

What negation can tell us about the origin of African American Vernacular English*

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In this paper, two main hypotheses on the origin of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis and the Substrate Hypothesis, are evaluated against the way negation is expressed in several varieties of old and modern English, including older and newer varieties of AAVE. The data indicate that early African American English (AAE) must have already had both English and creole sources / language contact: some expressions of negation clearly have a dialectal source, whereas others clearly do not. This paper concludes that the Substrate Hypothesis provides the best account for the available data. Moreover, fully in line with the Substrate Hypothesis, AAVE underwent a number of subsequent changes with respect to the expression of negation in the late 19th and 20th centuries. These recent developments resulted from various sociolinguistic factors.

1 Introduction: the Origin of AAVE

The origin of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been the topic of discussion for decades. In particular, the discussion focuses on the question as to whether it diverged from older varieties of American English, originally spoken by colonists, or whether AAVE developed under the influence of language contact with – among others – creole languages (such as Gullah, spoken in South Carolina) and subsequently converged towards American

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English. The former view, originally proposed as the Anglicist Hypothesis (cf. most notably, Kurath 1948; McDavid and McDavid 1951), takes AAVE to have started out as a dialect of English spoken by the first colonists and posits that many of the distinguishing features of AAVE are remnants of the original colonist varieties, which have disappeared from other dialects. The latter view, initially formulated as the Creolist Hypothesis, claims that AAVE is a creole-based variety of English and has developed from its creole origin (much like Gullah) towards Standard English. Important early protagonists of this hypothesis are Baily (1965), Stewart (1967, 1968), and Dillard (1972). Both hypotheses turned out to be untenable in their original radical formulation and had to be nuanced. This resulted in the postulation of both the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis and the Substrate Hypothesis, both of which we discuss in somewhat more detail.

1.1 *The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis*

The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis still aims at explaining the divergence of AAVE from English but takes various other grammatical properties of AAVE to be a result of later language change, some of them being fairly recently introduced (cf. Montgomery et al. 1993; Montgomery and Fuller 1996; Poplack 2000; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001). Note that under this hypothesis, creole influence on AAVE is no longer excluded.

The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of language change after the original formation of Early AAE (Wolfram and Torbert 2006:228). Supporters of the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis claim that AAVE used to bear much resemblance to white American speech, but they underline that AAVE has since undergone changes and diverged from South White Vernacular English (SWVE), resulting in the distinction that is nowadays observable between contemporary AAVE and white American varieties (Wolfram and Torbert 2006:228). The most distinctive properties of AAVE have only developed recently and are creations of the twentieth century (Labov 1998, in: Wolfram et al. 2002:12).

Although AAVE has developed some specific properties of its own over the last years, Poplack and Tagliamonte (2002:247) argue that most of the properties that are thought of as typically AAVE are in fact “reflexes of an earlier stage of the [English] language” that “have disappeared from contemporary mainstream standards over the course of the past couple of centuries.”

1.2 *The Substrate Hypothesis*

According to the alternative hypothesis, which is now best known as the Substrate Hypothesis, AAVE is primarily the result of language contact with creole speakers. Today, however, this view is more nuanced. It emerged in response to the strong Anglicist and Creolist claims discussed above and incorporates the advantages of both the (Neo-)Anglicist Hypothesis and the Creolist Hypothesis (cf. Winford 1992, 1998). It argues that the genesis of AAVE lies in the language contact situation between some English-based creoles and the dialects of the early settlers. In this sense, “the earliest forms of AAVE were not creole-like, but rather second language versions of the settler dialects” (cf. Winford 1998: 99).

The Substrate Hypothesis argues that AAVE is not merely a dialect of English, but that it has had creole and other language contact influences over the course of the years. One of the supporters of this hypothesis is Winford (1992). Winford (1992:311) argues that AAVE preserves traces of a shift from a creole pattern to a variety based on Standard English. However, Early AAVE itself was not full-fledged creole, but it arose “through a process of restructuring in which a creole substrate played a significant role” (Winford 1992:311). Howe (2005:174) argues that certain properties point to substrate influence from an earlier contact situation, like English-based creole Gullah.

In this view, AAVE came into being through language contact between European colonists and Africans in the South during the seventeenth century. AAVE thus originated in the English variety spoken by settlers, but it also continued to develop in contact with creole varieties. These creolized varieties of English, such as Gullah, were in turn restructured by substratum influence from other languages spoken by Africans in a process of adaptation. AAVE was therefore never a creole itself, but was created by African slaves (Winford 1997, 1998, in Green 2002:10).

Wolfram and Schilling (2006:223) argue that even though the socio-historical evidence does not support the existence of a widespread plantation creole in the 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 AAE.

Winford (1998) comes to a similar conclusion. He claims that not one English dialect or creole variety is the source of AAVE but that it has had multiple inputs and has evolved over time (Winford 1998:140). He further claims that AAVE is the result of a process of restructuring of the settler dialects by Africans and that it bears the distinctive marks of this creation. The long and close relationship between black and white speech communities in the South is reflected by the fact that AAVE and SWVE show extensive overlap in their

structural properties. The earliest forms of AAVE were not creole-like, but they were second-language versions of the settler dialects, according to Winford (1998:100). The mechanisms that best explain the emergence of AAVE include the processes of simplification in second-language learning, substratum influence from West African languages as well as creolized English, and the processes of levelling (that is, elimination of variation and preference for shared properties) (Winford 1998:100).

At present, the Neo-Anglicist and the Substrate Hypotheses represent the two dominant positions on the origin of AAVE. But these stands are not the only views currently adhered to by scholars. Howe (1992, 2005), for instance, has argued that both creole and dialectal influences led to the formation of AAVE – a view that is also shared by Mufwene (2000) and has been voiced in Winford (1998).

1.3 *Evaluating the two hypotheses*

In this article, we aim at contributing to this debate by exploring negation in AAVE. The domain of negation in AAVE is interesting because the expression of negation differs strikingly from Standard English and for this reason has occupied a central position in the discussion on the origin of AAVE. In this paper, we investigate which negation patterns have been attested in the dialects during the colonization and which in creole languages. We compare these to the following six English-based language varieties and the way they exhibit negation: Standard English, Early AAE, contemporary AAVE, early dialects of English, contemporary dialects of American English (in particular, SWVE), and creole languages (Gullah, Krio, and Jamaican Creole). Our data are mainly gathered from Kautzsch (2002), Howe and Walker (1999), and Howe (2005). For both hypotheses, we compare the relevant varieties with respect to the expression of negation. The Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis and the Substrate Hypothesis make quite different claims about the resemblance of Early AAE to other early dialects of English and about the resemblance of Early AAE and AAVE to creole sources. The comparison of the way negation is expressed can thus shed more light on the origin of AAVE.

In short, the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis expects negation patterns to be similar in Early AAE and early dialects of English. It underlines the influence of language change, which can result in different patterns between Early AAE and contemporary AAVE. Under the Substrate Hypothesis, by contrast, AAVE has both creole and dialectal influences. This means that resemblance to early English dialects and/or creole languages can be predicted. We will conclude that the Substrate Hypothesis can best account for the attested negation patterns. In addition, we conclude that various negation patterns that appear to be typical for

AAVE are the result of relatively novel developments, which we take to be due to sociolinguistic influences on AAVE that emerged in the late 19th century.

It must be acknowledged, however, that there is not a unitary AAVE. AAVE is rather a collection of several varieties, some of which have even become standardized. Furthermore, AAVE is known to exhibit a fair amount of language-internal variation that also affects the shape of negative sentences. Moreover, other varieties of English, such as SWVE, are also not monolithic. For this reason, this paper only focuses on robust differences in the expression of negation to ensure that the claims we make apply to all vernaculars and not just particular varieties of them. At the same time, it is unavoidable in a comparative study such as this one that some claims will apply to most but not all varieties of a particular language or dialect.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the various relevant patterns of negation are discussed and exemplified. In Section 3, the results and their implications for the two hypotheses are discussed, and it is concluded that the Substrate Hypothesis accounts best for the attested variation in negative patterns. However, this hypothesis leaves room for an explanation of several recent developments; these will be discussed in Section 4. Finally, the conclusion follows in Section 5.

2 Negation in AAVE

In this section, we will discuss four aspects of negation which form the major keys in the comparison of AAVE to other relevant varieties of English: Negative Concord, Negative Postposing, Negative Inversion, and the presence and distribution of the negative copula *ain't*. Each aspect of negation relevant to this discussion will be briefly discussed in the subsections 2.1–2.4 below.

2.1 Negative Concord

Negative Concord (NC) is “[t]he phenomenon where two (or more) negative elements that are able to express negation in isolation yield a single semantic negation [...]” (Zeijlstra 2007:504). This is in contrast to Double Negation, where each negative element introduces a semantic negation such that two negative elements receive a positive reading (Zeijlstra 2007:504).

Even though Standard English is a Double Negation language, Negative Concord is a property commonly attested in non-standard English. In the examples below, (1a) and (1b) are sentences containing one negative element each. The negation is being induced by the negative marker *not* and the negative quantifier *nobody*, respectively. In (1c), however, the negative elements *not* and

nobody are combined. Despite the fact that *not* and *nobody* each yield semantic negation when used in isolation, together they only contain one semantic negation. This last sentence is thus an example of Negative Concord in dialects where (1c) is interpreted as ‘John doesn’t call anybody’.

- (1) a. John does not call.
 b. Nobody has called.
 c. John doesn’t call nobody.

Furthermore, Negative Concord can be divided into a ‘strict’ and a ‘non-strict’ variant. In languages exhibiting strict Negative Concord, each negative quantifier (n-word) has to be accompanied by a negative marker. In non-strict Negative Concord languages, Negative Concord may only occur “between n-words in postverbal position and one element in preverbal position, either an n-word or a negative marker” (Zeijlstra 2007:504f).

The distinction between strict and non-strict Negative Concord alone is not directly relevant for our research. In order to get a more in-depth view on the use of Negative Concord, another subdivision needs to be made. We therefore follow Howe and Walker (1999), who categorize Negative Concord in slightly different terms than is standardly done in literature by distinguishing three types of Negative Concord: (i) *Negative Concord to indefinites within the same clause*, (ii) *Negative Concord to verbs within the same clause*, and (iii) *Negative Concord to verbs across the clause*; these three types of Negative Concord are exemplified in (2a-c), respectively. *Negative Concord to indefinites within the same clause* refers to cases where a negative indefinite is preceded by a negatively marked verb in the same clause (2a); *Negative Concord to verbs in the same clause* concerns the reverse pattern (a negative indefinite precedes a clause-internal negatively marked verb) (2b); *Negative Concord to a verb in a different clause* concerns cases where a verb in a lower clause is marked for negation as a result of the presence of a negatively marked verb in a higher clause (2c).

- (2) a. I **ain’t** got **no** money.
 b. **No** stranger **ain’t** got to come.
 c. But **don’t** you think that I’m **not** gon’ take it.

It should be noted that Negative Concord to indefinites within the same clause is possible in languages that exhibit either strict or non-strict Negative Concord while Negative Concord to verbs within the same clause is only possible in strict Negative Concord languages.

2.2 *Negative Postposing*

Negative Postposing refers to the occurrences of postverbal negative quantifiers in isolation, as illustrated in (3) and (4). This property is quite common in AAVE, which is unexpected given that it is a Negative Concord language, as most Negative Concord languages require postverbal negative indefinites to be accompanied by a preverbal negation (cf. Zeijlstra 2007).¹

- (3) I have **nowhere** to go. (vs. *I don't have anywhere to go.*)
 (4) He likes **nothing**. (vs. *He doesn't like anything.*)

2.3 *Negative Inversion*

Negative Inversion refers to the phenomenon where Negative Concord takes place under subject auxiliary inversion only (Tottie 2004:224). In (5) NC only takes place of the auxiliary has raised across the subject, otherwise NC is absent.²

- (5) a. Can't nobody tag you then. (vs. *Nobody can tag you then.*)
 b. Won't nobody catch us. (vs. *Nobody will catch us.*)
 c. Didn't nobody see it. (vs. *Nobody saw it.*)

In a way, this property is reminiscent of non-strict Negative Concord languages (such as Italian or Spanish) where only postverbal negative indefinites may be accompanied by a preverbal negative marker.

2.4 *Ain't*

Many varieties of English exhibit the auxiliary *ain't*. With regard to *ain't*, a distinction should be made between the use in non-standard English and in AAVE. In non-standard English, *ain't* can only be used as a variant of present tense BE+NOT (6a) and HAVE+NOT (6b), while *ain't* in AAVE has a wider distribution. As Weldon (1994) and Howe and Walker (1999) have shown, in AAVE *ain't* has three usages: it can be used for present tense BE+NOT (7a),

¹ While in Standard English, negative postposing can be used as a marked strategy, in AAVE it is a standard property. Example (3) is taken from Howe and Walker (1999:32); example (4) is from Labov (1972:133).

² Our definition of Negative Inversion deviates from the common one. Normally, Negative Inversion means that in English, subject and auxiliary change places when an n-word is fronted ('Never have I seen John'). Both (5a) and (5b) are taken from Howe and Walker (1999:33); example (5c) is taken from Labov (1972:133).

HAVE+NOT (7b), and past tense DO+NOT (7c), which is unattested in non-standard English. However, both English varieties with *ain't* and AAVE do not always allow *ain't* constructions. As Weldon (1994:114) has shown, the usage of *ain't* is dependent on the predicates it may select. Only past tense usages of *ain't* are fairly unrestricted. In this sense, only past tense usage of *ain't* is similar to the usage of *ain't* in certain English-based creoles where *ain't* may serve as a general negator.

Non-standard English:³

- (6) a. You **ain't** supposed to say ain't. (BE+NOT present tense)
 b. I sent her a wedding present twice and I **ain't** never heard from it.
 (HAVE+NOT present tense)

AAVE:⁴

- (7) a. You **ain't** damagin' this. (BE+NOT present tense)
 b. I'm real sorry we **ain't** had a chance to chill lately. (HAVE+NOT present tense)
 c. I **ain't** believe you that day, man. (DO+NOT past tense)

3 Predictions and their evaluation

Below we will investigate what the predictions are that the two hypotheses make with respect to the expression of negation in AAVE and varieties they relate to AAVE's origin. First we discuss the predictions of the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis (3.1) and then those of the Substrate Hypothesis (3.2).

3.1 *Evaluating the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis*

The Neo-Anglicist hypothesis explains certain developments of AAVE based on its resemblance to English dialects. If AAVE is basically thought of as a direct descendent of the early American dialects, the early dialects of English and Early AAE should behave on a par. Thus we expect that similar patterns in the domain of negation can be attested and that differences between AAVE and the early dialects of English should be the result of later innovations. However, this expectation is not borne out. The use of Negative Concord in AAVE has undergone several changes over the years. According to Feagin (1979:273, in:

³ Example (6a) taken from Feagin (1979:216); example (6b) taken from Howe and Walker (1999:7).

⁴ Example (7a) taken from Howe (2005:178), example (7b) from Howe (2005:176), and example (7c) from Howe and Walker (1999:12).

Winford 1998:109), clause-internal Negative Concord stems from non-standard dialects of English, as well as clause-external Negative Concord and Negative Inversion. Negative Concord within the clause to indefinites has changed from being optional to being obligatory and the use of Negative Concord within the clause to verbs has decreased from Early AAE to modern AAVE. Both Negative Inversion and Negative Postposing have become optional, while they were rarely used in Early AAE. Although these changes are in line with the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis (since they involve later changes), more problematic is the fact that certain cases can be attested where Early AAE already differs from other early English dialects.

Such differences concern the fact that the use of *ain't* for present tense BE+NOT has decreased, while *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT has increased enormously. Both the use of *ain't* for present tense DO+NOT and past tense BE+NOT have disappeared in modern AAVE (cf. Weldon 1994; Howe and Walker 1999:5). For *ain't*, Winford (1998:104–105) argues that it superficially resembles those forms found in Caribbean creoles and are used in intermediate creoles like Barbadian and Trinidadian as well. It is thus probable that these forms were part of the creole varieties introduced into the southern colonies from Barbados and other Caribbean islands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thus arguing against Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis. Let's look at the cases with *ain't* in more detail.

3.1.1 Present Tense DO+NOT

Only in Early AAE, and not in Early English dialects or current AAVE, does *ain't* for DO+NOT occur (albeit quite rarely). Howe and Walker (1999:17) claim it to be unique to Early AAE, and it is not attested in modern AAVE either.

- (8) I hop' ya **ain't** wanna kno' much mo' 'cause I 'bout through.⁵
[Early AAE; not attested in early English dialects]

This means that Early AAE deviates from early American dialects, which is not to be expected according to the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis. Hence, this is a problem for the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis. A contributing factor to this problem is that this use of *ain't* also occurs in creole varieties (Howe and Walker 1999:5).

⁵ Perdue et al. (1976:210; WPA VA), in: Kautzsch (2002:41); our emphasis.

3.1.2 *Past Tense DO+NOT*

In early dialects of English the use of *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT does not occur at all (Howe 2005:185), and in Early AAE this use only rarely occurred, that is, *didn't* was the preferred variant and was in fact nearly categorical (Howe and Walker 1999:14–15). However, Howe and Walker (1999:15) show that in modern AAVE, the use of *ain't* for DO+NOT is nearly as frequent as *didn't* (40% vs. 60%). This means that *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT is unique to modern AAVE (Howe 2005:185). As the data show, this particular use of *ain't* has increased enormously in the twentieth century and has become a common property of AAVE. The use of *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT in Early AAE can be held as evidence against the Anglicist position because in the early English dialects this use of *ain't* was non-existent.

- (9) When babies came dey **ain't** exknowledge 'em.⁶
[Early AAE; Not attested in early English dialects]

3.1.3 *Past Tense BE+NOT*

In Early AAE *ain't* for past tense BE+NOT is very rare, although it does occur (10) (Howe 2005:179). As with the past tense HAVE+NOT, there is no mentioning of this use in early English dialectal studies. We therefore assume this use of *ain't* did not occur in earlier English varieties. Contemporary SWVE could be held as additional proof, as *ain't* for past tense BE+NOT does not exist in this variety either. In contemporary AAVE this use is not attested either (Howe 2005:181). This could be used as evidence for the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis, although the fact that it did occur in Early AAE – even though very rare – undermines this position.

- (10) a. I tell you it **ain't** right, Miss, what I seen. It **ain't** right at all.⁷
[Early AAE; not attested in early English dialects]
b. Yesterday we took a long walk. The weather **ain't** nice
[Early AAE; not attested in early English dialects]

3.1.4 *Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis: Conclusion*

The overview in Table 1 makes clear that there are certain dissimilarities attested between Early Dialects and Early AAE, on the basis of which we

⁶ Perdue, Barden and Phillips (1976:207), in: Kautzsch (2002:41); our emphasis.

⁷ Miss 11:95, in: Howe (2005:177); our emphasis.

conclude that the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis does not provide a sufficient explanation for the origin of AAVE.

Table 1: Tested predictions of the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis

	Early dialects	Early AAE	Predicted by the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis
NC (within the clause)	YES	YES	YES
NC (across the clause)	?	YES	?
Negative Inversion	YES	YES	YES
Negative Postposing	?	YES	?
<i>Ain't</i> – present BE+NOT	YES	YES	YES
<i>Ain't</i> – present HAVE+NOT	YES	YES	YES
<i>Ain't</i> – present DO+NOT	NO	YES	NO
<i>Ain't</i> – past BE+NOT	NO	YES	NO
<i>Ain't</i> – past HAVE+NOT	NO	NO	YES
<i>Ain't</i> – past DO+NOT	NO	YES	NO

3.2 *Evaluating the Substrate Hypothesis*

The Substrate Hypothesis alludes to both dialectal and language contact / creole influences. This means that within the realm of negation, multiple influences can play a role, a prediction that we will show is borne out. The properties that proved to be problematic for the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis can be solved under the Substrate Hypothesis by arguing that they emerged under language contact.. Note the same solution is available for the problems that the Creolist Hypothesis faces: the properties that the Creolist Hypothesis cannot explain, are the result of a dialectal origin. This means that the following properties of negation are explained by the Substrate Hypothesis, with different sources for each of property. In Table 2, we provide the results for the Substrate Hypothesis in the same way as was done for the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis. Table 3 provides an overview of the different sources of the discussed negation properties.

Table 2: Substrate Hypothesis: conclusions

SUBSTRATE	Early dialects	Creole: now	Early AAE	Support for the Substrate Hypothesis
NC (within the clause)	YES	YES	YES	YES dialectal / creole origin
NC (across the clause)	?	NO	YES	?
Negative Inversion	YES	NO	YES	YES dialectal origin
Negative Postposing	?	NO	YES	?
<i>Ain't</i> – present BE+NOT	YES	YES	YES	YES creole / dialectal origin
<i>Ain't</i> – present HAVE+NOT	YES	YES	YES	YES creole / dialectal origin
<i>Ain't</i> – present DO+NOT	NO	YES	YES	YES
<i>Ain't</i> – past BE+NOT	NO	YES	YES	YES creole origin
<i>Ain't</i> – past HAVE+NOT	NO	YES	NO	YES creole origin
<i>Ain't</i> – past DO+NOT	NO	YES	YES	YES creole origin

As can be deduced from the table above, Early AAE had more dialectal influences than creole influences with respect to the expression of negation (c.f. Negative Concord and Negative Inversion), but still has a number of negation patterns that cannot have their source in the early English dialects, for instance, with respect to *ain't*,

Table 3: Different properties of negation and their origins

Negation type	Dialectal origin	Creole origin	Dialectal / Creole origin
Negative Concord within the clause	X		
Negative Inversion	X		
<i>Ain't</i> – present tense BE+NOT			X
<i>Ain't</i> – present tense HAVE+NOT			X
<i>Ain't</i> – present tense DO+NOT		X	
<i>Ain't</i> – past tense BE+NOT		X	
<i>Ain't</i> – past tense HAVE+NOT		X	
<i>Ain't</i> – past tense DO+NOT		X	

In sum, the Substrate Hypothesis explains the origin of each property and does not face any problems with regard to the origin of AAVE that can be traced back to the time of the colonization. However, some of the properties we discussed have undergone recent development; these will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph. In order to explain these changes, we include socio-linguistic explanations for such recent developments.

4 Recent developments and their possible explanations

As we have seen in the last section, our findings support the Substrate Hypothesis. We showed that the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis cannot account for all properties of negation in AAVE. There is a mixture of influences in the realm of negation, which only the Substrate Hypothesis can explain.

In short, there are some significant changes in the use of Negative Concord within the clause, *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT and *ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT. These properties of negation in AAVE have a non-standard character, as these forms do not occur in Standard English. From the nineteenth century onwards, there is a similar pattern visible in these three domains of negation. First, there is a steady decline in these non-standard properties, resulting in AAVE becoming more similar to Standard English. However, in the early twentieth century these non-standard properties show a remarkable renaissance, rendering AAVE more distinct from Standard English once again. First, we will discuss what these recent developments exactly entail. Second, we will demonstrate which socio-linguistic influences have contributed to these changes.

4.1 *Recent developments*

In order to pinpoint which changes have occurred, we have compared Early AAE to contemporary AAVE. We have found several discrepancies, which we have divided into major and minor changes. As language is subject to change, minor changes are to be expected. Minor changes are mostly language internal while the major changes have strong external influences. As minor changes can be explained by what we call natural language change, we will not discuss these in detail.⁸

However, the major changes show a sudden and rapid movement back towards non-standard patterns. These types of changes are not expected with natural language change and are therefore important to our hypothesis. They can only be explained by socio-linguistic influences. The three domains of negation that have changed greatly, and that will be addressed in the following subsections, are listed below:

- (i) Clause-internal Negative Concord;
- (ii) *Ain't* for past tense DO+NOT;
- (iii) *Ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT.

4.1.1 *Clause-internal Negative Concord*

With regard to clause-internal Negative Concord (i.e., Negative Concord to verbs and Negative Concord to indefinites in terms of Howe and Walker (1999)), Kautzsch (2002:63) shows that in AAVE this was predominantly used in the nineteenth century. In the period from 1833 to 1894, there is a steady decline: from over 90% (1833–1854) to over 80% (1855–1874) to over 70%

⁸ There are four minor changes that have occurred in the history of AAVE with regard to negation. While the major developments are developments towards a non-standard pattern, a reversed trend is visible for the minor developments. In all four of the domains of negation in which these minor changes have occurred, there is a movement from a non-standard pattern to a more standard pattern. The four domains of negation in which these minor developments took place are listed below:

- Clause-internal Negative Concord with verbs.
- *Ain't* for present tense BE+NOT.
- *Ain't* for present tense DO+NOT.
- *Ain't* for past tense BE+NOT.

With regard to Negative Concord within the clause and *ain't* present tense BE+NOT, the use of these two forms of negation has decreased (Howe and Walker 1999:8–9,26–27; Kautzsch 2002:44–46). The other two domains – *ain't* for present tense DO+NOT and *ain't* for past tense BE+NOT – were rare in Early AAE and are no longer used in contemporary AAVE (Howe and Walker 1999:11,16–17; Kautzsch 2002:44–45; Howe 2005:179–181).

(1875–1894) (Kautzsch 2002:62–63). Nowadays, however, Negative Concord within the clause has gained popularity again and has become near-categorical.

Table 4: Development of clause-internal Negative Concord

PERIOD	OCCURRENCE	BASIS
First half 19 th century	Predominant	Non-standard
Second half 19 th century	Decline	Movement towards Standard English
Early 20 th century	Near-categorical	Non-standard

4.1.2 *Ain't* for past tense DO+NOT

A similar pattern emerges for the use of *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT was ‘nearly extinct’ (Kautzsch 2002:87). In Early AAE, *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT seldom occurred as it was only used in 2–6% of the possible contexts. In contemporary AAVE however, this use of *ain't* has increased enormously to 40% of the possible contexts (Kautzsch 2002:87).

Table 5: Development of *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT

PERIOD	OCCURRENCE	BASIS
19 th century	Low	Non-standard
Last quarter 19 th century	Nearly extinct	Movement towards Standard English
Early 20 th century	Widely attested	Non-standard

4.1.3 *Ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT

Ain't for present tense HAVE+NOT has undergone similar changes. In Early AAE, *ain't* was strongly preferred over *haven't* in the first half of the nineteenth century (Howe and Walker 1999:7). In fact, it was nearly categorical until the middle of the nineteenth century. However, in the three decades after the Civil War, its use dropped dramatically and the regular forms of present tense HAVE+NOT became categorical (Kautzsch 2002:49). Also here, there was a reversed trend in the beginning of the twentieth century which led to the recategorization of *ain't* (Kautzsch 2002:50).

Table 6: Development of *ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT

PERIOD	OCCURRENCE	BASIS
19 th century	Near-categorical	Non-standard
Last quarter 19 th century	Virtually absent	Movement towards Standard English
Early 20 th century	Near-categorical	Non-standard

This means that, in a first step, Negative Concord within the clause, *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT as well as *ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT have moved from a non-standard pattern towards Standard English. However, in the early twentieth century all these three types of negation have undergone great changes and have moved towards a non-standard pattern of English again. As we will show in Section 6.2, these recent developments can be explained by socio-linguistic factors.

4.2 Possible explanations

The late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century show three major changes in the use of negation. First there is a decline from a non-standard pattern towards a standard pattern in the second half of the nineteenth century, while in the early twentieth century a sharp increase of the non-standard pattern is visible, as we have shown in Tables 4 to 6.

We follow Kautzsch (2002) in his hypothesis that the decline of the non-standard patterns can be explained by the Civil War (1861–1865) and the reconstruction after the Civil War, which had a huge impact on people's lives and in particular on who the people came in contact with. The Civil War brought people from various backgrounds and ethnicities in contact with each other. This resulted in – among others – a sharp increase in language contact between African Americans and the established white communities. The speech of the latter group was characterized by a more standard negation pattern. This eventually led to an increase in standard patterns in the speech of the African Americans (Kautzsch 2002:62–63).

Furthermore, influence from Standard English on the African American community came from other English dialects that use non-standard patterns of negation less often than the early African Americans did (Kautzsch 2002:63).

These factors explain the sharp decline in the use of non-standard negation patterns in the second half of the nineteenth century, as mentioned in Section 6.1. This entails that Negative Concord within the clause, *ain't* for past tense DO+NOT, and *ain't* for present tense HAVE+NOT, which all show the same

development from a non-standard to a standard pattern, are due to the increasing amount of language contact with the white community during and after the Civil War in the second half of the nineteenth century.

However, this decline in non-standard patterns in black speech did not continue until a pattern fully similar to that of Standard English had emerged. On the contrary, African American speech showed a sharp increase in non-standard pattern in the early twentieth century. The changes from a non-standard pattern to a standard pattern are a result of language contact, as discussed. This is not surprising given that natural language change is often caused by language contact. That this pattern reversed to a non-standard pattern again is remarkable. We argue that the increase in non-standard patterns in negation is due to a combination of sociolinguistic factors.

During and after the Great Migration there was an increased segregation of African Americans in urban ghettos (Kautzsch 2002:63,88). This was a fertile social environment for developing and maintaining a distinct ethnic variety (Wolfram and Torbert 2006:231), which resulted in the emergence of a black linguistic identity (Kautzsch 2002:63,88). The African Americans wanted to set themselves apart from the white community, which – among others – became visible in distinct speech patterns that marked their identity.

Furthermore, expanded mobility of African Americans in the twentieth century resulted in increased contact between speakers from different regions, making it easier for interregional language spread to take place (Wolfram and Torbert 2006). This offered the possibility for non-standard patterns to become widely established within the social group of African Americans. Speech became an identity marker, which they used to distinguish themselves from the white community.

Moreover, social mechanisms such as community-based social networks and stereotypical media projections of African American speech caused a growing sense of ethnic identity associated with AAVE. Regional dialects and Standard English on the other hand became associated with white speech over the second half of the twentieth century.

The black community adopted an oppositional identity, meaning that its members avoided behaviour that had strong associations with white norms. This became an important part of the ethnic divide. Language had thus a symbolic role in the African American experience, indicating the enduring cultural clash between two cultures (Wolfram and Torbert 2006:231).

African American speech is strongly influenced by history, politics, and culture (Trudgill 2002:277). In most African American communities, language is considered a social act (Morgan 1998:252). It works within a cultural framework based on African American norms and practices (Trudgill 2002:277). The usage of different aspects of the language reinforces and criticizes social

and cultural roles. This means that the speakers' social standing is determined by how they interact with members of the dominant culture and within the social strata of the black community. Language as a conscious social act is particularly visible within the group of the African American urban youth (Morgan 1998:252).

That these particular properties are used as tools in marking a separate identity is because they stand out and are thus superficially very characteristic for AAVE. These non-standard properties obviously differ from Standard English. For this reason, they are the most likely to be used as identity markers as the black community wished to set itself apart. In cases where AAVE deviates from Standard English in a less obvious manner, these differences are less prone to be used for sociolinguistic purposes.

AAVE can thus be seen as a medium through which power is being executed. It functions as a response to a dominant culture that considers itself as the elite. The black community has chosen not to succumb to this dominant culture that has criticized and pinpointed its members as inferior to the 'white culture'. African Americans have chosen to revolt in their own way by cultivating their own identity as a way to establish themselves as a separate group. This segregation of the black and white community is ongoing, as is shown by population demographics, which indicate that many northern urban areas have become more densely populated by African Americans (Wolfram and Torbert 2006:231).

5 Conclusion

In this paper, we looked at two main hypotheses on the origin of AAVE: the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis and the Substrate Hypothesis. To find out which hypothesis makes the correct claim, we have compared negation patterns in several varieties of English. As we have argued in this paper, the Substrate Hypothesis best explains the attested variation with respect to the expression of negation, since this hypothesis takes both influences of English dialects and of language contact into account.

What the negation data show is that Early AAE already must have had both English and language contact / creole sources: some expressions of negation clearly have a dialectal source, whereas others clearly have not. Moreover, fully in line with the Substrate Hypothesis, in the late 19th and 20th Century, AAVE underwent a number of subsequent changes with respect to the expression of negation. We have argued that these recent developments are the result of the influence of various socio-linguistic factors.

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