includes language as well. Looking for new work opportunities, visiting friends and relatives, no matter what the purpose is, moving “over a sustained period, elements of one language or variety can influence another in various ways.” (Peterson 2019:63). Direct contacts are not the only way in which speakers of different languages mix separate linguistic systems with one another. Taking into account the English language, that is the most spoken language in the world, it turns out, that it is influenced by several cultural and social backgrounds of the different countries in which this language is spoken. “English [...] is a language of widespread cultural influence” (Peterson 2019:63). So English varieties may have been influenced by ways of thinking, living life, or translating words from one outdated but deep-rooted language, to a new

global one, in order not to lose a significant part of their cultural background, and so their identity. This links to the concept of “group solidarity / identity” (Peterson 2019:63), that recognizes the strong existing relationship between speakers of “so-called ‘small’ or ‘minority’ languages” (Peterson 2019:63). In many cases these deep-rooted and ancient languages represent a sense of belonging and bonding with the small or minor community they grew up in.

1.2 Grammar of AAVE

This section of the first chapter is dedicated to grammar and phonology of AAVE. As already stated in the first part of this chapter there are some aspects of AAVE that seem to confirm and support creole – hypothesis. On the other hand, others are just considered typical of this variety and the cause of all the positive and negative distinctions from standard forms and structures. Even though many things need to be deeper examined and better understood, examples and explanations of some of the features of AAVE are provided in this section. The intent is to try to give a concrete and practical clarification and demonstration of the use of the vernacular language and its structures. So, attention will be paid to those aspects that, when used with speakers of other varieties or languages in general, lead to discrimination, social distinction and many other forms of social and cultural differences. This subchapter is going to mainly present verb tenses and verb structures typical of AAVE: zero copula, habitual/aspectual be, remote past/stressed BIN, done, sequential *be done*, non-recent perfective *been*, -s absence in third person singular present tense conjugation. Other patterns and the structures of AAVE are going to be presented and explained: *multiple/double negation*, and conclusively two phonological aspects: *final cluster reduction* and the realisation of the phonemes /ð/ and /θ,ð/.

1.2.1 Copula absence or zero copula

This part begins with the grammatical structure mentioned above in this chapter: copula absence or zero copula. Here is an example provided by Peterson (2019) about “copula absence in the *present* tense” (Peterson 2019:106):

“I’m going.

You going.

She going.

We going.

They going” (Peterson 2019:106).

“*She nice* or *you nice*” (Wolfram 2002:66)

Peterson selected among many typical analysed structures of African American English, that of “copula absence in the *present* tense” (Peterson 2019:106) that is shared with a variety that is of our interest: AAVE. “This rule means that there is no form of the verb *to be* in sentences that require *to be* in standard US English” (Peterson 2019:106). With this the author explains easily what this grammatical structure consists of, underlying that “copula deletion does *not* occur in the first person singular” (Peterson 2019:106), exactly as Rickford explained “first person copula absence is common in the Caribbean creoles but not in contemporary AAVE” (Rickford 2022:188). So, this grammatical verb structure is present in creole language, as well and this is one of the points in favour of creole – hypothesis. Moreover, “when a sentence is in the past tense, there can be no copula deletion” (Peterson 2019:106). This structure is particularly evident in AAVE when it is compared to standard English (SE). With regard to this “while SE requires an inflected form of *be* in all nonverbal predications, in AAVE such predicates are used without any copula [...]” (Rickford 2022:190).

1.2.2 Habitual/aspectual be

Going on with the analysis of verb forms of AAVE, Peterson mentioned the “habitual/aspectual be” (Peterson 2019:106):

“They reading. They be reading.

They playing. They be playing.

She working late. She be working late.” (Peterson 2019:107)

She adds something very relevant to the perception of this variety in English speaking society: “This is probably the most stereotyped, meaning that when outsiders want to mimic or make fun of African American English, they try to use aspectual *be*” (Peterson

2019:106). This can be therefore considered a crucial consideration that slightly introduces the following points that will be presented in the next chapter, which aims to provide an analysis of the effects of AAVE on the social life of its speakers. Furthermore “non-finite be had a habitual meaning” (Labov 2022:131), so this grammatical structure also occurs to represent something habitual. In addition to what has just been explained “non-finite be carries no tense information” (Labov 2022:131). This last phenomenon has been proven to be “a creation of the second half of the twentieth century” (Labov 2022:134), since it was first used by those who are born after 1944.

These first two grammatical structures may be misunderstood or even thought to be replaceable to speakers of other languages, but their meanings are completely different and “speakers of other varieties are not likely to perceive any difference in meaning” (Peterson 2019:107). The difference between these two forms (copula absence in present tense and aspectual be) has to do with the relationship between time and frequency. Copula absence in present tense, that is realized through forms such as “they reading” (Peterson 2019:107) refers to an action that “is happening right now” (Peterson 2019:107), so right in the moment when it is uttered; while *aspectual be* refers to actions that happen “on a regular basis” (Peterson 2019:107).

1.2.3 Remote past/stressed BIN

The next verb form of AAVE is “remote past/stressed BIN” (Peterson 2019:107).

“She BIN running. She running. She be running” (Peterson 2019:107)

BIN is linked to the comparison between the first two grammatical structures presented above. Therefore, this construction can be considered as a more extended meaning and version of the previous two. *BIN* indicates that “an event or state is situated in the distant past. It could be that the state or event is still going on, but the use of *BIN* indicates that the event or state started a long time ago” (Peterson 2019:107). In this case *BIN* indicates that the described action lasts a long time, it may be concluded or not, what is stressed in this case is the length of what is described by the verb. Then, if taking into consideration the previous examples and trying to build a sentence of a slightly different meaning, what emerges is: they BIN reading. This sentence refers therefore to the action of reading that started a long time ago, and that maybe is still going on. The context in which the sentence is placed helps us understand whether it is concluded or not. As regards the spelling,

realized with capital letters, it is intentionally written this way, in order “to reflect the fact that it is emphasized or stressed in speech” (Peterson 2019:107).

1.2.4 Done

Proceeding with this analysis focused on verb tenses and their relation to durability, what marks finalization in AAVE is the verb *done*. Here are some examples that will be explained later in this chapter:

1) “ ‘Buff, I done got wet twice goin’ to the store [...]’ (South Harlem, 39, 1967)” (Labov 2022:136)

2) “ ‘[...] Boy – you done done it now’ (Baugh 1983)” (Labov 2022:136)

3) “ ‘He done slept with Frence and he done slept with Darlene... and he supposed to be a good friend of Henry.’ (Darlene’s husband, from W. Philadelphia)” (Labov 2022:137)

This “indicates to the listener that an event has ended” (Peterson 2019:107). “*done* precedes a verb that makes reference to an action completed in the past” (Labov 2022:135), so this word can precede past simple tense, as it does in example 3). Moreover “Among adults, one often finds *done* alternating with the GE present perfect *have + en*, showing that for some AAVE speakers this GE form can be an equivalent to the present perfect” (Labov 2022:135). According to Labov (2022), this grammatical structure can have three different interpretations in relation to the clause and the context in which it appears: action completed, intensive meaning or even moral indignation. The examples above represent each possible interpretation: example 1) is a representation of a completed action; example 2) represents intensive meaning; while moral indignation is exemplified in 3). When *done* in a sentence conveys a certain moral indignation, that is also up to the speaker’s personal values and moral perception, *done* “can be translated by the phrase ‘had the nerve to’ [...]”. (Labov 2022:137).

1.2.5 Sequential be done

There is something more to examine about shades of meaning of verb tenses of AAVE. In this regard, Labov (2022) continues his analysis with the “sequential *be done*” (Labov 2022:141) a combination of the two structures previously analysed: habitual/aspectual *be* and *done*.

“ ‘My ice cream’s gonna *be done* melted by the time we get there. (25-year-old woman, Dayton 1996)’ (Labov 2022:141)”

“This relationship is prototypically indicated by the phrase *by the time*” (Labov 2022:141) and therefore refers mainly to something that locates in the future. This is the reason why this structure “can frequently be translated as equivalent to the GE future perfect, equivalent to ‘will have done’” (Labov 2022:141). In this structure of AAVE “be done is followed by a past participle form” (Labov 2022:142). In the case of the example above, as it is well explained by the author, the ice cream melts after the uttering of the sentence, but before getting somewhere known by the interlocutors. Nevertheless, there are examples that show how this grammatical pattern is “free of any reference to absolute location in time.” (Labov 2022:143), so context is crucial for the understanding of “the exact circumstances in which it was said” (Labov 2022:143) and therefore the understanding of the relationship between the time of speaking and the happening of events.

1.2.6 Non-recent perfective been

Another structure worth mentioning is “non-recent perfective been” (Labov 2022:147).

1) “She *been* married” (Labov 2022:147)

2) “A: They been left.

B: They left *already*?

A: They *been* left. (Dayton 1996)” (Labov 2022:148)

3) “A: New glasses, Ron?

B: I been had ‘em. (Dayton 1996)” (Labov 2022:149)

In this case, this structure is used for describing actions that may be classified with one of these “three semantic components: {1} a condition referred to was true in the past; {2} it has *been* true for a comparatively long time (non-recent); {3} it is still true” (Labov 2022:147). So, this construction is typically used for describing something that took place and concluded in the past or is still happening. When this structure is read and should be

interpreted by a reader who speaks or at least knows General English (GE), there could be some discrepancies between what the sentence really means and what is rather understood by a GE speaker. In this regard Labov (2022) provided an investigation made by Rickford in 1973 about the possible misunderstandings when reading the sentence reported also above: “She been married” Rickford (1973 in Labov 2022:147). “through the question ‘Is she still married?’ [...] white response was ‘No’, since *has been* without a temporal modifier of duration implies the completion of the action. The majority of blacks responded ‘Yes’ [...]” (Labov 2022:147-148). To conclude with the explanation of this verb structure, in the examples 2) and 3) the meaning of *been* is clarified thanks to the context or other surrounding words. Example 2) can be correctly read, thanks to presence of *already* and the “re-assertion of *been*” (Labov 2022:148). Therefore the semantic feature is clarified and the action of leaving “is complete at the present time” (Labov 2022:148), so when it is uttered. Example 3) describes something that is not new and that could have been noticed earlier.

1.2.7 -s absence in third person singular

As regards -s absence in third person singular verb conjugation, this deserves to be mentioned, since this grammatical structure and concordance is something that is deeply underlined while learning English.

“*The dog bark_*” (Wolfram 2002:66)

Therefore, forgetting or omitting -s ending in third person present tense is a big mistake in standard English. Contrarily, “In African American English, there is no third person -s: all of the forms have just the verb stem” (Peterson 2019:108-109), this quotation refers for the sake of convenience to African American English, but this unusual structure is typical of AAVE as well: “There is no third singular /s/ in AAVE and no subject-verb agreement” (Labov 2022:126).

1.2.8 Multiple/double negation

In relation to “multiple/double negation” (Peterson 2019:110). This can be described also as “negative concord” (Peterson 2019:110). Here an example of how it works:

“He went out into that storm without no coat or nothing” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:19).

This grammatical structure has to do with the construction of negative clauses, that in AAVE works very differently from standard English. It is referred also as “multiple negation and pleonastic negation” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:18) and “essential characteristics of negative concord sentences is the use of two or more negative morphemes to communicate a single negation.” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:18). So, in this sense, a clause in AAVE such as the one mentioned above should be interpreted as if the negation were just one. Accordingly, the equivalent in standard English is “He went out into that storm without a/any coat or anything” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:19). So, this is a demonstration of the fact that “Where AAVE permits more than one such morpheme in a negative sentence, SE uses one and (optionally) one or more negative polarity items” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:19). In this kind of sentences negative morphemes are pronounced differently: “one of the negative words receives normal stress while the other receives heavier stress and often a rising tone.” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:19-20).

1.3 Phonology of AAVE

The last part of the chapter focuses on two phonological AAVE aspects, and therefore changes and differences between AAVE and SE: *final cluster reduction*, the substitution of /d/ for /ð/ and of /f,v/ for /θ,ð/.

1.3.1 Final cluster reduction

- 1) “first time firs’ time” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94)
- 2) “first girl firs’ girl” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94)

Bailey and Thomas (2022) stated that “final cluster reduction and the deletion of reduplicated syllables, occur in all or most varieties of English but seem either to be more frequent in AAVE or to occur in a wider range of contexts” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94). In this variety “there are both phonological and grammatical constraints on the process” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94). Thereby, as explained by the authors, “reduction is much less likely if the word following the consonant cluster begins in a vowel (as in *first apple*) or if the final consonant in the cluster marks past tense (as in *walked*)” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94). So in this case, morphemes that have a relevant grammatical function in the sentence should be kept, as well as those whose phonological realization happens

in a different place of articulation from the surrounding morphemes. Nevertheless, as it is exemplified in 2) it is possible for adjacent units with different place of articulation to be phonetically realized deleting one of them. Therefore “consonant cluster reduction is perhaps the best example of this phenomenon” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94), as it is exemplified by the authors with the phrase “firs’ time” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94), also mentioned in 1).

1.3.2 Substitution of /d/ for /ð/ and of /f,v/ for /θ,ð/

Another feature that is “especially frequent in AAVE” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97) is “the substitution of /d/ for /ð/ initially [...] and of /f,v/ for /θ,ð/ medially and finally” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97).

- 1) “*with* variously as [wIt], [wId], [wIf] and [wIv]” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97)
- 2) “*dese* for *these*” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97)
- 3) “*mouf* for *mouth*” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97)
- 4) “*brover* for *brother*” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97)

These pronunciation variants that make a labiovelar sound as an alveolar or vice versa are caused by factors that “are not clear” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97). The authors provide examples of these changes taking into account the preposition *with*, whose phonetic realisation is explained in the example above. Meanwhile example 2) is a representation of the “substitution of /d/ for /ð/” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97) in the first part of words. This happens also medially and finally, as exemplified respectively in examples 4) and 3).

This first approach to the analysis of AAVE presented some structures typical of this variety and proved some differences between AAVE and SE in phonology, time reference and negative clauses as well. In particular, thanks to this chapter, evidence was given to possible miscomprehension between speakers of different varieties. Furthermore, some features are understandable just for AAVE speakers, who therefore have a linguistic background that linguistically isolates them from speakers of other languages. This deduction served as an introduction to the social issues faced by AAVE speakers that are

going to be introduced and explained in the second chapter. Linguistic consequences are going to highlight how deep the impact of language could be in society, leading to significant effects in social relations and attitudes towards them.

2. Social implications of AAVE

This chapter will focus on the consequences that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) leads to in its speakers' life, taking into account three areas: the education, the workplace and the justice system. As explained and analysed in the previous chapter, which illustrated some of the most relevant and evident grammatical and structural differences between this vernacular language and standard American English, AAVE has several structures that make it sound unique and distinct from all other possible varieties of English. This language has a huge social impact on its speakers, and it makes them experience discriminating situations in several possible contexts. So, this chapter analyses three impacts of AAVE that in some ways may be considered as a limit and boundary to equal treatment and to equal possibilities of personal growth of AAVE speakers. In this regard, AAVE speakers are often marginalised because of their language by speakers of other English varieties. The implications discussed in this chapter concern three main environments: education, the workplace and the justice system. As regards the education and the workplace, they can be thought of as linked to each other. In particular education and so the level of preparation received at school has obviously an impact on potential working careers when entering the workplace. Peterson (2019) analysed the consequences of standard language over varieties that, as explained in the previous chapter, naturally develop in some areas in relation to culture and linguistic backgrounds. In this regard, the author explains that “[...] Standardization process of English, and, with it, the social changes that resulted in English no longer serving simply as a means of communication, but being lifted up as an object of scrutiny, dysphony and division” (Peterson 2019:17). So, this quotation helps with the understanding of the languages' power in society, in particular when *division* is mentioned. This concept helps with the introduction and understanding of how profound the impact of language on society is, as was briefly presented in the first chapter. Peterson (2019) further explains the importance of relying on a standardised language, better defying the areas in which a standard language may facilitate the sharing of information, over varieties, by saying: “In many ways the standardization process is a healthy sign that a language is vital, viable and meaningful for its speakers. For one thing, languages with a standardized variety tend to have a writing system based on a unified standard, which in turn opens up opportunities for literature, communication, and other cultural manifestations.” (Peterson 2019:18).

This may suggest that varieties represent the flexibility and adaptability of languages in relation to their group of speakers. Nevertheless, standard versions of languages need to be maintained so that comprehension and sharing of information between different parts of the world can successfully take place, as mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter. The concept of *standardization* is expanded in four “general stages, as introduced by the linguist Einar Haugen (1966): (1) selection (2) codification (3) implementation (4) elaboration” (Peterson 2019:18). All of these stages consist respectively of “the emergence of one dialect which gains recognition as a model” (Peterson 2019:18). Codification consists of the “creation of a code, or in other words, written grammars and dictionaries appear, including those that discuss how language should or should not be used” (Peterson 2019:18). Implementation takes place when “various decision makers and influential figures and organizations adopt the new norms in their own communication” (Peterson 2019:19). Elaboration refers to “widespread use and acknowledgment of the particular variety in elite forms such as science, technology and, for example, higher education.” (Peterson 2019:19). So, this is what is considered to shape a standard language and therefore everything that is different from its forms and structures results as a variety or, in some cases, as a vernacular language.

2.1 The impact of AAVE on education

Returning to the quotation mentioned above about the stage of *elaboration* of a language, that concentrates and analyses also which language is adopted in *higher education* contexts, this part of the chapter is focused on the impacts of a language on its speakers’ educational path or academic career. “Large numbers of immigrants to the UK from different parts of the world faced challenges related to integration, access to schooling, and job training. In general they faced social and economic challenges at a higher rate than nonimmigrants” (Peterson 2019:39). This helps with the beginning of the analysis, as well does the examined fact that takes into account the differences between UK and US English pronunciation. The languages considered are not related to this analysis, but what is relevant in this case is the fact that “Like any variety of a language, RP reveals the social background of its speakers” (Peterson 2019:35). The acronym *RP* stands for *Received Pronunciation* and this is “the name of the dialect – or, more accurately, the accent – which is used by the most socially prestigious or elite group in the UK”. (Peterson 2019:35). Again, the concept to take into account is the relevance and

importance that the most spread accent has over others. So, when a speaker of any variety interacts with others, its origins or linguistic group may be well and clearly exposed and noticed. As a deduction to what has been stated in the previous reasoning, those who speak a standard variety unconsciously experience a general favourable condition. This is stated and proven by the fact that “standardized English-speaking students” (Peterson 2019:45) tend to take as given several situations normally encountered in everyday life. Peterson (2019) listed some of them:

- “the newspaper, magazines, books, and other media they encounter at school will be in the type of English they are already familiar with.
- They will not be mocked or teased for how they pronounce their words.
- They will not be thought of as being less intelligent because of how they talk.
- Standardized test instructions and materials will be written in the English they are already familiar with
- Most of their educators will communicate with them in the type of English the students are already familiar with.
- The way they talk will not be the subject of jokes or belittling in mainstream TV shows or movies.
- Their pronunciation, intonation, and sentence structure will not interfere with their ability to be assessed accurately, to interact with authority figures, or, later in life, to obtain housing and be hired for a job.

Source: Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011:36” (Peterson 2019:45)

This list demonstrates some consequences of language varieties in academic environments, as well as other aspects attributed to social relationships and perception. As regards the school environment, Peterson (2019) underlined the significance of language in educational institutions and she gave evidence to a resultant situation “[...] where the student is not able to thrive in the school environment” (Peterson 2019:51). In this regard, after Winford (2002) talked about discriminations caused by different structures and patterns of building sentences, he said that “The other general arena in which AAVE speakers are discriminated against is the school system” (Winford 2002:33). This disadvantageous situation is intensified by the fact that “the linguistic needs of such children go unrecognized and ignored [...]” (Peterson 2019:51). In this sense Rickford (1999 in Winford 2002:34) further investigated the situation faced by children speaking

AAVE and he explained that “[...] the vernacular grammar and styles of communication used by Black children play a crucial role in limiting their scholastic success.” (Winford 2002:34). In this regard Winford (2002) added that “The continuing failure of the school system to provide an adequate education for the vast majority of African American children in the inner cities reflects, at the very least, a grave indifference to their needs and aspirations” (Winford 2002:33). Moreover younger speakers whose native language is AAVE may “face difficulties in learning to read and write in standardized English” (Peterson 2019:51). This is influenced and worsened by the circumstances existing in the school system, in which as explained by Rickford (1999 in Winford 2002:34), “Teachers’ negative and prejudicial attitudes toward AAVE and Black communicative styles, and their inability or unwillingness to take it into account when teaching language skills, are also part of the problem” (Winford 2002:34). So, AAVE speakers might encounter difficulties and because of this, they may be in specific need of assistance from teachers, who do not seem available and willing to help and provide them a specific and necessary assistance while learning. Together with this, their right to education is being violated as well as the right to equality, since they are considered neither to have enough preparation to be ready to study and reach certain levels of knowledge, nor to have the same practical skills, as a consequence of what is explained before.

A solution to this problematic situation in the school environment can be found starting from awareness of these issues, even though doing something concretely is the one and only way to face and solve this question. In this regard Winford (2002) analysed the strong relationship between language and identity, underlying the deep connection existing between language and the sense of belonging to a specific social group. The author clarified that “there is a clear distinction between the ‘status-oriented’ norms of evaluation that favor use of SE, and the community-oriented norms that place value on AAVE.” (Winford 2002:30). In this sense AAVE use in domestic domains may be caused also by a deep-rooted sense of belonging to a specific group.

Going back to what has been explained above, the awareness and recognition of human rights about equality and education collapse. “The methods currently being used to teach reading, writing, and language arts to African American children are an abysmal failure. The hardest-hit children are those of the working or poorer classes, whose first language is AAVE.” (Winford 2002:34). This undoubtedly explains that linguistic distinctions of

AAVE speakers together with prejudices about their language, and questionability about their competences are those factors that strongly limit their access to the same educational opportunities, and therefore to the same levels of education reached by standard speakers. All of these phenomena have been linked to a certain hostility towards non-standard speakers of English, Winford (2002) reported a case in which repudiation is evidently shown in a request presented in California in March 1997 that “was intended to ‘eliminate specified funding sources for all non-standard English instruction.’ Non-standard English was defined as ‘any vernacular dialect of English,’ especially ‘Ebonics, Black English, Black language or African American Vernacular English.’ It quite clearly repudiated any attempt to train teachers or administrative staff in schools to do any of the following:

- incorporate non-standard English into their lesson plans;
- legitimize, accept, or embrace non-standard English;
- Teach that non-standard English is a situationally correct alternative to English in some or all situations.” (Winford 2002:34).

This is a striking representation of how this vernacular variety is unfavourably perceived, and therefore thought to be necessarily eliminated.

Nevertheless in 1998-1999 a program was organised in order to help non-standard English speaking students and support them in their personal and educational development. This program is called *The Academic English Mastery Program*, it was designed and applied by the Los Angeles school system and it “incorporates into the curriculum instructional strategies that facilitate the acquisition of standard and academic English in classroom environments that validate, value, and build upon the language and culture of the students.” (“Los Angeles unified ready for the world” <https://www.lausd.org/AEMP>). Nowadays, this gives hope and demonstrates a concrete and real step closer to equal opportunities and growth possibilities, for those students whose linguistic background has caused impartial and detrimental situations in school environments.

2.2 The impact of AAVE in the workplace

As a consequence of what was said above and as it mostly happens, work possibilities and possible occupations are quite always the result of choices made by people from the beginning of their academic paths. So, they are also linked to the development of a personal sense of awareness of interests, passions and hobbies. Circumstances play a

crucial role in the academic and work careers. Anyway, society and prejudices may have a significant role in establishing personal work opportunities.

In regard of these conditions, Goodenow and White (1981 in Ball 2002:188) explained the existing relationship between the belonged social group and possible work occupations, recognising a limit imposed to specific individuals. In this sense she highlighted that “[...] Blacks were trained as professionals. [...] Manual training was used to keep Blacks in their ‘place’, not to offer them advancement” (Ball 2002:188). In support of Ball (2002), Rickford et al. (2015) analysed the effects of adopting AAVE, defining also the correlation between field of occupation, economic situation and language, explaining that “lower- and working-class status is correlated with the highest frequency of AAVE use” (Rickford et al., 2015, p. 11821). This leads to the deduction that the educational paths of AAVE speakers were thought and planned so as to limit the development of their skills and place them into a specific and stuck role in the workplace, so with no possibilities of growth and upgrades. But at this point, what happens when people can do absolutely nothing from the beginning of their careers because of discrimination and restricted opportunities due to their language and so their origins? As explained in the previous section, language discrimination is something rooted in society and in the perception of what is out of the majority’s inner circle. This is usually something to work on, trying to reduce the impacts that language has on its speakers, that is also the reason why “Black Americans are taught at an early age to suppress AAVE in educational and workplace contexts in order to obtain quality education and employment opportunities” (in McCluney et al., 2021, p. 9). Nevertheless, individuals who are considered to belong to a minor social group, that also defines a limited access to workplace, do not seem particularly upset, since they consider “[...] their vernacular as a badge of their identity and a symbol of resistance to their assimilation to the dominant ‘white’ culture, as indeed other minority groups do” Lippi - Green (1997 in Winford 2002:30). Furthermore, the feeling of belonging to a linguistic group, in which speakers can openly and freely express their thoughts, without any worry of being judged or labelled as different and inferior, has a prominent role in society. For this reason, even if talking about the workplace, language plays a symbolic role and that is why again “Black people positively evaluate the use of AAVE [...]” (in McCluney et al., 2021, p. 3), because of the familiarity and membership felt when sharing ideas and thoughts with someone

who has the same cultural background. According to this statement, when entering the marketplace, and so with a developed adulthood, people do not let others decide what is the best language to talk, and so the best group to belong to, accepting the consequences of their linguistic choices. In relation to this, Ingrid Piller (2016) dedicated part of her study to the bond between language background and workplace. “In 2006 [...] wages and other forms of remuneration have become increasingly unequal within and between sectors, communities, countries and regions, and between nationals and immigrants, the skilled and the less skilled, and urban and rural residents.” (Piller 2016:63). With this the author shared some of her deductions about the relationship connecting unemployment situations starting in 2006 and their correlation to diversities existing and distinguishing groups of people, among them the condition of being *less skilled*. This last condition is linked to the personal training and preparation that the school system and later work opportunities can provide. What has just been reported helps with the understanding of the impact that education has on work possibilities and opportunities in the workplace. So, if AAVE speakers do not have the same opportunities in schools and educational environments, they are consequently not as skilled as others. This is due to their missing possibilities of discovering their skills, passions and field of interest through education, help and support from teachers. In addition to this, they fit the group of those with a non-standard linguistic background that certainly empowers their position of inferiority or subordination, since “AAVE is highly stigmatized and perceived as inferior to standard American English” (in McCluney et al., 2021, p. 9). Consequently, in order to try to achieve equal work opportunities and be threaten honestly in the workplace, AAVE speakers “reduce the use of colloquialism and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to promote perceptions of competence and to receive fair treatment” (in McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2). As far as honesty is concerned, AAVE speakers face some concrete and unjust situations, actually “AAVE use is associated with adverse schooling, housing and labor market outcomes” (in Rickford et al., 2015, p.11821). This is due to the denigrating attitude towards AAVE and all other characteristics that are considered to be adjacent to it. Therefore there are “Behaviors that are considered stereotypically ‘Black’ (e.g., use of AAVE, natural hairstyles) tend to be negatively judged by White observers” (in McCluney et al., 2021, p. 3). This influences attitudes of AAVE speakers towards their language, when they decide to pursue a path focused on training and growing their

academic as well as professional career. Accordingly “AAVE use [...] decline as a youth enter college or the labor market” (in Rickford et al., 2015, p. 11819). So, once AAVE speakers decide to enter the workplace, they have to make a choice: adapt to standardisation imposed by society in order not to be left apart or discriminated, or carry on their cultural and linguistic background accepting social judgments and discriminating work and academic circumstances. Furthermore, the impossibility of having both success in the workplace and free expression of their linguistic identity can have negative and restrictive effects on the free manifestation of their linguistic and consequently cultural peculiarity.

2.3 AAVE impact on the justice system

The third impact to be examined in this analysis is that of the justice system. This part aims to give a representation of the effects that speaking a different variety or a vernacular language might have in a court: in front of a judge and all other members working there. The effects and therefore issues that may be faced are misunderstandings, incomprehensions and little consideration. Peterson (2019) referred to this issue as “the (in)justice system” (Peterson 2019:53), later in this research it will be hopefully clearly explained why Peterson (2019) described it as *(in)justice*. The court is a place where people share information, discuss facts and testify, thinking their voice is properly heard and taken into consideration. Thus “the relationship between language and justice is a strong and obvious one. After all, waiving or accepting rights, testifying in court or serving as a witness to a crime are all activities contingent on the use of language” (Peterson 2019:53).

“*State of Florida v. George Zimmerman*” (Peterson 2019:53) is an example of a clear and concrete proof and demonstration of linguistic discrimination in the juridical field. This case is about the murder of Trayvon Martin, whose only available witness was his friend Rachel Jeantel. The crux of the matter has to do with proving the accusation against George Zimmerman to be responsible for the death of Trayvon. Nevertheless Jeantel, a friend of the victim and the last person to talk to Trayvon, spoke AAVE that “linguists call ‘African American Vernacular English’ (AAVE)” (Rickford and King, 2016, p.949). The crucial problem of the trial was its outcome because “jurors, partly because they could not hear, understand, or believe her, disregarded her testimony and acquitted Mr. Zimmerman” (Rickford and King, 2016, p.949). What may shock the most is the fact that

“there was no question that Zimmerman had killed Martin, but the point of going to trial was to try and determine whether Zimmerman had shot Martin out of self-defence, or if the shooting was murder” (Peterson 2019:54). The killing happened in 2012, Zimmerman went to trial in 2013 and the case “[...] merits special attention because of the pivotal role of language used in court” (Peterson 2019:54). As explained by Rickford and King (2016) Rachel Jeantel spoke AAVE and she “identifies as African American and speaks nonstandardized varieties.” (Peterson 2019:54). For this reason, in spite of being the last person to talk with the victim, “Jeantel was, in effect, deemed an unreliable witness in the murder case” (Peterson 2019:55). The two friends were talking on the phone, when Martin admitted to be scared because a man seemed to follow him. In spite of Jeantel’s witnessing, that highlighted Zimmerman’s guilt and underlined some crucial details about the instants preceding the murder, her linguistic background represented a limit and barrier so high-priority and deep, that self-evidence of events fades into the background. As represented in some reported parts of Jeantel’s testimony, her “usage is highly vernacular” (Rickford and King 2016, p. 956), and this is proven by the structures of her declarations, here are few: “he said he Ø from – he – I asked him where he Ø at.” or again “the nigga Ø behind me” (Rickford and King 2016, p. 956). In the first examples provided above there is a representation of the structure of copula absence or zero copula in AAVE, presented and explained in the previous chapter. In this regard, this analysis is expanded to other utterances of Jeantel, that are typical of AAVE language, as for example:

“(19) stressed *BIN* as a remote phase marker

I BIN knew I was the last person to talk to Trayvon (= ‘had known for a long time’)

(deposition; 3/13/2013)

(20) invariant habitual *be*

a) That’s where his headset be at (testimony; 6/26/2013)

b) Sometimes my friends be texting for me, when I’m busy

(deposition; 4/24/2013)”

(Rickford and King 2016, p. 958)

Again there are other reproductions of AAVE in structures that she used:

“(23) Negative concord

The Crump interview don't mean nothing to me. (testimony; 6/26/2013)" (Rickford and King 2016, p.958).

Since the previous section was also about the typical structure of the absence of present tense -s, this feature emerged from Jeantel's testimony as well and so it deserved attention and mentioning, as reported by Rickford and King (2016), Jeantel's "Ø THIRD SINGULAR PRESENT -S:

'It make Ø him hungry.' 99% (119/120)" (Rickford and King 2016, p. 958). This means that while testifying she omitted the third singular present tense -s 99% of the time.

All these structures were presented in the first chapter. So, reporting some practical and concrete examples of their use in everyday life and in context such as the juridical one, also adding two reactions to structures of AAVE, can help with the representation of the language usage and its social perception. In this regard, Rickford and King (2016) reported also some online comments and reactions to her testimony: "(11) 'she is a dullard, an idiot, an individual who can barely speak in coherent sentences' - Jim Heron, Appalachian State²¹"; "Everyone, regardless of race, should learn to speak correct English, or at least UNDERSTANDABLE English... I couldn't understand 75% of what she was saying ... that is just ridiculous [sic]!" Emma, comment on MEDIAite²⁵" (Rickford and King 2016, p. 957).

Due to AAVE structures and features that emerged from her speech, "Jeantel's six hours of testimony and 15 hours of case-related were never fully utilized." (Peterson 2019:55), even though as explained by Rickford and King (2016) "[...] her speech is neither 'inarticulate' or 'incoherent', but a systematic exemplification of the grammar of AAVE [...]" (Rickford and King 2016, p.957). Jeantel was thought to be unreliable just because of her language and her way of behaving in such a formal setting.

The next steps in the analysis, representation and demonstration of issues relating AAVE and the justice system, consist of trying to give an explanation of such discriminating and hostile attitudes and reactions to varieties. The first element that needs to be reported has to do with the attitude of court members towards language variety. In particular the role of court reporters is analysed, presented and explained by Jones, Kabfeld, Hancock and Clark (2019 in Peterson 2019:55), who found evidence of the fact that the central and influential figures of court reporters "[...]were not capable of understanding and accurately transcribing African American English" (Peterson 2019:55). So, what can be

explained thanks to the support of studies and research is a situation in which some individuals are not completely and rightly understood in courts because of their language. This is the case of those speaking varieties or vernacular forms of English, including AAVE. In such environments, where key decisions must be made, judging someone guilty or innocent for a crime, misunderstandings or incomprehensions should not emerge. Nevertheless, a study was conducted by linguists on 27 court reporters working in Philadelphian courts started from “the premise that US court reporters must demonstrate at least 95 percent accuracy in their transcriptions in order to be certified” (Peterson 2019:55). The experiment consisted of making them transcribe and paraphrase, if necessary, what they understood from the discourse they were given. So the aim was that of testing their skills to adapt to and to understand a different language from the one that they well knew, mastered, and listened to most of the time in juridical environments. Given their central figures, they were expected to correctly interpret 95 percent or more of what they heard. But the results of the experiment showed that “[...] 59.5 percent of the transcribed utterances were incorrect in some way” (Peterson 2019:56). Since the study was conducted on AAVE testimonies, this demonstrated that declarations of those who spoke AAVE tended to be misreported. According to the findings of this study, what was particularly shocking and unexpected is the true percentage of accuracy, compared to the percentage of mistakes that in advance were thought to be accepted and potentially expected in these particular linguistic circumstances. Compared to 95 percent accuracy expected, the study shows 40.5 percent reliability of what reporters understood and transcribed.

This chapter aimed to represent social implications of AAVE, trying to provide explanations of what it means to belong to a linguistic minority and denigrated linguistic group. In particular, when institutions (such as the justice system) who wield enormous power in the society, and for this reason exercise influence on individuals, tend not to act the same way towards different groups, this intensifies and strengthens the gap existing and dividing the different groups that make up the society. Social implications on speakers of different languages may cause isolation and so a feeling of desolation due to emancipation, as well as a deep and intense identification with a specific linguistic minority. So, there are two things that increase: the gap between social linguistic groups

and the distance from reaching equal treatment in school environments, the workplace and courts. The three areas presented above: education, the workplace and the justice system have been chosen due to wide and broad effects they have on AAVE speakers' everyday life: from the beginning of educational programs to personal realisation and achievement in the workplace. Going on with the juridical field that should be and is expected to be the most neutral and impartial, as well as to adequately understand and respect everyone, without any distinction of race, sex, or any other kinds. The presentation of AAVE structures and features, and the social attitudes towards AAVE speakers is concluded. It will be followed by a creative approach that analyses the film "The Color Purple", in which the structures of verbs of AAVE are represented in the dialogues of the characters.

3. AAVE verbs in the film “The Color Purple”

This chapter aims to investigate the use of AAVE in the film. In particular, this part is dedicated to verbs that mirror AAVE structures analysed and presented in the first chapter and that were found in the film “The Color Purple”. The film was written by Menno Meyjes and directed by Steven Spielberg, with the support of the producers: Kathleen Kennedy, Frank Marshall and Quincy Jones. It was released in 1985 and inspired by the homonymous novel by Alice Walker published in 1982. The plot revolves around Nettie and Celie: two little sisters whose fates evolved very differently. Celie is forced to marry Albert, meanwhile Nettie is victim of the domestic abuses of her father.

The novel has an epistolary style and does not follow a chronological order. It portrayed the Southern area of the United States in the first half of the 20th century. As concerns the structure of the novel, it is “‘pieced’ from patches of memory, from patches woven of different threads and for different wear, but brought together so as to make a whole meaning from Celie’s and Nettie’s seemingly separated lives” (Tavormina 1986:225). Moreover, going on with the analysis taking into account the language used by Walker, she gave voice to her characters, adopting “Black English Vernacular” (Shuv 2016:116), a variety closely associated with the main character: Celie. In this regard, it is relevant to point out that she expresses her thoughts and her ideas without any difficulties related to the variety she spoke. Therefore “Celie’s emergence into authority, independence, and agency results from her facility for expressing her suffering to Shug Avery, God, and her sister Nettie in the Black English Vernacular” (Shuv 2016:116). So, language neither represents a barrier to Celie’s possibility of gaining independence and finding freedom again, nor a sign to Celie’s impossibility to take again control of her life.

Analysing the film “The Color Purple”, it could be said that the novel by Walker was interpreted by Spielberg and his colleagues. In particular McMullen and Solomon (1994) commented the film highlighting two positive characteristics of it. In this regard, according to their opinions the film represents a valid interpretation of the novel, and an accurate representation of America in the first half of the 20th century.

Going deeper into the analysis of the main character, Celie is the persona whose dreams and life expectations are limited the most, in particular accessing education was one of her rights to be violated. More specifically “her father deprived her of her right to education” (Wang and Yang 2019:804); but her sister Nettie tried to teach her new words

and correct reading. In addition, Celie is a character whose identity and self-expression are repressed also by her husband Albert. In this regard, “The picture Celie creates, written in dialect, vividly and painfully describes her sense of entrapment and hopelessness.” (Mcmullen and Solomon 1994:164). This portrayal of Celie’s linguistic skills was altered in the film, since “In the book she is able to articulate her thoughts and feelings through her letters (such as an unexpectedly close feeling for Albert), while her literal silence in the film obscures these emotions” (Mcmullen and Solomon 1994:167). Even though in the film Celie is not able to express her feelings and emotions in words, this does not mean that she remains completely silent. “Thus, most of the events are filtered through Celie’s worldview, captured in her black dialect. Celie’s mode of self-expression is a vital element in the reader’s comprehension of her plight” (Mcmullen and Solomon 1994:167). So, her dialect and way of speaking help the viewers to empathise and therefore recognise the emotions that she indirectly tries to convey.

3.1 Data and methodology

This analysis is not focused on the plot, it rather concerns dialogues and in particular verb structures that emerged from Celie, Celie’s father, Nettie, Albert, Albert’s father, Shug Avery, Sofia, Miss Millie and Mr. Hamilton. Verbs were retrieved from the script and from several rewatching. Moreover, particular attention was paid to dialogues that needed to be listened to multiple times. The verbs mirror some of the structures presented in the first chapter. The verb structures that are taken into consideration are: copula absence or zero copula; *-s* absence in third person singular; *done*; non-recent perfective *been*; aspectual *be*. They were already presented and analysed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, a portrayal of verb features of AAVE is going to be presented, in order to analyse and list them referring to the film, whose dialogues are mainly uttered in AAVE. In addition, a representation of the multiple/double negation in the construction of negative sentences in AAVE will be presented. In spite of the strong presence of AAVE, there are also some utterances in standard English, and a possible explanation for this is provided in the section that will discuss the use of standard English in the film.

3.2 Analysis based on the script of the film “The Color Purple”.

This section deals with verb forms of AAVE as presented in the film “The Color Purple”. This part should be useful to underline the importance of verbs in the utterances and their

relation to actions and facts referred to the verbs themselves. Moreover, it is equally important to highlight discrepancies from standard English. All verb structures that are going to be reported are retrieved from the script that is relevant and useful for presenting and analysing the feature that is taken into consideration in the different parts of this section. The first two structures that are going to be taken into account are copula absence and -s absence in present tense verbs conjugated in the third person.

3.2.1 Copula absence or zero copula

Copula absence consists of deleting copula, this omission is not present in standard English, where copula is always present. In AAVE copula absence occurs in two verb tenses: present simple and present continuous, apart from the first person singular. With the first person singular, as explained in the first chapter, copula is always present. In this regard, as it could be noticed from some sections of dialogues of the film, copula absence could be omitted or deleted for many reasons that are up to the hidden meaning that the character pronouncing the utterance conveys, potentially according to the intentions of the writer as well. In particular, going deeper into this analysis, there are mainly two reasons why copula absence occurs, that are linked to each other: omitting because of linguistic attitudes, and omitting because the character is having a moment of stream-of-consciousness, during which no attention is paid to language structures or proper explanation. In those moments of flow of thoughts, characters formulated just disconnected utterances. Here are some examples of these two different but similar circumstances. The first to be taken into consideration is that of characters simply omitting copula:

1. “they getting married now” (Celie)
2. “his wife dead” (Celie)
3. “she too young” (Celie’s father)
4. “what you doing that for?” (Celie’s brother)
5. “this here your new mammy” (Albert)
6. “while he on top of me” (Celie)
7. “wonder if she safe” (Celie)
8. “what he doing to me, he done to her” (Celie)
9. “My husband waiting” (Mr. Samuel’s wife, those who adopted Celie’s daughter)
10. “Who her daddy? [...] who he?” (Celie)

The other circumstance is about characters omitting because of stream-of-consciousness or intense emotions. This is typical of utterances such as:

1. “I think she mine, my heart say she mine, but I don’t know she mine. If she my baby her name Olivia” (Celie).

The example reported above was uttered by Celie in a shop, when she casually met her daughter held in the arms of another woman, who is now her mother. By omitting copula, Celie shared and conveyed her feelings and emotions. In this regard, copula absence could be seen and interpreted also as a medium for better conveying and representing the intense emotions and repressed happiness of being a mother.

2. “when you free, me and the baby be waiting” (Sofia).

This was uttered by Sofia, the future wife of Harpo, brother in law of Celie. The scene in which Sofia uttered this is particularly intense, because of the nervousness, irritability, but also bravery of Sofia when protecting herself, her family and her choices.

So, at the end of the analysis of copula absence, it could be said that it is a typical feature of AAVE that is used by characters spontaneously, but also as a medium of intensifying certain feelings in crucial or pivotal moments.

Nevertheless, there are some scenes in the film in which copula is present and in these cases, it could be justified and explained as a choice to underline certain details or information. In this regard here are some examples:

“Celie is ugly, but she ain’t no stranger to hard work” (Celie’s father). In this utterance the fact that Celie is not pretty should fade into the background, since she works hard. Another example for this exception is: “she’s got a man always looking at her” (Celie). This utterance provides an explanation and justification of the fear felt and expressed by a character. And again “why are you always covering up your smile?” (Shug Avery with Celie) as a shocked and doubtful reaction to the fact that Celie never openly smiles. She always hides her teeth and Shug Avery does not understand at all this action, that might be the reason why in this question the verb “are” is expressed. “Are” is therefore present so as to intensify the question and the fact that the person uttering it can not find an explanation at all of this. Another example linked to this last attitude is “are you trying to kill me?” (Shug Avery nervous with Albert). This is uttered in a particularly desperate as

well as shocking situation. And again “I didn’t see nothing, but I know something’s there” (Celie). This construction is divided into two clauses. The last one: “but I know something’s there” should be interpreted as a contrast to what is said in the first clause, and so the conviction and belief are strengthened by the presence of the copula. In the following and last utterance: “sure is a pretty dress you have on” (Albert), thanks to the presence of the verb “is” and because of the construction of the utterance, emphasis is put on the fact that Albert found her dress to be a nice one.

3.2.2 -s absence in third person singular

Going on with the analysis of utterances from the dialogues of the film “The Color Purple”, another typical verb structure of AAVE is -s absence in present tense verbs conjugated in third person singular. Furthermore, as it will be demonstrated below, there are some cases in which -s absence is used to express past tense. Nevertheless, -s is sometimes present in order to intensify the meaning of the utterance and to better describe the attitude of the characters in specific scenes as well. As regards the typical -s absence in AAVE, it spontaneously occurs. Here are some examples:

1. “he act like he can’t stand me no more” (Celie)
2. “he try everything” (Nettie)
3. “before he make his move on you” (Celie)
4. “before he break us apart” (Celie)
5. “she say she write, but she never write. She say only death could keep her from it, maybe she dead” (Celie)
6. “your pa love you?” (Shug Avery)
7. “My pa loved me, my pa still love me” (Shug Avery)
8. “he know ‘cause he the only one” (Sofia)

Apart from this use, as introduced above, there are also some circumstances in which -s absence occurs when a verb in past tense is expressed through present tense:

1. “one day, my daddy come and say” (Celie)
2. “maybe she like it” (Celie referring to Albert’s dead wife)
3. “he come home with a girl” (Celie)

As further concerns -s absence in present tense, there are some cases in which -s occurs, when the meaning of the sentence is intended to be intensified, as these examples demonstrate:

1. “I can’t, it hurts her” (Celie). This is a response to an absurd request and claim of shutting a baby up, while combing its knotted hair.
2. “this life be over soon, heaven lasts always” (Celie). In this example, -s presence is used to intensify the contrast existing between life on hearth and spiritual life.

3.2.3 Done

As regards *done*, in the film it represented all the three possible meanings introduced in the first chapter. As a first example, the utterance that is reported below was formulated when Celie told the sister about the abuses she experienced from Albert. The utterance in question is: “he done to her” (Celie). In this regard moral indignation is present as well as intensive meaning and completed action. Moral indignation, in this scene could be veiled by a sense of disgust and at the same time resignation. Moreover, intensive meaning might be present as well as an intensifier of what she was forced to experience. As concerns *completed actions*, it is the meaning that could most easily be understood, since in that moment she made a comparison and similitude between what she must endure and what the deceased wife had too, when she was still alive. As it was explained in the first chapter, *done* marks finalisation and as presented in the examples of the first chapter, in this specific relation between action and timing, *done* is associated with a past simple verb:

1. “she done asked Sofia to teach her [...]” (Celie)
2. “god done fixed her” (Celie’s father)
3. “I done fixed that mailbox” (Albert)
4. “Shug Avery done set the population of Hartwell county” (Albert’s father)
5. “look what I done brought you” (Albert)
6. “this here mess you done made” (Sofia)

Done is therefore used to describe completed action that took place in the past, whose results or consequences are still visible, and the use of *done* in the film mirrors this.

3.2.4 Non-recent perfective been

As regards *non-recent perfective been*, the forms that were encountered in the film referred to all the semantic components already outlined in the first chapter: something true in the past; something that lasted for a long time in the past, but is not completed; and something that is true even in the moment in which it is said.

1. “her heart been broke” (Celie)
2. “I been needing myself some curtains” (Sofia)
3. “how you been? I been sick, maybe you heard” (Shug Avery)
4. “I been staying with Albert and Celie [...] they been taking care of me” (Shug Avery)
5. “us been driving all night” (Shug Avery)

All the examples listed above refer to something that lasted for a long time in the past, but is concluded in the moment in which they are uttered, since there is no time reference. If there were time references, the meanings would be slightly different.

3.2.5 Aspectual be

Aspectual be is the structure that is mostly associated with AAVE and its speakers, since “speakers of other varieties are not likely to perceive any difference in meaning” (Peterson 2019:107). In this regard, Peterson (2019) exemplifies the inability of speakers of other varieties to understand the correct and different meaning from utterance such as: “They reading” (Peterson 2019:107) and “They be reading” (Peterson 2019:107). Moreover, *aspectual be* “is probably the most stereotyped” (Peterson 2019:106). This structure is used when the relation linking the moment in which the utterance is realised and the moment in which the described action takes place is that of phenomena regularly happening. Nevertheless, in utterances such as: “They just be marching, like going to war” (Celie talking about Harpo and Sofia), *aspectual be* is used to describe an action of continuity that is happening when Celie is narrating the event. Another meaning that could be associated with this structure, as it is used in the film, is that of thoughts and deduction of something that according to those who say it, might be true. So, in this case “may” or “might” could be inserted between the subject and *aspectual be*. The examples taken from the film are:

1. “she be a big girl” (Celie)

2. “She be almost my age, but they getting married now.” (Celie)

A different meaning could be associated with this feature, in addition to those suggested before. In particular, the sentence: “Harpo be in love with a girl called Sofia” (Celie) describes a status that is lasting for a lot and is still true and concrete at the moment in which it is uttered. Meanwhile in the sentence: “my boy be needing his supper” (Albert), *aspectual be* is also used to describe impatience due to the fact that the son (mentioned as “my boy”) was waiting for his supper for a long time.

3.2.6 Multiple/double negation

As concerns AAVE and its strong presence in the film “The Color Purple”, *multiple/double negation* was present in utterances such as:

1. “I don't want nothing!” (Shug Avery)
2. “ain't nobody in the fields” (Albert’s father)
3. “I ain't in no trouble” (Sofia)
4. “you better not never tell nobody but god” (Celie’s father)
5. “I ain’t never looked at the other one before” (Albert)
6. “I didn’t see nothing” (Celie)
7. “I ain’t living in no streets” (Sofia)
8. “wasn’t nothing moving” (Celie)

Multiple/double negation deserved to be mentioned, since it is a relevant part in a complete and accurate representation of AAVE and its use in the film.

3.3 Standard English in the film

Apart from AAVE presence in the film, there are also some scenes and dialogues that linguistically emerge in the film because they are entirely uttered in standard English (SE). The presence of SE is typical of the dialogues of Miss Millie (the mayor’s wife), Mr. Hamilton (the owner of the grocery), and of the letters that Celie received from her sister Nettie.

Miss Millie is the only character who speaks exclusively in SE. She is the wife of the mayor and she is the only white character who directly interacts with black people. So, SE is spoken by white as well as black characters. For this reason, it is important to

underline the presence of standard English (SE), even though AAVE has a predominant presence in all dialogues.

Here follow some examples of utterances in SE in the film, realised by characters usually talking in AAVE:

1. “Sofia thinks too much of herself” (Albert)
2. “god knows I do” (Sofia nervously crying with Celie)
3. “today is a peculiar day” (Celie)
4. “this song I am about to sing is called Miss Celie’s blues” (Shug Avery)

Apart from some isolated and rare cases of SE in the dialogues that do not concern Miss Millie and the owner of the grocery, in which also Celie went for doing the shopping for Albert, the dialogues that emerged from Miss Millie and Mr. Hamilton are all in SE. Here are some examples:

1. “you’re so cute” (Miss Millie to Sofia’s children)
2. “your children are so clean” (Miss Millie to Sofia’s children)
3. “how are you today Miss Millie?” (Mr. Hamilton, shop’s owner)
4. “it’s a little late this year” (Miss Millie)
5. “Sofia’s a wonderful teacher” (Miss Millie).

As concerns the letters for Celie from Nettie, that Albert had been hiding for a lifetime, they are all written in SE, and thanks to this, events and their happenings are clearly understandable. Examples that follow illustrate the presence of copula, -s in third person singular verbs, future and past tenses

1. “it has been a long time since I had time to write”
2. “they are so big, they look like they were built”
3. “Olivia’s the only girl”
4. “there is a little girl [...] she plays with Olivia “
5. “they are like white people at home”
6. “she is sharp”
7. “everything she learns, she shares with Tashi”
8. “we’ll all be coming home soon”.

Standard English is also used in hymns sung in church, as it could be demonstrated by utterances such as: “heaven belongs to you” and “God is trying to tell you something”.

This chapter aimed to analyse the linguistic structures that were first presented in the first chapter. The representation of AAVE structures in the film, and reporting them back in this section have been useful for providing further examples and an accurate portrayal of the use of AAVE, applied to characters, whose thoughts, feelings and ideas were expressed mainly through African American Vernacular English. So, in spite of the non standard variety, characters can vividly express themselves. Moreover, thanks to the film and to the examples made in this last section, AAVE has hopefully been shaped as a language characterised by its typical and unique features and structures that its speakers spontaneously use and fully understand. In this regard, characters give a demonstration of the authenticity of their vernacular, that “finds expression in personal dialects and letters.” (Tavormina 1986:225). In addition, in spite of discrepancies between the two varieties of English encountered in the film: AAVE and SE, there are no issues of communication between characters. So, language might represent a social limit, but what makes the difference is the intentions of speakers of understanding each other and sharing thoughts and information, overcoming this invisible but strong barrier. Furthermore, language has a significant social impact, since it “displays the inner self, giving shape to thought and feeling [...] influencing others’ perception of that self” (Tavormina 1986:220). Consequently, discussing with one another may result in pleasant and surprising discovery: “each person’s personality formation process reflects the shaping role of culture. When the individual’s personality tends to be the same, the collective personality is born.” (Wang and Yang 2019:805). So, the significant role that language plays in society may lead to the creation of linguistic and cultural groups. In this regard, the alternation between varieties in the film might be an attempt to break the barriers separating cultural and linguistic groups, spreading a message as worldwide as possible. It is equally crucial to explain that the context someone grows up in and the social background influence the self. So “our emotions and attitudes are largely shaped by the environment in which we live. This environment has both a cultural environment and an individual environment. They work together and complement each other.” (Wang and

Yang 2019:804). Everything that concerns the self is strongly related and connected to the surroundings, that consequently also affect the social perception of the self.

To conclude, what could “purple” mean? “The purple flower sea symbolizes the desire of the Sisters desire for joy and freedom in the heart” (Wang and Yang 2019:804). Accordingly, the colour purple stands for Nettie and Celie’s desire to get rid of all the limitations and therefore release their self-expression. This last situation occurs at the end of the film, when the two sisters find inner peace and can freely express themselves without any linguistic or physical barrier.

Conclusion

This dissertation has shown, in the first chapter, two of the most spread hypotheses about the origins of AAVE: the Anglicist- and the Creole-hypothesis. Starting from the Anglicist-hypothesis, it was possible for this dissertation to trace the origins of AAVE “from British – base dialects” (Wolfram et al. 2002:12), that were brought to North America in the period of the African diaspora. On the other hand, the Creole-hypothesis traced the roots of AAVE in “some variety of West African Pidgin English (WAPE) or Guinea Coast Creole English (GCCE)” (Rickford 2022:172-173). So, the presence of these two hypotheses prove that there is not a final and definitive answer about the origins of AAVE yet. However, the typical aspects of AAVE are specifically outlined. The aspects that are mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation concern grammar, and more specifically the verb forms of AAVE. In particular, when presenting the verb forms of AAVE and comparing the relation between timing and happening of events, this dissertation highlighted that speakers of other languages might not completely understand whether the action is concluded or not. This happens when copula absence, habitual/aspectual be, remote past/stressed BIN, done, sequential be done and non- recent perfective been are involved. Moreover, as further concerns verbs, AAVE speakers omit -s in third person singular verbs. Furthermore, AAVE speakers deny what the verb means by using “two or more negative morphemes to communicate a single negation.” (Martin and Wolfram 2022:18). The first chapter ends with the presentation and analysis of two phonological aspects of AAVE. The first is called final cluster reduction and it occurs “in all or most varieties of English but seem either to be more frequent in AAVE” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:94). The other phonological aspect is about “the substitution of /d/ for /ð/ initially” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97) and the substitution “of /f,v/ for / θ ,ð/ medially and finally” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97). However, these variants in pronunciation are caused by factors that “are not clear” (Bailey and Thomas 2022:97).

The second chapter explored the impacts of AAVE in the social lives of its speakers. In particular, it discusses three circumstances in which speaking in AAVE may have consequences in lives of AAVE speakers. More specifically, the impacts of AAVE analysed in this chapter concern three contexts: education, workplace and justice system. The section dedicated to education outlined that children speaking in AAVE have a limited scholastic success, due to the fact that their linguistic needs “go unrecognized and

ignored [...]” (Peterson 2019:51). Nevertheless since 1998-1999, thanks to a program called “The Academic Mastery Program”, education has been taking steps forward so as to offer equal opportunities to students without any discrimination linked to their linguistic background. Moreover, as concerns the workplace, this analysis showed that speaking in AAVE is associated with “lower- and working class status” (Rickford et al., 2015, p. 11821). For this reason, AAVE speakers tend to suppress their linguistic background in order to have the same educational and work opportunities. Additionally, the use of AAVE tends to be suppressed so as to create a more competent and professional image of the self. The last analysed area concerns the justice system. The impacts of AAVE in this context were presented and analysed thanks to the legal issue of George Zimmerman. In this issue, Zimmerman was acquitted in spite of his guilt, because the only witness testifying against him spoke AAVE and court reporters were not able to properly understand her testimony. Moreover, a study examined the ability of understanding AAVE testimonies of 27 court reporters working in Philadelphia. The study demonstrated that the percentage of accuracy of their transcription was up to 40.5 percent. This demonstrates that AAVE speakers are not correctly represented and completely understood in courts.

The third chapter of this dissertation analyses the film “The Color Purple” by Steven Spielberg. Thanks to the analysis of the dialogues found in the film, the typical structures of AAVE that emerged are copula absence, -s absence in third person singular verbs, done, non-recent perfective been, aspectual be and multiple/double negation. As concerns possible social implications of AAVE and their representation in the film, it is possible to highlight a connection between what Winford (2002) said about languages and the strong relationship between blacks and their social identification in the film. According to Winford (2002), in fact, languages “are also vehicles of social interaction and badges of social identity [...]” (Winford 2002:35). This strong connection within social or linguistic groups is represented in the film when Miss Millie, the wife of the mayor, is visibly scared because many black people around her were trying to help her driving her car out of the private garden of Sofia (The Color Purple, 01:34:24 -01:35:00). Her fear is caused by her feeling of belonging to a different social group, and this is proven by: “I have always been good to you people”. With this utterance she excluded herself from blacks’ group. Moreover, her unjustified and pointless fear is caused by her perception and ideologies

about black people. As explained by Winford (2002) “our perception of them is conditioned by social practice, social relationships, and attendant ideologies” (Winford 2002:35). In addition, Miss Millie spoke exclusively in standard English, so her language represents a barrier to AAVE spoken by blacks in the film. For this reason, their vernacular can be considered “[...]as a badge of their identity [...]” Lippi - Green (1997 in Winford 2002:30).

Everything considered, this dissertation has shown that AAVE has implications, due to its typical structures, in three areas: education, workplace and justice system. In the circumstances that were taken into account, communication and sharing of information are fundamental. In these situations, language has a crucial role and for this reason it emerges as a characteristic of people actively trying to participate in those contexts. So, as *The Academic Mastery Program* is doing, it is important to recognise the authenticity of AAVE and with it the learning needs of its speakers, starting from the school system. This means from children during their years of education. The impact of language is significant on society, in particular when a language such AAVE, together with the impacts it has on society, is thought of as linked to the tradition and culture of its speakers. In this sense, steps forwards still need to be done in order to overcome linguistic discrimination and linguistic emancipation.

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Riassunto

L'analisi su cui si basa questa tesi di laurea riguarda una varietà di inglese chiamata African American Vernacular English (AAVE). L'argomento si sviluppa in tre capitoli, ognuno dei quali è diviso in sezioni che vanno ad analizzare diversi aspetti linguistici e strutturali della varietà di inglese presa in considerazione. In particolare, il primo capitolo cerca di posizionare in una linea temporale le prime apparizioni di AAVE nella storia, datandole all'epoca del commercio transatlantico degli schiavi, che ebbe luogo tra il XVI e il XIX secolo. Inoltre, il primo capitolo serve da introduzione all'argomento, andando ad offrire due tra le principali ipotesi riguardanti le origini di AAVE. Per quanto riguarda la prima ipotesi sulle origini linguistiche di AAVE, questa è chiamata "Anglicist – hypothesis" e traccia in dialetti inglesi l'origine della varietà linguistica presa in considerazione. In supporto a questa ipotesi sono presenti tracce dell'attuale AAVE in dialetti parlati nelle isole inglesi. Per di più, gli schiavi portarono con sé, in America, diverse lingue africane che andarono ad amalgamarsi con altre lingue parlate dagli americani. All'ipotesi "Anglicist" è stata accostata una considerazione riguardo le abilità fisiche e intellettuali dei parlanti di AAVE, che sono stati definiti incapaci di riprodurre propriamente e correttamente i suoni dei dialetti inglesi. Secondo degli studi, le caratteristiche di AAVE derivano quindi da alcune di queste limitazioni fisiche e intellettuali. Inoltre, dopo essere stati in contatto con alcune varietà linguistiche locali di inglese britannico, i parlanti di AAVE hanno passivamente assorbito alcuni tratti linguistici senza alcuna influenza dalle loro lingue native o dalle loro culture. In contrasto a questa ipotesi, troviamo la seconda ipotesi presa in considerazione in questa analisi: la "Creole – hypothesis". Questa ricostruisce la storia della lingua AAVE andando ad analizzare gli aspetti che questa varietà di inglese ha in comune con una lingua chiamata "creolo". In particolare le similitudini e le affinità linguistiche tra queste due lingue non sono da considerare come delle dirette trasmissioni ed influenze linguistiche, quanto piuttosto come delle caratteristiche linguistiche che i parlanti di AAVE hanno assorbito ed adottato nella loro lingua. In supporto a questa ipotesi, sono stati sviluppati tre punti che danno evidenza e potrebbero fungere da prova concreta all'ipotesi che vede le basi di AAVE nel creolo. Queste tre evidenze riguardano: condizioni storico-sociali, documenti scritti e registrazioni audio datate all'epoca della diaspora. Molti schiavi infatti arrivarono nelle colonie americane parlando già alcune varietà di inglese: l'inglese pidgin dell'Africa

orientale o quello creolo, tipico della costa della Guinea. Passando poi alle documentazioni scritte, ci sono due tipi di documenti su cui fare affidamento: i testi letterari e le trascrizioni di interviste in cui erano coinvolti anche gli schiavi. Per quanto riguarda i testi letterari, sorgono dei dubbi sull'autenticità e sull'affidabilità di tali fonti, visto che non era possibile per gli schiavi essere coinvolti in attività come la scrittura e quindi la possibilità di esporre e far valere i loro pensieri. Riguardo le registrazioni audio, invece, queste sono state fatte a persone afroamericane che lasciarono gli Stati Uniti per cercare fortuna in altri paesi. Dunque, per ogni genere di documentazione o prova di AAVE, sono state delineate quattro principali problematiche che potrebbero indebolire o addirittura far perdere autenticità e affidabilità alle varie documentazioni: l'autorialità, le versioni, la manipolazione e la rappresentatività. Alcune modifiche infatti sarebbero potute essere apportate in modo tale da correggere le caratteristiche linguistiche tipiche di AAVE, così come per evidenziarle e quindi accentuarle. Oltre ai quesiti di origine e derivazione della varietà di inglese presa in considerazione, è stato necessario anche stabilire quali potessero essere alcune delle condizioni che potessero portare una varietà linguistica ad espandersi e a mantenersi nella storia. Sono state quindi stabilite quattro possibili cause: isolamento geografico (tipico di aree isolate e difficili da raggiungere per le caratteristiche naturali circostanti alle aree stesse), isolamento sociale, contatto con altre lingue o varietà linguistiche, solidarietà e identità verso un gruppo specifico (e quindi di conseguenza tutto ciò che comporta l'appartenere ad un gruppo, tra cui, in questo caso, la lingua). Sicuramente, essendo l'inglese la lingua più parlata al mondo, questo aumenta la possibilità di esposizione a variazioni ed adattamenti ad altre lingue e culture con cui l'inglese stesso può entrare a contatto. Il primo capitolo continua con la presentazione e spiegazione di alcune caratteristiche grammaticali, strutturali e fonologiche di AAVE, che catturano l'attenzione proprio per i loro tratti fortemente distintivi rispetto alle corrispondenti forme dell'inglese standard. Dal punto di vista grammaticale vengono analizzate soprattutto le forme verbali, mentre dal punto di vista strutturale viene presa in considerazione la costruzione di proposizioni negative. Queste ultime infatti vengono realizzate in AAVE con più di una particella che esprime negazione; mentre nell'inglese standard, due particelle che contengono un significato negativo o privativo annullano la negazione stessa. Infatti, nell'inglese standard, la negazione è espressa da una sola particella di negazione. Infine, gli aspetti fonologici di AAVE analizzati nel primo

capitolo, riguardano alcune delle diverse realizzazioni fonologiche rispetto all'inglese standard, tra cui la riduzione di alcune finali di parola e la modifica della realizzazione di alcuni fonemi in base alla loro posizione nella parola.

Il secondo capitolo continua l'analisi di AAVE, focalizzandosi sulle implicazioni e impatti sociali che i parlanti di questa varietà affrontano in tre circostanze: l'istruzione, l'ambiente lavorativo e il sistema di giustizia. Per quanto riguarda l'ambiente scolastico, e quindi l'istruzione, i parlanti di AAVE, che usano tale varietà anche nei contesti domestici, sono soggetti a discriminazioni linguistiche che partono dai docenti. Più specificatamente, gli insegnanti sono indifferenti e insensibili ai bisogni di supporto dei bambini che parlano AAVE. In particolare, gli insegnanti non offrono e non garantiscono loro uguale possibilità di crescita e sviluppo intellettuale nell'ambiente scolastico, per incapacità o mancata volontà di prendere in considerazione la loro situazione linguistica svantaggiata. Di conseguenza, le discrepanze linguistiche tra i parlanti di AAVE e i parlanti dell'inglese standard, presenti in alcune scuole, portano a diversi livelli di preparazione e sviluppo di competenze e conoscenze utili al futuro lavorativo e professionale. A questo fenomeno che, in California, nel 1997, rischiò di essere aggravato ed intensificato con delle normative che andavano ad abolire nel modo più assoluto l'utilizzo di AAVE, venne cercata e proposta una soluzione al fine di facilitare l'acquisizione dell'inglese standard e accademico nelle aule per i parlanti di AAVE. In merito all'ambiente lavorativo, i parlanti di AAVE si ritrovano limitati nelle opportunità, proprio per l'inferiore livello di educazione che ricevono nelle scuole. Per questo nei contesti scolastici e lavorativi, i parlanti di AAVE vengono portati a sopprimere ed eliminare l'utilizzo di AAVE così da poter aver accesso ad uguali opportunità lavorative ed uguali livelli educativi. Per questo motivo, l'uso ridotto di AAVE comporta ad una più elevata percezione di competenza e quindi ad una maggiore probabilità di ricevere trattamenti equi nel lavoro. L'uso di AAVE è infatti associato ad un accesso precoce al mondo del lavoro e a retribuzioni non oneste. Il sistema di giustizia, presenta invece notevoli problematiche per quanto riguarda la corretta e accurata interpretazione delle testimonianze fatte dai parlanti di AAVE. Questi infatti risultano non essere compresi o considerati a pieno, anche a causa degli stereotipi linguistici verso di loro. In questa parte del secondo capitolo, è riportato un esempio concreto di un processo svoltosi nel 2013 in Florida. Durante il processo, infatti, si doveva discutere e decidere se l'assassinio del giovane Martin Trayvon fosse avvenuto

volontariamente, o lo sparo fosse un tentativo di difesa personale. Tuttavia, la corte assolse l'omicida, e numerose critiche emersero nei confronti dell'amica della giovane vittima: Rachel Jeantel. Quest'ultima testimoniò per l'amico come ultima persona ad essere stata in contatto con la vittima, pochi istanti prima dell'omicidio. Rachel parlava in AAVE, per questo le venne accusato di non aver adottato un linguaggio appropriato al contesto giudiziario e alla propria posizione e rilevanza nel processo. Quindi, per quanto la sua testimonianza potesse essere cruciale nella sentenza, la stessa risultò inutile alla risoluzione del caso.

Il terzo ed ultimo capitolo serve come esempio e dimostrazione concreta dell'utilizzo di AAVE nella quotidianità. L'analisi svolta è basata su un film del 1985: "The Color Purple", diretto da Steven Spielberg ed ispirato all'omonimo romanzo di Alice Walker. La ricerca si focalizza su alcune strutture e caratteristiche linguistiche di AAVE ritrovate nei dialoghi del film e precedentemente elencate, spiegate ed analizzate nel primo capitolo. È importante sottolineare come nel film siano presenti due varietà linguistiche: AAVE e inglese standard. Nonostante la compresenza di due varietà linguistiche, i personaggi riescono a comprendersi e comunicare senza alcun problema. La lingua dunque può diventare un'invalicabile, seppur invisibile barriera. A far la differenza è la volontà di comprendere e di comunicare, andando oltre le molteplici differenze che ci distinguono l'uno dall'altra, prima fra tutte: la lingua.