

## A Present Perfect Puzzle for African-American English

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It is a well known fact of Standard English (SE) that definite, past-time denoting adverbs are incompatible with present perfect constructions, but are not incompatible with past, or non-finite perfect constructions (Comrie 1976, McCoard 1978, Dowty 1979). This phenomenon, demonstrated in (1), has come to be known as the *present perfect puzzle* (Klein 1992). (Note that in (1), both *on Monday*, and *at 5 o'clock* are taken to be used definitely; they do not mean *On a Monday* and *at some 5 o'clock*.)

- (1) a. \*Mary has eaten sweet potatoes yesterday/on Monday/at 5 o'clock.  
b. Mary had eaten sweet potatoes yesterday/on Monday/at 5 o'clock.  
c. Mary must have eaten sweet potatoes yesterday/on Monday/at 5 o'clock.

The puzzle gains much of its intrigue and perhaps even part of its status as a true puzzle from the fact that the incompatibility of these adverbs with the present perfect is a fact of (Standard) English, but not of German, Dutch, Icelandic or Italian --- all of which allow the combination. Numerous explanations for this have been advanced (Klein 1992, Giorgi and Pianesi 1998, Musan 2001, Pancheva and von Stechow 2004).

This talk investigates the interaction of these adverbs with African-American English (AAE) preverbal *done* constructions such as that in (2).

- (2) Mary done ate sweet potatoes (AAE)  
'Mary has eaten sweet potatoes' (SE)

Numerous authors (e.g. Dechaine 1993, Dayton 1996, Terry 2004) have argued that AAE preverbal *done* constructions are perfects. A natural question to ask is whether they pattern with Standard English or with languages like German and Italian when modified by definite, past-time denoting adverbs. This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. Green (1993) reports that *done* constructions behave as Standard English perfects do, but Dayton (1996) reports instances in which AAE speakers use the presumably illicit combination. Indeed, many AAE speakers treat sentences such as (3) as sometimes acceptable and sometimes not.

- (3) ?Mary done ate sweet potatoes yesterday (AAE)  
'Mary has eaten sweet potatoes yesterday' (SE)

That such "inconsistencies" can be found in single speakers suggests that appeals to sub-varieties of AAE, each patterning differently, or historical change (as Dayton has suggested) will not explain the data. This talk focuses on better describing when AAE speakers can use definite, past-time denoting adverbs such as *yesterday* in *done* constructions, and developing a formal semantic account of the facets of the present perfect puzzle found in AAE that fits within the constraints of AAE grammar.

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