Morphosyntactic Features in Late 19th Century African American Vernacular English

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Abstract:
This paper discusses the use of African American Vernacular English as a literary dialect. The analysis is based on a corpus containing data collected from two 19th century American novels: '*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*' by Mark Twain and '*Uncle Tom's Cabin*' by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The speech of two characters of African American descent is under scrutiny: Jim and Aunt Chloe. The first part of the study provides an overview of the sociohistorical context in which AAVE originated and subsequently developed. The paper also highlights several morphosyntactic features attested in AAVE and the last part aims at identifying such features in the speech of the two African American characters aforementioned.
Keywords: African American Vernacular English, literary dialect, variety, Ebonics, dialectal writing

1. Sociohistorical context: From Negro dialect to Ebonics to AAVE

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is, to say the least, one of the most controversial and well-researched varieties of English in North America. Well-established researchers have yet to reach a consensus as to the development of AAVE. Throughout time this variety has had different labels: *Negro dialect, Nonstandard Negro English, Negro English, American Negro speech, Black communications, Black dialect, Black folk speech, Black English, Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, Afro American English, African American English, African American Language, African American Vernacular English* (Green, 2002:6). Despite the different labels, they all refer to the same system. Another term used to refer to this variety is *Ebonics*. However, there is great controversy as to whether Ebonics is deemed an appropriate term to refer to AAVE. Robert Williams coined the term Ebonics in 1973, at a conference entitled "Ebonics as a Bridge to Standard English". This is how the conversation went on January 26, 1973:

(1) Robert Williams: We need to define what we speak. We need to give a clear definition of our language.

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Ernie Smith: If you notice, every language in the world represents a nation or a nationality. What we are speaking has continuity not only in the United States, but outside the United States and all the way back to the mother country. We need to get the term completely off the English scale and start calling it what it really represents.

Robert Williams: Let me make a point here. Language is a process of communication. But we need to deal with the root of our language. What about Ebo? Ebo linguistics? Ebolingual? Ebo Phonics? Ebonics? Let's define our language as Ebonics.

The Group: That sounds good.

Robert Williams: I am talking about an ebony language. We know that *ebony* means *black* and that phonics refers to speech sounds or the science of sounds. Thus, we are really talking about the science of black speech sounds or language. (Williams, 1997: 14)

In 1975, Williams provided the following definition of Ebonics:

> the linguistic and paralinguistic features which in a concentric continuum represents the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendant of African origin. It included the various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of black people" especially those who have been forced to adapt to colonial circumstances. Ebonics derives its form from ebony (black) and phonics (sound, the study of sound) and refers to the study of the language of black people in all its cultural uniqueness. (Williams, 1975: vi)

Despite a reticence among linguists and the general public to use the term *Ebonics*, the situation drastically changed in December 1996 when the Oakland (CA) School Board acknowledged Ebonics as the primary language of its African American students and decided to take it into account in teaching them standard English. The term *Ebonics* encompasses the African roots of African American speech and the ties it has with languages spoken in different places in the Black Diaspora, for instance Jamaica or Nigeria. In an attempt to shed light on the origin and meaning of the term *Ebonics*, Smith (1998: 55) writes that "When the term *Ebonics* was coined it was not as a mere synonym for the more commonly used appellation Black English." Smith also draws attention that:

> Ebonics is not a dialect of English. The term *Ebonics* and other Afrocentric appellations such as *Pan African Language* and *African Language Systems* all refer to the linguistic continuity of Africa in Black America. Eurocentric scholars used the term *Ebonics* as a synonym for "Black English." In doing so, they reveal an ignorance of the origin and meaning of the term *Ebonics* that is so profound that their confusion is pathetic. (Smith, 1998: 57)

Although Smith's position is quite clear, research on the origin of this linguistic variety is diverse. Mufwene (2001: 24), in trying to explain the origin and development of AAVE, argues that it is "irrelevant whether African American English shares features with other North American varieties of English or where the features originates or how AAE developed (some of) its structural features". He also brings into discussion another variety, Gullah, as some researchers hypothesize that AAVE and Gullah are actually varieties of African American English. An interesting view is that of Spears (1988) who claims that there is a standard African American English, different from the basilectal variety studied by linguists – African American Vernacular English – usually associated with illiteracy or little schooling. In defending this position, Spears (1998: 230) writes that:

> I use the term African-American English (AAE) as a cover term for Standard African-American Englishes (SAAE) and for African American vernacular Englishes (AAVE), both of which are in turn the cover terms for the collections of standard and non-standard varieties of AAE respectively. In doing this, I am making two claims: (1) AAE comprises not one but a number of related standard and nonstandard varieties, and (2) varieties of AAE may have distinctively African American traits while having none of the features widely agreed upon as being nonstandard, e.g., the use of *ain't* and multiple negatives within a sentence. The distinctively African-American features of SAAE have to do primarily, but not solely, with prosody and language use.

Spears's view is shared by Morgan (1998) and, to a certain extent by Mufwene (2001). Returning to the distinction between AAVE and Gullah, Mufwene (2001: 36) suggests that it is actually a regional one, "within which other continua are identifiable and associated, in part, with density of their respective basilectal features". Smitherman (1997: 29) uses the term "U.S. Ebonics" which comprises AAVE and Gullah, but not Caribbean creole varieties nor African pidgin or creole varieties. For Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2008: 213) AAE represents "the language variety spoken by many people of African descent in the US and associated with African American ethnic identity and cultural heritage." It is difficult to provide an all-encompassing definition of AAVE, and maybe we should focus instead on the linguistic features observable among African Americans.

Green (2002: 8) notes that historical discussions regarding the origin of African American English commence with the first arrivals of African slaves on American soil. Several hypotheses as to the roots of AAVE have been presented throughout the years. The first view is the *Anglicist Hypothesis* which states that AAVE has the same sources as other European American dialects, namely the English dialects spoken in the British Isles. Mid-twentieth century dialectologists accepted this

position, as well as the fact that present-day African American speech was "identical to that of comparable Southern white speech" (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002: 12). The two sociolinguists later highlight that some of the arguments encountered in the literature posit that African American speech of the nineteenth century was "identical to that of cohort European American speech but that it has since diverged" (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002: 12-13). This point of view is perfectly illustrated by Kurath (1949: 6):

> By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language of the white man of his locality or area and of his education…As far as the speech of uneducated Negroes is concerned, it differs little from that of the illiterate white: that is, it exhibits the same regional and local variations as that of the simple white folk.

The Anglicist Hypothesis maintains that the language contact situation of the people of African origin in the United States was no different from that of other groups of immigrants. It is true that African slaves brought with them several African languages to North America, but after a couple of generations, these heritage languages were gradually lost, as Africans learned the regional and social varieties used by North American white speakers.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s this position was challenged and replaced by the *Creolist Hypothesis*, which maintains that AAVE developed from a creole language, as an outcome of the early contact between Africans and Europeans (Stewart, 1967; Dillard, 1972). One of the most well-known advocates of the Creolist Hypothesis is William Stewart who wrote that:

> Of the Negro slaves who constituted the field labor force on North American plantations up to the mid-nineteenth century, even many who were born in the New World spoke of a variety of English which was in fact a true creole language – differing markedly in grammatical structure from those English dialects which were brought directly from Great Britain, as well as from New World modifications of these in the mouths of descendants of the original white colonists. (Stewart, 1968: 3)

Despite the fact that not all scholars on AAVE accepted such a strong interpretation of the creolist hypothesis, certain authors accepted some version of it. Fasold (1981: 164) was one of them, who mentioned that "the creole hypothesis seems most likely to be correct, but it is certainly not so well established as Dillard (1972), for example, would have us to believe." Fasold actually refers to Dillard's highly influential book *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States*, published in 1972, which promoted the creolist hypothesis. Under this hypothesis, AAVE is considered to have started off as a creole, just like

Jamaican Creole or Gullah (spoken in the Sea Island off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia), as AAVE shares some grammatical features with these two creole varieties of English (Green, 2002: 9). Rickford (1998: 189) opines that "there is enough persuasive evidence in these data to suggest that AAVE did have some creole roots."

In the 1980s the creolist hypothesis was called into questions due to the publication of different sets of data. One of them was a set of written records of ex-slave narratives collected under the Works Project Administration in the 1930s, published in 1991 as *The Emergence of Black English: Text and commentary* by Bailey, Maynor and Cukor-Avila. Other materials included letters written by semi-literate ex-slaves in the mid-nineteenth century (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993) and the Hyatt texts, which represent a set of interviews with Black practitioners of voodoo in the 1930s (Hyatt 1970-8, Ewers 1996). All these records showed that earlier AAVE was not as different from postcolonial European American English varieties, thus apparently disproving the creolist hypothesis. The emergence of data from these newly discovered texts led to the development of the *Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis* (Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001). More recently, Van Herk (2015: 23) uses the term *English Origins Hypothesis* (EOH) and associates it with the *Ottawa School*. This hypothesis, similar to the *Anglicist Hypothesis* which circulated in the mid-twentieth century, posits that although earlier postcolonial African American speech was influenced by early British dialects brought to North America by British colonists, it has since diverged and present-day AAVE is actually different from contemporary European American vernacular speech (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2008: 222). Based on recent studies which focused on expatriate enclave communities, Poplack (1999: 27) postulated that "AAVE originated as English, but as the African American community solidified, it innovated specific features and contemporary AAVE is the result of evolution, by its own unique, internal logic". Labov (1998: 119) makes a similar observation and writes that "The general conclusion that is emerging from studies of the history of AAVE is that many important features of the modern dialect are creations of the twentieth century and not an inheritance of the nineteenth".

Even though many scholars adhered to this position, a consensus has yet to be reached. The validity and nature of the data is questioned by some researchers (Debose 1994, Hannah 1997), the earlier contact situation between Africans and Europeans (Winford 1997) as well as the "sociohistorical circumstances that contextualized the speech of earlier African Americans (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002: 14). Grammatical features such as copula absence (e.g. *She beautiful)* and inflectional *-s* absence (e.g. *He go*) occur frequently in language contact situations.

These features particularized earlier African American speech and persist in present-day AAVE. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2008: 223) note that influence from another language or a language contact situation that takes place longer than the original contact circumstance is known as a *substrate effect*. The persistence of copula absence and inflectional *-s* absence in present-day AAVE, centuries after the first contact situation between British colonists and African slaves is deemed a substrate effect in AAVE (see also Kautzsch, 2002).

The last hypothesis which speculates on the origins and subsequent development of AAVE is the *Substrate Hypothesis* which suggests that although earlier AAVE may have contained features from regional varieties of American English, its durable substrate effects "have always distinguished it from other varieties of American English (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2008: 223). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes further claim that even though sociohistorical evidence does not support the existence of a plantation creole in the American South, "this does not mean that contact with creole speakers during the passage of slaves from Africa to North America could not have influenced the development of earlier AAVE" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2008: 223).

Given the different opinions and the lack of a general consensus as to the origin and early development of AAVE, it is futile to believe that we have a definitive answer to this question. These shifts in positions over the last century warn us to be careful in reaching a final conclusion to explain the origin and early evolution of AAVE.

2. AAVE as a literary dialect in 19th century American fiction

Throughout American literary history, a significant number of authors have attempted to craft the language of African American characters for different reasons. However, each author used their own set of orthographic conventions as "no orthographic system has ever been developed or agreed upon for how to represent different dialects of American English" (Peterson, 2015: 691). As a result, authors made use of *eye dialect*. This term was coined by Krapp in 1925 in his book *The English Language in America* to describe graphemic alterations that differ from the nonstandard pronunciation but which have a role in creating the impression that the speaker is using a dialectal form. Later on, Preston (1985), in an attempt to distinguish among different types of *respellings*, identified the following: *allegro speech forms*, *dialect respellings* and *eye dialect*. Allegro speech forms represent instances of nonstandard spelling that try to render casual speech (e.g., *walkin', till, an'*). Dialect respellings aim at conveying social features of pronunciation (e.g., *dem* for *them*). Finally, eye dialect is used to show a

phonological difference between standard and nonstandard form that do not actually exits (e.g., *wuz* for *was*).

This section focuses on how and why American authors like Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe represented African American Vernacular English in the speech of two characters: Jim and Aunt Chloe. I agree with Lanehart (2001: 1) who states that "we cannot talk about a language without considering and trying to understand the people in and of their sociocultural and historical contexts. In other words, the language and the people are inextricably linked." I prefer the term *dialectal writing* (or *writing in dialect*), as opposed to *Remus orthography*, a concept originally introduced by Hadler (1998: 108) to depict "a written language riddled with apostrophes, misspellings, and omitted letters and words" and subsequently used by Peterson (2015). The term *Remus orthography* is an obvious reference to Joel Chandler Harris's African American tales. Uncle Remus is an old former slave used by Chandler to portray the language of the Old South and Gullah (Peterson, 2015: 693). The term dialectal writing is more generous and has a wider meaning, applicable to all authors who made use of nonstandard language to render the speech of different characters.

Many (socio)linguists question the importance and accuracy of using literary dialect to draw conclusions and inferences as to the origins and development of a certain dialect, and AAVE is no exception. I follow Minnick (2004: xvi) who postulates that "there is an abundance of skepticism about the linguistic value of literary dialect – which is defined here as written attempts at representing social, regional or other types of spoken linguistic variation – still the analysis of literary dialect can be important to linguistic study as it is to literary study".

According to Dillard (1977) AAVE, when used as a literary dialect, is always rendered in a different orthography, compared to the speech of non-Black characters which is always portrayed using Standard American English orthography. This position raises a number of problems. The first one is that in the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (henceforth AHF) by Mark Twain, the story is told by Huckleberry Finn, a "vernacular-speaking child" (Fishkin, 1993: 3) and a non-Black character. Furthermore, in the "Explanatory" with which the novel begins, Twain acknowledges that seven dialects are used in the book:

> In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guess-work; but painstakingly, and with trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

> I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding. (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1994: 6)

It is a wide-held belief that the only "negro dialect" in the book is the one spoken by Africa-American characters. Apart from the phonological features used to render the speech of Jim (he used '*dat*' instead of '*that*'), morphology, syntax and diction also play an important role in portraying a character's voice. A voice also comprises something that transcends grammar or literary devices. It is what Claude Brown describes as "*Spoken Soul*", a term he coined for black talk. The term was also used by Rickford and Rickford (2000) in the title of their book: *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. The authors cogently argue that:

> Most African Americans – including millions who, like Brown and Baldwin, are fluent speakers of Standard English – still invoke Spoken Soul as we have for hundreds of years, to laugh or cry, to preach and praise, to shuck and jive, to sing, to rap, to shout, to style, to express our individual personas and our ethnic identities ("'spress yo'self!" as James Brown put it), to confide in and commiserate with friends, to chastise, to cuss, to act, to act the fool, to get by and get over, to pass secrets, to make jokes, to mock and mimic, to tell stories, to reflect and philosophize, to create authentic characters and voices in novels, poems, and plays, to survive in the streets, to relax at home and recreate in playgrounds, to render our deepest emotions and embody our vital core. (Rickford and Rickford, 2000: 4)

The use of AAVE in literary texts creates an intimacy and great familiarity, something that could never be achieved through the use of Standard English. Although Twain has been criticized for the way in which he portrayed Jim's speech, he was a "mostly conscientious observer and reporter of common features of African American English" (Minnick, 2010: 184). When comparing Jim's and Huck's speech, some apparently insignificant sociolinguistic differences arise. For instance, Jim uses the alveolar nasal pronunciation (i.e., the use on /n/ instead of /ŋ/ in words like *working*), while Huck does not. Consider the following examples:

> (1) 'Well, it's all right, anyway, Jim, long as you're going to be rich again some time or another.' (Huck, p. 54)
> (2) Don't you git too peart. It's a-comin'. Mind I tell you, it's a-comin'.' (Jim, p. 58)

The fact that Huckleberry Finn speaks in the Pike County dialect should have also been mirrored in the pronunciation of ING. The ING variable is one of the most well-researched phonological variables.

Several studies (Labov 1966, Wald and Shopen 1985, Campbell-Kibler 2006) have pinpointed that the */n/* variant is the nonstandard one, associated with the lower and middle classes, whereas the */ŋ/* variant is the standard one, preferred by the upper class. Huckleberry Finn would have been expected to use the nonstandard form and not the standard one.

In the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (henceforth UTC) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, not only the speech on Black characters is rendered as nonstandard. The novel opens with a discussion between Mr Shelby, the master of the plantation and Haley, a slave trader. Stowe uses the word "gentlemen" to describe both men, however, she further writes that "one of the parties, when critically examined, did not seem, strictly speaking, to come under the species" (UTC, 1982: 11). The author obviously refers to Haley, a white slave trader from Kentucky, whose "conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar, and was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to transcribe" (UTC, 1982: 11). The story is told by an omniscient narrator, focusing on two stories: Tom's destiny and Eliza's and George's escape. Even though most of the white characters speak in Standard English, some of them speak in a dialect. African-American characters such as Eliza and George Harris use Standard English impeccably, while Aunt Chloe uses AAVE. This is to show that Dillard's (1977) claim mentioned above does not stand. The speech of white characters is also sometimes portrayed as dialectal and there are cases in which the speech of Black characters is rendered in Standard English.

Twain's and Stowe's representation of AAVE has been subjected to criticism, with McDowell (1931: 322) referring to Stowe's "persistent inconsistency", and later on, Holton (1984: 70) talking about "dialectal inconsistency". Nonetheless, Holton (1984: 102) acknowledges that "Mark Twain's representation of Jim's dialect is certainly extremely well done". Evidence shows that Twain was striving, to the best of his ability, for accuracy and readability (Fishkin, 1993: 103). These two factors play an important part in a work of fiction which makes use of dialectal writing. Authors have to come up with a perfect formula, a balance between accuracy and readability. If the text contains too many instances of dialectal writing, then in might pose difficulties for the reader, especially if they are not acquainted with the dialect that is portrayed. So, we expect that in their representation of AAVE in the two novels under scrutiny, Twain and Stowe did not employ all the linguistic features attested in AAVE, but just a few in order to catch a glimpse of how 19th century African-Americans "sounded" like. This hypothesis is also sustained by Twain's 'Explanatory" note that precedes Chapter 1 of the novel, which was already mentioned above.

3. Morphosyntactic features of African American Vernacular English

According to Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2008: 214) there is a general consensus among dialectologists that some features of AAVE are particular to this variety and are not found in European American varieties. An extensive list of phonological and morphosyntactic features of AAVE is presented in Rickford (1999) and Green (2002). Below we provide a list of some distinguishing morphosyntactic features of AAVE, as formulated in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2008: 214-215):

(i) habitual *be* for habitual or intermittent activity;
(3) She don't usually be here.

(ii) absence of copula for contracted forms of *is* and *are*;
(4) He nice.

(iii) present tense, third-person -*s* absence;
(5) *he eat* for *he eats*
(iv) possessive -*s* absence;
(6) *man_coat* for *man's coat*

(v) general plural -*s* absence;
(7) *a lot of time* for *a lot of times*

(vi) simple past tense *had* + verb;
(8) They had went outside in the garden.

(vii) *ain't* for *didn't*
(9) He ain't do it.

This somewhat restricted list does not include multiple negation as this is not necessarily a feature associated only with AAVE. Sutcliffe (1998), who looks at grammatical features found in 19th century AAVE and Gullah, highlights another important peculiarity of AAVE, i.e., zero tense marker, arguing that this is a typical creole feature. He further argues that in almost 90% of the cases the reasons behind the lack of inflection are:

(a) the use of the historic present in narrative;
(b) phonological simplification leading to loss of the -ed ending;
(c) a past tense form identical to the present (e.g., the standard English *put*);
(d) deletion of underlying 'would' in habitual past tense reference.

(Sutcliffe, 1998: 141)

Let us now turn our attention to the way in which AAVE was used as a literary dialect in the two novels under scrutiny and discuss some of the morphosyntactic features identified in the speech of Jim (AHF) and Aunt Chloe (UTC).

4. Morphosyntactic features in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Several morphosyntactic features will be considered in this section: multiple negation, the absence of various suffixes (third-person singular, plural -s), the absence of copula *be*, the presence of the suffix -*s* with first and second person subjects, lack of concord, regularization of verb forms, possessive and personal pronouns and *a*-prefixing.

Multiple negation is a nonstandard grammatical feature found in most, if not all, dialects of English and AAVE is no exception. Green (2002: 77) writes that multiple negators like *don't*, no and nothing can be used in a single negative sentence. In both AFH and UTC multiple negation is a feature that appears quite frequently in the speech of Jim and Aunt Chloe respectively. Consider the following examples:

(10) a. 'I couldn't git nuffn' else (Jim, p. 49)
b. I 'uz powerful sorry you's killed, Huck, but I ain't no mo', now.' (Jim, p. 50)
c. But I didn' have no luck.' (Jim, p. 51)
d. I see it wan't no use fer to wait…' (Jim, p. 51)
e. Mighty few – an' dey ain' no use to a body.' (Jim, p. 52)

(11) a. 'don't tell me nothin' of dem…' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
b. 'I never said nothin'. (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
c. 'Ta'nt no fault o' hern' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
d. 'Lor, the family an't nothing!' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
e. 'I can't do nothin' with ladies in de kitchen!' (Aunt Chloe, p. 38)

In the examples provided in (10) we can observe instances of intra-speaker variation, in the pronunciation of the negator *ain't*, which is spelled *ain't* (10b) and *ain'* (10e). A third pronunciation is found in Aunt Chloe's speech, who pronounces it as *an't* (11d). Fickett (1975) researched the verb system in AAVE with a particular emphasis on the uses of negative elements *ain't*, *not*, and *don't* from the perspective of tenses. He concluded that "because it has a system of tenses which indicate degrees of pastness and degrees of futurity, it can talk about how long-ago things didn't happen, or how far ahead they aren't going to

happen" (Fickett, 1975: 90). This can also be observed in the examples provided above in (10) and (11).

Another morphosyntactic feature that can be found both in the speech of Jim and Aunt Chloe is the absence of various suffixes (third-person singular, plural *-s*) or the presence of the *-s* suffix with first and second person subjects. Consider the following examples:

(12) a. 'Well, I knows what I's gwyne to do. (Jim, p. 14)
b. 'I's gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin.' (Jim, p. 14)
c. 'Here' I've got a thin old knife, I keeps sharp a purpose.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 35)
d. '…dey takes dat ar time.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 37)
e. 'Well, now, I hopes you're done' (Aunt Chloe, p. 40)
f. 'We wants to sit up to meetin' – meetin's is so curis. We likes 'em.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 40)

The presence of the *-s* suffix with first and second person subjects appears more frequently in the speech of Aunt Chloe than in the speech of Jim. In most cases the suffix *-s* is attached to verbs used with first person subjects (e.g., *I knows, I hears, I hopes, I keeps*). The fact that both Jim and Aunt Chloe add *-s* to verbs in the first person singular, which results in a pronoun-verb discrepancy, is known as hypercorrection (Huber, 2018: 68).

There are several instances of lack of concord between subject and verb, for example:

(13) a. 'Say – who is you? Whar is you?' (Jim, p. 14)
b. 'Yo' ole father doan' know…' (Jim, p. 26)
c. 'Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout… .' (Jim, p. 26)
d. 'But you is all right.' (Jim, p. 26)
e. 'Dey's two gals flyin' 'bout you…' (Jim, p. 26)
f. W'y, what has you lived on.' (Jim, p. 49)
g. '…it's a sign dat you's agwyne to be rich.' (Jim, p. 52)
h. '…don' you see I has? (Jim, p. 52)

(14) a. Jinny and I is good friends… .' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
b. 'Ah, Mas'r George, you does n't know half your privileges…' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
c. '…but tan't everybody knows what they is.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 38)
d. '…for we's goin' to have the meetin'.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 40)

Lack of subject-verb agreement is well-documented in AAVE (Cukor-Avila 2001, Wolfram and Thomas 2002) and it seems that this feature has been preserved in contemporary AAVE (Rickford, 1992; Wolfram, 2004).

The absence of copula occurs in the speech of Jim:

(15) a. 'You gwyne to have considable trouble…' (Jim, p. 26)
b. Sometimes you gwyne to git huty, en sometimes you gwyne to git sick' (Jim, p. 26)
c. '…didn' know by de sign dat you gwyne to be rich bymeby.' (Jim, p. 52)

There were no instances of the absence of copula in the speech of Aunt Chloe. Furthermore, there are several instances in Jim's speech in which the copula is preserved. Consider the following examples:

(16) a. 'I knows what I's gwyne to do.' (Jim, p. 14)
b. 'Yo ole father doan' know, yit, what he's a-gwyne to do.' (Jim, p. 26)
c. 'You's gwyne to marry de po' one…' (Jim, p. 26)
d. 'dat you's gwyne to git hung.' (Jim, p. 27)

Despite the fact that the copula is retained in these instances, the contracted form *'s* is used with first- and second-person singular subjects. Significant is also the form *gwyne* used as a future tense marker.

As somewhat expected, Jim and Aunt Chloe regularize irregular verb forms, although this does not occur quite frequently.

(17) a. 'I knowed dey was arter you.' (Jim, p. 52)
b. 'And so ye telled Tom, did ye?' (Aunt Chloe, p. 37)
c. 'Cake ris all to one side' (Aunt Chloe, p. 35)
d. 'You know'd your old aunty.' (Aunt Chloe, p. 35)

The process of regularization of irregular verbs occurs in several varieties of North American English (see Montgomery, 2004; Bayley and Santa Ana, 2004; Fought, 2002) as well as varieties of British English (see Miller, 2004; Trudgill, 2004; Anderwald, 2009). This feature has also been attested in AAVE (see Wolfram, 2004).

There are several instances in Twain's novel where Jim does not mark past tense forms. The tense is only understood from the context:

(18) a. 'I come heah de night arter you's killed.' (Jim, p. 49)
b. 'I see a light a-comin' roun' de p'int.' (Jim, p. 51)

c. ‘I see it warn’t no use fer to wait, so I slid overboard, en stuck out…’ (Jim, p. 51)
d. ‘When we ‘uz mos’ down to de head er de islan’, a man begin to come aft wid a lantern.’ (Jim, p. 51)

This peculiarity was only found in Jim’s speech. In the speech of Aunt Chloe, however, we could not find any such instances. Another interesting feature which characterized Jim’s speech was the use of past participle forms instead of the past tense. Consider the following examples:

(19) a. ‘Den I swum to de stern uv it, en tuck aholt.’ (Jim, p. 51)
b. ‘So I clumb up en laid down on de planks.’ (Jim, p. 51)
c. ‘No, but I been rich wunst, and gwyne to be rich agin.’ (Jim, p. 52)
d. ‘So I done it.’ (Jim, p. 53)

Noteworthy is the irregularization of the verb *climb*, as ‘*clumb*’ (19b), probably by analogy to verb forms like *find-found*, *hang-hung*.

An important feature that appears consistently in Jim’s speech is *a*-prefixing. Schneider (1989: 147) writes that *a*-prefixing frequently occurs in folk speech on both sides of the Atlantic.

(20) a. ‘…what he’s a-gwyne to do.’ (Jim, p. 26)
b. ‘…but dey wuz people a-stirrin’ yit’ (Jim, p. 50)
c. ‘I see a light a-comin’ roun’ de p’int.’ (Jim, p. 51)
d. ‘What you want to know when good luck’s a-comin’ for?’ (Jim, p. 52)
e. ‘…it’s a sign dat you’s agwyne to be rich…’ (Jim, p. 52)
f. ‘…right off en keep things a-movin’.’ (Jim, p. 53)
g. ‘…didn’t de line pull loose en de raf’ go a-hummin’ down de river’ (Jim, p. 88)
h. ‘I was a-listenin’ to all de talk…’ (Jim, p. 95)

(21) ‘…there’s old Bruno, too, a pawin’ round; what on airth!’ (Aunt Chloe, p. 51)

A-prefixing also occurs in Aunt Chloe’s speech, albeit rare, as illustrated in (21). It is also worth mentioning the use of possessive pronouns, especially ‘your’ which is represented in its nonstandard and weakened forms *yer* and *yo*, as illustrated below:

(22) a. ‘Yo’ ole father doan’ know…’ (Jim, p. 26)
b. ‘You gwyne to have considable trouble in yo’ life…’ (Jim, p. 26)

c. 'Dey's two gals flyin' 'bout you in yo' life.' (Jim, p. 26)
d. '…how yo' pap come over to de town…' (Jim, p. 50)
e. 'It ain't yo' fault, Huck' (Jim, p. 96)

(23) '…you does n't know half your privileges in yer family' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)

In Aunt Chloe's speech the personal pronoun '*you*' is rendered in its nonstandard form *ye*, whereas in Jim's speech Twain uses the standard form *you*.

(24) a. 'Jinny and I is good friends, ye know' (Aunt Chloe, p. 36)
b. 'And so ye telled Tom, did ye?' (Aunt Chloe, p. 37)

(25) a. 'But you is all right.' (Jim, p. 26)
b. '…dat you's gwyne to hit hung.' (Jim, p. 27)
c. '…maybe you's got to be po' a long time fust.' (Jim, p. 52)
d. 'don' you see I has?' (Jim, p. 52)

Noteworthy is also the use of the tag question in (24b), in the speech of Aunt Chloe.

The occurrence of the suffix *-s* with first and second person subjects (e.g., *I knows*, *We wants*, *We likes*, *I hopes*), the construction *for to* in (10d) and (18c), as well as preverbal *a-* in (20), reveal that 19th century AAVE was characterized by rich verbal inflections. These features rarely occur in present-day AAVE.

Conclusions

This paper has discussed AAVE as a literary dialect in two 19th century American novels: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The analysis has highlighted several morphosyntactic characteristics associated with AAVE in general and has identified several morphosyntactic features found in the speech of two characters of African-American descent: Jim and Aunt Chloe.

All the morphosyntactic features identified in the speech of the two African-American characters under scrutiny have been attested in AAVE. The authors have also managed to keep a balance between accuracy and readability, which is a vital aspect in a work of fiction that makes use of dialectal writing. The linguistic inconsistencies for which both authors have been blamed contribute to the novels' authenticity and make the characters believable and realistic. The instances of *intra-speaker* variation that have been highlighted stand proof to the (socio)linguistic insight that the authors possessed. It is also clear that

Mark Twain offered a very accurate description of AAVE through the consistent features employed (rich verbal morphology, *for to* infinitives, *a*-prefixing, the use of pronouns etc.). Beecher Stowe's rendition of AAVE includes more instances of *eye dialect* and *pronunciation respellings* than morphosyntactic particularities.

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