

**Grammatical Features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Toni Cade Bambara Short  
Story, *The Lesson***

**Vidia Christika Sari**

English Literature, English Literature English Department Faculty of Languages and Arts,  
State University of Surabaya  
[Vidiasari@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:Vidiasari@mhs.unesa.ac.id)

**LisetvoArivanti, SS., M.Pd.**

English Education Study Program, English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Languages and  
Arts,  
State University of Surabaya  
[Lisetvoariyanti@unesa.ac.id](mailto:Lisetvoariyanti@unesa.ac.id)

**Abstrak**

*African American Vernacular English (AAVE)* adalah sejenis variasi bahasa Inggris Amerika lainnya. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengklasifikasikan fitur gramatikal bahasa Afrika-Amerika Bahasa Inggris Vernakular yang ditemukan di Toni Cade Bambara, *The Lesson* dan menggambarkan alasan karakter Afrika-Amerika menggunakan bahasa Afrika-Amerika Vernakular Afrika dalam cerita pendek ini. Penulis lebih fokus pada fitur AAVE dalam sintaksis dan morfologis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penulis menemukan sepuluh fitur tata bahasa (Syntactical and Morphological) dari African American Vernacular English (AAVE), berdasarkan pada dua teori oleh Rickford (1999) dan Green (2002). Kesimpulannya Penulis mendapatkan alasan orang Afrika-Amerika memanfaatkan AAVE. Dalam setiap narasi dan percakapan, mereka memiliki fitur tata bahasa yang unik. Yaitu untuk menampilkan identitas kelompok etnis Afrika-Amerika dan untuk muncul kelas sosial di antara karakter.

**Abstract**

*African American Vernacular English (AAVE)* is a kind of another variation of American English. The writer focuses more on AAVE features in syntactical and morphological. The aims of this study are to classify the grammatical features of *African American Vernacular English* found in Toni Cade Bambara, *The Lesson* and describe the reasons of African American characters using *African American Vernacular English* in this short story. Then, the writer the qualitative approach is used to describe each type of AAVE features by the characters. The result shows that the writer found ten of grammatical features (Syntactical and Morphological) of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), based on two theories by Rickford (1999) and Green (2002). The data also shows that the reasons of African American characters using *African American Vernacular English* in this short story are to show their identity and social class. In conclusions The writer got the reasons of African American utilizing AAVE. In each narration and conversation, they have an unique grammatical features. That are to appear the identity of African American ethnic group and to appear social class among the characters.

**INTRODUCTION**

English is as an international language. It has been used around the world and widespread in different countries such as Australia, Britain and the USA (Yule, 2010). People can use variation of English, there are Indian English, Australian English, New York English, West Country English, African American Vernacular English, Non-Standard English, BBC English, and so on (Wardaugh, 2006). Because of

that, largely people have accepted the fact that every language has a lot of variation.

Language variation is influenced by the factors such as age, sex, social class, and ethnic background. Those factors make them speak differently. The uniqueness language ethnicity in a single region refers to dialect. Every region has a differentiation in dialect. People in a social group have different dialect which associated with specific colloquial language, known as vernacular (Wardaugh, 2006).

Vernacular is a topic to start this study. Vernacular is the language variation which refers to non-standard language. Holmes (1995, p.80) says that it is usually the first language learned by people in multilingual community for informal situation. Vernacular generally refers to a language which has not been standardized and has not an official status. Furthermore, Meyerhoff (2006, p.37) states that amount kinds of vernacular used as a local languagesuch as, Vernacular Variety of German, Standard German (Hochdeutsch), White American Vernacular English (WAVE), Vernacular Varieties of Arabic and Haitian, African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

*African American Vernacular English (AAVE)* is a kind of another variation of American English. Green (2002, p.6) defines that AAVE has a list of labels, they are : Negro Dialect, Nonstandard Negro English, Negro English, American Negro Speech, Black Communications, Black Dialect, Black Folk Speech, Black Street Speech, Black English , Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, Afro American English, African American English, African American Language, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The last four are more commonly used today. However, people more often heard those beginning with “Black”.

In additional, AAVE is the assortment of once known as Dark English Vernacular or Vernacular Dark English among sociolinguists, and commonly called Ebonics exterior the scholarly community. Whereas a few highlights of AAVE are clearly one of a kind to this assortment, in its structure it too appears numerous commonalties with other assortments counting a number of standard and non-standard English assortments talked within the Joined together States.

AAVE has been at the heart of a few open wrangles about and the examination of this assortment has moreover started and maintained talks about among sociolinguists. Numerous sociolinguists would save the term of AAVE for assortments which are checked by the event of certain particular linguistic highlights. Indeed so, it may still be troublesome to say with any exactitude how numerous AAVE speakers there are since such linguistic highlights happen dynamically, that's in variation with standard highlights.

The history of AAVE and its hereditary connection, by which we cruel what dialect assortments it is related additionally a matter of discussion. A few researchers fight that AAVE created out of the contact between speakers of West African dialects and speakers of vernacular English assortments. Agreeing to such a see, West Africans learned English on manors within the Southern Coastal States (Georgia, South Carolina, etc) from a really little number of local speakers (the indentured laborers). A few recommend that this driven to the improvement of

a simple pidgin which was afterward extended through a prepare of creolization.

Studies about AAVE have been done with different focuses. Pullum (1999) describes several features of AAVE uttered by African American in California school board. In conclusion, they talk about vernacular forms which mostly occurs systematic differences from SAE in the domain of words, structures, and sound. Deak (2007) observes the status of using AAVE in California school board educational practice. Ezgeta (2012) studies grammatical variations of selected AAVE, those are the third person singular – s absence, the plural –s absence and generalization *is* and *was* to plural and second pronouns in ten African American public figures.

The writer will analyze short story *The Lesson* by *Toni Cade Bambara*. The author is an AAVE. The most language in *The Lesson* is mostly different from Standard American English. In this short story, the writer focuses grammatical features of AAVE, especially in syntactical and morphological, then phonological and lexical will be left.

Based on this study, the writer looked the previous studies about AAVE used by White American in 8 Mile movie because there is same research that represent the grammatical features of AAVE. From the previous study, The discrimination abolishment and right equality have made it possible for AAVE as Black Vernacular language is not to be considered as an ungrammatical English. It can never be in the same place as Standard American English (SAE) as Standard Language is the standard variation customized among the Americans as a formal form of their English language that differs even from other White American dialects. But people's prejudice about its use in society still lingers in its ungrammatical form and lower social context.

The explanations above make the writer not only curious about AAVE, but also inspired to focus more on AAVE features in syntactical and morphological. Furthermore, the data are taken from the narration and conversation of the short story. The writer focuses on two types of AAVE features by Rickford (1999) and eight types others by Green (2002). In additional, this thing is to answer statement of problems, the writer uses theory of language variation by Meyerhoff (2006), Wardaugh (2006), and Yule (2006); language and identity; language and social interaction by Edward (2009); and the theory AAVE features by Green (2002) and Rickford (1999).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, the writer used qualitative approach because the data came in the form of the text to be analyzed. Namey and Mitchell (2012) stated that qualitative research divides the qualitative

data into its three main forms, text, image, and sound. It means that the data analysis is in a form of description, not numeral or deficient of cause and effect relationship. At all, this study didn't use a formula.

This study classified and described the grammatical features of AAVE in *Toni Cade Bambara* short story, *The Lesson*. Furthermore, the qualitative approach is used to describe each type of AAVE features by the characters.

The subject of this study is all African American's characters in *The Lesson*. They are Sylvia, Sugar, Miss Moore, Junebug, Flyboy, Big Butt, Rosie, Mercedes, and Q. T. The writer used those characters to represent the grammatical feature of AAVE in that short story.

The data of this study is taken from the internet with the written text as a short story. The writer took the narration and conversation of Nigger characters in this short story, it could be a form of words, phrases, or sentences. The writer only took AAVE as non-standard American English.

The observation of this study will come from the writer herself is used as the tool in seeking the answer to the research questions. It means that the writer herself who collected, interpreted, organized, and analyzed the data and conclude the conclusion for this study. To collect the data, the writer also need to be printed out of this short story pen, note, and internet connection for looked deepest information about *Toni Cade Bambara* short story, *The Lesson*.

The writer herself is the most instrument of the consider as the writer features an expansive portion of the method in this qualitative inquire about. The concept of the writer is the essential instrument or medium through which the investigate is conducted (Loftland, 2006, p. 3). The writer is considered as one of the major subjective instrument in this sort of research, as she could be a expansive portion of the method. The subjective writer for the most part creates the questions that she inquires some time recently the consider starts, as the point of subjective investigate is to urge a individual see at the subject, or subject being examined.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### FINDING

To analyze grammatical features of *African American Vernacular English*, the writer chose the information from short story by *Toni Cade Bambara*, *The Lesson*. *Toni* was an African-American creator, narrative film-maker, social dissident, and college teacher. She was born in Unused York to guardians Walter and Helen (Henderson) Cade. Her first book was *Gorilla, My cherish* (1972), which collected

fifteen brief stories, one of them is *The Lesson*, composed between 1960 and 1970. *The Lesson* was described by a youthful young lady named Sylvia who is developing up in Harlem in an unspecified time period.

This story is almost how a trip started by a well-educated lady named Miss Moore who has taken it upon herself to uncover the unappreciative children of the neighborhood to the exterior world of their community. The goal is the FAO Schwartz Toy Store in Manhattan, where the toys pointed at a white showcase are amazingly costly. There are nine characters of this story, Sylvia, Sugar, Miss Moore, Junebug, Flyboy, Enormous Butt, and Mercedes.

After read all of this story, the writer found ten of grammatical features (Syntactical and Morphological) of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), based on two theories by Rickford (1999) and Green (2002). It contain of the use of *ain't*, invariant *dɔn*, omitting auxiliaries in question, the absence of auxiliary or conjugated form, preterit *had*, multiple negations, the use of *say*, the use of *steady*, past morphology, and verbal *-s*.

### Syntactical Features

#### Use of *Ain't*

*Ain't* is one of AAVE's most popular feature. According to Green (2002), *ain't* feature in AAVE has classified as negation. Usually, all negative sentences in AAVE using negation *ain't*. In contrary, the negation form for SAE occurs in the form for SAE occurs in the form *isn't* for *to be* and contracted *not*, then *didn't*, *can't*, *hasn't*, *haven't*, and etc.

Data 1 So we heading down the street and she's boring us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money **ain't** divided up right in this country. And then she gets to the part about we all poor and live in the slums which I don't feature. And I'm ready to speak on that, but

This narration happened when Sylvia, Sugar, and Miss Moore walked on the street and thought that money in their country is very difficult to get. In additional, they realized how so poor their country with lower income of each family and those seedy neighborhood. For that reasons, they felt modestly.

#### Invariant *Dɔn*

Verbal maker *dɔn* denotes that an event has ended. Sometimes, *dɔn* has the function as the replacement of the verb *has* or *have*.

Data 6 their hair ribbons and their money too. And Miss Moore files that remark away for next week's lesson on brotherhood, I can tell. And finally I say we oughta get to the subway cause it's cooler an' besides we might meet some cute boys. Sugar **done** swiped her mama's lipstick, so we ready.

This feature is one that is used only one to one character by *Toni Cade Bambara* short story, *The Lesson*. The use of *dɔn* in this narration stated that Sugar already do that activity and ready to do the next activity with Sylvia.

### Omitting Auxiliaries in Question

Auxiliary verb to be, have, do, does, did, or modal auxiliary can, may, might, will, might, must, may, ought to, would go before the subject is portrayed as questions. Be that as it may, we may discover a few yes no questions in AAVE that are shaped without obvious auxiliaries within the sentence introductory position.

Data 7 "This is the place," Miss Moore say, presenting it to us in the voice she uses at the museum. "Let's look in the windows before we go in."

"Can we steal?" Sugar asks very serious like she's getting the ground rules squared away before she plays. "I beg your pardon," say Miss Moore, and we

This discussion happened when Sugar inquired to Miss Moore around the windows of the toy store. Sugar truly needed to have all of the toys but she seem not. On the other hand, Miss Moore blocked Sugar's want. In spite of the fact that we cannot have something that we need such cash to purchase. It does not cruel we ought to do everything in arrange to induce them, incorporates do the awful way. Miss Moore teach the great lesson to the children to remain gotten to be great individual in their troublesome live.

### The Absence of Aux or Conjugated Forms

The auxiliaries are is, am, are, was, were or conjugated shapes to be, do, have, modals in African American Vernacular English can be characterized by a set of properties that as a rule decreased. It makes the sentence cannot be demonstrated as present tense, present progressive tense, and perfect tense.

Data 13 So this one day Miss Moore rounds us all up at the mailbox and it's puredee hot and she's knockin herself out about arithmetic. And school suppose to let up in summer I heard, but she don't never let up. And the starch in my pinafore scratching the shit outta me and I'm really hating this nappy-head bitch and her goddamn college degree. I'd much rather go to the pool or to the show where

The narration represented how Sylvia really hate Miss Moore with all her achievement. In Standard American English, this narration become

And the starch in my pinafore is scratching the shit outta me.

The auxiliary "is" preceded in this narration to show one of African American Vernacular English feature.

### Multiple Negations

Multiple negations are a sentence which comprises of more than one negator, it can be double, triple, or more negator. In African American Vernacular English, different invalidations can be utilized in a single negative sentence and stamped within the assistants don't, isn't, aren't, won't, and uncertain things such as *anybody* (*nobody*), *nothing* (*nuthin*), and *anything* (*nothin*).

Data 35 We start down the block and she gets ahead which is O.K. by me cause I'm going to the West End and then over to the Drive to think this day through. She can run if she want to and even run faster. But ain't nobody gonna beat me at nothin. -1972

There are three negators in one sentence, *ain't*, *nobody*, and *nuthin*. In African American Vernacular English, this sentence is true but different in Standard American English. This feature is one that is used only one to one character by Toni Cade Bambara short story, *The Lesson*. Miss Moore very swaggered up.

### Use of Steady

Utilize of *steady* as an escalates continuative marker, as a rule after invariant habitual *be*, but some time recently a dynamic verb, for activities that happens reliably or persistently.

Data 36 Same thing in the store. We all walkin on tiptoe and hardly touchin the games and puzzles and things. And I watched Miss Moore who is steady watchin us like she waitin for a sign. Like Mama Drewery watches the sky and sniffs the air and takes note of just how much slant is in the bird formation. Then me and

*Steady* in this narration to demonstrate that Sylvia's action happened before progressive verb (*watchin*) or with overwhelming push in sentence-final position, so the more noteworthy accentuation happens when sentence conclude with *steady*.

### Use of Say

Utilize of *say* is to introduce a citation or a verb complement. That's comparable in a few creoles, provoking speculation that it could be a remnant of creole impact (Rickford 1999). *Say* may too be amplified in AAVE to allude non-human and lifeless objects.

Data 37 she from Georgia so she can kick ass, preferably Mercedes'. And Miss Moore asking us do we know what money is like we a bunch of retards. I mean real money, she say like it's only poker chips or monopoly papers we lay on the grocer. So right away I'm tired of this and say so. And would much rather snatch Sugar and go to the Sunset and terrorize the West Indian kids and take their hair ribbons and their money too. And Miss Moore files that remark away

The narration above use *say* to introduce a quote of Sylvia to Miss Moore and indicate inanimate object (money). Sylvia hoped that she can get the good thing but what she get was different with her expectation.

## Morphological Features

### Past Morphology

Past morphology in AAVE usually has no distinction verb form for the simple past and past participle sentence. The same form for simple past and past participle. In terminology, participle forms are used with helping verbs, as in *I eat, I ate, I have eaten*. The participle or *-en* form is eaten.

Data 43

she not even related by marriage or blood. So they'd go for it. Specially Aunt Gretchen. She was the main gofer in the family. You got some ole dumb shit foolishness you want somebody to go for, you send for Aunt Gretchen. She been screwed into the go-along for so long, it's a blood-deep natural thing with

In Standard American English must be :

She has been screwed into the go-along for so long, it's a blood-deep natural thing with her.

This narration happened when Aunt Gretchen left Sylvia, Sugar, and Junior for a long time and she never came back.

### Verbal -s

In verbal *-s* feature, verb base may occurs in subject third person singular. As the result, base form for present tense with the third person singular subject is not marked with an *-s*. African American Vernacular English speakers often produce sentences like *She come, He go*, and so on. In contrary, the speakers intentionally leave out the third person *-s* and add it where it does not belong to Standard American English form, the distinction between singular and plural verb is neutralized verbal *-s*.

Data 49

"Not exactly," say Miss Moore, which is what she say when you warm or way off too. "It's to weigh paper down so it won't scatter and make your desk untidy." So right away me and Sugar curtsy to each other and then to Mercedes who is more the tidy type.

"We don't keep paper on top of the desk in my class," say Junebug, figuring Miss Moore crazy or lyn one.

The use of verbal *-s* stated in this conversation using verb base or verb one (say) after third person singular (she). Whereas, in Standard American English, if we use subject third person

singular, we have to use verb *-s*. This conversation happened when Miss Moore explained the use of paperweight by doing small instruction to make sure Flyboy and Rosie Giraffe understand with her explanation.

## The Reason of African American Characters Using African American Vernacular English

After analyzing the short story *The Lesson*, the writer found ten grammatical features of *African American Vernacular English (AAVE)*. This phenomenon happens because Niggers have some reasons using AAVE in this short story.

### To Show the Identity of African American Ethnic Group

The language structure of AAVE has a few highlights which essentially don't happen within the language structure of white Americans. In extra, the special characteristic of particular social bunches, AAVE. It can be utilized to fortify enrollment of the character. AAVE is completely distinctive from the English of white Americans When talking, an African-American

man or lady may select the highlights of AAVE. However, they need to stretch their social personality of ethnic gather as an African American. It can be seen on this narration :

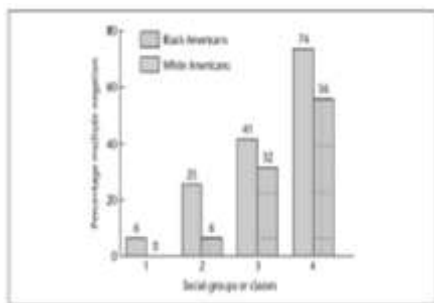
Data 14

goddamn college degree. I'd much rather go to the pool or to the show where it's cool. So me and Sugar leaning on the mailbox being surly, which is a Miss Moore word. And Flyboy checking out what everybody brought for lunch. And

Miss Moore saw Sylvia and Sugar unhappy on the mailbox. They were bored on Miss Moore. In Standard American English, this portrayal ended up So me and Sugar are leaning on the mailbox being surly.

It could be a Miss Moore word. This highlight is significantly separates from Standard American English. From this citation ready to see the diverse between *African American Vernacular English* and *Standard American English*. They utilize interesting grammatical include to show their ethnic gather to the others.

There are a few highlights which clearly recognize two tongues, just like the clarification some time recently. For case, numerous invalidation is one of them, where AAVE employments higher frequencies than are found within the English of most white Americans. It can be seen in this chart :



The other social groups such as in Britain. The way distinctive minorities talk English is frequently similarly unmistakable. The English of those who talk minority dialects such as Gujerati and Turkish. It is for the most part signals to their ethnic backgrounds.

### To show Social Class

There are many features of the English used by lower economic groups in the USA which also occur in AAVE. Overall, the characters in this short story are in the same social class. They have no powerful characters in term of money and position. Miss Moore is well educated woman but she also didn't have power in money. It is same with the others in this short story. On the other hand, one of the character in this short story wanted to be rich like White Americans. She is Mercedes. It can be seen in this narration :

Data 1

So we heading down the street and she's boing us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money ~~that~~ divided up right in this country. And then she gets to the part about we all poor and live in the slums which I don't feature. And I'm ready to speak on that, but

This narration happened when Sylvia, Sugar, and Miss Moore walked on the street and thought that money in their country is very difficult to get. In additional, they realized how so poor their country with lower income of each family and those seedy neighborhood. For that reasons, they felt modestly. Behind all of the problems, many of African American uses African American English Vernacular is on lower income or work class. Along the time, their existence become higher and higher than before. They are trying to be success person like White American by increasing their education and creativity. Because a part of African American is really want to be White American on higher income.

Based on the data above, we can conclude that the characters of this short story are in middle class. Individuals of this class must moreover work in arrange to outlive, so they have a double presence – as (little scale) property proprietors and as laborers. Since of this double part, individuals of this class have separated interface, more often than not wishing to protect private property and property rights, but with

interface frequently contradicted to those of the capitalist class.

## DISCUSSION

This study describes grammatical features narrated by the Nigger characters in *Toni Cade Bambara* short story, *The Lesson* in another variation of American English. The writer uses African American Vernacular English by Rickford (1999) and Green (2002) in classifying data. There are ten features of AAVE grammatical features, they are; the use of *ain't*, invariant *dɔn*, omitting aux in question, the absence of aux or conjugated forms, preterit *had*, multiple negation, the use of *steady*, the use of *say*, past morphology, and verbal *-s*.

AAVE is one of other variation of America English used by majority African American people in US. African American characters not always using AAVE in every narration and conversation. As stated in the appendix 4 and 5, shows ten grammatical features of AAVE used by Nigger characters. They are the use of *ain't*, invariant *dɔn*, omitting aux in question, the absence of aux or conjugated forms, preterit *had*, multiple negation, the use of *steady*, the use of *say*, past morphology, and verbal *-s*. As in the case for the grammar rules, these variation will not occur in every narration and conversation of every word.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### CONCLUSION

To classify the data, the writer use AAVE theory by Rickford (1999) and Green (2002). There are ten features grammatical of AAVE. They are, the use of *ain't*, invariant *dɔn*, omitting aux in question, the absence of aux or conjugated forms, preterit *had*, multiple negations, the use of *steady*, the use of *say*, past morphology, and verbal *-s*.

Based on the discussion within the previous chapter, the writer classify grammatical features of *African American Vernacular English (AAVE)* in short story *The Lesson* by *Toni Cade Bambara*. The writer got the reasons of African American utilizing AAVE. In each narration and conversation, they have an unique grammatical features. That are to appear the identity of African American ethnic group and to appear social class among the characters.

### SUGGESTION

This study does not completely discusses the lexical pattern and phonological variation because the object of the study taken from written form. For that reason, the study about AAVE is suitable for spoken text that contains a vowel, phoneme, etc. It will be the

gap for the further studies to analyze AAVE in a movie. The next studies will give new nuance to find the new kinds of AAVE which contains phonological pattern never been discussed by the newest previous study.

The writer holds a really high desire that it can inspire other writers to discover other Vernacular dialects that have the same position of AAVE, since its battle to ended up a recognized English has shown great comes about. Enhancing the readers' information approximately AAVE is additionally one of the concerns in this study.

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