

Ling 101, *People and their Language*, Fall 2006

Discussion Sections 1 and 5

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Discussion Section 9

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1 Aspect

1.1 Definition

- **Aspect** A grammatical category, associated with verbs, that expresses the running time of the event or state denoted by the verb. As such, it is concerned with the duration, completion, or iteration of the event expressed by the verb.

How is this different from *tense*? Give a definition for tense, and explain how the two categories of tense and aspect could be related.

What are examples of standard American English aspects and their grammatical expressions?

1.2 Review of AAVE aspects considered in lecture.

1. Habitual *be*
2. Momentaneous aspect *be*
3. Perfective *dən*
4. Remote past *BIN*
5. Habitual + Perfective *be dən* (habitual resultive state)
6. Perfective + Remote *BIN dən* (remote past resultant state)

Which aspect do each of the following exemplify?

1. I be looking for somewhere to waste time.
2. I told him you dən changed.
3. She BIN eating.
4. She BIN ate.
5. A: Y'all keep up with the news, hunh?
B: Yeah, when it comes on there, we be dən read it in the newspaper.
6. He bin dən put that in there.
7. Bruce sleeping when I come home from work.

More questions to think about (adapted from Green 2002:74)

1. Explain the similarities and differences between the following pairs of sentences.
 1. They eating./They be eating.
 2. They tall./They be tall.
 3. They dən ate./They BIN ate.
 4. They BIN ate. They BIN dən ate.
2. Consider the AAVE sentence *Johnny be good*. An *inaccurate* gloss for this sentence is 'Johnny is a good person.' What would be a more accurate translation?
3. What are some differences and similarities between what we have seen of the AAVE aspectual system and the standard American English one?

2 Negation

2.1 Negative concord

What is the meaning of negation?

What are examples of negation expressing words in standard American English?

What happens if we combine consecutive negative words in standard English?

Eg. I didn't see no one.

Languages' grammars differ with respect to whether or not multiple instances of negation are used to express a single negation.

- standard American English does *not*
- AAVE, Spanish, and French (amongst others) *do*.

Examples:

- (1) personne n'a rien vu.
 No.one not.has nothing seen
 'No one saw anything.'

Constructions such as those in (1) are referred to as negative concord.

- **Negative concord** Term that refers to situations in which more than one negation expressing word expresses a single negation.

Examples of negative concord from AAVE (All examples from Green 2002, Chapter 3)

1. When I rose this morning, I **didn't** have **no** doubt.
2. I sure hope it *don't* be **no** leak after they finish. ('I hope there won't be a leak after they finish.')
3. If you **don't** do **nothing** but farm work, your social security **don't** be **nothing**. ('If you only do farm work, then your social security isn't usually very much.')

A few features to note:

- The occurrence of the additional negative words does not have an affect on the negative meaning of the sentence; i.e. they do not make the sentence positive, or make it 'more' negative.
- There is no limit on the number of negation-expressing words that can occur together in a single clause.

Can you think of any similar patterns which characterize standard English negation?

2.2 Negative inversion

Examples

1. Don't no game last all night long. ('No game lasts all night long.')

2. Can't nobody tell you it wasn't meant for you. ('Nobody can tell you it wasn't meant for you.')
3. Ain't nothing you can do.
4. Shouldn't be nothing happening you don't know about.

Grammatical Characteristics:

- *Order:* Auxiliary (always first!) + indefinite noun phrase
- Both the auxiliary and the nominal must be negative
- Has a declarative meaning (i.e. not an interrogatory one, despite superficial resemblance to standard English yes-no questions)
- Gives "added prominence" to the negative

3 Names of dialects

(to be discussed if we have time)

Green (2002:6) gives the following list of labels that have been used for the dialect of English we are calling AAVE:

Negro dialect

Nonstandard Negro English

Negro English

American Negro speech

Black communication

Black dialect

Black folk speech

Black street speech

Black English

Black English Vernacular

African American English

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

- As is reflected in these names, it is often the case that names of dialects reflect non-speakers' prejudices against the members of the community of speakers.

-One example of this is that one name for the language spoken by the Zoroastrian religious minority of Iran is *Gabri*, which means 'language of the infidels in Arabic'.

References

Green, Lisa J. 2002. African American English: A linguistic introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.