

phonetic transcription with what we actually hear in standard British English today. A truly compelling publication.

*Reviewer's address:*

*UCL Institute of Education*

*University College London*

*20 Bedford Way*

*London WC1H 0AL*

*United Kingdom*

[k.hammer@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:k.hammer@ucl.ac.uk)

### References

- Gimson, A. C. 1962. *An introduction to the pronunciation of English*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gimson, A. C. 1977. *English pronouncing dictionary*, 14th edition (originally compiled by Daniel Jones). London: Dent Sons.
- Gimson, A. C. 1981. Pronunciation in EFL dictionaries. *Applied Linguistics* 2, 250–62.
- Wells, J. C. 1982. *Accents of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wells, J. C. 2008. *Longman pronunciation dictionary*, 3rd edition. London: Longman.

(Received 5 October 2023)

doi:[10.1017/S136067432300045X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S136067432300045X)

**Salikoko S. Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey and John Baugh (eds.),** *African-American English: Structure, history and use* (Routledge Linguistics Classics). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xvi + 368. ISBN 9780367760687.

Reviewed by Walter F. Edwards , Wayne State University

Salikoko S. Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey and John Baugh's edited volume *African-American English: Structure, History and Use (A-AE)* was first published by Routledge in 1998. It was an instant classic, providing African American Vernacular English (AAVE) scholars and college students with a much-needed textbook that covered the principal areas of research on the variety. The volume is edited by four of the leading scholars in the field, and comprises ten full-length, in-depth essays on the structure, history and use of AAVE. It is certainly worthy of republication, but my initial expectation was to see a second edition with more recent studies and not a republished volume with only the addition of a thoughtful Foreword by Sonja Lanehart, editor of the authoritative *Oxford Handbook on African American Language* (2015). However, on reflection I concluded that it is unwise to attempt to improve a classic, especially since *A-AE* remains the best textbook of its kind. Other edited

textbooks on AAVE/AAE (including Baugh 1983; Lanehart 2001, 2015) are either too long or include studies that are not as seminal as those in *A-AE*; and single-authored texts such as Labov (1972), Rickford (1999) and Green (2002) present the ideas and analyses of just those authors. Thus, *A-AE* remains the gold standard of textbooks on AAVE and is indeed worthy of a Classic Edition.

The first chapter (pp. 11–40), by Stefan Martin and Walt Wolfram on AAVE sentence structure, is an appropriate beginning because it introduces the reader immediately to some grammatical properties of AAVE to establish that the variety, in common with other dialects, is linguistically systematic and complex. The authors point out that the distinctiveness of AAVE does not lie in sentence structure but in the syntax and semantics of its aspect markers, including remote phase *been* and some semi-auxiliaries like ‘indignant’ *come*, and in serial verb constructions such as *tell say*.

This chapter leads seamlessly into the theme of the second chapter, authored by Lisa Green, on aspect and predicate phrases in AAVE (pp. 41–74). Professor Green provides an in-depth description of the verbal forms in AAVE and analyzes the phrases they generate, providing analyses within the Government and Binding theoretical framework. This chapter establishes that AAVE is as systematic as Standard English (SE) and other natural languages that are described within this Chomskyan framework. Green uses these analyses to point out significant features of the variety, including the fact that verbal elements that are homophonous with verbal forms in SE can have quite different selectional requirements in AAVE.

The third chapter, ‘The structure of the Noun Phrase in AAVE’ by Salikoko Mufwene (pp. 75–90), aims to highlight aspects of the AAVE Noun Phrase that are different from those of SE. Mufwene provides evidence that AAVE syntactically resembles other dialects of English more than it does Gullah or Caribbean creoles, foreshadowing and providing context to the following section of the book, which deals with the history and development of AAVE. Among the insights from Mufwene is the observation that AAVE, unlike creoles, cannot express generic reference through ‘a non-individuated noun or nominal’ (p. 77), like *dog* meaning ‘dogs’ in general.

The fourth chapter, on AAVE phonology, is authored by Guy Bailey and Erik Thomas (pp. 93–118). This is the first chapter in the ‘History’ section of the book and appropriately takes a diachronic approach to the phonology of AAVE. The authors identify four types of phonological features: (i) ones which occur in all or most varieties of English but are either more frequent or occur in more contexts in AAVE; (ii) ones which occur in some other non-standard varieties, but not in standard ones; (iii) ones which represent general Southern American English phonology; and (iv) ones that are restricted to AAVE. Insights from this chapter include the notion that ‘some of the differences reflect the unique origins of AAVE, but others reflect innovations in white speech that did not develop in AAVE or innovations in AAVE that never spread to white vernaculars’ (p. 114), and that studying the vowel system helps us reconstruct the history of AAVE in a way that grammatical features cannot.

William Labov, undoubtedly the doyen of AAVE studies, is the author of the fifth chapter, on ‘Co-existent systems in African-American vernacular English’ (pp. 119–

68). He claims that the grammar of AAVE is characterized by two sets of non-overlapping and structurally inconsistent rules (p. 123). He further proposes that AAVE consists of two components, the General English component and the African-American (AA) component, which are not tightly integrated, but ‘follow internal patterns of strict co-occurrence’ (p. 128). The AA component is not a full grammar, and the GE component serves as a set of default values. The chapter is particularly valuable because Labov diligently reviews the specifics of the AAVE Tense, Modal and Aspect (TMA) system. In terms of the debate over the history of early AAVE, Labov sidles over to the Anglicist side of the fence by arguing that ‘many important features of the modern [AAVE] dialect are creations of the twentieth century and not an inheritance of the nineteenth’ (citing Labov 1998: 119).

The case for the creole origins hypothesis is made by John Rickford in his contribution on ‘The Creole origins of AAVE: Evidence from copula absence’ in chapter 6 (pp. 169–220). John Rickford is a redoubtable, passionate scholar of both AAVE and Caribbean Anglophone creoles, and thus is in an excellent position to evaluate the connectedness between the two varieties. In this chapter he focuses on the question of whether AAVE’s predecessors included creole languages like Gullah and those of the Caribbean. Early creolists assumed that AAVE was originally a uniform basilectal creole which decreolized to become closer to English, but more recent accounts see it as always having been a linguistic continuum with variation. Rickford argues that creoles were a significant part of the mix from early on and decreolization was a gradual process. To address this question, Rickford examines seven kinds of evidence and concludes that AAVE clearly has some creole roots, but that much more research needs to be done to address all aspects of its original provenance.

The final section of the edited volume on AAVE ‘Use’ is more socially and culturally focused than the previous sections. Chapter 7 (pp. 223–48) is authored by the iconic AAVE scholar Geneva Smitherman, whose books and articles are celebrated for capturing the words, spirit and ethos of the AAVE speech culture (e.g. Smitherman 1986, 1994) and have inspired the scholarship of top-tier AAVE scholars who are also native speakers of the variety. In her chapter in this book Smitherman discusses the lexicon of AAVE, rejecting the idea that it is primarily youth slang and relating it to cultural values such as the importance of the spoken word, the desire to pay tribute to earlier forms of art, like the blues and Motown, and the need for a strong identity apart from white America.

In chapter 8 (pp. 249–76), Arthur K. Spears addresses informal uses of AAVE, specifically ‘so-called obscenity’. I think that the underlying point of this piece is to establish that AAVE, like all language varieties, has language rules that govern all styles of talk, including obscenities. Spears develops the notion of uncensored speech mode (UM) and provides a cogent, scholarly discussion of the place of uncensored speech in the ethnography of speech styles among AAVE speakers. He shows that so-called obscene words and expressions are rule-governed. Examples are *bitch-ass*, *jive-ass* and *triflin-ass*, which need to be followed by nouns. Thus *bitch-ass idiot* but *\*bitch-ass* and *\*jive-ass*. Spears focuses on how a word such as *nigga*, which is

generally considered an obscenity, may become neutralized or gain a different connotation when used in certain contexts among AAVE speakers.

Chapter 9 by Marcyliena Morgan (pp. 277–311) complements Geneva Smitherman's chapter by delving deeply into the sociocultural intricacies of the AAVE speech community. Morgan discusses not only the typical AAVE styles such as *playing the dozens*, *signifying*, *dissin* and *readin*, but excavates more subtle habits such as *instigating*, *he-said-she-said* conversations, *indirectness* and *baited indirectness*, providing examples to explicate these genres. This chapter emphasizes how language use reflects the values of a community and how speakers can cultivate language to exert control over identity.

The final chapter, by John Baugh, is on 'Linguistics, education, and the law: Educational reform for African-American language minority students' (pp. 313–34). Baugh argues that schools are failing to teach AAVE-speaking students Standard English and some AAVE-speaking children are being unfairly classified as disabled because of a failure of pedagogy. Baugh also surveys the relevant laws and educational policies and argues that AAVE students should neither be put in special education courses nor treated as though they are bilingual in a language other than English, but rather that they should be recognized as a linguistic minority in their own right, like Hawaiian Pidgin English students in Hawaii, and funded accordingly. This chapter is a good choice to end the book on because it provides direct guidance on how to improve the situation of AAVE students and serves as something of a call to action for sociolinguists.

All in all, my rereading of *African-American English: Structure, History and Use* confirms my opinion that it is a classic that deserves to be republished without modification. I cannot think of a better text for teaching a course in AAVE to senior linguistics students; and the book should be required reading for teachers in schools with high enrollments of AAVE-speaking students. This classic academic text should also be of interest to motivated lay persons, including educators and policy makers in urban and other communities with significant populations of working-class African Americans.

*Reviewer's address:*  
*College of Liberal Arts and Sciences*  
*Wayne State University*  
*2155 Old Main*  
*4841 Cass Avenue*  
*Detroit MI 48201*  
*USA*  
[walter.edwards@wayne.edu](mailto:walter.edwards@wayne.edu)


## References

- Baugh, John. 1983. *Black street speech: Its history, structure and survival*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Green, Lisa. 2002. *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Labov, William. 1972. *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, William. 1998. Co-existent systems in African-American vernacular English. In Salikoko S. Mufwene, John R. Rickford, Guy Bailey & John Baugh (eds.), *African-American English: Structure, history and use*, 110–53. London: Routledge.
- Lanehart, Sonja (ed.). 2001. *Sociocultural and historical contexts*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Lanehart, Sonja (ed.). 2015. *The Oxford handbook of African American language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rickford, John. 1999. *African American vernacular English: Features, evolution, educational implications*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Smitherman, Geneva. 1986. *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Smitherman, Geneva. 1994. *Black talk: Words and phrases from the hood to the amen corner*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books.

(Received 27 July 2023)

doi:[10.1017/S1360674323000400](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674323000400)

**John Considine**, *Sixteenth-century English dictionaries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xiv + 496. ISBN 9780198832287.

Reviewed by Ian Lancashire , University of Toronto

This book on sixteenth-century English dictionaries by John Considine will be welcomed by anyone interested in lexicography. It is the first volume in a trilogy, the next two volumes of which will treat the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Online Oxford English Dictionary* has recently been drawing on the lexicons of this long period, moved by groundbreaking books on John Palsgrave (1530) and Sir Thomas Elyot (1538) by Gabriele Stein, the Ashgate series on early modern lexicographers, EEBO-TCP (Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership) and *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (LEME). Considine discusses three themes in this period's English dictionaries, glossaries and wordlists: their diversity, their multilingualism and their reliance on continental lexicography. Most monolingual wordbooks not relying on European sources serve the mother tongue alone. Considine has an impressive knowledge of major and minor wordbooks and makes sustained, acute observations on their makers, texts and sources. Sometimes he passes over sizeable English works like those by John Marbeck, William Lambarde, John Gerard and William Camden.