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“When You Out in Open Spaces”: Copula Absence in Afro-Texan English and the Origins and Development Debate

Brandon Davis Cooper

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“WHEN YOU OUT IN OPEN SPACES”: COPULA ABSENCE IN AFRO-TEXAN ENGLISH AND THE
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT DEBATE

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DEDICATION

For my family – a soft place to fall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It might go without saying but bears repeating that a project like this is rarely if ever brought to completion without the support and encouragement of a lot of people. Words cannot adequately express my appreciation for everyone who saw me through this, but this is the place where I try to make them.

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ABSTRACT

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is perhaps the most studied variety of American English, and interest in its origins and development has raised enough questions to launch a thousand studies. Naturally, positions on AAVE's origins and development have become increasingly nuanced since the debate's inception. Increasingly, AAVE is treated less like a monolith, and interest in the dimensions of its regional diversity has grown. No position on AAVE's origins and development can be taken seriously if it fails to consider its capacity for areal differentiation. Indeed, most positions on AAVE's origins and development now strongly assert the likelihood of multiple origins and often begin with the assumption that variation in local social ecologies (settlement history, interactional patterns, etc.) would have resulted in some measure of differential development. With this in mind, this dissertation investigates the structural homogeneity of AAVE copula absence in Texas, considers the influence that one learner variety of English – Yoruba English (YE) – might have had on nineteenth century AAVE (where the two co-existed), and presents a comparative analysis of copula absence in AAVE and related varieties, weighing the implications for the origins and development debate.

Using statistical and hierarchical model comparison, I show that differences between the AAVE of East and West Texas – two subregions of the state distinguished by features of language and culture – are only surface-deep, at least with respect to copula absence. Crucially, Texas AAVE is characterized by a non-English form of verbal morphology – so-called “predicate control” – which seems to be shared by many varieties

of the African Diaspora. But it does not appear to be a feature of YE – one of the learner varieties central to the origins and development debate. In comparative perspective, the key features associated with AAVE copula absence are not likely owing to a single source but to multiple, converging streams of influence including creole and learner varieties as well as White vernaculars.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
CAACS	Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech
CECs	Caribbean English Creoles
GC	Guyanese Creole
JC	Jamaican Creole
L1	First Language
ME.....	Middle English
NSR.....	Northern Subject Rule
OE	Old English
SWVE	Southern White Vernacular English
TC	Trinidadian Creole
WNSE	White Non-Standard English
YE	Yoruba English

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this study

No single speech variety has received more attention from linguistic variationists than that of African American Language – a cover term for a broad range of social and regional language varieties spoken by African Americans in the United States. And the vast majority of this scholarship has focused on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) – a variety more frequently found in informal contexts than its counterpart, Standard African American English (Spears 1988, 2015). Much of this scholarship has proceeded via quantitative analysis of AAVE varieties and comparison with other White vernaculars and Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora in an effort to address one of two issues – one, synchronic and the other, diachronic. With respect to the synchronic issue, some linguists have argued that AAVE and co-territorial White varieties share the same deep structure, while others have argued to the contrary suggesting a structural relationship between AAVE and Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora. With respect to the diachronic issue, some have maintained that the first New World Africans rapidly accommodated to the regional norms of co-territorial Whites so that their speech closely approximated that of the White vernaculars around them. Meanwhile, others have held that the speech of New World Africans was a creole or semi-creole. Whatever the persuasion, much of the scholarship has proceeded with the tacit or explicit assumption that AAVE is structurally homogeneous in spite of its distribution across an expansive and varied geography. And all

too often, findings from one community have been extended to the whole of AAVE in support of broad generalizations about its origins, development, and structure. But a growing body of research has begun to question the structural homogeneity of AAVE, and this has coincided with more nuanced positions about both its status vis-à-vis its contemporaries and its origins and development. The goal of the present study is to assess the structural homogeneity of regional varieties of AAVE with a view to understanding both its structural consistency and what implications its homogeneity, or lack thereof, has for the origins and development debate.

The copula system has frequently been the scene of inquiry into AAVE's origins and development owing to the fact that some patterns of copula absence bear remarkable similarity to Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora. And linguists of all theoretical persuasions have mustered data on the copula in support of their positions. As such, the body of work on the AAVE copula system is substantial, constituting a broad base for comparative study. The present report adds to this work with a quantitative analysis of the AAVE(s) of early twentieth century Texas. The aim is to distinguish between superficial, quantitative differences related to rates of absence and significant deep structure differences as revealed by the linguistic factors that control absence. In this way, the extent of structural cohesion in Texas AAVE will become apparent. I will then compare these constraints to those found in other varieties of the African diaspora both in time and space. By comparing the constraints on copula absence in Earlier AAVE, Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora, varieties of the African American diaspora, and White vernaculars, I hope to shed light on the potential donor varieties responsible for the introduction of copula absence in AAVE. In this way, this dissertation will show the relative contribution

that each of AAVE's forerunners has made on the variety and how these have affected its development over time.

1.2 Background

In the early twentieth century, dialectologists, who had worked painstakingly to map the geographic contours of White vernaculars, concluded that the language of African Americans was 'finally and completely English' with hardly a trace of any African influence (Krapp 1924:190; for a weaker version of this see also Kurath 1949:6), and thus the dialectologist or Anglicist position was formalized. But the publication of Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949) challenged this position by presenting evidence that, according to even some dialectologists, "dispels effectively the notion that the American Negro lost all his language and his culture under the impact of chattel slavery and the plantations system" (McDavid & McDavid 1951). Later, creolists began comparing AAVE to Afro-English creoles of the Caribbean and extended this claim, arguing that AAVE had in fact derived from a creole not unlike Gullah or numerous other Caribbean English Creoles (e.g. B. Bailey 1965; Stewart 1967).

For decades Anglicists maintained that AAVE was fundamentally no different than historically co-territorial varieties of White Non-standard English (WNSE), specifically those associated with the American South. Meanwhile, creolists argued to the contrary that AAVE was a separate system, distinct at its deep structure owing to creole origins. But by the early 1980s, the controversy appeared to yield to a consensus that:

1. The Black English Vernacular is a subsystem of English with a distinct set of phonological and syntactic rules that are now aligned in many ways with the rules of other dialects.
2. It incorporates many features of Southern phonology, morphology and syntax; blacks in turn have exerted influence on the dialects of the South where they have lived.

3. It shows evidence of derivation from an earlier Creole that was closer to the present-day Creoles of the Caribbean.
4. It has a highly developed aspect system, quite different from other dialects of English, which shows a continuing development of its semantic structure. (Labov 1982: 192)

Taking this point by point, the key assertions here are: 1) AAVE has a similar deep structure to WNSE though it may differ superficially in some respects; 2) AAVE has converged with WNSE overtime; 3) AAVE had a creole primogenitor; and 4) AAVE is currently diverging from WNSE. This apparent concord was short-lived, however, rebuffed as it was by evidence from urban centers like Philadelphia suggesting that Black and White vernaculars were diverging rather than converging (Labov & Harris 1986; Ash & Myhill 1986).

Up to this point, much of the data for AAVE had been collected from urban youth, and variationists of all persuasions were becoming increasingly aware that “a slice of black folk character [had been] presented as the whole” (Smitherman 1988:162). And a new generation of dialectologists – so-called Neo-Anglicists – pointed to a dearth of evidence for rural Southern varieties of AAVE and for cross-generational data that could together shed light on earlier states of the variety and facilitate analysis capable of describing the processes of change responsible for its modern form (e.g. Bailey & Maynor 1987). Consequently, dialectologists and sociolinguists alike pursued new evidence; and, among other novel data, for the first time speech from African American adults in the rural South was collected and analyzed (e.g. Bailey & Maynor 1985a, 1985b, 1987, and 1989; Cukor-Avila 1995, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1996), thrusting into the fore many varieties that had, until then, been overlooked. Among these, Afro-Texan folk speech.

Afro-Texan folk speech became significant in the origins and development debate largely due to the work of Guy Bailey and his students and colleagues, all of whom worked

tirelessly to muster data on earlier vernaculars of the American South, both Black and White. Bailey has been one of the few scholars to conduct large-scale randomized language sampling in the South, and his location in Texas for a number of years resulted in descriptions and analyses of Texas English rivaled only by predecessors like Lee Pederson in the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (Pederson et al. 1986-92) and, earlier, E. Bagby Atwood in his *Regional Vocabulary of Texas* (Atwood 1962).

While maintaining a laser-sharp focus on the development of Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE), Bailey and his cohort also contributed to the evolving debate about the origins and development of AAVE. To this end, he and his associates were responsible for the analysis of Works Progress Administration (WPA) recordings with ex-slaves (Bailey, Maynor & Cukor-Avila 1991), ethnographic interviews with tenant farmers (Bailey & Maynor 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1989), an OMNIBUS telephone survey in the 1990s (Bailey & Bernstein 1989; Bailey, Wikle & Sand 1991), and longitudinal studies of enclave communities (Cukor-Avila 1995). Needless to say, due to the work of Bailey and his colleagues the volume of scholarship that utilizes data from Texas is quite large, and his work with Afro-Texan folk speakers has established an important baseline for describing and analyzing the variety, assuming of course that it is reasonable to think of Afro-Texan folk speech as a cohesive whole.

The first African – a skilled linguist – set foot in Texas in the sixteenth century, but the non-native settlement of Texas proceeded slowly until the late eighteenth century at which time people of African descent constituted a reasonable portion of the non-native population. Most were free Blacks. But in the early nineteenth century, self-emancipated Blacks winged their flight by a southwesterly route into Spanish and, later, Mexican Texas.

And Whites from the Upper South began to settle the territory – some illegally and some under the empresario system – bringing enslaved Africans with them. But the protections provided by the Mexican government maintained a population of free Blacks in the territory alongside the enslaved until the growing White population asserted its commitment to the slave economy and defeated Mexico to form a republic defined by the institution. The period that followed witnessed exponential growth in the Black population as Whites from the Lower South flooded into East Texas and Whites from the Upper South made their way to the interior, each group bringing with it its human cargo. Meanwhile, from the early nineteenth century to the Civil War, African- and Caribbean-born Blacks were smuggled through and into East Texas from the coast to the Piney Woods. Is it possible that this complex and varied socio-historical background yielded little to no differences in social ecology and linguistic landscape for such an expansive territory? This dissertation seeks an answer to that question – an answer that has been a long time coming.

The boundary lines of American cultural geography have been drawn almost exclusively in white. In most cases, when people of African descent have been referenced, it has been to reinforce the case for a distinctive form of White place-making rather than to understand the nuances Black culture and Black place-making. Jordan's (1967) weighting of the Black population density in his indices of White cultural geography is one example of this. Undoubtedly, Black population densities are relevant to White cultural geography just as White population densities are relevant to Black cultural geography, but White cultural geography tells us little about how African knowledge systems transformed the terrain that they inhabited or influenced the social ecology of the places Blacks made. As Carney and Voeks (2003) note, "scholars have been slow to consider the proposition

that slaves may have actively shaped landscapes of the Americas not solely by their brawn but also with their brains” (145). But the emergence of Black Geographies as a field of academic inquiry is redressing this oversight. And it is only natural and fitting that it should be accompanied by a Black Dialectology (Troike 1973:8; Anshen 1969:6).

Indeed, this is the direction that the origins and development has been turning since Schneider introduced the idea of differential development, which embraces the obvious – that AAVE would have been subject to a variety of linguistic influences to varying degrees resulting in diversity in the processes and trajectories of its development. Since the 1990s, there has been increasing acknowledgement that “there is a diversity in AAVE that argues against the hypothesis of AAVE having a unitary historical analysis” (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993:338-9). And there have been significant revisions to the Creolist Hypothesis to account for this diversity by suggesting the possibility of influence from *pockets* of creole and restructured, learner Englishes, especially during the nineteenth century AAVE (Winford 1997, 1998). Thus, the terms of the debate have been amended as researchers have redoubled their efforts to address the regional dimensions of AAVE, effectively “dispel[ing] the belief that [its] speakers are homogenous regardless of where they come from” (Lanehart 2019:6).

More recently, Wolfram (2007) has argued that much of the work on AAVE’s origins and development is predicated on an assumption of supraregional homogeneity such that generalizations about its structure have been drawn with little or no reference to local dynamics or differential development. He and others have begun to reveal facts that complicate prior research. Whereas Bailey et al. (1991) and Labov (1991:38) found that African Americans do not participate in many regional speech norms, when the findings of

Mallinson and Childs (2004; also Childs & Mallinson 2004) are compared to those of Wolfram and Thomas (2002) it is clear that speakers simultaneously deploy supraregional ethnic norms *and* regional norms in their linguistic repertoires with the local meaning of linguistic forms playing an important role in feature selection and use (Jones & Preston 2011). Some of these supraregional ethnic norms have emerged fairly recently, but others – among them copula absence – appear to have been established much earlier in the evolution of AAVE. This dissertation investigates whether or not AAVE is homogeneous with respect to copula absence both superficially and at its deep structure with a view to understanding what impact, if any, differential development has had on its copula system. Differential development is directly relevant to the origins and development debate because if the underlying grammar of copula absence is shared across varieties in both time and space, it suggests a shared source of influence and/or a shared predecessor. Thus, the findings for Texas AAVE reported here are also situated against those from other studies in order to understand the implications for the origins and development debate.

Studies of the AAVE copula system are numerous, which enables a comparison of the findings for Texas AAVE with varieties from across the United States throughout the twentieth century and varieties from across the American South throughout the nineteenth century in addition to those from the African American diaspora and African Diaspora. As broad a range as this covers, no data have been introduced for any of the restructured, learner Englishes that are relevant to the language shift hypothesis. As chapter two will show, learner Englishes like Yoruba English (YE) were undoubtedly found in Alabama and very likely also Virginia, Texas, and elsewhere. Given how little data for nineteenth century AAVE have been turned up in spite of the intense interest in it, it stands to reason

that data for adult English language learners of the same period would be even more limited. This dissertation introduces such data into the comparative milieu to identify whether some of the linguistic factors related to copula absence might also be attributable to adult language learning, whether as a result of universal processes or as a result of first language (L1) transfer. Ultimately, this analysis enables us to explore new aspects of the origins and development debate and to understand the story that Texan AAVE is telling us about the morphosyntax of the AAVE copula system.

At issue are the linguistic factors that control copula absence. Subject control is the norm across English varieties. Often, basic subject-verb concord – differentiation based on subject person/number – determines the form of the copula. But subject-based alternatives to concord also exist. For example, other English varieties like Scots-Irish (Montgomery 1990, 1991) exhibit conditioning related to subject type (i.e., the grammatical class of the subject).

Clearly, AAVE has some measure of subject-verb concord given that *I* favors full or contracted *am* at a near categorical rate in most AAVE varieties and *are* is not used outside of plural & 2nd person singular contexts. But copula absence is also frequently shown to be sensitive to subject type, bearing similarity to Northern English and Scots English varieties. Meanwhile, absence is consistently found to be sensitive to predicate type (i.e. Noun Phrase, Adjective Phrase, Locative, V+*ing*, *going to*), bearing similarity to Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora and to some West African languages, like Yoruba. Thus, subject person/number, subject type, and predicate type are key factors investigated in this dissertation.

Reams have been written about the high adjective pattern of creoles and the similarity or lack thereof in AAVE (Baugh 1979a, 1980; Mufwene 1992), but conclusions about the origins and development of the copula system do not depend on this one detail. Even committed Anglicists acknowledge that similarity at the granular level of predicate ordering is not the linchpin of the Creole Hypothesis.

The exact order of the constraints of the following predicate on copula deletion is not really crucial to the creole hypothesis. The fact that the following environment matters at all is sufficient to prove that this comes from something other than English. In English the form of the verb always depends on the subject. Even in those dialects that do not have subject-verb concord, the form of the verb is determined by whether the subject is an NP or PRO. (Guy Bailey p.c. in Rickford 1998:191)

This is not to say that predicate ordering is irrelevant. It is telling that, although the order of NP, AdjP, and LocP varies, the general trend of true copula environments favoring presence and auxiliary environments favoring absence holds across all relevant varieties. Thus, predicate control, which can only be determined via statistical or hierarchical modeling, and the true copula/auxiliary distinction are vital issues to consider when determining what controls copula absence.

The key research question that this dissertation will address, then, is whether Afro-Texan folk speech exhibits homogeneity with respect to the linguistic constraints on copula absence as the ordering of these constraints are understood to constitute the grammar of the variety (Tagliamonte 2006:237). Here homogeneity means that a given feature is conditioned by the same linguistic factors and that these factor levels have the same effect on the output – here, the presence or absence of the copula. With the assistance of new data for nineteenth century YE and a comparison of absence across a number of relevant English-influenced varieties, this dissertation will also consider the possible source of

linguistic constraints on copula absence found in Afro-Texan AAVE and other such varieties in time and space.

1.3 Research questions

Scholarship on AAVE has typically taken up one of two lines of inquiry – one synchronic and the other diachronic. Traditionally, synchronic studies have dealt with the structural similarity of AAVE when compared to White vernaculars. But the synchronic issue that we are interested in relates to AAVE's structural homogeneity. That is, does the AAVE of East Texas share the same deep structure as that of West Texas, and are these two structurally similar to the AAVE of rural Carolina and so on? Are African American varieties of the early twentieth century similar in their deep structure to expatriate varieties and Afro-English creoles of the same period?

The diachronic question deals with AAVE's origins and development. In our case, what predecessors can be identified given the characteristics of AAVE copula absence? How does early twentieth century AAVE absence compare with that of subsequent periods? What developmental processes are responsible for the evolution of AAVE?

This dissertation will deal with three interrelated questions. These are:

1. What linguistic factors control copula absence in East and West Texas AAVE? Are East and West Texas similar in their deep structure?
2. What characteristics of copula absence are associated with mid-nineteenth century YE – a restructured, learner variety hypothesized to have exerted substrate influence upon AAVE where the two co-existed?

3. How do patterns of copula absence in East and West Texas AAVE compare to those found in its predecessors and contemporaries and what conclusions might be drawn from such comparisons about the origins and development of AAVE?

To address the first of these questions, I introduce data from a subset of interviews taken from the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech (CAACS), a collection of some forty-three interviews with Afro-Texan cowboys from all over the state. I utilize mixed effects modeling of present tense copula absence to identify the linguistic constraints on absence in East and West Texas and random forest modeling to determine which factors truly control it.

There are four possible scenarios. These are listed below with some implications for the regional homogeneity hypothesis.

1. Similar rates and similar constraints (the null/null hypothesis): East and West Texas are similar at both surface and deep structures. This situation would support a theory of regional homogeneity in AAVE grammar.
2. Different rates and similar constraints (the alternative/null hypothesis): In this case, East and West Texas differ on the surface but share the same system. One subregion is more basilectal on the vernacular continuum than the other, but only superficially.
3. Similar rates and different constraints (the null/alternative hypothesis): This situation indicates that superficial similarities between East and West Texas mask differences in the deep structure. Comparable rates of absence would make the varieties apparently similar to the casual observer. But the lack of homogeneity

would suggest that the copula system varies regionally thus limiting broad-based conclusions as to the origins or development of AAVE.

4. Different rates and different constraints (the alternative/alternative hypothesis): In this scenario, East and West Texas are neither similar at the surface nor the deep structure with respect to copula selection. Again, this would indicate that there are regionalized differences in the copula system that may endure elsewhere with even greater intensity.

Addressing the question of Texas AAVE's structural homogeneity is important because there are significant implications for the origins and development debate. If Texas AAVE is internally consistent and if this same consistency extends to its AAVE contemporaries and predecessors, then there is support for a common forerunner. If, however, the opposite scenario obtains, then there is support for multiple sources. Because restructured, learner varieties of English are potentially relevant to the development of AAVE in Texas and elsewhere, I address question two by introducing and analyzing data on the nineteenth century restructured, learner English of an adult L1 speaker of Yoruba. The purpose of doing so is to better understand the linguistic profile that likely existed in pockets of East Texas during the nineteenth century – a critical period for the development of AAVE.

To answer question three, I situate the findings for Texas AAVE and YE alongside those drawn from subsequent studies of other relevant varieties including Old English (OE), Middle English (ME), Early Modern English, nineteenth century SWVE, early twentieth century SWVE, Earlier AAVE, Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora, expatriate varieties of the African American diaspora, and early twentieth century AAVE.

Comparative analysis of these varieties can help to reveal the donor varieties responsible for copula absence, the directionality of influence in the American South, and the nature of development within AAVE. Thus, in so doing I hope to determine how these varieties might contribute to the origins and development debate.

1.4 Overview of the dissertation

In chapter 2, I review the literature related to the origins and development of AAVE emphasizing the role that copula absence has played in the debate, and I introduce the linguistic variables relevant to the study of copula absence based on previous studies. I also review the socio-historical facts that bear upon the social ecologies found in Texas and give special attention to the formation and evolution of cultural sub-regions especially as they relate to Black place-making and cultural identity.

In chapter 3, I describe the CAACS data, its consultants, and the interview contexts. Additionally, I will discuss the extra-linguistic variables considered in this study.

Chapter 4 presents my quantitative analysis of copula variation as it occurs in Texas AAVE. After testing for regional differentiation, the respective constraints on absence are compared to assess the degree of homogeneity between East and West Texas.

Chapter 5 introduces novel data from an adult L1 Yoruba speaker born in the mid-nineteenth century. The language shift hypothesis has suggested that restructured, learner Englishes may have exerted influence over AAVE where the two coexisted, but thus far no data for relevant adult learner varieties has been produced for the period during which it is assumed shift would have been most likely to have occurred. And in the absence of this data, it is impossible to conclusively identify the source of key features of AAVE copula absence. In this chapter, I analyze the patterns of copula absence in an effort to

determine whether universal language learning processes or typologically specific processes might be responsible for the patterns of absence that we observe in AAVE.

In Chapter 6, I begin with an investigation the possible English origins of copula absence starting with OE and ME then moving through Early Modern English, Colonial English, and mid-nineteenth century White vernaculars of the American South. Afterward, I situate the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 alongside those from previous studies of other relevant varieties including Earlier AAVE, Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora, expatriate varieties of AAVE, and White vernaculars to determine how they compare across key linguistic constraints that are consistently observed in studies of AAVE copula absence.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the findings. I discuss the significance of my findings and limitations of the present study, and I suggest avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The origins, development, and homogeneity of AAVE

Two perspectives have long framed the discussion of the origins and development of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) – the Anglicist hypothesis, which holds that AAVE derived from White vernaculars, and the creolist hypothesis, which holds that AAVE derived from a creole or creole-like variety. But over time, these positions have undergone revision and refinement, allowing for more nuanced alternatives; and hybrid or compromise positions have joined the fray. The issues that have traditionally divided linguists relate to the variety's origins, its development, and its synchronic status vis-à-vis White varieties (i.e. whether or not AAVE differs in its deep structure from White Non-Standard English [WNSE]). Table 2.1 summarizes each of the prevailing positions and its stance on these issues. For the synchronic question, it is convenient to use Feagin's (1979) designations of minimalist, maximalist, and moderate, which are based upon the degree of difference that each of the prevailing positions allows between AAVE and WNSE (see also Schneider 1989 and Montgomery & Bailey 1986).

The maximalist position maintains that there is a deep structural difference between AAVE and White vernaculars despite any apparent surface similarities. Maximalists note, instead, structural traits shared by AAVE and Anglophone creoles of the African diaspora. Because convergence with White vernaculars is assumed, adherents argue that AAVE has creole roots that have been obscured to the casual observer by surface restructuring

associated with decreolization. Creolists maintain that apparent surface similarities belie the distinctiveness of AAVE’s deep structure. They note, instead, structural similarities between AAVE and many Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora. Convergence with White vernaculars is assumed, so adherents argued that AAVE must have creole roots obscured to the casual observer by the process of decreolization. The first wave of creolists (among them B. Bailey 1965; Stewart 1967, 1968, 1969; Dillard 1968, 1975; and Loflin 1969, 1970) came to these conclusions based on close investigation of the lexicon and the verb phrase, where certain putative “Africanisms” and/or creole-like structures had been identified.

Table 2.1 Prevailing positions on AAVE’s origins, development, and synchronic status vis-à-vis White varieties

	Origins	Development	Degree of Difference
Anglicist Position	Co-territorial Colonial English	Rapid convergence with regional (i.e. White speech) norms	Minimal
Neo-Anglicist Position	Co-territorial Colonial English	Rapid convergence with co-territorial English followed by relatively recent divergence	Minimal
Consensus Position	Gullah-like creole	Decreolization	Moderate
Creolist Position	Gullah-like creole	Slow decreolization intensifying after the Civil War	Maximal
Neo-Creolist Position	Semi-creole	Decreolization	Maximal

As we will see shortly, the early Anglicists are comfortable relegating differences between AAVE and other varieties of American English to linguistic conservatism on the part of African Americans, but many creolists no doubt see this explanation as a kind of erasure – an attempt to blot out the uniqueness and the contributions of New World

Africans and their descendants to the American cultural tapestry. Thus, there was a feeling that “dialect geography left the Black patterns out” (Dillard 1975:30). But the creolist position marks a significant shift in the origins and development debate. For one, creolists note a substantially different interplay between substrate and superstrate languages in contact situations than that advanced by Anglicists for the earliest language varieties of New World Africans. Rather than the complete adoption of a superstrate language system, creoles often incorporate the vocabulary of the superstrate language while retaining the pronunciation and grammar of the substrate.

Whereas Anglicists take Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE) varieties as their point of comparison and find a minimal degree of difference, creolists took Caribbean English Creoles as theirs, concluding that AAVE is a distinct system from SWVE because it descends from a creole rather than an English ancestor (Bailey 1965:172). They further argue that decreolization over several generations has resulted in significant convergence between AAVE and SWVE, but that the enduring differences between the two cannot be relegated to a handful of phenomena at the periphery of the AAVE linguistic system. Thus, AAVE has, in spite of surface evolution toward SWVE, remained structurally distinct.

A second wave of creolists has since expanded the envelope far beyond the lexicon and the verb phrase to include speech practices and camouflage forms (Spears 1982; Baugh 1983; Spears & Hinton 2010). Early on, the creole primogenitor of AAVE was presumed to be widespread and, consequently, AAVE was in turn presumed to be fairly homogeneous. But this position has since undergone revision so that many creolists accept the likelihood of differential development based upon sociocultural and demographic differences (Stewart 1968:23; Dillard 1972:86 & 98; Rickford 1997, 1998, 2015).

The moderates maintain a middle-ground, so-called “consensus” position. It is strongly associated with the sociolinguist perspective (Schneider 1989:19), which acknowledges some differences between AAVE and White vernaculars, but maintains that these differences are low level phonological and grammatical differences (Labov 1969, 1972b; Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972b). Like the minimalist Anglicists, moderates accept that many features of AAVE are also found in WNSE but are simply more frequent and apply in more contexts. But moderates also concede to the creole origins argument and assume that AAVE has been converging with varieties of WNSE, going farther than creolists by arguing that the process of decreolization has been so thorough that AAVE now shares the same underlying structure as White vernaculars. But shortly after Labov’s well-known articulation of the consensus position, sociolinguistic studies situated in Philadelphia began to challenge the idea that AAVE was converging with WNSE. Analyses of AAVE morphosyntactic features seemed to suggest that, in fact, AAVE was diverging from co-territorial White speech norms, becoming “more remote from other dialects than [had] been reported before” (Labov & Harris 1986:4; see also Ash & Myhill 1986).

Like the moderate position, the minimalist position acknowledges quantitative differences between AAVE and varieties of WNSE, especially SWVE. But minimalists maintain that the speech of African Americans is essentially the same as that of European Americans of comparable regional and social situations. As such, for most moderates, asynchronies are understood to be the result of social factors like access to education rather than creole origins. Any apparent qualitative differences in the deep structure of AAVE, it is argued, result from relatively recent divergence from White vernaculars. First wave minimalism (Krapp 1924; Kurath 1949; and the McDavid & McDavid 1951) bases this on

literary dialect and Linguistic Atlas data, concluding that there are no significant structural differences to warrant the conclusion that the English spoken by African Americans was fundamentally different than that spoken by co-territorial Whites.

First wave minimalists not only deny any claim of meaningful synchronic differences between comparable Black and White varieties, but they also hold a decidedly Anglicist position with respect to AAVE's origins and development. Although they acknowledge some quantitative differences between AAVE and varieties of WNSE, especially SWVE, they maintain that the speech of African Americans was at its core structurally identical to that of Whites of the same region and social situation, though more "old-fashioned" in some respects (Kurath 1949:6). As such, asynchronies between Black and White varieties of English are understood to be the result of linguistic conservatism on the part of the former owing to social factors like unequal access to education rather than evidence of creole origins. Adherents conclude that, not only are there no structural differences to warrant the conclusion that the English spoken by African Americans is of a different kind than that spoken by co-territorial Whites, but that the first Africans in the New World rapidly and completely acquired the White vernaculars surrounding them. Thus, AAVE derived from English and not a creole or creole-like variety.

Although his earlier work praises Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949) and is optimistic about the possibility of identifying African remnants or African influence in AAVE (McDavid 1950; McDavid & McDavid 1951), McDavid later voices skepticism toward a 'generalized Aframerican pidgin in the past' (1965:258). Instead, the early Anglicist consensus is that Africans who were brought forcibly to the New World as slaves learned English so thoroughly and so quickly that there were virtually no remnants of

African origin that endured in their speech (Krapp 1924:190; also Kurath 1949:6). Evidently, linguistic conservatism emerged only after intense and rapid accommodation was focused solely on the maintenance of recently acquired structures associated with White vernaculars. Moreover, some Anglicists even argue that New World Africans and their descendants did not contribute ‘anything of importance from their native tongues to the general language’ (Krapp 1924:190)! Of course, this bold conclusion hinges almost entirely on the assumption that in contact situations the substrate group ‘adapts itself freely’ to the superstrate whereas the latter ‘borrows little or nothing’ from the former (190). We will revisit this assumption in chapter six.

According to Anglicists, the uniqueness of AAVE is only apparent – a result of the Great Migration, during which African Americans brought their chiefly southern speech to urban centers outside of the South where it stood in greater contrast to the English varieties of their new neighbors. As such, when SWVE is taken as the point of comparison, these apparent differences virtually disappear with only surface-level quantitative differences remaining. Thus, first wave minimalism concludes that African Americans spoke the English of European Americans in the South albeit a form that was “more archaic or old-fashioned” (Kurath 1949:6).

Keen as they are on linguistic geography, it is odd that many Anglicists make little reference to regional variation in AAVE. Kurath overtly embraces African American dialect diversity, but the variation that he allows is, perhaps predictably, associated with White speech ways. For Kurath, the speech of African Americans “exhibits the same regional and local variations as that of the simple white folk” (1949:6). But McDavid departs from this assessment with respect to Gullah phonology noting that ‘the phonemic

system of Gullah and the phonetic values of individual allophones show striking uniformity in all the communities where the dialect is spoken, although these communities occur discontinuously along three hundred miles of coast in the region in which dialects of American English show the greatest local diversity' (1950:330).

More recently, a second wave of minimalists has broadened the comparative base to include older, rural speakers of AAVE with data from enclaves (Bailey & Maynor 1985a, 1987) and expatriate communities (e.g. Samaná, Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Nova Scotia, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991); mid-nineteenth century correspondence (e.g. Montgomery, Fuller, & DeMarse 1993); and interviews with former slaves (Bailey, Maynor & Cukor-Avila 1991). Seizing on the observation by Labov and others that AAVE rather than converging with White vernaculars appeared to be diverging from them, the Anglicist research agenda shifted and the position was amended by so-called minimalist Neo-Anglicists, specifically with respect to the question of AAVE's development. Like their forerunners, the Neo-Anglicists maintain the view that Africans in the New World had rapidly adopted the regional norms of their White counterparts and, consequently, that AAVE was principally English in origin. Similarly, the Neo-Anglicists hold the minimalist view of AAVE's synchronic status - that AAVE and other comparable varieties of WNSE share the same deep structure. In their view, the distinctiveness of AAVE is only quantitative and superficial. In some cases, it preserves linguistic relics lost by White speakers. And in other cases, African Americans are said to have extended the contexts in which features in White varieties applied.

The major difference between first wave minimalists and second wave minimalists lies in AAVE's more recent development. Second wave minimalists have broadened the

AAVE data set to include older, rural speakers, leading them to the conclusion that any apparent qualitative differences in the deep structure of AAVE are fairly peripheral and are the result of relatively recent divergence from WNSE resulting from racial segregation and isolation in urban centers. In their view, any significant restructuring of AAVE was occurring in urban areas and spreading outward, and thus cannot be considered evidence of creole origins. Whereas creolists assert that AAVE has been converging with other varieties of American English making it more acrolectal, Neo-Anglicists find the opposite occurring – divergence.

Although Anglicists are fairly silent on the issue of development, assuming that convergence with White norms was rapid and thorough, Neo-Anglicists reserve their silence for another issue. The early Anglicists were careful to allow for regional variation in AAVE albeit variation consistent with White speech norms, but the Neo-Anglicists have relatively little to say about this. Intent on completely dismantling the most extreme versions of the creolist hypothesis, neo-Anglicists often generalize findings from enclaves and isolates to the whole of AAVE (e.g. Cukor-Avila 2001).

Hybrid & Compromise Positions

It is important to avoid absolutist interpretations of any of the positions discussed thus far, realizing that there are subtleties in each. With the exception of the earliest articulations of the Anglicist position, neither extreme completely denies the claims made by the other. White speech has undoubtedly influenced Black just as Black speech has undoubtedly influenced White (Feagin 1979:266; Schneider 1989:37). And there can be little doubt that the social conditions of the colonial period produced at least one Afro-English creole in the American colonies (i.e. Gullah) or that there are some African or creole remnants that have

persisted in AAVE – a fact that Rickford takes as absolute vindication of the Creolist Hypothesis (2015:36). What separates the prevailing positions, then, is the *degree* of influence that White vernaculars have had on AAVE and the nature and trajectory of its development, particularly in the nineteenth century. But even more nuanced positions have joined a debate that is now punctuated by new concerns, and following the divergence controversy, several compromise or hybrid positions (shown in Table 2.2 below) have emerged, all of which reject the notion of AAVE’s structural homogeneity.

Table 2.2 Compromise positions on AAVE’s origins and development with representative publications

	Origins	Development	Representative Publications
Anglicist Compromise Position	Co-territorial White vernaculars; pockets of creolization	Differential with areas of creole influence	Schneider 1989; Kautzsch & Schneider 2000; Kautzsch 2002;
African Substrate Position	Co-territorial White vernaculars; creolization limited to coastal areas of the Lower South	Differential with pockets of African substrate influence	Mufwene 1992:159, 2000:234, 2015
Language Shift	Co-territorial White vernaculars	Differential with significant mid-19th century creole or African influence in the South	Winford 1997, 1998, 2015:85

As the divergence controversy was coming to the fore, Schneider (1989) began to seriously consider the issue of regional differences in AAVE, which had been raised by Troike (1973:8) but had not received much serious attention. Schneider looked for areal patterns in nineteenth century AAVE using the ex-slave narratives collected for the Federal Writers’ Project. He concluded that “the linguistic varieties spoken by blacks must have

covered a continuum of possibilities ranging from (presumably restricted and perhaps short-lived) creoles, on one hand, over various intermediate stages to a practically complete mastery of the target variety, nonstandard English, on the other” (Schneider 1989:278). Putting aside the assumption that White vernaculars were indeed the “target variety,” Schneider provides for differential development of AAVE dependent on the local dynamics of social ecology. In a subsequent publication, he and Kautzsch find just such a continuum in the nineteenth century AAVE of South Carolina (Kautzsch & Schneider 2000). Their analysis shows that as one moved from the upstate to the coast the Earlier AAVE of South Carolina became more basilectal, at least with respect to grammar, and they attribute this to creole influence from Gullah. Similarly, Kautzsch (2002) finds that Earlier AAVE differed by state throughout the South – that it was hardly a structural monolith during the nineteenth century.

In a similar vein, Mufwene notes that “neither the dialectologist nor the creolist position accounts adequately for all the facts of [African American English¹]” (1992:158), but where Schneider hypothesizes pockets of creolization and creole influenced AAVE, Mufwene instead advocates for a language shift scenario owing to African substrate influence. Like Schneider and Kautzsch, Mufwene maintains that early AAVE had its origin in Colonial Englishes because the social ecology did not support the formation of a creole in the seventeenth century; and, thus, “all along, there must have been a continuum of speech forms from the least to the most English-like” (Mufwene 1992:159). But because the slave population increased more by importation than by birth in the eighteenth century, Mufwene argues that African languages rather than creoles had a greater impact upon AAVE.

Winford's argument for language shift as an explanation for AAVE's creole-like attributes is similar to Mufwene's and Schneider's in many respects but not all. Winford concurs that AAVE "was never itself a creole" (1997:308). Instead, the first generations of New World Africans somewhat successfully acquired settler English producing AAVE, which was subsequently transformed by contact with Africans who were imported later. These newly-arrived Africans encountered American-born slaves, many of whom had conformed to the linguistic norms of Whites in most respects. As they accommodated to the speech norms of American-born blacks, AAVE was in turn transformed by "substratum transfer" (Winford 1992:11) via contact with West African languages and restructured varieties resulting from incomplete second language acquisition including pidginized and creolized languages. Thus, Winford agrees with Mufwene's African Substrate Hypothesis while leaving the door open for possible influence by all sorts of restructured varieties.

Evidence for enduring heterogeneity

The various hybrid, compromise positions represent an important turn for both the synchronic and diachronic discussions about AAVE. Their key contribution, in my view, has been the seriousness with which local dynamics have been treated in the AAVE origins and development debate. Until relatively recently, rigorous debate obscured an underlying common ground – regardless of the orientation (i.e. Anglicist, creolist, etc.), a presumption of regional uniformity persisted on all sides. That is, conclusions drawn from a limited geographic sample have often been generalized to the whole of AAVE with little or no reference to the possibility of regional variation seeded by the differential dynamics of local social ecologies.

At times this assumption is not only explicit but a key component in the origins and development debate. For example, some early creolists do not merely presume but actively assert the “supraregional spread and uniformity of the variety spoken by” New World Africans (Schneider 1989:24), what Dillard called the “Plantation Creole” (1972, 1977; also Stewart 1967). For maximalists like Dillard and Stewart, this is evidenced in the varieties of AAVE documented during the 1960s, which appeared “very much alike throughout the country while different in many ways from the non-standard dialects of whites” (Stewart 1967:4).

Moderates occupying the consensus position similarly remarked on AAVE’s apparent structural homogeneity. When Fasold (1972b) compared his data from Washington D.C. to that of Labov (1969) for New York and Wolfram (1969) for Detroit, he found “a great deal of unity in the structure of Black English in all three cities” and concluded that it was “reasonable to infer that variation in Black English, in northern cities at least, is not greatly affected by geography” (Fasold 1972b:219).

And maximalists often tacitly accepted homogeneity also, and in many cases, it was a core component of their position (e.g. Dillard 1972:99). And the lower proportion of Blacks on the North American mainland has often been taken as evidence that the historical demographics did not support a creole’s formation outside of coastal South Carolina and Georgia. But, as Holm (1991) points out, “the ratio of blacks to whites differed considerably from one locality to another” and by 1860 “there were large sections of all the coastal states from Virginia to eastern Texas where blacks made up the majority of the population” (245).

While many linguists left the assumption of AAVE's regional homogeneity unimpeached, continuing instead to rely on the supraregional myth as an unstated condition of their conclusions, others began to note significant heterogeneity in nineteenth century AAVE (e.g. Schneider 1989). And a growing body of research has begun to interrogate the assumption of regional homogeneity for contemporary varieties of AAVE. These studies are beginning to reveal that accommodation and resistance to regional and ethnolinguistic norms is remarkably variable over time and space, producing a kaleidoscope of regional and social variation. Examples of this can be found in North Carolina.

Utilizing several diagnostic phonological and grammatical variables, among them copula absence, Childs and Mallinson (2004) compare the speech of African Americans residing in Texana, North Carolina – the largest African American enclave in the Smoky Mountains – to the speech of co-territorial Whites. The authors find a mix of accommodation to regional norms and persistent “substrate influence.” Among younger speakers, the authors mostly note convergence with local norms and divergence from supraregional, ethnolinguistic norms. But, some features, like copula absence, are an exception with younger speakers moving away from local trends and toward the supraregional ethnolinguistic norms of AAVE.

Wolfram and Thomas (2002) likewise report a mix of accommodation and resistance to regional norms in their comparison of the AAVE of Hyde County, North Carolina to the co-territorial White vernacular. In contrast to Childs and Mallinson (2004), however, they note that younger African Americans in Hyde County are mostly moving away from local norms toward supraregional AAVE norms in order to avoid sounding either White or country (Wolfram & Thomas 2002:209). Again, copula absence is among

the linguistic features that young Hyde County African Americans are using in their ethnolinguistic repertoire.

The findings from Texana and Hyde County provide a compelling reason to continue an investigation of regional uniformity in AAVE. The interplay between regional and ethnic identification is complex, and it is highly consequential to the origins and development debate. Before the questions of AAVE's origins and developmental trajectory can be resolved, the breadth of its variation as a mixture of regional and ethnic norms must be reckoned with.

2.2 Copula variability in AAVE

An interrogation of structural homogeneity is perhaps nowhere better begun than with the copula – “the showcase variable in American dialectology and quantitative sociolinguistics” (Rickford et al. 1991:104) – given that it has factored so heavily in the origins and development debate. Thus far, the term *copula* has been applied to all uses of present tense forms of *be*. As many have noted (Labov 1972b; Holm 1984; Rickford et al. 1991), the use of the term *copula* in variationist literature conflates all uses of *be* into a single category. Labov writes:

The awkward disjunction “copula and auxiliary *be*” is necessary here since the *be* of the progressive and future is usually not considered the same grammatical form as the copula before noun phrases and predicates. At various points in the discussion, *copula* is used as a shorter way to refer to both where no ambiguity is likely. As the discussion progresses, it will be obvious that this issue is not an important one for the rules we are investigating, since it is the finite forms of *be* which are involved in the phonological component of the grammar. The distinction between copula and auxiliary will however reappear in terms of the influence of the following grammatical environment on the variable rules which contract and delete these forms. (1972b:67)

As will become progressively more obvious, the distinction between copula and auxiliary uses of present tense *be* is not inconsequential as one of the key issues is how this system is partitioned in AAVE. However, for the sake of continuity and simplicity, I will refer to all uses of *be* as *copula* except when it is important to distinguish between the functions of *be* (cf. Weldon 1998:19). In these instances, I will use the terms *auxiliary* for the form that occurs with verbal predicates (i.e., *V-ing* and *gonna*) and *true copula* with non-verbal predicates (i.e., in equative, locative, and attributive contexts).

The copula entered the discussion of AAVE very early. Krapp (1924) notes the feature specifically in his argument for the rapid and complete accommodation of African Americans to the norms of Colonial Englishes, but he does not note copula absence, focusing instead on the generalization of *is* to all subject persons/numbers (191). As the discussion has evolved, however, copula absence has taken center stage. And the key question has become whether absence is primarily conditioned by the subject (i.e., by subject person/number or subject type) or by the predicate. In Mainstream American English (MAE) and many other non-mainstream varieties, the subject form controls the copula type as seen in examples 1-3.

- (1) I'**m** fixing to be. (AAME17)
- (2) You'**re** out in the open. (AAME17)
- (3) It'**s** a difference between being a regular cowboy [and a rodeo cowboy]. (AAME17)

The reader will note that in each of the examples above where there is an overt copula, its inflected form depends upon the grammatical person/number of the subject. By contrast, copula absence additionally exhibits sensitivity to the predicate types shown in 4-8. Specifically, verbal predicates like those in 4 and 5 are more likely to feature copula

absence than attributive, locative, and nominal predicates like those in 6 through 8 respectively.

- (4) Future *going to* – He Ø gon bleed like me. (AAME17)
- (5) Progressive – You Ø hitting it every now and then. (AAME17)
- (6) Adjective phrase – But you Ø more comfortable. (AAME17)
- (7) Locative – When you Ø out in open spaces, uh you don't have much shade or nothing like that. (AAME17)
- (8) Noun phrase – Everybody Ø a person like me. (AAME17)

The sensitivity that the copula exhibits to predicate type has become central to the origins and development debate because it lacks any antecedent in historical varieties of English² but is found in Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora and West African languages like Yoruba. This putative similarity between AAVE and other varieties of the African Diaspora has led many sociolinguists to probe further in search of a historical connection. The key question is if AAVE exhibits a form of subject control (whether in the form of sensitivity to subject person/number or subject type) or if it exhibits predicate control. varieties. In what follows, I give a brief overview of work on AAVE copula absence with a focus on the internal, linguistic factors that influence absence and their relevance to the origins and development debate.

Predictors of Copula Absence

Creolists were the first to suggest that copula absence may be instrumental in identifying the origins of AAVE (Bailey 1965, Stewart 1967, 1968; Loflin 1969). In her comparison of Jamaican Creole (JC) and literary depictions of Southern AAVE, Beryl Bailey (1965) notes that Southern AAVE was more like JC than MAE since both JC and Southern AAVE feature copula absence particularly with attributive (AdjPs) and locative (LocPs) predicates. This assertion foregrounded the significance of the predicate and, in addition to

other shared features, led creolists to conclude that there is a deep structural difference between AAVE and MAE.

Challenging the assertion that AAVE is anything more than superficially different than other dialects of English, Labov (1969) compares urban AAVE to WNSE. He begins by citing numerous contexts in which the copula is categorically or near-categorically present before reporting that contraction and copula absence appear to share the same variable rules with respect to subject type and predicate type. That is, contraction and deletion show a mutual preference for a preceding (i.e. subject) pronoun and for verbal predicates (i.e. auxiliary contexts). The only difference, according to Labov, is in low-level phonological rules related to the preceding segment. Contraction favors a preceding vowel; and deletion, a preceding consonant. Labov goes on to argue that the copula is part of the underlying system of AAVE given both its categorical presence in a variety of contexts (e.g. with *what*, *it*, and *that* pro-form subjects) and the grammatical constraints that copula absence shares with contraction. Thus copula absence, he argues, is in fact copula deletion, which occurs according to the application of additional variable rules that apply after those of contraction; and, thus, the differences between the WNSE and AAVE copula systems are minimal and superficial. In his estimation, the copula must be a part of the underlying system of AAVE, and absence is more appropriately understood as deletion.

Whereas Labov (1969) sees null copula as a case of extension – wherein a low-level, phonological rule permitting deletion has been added to the rules governing contraction, Stewart (1969: 244) sees copula presence as a case of insertion – wherein the copula has been slowly introduced into AAVE via a process of decreolization. This, he and others argue, is evidenced by the high rates of copula absence recorded for auxiliary

environments when compared to those recorded for true copula environments. According to Stewart, the greater frequency of \emptyset copula with verbal predicates is a consequence of a four-stage process introducing the superstrate copula via insertion and relexification – a process clearly observable in Gullah.

Table 2.3 depicts Stewart’s hypothesized process of decreolization. In the first stage, /da/ occurs as both an equative copula and as an auxiliary in present progressive contexts where the present participle is unmarked (i.e. lacking the *-ing* morpheme). In the second stage of copula introduction, /da/ is removed in progressive contexts as the present participle acquires overt marking via the addition of *-ing*. In a third stage, equative /da/ is relexified to /ɪz/, and in the final stage a “dummy /ɪz/” is inserted in V+*ing* phrases, which now alternates with \emptyset copula.

Table 2.3: Decreolization of the copula system in Gullah
(Stewart 1969:244)

	Equative contexts	Auxiliary contexts
Stage 1.	/da/	/da/
Stage 2.	/da/	\emptyset + {ing}
Stage 3.	/ɪz/	\emptyset + {ing}
Stage 4.	/ɪz/ & \emptyset	\emptyset & /ɪz/ + {ing}

Reinforcing the case for deletion, Fasold (1972) argues for three additional stages that bridge that gap from Gullah (or a Gullah-like creole) to AAVE, ultimately concluding that the process of decreolization was so thorough that there is now an underlying copula in AAVE, which is deleted via the application of phonetic rules. In Fasold’s fifth stage, equative /ɪz/ and verbal /ɪz/ becomes associated and vary with \emptyset copula in their respective contexts. Copula absence was more frequent in auxiliary than equative contexts at this time owing to the later introduction of \emptyset with NP predicates. But both true copula and auxiliary

environments call for the same copulae and are subject to the same rules and the same rule ordering. In the sixth stage, speakers add a contracted copula only where deletion does not occur; that is, the phonological rule permitting contraction applies only after the syntactic rule permitting deletion, which is reversed in the seventh and final stage wherein contracted forms are finally associated with full forms so that contraction applies first followed by deletion. The late addition of dummy /ɪz/ with verbal predicates in Stewart's (1969) third stage is still reflected in greater rates of copula absence with V+ing than with NPs in AAVE.

Table 2.4 Decreolization of the copula system in AAVE
(Fasold1972a:12)

	Equative contexts		Auxiliary contexts
Stage 5.	/ɪz/ & Ø	←-----→	Ø & /ɪz/
Stage 6.	copula deletion rule > <i>is</i> contraction rule		
Stage 7.	<i>is</i> contraction rule > copula deletion rule		

Another counterpoint to Stewart's (1969) theory of decreolization is raised by Wolfram (1974), who finds similar predicate patterns in his study of rural, White youth to those reported by Labov (1969) with urban, Black youth. But Labov (1969) is the only one of these analyses to distinguish between attributive (i.e., AdjP) and (i.e., LocP) locative contexts, though he does not pursue this distinction rigorously. As such, creolists begin to focus on this distinction because they see potential evidence for creole origins and, for some, even African substrate influence. In his argument against the variable rules proposed by Labov (1969), Bickerton (1971:491) notes that the mesolect of Guyanese Creole (GC) shows the same cline (i.e. *gon* > V-ing > AdjP > LocP > NP) found by Labov (1969) for AAVE proposing that this pattern of absence obtains in GC by virtue of the introduction of superstrate copula (i.e., inflected forms of *be*) beginning with the replacement of

equative *a*, followed by locative *de*, attributive \emptyset , and so on. This process bears some similarity to that proposed by Stewart (1969) for Gullah, albeit with *de* rather than *a*, except that Bickerton (1971) suggests null emerges as a transitional form between the introduction of inflected forms of *be*. It is assumed that the same process is likely responsible for Labov's findings for AAVE (Bickerton 1971:491).

Arguing that this predicate cline is evidence of African substrate influence, Holm (1976, reprinted as 1984) maintains that separating AdjPs from LocPs in a quantitative analysis is crucial to establishing the historical relationship shared by Caribbean English Creoles (CECs), West African languages like Yoruba, and AAVE. Like the early studies of AAVE, \emptyset copula emerged more frequently with AdjPs than with LocPs in CECs, which appear to treat the former as a subclass of verbs like the West African language of Yoruba. As such, attributive predicates are less likely to be accompanied by an overt copula. Acting on Holm's suggestion, Baugh (1979a, 1980) reexamines Labov's (1969) New York City data to test the significance of separating AdjPs from LocPs. Like a number of preceding studies, he again finds that an overt copula is favored in true copula environments (i.e. in equative and locative contexts) and disfavored in auxiliary environments. And crucially, Baugh indeed finds that AdjPs are preceded by \emptyset copula more often than LocPs, matching the pattern of GC mesolect reported by Bickerton (1971), JC (Holm 1984), and other Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora.

But the AdjP>LocP ordering does not obtain for all AAVE varieties (e.g. rural Carolina AAVE, Weldon 1998:155), which has been interpreted by some as a blow to the creolist hypothesis. Bailey and Maynor (1987) compared copula use by rural Afro-Texans born before World War II with that of comparable Anglo-Texans and younger African

Americans from the same area. The data for older African Americans, male and female, were collected by Bailey and his team as well as an ethnographer studying the tenant farming system. Thus, they were not all sociolinguistic interviews of the type described by Labov (1972a), which are designed to measure style shifting by moving the speaker from more careful speech contexts like word lists (Labov's type D) and short passages (type C) to more casual contexts (types A¹ – A⁵). But Bailey and Maynor note that their intention was “to sample as broad a stylistic range as possible” (1987:451), so it is very likely that their data include speech outside the formal interview (A¹), speech with a third person (A²), unsolicited commentary and advice (A³), much discussion about childhood (A⁴), and even danger of death scenarios (A⁵), as detailed in Labov (1972a) – contexts favorable to the emergence of vernacular speech.

Bailey and Maynor report that use of Ø copula among folk speakers of AAVE followed similar patterns to the co-territorial variety of SWVE whereas youth speakers appeared to be diverging from regional norms. In their data, not only does copula absence appear to be more frequent with youth respondents, but the constraints on variability also seem to reveal that predicate control is the result of a relatively recent restructuring of the copula system (see also Poplack and Sankoff 1987). Like the studies noted above, Bailey and Maynor find that, among youth speakers of AAVE, Ø copula is much more common in auxiliary rather than true copula environments, and that younger speakers, in an apparent departure from their elders, and expatriate enclave varieties (Poplack and Sankoff 1987), use Ø copula more frequently with AdjPs than LocPs – a pattern central to Bickerton's (1971), Holm's (1984), and Baugh's (1979a, 1980) arguments for creole origins. As such, Bailey and Maynor, along with other minimalists, assert that the creole pattern of copula

selection frequently observed in AAVE is a relatively recent product of divergence from regional norms in favor of emergent ethnolinguistic norms emanating from urban centers.

Bailey and Maynor's series of studies on Black and White vernaculars in Texas, and others like them provide a compelling case for divergence if the AdjP/LocP constraint ordering is conclusive evidence of the origins of AAVE copula absence. But the opposite order LocP > AdjP frequently obtains (e.g. Liberian Settler English, Singler 1991; Trinidadian Creole (TC), Winford 1992; and Gullah, Weldon 1998:261). Winford (1992) explains that one reason for the disparate findings is related to the points of comparison. Winford (1992) counters this, however, by pointing out that the AdjP>LocP ordering is characteristic of basilectal creoles, but mesolectal creoles, LocP>AdjP like TC, "provide the best basis for comparisons" with AAVE (27). Winford hypothesizes that AAVE started with null rather than creole copulae like *a* and *de*. And Singler (1991) notes that the precise ordering of AdjP and LocP may not be nearly as important as the comparability of copula absence rates between locative an(T)d attributive predicates. Basilectal varieties like JC have the AdjP > LocP pattern, and mesolectal varieties like Barbadian English and TC the LocP > AdjP pattern. But even this seems insufficient to explain the variability in constraint ranking that has been observed in the AAVE of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kautzsch 2002).

Kautzsch (2002) analyzes evidence for Earlier AAVE using a variety of sources, and copula variation is one among several variables that he investigates. His most intensive analysis is reserved for 3rd person singular environments owing to the near categorical presence of the copula with 1st person singular subjects and the variable rhoticity of some consultants, which might have an unpredictable effect for 2nd person and plural contexts

given that transcriptions of the WPA ex-slave interviews were often completed later based on fieldworker notes and memory. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that with 1st singular subjects he found the highest concentration of zero copula in the South Atlantic States (North Carolina, South Carolina and possibly Virginia), Mississippi, and Alabama, where the social ecology would have been different given the higher population density of Blacks when compared to Tennessee, Arkansas, and elsewhere. Absence with 1st person singular subjects became less frequent as one moved westward until in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas one found only copula presence with 1st singular subjects, which Kautzsch attributes to differential creolization (i.e. the variable presence of creole features in the American South). His more detailed analysis of absence in *is* environments is also quite revelatory in that it shows significant variation by state in the rates of zero copula with the different predicate types. For example, the frequency of absence with *V+ing* ranged from 6% on the low end to as much as 40% on the high end. As such, Earlier AAVE was hardly a monolith in this respect.

Many questions have been raised with respect to how the copula should be counted or what contexts should be included in an analysis of variation (i.e. whether or not to include contexts in which the copula is categorically or near-categorically present), how copula use is affected by the contexts of fieldwork (e.g. the stylistic effects of cross-racial interviews and familiarity in longitudinal studies), and how to interpret higher rates of copula absence among adolescents (e.g. the possibility of age-grading). But here I explore an additional possibility – that differences in findings related to copula selection may be due in part to regional variation in AAVE.

2.3 Afro-Texan demographics and speech

Although the mythology of Texas is steeped in White narratives and White faces, Anglos were not involved in its earliest foreign exploration. Indeed, the arrival of people of African descent preceded Anglo settlement by nearly 250 years. Estevanico, the enslaved Moroccan credited with discovering New Mexico, was among four survivors of a doomed expedition of approximately 600 persons, the goal of which was to “conquer and govern the provinces that [lay] between the river of Las Palmas and the tip of Florida” (De Vaca 1993:5). The expedition was beset by difficulty and disaster from the start, and Estevanico along with three surviving Spaniards set foot in Texas in the autumn of 1528 wandering from the Gulf Coast into the interior and across the Trans-Pecos area over a period of ten years before finally being recovered by Spanish soldiers and returned to Mexico. It is unlikely that Estevanico’s three fellow sojourners would have survived were it not for his skill as an interpreter able to communicate with the indigenous peoples that they encountered.³

As bell hooks notes, “Racist biases shaped historical scholarship so that the information about African explorers who came to the Americas before Columbus was suppressed along with elementary knowledge of the black folks who came as explorers and immigrants who were never slaves. Indeed, until recently most black people telling the story of [the black] presence here in the so-called New World would begin that narrative with slavery” (2000:89). But the tragedy of Estevanico was that he was rewarded for his lifesaving linguistic skills with re-enslavement in order to compel him to labor on another failed expedition that, this time, would cost him his life. Nevertheless, free Blacks were

instrumental in the exploration of the American Southwest, some of them acting as interpreters just like Estevanico (Riley 1972:253).

From the sixteenth century until Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821 non-Native inhabitants were relatively few compared to the indigenous population, but people of African ancestry were present, many of whom were free.

In 1792 the Texas population of 2,992 included 34 people listed as Negro, meaning African ancestry. The same Spanish records also registered 414 persons as mulattoes, usually of mixed Spanish and African ancestry, although some might also have had Indian forebears. Thus, these people with African ancestry represented 15 percent of Texas society. (Barr 2004:3)

By some accounts two-thirds of all people of African ancestry lived in Bucareli (Madison County, TX) and later Nacogdoches in deep East Texas (Tjarks 1974) in the 1790s. This included both free and enslaved persons. Most of the latter “were bought in New Orleans or in the French settlements along the Louisiana border by Texan cattlemen, who often used them as barter currency in their cattle business” (328). The number of Blacks in Texas, no doubt, increased after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, when Spain proclaimed that any enslaved person who crossed into Texas would be considered free upon arrival. All of this preceded nearly fifty years of profound growth in the Black population initiated by Anglo settlement and the forced migration of their enslaved laborers, the majority of whom were very likely American-born.

The mass migration of Anglos into Texas began with Stephen F. Austin and his Old Three Hundred. And a sizable proportion of the Black population was situated between the Colorado and Brazos Rivers, where Austin’s Colony was established. It was here that the plantation system immediately took root. The official census of the colony in 1825 put the

population at 2,243 persons, some 443 of which were enslaved (Barker 1923:149). But the number of African souls in Texas certainly exceeded that figure for two reasons.

When Texas was still a territory of Spain, illicit trade networks brought Africans through Texas to circumvent United States laws forbidding the foreign importation of slaves. Many of these Africans were seized via piracy while being trafficked from the West Indies (Barker 1902). One such outlaw, the well-known pirate Jean Lafitte, would transport human cargo to his stronghold in Galveston where they were sold to buyers in Louisiana (Andres 2016:378).⁴

Even before Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821 and prohibited slavery in Texas, the territory was a place of refuge for Africans fleeing slavery in the United States. Some self-liberated Blacks presented themselves to Spanish authorities seeking asylum (Andres 2016:369). Others did not. “In Texas, the forests around Nacogdoches provided cover or runaways could join indigenous groups. The near absence of population centres and vast land expanses, much of it rough chaparral terrain, made it easy for runaways to elude pursuers” (Richmond 2007:205). And “near what later became Jefferson, the largest enclave of free blacks began to emerge” (209). Even though chattel slavery was an illicit practice, the population of enslaved Africans in Texas continued to increase with planters often falsely claiming that their slaves were servants in order to feign adherence to Mexican laws.

After the Revolution in 1836, slaveholders in Texas could dispense with the pretense, opening the floodgates of lower southern migration into the state. But, following the lead of the United States, the foreign slave trade was made illegal barring a single exception - purchase from the United States. Still, illicit human trafficking continued as

many traffickers skirted the embargo by first landing just east of the Sabine River in Louisiana before transporting their captives into Texas. Thus, African slaves continued to arrive from Cuba. Although several protests and pleas for the United States to help prevent these schemes were levied, these did little to curb the trend. And even after the annexation of Texas by the United States, foreign importation of slaves continued well into the 1850s.

The result of the illegal trafficking of slaves through Cuba was the continuous introduction of Afro-Cuban creoles and African-born persons into the American-born Black population transported to Texas from the United States by their Anglo captors. Rickford (1997) shows that creole influence would have been significant during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But Kelley argues that most of those who were imported into Texas from Cuba during the nineteenth century were, in fact, African-born (2008:413) and that “because they were smuggled in by local planters and not commercial speculators, they tended to remain in the area” (407). As such, the lower Brazos River had some of the highest concentrations of African-born slaves in Texas at the time, up to half of all Blacks in Brazoria County were African-identifying (418). These African-born Blacks tended to be more endogamous and reproduced at a higher rate than their American-born counterparts. And if the ethnic makeup of those trafficked from Cuba matched that imported to Cuba, three-quarters of the Africans destined for forcible removal to Texas would have been Yoruba or Ki-Kongo speakers (Kelley 2008:414-5).⁵

Archeological digs in Brazoria County have yielded evidence of this African presence. Excavations of the Levi Jordan plantation, which held up to 150 enslaved workers some of whom remained on the grounds during the early years of tenancy, have provided material evidence of African retentions in the social structure, daily routines, and

customs of the enslaved people forced to work the plantation (Brown & Cooper 1990). Among those housed at the plantation, there were “a traditional African religious practitioner” and “a craftsman producing carved bone and shell objects” (12). And “the data suggest that a great deal of continuity existed within this community” (11) before and after the Civil War. That is to say, the economic and political hierarchies that existed prior to emancipation persisted into reconstruction – at least on the Jordan plantation.

This situation corresponds closely to that described by Kossola “Cudjo” Lewis in his interviews with Zora Neale Hurston, which were recently published under the title *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”* (Hurston 2018). Kossola – a speaker of Yoruba – was captured in 1859 at the age of 19 and forcibly removed on the last known slave ship to make the transatlantic passage to the United States – the *Clotilda*. Because of his age, Kossola has clear memories of his homeland, capture, transport, and the conditions of his life during enslavement. And much of the interviews document his life after emancipation. According to his description, the post-Civil War social ecology within the Black community was one in which African-born Blacks could not always easily integrate into the communities of American-born Blacks.⁶ Although he was selected from among the African-born for his “good speech” to represent them in interactions with Whites, he simultaneously describes being taunted by American-born Blacks for his speech, which is clearly the restructured English of an adult learner. And he claims that even his children faced hardship within the Black community. As such, the newly emancipated Africans in Mobile, Alabama founded a community originally called *Africana*,⁷ and among those selected to lead the community were individuals who had occupied positions of nobility in Africa. That is to say, Kossola clearly describes a social

structure, routines, customs, and polity that are tied to the African homeland for which he longed even in his old age.

Thus, there can be little doubt that where the African-born population was significant (e.g. Mobile, Alabama and Brazoria County, Texas), African languages and restructured, learner Englishes could have (re)introduced or reinforced Africanisms for co-territorial varieties of AAVE. And there is good reason to believe that African languages played a role in Texas. Among the many facts Kelley cites in support of the African presence in Texas is the account of William Fairfax Gray, who wrote of a group that he encountered in 1836, “They are evidently native Africans, for they can speak not a word of English, French, or Spanish” (Lack 1997:151). Rickford (1997) cites a similar observation. “There are great Quantities of those Negroes imported here yearly from Africa, who have language peculiar to themselves, who are here for many years before they understand English; & great Numbers there are that never do understand it, well enough to reap any Benefit from what is said in Church ...” (Reverend James Marye, Jr., 326).

In 1836, most of the Black population was concentrated in southeast Texas along the coast where the Lower Southern plantation culture dominated as Figure 2.1 depicts. In addition to indigenous peoples, the interior of the state was populated by Upper Southern yeoman who owned few slaves compared to Lower Southern planters. Though less numerous in the interior, this group constituted the founding Black population of the area upon whose speech norms for the area would be based. And sociohistorical evidence suggests that the AAVE of the Upper South may have had less influence from creole or African input (Mufwene 2015; Winford 2015) than that of the Lower South (e.g. that of

South Carolina [Schneider & Kautzsch 2000]) never mind the steady stream of Africans that continued to flow into Coastal and Eastern Texas by way of Cuba.

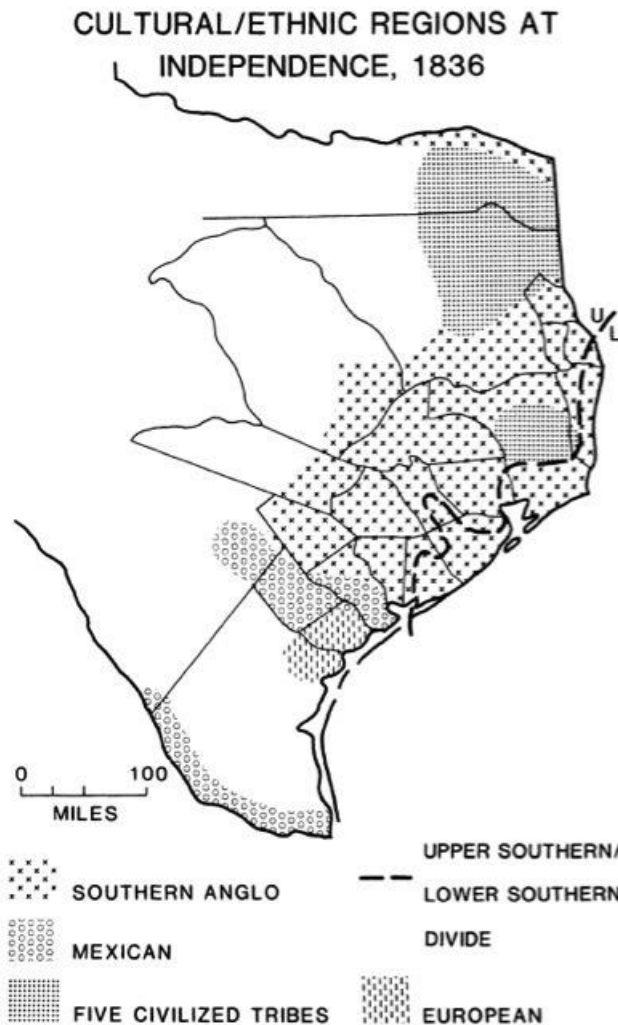


Figure 2.1 Cultural/Ethnic Regions at Independence, 1836 (Jordan 1986:387)

After Texas won independence, the White population increased tremendously and Upper and Lower Southerners alike raced into the state. When it was annexed by the United States in 1845, there were some 30,000 enslaved Blacks in Texas. By 1850, this number exceeded 58,000 with waves of Lower Southerners pouring into the interior of East Texas, outpacing and rapidly outnumbering their Upper Southern forerunners. These Lower

Southern planters pushed the Upper Southern yeomen farther into the interior, and the cultural boundary between the two shifted north and west from its original location. As a result, the slave population likewise increased in East Texas. And pockets of Black majority emerged in northeast Texas and between the Brazos and Colorado Rivers as Figure 2.2 indicates.

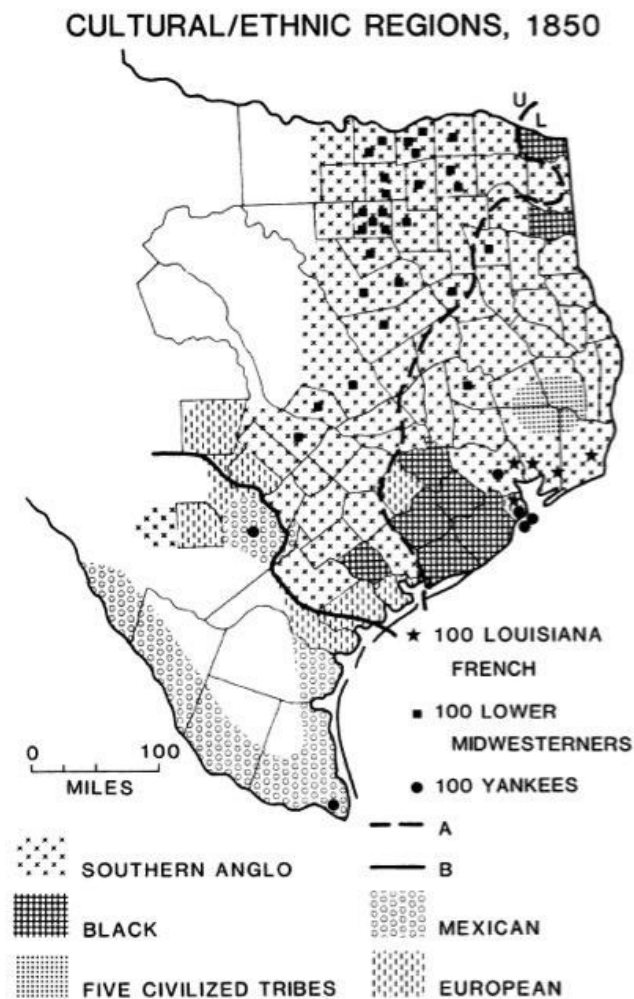


Figure 2.2 Cultural/Ethnic Regions, 1850
(Jordan 1986:389)

One of the most underexplored (and perhaps underappreciated) aspects of Texas's early settlement is the extent to which the African-born population affected the social ecology, particularly in the lower Brazos Valley – an area of Black majority – where there

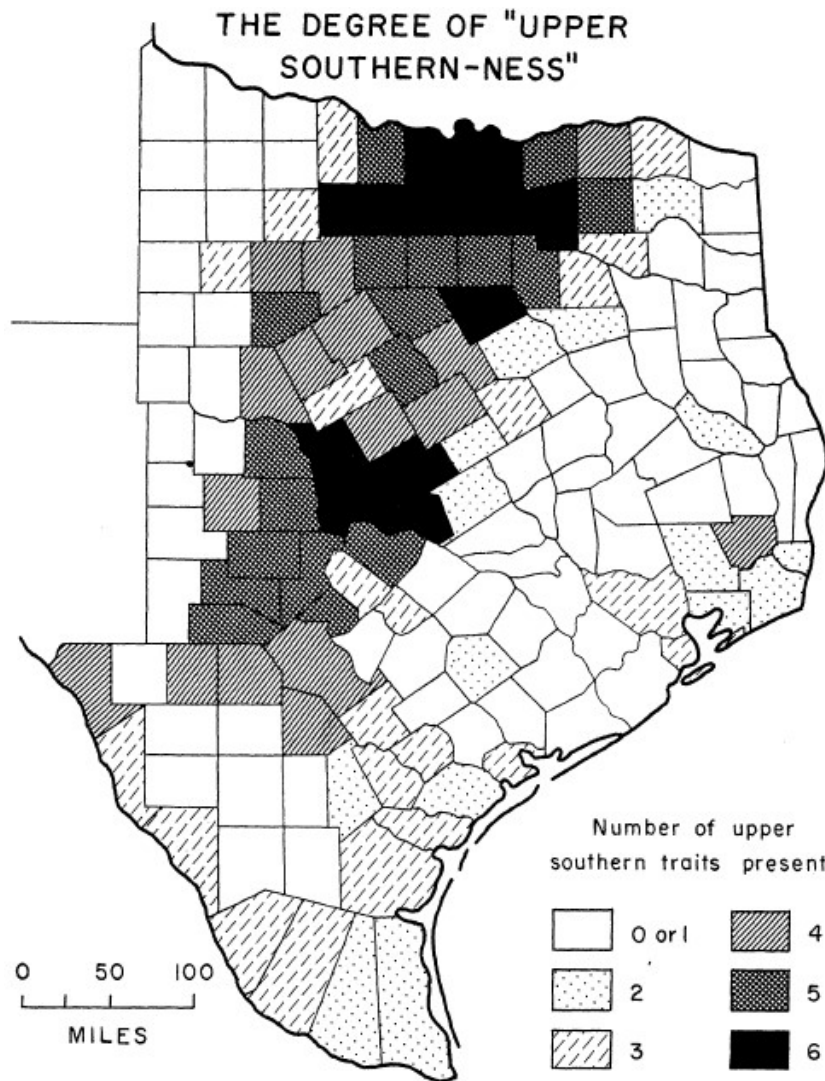
is strong evidence of African cultural and linguistic retentions (Kelley1998). Assuming that “creole-like or SLA varieties may have existed in situations where isolation or African-origin population ratios encouraged them” (Van Herk 2015:29), the influence of this group and possibly others throughout East Texas upon the speech of American-born Blacks and their descendants must be given serious consideration.

Added to this was the tendency for Upper Southerners to gather in West Texas and Lower Southerners to gather in East Texas. Correspondingly, there was a much lower concentration of enslaved persons in West Texas than East, and those in West Texas were more likely to have been transported there from the Upper South. Slave markets would have been more numerous and more active in East Texas given the demand for laborers in that area; and, thus, the African-born were more likely to have been influential to culture and speech in East Texas than West.

These demographic trends,⁸ which persisted through Reconstruction, were reflected in the distinctive cultural landscapes of East and West Texas mapped by Jordan in Figure 2.3 below. Using a six-way metric that included demographic factors in combination with political activity (i.e. percent of electorate voting against secession) and agricultural factors (i.e. cotton and wheat production as well as livestock), Jordan (1967) quantified the degree of Upper Southernness in Texas prior to 1880 and plotted his findings by county. Again, a dividing line emerged between East and West Texas.

By the 1880s, with the assistance of Buffalo Soldiers, many of whom were Afro-Seminoles who had relocated to northern Mexico from Oklahoma (Hancock 2015), the last remaining Plains tribes had been removed from the extreme western and panhandle areas

of the state, effectively opening these territories for settlement, which was predominantly from adjacent regions (Jordan 1976a)



UPPER SOUTHERN TRAITS

1. 0 to 50 bales of cotton per 100 inhabitants, 1859
2. 3 or more bushels of wheat per capita, 1859
3. slaves form 0-30% of total population, 1860
4. horses outnumber mules + asses 8 to 1 or more, 1860
5. 25% or more of electorate voted against secession, 1861
6. largest immigrant group born in Upper South, 1870-1880

Figure 2.3 The degree of "Upper-Southernness" in Texas pre-1880 (Jordan 1967:689)

But westward expansion post-1880 progressed slowly due to a lack of irrigation and reliable transportation networks (Gutmann & Sample 1995). Nevertheless, as shown

in Figure 2.4, Middle-class Upper Southerners (US-1) and Appalachian hill folk (US-2) slowly pushed into West Texas as these challenges were overcome, and by 1940 the area had become an extension of Upper Southern culture while East Texas remained the domain of the plantation aristocracy (LS-1) and badland poor Whites (LS-2). In a small area of South Texas, the culture of the plantation aristocracy was later overlaid with those of Midwestern and European immigrants (LS-3) while still being very much Lower Southern.

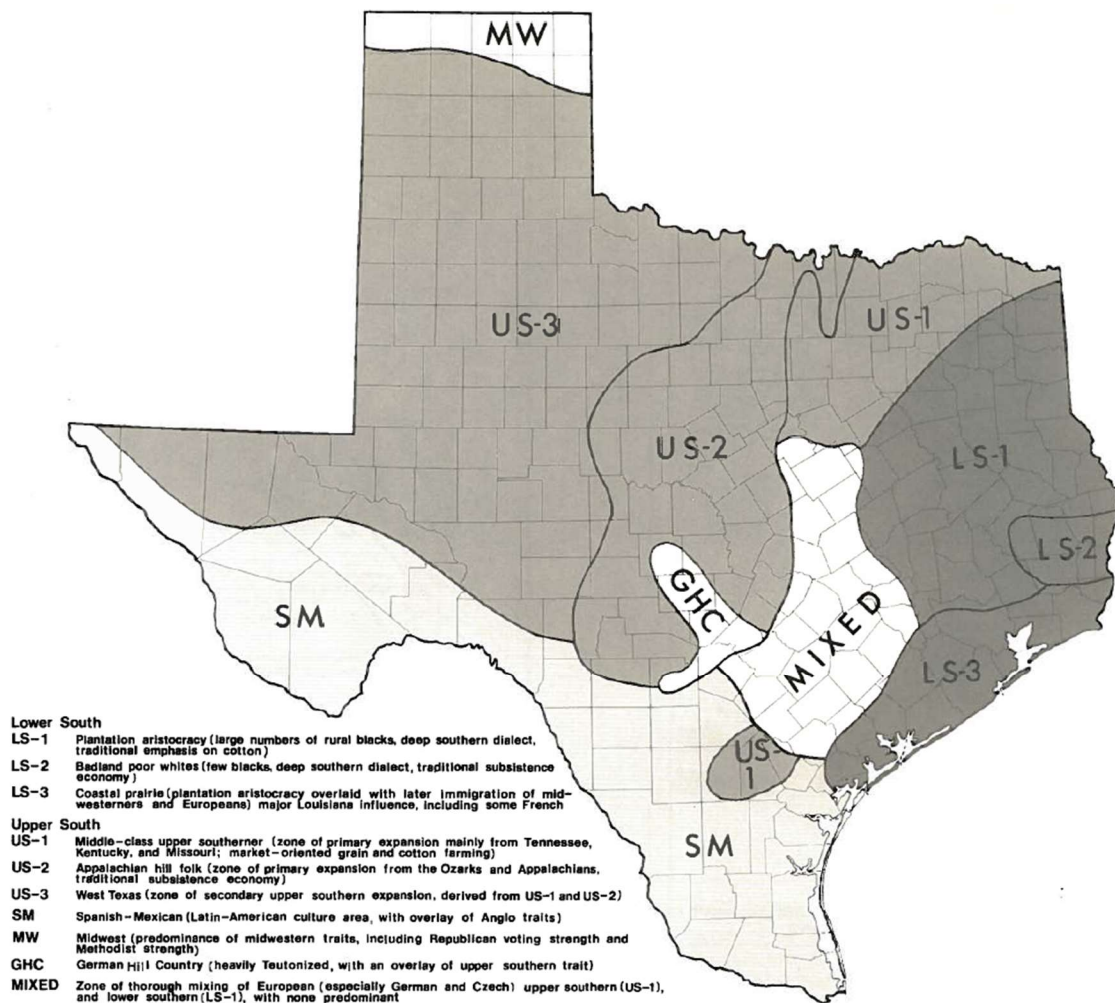


Figure 2.4 The cultural geography of Texas (Jordan 1976b:31)

A small area in Central Texas held a dense population of people with German ancestry (GHC); a Latin American cultural area dominated much of South Texas and ran along the

border of Mexico (SM); and a small sliver of the northernmost Panhandle was more Midwestern in character (MW). Into the middle twentieth century, African Americans persisted in East Texas, but much of the population shifted from rural communities to urban centers (Figure 2.5).

In the mythos that covers Texas like a veil, cattle work and cowboys loom large. But the economy in which these characters are embedded emerged comparatively late in Texas when viewed against other territories of the New World (e.g. South Carolina [Wood 1974]). Open-range cattle herding could be found in Barbuda, Hispaniola, and Jamaica nearly two centuries before it appeared in Texas (Sluyter 2012:6). And before that, Africans had been herding cattle in proximity to the sub-Saharan steppes for millennia (7). As such, when Africans were forced to tend cattle in the New World, they brought to the task generations of inherited wisdom. Their predecessors had worked cattle along the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, tending to them on foot on the open ranges. The animals were docile because most bulls were castrated and the sows milked regularly, and they were earmarked to establish the ownership of strays. Among all of the cattle herding cultures of Europe there were none that practiced long-distance transhumance (i.e., long-range cattle drives), but this practice was firmly established among African herders who sent their cattle with the Fulani for summer grazing (7-9). Thus, the Black cattleman is not the invention of the silver screen. He appeared in East Texas when the territory was under Spanish rule in the eighteenth century; he persisted after emancipation; and he endures to this day.

The cattle economy began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century with roundups of feral cattle in South and Central Texas followed by long-range cattle drives to markets in Kansas. But from 1900 to 1950 cotton production pushed westward into the Blackland

Prairie and cattle production pushed into East Texas so that cattlemen are now found throughout the state. This blending, no doubt, had a homogenizing effect on culture and language as the movement of people pursuing industry brought cultural conventions and linguistic patterns into contact with alternative systems. Nevertheless, a number of linguists have identified major and minor dialect divisions in Texas, and many of these correspond closely to the boundary between Upper Southern and Lower Southern cultures in Texas (Figure 2.4).

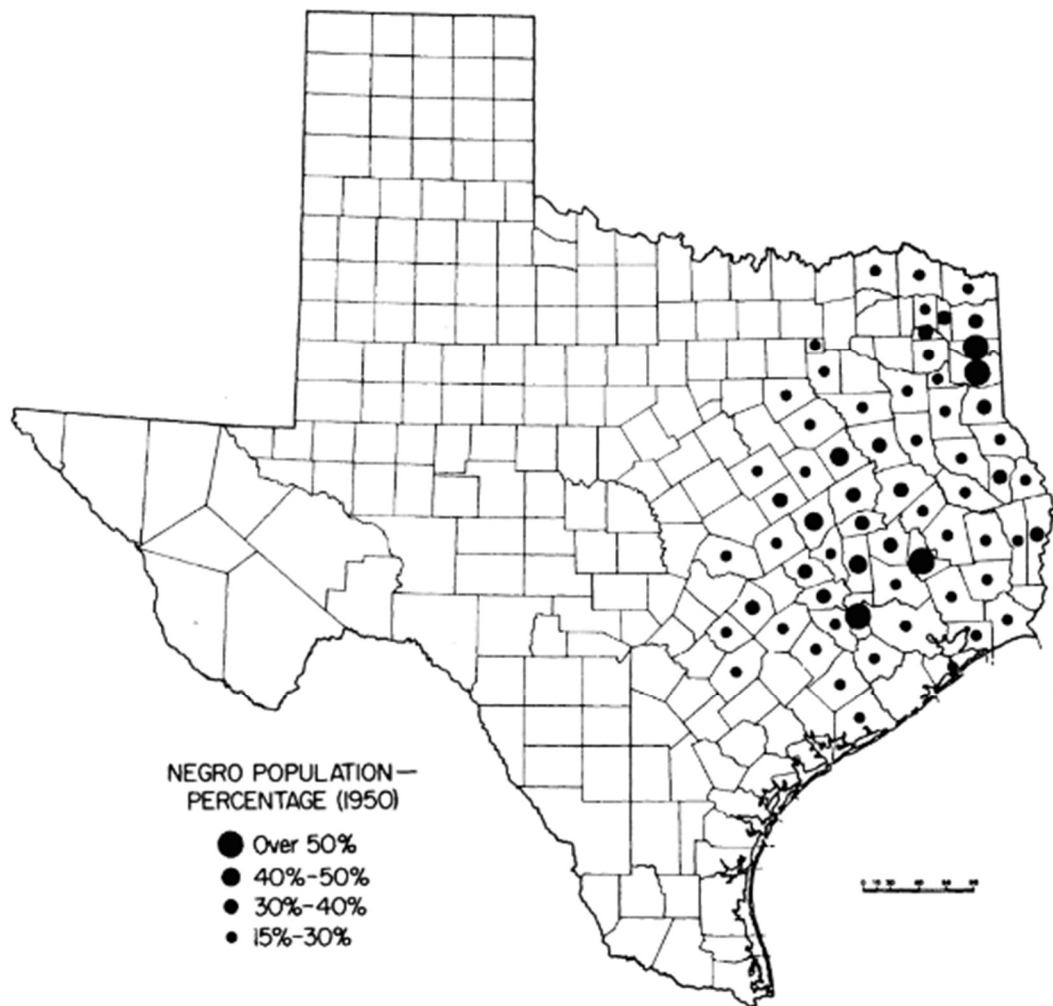


Figure 2.5 African American population in 1950 (Atwood 1962:15)

With respect to White dialects, reports about major dialect divisions group into two perspectives. One identifies a boundary in the Trans-Pecos area of extreme West Texas. For example, Atwood (1962) claims that the vocabulary of Texas is predominantly Southern, which includes both the Coastal and Interior South, and that Texas lies in the western extreme of the Southern dialect area. But Atwood identifies the Trans-Pecos area of far West Texas as transitional – an area where the rates of Southern terms decline noticeably (86-7). Labov, Ash and Boberg (2005) similarly finds the western boundary of the Southern vowel system in the Trans-Pecos area (148).

Other reports, however, have identified a major boundary that coincides more closely with the Upper/Lower Southern distinction (Figure 2.4), my West/East division. One of these is Shuy (1967), which locates a boundary for the Western and Central Southern dialect areas that approximates it (Figure 2.6). Note, however, that his division runs towards the north/northwest rather than the northeast. Mapping items from the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, Carver (1987) basically concurs with Shuy (1967) but pushes this boundary a bit farther east.

The Upper/Lower Southern distinction in Texas represents a major boundary for some sets of features, but not for others. Thus, it may be more fitting to think of it as a minor dialect division instead. Though he does not find enough evidence to support a major division, Atwood (1962) identifies several lexical and grammatical items whose areal distributions have a historical connection to Upper or Lower Southern settlement. Among these are the lexical items *earthworm* as well as the oft-cited *snake doctor* and *mosquito hawk* (196; see also Pederson et al. 1986:75). Also the second person plural *you'uns*, though infrequent, is generally restricted to West Texas and the Upper South (Atwood

1962:200). Pederson et al. (1986) likewise notes similar distributions for the lexical variables {*snake doctor*, *mosquito hawk*} (76) and {*tow sack/bag*, *crocus/crocker sack*} (77).



Figure 2.6 Major dialect boundaries of the United States (Shuy 1967:47)

In addition to grammatical and lexical evidence for the Upper/Lower division in Texas, there are pronunciation differences that warrant consideration. For example, the *LAGS* map for /r/ vocalization in *ears* and *years* (Pederson et al. 1986:71) shows that vocalization, which is historically Lower Southern, is virtually absent in the Upper Southern section of Texas. Furthermore, although Labov et al. (2005) does not make the Upper/Lower Southern distinction per se, it does distinguish two core areas where Southern vowel features are most advanced. One of these, the Inland South, lies in Southern Appalachia, within the domain of the Upper South. The other, the Texas South, lies in North and West Texas, an area settled by Upper Southerners. Thus, it is safe to say that the

Upper/Lower Southern distinction in Texas corresponds, if not to a major dialect boundary, to a minor boundary in White speech. But evidence suggests that the Upper/Lower South division is also relevant to Black speech, at least that of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth century.

In an analysis of ex-slave interviews, Schneider (1989) finds considerable regional variation in the grammar of Earlier AAVE. In the late nineteenth century, the greatest differences lay between the Coastal Southern states and Tennessee. In general, the Earlier AAVE of Tennessee is “characterized by its greater proximity to the standard variety” (255). And, of immediate relevance to the present study, Kautzsch (2002) notes regionalized differences in copula absence. Some varieties of Earlier AAVE permitted zero copula with first person singular subjects, for example, while others did not; and many areas differed with respect to constraint rankings on copula absence. Both of these studies illustrate the variability in Earlier AAVE; but, due to the nature of their data, they only consider variation at the state level, which can obscure intrastate distinctions like those considered here.

When the pre-Anglo settlement patterns of Texas are considered, the situation becomes more complex. San Antonio had a Black population of 15% – the majority freemen – in the years prior to the arrival of the Old Three Hundred (i.e., the Anglo settlers of Austin’s Colony who emigrated primarily from the Upper South with enslaved Blacks who brought a variety of AAVE that was morphologically more acrolectal). The self-emancipated could also be found in pockets of East Texas, some living among indigenous peoples bringing Anglophone creoles, learner Englishes, and Lower Southern AAVE into contact with native languages. African-born and some Afro-Cuban creoles were smuggled

from Texas into Western Louisiana. And all of this preceded significant growth in the Upper Southern and Lower Southern Black populations that occurred between 1821 and 1865, with illicit trafficking continuing to inject significant African (strongly Yoruban) influence into some coastal (and perhaps inland) East Texas counties.

Afro-Texan English also exhibits some regional differentiation with respect to the East/West division found in Anglo-Texan English. Jones (2020) convincingly demonstrates that “there is regional variation in AAE” (259) in the vowel system of speakers born in the twentieth century. And, crucially, according to his analysis, speakers situated in the part of Texas I have identified as “East Texas” pattern more closely with speakers in southern Alabama than they do with speakers situated in the part of Texas I have identified as “West Texas.” Thus, differences in social ecology and language support constitute the rationale for if and where to divide Texas for the purpose of a regional comparison of AAVE.

¹ In this article, Mufwene uses the term *African American English* “to refer to the vernacular spoken by African Americans particularly in urban ghettos and rural areas of the USA, with of course the exception of some coastal isolates of South Carolina and Georgia, where Gullah is spoken” (1992:141).

² Michael Montgomery (personal communication) notes that the lone instance of copula absence that has been found for Irish English is hardly evidence for absence as a feature of the variety. Not only is this the only citation, but the writer from whom it is drawn is clearly a second language user and, thus, not representative of Irish English but of the restructured English of an adult learner.

³ See also Picone (2003) regarding the linguistic capital of Anglophone Blacks in Louisiana.

⁴ See also Picone (2003).

⁵ See also Picone (2003) regarding African languages in Louisiana. “Michael, a mulatto aged about 38 years; five feet two inches high; speaks English and very little French; of middle size. . . . The negro Clark, of the Congo nation, having some marks of his country on his forehead, aged about 20 years; a round face, four feet nine inches, American measure, high, speaking very bad English and in the habit of answering in Congo the questions put to him. [4 Jan. 1816; cited in Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant 1945, 251–52].”

⁶ For the reverse of this, see Picone (2003) regarding the animus between anglophone and francophone creole speaking Blacks in Louisiana. “[Anna – an English-speaking nurse to the Locoul children of the Laura plantation in west-central Louisiana] She came from Wilmington, North Carolina and the Creole negro servants hated the American negroes and made them very unhappy because they did not speak the negro French dialect. [Gore 1936, 33].”

⁷ In the early period of American history, the African experience was very immediate and real to the slaves and many yearned to escape back to Africa. As time progressed, though, the African slave became rather firmly entrenched in the New World, and hopes of returning to the motherland began to seem more like unattainable fantasies. Having thus resigned themselves to a future in the New World, many slaves began to take on what Langston Hughes has termed the “ways of white folks” — their religion, culture, customs, and, of course, language. At the same time, though, there were strong resistance movements against enslavement and the oppressive ways of white folks. Thus, from the very beginning, we have the “push-pull” syndrome in black America, that is, pushing toward White American culture while simultaneously pulling away from it (Smitherman 1977:10-11).

⁸ The slave population was tallied at 182,566 in 1860. Triple that for 1850.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research questions of this dissertation, it was necessary to locate a sample of Afro-Texan folk speakers located in both the densely populated eastern and coastal portions of the state and the more sparsely populated interior, western, and panhandle areas. It may strike some readers as a novelty to focus on the Black cowboys of Texas, but the selection of this community is strategic. First, there is a widespread assumption that post-Emancipation, “all newly freed Black men and women moved to cities for domestic work or became sharecroppers” (Roberts 2017:14). Indeed, this false dichotomy undergirds strong assertions about the social ecology of the South and the development of White and Black vernaculars in the early twentieth century, giving primacy to the general store as a locus for social exchange between African and European Americans living side-by-side in the tenancy system (e.g. Bailey 1987). But it is the nature of contact rather than the contact itself that is most relevant to linguistic accommodation, maintenance, or divergence (Schneider 1989:36-7). And the nature of contact is subject to change over time as conditions favorable to intergroup cohesion give way to conditions unfavorable to it (Rickford 1987:60-1).

Aside from a lack of nuance that borders on overly reductive, the rural tenant farmer/urban laborer dichotomy erases the entrepreneurialism and place-making of rural Blacks, at least in Texas. As Andrea Roberts notes, “In 1870, former slaves owned two percent of farmland in Texas, and 50 years later, that number had risen to more than 26

percent” (2017:14). Throughout Texas, African Americans created independent, self-sustaining, and thriving communities that shaped the rural geography and its culture just as those who moved to cities did in urban landscapes. These Black villages – these pockets of Black majority – push against the notion that cultural and linguistic leveling at the country store was the unmitigated norm in rural Texas, and the accounts of Black landowners who, after Emancipation, created and remained in rural Black spaces throughout the First (1916-1930) and Second (1940-1970) Great Migrations must be added to the stories of sharecroppers, industrial workers, and domestics who are well represented in the sociohistorical narrative. Independent Black farmers and ranchers are part of an often-overlooked aspect of rural Texan folk life and African American place-making.

Although linguists have shown some interest in understanding the social and linguistic landscape of Black Texas, sampling has either been restricted to East Texas to the exclusion of West as in the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (Pederson, McDaniel, and Bassett 1986) or it has been skewed toward urban centers as in the Phonological Survey of Texas (Bailey, Tillery, and Wikle 1997). There have been some isolated, more or less independent studies of individual communities and individual speakers (Bailey and Maynor 1985a, 1987; Cukor-Avila 1995), but these investigations make limited reference to comparative data for the purpose of areal analysis. To date there has been little to no attempt to produce a linguistic geography of the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) of Texas. In part, this has been due to sampling methodology. When Bailey, et al. conducted a randomized telephone survey in the early 1990s, the sample was naturally skewed toward urban centers, where most phone numbers were registered. This resulted in the underrepresentation of rural speakers because no sampling control had been introduced

to ensure that more sparsely populated areas would be represented (e.g. proportionate stratification) – an oversight that the researchers themselves acknowledged and corrected when a similar-such survey in Oklahoma was undertaken. The skew toward urban centers was more dramatic for Black respondents than White, given that the proportion of African Americans living in urban versus rural settings was higher than that of European Americans. Thus, rural Afro-Texan speech is underrepresented. Where random sampling failed, however, judgement sampling can fill in the blanks, and cowboys are an ideal population to sample for areal analysis in Texas because they are spread throughout the state since livestock are hardy to a variety of conditions, whereas farmers are restricted to the arable land suitable for crops – land that was concentrated in the eastern and coastal portions of the state in the early twentieth century prior to the introduction of irrigation technology in West Texas and the Panhandle.

The icon of the cowboy weighs heavily in the Texan mystique, in the minds of both native stock and outsiders. This was certainly true for Bailey and his cohort when they were searching for a way to measure respondents' attachment to place for their telephone survey of Texas dialects. As a way to measure their regional identification, the research team asked respondents whether or not they wore cowboy hats and boots and drove pickup trucks. Those who responded in the affirmative were assumed to have a strong sense of Texan identity, while those who responded in the negative were assumed to have a weak or non-existent sense of Texan identity. Skewed as their data for African Americans were toward urban consultants, this well-intentioned attempt to identify linguistic markers of Texan identity, because of its sampling procedure, largely excluded the very African Americans who were likely to evince the most obvious signs of regional affiliation (i.e., to

wear cowboy hats and boots and drive pickup trucks). Thus, we have in the Black cowboys a sample of Afro-Texans that defies the rural sharecropper/urban laborer dichotomy, that resists urban flight and perseveres in rural spaces, and that participates as vigorously as any other group in the vernacular culture that has come to define the state writ large.

3.1 Data collection

The data for this dissertation are drawn from the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech (CAACS) – a collection of some forty-three tape-recorded ethnographic interviews conducted by Michael Searles with cowboys in Texas. Searles – a self-identified Black cowboy and now-retired professor – conducted his fieldwork in the early 1990s with the goal of producing a comparative study of Black cowboys in East and West Texas. Since his intention was to analyze regional differences in African American cowboy culture, his interviews were conducted all over the state.¹ His chief selection criteria were that male consultants would have spent “at least ten years of their lives as working cowboys” and that female consultants would “have lived around a ranch environment” (Appendix A, Consent Protocol).² Searles’s aim was to provide “the public and scholarly community with insight into a neglected area of American history and culture” (Appendix A).

Most consultants were interviewed once between July of 1995 and September of 1997, but some were interviewed two or three times. Interviews were conducted in the homes of consultants and at livestock auctions,³ and they frequently enough occurred with other family or friends, some of them recent or soon-to-be consultants. In locating his sample, Searles often relied on a social network type procedure, contacting friends and friends of friends. In the absence of direct referrals, he utilized local cowboy and livestock

associations and came to find that cowboys whom he believed to be strangers to one another were often acquainted through rodeos, stock auctions, or trail rides.



Figure 3.1 African American cowboys on their mounts, 1911 (Erwin E. Smith Collection, Amon Carter Museum of American Art)

Like Bailey and Maynor's sample of Afro-Texan folk speakers, CAACS features consultants born prior to World War II, from 1906 to 1948, and data gathered for ethnographic purposes. All consultants are shown in Table 3.1. Given the personal nature of some of the conversations, Searles gave respondents the opportunity to choose pseudonyms, but none elected to do so. In the present study, however, they have been given unique identifiers for convenience. Consultant codes represent race (AA for African American and EA for European American); sex (M for Male and F for Female); and geographic subregion (C for Central, E for East, N for North, NW for Northwest or Panhandle, S for South, and W for West).

Table. 3.1 All consultants in the CAACS corpus (n=43)

Consultant ID	County of Upbringing	Geographic Region	Birth Year
AAMC1	McLennan	Central	1908
AAMC2	Blanco	Central	1940
AAMC3	Travis	Central	1931
AAMC4	Travis	Central	1940
AAMC5	Lee	Central	1930
AAMC6	Colorado	Central	1916
AAMC7	Colorado	Central	1937
AAMC8	Victoria	Central	1922
AAFE1	Harris	East	1946
AAME1	Smith	East	1912
AAME2	Smith	East	1925
AAME3	Grimes	East	1917
AAME4	Walker	East	1929
AAME5	Walker	East	1940
AAME6	Harris	East	1906
AAME7	Harris	East	1925
AAME8	Harris	East	1934
AAME9	Liberty	East	1930
AAME10	Jefferson	East	1918
AAME11	Jefferson	East	1938
AAME12	Fort Bend	East	1915
AAME13	Fort Bend	East	1916
AAME14	Fort Bend	East	1924
AAME15	Fort Bend	East	1931
AAME16	Chambers	East	1919
AAME17	Chambers	East	1932
AAME18	Marion?	East	1931
EAME1	Liberty	East	1922
EAFN1	Parker	North	1941
AAMN1	Parker	North	1941
EAMN1	Parker	North	1934
EAMN2	Parker	North	1939
EAFNW1	Sherman	Northwest	?
AAMNW1	Sherman	Northwest	1948
AAMNW2	Lubbock	Northwest	1927
AAMNW3	Lubbock	Northwest	1946
AAMS1	Bee	South	1915
AAMS2	Refugio	South	1914
AAFW1	Mitchell	West	1919
AAMW1	Reeves	West	1929
AAME18	Midland	West	1931
AAMW2	Mitchell	West	1924
AAMW3	Taylor	West	1916
EAMW1	Tom Green	West	1926

Numbers are used to combine consultants with the same ethnicity, sex, and physical region. Cultural region refers to the major East/West division investigated in this dissertation. The dividing line between the two cultural areas is based on the settlement patterns and sociohistorical facts discussed in chapter two. Although respondents are predominantly male and African American (n=35), CAACS includes a handful of interviews with females⁴ (African American=2 and European American=2) and White males (n=4) as additional points of comparison for Searles.

Searles's fieldwork involved two generations of speakers (i.e. those born before 1927 and those born after) distributed widely across the state. Consultants were 48 to 89 years old at the time that they were interviewed. Accepting the assumptions inherent in the apparent time construct, the age range of these respondents gives us access to the vernacular both before and after WWII, which Neo-Anglicists argue is a key turning point in the development of AAVE.

The locations of all of the African American CAACS consultants are given in Figure 3.2. In many cases, more than one speaker is represented by a point on the map. The cowboys hail from all six of the geographic subregions identified by Atwood (1962) in his vocabulary survey of Texas dialect. Atwood's regional divisions do not directly correspond to the physical geography of the state. East Texas includes all of the Piney Woods Region, the eastern portion of the Post Oak Belt and the southeastern corner of the Gulf Coast Plain including Houston. Central Texas includes most of the Post Oak Belt, the central Gulf Coast Plain, the central Blackland Prairie, and the southeastern section of the Grand Prairie. North Texas includes the northernmost extreme of the Blackland Prairie, most of the Grand Prairie, and the northeastern tip of the Lower Plains. North West Texas includes most of

the Lower Plains and most of the High Plains. West Texas includes all of the Edwards Plateau and the Mountain and Basin Region. And South Texas includes all of the South Texas Plain and the southernmost tips of the Blackland Prairie, the Post Oak Belt, and the Gulf Coast Plains. With interviews from all of the regions, Searles's corpus is well-suited for a comparison of Afro-Texan folk speech.

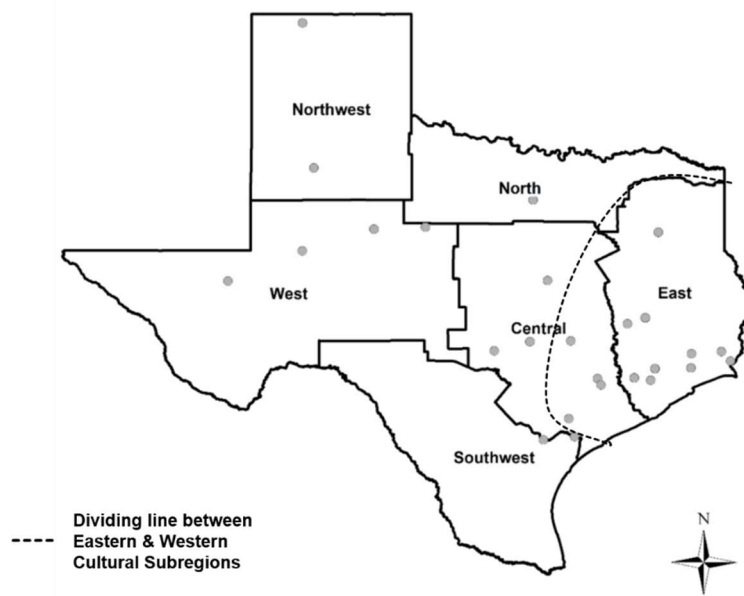


Figure 3.2 Locations of African American CAACS consultants with Atwood's (1962) geographic subregions depicted

Although the corpus contains interviews with cowboys rather than tenant farmers like that of Bailey and Maynor (1985a; 1987; 1989), these two groups are comparable in that they fit with the traditional conception of folk speakers. Both are groups of rural, working-class Afro-Texans with little formal education⁵ and a rootedness in vernacular culture.

Similarly, the contexts of the interviews are comparable to those of Bailey and Maynor in many ways. Both sets of interviews focus on rural life for Black Texans in the early twentieth century, and neither was formatted as a sociolinguistic interview. As such,

they do not include the more careful contexts labeled in Labov's framework (1966 & 1972a) as types C and D contexts. That is, there are no reading passages or word lists. But the interviews are rich indeed in all of the type A contexts that Labov identifies. Searles revealed to me that he felt the speech of the cowboys in the portions of the state I have collectively identified as West Texas sounded less "Black" than the speakers he grew up with in Illinois, those who surrounded him in Georgia (where he made his home), and those whom he had interviewed in East Texas. But when pressed he could not say what features gave him this impression, only that it sounded less "Black" than the speech he heard in East Texas.⁶

Searles opens his interviews with Black cowboys by asking consultants about their early years (i.e., when and where they were born, their family's composition, etc.) and the demographics of their town. From there, he asks his consultants about the community and its churches, schools, and political activity, moving eventually to inquire about specific events in Texas history like the Brownsville Raid of 1906 and race riots in Houston and elsewhere. Searles asks about their recollection of Ku Klux Klan activity and their memories of segregation. After this more general line of questioning, he then moves into a section of the interview that covered notable African American figures including cowboys like Bill Pickett, Matthew "Bones" Hooks, and D.W. "80 John" Wallace. Most consultants were only familiar with Bill Pickett – a rodeo pioneer, founder of The Picket Brothers Bronco Busters and Rough Riders Association, and namesake for the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, which is now in its 36th year. But at least one consultant knew the famed Texas cattleman "80 John" Wallace personally, having owned property in the 1930s that abutted the legend's enormous ranch. After asking about his consultants' familiarity with

important African American figures, Searles then asks about how they were introduced to cowboying, how they were trained, the gear that they used, the clothing they wore, and the general practices of managing livestock or competing in rodeos. He asks about their experience with discrimination and prejudice. And he asks about the games they played, the songs they sang, and their leisure time. He concludes, when appropriate, by asking his consultants about their retirement, what motivated them to stop cowboying if they had retired, and their regrets, if any. Much of the consultants' speech is set in the past tense, but there are frequent refrains that feature speech set in the present, often for the purpose of contrasting the ways of the past with the ways of the present or instructing Searles about how cattle work or training horses is done or the nature of the cattle business in general.

In this dissertation, and in Searles' sample methodology, *cowboy* is used exclusively to designate those who regularly participate in cattle culture rather than so-called "weekend" or "urban" cowboys, who, donning the associated regalia,⁷ emerge seasonally at county fairs and rodeos or on weekends at country-western dance halls. But *cowboy* is also used somewhat broadly here as a cover term for two separate, though not mutually exclusive, livestock-oriented occupations. Those who participate in ranch work occupationally we might call *cowhands*. These include those who own and/or tend cattle on a ranch or a farm to be processed for consumption or sold at auction. And we can include those who breed and/or train horses in this group. Their forerunners include famous Black cattlemen like Daniel "80 John" Wallace and Bose Ikard. Alternatively, there are athletes who, in the trailblazing footsteps of Bill Pickett, participate in amateur or professional rodeos competing in saddle bronc and bareback riding, calf roping, bull riding, and steer dogging among other events.

To the outside observer, the distinction between working and rodeo cowboys may not be meaningful. Indeed, it would be difficult to distinguish the two off the ranch or outside the arena. And it is true that for many of the CAACS consultants the two are not mutually exclusive. At one point or another many *cowhands*, especially in their youth, have competed in rodeos. But several respondents indicate that there is a meaningful difference between working and rodeo cowboys that is based on both the knowledge and the skill sets required for each vocation. Floyd Frank,⁸ cowhand and rodeo cowboy from southeast Texas, underscores this point, referring to rodeo cowboys lacking ranch experience as *drugstore cowboys*. “Right now, you can’t hardly find anybody that knows too much about ranch life. You’d find a lot of rodeo cowboys, you know. But after they leave the rodeo arena, that’s it. Because, see, I give rodeos all the time. [...] They (rodeo cowboys) don’t have the understanding about horses. They’re raised up in town or raised up somewhere they don’t have too much dealing with horses and they’re just afraid of them” (Frank 1991:17-8). The distinction between working and rodeo cowboys extends to equipment and even symbolic resources like costume. A participant from North Texas indicated that, in addition to the gaudy belt buckles worn by rodeo cowboys who have had some measure of competitive success, the cowboy hat itself is an indicator for those in the know. This consultant, who had intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Fort Worth livestock scene, black hats should be exclusively reserved for those who were or had been rodeo cowboys, and that all others should wear white hats. The consultant noted that this nuance is lost on the casual, weekend cowboys, who know nothing of it and often wear black hats because they are fashionable.

Recently, the visible differences between the working and rodeo cowboys have become more pronounced as rodeo sports have begun to merge with other “extreme” sports. It is now common to see younger rodeo cowboys, especially Whites, ditching western cut shirts, cowboy hats, and boots in their casual, everyday costume for t-shirts, sneakers, and flat-brimmed baseball caps from brands like Hurley,⁹ which are more broadly associated with other extreme sports. While it would be interesting to look for stylistic speech differences between cowhands and rodeo cowboys, such a question is outside of the scope of this dissertation. No such analytical distinction was made in Searles’s recruitment of consultants nor has any such distinction been made here.

The CAACS interviews depart from those of Bailey and Maynor in one important way. Like much of the fieldwork that has been conducted in pursuit of answers in the origin and development debate, Bailey and Maynor’s was, so far as we can tell, cross-racial in nature – White fieldworkers in Black communities. Bailey and Maynor are White as is the late Joe Graham – the ethnographer upon whose fieldwork they at least partially depended. Researchers have subsequently found that copula absence in addition to other features can decrease in such contexts – the so-called “cross-racial fieldworker effect” (Rickford & McNair-Knox 1993; Hannah 1997). CAACS interviews, on the other hand, were conducted by Searles alone, an ostensible in-group member not only by virtue of his race but also by virtue of his familiarity with and participation in cowboy culture. With his wranglers, boots, and cowboy hat, he would have looked the part while conducting the interviews. And his familiarity with terms, traditions, practices, and notable figures likewise increased his interpersonal proximity with his interviewees. This does not eliminate the observer’s

paradox, but it does eliminate the variability introduced by a bevy of fieldworkers and, more importantly, obviates some of the unintended impact of a cross-racial context.

3.2 Participants

The consultants selected for the present study are a subset of the larger CAACS sample. The goal was to identify a representative sample for each region – East and West – and to achieve relative balance with respect to age (i.e., those born before and those born after 1927). One of the chief selection criteria was the audio quality of the recording, which is not consistent throughout the corpus owing to the fact that some interviews were conducted in less-than-optimal contexts (e.g. outdoors) while others involve speakers whose vocal quality had diminished with age. Speakers with schooling beyond the twelfth grade were also excluded from the sample as it is assumed post-secondary education might limit the emergence of the vernacular, especially in the presence of a professor and researcher. For this reason, no females were included in the sample considered here. They are underrepresented in CAACS, and all of those who were interviewed by Searles had post-secondary education.

One additional exclusion criterion related to those who were located in South Texas (n=2). The sociohistorical situation of South Texas is quite different than that of East and West Texas, given the considerable and sustained influence of Mexican culture and the Spanish language. As such, this region is outside the scope of this investigation, and these two speakers are excluded from the present study.

Details about the sixteen participants who were selected are shown in Table 3.2 below. The sample is balanced in terms of generational grouping and cultural subregion (i.e., East and West Texas). The West Texas speakers are on average six years younger

than the East Texas speakers. When those born in 1927 or earlier are grouped separately, the East Texas group is on average three and a half years older than the West Texas group. And the East Texas group is on average eight and a half years older than the West Texas group when considering only those born after 1927.

Table 3.2 Speakers selected for the present study (n=16)

Consultant ID	County	Cultural Subregion	Birth Year	Generational Group
AAME1	Smith	East	1912	Up to 1927
AAME12	Fort Bend	East	1915	Up to 1927
AAMC6	Colorado	East	1916	Up to 1927
AAME10	Jefferson	East	1918	Up to 1927
AAME9	Liberty	East	1930	After 1927
AAME18	Marion?	East	1931	After 1927
AAME17	Chambers	East	1932	After 1927
AAMC7	Colorado	East	1937	After 1927
AAMC1	McLennan	West	1908	Up to 1927
AAMW3	Taylor	West	1916	Up to 1927
AAMW2	Mitchell	West	1924	Up to 1927
AAMNW2	Lubbock	West	1927	Up to 1927
AAMC5	Lee	West	1930	After 1927
AAMC2	Blanco	West	1940	After 1927
AAMNW3	Lubbock	West	1946	After 1927
AAMNW1	Sherman	West	1948	After 1927

3.3 Transcription and coding

Searles' original interviews were first digitized by Sam Houston State University to be made available to historians, ethnographers, linguists, and interested laymen. The recordings selected for this dissertation were then transcribed by me with the goal of producing a searchable finding aid for general use rather than a narrow transcription for use by a linguist (Appendix B). These and all future transcriptions will ultimately accompany the digitized audio when it is made available to the public.

With respect to the coding, I listened to each sample at least twice to confirm copula form. Occasionally, if I was unsure whether a copula was contracted or absent, I double-

checked my impressions against those of an auditor experienced in phonetic transcription and analysis.¹⁰ In these cases, the auditor typically agreed with my initial impression, but where consensus could not be reached, the token was excluded from analysis.

In this dissertation, two types of predictors are coded and modeled: internal linguistic variables and external demographic variables. Many of the linguistic variables are discussed at length in chapter two, but they are summarized for convenience in Table 3.3 below. The internal, linguistic variables include subject type (NP or Pro), subject person/number (1st singular, plural & 2nd singular, and 3rd singular), predicate type (Future *going to*, V+*ing*, AdjP, LocP, NP), preceding phonological segment (Vowel or Consonant), and following segment (Vowel or Consonant). In the subject type factor group, the Pro category is composed only of personal pronouns. Other pronouns (e.g. existential *there* or *they*) were included with NPs with the exception of *WIT* subjects (i.e., *what*, *it*, and *that*). Past participles were included in the factor level for AdjPs, and statives were not subdivided from non-statives (cf. Cukor-Avila 1999, 2001).

Table 3.3 Summary of all internal and external variables used in this study

Internal variables	External variables
Subject type (NP or Pro)	Age
Subject person/number	Generational grouping
Predicate type	Cultural subregion
Preceding phonological segment	
Following phonological segment	

In addition to these linguistic variables, three extralinguistic, demographic variables are modeled. These are the consultant's age, generational grouping (prior to or after 1927), and cultural subregion (East or West). Age is included in the statistical modeling in addition to generational grouping just in case shifts in the nature of copula

absence are detectable at a more granular level between the generations. And cultural subregion is modeled to test whether or not the settlement patterns and sociohistorical contexts described in chapter two have resulted in divergent speech patterns.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Much of the research that utilizes statistical modeling on AAVE copulae relies on some form of multiple logistic regression. The mixed effects modeling used in some parts of the present study is, likewise, a form of multiple logistic regression in that it predicts the outcome of a binomial dependent variable based upon more than one predictor variable. However, mixed modeling has an advantage over other forms of logistic regression because it includes both fixed effects (i.e. variables of primary interest with few levels like subject person or number) and random effects (i.e. variables not of primary interest with many levels like speaker) in the same analysis. As Johnson (2009) explains, the independence of observations is a key assumption that underlies regression analysis, but independence is rarely the case in linguistic studies since external variables like age and region are “properties of speakers, [...] so the true significance of such effects depends on the patterning of speakers, not linguistic tokens” (363).

Because traditional multiple logistic regression treats all variables as fixed effects (i.e. independent), the linguist must decide whether to exclude or include speaker as a variable. Running a regression model for a small group of participants *without* including speaker as a variable can lead to the overestimation of the significance of external variables like age and region, a Type 1 error, while running it *with* speaker as a variable can lead to the underestimation of their significance, a Type 2 error. By way of contrast, the simultaneous modeling of random and fixed effects reduces the likelihood of making a

Type 1 error because it requires a factor's effect to be strong enough to "rise above the inter-speaker variation" (365). Mixed effects modeling is used here because it is more robust with smaller sample sizes and it weighs the significance of other predictors against the degree of variation attributable to inter-speaker differences. That being said, mixed models tend to be more conservative with their results. One is not likely to find that a predictor is significant when it is not but is also more likely to find that a factor is not significant when in fact it is.

¹ These recordings, which are now being transcribed by the present author, have been digitized as part of an ongoing project to make these oral histories available for scholarship and public enrichment.

² At least one interview breaks with this norm – that of Elmer Kelton, who was a prolific author of Western novels. Searles's interest in Kelton stemmed from the author's inclusion of black cowboys in his novels. Kelton produced dozens of books over a 50 year career and passed away in 2009.

³ Some interviews at consultants' homes were conducted outside, but those conducted at livestock auctions occurred in office quarters.

⁴ Female respondents include Mollie Stevenson, Jr. who, with her mother Mollie Stevenson, Sr., is one of only two African American women inducted into both the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame and the National Multicultural Western Heritage Museum. In 1987, she established the American Cowboy Museum in Houston.

⁵ One consultant – a college graduate – is a clear exception.

⁶ For further discussion on "sounding Black" see Weldon (2018).

⁷ This distinction is so significant for one female participant that she refuses to refer to herself as a *cowgirl*, which she associates with women who appropriate western-style dress at dancehalls and county fairs, in favor of the term *cowboy*, which she reserves for those who actually work with livestock in some form.

⁸ Floyd Frank's interview is not included in CAACS owing to the fact that it was not conducted by Searles.

⁹ Brands with similar styles like Hooey have even emerged presumably as an alternative to the Nike-owned brand Hurley.

¹⁰ I am thankful to Valerie Bell Cooper, a gifted speech pathologist experienced with phonological analysis and phonetic transcription for lending her ear.

CHAPTER 4

COPULA ABSENCE IN EAST AND WEST TEXAS AAVE

This chapter addresses the first question of this dissertation (i.e., whether or not East and West Texas are similar with respect to rates and constraints on copula absence). The goal is to investigate the homogeneity of the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) of Texas. Section 4.1 discusses the motivation behind considering 3rd singular and plural & 2nd person singular subjects in the same analysis as opposed to modeling each separately. Section 4.2 investigates the extent of East and West Texas AAVes' surface similarity by comparing each region vis-à-vis the frequency of copula absence. This section reports rates calculated two ways (both with and without *WIT* and 1st singular subjects) in order to facilitate comparison to previous studies, but it also considers the rather consequential effects of counting or not-counting so-called *WIT* tokens. Section 4.3 addresses the second question – that of their deep structure similarity – with a comparison of the constraints on copula absence for each region to test for structural homogeneity between East and West Texas AAVE. The goal of the analyses in sections 4.2 and 4.3 is to establish whether or not any linguistic justification for separating the two regions can be added to the sociohistorical evidence discussed in chapter two and ultimately whether or not the AAVes of Texas are products of differential development. Finally, section 4.4 concludes the chapter with a summary and discussion of the findings.

4.1 Rationale for combining *is* and *are*

In this chapter, my analyses of null copula in East and West Texas do not differentiate between so-called *is* and *are* contexts. There are several motivations for this. First, null copula occurs at non-negligible rates in both contexts. The same cannot be said for absence in *am* environments or with *WIT* subjects in most varieties of AAVE. Moreover, the constraints on absence in *is* and *are* environments, while not identical, are comparable (Rickford et al. 1991). And a number of researchers deal with the two together rather than separately (inter alia Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Hannah 1997; Singler 1991; Wolfram 1969; Winford 1992). One of the key studies involving Texas AAVE took this very approach (Bailey and Maynor 1985a, 1985b, 1987; also Bailey 1987), so this too is strong motivation for me to do the same.

Granted, absence with 3rd person singular subjects is somewhat less frequent than absence with plural & 2nd person subjects. But separating *is* environments from *are* environments is not as simple as creating factor levels for 3rd person singular and plural & 2nd person subjects. As Brewer (1973:9) notes, in Earlier AAVE plural subjects feature the widest variety of copulae including *am*, full and contracted *is*, and null alongside full and contracted *are* and, as such, Earlier AAVE lacks subject concord in these environments. Similarly, the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech (CAACS) data frequently exhibit non-concord with plural subjects (example 1) with *is* frequently appearing in so-called *are* environments. In fact, *are* (contracted and full) rarely occurs in 3rd person plural environments. Instead, null and full and contracted *is* predominate. Compared to Earlier Texas AAVE, the AAVE analyzed here differs only with respect to *am*, which is restricted to 1st person singular subjects. The fact that Brewer finds such high rates of non-concord

indicate that copula selection did not depend on subject person/number in Earlier AAVE. And, thus, separating *are* environments from *is* environments is not as simple as partitioning 3rd singular subjects separately from plural & 2nd person subjects, which is the typical approach.

- (1) He got a couple of sons now in Houston. They’s ministers [Michael Searles: Yes sir.]. Good ministers too. (AAMC6)

So an additional reason to model both *is* and *are* environments together stems from the nature of concord, or the lack thereof, in East and West Texas AAVE. As Table 4.1 indicates, while 3rd singular subjects occur with *is*, ‘*s*, and null copula exclusively, plural & 2nd person subjects occur with all forms of the copula except *am* and contracted ‘*m*.

Table 4.1 Copula forms by subject person/number

	1 st singular	Plural & 2 nd singular	3 rd singular
‘ <i>m</i>	93 (96.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>are</i>	0 (0%)	9 (5.8%)	0 (0%)
‘ <i>r</i>	0 (0%)	21 (13.6%)	0 (0%)
<i>is</i>	0 (0%)	11 (7.1%)	89 (10.4%)
‘ <i>s</i>	0 (0%)	35 (22.7%)	696 (82.0%)
null	3 (3.1%)	78 (50.6%)	63 (7.4%)

Undoubtedly, the shape of the copula itself might contribute to the higher rates of copula absence observed with plural & 2nd person subjects when compared to 3rd singular subjects since /r/-lessness, in nonrhotic varieties, creates a context that is favorable to copula absence. After all, “copula absence among European Americans tends to be restricted to *are*, and to be found only in regions that are largely nonrhotic (Wolfram 1974a; Feagin 1979; Bailey and Maynor 1985b)” (Wolfram & Thomas 2002). But /r/-lessness is

probably not the only factor that contributes to higher rates of absence in so-called *are* environments. Subject-based alternatives for verbal marking (i.e., systems that are not based on subject-verb concord) that operated in Earlier AAVE (Montgomery, Fuller, & DeMarse 1993) might very well have contributed to higher rates of absence in these contexts (Bailey, Maynor, & Cukor-Avila 1989). In chapter six, I conduct a more granular analysis that teases apart *are* contexts, separating 3rd person plural environments from 2nd person environments to explore the impact of subject type constraints on the distribution of copula absence.

4.2 Surface comparison of East and West Texas AAVE

Excluding the contexts noted in chapter two (e.g. negative environments, inversion, tag questions, etc.), the total number of present tense affirmative copula tokens identified in the CAACS data is 1098 including *WIT* subjects (n=595). 144 of these feature null copula, an overall rate of 13.1%, which is low when compared to the 17.9% reported by Bailey and Maynor (1987) for an East Texas community. Note, however, that this rate includes both the East and West Texas speakers. Table 4.2 shows the rates for each. Thus, there is an apparent difference between East Texas AAVE and West with respect to the overall frequency of absence. The rate of absence in East Texas AAVE more closely approximates Bailey and Maynor's sample of Afro-Texan folk speakers (1985a, 1987). The West Texas sample, however, uses copula absence somewhat less than East. To determine whether this difference reaches the threshold of statistical significance, a chi-square test was used. The low p-value (0.0088) indicates that the observed differences are not likely to be the result of chance. But thus far we have included *WIT* tokens – a decision that , as noted in chapter

three, is methodologically problematic because *WIT* subjects almost always feature contracted *is* making their inclusion in an analysis of variation dubious.

Table 4.2. Copula absence/presence by region, *WIT* and 1st person singular tokens included with chi-square statistic

	West	East	Total
Absence	57 (10.4%)	87 (15.8%)	144 (13.1%)
Presence	493 (89.6%)	461 (84.4%)	954 (86.9%)
Total	550	548	1098

$\chi^2 = 6.844$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 0.008894$

As noted above, in the CAACS data, approximately half of all instances of present tense copula occur with *WIT* subjects ($n=595/1098$). Thus, their impact on a quantitative study is substantial, especially if they are counted among the other 3rd person singular subjects. While \emptyset copula with *WIT* tokens has been documented in rural South Carolina and Gullah (Weldon 1998:156, 2003a:53) as well as in some Caribbean English Creoles, it is uncommon in most varieties of AAVE. But, though half of the CAACS participants use null copula with *WIT* subjects at least once, copula absence in these contexts is rare overall, occurring only 2.6% ($n=16/595$) of the time. All instances are shown below in 2-17. The reader will note that most cases of null copula occur with *that* while a handful occur with *it*. Null copula with *that* is found in both East and West Texas AAVE in the speech of both generational groupings whereas all instances of null copula with *it* are found only among the oldest speakers of East Texas AAVE.

East Texas

- (2) Well, it \emptyset just, it \emptyset just something that uh, I just love stock. (AAME1)
- (3) That \emptyset the one I go to over there. (AAME12)
- (4) That \emptyset the way, that's the way it was. (AAME12)
- (5) That \emptyset the reason she's up there at, at River Oaks. (AAMC6)
- (6) That \emptyset just how smart they is. (AAME10)
- (7) That \emptyset the church. (AAME10)

- (8) It Ø different one. (AAME10)
 (9) It Ø just certain thing you can do right now. (AAME10)
 (10) That Ø my son right there. (AAME9)
 (11) That Ø the cheapest thing to buy. (AAME9)

West Texas

- (12) That Ø the name of the hotel. (AAMC1)
 (13) That Ø where we went to church all the time. (AAMW3)
 (14) Yeah, I heard them talking about it, and uh lot of these, you know, uh people that Ø in town that they knowed. (AAMW3)
 (15) That Ø the way we got some Black papers. (AAMW2)
 (16) That Ø four oh nine. (AAMC5)
 (17) That Ø the way this horse did. (AAMC2)

Thus, in this corpus *WIT* subjects occur with an overt copula at a near categorical rate (n=579/595, 97.3%), just as Blake (1997) and others have reported. As Blake indicates, this alone warrants their exclusion from an analysis of variation. And it is clear that the decision is not inconsequential when their distribution with respect to predicate types is considered.

As Table 4.3 below shows, when the present tense copula is involved 86.1% of all *WIT* subjects occur with NP (n=272) and AdjP (n=132) predicates – true copula environments. LocPs are considerably less common. In studies that include *WIT* tokens, this could contribute to the higher rates of absence in LocP contexts than AdjP contexts given the preference for copula presence with *WIT* subjects.

Table 4.3 *WIT* tokens by predicate type irrespective of absence (n=469) ¹

	NP	LocP	AdjP	V-ing	gonna	Total
<i>it</i>	93 (58.8%)	19 (12.0%)	43 (27.2%)	1 (.6%)	2 (1.2%)	158
<i>that</i>	177 (58.4%)	34 (11.2%)	87 (28.7%)	4 (1.3%)	1 (.3%)	303
<i>what</i>	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)	8
Total	272 (57.9%)	53 (11.3%)	132 (28.1%)	9 (1.9%)	3 (.6%)	469

When included in an analysis of Ø copula, their near categorical preference for an overt copula (i.e. 97.3%), high frequency compared to all other subjects, and common co-occurrence with NPs and AdjPs converge and skew the results toward copula presence in true copula environments. For all of these reasons, *WIT* tokens are excluded from the statistical modeling that follows.

Similar considerations must be weighed for 1st singular contexts as well. Like *WIT* tokens, 1st singular environments almost categorically prefer copula presence. In fact, in the CAACS data these contexts almost always co-occur with contracted *am*, the full form does not occur outside of emphatic, inverted, or negated sentences and other excluded constructions (e.g. in clause final position). As illustrated earlier in Table 4.1, only 3.1% of 1st singular subjects employ a null copula (n=3/96). The remaining 96.8% use *'m*. In the present corpus, however, NP predicates rarely accompany 1st person subjects. As illustrated in Table 4.4, only 8.3% of predicates are NPs (n=8/96). AdjPs, on the other hand, are well-represented at 26% (n=25/96). And auxiliary environments (i.e., *V-ing* and *gonna*) are very frequent at 61.4% (n=59/96). As such, the inclusion of 1st singular subjects in an analysis of variation does not skew the results toward true copula like *WIT* subjects. Nevertheless, their near categorical preference for copula presence warrants their exclusion from an analysis of variation.

Table 4.4 1st singular subjects by predicate type irrespective of copula absence

NP	LocP	AdjP	<i>V-ing</i>	<i>gonna</i>	Total
8 (8.3%)	4 (4.1%)	25 (26%)	40 (41.6%)	19 (19.7%)	96

Given these considerations, the rates of copula variability in East and West Texas were rerun excluding *WIT* and 1st singular subjects, and absence remains more frequent in

the former than the latter as Table 4.5 indicates. And another run of the chi-square test on these data again indicates a relationship between region (i.e., East or West) and copula absence. As Figure 4.2 below reports, copula absence is more frequent in East Texas AAVE than West ($p = .01798$).

Table 4.5. Copula absence/presence by region, *WIT* and 1st person singular tokens excluded with chi-square statistic

	West	East	Total
Absence	47 (24.2%)	71 (35.6%)	118 (30%)
Presence	147 (75.7%)	128 (64.3%)	275 (70%)
Total	194	199	393

$X^2 = 5.5985$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 0.01798$

East and West Texas also appear distinct in another way. Tables 4.6 and 4.7 report the rates as well as results of chi-square tests comparing generational groupings for each area. “Up to 1927” and “After 1927” refer to the birth years of CAACS consultants. There appears to be a generational difference in the rates of copula absence in East Texas that does not obtain in West Texas. In the former, those born after 1927 use copula absence at a higher rate than those born before. The exact opposite is true in the latter. But the difference only meets the standard for statistical significance for East Texas.

Tables 4.6 & 4.7 Copula absence/presence by generational grouping in East and West Texas with chi-square statistics for each

East Texas AAVE			West Texas AAVE		
	Up to 1927	After 1927		Up to 1927	After 1927
Absence	18 (25%)	53 (41.7%)	Absence	17 (32%)	30 (21.2%)
Presence	54 (75%)	74 (58.2%)	Presence	36 (67.9%)	111 (78.7%)

$X^2 = 4.9003$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 0.02685$

$X^2 = 1.8941$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 0.1687$

It would appear, then, that a generational difference holds for East Texas but not West Texas. I will return to these regional and generational differences later. For now, we

will take them at face value and probe the deep structure differences that may underlie the superficial, quantitative differences that have been identified thus far.

4.3 Deep structure comparison of East and West Texas AAVE

Based on the superficial, quantitative difference between the regions, copula presence has been modeled separately for East and West Texas using mixed modeling in order to test if qualitative, structural differences accompany the observed quantitative difference in Ø copula use. In this analysis, it is assumed that “if a variable phenomenon is conditioned by the same factors, which in turn are ranked in the same order across varieties, this will be evidence that they share a single underlying grammar” (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991), and that the varieties being compared are structurally consistent with respect to the variable in question – in this case the copula.

For both East and West Texas AAVE, the linguistic environments that consistently returned statistically significant results in previous studies (e.g. the predicate) – have been fit to the model first. Factors that were not statistically significant were then removed from the model. More controversial factors (e.g. the possible interaction between PrePhon [i.e., preceding phonological context] and SubType [i.e., pronoun versus NP]) were added later, and again, insignificant factors were removed. This process was repeated until a model with only significant factors remained.

Along the way, the model was checked for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor, which quantifies the degree to which two or more predictor variables are linearly related. For example, when we model an interaction for PrePhon and PerNum (i.e., subject person/number), we introduce multicollinearity into the model because absence rates are higher with plural & 2nd person subjects, which are often pronominal and end in

a vowel (e.g. you, we, they). Thus, if absence is more likely with plural & 2nd person subjects which are frequently pronouns ending in a vowel that immediately precedes the copula, multicollinearity becomes an issue. A test of the variable inflation factor will identify multicollinearity, but to resolve this, one needs a test of variable importance to determine which factors (i.e., the preceding segment, the subject person/number, or the interaction of the two) are primarily influencing the outcome variable – in this case copula absence. When multicollinearity was detected via the variable inflation factor, I decided which factors to exclude from the model based on a test of variable importance, keeping the factors that had the greatest influence on the dependent variable and tossing those that caused multicollinearity and had a weaker influence.

In what follows, I present a summary of the East and West Texas models of copula absence and an analysis of significant predictors. The ranking of significant factors cannot be extracted directly from the mixed model itself, nor is it self-evident in the descriptive statistics that are often cited as evidence of “subject control” or “predicate control.” To establish the rank ordering of linguistic constraints in the present study, I used a random forest approach that allowed me to perform a variable importance test that orders the significant factors by the size of their effect on the outcome variable. Not only did this allow me to resolve issues of multicollinearity as described above, but it also enabled me to rank the linguistic variables by the size of their effect and to make statistically supported conclusions about what truly “controls” copula absence. Furthermore, it facilitated a side-by-side comparison of the two regions based on the rank ordering of linguistic constraints. Recall that the ranking of significant factors is assumed to reveal the underlying structure and, as such, will show 1) whether AAVE in Texas exhibits subject or predicate control

and 2) whether or not East and West Texas AAVE are structurally uniform (i.e., whether or not they share the same underlying system) in spite of the superficial differences identified above. I am not aware of any quantitative study of copula absence that has used this approach to rank linguistic constraints on copula absence, though studies have tossed around the notion of subject and predicate control based purely on descriptive statistics (e.g. Bailey & Maynor 1987).

East Texas AAVE

An initial run of the model with independent variables Predicate and SubType indicated that both were significant factors for East Texas AAVE. A random intercept for Participant|Predicate was also initially modeled under the assumption that predicate may not have the same effect for every speaker in the corpus (i.e., the ranking of predicates by propensity for absence might be subject to interspeaker variation). This interaction was not flagged as significant, nor did an ANOVA test of models with and without this intercept bear this assumption out. That is, the model with a random intercept for Participant|Predicate was no better at explaining variation in copula absence than the model without it. Consequently, the former model was scrapped and the latter model used instead.

When PerNum was added to the model, this factor returned a statistically significant result, but SubType dropped out as a significant factor. As such, SubType was dropped from the model and PerNum retained. Subsequently, PrePhon and PostPhon (i.e., following segment) were added, but neither returned a significant effect. Nor did their inclusion affect the significance of Predicate and PerNum. Thus, both independent variables for phonological factors were tossed from the model. And the final variable that was input was

the interaction between PrePhon*SubType, which yielded no significant effect and, as such, was removed.

To the contrary, a test for an interaction between PerNum*PrePhon did render a significant effect as did the independent variable PrePhon when this interaction was included in the model. But what to make of this? As Table 4.8 indicates, there is evidence of phonological conditioning in that absence is correlated to a preceding vowel ($p = 3.531e-05$). And as Table 4.9 shows, plural & 2nd person subjects are more likely to end in a vowel than 3rd singular subjects. The high rate of plural & 2nd person subjects ending with a vowel is the result of the high frequency of pronominal subjects in these person/number contexts (i.e., *we*, *they*, and *you*) compared with 3rd singular contexts (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.8 Copula absence/presence by preceding phonological segment for East Texas AAVE

	Consonant	Vowel
Absence	16 (18.8%)	55 (48.2%)
Presence	69 (81.1%)	59 (51.7%)
$X^2 = 17.108$, $df = 1$, $p\text{-value} = 3.531e-05$		

For this reason, the interaction between PerNum*PrePhon returns as a significant effect. As such, a test for the variance inflation factor was performed on the model to check for multicollinearity and ensure the accuracy of estimates for individual predictors.

Table 4.9. Phonological segment types preceding the copula by subject person/number for East Texas AAVE

	Consonant	Vowel
2&p	17 (22%)	60 (77.9%)
3s	68 (55.7%)	54 (44.2%)

Table 4.10. Subject types by subject person/number for East Texas AAVE

	NP	Pro
2&p	11 (14.2%)	66 (85.7%)
3s	49 (40.1%)	73 (59.8%)

Opinions vary about what counts for a high variance inflation value when it falls between 2.5 and 10, but the values that we find in Table 4.11 undoubtedly justify the preceding investigation as there is a high degree of multicollinearity between PerNum*PrePhon, PrePhon, and PerNum. Dropping the interaction between PerNum and PrePhon resolves the issue of multicollinearity (see Table 4.12) without compromising much of the predictive value of the mixed model. As such, this interaction was removed.

Table 4.11. Variance inflation factor scores for remaining factors in the mixed model for East Texas AAVE, interaction of PrePhon*PerNum included

	GVIF	Df	$GVIF^{(1/2*Df)}$
Predicate	1.714686	4	1.069727
PrePhon	6.252468	1	2.500493
PerNum	6.381315	1	2.526126
PrePhon*PerNum	6.664536	1	2.581576

To understand the relative importance of linguistic constraints (i.e., what “controls” copula absence), I ran a test of variable importance for East Texas based on a random forest approach. This test was run only for the factors identified as significant at some point during the construction of the mixed model (i.e., Predicate, PrePhon, PerNum, and SubType) even if they were ultimately dropped from the analysis for failing to return a statistically significant effect when other factors were added (e.g. SubType).

Table 4.12. Variance inflation factor scores for remaining factors in the mixed model for East Texas AAVE, interaction of PrePhon*PerNum excluded

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^(1/2*Df)
Predicate	1.268846	4	1.030211
PrePhon	1.224581	1	1.106608
PerNum	1.136634	1	1.066131

The results for the variable importance test are shown in Table 4.13 below. The larger the output for each factor, the more important it is for obtaining an accurate prediction of copula absence. The effects for PerNum and SubType are weak overall. Thus, subject related categories were dropped from the model.

Table 4.13. Variable importance of significant factors for East Texas AAVE

	Variable Importance
Predicate	7.140337
PrePhon	2.647195
SubType	1.430936
PerNum	1.403650

The resulting mixed model, which includes only statistically significant predictors of absence, is shown in Figure 4.1 below. The random intercept for participant is not significant (variance = .0566). That is, individual speakers do not deviate much from the group as a whole with respect to copula absence. The model indicates that the effects we observe for Predicate and PrePhon are not the result of chance. Those for Predicate show significantly more absence in AdjP, V-ing, and *gonna* contexts, and those for PrePhon show significantly more absence in post-vocalic contexts. And we know from the test of

variable importance facilitated by random forest modeling (Table 4.13) that Predicate is far and away the most important linguistic constraint on absence.

Random effects:

Groups	Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
Participant	(Intercept)	0.0566	0.2379

Number of obs: 192, groups: Participant, 8

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)	
(Intercept)	2.1279	0.4160	5.115	3.14e-07	***
Predicateloc	-0.0245	0.6008	-0.041	0.96747	
Predicateadj	-1.0719	0.4704	-2.279	0.02269	*
PredicateV-ing	-1.7491	0.5429	-3.222	0.00127	**
Predicategonna	-2.7427	0.6719	-4.082	4.46e-05	***
PrePhonv	-1.0400	0.4045	-2.571	0.01013	*

Figure 4.1. Mixed model of copula absence in East Texas AAVE

The rates of copula presence and absence by predicate type for East Texas are shown in Figure 4.2 below. These are typical of copula studies in terms of the cline they produce.

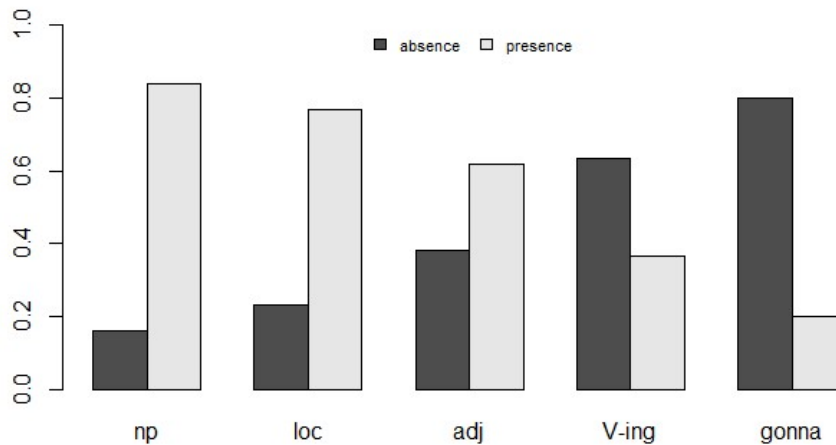


Figure 4.2. Percentage copula absence by predicate type for East Texas AAVE

The rate of copula absence is highest with *gonna* (80%) followed by *V-ing* (63.3%), AdjPs (38.2%), LocPs (23%), and finally NPs (15.9%). The ranking of AdjPs above LocPs with

respect to absence locates the underlying structure of East Texas AAVE alongside many other varieties of AAVE (especially urban lects) and basilectal creole varieties.

To get a better sense of the factor levels responsible for correlation between predicate type and copula absence, a Tukey test was conducted for side-by-side comparison. The results are shown below in Figure 4.3 with significant contrasts indicated. Note that all significant contrasts obtain between auxiliary and true copula environments with copula absence favored in the former and presence favored in the latter (c.f. Figure 4.4).

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
loc - np == 0	-0.0245	0.6008	-0.041	1.0000
adj - np == 0	-1.0719	0.4704	-2.279	0.1479
V-ing - np == 0	-1.7491	0.5429	-3.222	0.0107 *
gonna - np == 0	-2.7427	0.6719	-4.082	<0.001 ***
adj - loc == 0	-1.0474	0.5834	-1.795	0.3693
V-ing - loc == 0	-1.7246	0.6154	-2.803	0.0392 *
gonna - loc == 0	-2.7182	0.7556	-3.598	0.0030 **
V-ing - adj == 0	-0.6772	0.5146	-1.316	0.6754
gonna - adj == 0	-1.6708	0.6709	-2.491	0.0901 .
gonna - V-ing == 0	-0.9936	0.7093	-1.401	0.6209

Figure 4.3. Tukey-type, side-by-side comparison of predicate types for East Texas AAVE

As the test of variable importance indicates, in East Texas AAVE the internal linguistic constraints that condition copula absence can be ranked as predicate > PrePhon. As such, the predicate controls copula absence with auxiliary environments favoring null copula, but there is a secondary effect for the preceding phonological segment with preceding vowel favoring null. Neither subject type nor subject person/number return a high value in the test for variable importance. Thus, East Texas AAVE is characterized by predicate rather than subject control of copula absence with preceding phonological environment a distant, secondary constraint.

West Texas AAVE

The analytical procedure for West Texas AAVE proceeded very much like that for East Texas AAVE. Modeling began with linguistic variables that commonly emerge as significant in previous studies, and variables that emerge less frequently in previous studies were added during subsequent iterations. Along the way, factors that did not meet the threshold of statistical significance were removed, and, when appropriate, variance inflation tests for multicollinearity were performed. As in the modeling process for East Texas AAVE, a test of variable inflation revealed some multicollinearity with PerNum, PrePhon, and the interaction between PerNum*PrePhon though not quite as extreme. The reasons for this were similar to East Texas; plural & 2nd person subjects end in a vowel more frequently than 3rd singular subjects, and a preceding vowel favors absence. Nevertheless, just as with East Texas, the interaction was dropped to resolve the issue of multicollinearity.

A key point of departure between the two varieties emerged upon a test of variable importance, which was conducted to determine the rank order of significant effects (i.e., what linguistic factor controls copula absence). As Table 4.14 shows, West Texas AAVE is comparable to East Texas AAVE with respect to the predicate's dominance over other linguistic factors in controlling copula absence. But for West Texas, subject person/number outranks preceding phonological segment in its influence on copula absence, whereas subject factors are not significant determinants for East Texas.

The summary for the West Texas model is shown in Figure 4.4. The results are nearly identical to those for East Texas save for the significance of PerNum. Like the model

for East Texas AAVE, that for West Texas also flags the predicate and the preceding phonological context as significant.

Table 4.14. Variable importance of significant factors for West Texas AAVE

	Variable Importance
Predicate	11.637390
PerNum	7.380666
PrePhon	4.890847
SubType	1.173855

Random effects:

Groups	Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
Participant	(Intercept)	0.5007	0.7076

Number of obs: 184, groups: Participant, 8

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)	
(Intercept)	1.4312	0.5747	2.491	0.01275	*
Predicateloc	-0.4151	0.7323	-0.567	0.57078	
Predicateadj	-0.7780	0.5322	-1.462	0.14379	
PredicateV-ing	-0.9756	0.6600	-1.478	0.13940	
Predicategonna	-4.3282	1.1716	-3.694	0.00022	***
PerNum3s	1.4368	0.4804	2.991	0.00278	**
PrePhonv	-1.2982	0.4619	-2.811	0.00495	**

Figure 4.4. Mixed model of copula absence in West Texas AAVE

To get a clearer picture of what predicate control means in West Texas AAVE, the rates of copula presence and absence by predicate type are given in Figure 4.5. Again, West Texas AAVE is identical to East Texas AAVE relative to the cline of predicates ordered by their preference for null copula – *gonna* > *V-ing* > *AdjP* > *LocP* > *NP*. Once again, absence is more likely in auxiliary environments than true copula environments, and *AdjPs* are more likely than *LocPs* to feature the zero form. Not surprisingly given the mixed model for West Texas, a side-by-side comparison of predicate types, shown in Figure 4.6 below,

reveals that the high rates of copula absence with *gonna* are responsible for all of the statistically significant contrasts. Compared against NPs, LocPs, AdjPs, and V-ing, copula absence is statistically more likely to accompany future *gonna*.

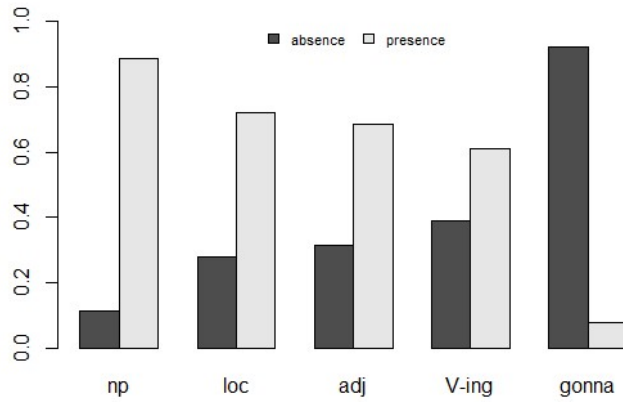


Figure 4.5. Percentage copula absence by predicate type for West Texas AAVE

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
loc - np == 0	-0.4151	0.7323	-0.567	0.97802
adj - np == 0	-0.7780	0.5322	-1.462	0.56796
V-ing - np == 0	-0.9756	0.6600	-1.478	0.55715
gonna - np == 0	-4.3282	1.1716	-3.694	0.00184 **
adj - loc == 0	-0.3629	0.7428	-0.489	0.98738
V-ing - loc == 0	-0.5605	0.8525	-0.657	0.96231
gonna - loc == 0	-3.9131	1.3099	-2.987	0.02127 *
V-ing - adj == 0	-0.1976	0.6748	-0.293	0.99825
gonna - adj == 0	-3.5502	1.1948	-2.971	0.02235 *
gonna - V-ing == 0	-3.3526	1.2475	-2.687	0.05042 .

Figure 4.6. Tukey-type, side-by-side comparison of predicate types for West Texas AAVE

Thus, West Texas AAVE is very similar to East Texas AAVE. Both exhibit predicate control of copula absence with absence favored in auxiliary environments and presence favored in true copula environments. And the cline of predicate preference is identical for each region. Additionally, the preceding phonological segment is significant for prediction of copula absence in both varieties with absence favored after a vowel. The two differ only with respect to second tier effects; West Texas AAVE shows some

sensitivity to subject person/number that East Texas AAVE does not. The significance of these results is discussed below.

4.4 Preliminary discussion of comparative modeling for East and West Texas

Thus far, the analysis in this chapter has once again revealed that the inclusion of *WIT* tokens does not have a negligible impact on studies of copula absence. In CAACS, *WIT* subjects almost categorically co-occur with an overt copula; and, as the counts in Table 4.3 show, these subjects are numerous (i.e. more than half the total sample) and prefer true copula environments. Thus, including these tokens skews the results toward copula presence in true copula environments. Significantly, though, with or without them, West Texas is more like co-territorial White varieties than East, at least superficially with respect to the overall frequency of absence.

Notably, East and West Texas AAVE are distinguished in the rate of copula absence as the chi-square tests summarized in Tables 4.2 (with *WIT* and 1st singular subjects) and 4.5 (without *WIT* and 1st singular subjects) revealed. When the rates of absence for the two groups are compared, those for West Texas AAVE are significantly lower than those for East, which more closely approximate Bailey and Maynor's (1987) East Texas community in the Brazos Valley, where the proportions of African Americans have remained high since the early nineteenth century. But the devil is in the details. While the overall rates of absence in East Texas are comparable to those reported by Bailey and Maynor (1987), there are considerable differences when specific subject person/number contexts are compared. Whereas the East Texas AAVE reported on here returns rates of 3%, 20.4%, and 62.1% for 1st singular, 3rd singular, and plural & 2nd person subjects respectively, Bailey and Maynor (1987) reports 1%, 6%, and 58% (452). Thus, in the

contexts where co-territorial White vernaculars feature absence (i.e., plural & 2nd person), the rates of absence in Bailey and Maynor's data are comparable to the rates of absence in my sample. But in the contexts where co-territorial White vernaculars feature considerably less absence (i.e., 1st singular and 3rd singular), the rates of absence in Bailey and Maynor's data are quite a bit lower than those in my sample. Note that the same does not obtain for Bailey and Maynor's adolescent sample (3rd singular absence = 15%), which was interviewed in both individual and peer group settings. Given that the key difference between their interview contexts and those of the present study is the race of the fieldworker, it would appear in this instance that the significance of cross-racial fieldworker effect, which has been documented elsewhere (see e.g., Rickford & McNair-Knox 1993) is not negligible. I think that it is quite possible that absence in 3rd singular contexts (and perhaps 1st singular also) is subject to the same kind of style-shifting observed by Winford for Trinidadian Creole in individual versus group interview settings (1992:42). Note that the comparable rates Bailey and Maynor (1987) observe for White and Black vernaculars in the Brazos Valley are interpreted as strong evidence of more recent divergence of the latter from the former. If in fact the low rates they find in 3rd singular environments are a reflex of style-shifting triggered by the cross-racial nature of their fieldwork, this is a considerable blow to their interpretation.

While the rate of copula absence in East Texas is similar to that which Bailey and Maynor documented in their Brazos Valley study, the present study reveals that copula absence was undoubtedly controlled by the predicate rather than the subject in early twentieth century Texas AAVE. While East and West Texas appear distinct when it comes to the rate of copula absence, mixed modeling revealed that both groups share so-called

“predicate control.” In both samples, predicate type accounts for more of the variation than any other single factor. And the ranking of predicates is consistent in both varieties.

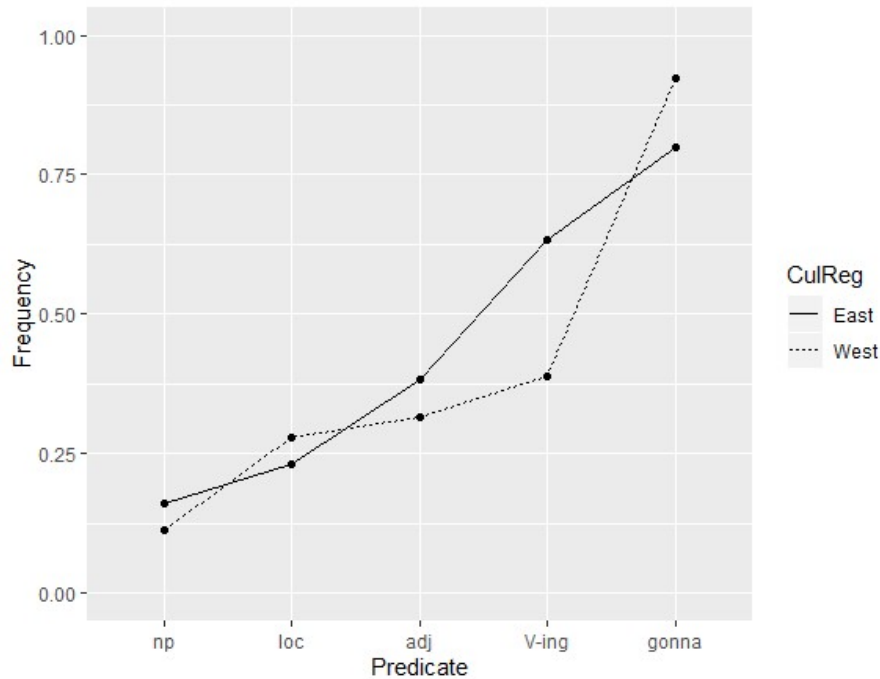


Figure 4.7. Percentage copula absence by predicate type for East and West Texas AAVE

As shown in Figure 4.7, copula presence is favored in true copula environments, and copula absence is favored in auxiliary environments, especially with *gonna*, which could be interpreted as evidence of creole origins. Recall that Bickerton (1971) assumes AAVE follows a similar developmental trajectory as Guyanese Creole, which in its initial step of superstrate copulae adoption replaced equative *a* with inflected forms of *be* and in its final step inserted inflected forms of *be* before *gon(na)*, which he interprets as a calque for a West African future marker. As such, the superstrate copulae would be better established with nominal predicates in AAVE than with *gon(na)*, as the Texas data show. Of course, univerbation – the diachronic process by which a word is formed out of a phrase – could also produce *gon(na)* sans copula assuming that this process is more advanced in AAVE than White Non-Standard English. However, comparing the rates of absence in this

context against the similarly high rates found in Earlier AAVE (Kautzsch 2002) and Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora, this simply cannot be. Rather, what we find for East and West Texas AAVE is entirely consistent with Earlier AAVE and creole varieties.

Similarities aside, one qualitative difference in copula use emerged in this analysis. The mixed modeling indicates that the two varieties differ in secondary effects for other linguistic factors, namely an effect for subject person/number in West Texas that does not obtain in East. As I am unaware of any other study that has used variable importance testing on the linguistic factors that condition copula absence in Earlier AAVE, it is impossible to situate this second-tier constraint diachronically. Has it recently been knocked out of a position of primacy by predicate type or is it emerging uniquely in West Texas AAVE? We cannot know at this time. We can only say that there appears to be an additional constraint in West Texas AAVE that is evidently not present in East. This subject constraint would locate West Texas AAVE closer to White varieties, which would fit with the sociohistorical evidence outlined in chapter two.

But this is where a word of caution is in order. When the rates of copula absence by subject person/number are considered (Table 4.15 & Figure 4.8), a similar effect for East Texas AAVE would appear likely if not inevitable. Indeed, the difference between 3rd singular and plural & 2nd singular subjects is much more extreme in East Texas than West, but the mixed model for East Texas does not reflect any person/number constraint on absence. Thus, it is very possible, that the absence of a person/number effect for East Texas may be the result of the type of modeling used.

As Johnson (2009) explains, mixed modeling is preferable in studies with small sample sizes because it is unlikely to result in a Type I error (i.e. finding that a factor is a significant predictor when in fact it is not). However, mixed modeling is more prone to Type II errors (i.e. finding that a factor is not a significant predictor when it is). Increasing the sample size reduces the likelihood of Type II errors and, as such, would very likely reveal that East Texas AAVE shares the same subject person/number constraint as West Texas AAVE, in which case the difference between regions would be merely quantitative (i.e., related to the rates of absence) and not structural (i.e., related to the nature and ordering of the linguistic predictors of absence).

Table 4.15 Copula absence by subject person/number for East and West Texas²

	1s	3s	Plural & 2s
East Texas AAVE	1/44 (2.2%)	25/122 (20.4%)	51/82 (62.1%)
West Texas AAVE	2/52 (3.8%)	24/138 (17.3%)	25/65 (38.4%)

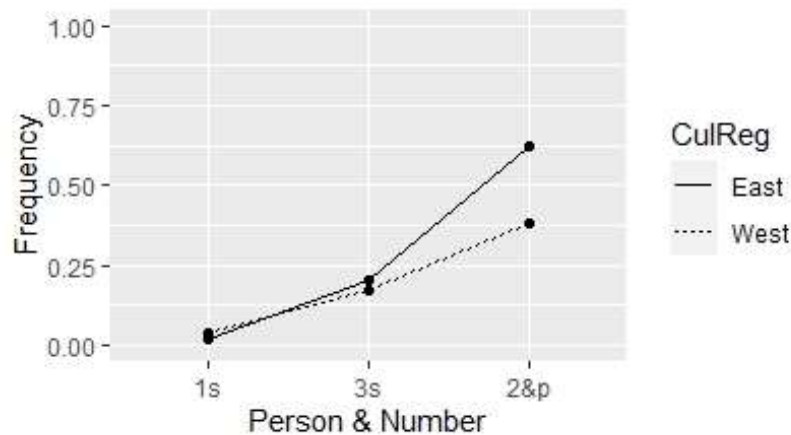


Figure 4.8 Percentage copula absence by subject person/number

4.5 Combined modeling for Texas AAVE

Given the merely superficial differences between the East and West Texas AAVE and their common underlying structure (i.e., predicate control and identical predicate factor level ranking), I prepared a single mixed model with the combined data for both regions in order

to test whether or not region and generational grouping emerged as significant predictors of absence when all other internal linguistic variables are simultaneously considered. The reader will recall that region returned a significant result when the overall rates of absence were considered above (Tables 4.2 & 4.5) as did generational grouping in East Texas (Table 4.7). But neither cultural region nor generational grouping are selected as significant when the internal, linguistic factors are simultaneously modeled. Thus, the difference between East and West Texas AAVE and that between older and younger speakers in East Texas are indeed purely superficial (i.e., associated with proportions of overall absence).

Table 4.16. Variance inflation factor scores for remaining factors in the mixed model for the combined corpus, interaction of PerNum*PrePhon included

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^(1/2*Df)
Predicate	1.297361	4	1.033077
PerNum	3.575761	1	1.890968
PrePhon	3.812810	1	1.952642
PerNum*PrePhon	4.823210	1	2.196181

The mixed model for pan-Texas AAVE, like those for East and West Texas respectively, is no better with a random intercept for Participant|Predicate than without. As such, the simpler model has been retained. As with the separate models, the interaction between PrePhon*SubType is not significant, and that between PrePhon*PerNum is. But once again, a test of the variable inflation factor (shown in Table 4.16) reveals that this addition introduces a high degree of multicollinearity into the model.

Like the separate models for East and West Texas AAVE, this multicollinearity is the result of high proportions of pronominal subjects in plural & 2nd person contexts. Because absence is more common in contexts with a preceding vowel segment and these

pronominal plural & 2nd person subjects end in vowels, collinearity results from modeling all three factors (i.e., PrePhon, PerNum, and PerNum*PrePhon). Here again, the interaction has been tossed to avoid this collinearity, and a second run of the variable inflation factor without the interaction returned more acceptable scores (Table 4.17). The resulting model for the combined corpus (Figure 4.9 below) looks very much like those for East and West Texas AAVE. Predicate, subject person and number, and preceding phonological context are all significant for predicting copula absence/presence.

Table 4.17. Variance inflation factor scores for remaining factors in the mixed model for the combined corpus, interaction of PerNum*PrePhon excluded

	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^(1/2*Df)
Predicate	1.158489	4	1.018560
PerNum	1.065582	1	1.032271
PrePhon	1.088990	1	1.043547

As Table 4.18 below shows, a test of variable importance likewise indicates that the rank order of significant factors in the combined corpus matches that for West Texas AAVE. That is, Predicate is more important than PerNum, and PerNum more important than PrePhon for determining copula absence. And like the separate models, the side-by-side comparison of predicates (Figures 4.10) once again indicates that copula absence is preferred in auxiliary contexts and presence is preferred in true copula contexts. Thus, we find the same rank ordering of predicates for the combined corpus. with the cline of preference for absence being *gonna* (84.8%) > V+ing (54.1%) > AdjP (35.2%) > LocP (25%) > NP (13.2%). This is visualized in figure 4.11 below.

Random effects:

Groups	Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
Participant	(Intercept)	0.1995	0.4467

Number of obs: 376, groups: Participant, 16

Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)	
(Intercept)	1.24267	0.36173	3.435	0.000592	***
Predicateloc	-0.09721	0.47573	-0.204	0.838085	
Predicateadj	-0.76479	0.36082	-2.120	0.034042	*
PredicateV-ing	-1.33006	0.42091	-3.160	0.001578	**
Predicategonna	-3.32772	0.57569	-5.780	7.45e-09	***
PerNum3s	1.39194	0.29024	4.796	1.62e-06	***
PrePhonv	-0.97774	0.30728	-3.182	0.001463	**

Figure 4.9. Mixed model of copula absence/presence for East and West Texas combined

Table 4.18. Variable importance of significant factors for combined corpus

	Variable Importance
Predicate	11.225882
PerNum	7.372774
PrePhon	5.294207
SubType	1.249781

One thing that this chapter has revealed is that when weighed independently from other predictors an external factor may return a statistically significant value (e.g. the difference observed in the chi-square analysis for East and West Texas AAVE, Tables 4.2 & 4.5) without implicating any meaningful deep structural differences. When the whole sample is not subdivided by East and West and cultural subregion is included in the mixed effects modeling, no significant contrast emerges between the two regions. Thus, a chi-square statistic is hardly sufficient for probing significant differences between speech communities, and statistically significant differences observed with this measure should qualify as merely quantitative and superficial if they are unaccompanied by more robust

measures (e.g. statistical and hierarchical modeling) that simultaneously assess the significance of internal and external factors relative to the degree of interspeaker variation.

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
loc - np == 0	-0.09721	0.47573	-0.204	0.9996
adj - np == 0	-0.76479	0.36082	-2.120	0.2040
V-ing - np == 0	-1.33006	0.42091	-3.160	0.0129 *
gonna - np == 0	-3.32772	0.57569	-5.780	<0.001 ***
adj - loc == 0	-0.66758	0.47213	-1.414	0.6088
V-ing - loc == 0	-1.23285	0.51416	-2.398	0.1110
gonna - loc == 0	-3.23051	0.66084	-4.889	<0.001 ***
V-ing - adj == 0	-0.56527	0.41735	-1.354	0.6475
gonna - adj == 0	-2.56293	0.58980	-4.345	<0.001 ***
gonna - V-ing == 0	-1.99766	0.61664	-3.240	0.0101 *

Figure 4.10. Tukey-type, side-by-side comparison of predicate types for East and West Texas combined

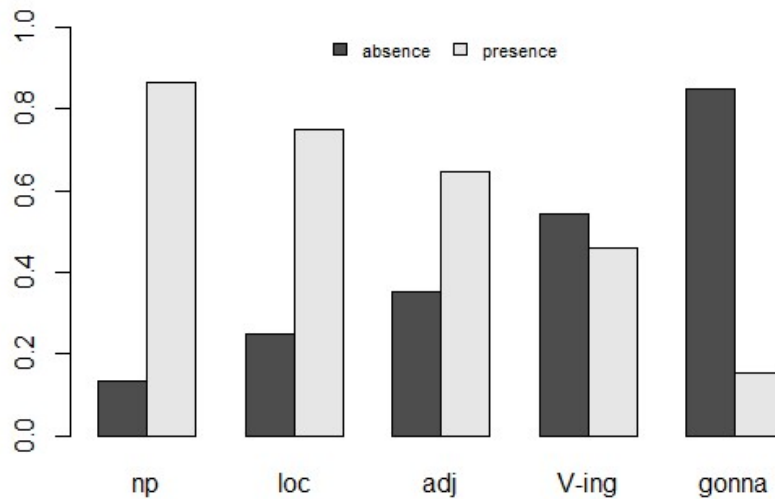


Figure 4.11. Percentage copula absence/presence by predicate type for East and West Texas combined

With respect to the origins and development debate, the present results encourage caution. Taken together with Kautzsch's (2002) findings for nineteenth century and early twentieth century AAVE, it appears that copula absence in Texas retained some of the distinctive regional traits found in Earlier AAVE. Among these is the near categorical presence of the copula with 1st person singular subjects. It is also clear that predicate control

was already established in the first half of the twentieth century in both East and West Texas and could hardly be considered an innovation of urban AAVE (contra Bailey & Maynor 1987). The disparity between East and West Texas with respect to overall rates of absence pushes against the supraregional hypothesis in support of the notion of a degree of differential development with respect to the copula, but structural homogeneity can nevertheless be found in a shared preference for predicate control and in the cline of predicates ranked by their preference for absence. What we see then, are two varieties of Texas AAVE that differ superficially in terms of rates of copula absence but are mostly homogeneous at the deep structure. As such, going forward, the combined corpus will be used for comparison with historical and contemporary varieties relevant to the origins and development debate.

¹ Excludes complementizer phrases and temporal phrases.

² Includes complementizer phrases and temporal phrases.

CHAPTER 5

THE SHAPE OF A SUBSTRATE – YORUBA ENGLISH

Chapter four took up the issue of African American Vernacular English's (AAVE's) structural homogeneity with respect to copula absence. The key questions were whether or not East and West Texas AAVE are similar at their surface structures (i.e., via comparable rates of zero copula across a variety of linguistic predictors) and whether or not they were similar at their deep structures (i.e., via the conditioning of absence as a result of a variety of linguistic predictors). Although the overall rates and even a Chi-square test revealed that the two were dissimilar on their surface, statistical and hierarchical models independently confirmed similar patterns of copula conditioning at their deep structures. The remaining question is how these findings inform the origins and development debate – a question whose answer requires one to weigh many different types of evidence.

Rickford (1997:316; also 1998 and 2015:36) describes seven types of evidence relevant to the Creolist Hypothesis specifically but also to the origins and development debate more broadly. These are summarized below in Table 5.1. Thus far, I have addressed the first of these issues with the sociohistorical description of Texas in chapter two. There, I showed that East Texas was settled primarily from the Lower South and West Texas from the Upper South, where Earlier AAVE tended to be closer to White vernaculars (both in terms of social and linguistic proximity). Given the plantation culture of the former and the yeoman culture of the latter, the concentration of Blacks in East Texas has always been much higher than that in West Texas.

Table 5.1 Evidence types relevant to the origins and development debate (Rickford 1997:316; also 1998 and 2015)

1. Sociohistorical conditions (suitable for pidginization and/or creolization)
2. Historical attestations (literary texts; ex-slave narratives and recordings)
3. Diaspora recordings (Samaná, Liberian Settler, African Nova Scotian English)
4. Creole similarities (between AAVE and Caribbean creoles, Gullah, Hawaiian, etc.)
5. African language similarities (between AAVE and West African varieties)
6. English dialect differences (between AAVE and British/White American dialects)
7. Age group comparisons (across different generations of AAVE speakers)

This, along with the waves of enslaved Africans smuggled to Texas from the late eighteenth century onward, fostered the maintenance of a distinct social ecology in each region and raises the question about what the impact of such a situation might have been socially and linguistically. As Rickford (1997:318) shows, population densities need not approach the 80/20 substrate/superstrate figure originally suggested by Bickerton (1981:7) for creolization to occur. Thus, even though the density of the Black population did not approach that found elsewhere (see Wood 1974; Rickford 1997), given the right circumstances (i.e., the nature of contact with White varieties and Earlier AAVE), creole pockets could have emerged in parts of East Texas. And if creolization was barred for any reason, the door is still open for substrate influence from transported creoles or restructured, learner varieties, the latter of which very likely existed at least in coastal Texas (e.g. Brazoria County, see chapter two). Because the urban/tenant dichotomy did not apply as broadly in Texas as it might have elsewhere (Roberts 2017), the social ecology was more favorable to the maintenance of creole or African substrate features than Bailey (1987) allows.

As noted in chapter two, the trafficking of Africans to feed the slave economy continued long after 1808, when it was made illegal at the federal level, and this is key to

the language shift position, which holds that features from creole varieties and restructured, learner Englishes were introduced into the feature pool exerting substrate influence on AAVE. While there are several sources of evidence for Earlier AAVE, I am unaware of any that has been produced for restructured, learner Englishes of the nineteenth century that are immediately relevant to the origins and development debate. Thus, we have no restructured African English counterpoint to compare against Earlier AAVE and confirm the language shift position. And we have little way of knowing what influence these restructured Englishes might have had on AAVE in Texas. As such, I introduce newly available data for mid-nineteenth century Yoruba-influenced English (YE). While the particular variety that will be analyzed was spoken in South Alabama, the founding populations, social ecologies, and linguistic contexts were similar enough to those of East Texas to permit some comparison.¹ The data that I analyze here are similar in kind to those that have already been analyzed for Earlier AAVE, which require special consideration. As such, in section 5.1 close attention is given to the available data for Earlier AAVE.

In the past, some have suggested that copula absence in AAVE might be attributed to imperfect second language learning by adult learners (Winford 1998; McWhorter 2000; Wolfram 2000).² Sharma and Rickford (2009) investigate this claim directly via a quantitative comparison of copula absence in learner Englishes influenced by a number of different first languages (L1s). But none of the those that they analyze have ever been connected to AAVE, much less during the period germane to the language shift position, so section 5.2 describes and analyzes copula absence in the restructured, learner English of an L1 Yoruba speaker from the mid-nineteenth century. These data are unlike any other that have been introduced into the origins and development debate thus far. They are a

direct window into one of the very learner English varieties central to the language shift position, and as I note in chapter two, the account they are culled from offers a rare glimpse into the social ecology of the mid-nineteenth century from the first-hand perspective of an African-born person. There has been much written about the field-hand/domestic dichotomy in the formation of AAVE but almost nothing on the American-born/African-born dichotomy that is equally relevant to the origins and development debate. While this account speaks to the experiences of an individual who lived his entire adult life in Alabama, it is assumed that similar social conditions and linguistic processes as are documented in the account under consideration here would have held in pockets throughout East Texas. The consequence is that African substrate influence would have influenced the social ecology and contributed to the linguistic feature pool wherever such learner varieties were found. As such, the evidence analyzed in section 5.2 is not only relevant to the question of the universality versus typological specificity of copula absence in learner Englishes but, to the extent that we can assume that similar social dynamics were at work in East Texas, it also provides an example of one of the substrate language systems feeding into the linguistic feature pool for the area, adding an important point of comparison for the present study and, perhaps, providing a possible explanation as the surface-level differences that we observe in AAVE.

5.1 Data on Earlier AAVE and early learner Englishes of the African Diaspora

Linguists who wish to make generalizations regarding Earlier AAVE and the restructured English varieties that might have influenced it face a challenge that those studying earlier White vernaculars do not. There is a general dearth of unmediated evidence in the form of mechanical recordings and holograph correspondence. As a result, linguists have filled this

gap by weighing less ideal forms of evidence – those that come through an intermediary, including transcribed interviews, literary representations, and even some mechanical recordings (e.g. the early Ediphone recordings of Hyatt [1970]). The mediated evidence requires additional consideration based in part on the positionality, training, and experience of those who produced it – in most cases White fieldworkers and authors. And even the unmediated evidence requires some care based on these same considerations and what we know about the observer’s paradox in general and cross-racial fieldworker effects in particular. Still, between literary attestations (B. Bailey 1965; Stewart 1967; Repka & Evans 1986), transcribed interviews with ex-slaves (Brewer 1974; Maynor 1988; Kautzsch 2002) mechanical recordings of interviews with ex-slaves (Bailey 1987; Bailey, Maynor & Cuckor-Avila 1991; Kautzsch 2002), and holograph correspondence (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993), there is a reasonable amount of evidence for Earlier AAVE. But evidence for earlier learner varieties of the African Diaspora has yet to be submitted for consideration.

Undoubtedly, the origins and development debate has been moved forward thanks to literary representations of dialect (e.g. Bailey 1965, Stewart 1967, Dillard 1972, Repka & Evans 1986). But representations prior to the twentieth century were mostly penned by White authors, whose access to and experience with Black speakers is either limited or unknown as is the nature of any possible contact. Thus, the speech depicted in literary works may represent “conventionalizations rather than trustworthy reflections of contemporary speech” (Rickford 1998:164). Regarding the use of literary representations of dialect, Montgomery and Bailey (1986:13-14) suggest that authors often misrepresent dialects due to inadequate understanding of them, particularly as it relates to variation (see

Weaver 1970). The very likely outcome of such a scenario would not only entail the over- or underrepresentation of certain features but almost certainly would fail to capture the nuanced linguistic and extralinguistic factors that condition the emergence of a variant in the authentic, natural speech that the author intends to represent. It is possible, then, that not only would a feature like copula absence be over- or underrepresented in a text, but that the distribution of a feature would not be accurately represented such that the variable rules responsible for its emergence might be ascertained. The situation is similar, though not as extreme, when one considers the transcribed interviews of former slaves.

The WPA transcripts, to be sure, are less removed from actual speakers and speech communities than literature. Whereas the language of literary sources is largely the invention of the author, that of transcribed interviews is largely that of the speaker. But, given the positionality of White fieldworkers, caution is still warranted. A key consideration is the effect of the context on the data it yields. For example, would this cross-racial context result in the underrepresentation of vernacular features, especially ethnolinguistic features, as a result of style shifting? Or, given the objectives of the fieldworkers, would interviewees seek to give their interlocutors what they were looking for in terms of “exotic” folk ways and speech (Wolfram 1973:674)? Yet another position is advanced by Maynor (1988), which suggests that some vernacular features were overrepresented.

It is no surprise, then, that the reliability of the WPA ex-slave interview transcripts has been questioned (Wolfram 1990; Montgomery 1991). As Maynor (1988) shows via a comparison of Rawick (1972) with Rawick (1977/79), unfavorable content was scrubbed at the local level before it was sent to the national office. And others have remarked on the

problematic, paternalistic relationship between some interviewers and interviewees. But Brewer (1974) reasons that, given the fact that there are numerous interviewers conducting relatively few interviews, “similarities are [...] more likely to reflect grammatical structures by the ex-slaves than the bias of a single interviewer” (8). Unless, of course, a common, collective bias coalesces around a handful of stigmatized linguistic features. Kautzsch, who uses the ex-slave narratives in addition to correspondence and mechanically recorded material, basically shares Brewer’s position in this respect and, like Schneider (1989), concludes that investigations of pronunciation would be dubious but those related to morphology and syntax are reasonable. In spite of their apparent problems, like Brewer (1974) and Schneider (1997), I would contend that the transcripts are still a valuable source of data that shed light on Earlier AAVE, especially where they agree with one another and can be corroborated with other types of data (see Labov’s Principle of Convergence, 1972c:102).

It is my position that Zora Neal Hurston’s posthumously published *Barracoon* (2018) represents a very different kind of source than those cited above. This text is not literary dialect. Rather, it is a set of transcriptions from interviews that Hurston conducted with Kossola “Cudjo Lewis,” who at the time of his interview was believed to be the last living person to have endured the transatlantic passage as a captive on the slave ship *Clotilda*.³ Kossola was Yoruba and, having been taken by the Dahomey and sold into slavery as a teenager, was a fluent speaker of Yoruba with clear recollections of life prior to his capture and enslavement. Whereas John Lomax had instructed fieldworkers of the Federal Writers’ Project to standardize the representation of dialect in order to minimize the difficulty for the reader (Kautzsch 2002), Hurston was trained by Franz Boas to

prioritize the faithful representation of her subjects' speech. And as an ostensible⁴ in-group member, she may have been able to avoid some of the unintended effects that would otherwise result from a cross-racial context, accessing the more unguarded speech ways of her consultant.

Barracoona (2018) is an exciting and valuable resource because these transcripts do not record the speech of Earlier AAVE but of the restructured English of an adult second language learner – a YE speaker to boot. And Kossola's descriptions of the social ecology, particularly that of the emancipated community, are tremendously important for understanding the nature of social interactions and, thus, the dynamics that influence the transmission and diffusion of linguistic features. And Hurston's transcripts provide a record of a speech type central to the language shift position – one that could have exerted African substrate influence upon Earlier AAVE, introducing restructured English elements to the feature pool. This is a piece of the puzzle that has, to this point, been missing from the origins and development debate.

5.2 Restructured, learner Englishes

As noted above, copula absence could simply be the result of a universal process in adult second language learning. In this view, it is the markedness of the English copula and not necessarily substrate transfer that is responsible for the phenomenon. This position is partially motivated by orders of acquisition for verbal morphology that have been hypothesized for English language learners. Although there is some disagreement about the precise order of acquisition for verbal morphology, those cited by Sharma and Rickford (2009) all agree that the true copula (whether equative, locative, or attributive) is acquired before the auxiliary (Dittmar 1980; Felix 1978; Pienemann 1981). And thus, given this

hypothesized order of acquisition, all else being equal we would expect inflected forms of *be* to appear in true copula environments before they appear in auxiliary environments and for this to be reflected by higher rates of zero in auxiliary environments than in true copula environments as a result of incomplete acquisition. If this scenario holds regardless of L1, then copula absence would not be typologically specific. But Sharma and Rickford clearly demonstrate that the ranking of predicate types by their preference for zero copula is not universal but does in fact differ by L1. They conclude, “while AAVE, creoles, and some L2 varieties of English are alike at the coarse level of displaying copula absence (differing from Standard English and most other L1 varieties of English in this respect), there is no single ordering of copula use by predicate type across all such datasets. Under a finer analysis, only AAVE and the English-based creoles appear to share a similar system” (2009:59). Sharma and Rickford’s (2009) work is an important contribution to the origins and development debate because their comparison not only puts to rest the notion that language universals alone could be responsible for the patterns we find in AAVE but it also introduces a hypothesis worthy of testing – that the pattern found in AAVE must be attributed to African substrate influence, whether from Anglophone creoles or learner Englishes of the African Diaspora. To determine this, however, we need to know more about the shape of the substrate. Thus, into this comparative milieu, I add data for nineteenth century YE – data that provide a much-needed view of one of the most important restructured Englishes for the origins and development debate – the very variety that may have been involved a language shift scenario (Winford 1997, 1998).

As noted above, Hurston’s *Barracoön* (2018) provides an important window into the restructured English of an adult learner – a mid-nineteenth century L1 Yoruba speaker.

The reader will recall from chapter two that the majority of Africans forcibly removed to the New World were Yoruba or Ki-Kongo speaking. As chapter two also discusses, some counties in Texas appear to have had a significant degree of African cultural and, at least with respect to naming customs, linguistic influence (e.g. Brazoria County). Thus, I reviewed the Hurston's *Barracoon* (2018) identifying all copula tokens to describe the contexts in which null copula occurs and characterize its variation. The first goal is to situate these findings alongside the learner Englishes reported by Sharma and Rickford (2009). In the next chapter, I place these findings alongside those for Texas AAVE and a bevy of others to consider the origins of key structural aspects of AAVE copula absence. Hurston's transcripts make it clear that Kossola's speech is characterized by transfer, generalization, and simplification. By transfer, I mean some features of Yoruba are transferred into his English. For example, Kossola frequently inserts a vowel, most often /i/, after content words (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) as in example 1 below. The same kind of epenthetic vowel is found in the speech of a Virginia slave depicted by Defoe (Rickford 1997:329).

- (1) Cudjo goin' tellee you. (p. 28)
- (2) "Yes, yes ... me know, but me want speak, me tell something. O! me no let him makee de great master angry." (Defoe 1722, *Colonel Jacque* p. 152 cited in Rickford 1997)

By generalization, I mean that some features of English are extended to contexts beyond those permitted by co-territorial L1 English varieties. For example, Kossola regularly uses the definite article, which Hurston transcribes as *de*, with proper nouns and in contexts where the referent has not been introduced into the discourse – so-called "discourse-new" contexts – and is not inferable (Rupp & Tagliamonte 2019).

By simplification, I mean that typologically marked linguistic features do not occur. For example, Kossola's verbal system is characterized by the virtual absence of modals, morphological tense, and verbal -s as well as the use of bare infinitives where co-territorial varieties would have a full infinitive. *Can* is the most frequent modal used by Kossola, appearing as negative *cain* and its variant form *caint* or as affirmative *kin*. These are generally restricted to root rather than epistemic uses. Additionally, the past tense is only rarely morphologically realized. And, most importantly for the present analysis, Kossola's copula system has been significantly simplified.

The full range of copulae and possible copulae are shown in 1-13 below. The first thing to note is the breadth of this list, which includes *am*, *'m*, *is*, *'s*, *tis*, *are*, *'re*, *be*, *were*, *was*, and null copula. There are also instances of *de* and *a* that seem to be copula-like though on closer inspection are probably not. More on that shortly.

- (3) I **am** growin' old. (p. 21)
- (4) I **'m** goin' home disa morning. You going piece de way wid me? (p. 109)
- (5) I cain talk about de man who **is** father till I tellee you bout de man who he **Ø** father to him. (p. 21)
- (6) Now dass right, ain't it? (p. 68)
- (7) I tellee you lak it **tis**. (p. 20)
- (8) We **are** still smelling it. (p. 35)
- (9) And now we **'re** nothing but a widow. (p. 35)
- (10) An' always de seven men **be** together till he git grown, and de time come for him to marry. (p. 100)
- (11) One day dey two servants dey **were** quarreling. (p. 106)
- (12) I tellee you mo' 'bout Cudjo when he **was** in de Dahomey. (p. 52)
- (13) I **Ø** so lonely. (p. 18)
- (14) I 'member everything since I **de** five year old. (p. 26)
- (15) Dese servant dey quarrel, don't lettee dat breakee de friendship. Now, **data** right, **dasa** left. Now which way you goin'?. (p. 106)

In Kossola's restructured English, copula absence occurs in both past and present environments, and it can often be difficult to tell which is which because the virtual lack of tense marking on other verbs make the strategy used by others to determine the tense of

a null (see Kautzsch 2002) dubious. But copula absence in past tense contexts is found in the ex-slave narratives (Brewer 1974:96-8), Anglophone creoles (Rickford 1999, 1996:369; Weldon 1998), and diaspora varieties (Poplack and Sankoff 1987; Singler 1991:132), and *was* and *were* like most of Kossola's copulae are fairly marginal forms. As such, both past and present tense copula contexts will be included in the analysis that follows.

Full and contracted forms of overt copulae rarely occur outside of exposed positions, negative contexts, and questions. This is not to say that null copula does not occur in some of these contexts. Full and contracted forms of the copula vary with zero in both questions and negative contexts. The copula is not a host for cliticized *not* save for *ain't*, which is assumed to operate along different parameters and is probably not analyzed as *am not* but rather as a monomorphemic negator (c.f. Weldon 1994). To facilitate comparison with previous studies, questions and negative contexts are not included in the subsequent analysis. As noted in chapter two, when the copula is absent in a question it is not clear whether inversion has taken place and, thus, what the phonetic values of the preceding and following segments are. And, like Weldon (1998), I assume that a separate analysis of negation is necessary to disentangle the intricacies of copula use in negative contexts.

In some instances, Kossola appears to deploy creole copulae *de* in equative contexts and *a* for attributive contexts (see 15 and 16). Indeed, some speakers of Nigerian English have identified his use of *de* in certain contexts as a copula.⁵ Nevertheless, on closer inspection what appears to be equative *de* is more likely the extended application of the definite article described above that co-occurs with copula absence. The status of *a*,

however, is not so clear. For one, whereas the definite article occurs frequently in numerous contexts, the indefinite article rarely occurs.

- (16) De first landin' after de Mobile it **de** Twenty-One-Mile Bluff; de nexy it **de** Chestang; de nexy it **de** Mouth of de Tenesaw; [...] den de nexy it **de** Montgomery Hill; den de nexy it Ø Choctaw Bluff... (p. 61)
- (17) Abraham say to de Lot, "We two kinfolks. Dese servant dey quarrel, don't lettee dat breakee de friendship. Now data right, dasa left. Now which way Ø you goin'?" (p. 106)

Although there are a handful of utterances that appear to contain creole copula *a*, it is unlikely that these are indeed instances of copular *a*. Instead, this *a* is probably epenthetic, occasionally inserted to avoid coda consonants or consonant clusters. Its insertion conforms to a preference for a less marked, CVCV phonetic structure rather than CVC or CCV. Consider example 16 below where *a* is linked to *dis*.

- (18) I'm goin' home disa morning. (p. 109)

Situated as it is within a determiner phrase between the demonstrative pronoun and its nominal complement, *a* cannot be a copula. Here the insertion of *a* is epenthetic, facilitating resyllabification to *di•sa* – a CVCV syllable string – rather than *dis•mor•ning* – CVC – or *di•smor•ning* - CCV. Thus, there are no unambiguous uses of copular *de* and *a*. Copulae have been coded accordingly so that where *de* or *a* follow copula nodes the copula form is coded for what precedes them. For example, 15 above is considered null since no overt copula precedes *de* and 16 is considered 's since /s/ is cliticized to the pronoun preceding it.

Are, *were*, *am*, and uninflected *be* are almost categorically absent from Kossola's speech. Uninflected *be* occurs only four times. One of these instances (i.e., example 21 below) is clearly durative, but the remaining three (18-20 below) are not. All instances of

uninflected *be* have been retained in this analysis as this token is not restricted to durative or habitual contexts like it is in modern AAVE.

- (19) Dey take him in de bush where de king of Dahomey wait wid some chiefs till
Takkoi **be** destroy... (p. 46)
- (20) We doan know why we **be** bring 'way from our country to work lak dis. (p. 60)
- (21) You think if I **be** yo' wife you kin take keer me? (p. 71)
- (22) An' always de seven men **be** together till he git grown, and de time come for him
to marry. (p. 100)

Contracted *are* appears only once, and the full form is almost equally rare. Neither appears with 1st singular or 3rd singular subjects. When either appear, they do so in highly restricted contexts that warrant exclusion from this analysis. The first context in which we find full and contracted forms of *are* is the translation of songs sung by Kossola in Yoruba. Two examples are given below. Each is a song of mourning sung by the wives of Kossola's grandfather after their husband's passing.

How long since we were married?
And now we **are** nothing but a widow

De husband what know how to keep women
De husband what know how to prepare a house

De husband what know every secret of women
De husband what knows what is needed
and gives it without asking—

How long since we were married?
And now we're nothing but a widow.' (p. 34-5)

And again in another song of mourning.

Whoever shake de leaf of dat tree
(a sweet shrub)
We **are** still smelling it.
Whoever kill our husband,
We shall never forget. (p. 35)

Hurston scholar Deborah Plant (p.c.), who edited the transcripts for publication, takes these translations to be jointly constructed, with Kossola providing a gloss in his vernacular and Hurston translating the glosses into something a bit closer to standardized English.⁶

Two other contexts in which full or contracted *are* occur are reported speech (as in 22) and the interpretation of the Yoruban songs (as in 23). These three contexts have been omitted from consideration here, and copula tokens occurring therein have not been included in the subsequent analysis. Doing so drops the count of full and contracted *are* to zero, the count of full and contracted *am* to three, and the count of *were* to one. The absence of *are* makes for yet another similarity between Kossola's copula system and that observed in the ex-slave narratives which led Brewer (1974) to conclude that "are was not part of the early B[lack] E[nglish] lexicon" (47). Weldon (1998:117) likewise finds very low rates of full and contracted *are* for Gullah (i.e., 1% for full and 3% for contracted *are* overall, and 6% for full and 16% for contracted in plural & 2nd person singular contexts specifically). And as chapter four reports, contracted and full *are* is the least common copula in the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech.

(23) "Dey tell me, 'You **are** jus' below us. You **are** not yet a man. All men **are** still fathers to you.'" (p. 42)

(24) The actual meaning is, "When we get there we shall make our demands and if we **are** crossed we shall tear down the nation who defies us." (p. 40)

Unlike *are*, *am*, *were*, and *be*, full and contracted forms of *is* occur more frequently and with both 3rd singular subjects and plural & 2nd singular subjects. After null, it is the second most common copula in Kossola's speech. Whereas *is* can be found with both pronouns and NPs, contracted *is* always occurs with a pronoun subject and is almost categorically preferred with *that*. In fact, there are only three examples of *is* contraction with other subjects – two instances with *there* and one with *you* (see 25-27 below). *That is*

by far the preferred host for *is* cliticization. Hurston records instances of *that's* as *dat's*, *dats*, *dass*, or *thass*. The preceding segments of *dass* and *thass* are coded as consonants under the assumption that /t/ assimilates to /s/ given that *dat* without the copula and *dats* also occur. See Wolfram's (1974) rules for contraction and deletion for this.

- (25) Captain, dere's a man in de boat and den he pay his fare. (p. 104)
- (26) Jonah, dere's seven thousand women and chillum in dat city don't know right from wrong. (p. 105)
- (27) If you think I go 'stroy dem, youse crazy. (p. 105)

One special case is instances of Ø that occur with *name* as in example 27 below. Bailey (1966) treats these as a special case in Jamaican Creole – a verb that does not require a copula. Rickford (1996) on the other hand treats these as *name* followed by a copula (mostly null) because he finds a single case of copula *a* following *name* in the audio of the DeCamp (1960) data set. Likewise, I find one example with a copula in *Barracoon* (shown in 28) while all others feature no copula at all.

- (28) My mama she name Ny-fond-lo-loo. She de second wife. (p. 38)
- (29) My name, is not Cudjo Lewis. It Kossula. (19)

Note, however, that example 29 could be a case of *it's* with /t/ assimilated to /s/ or /z/ or deleted (see Labov 1969 but c.f. Winford 1992). In *Barracoon* (2018), we frequently find /t/ assimilation or deletion with *that's*, which Hurston renders as *das*, *dass*, or *thass* (see examples 29-31).

- (30) Das right, ain't it? (p. 68)
- (31) Dass yo' boy. (p. 85)
- (32) Thass yo' boy. (p. 86)

Thus, this instance of *name* followed by *is* could be viewed as justification to code my data set similarly to Rickford's initial coding – as *name* followed by a copula. But, even if instances of *name* do involve the copula, because past participles and possessive

pronouns are not always morphologically marked as such in Kossola's speech, it is not clear in many cases whether *name* is a verb or a noun. As such, it is unclear where the copula node sits in these sentences – before *name* if it is the past participle or after *name* if it is the noun. Including these tokens would not only cause problems for determining the subject but also the predicate, preceding segment, and following segment. So, concurring with Rickford's (1996) final assessment (see also Brewer 1974:97), I have excluded instances involving *name* from my analysis.

Whereas some subjects have a categorical or near-categorical effect on the copula (e.g. *WIT* and 1st singular subjects' preference for contraction), this is not the case for these data. In YE, absence is frequent with all subject types and subject persons/numbers much like Barbadian English (Rickford & Blake 1990) and Samaná English (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Hannah 1997). As such, no token is excluded from the present analysis by virtue of its subject type or subject person/number.

To summarize, both past and present copula contexts are included in this analysis as are copular sentences with *WIT* and 1st person singular subjects and those with uninflected *be*. Contexts that are excluded are those containing translations of Yoruban songs, their interpretations, and reported speech as well as sentences where the use of *name* make the details surrounding absence unclear. The full list of copulae by subject person/number are given in Table 5.2 below. Clearly, zero is preferred far and above any other alternative in Kossola's copula system. As noted above, full and contracted *are* do not occur (c.f. Samaná English in Hannah 1997), and *were* is virtually absent. Full and contracted *am* are marginal variants for 1st person singular subjects, but *is* can be found

with some frequency with both 3rd singular and plural & 2nd person subjects. *Was* has a slightly broader distribution, occurring with all subject persons/numbers.

Table 5.2 Kossola's copula forms by subject person/number

	1 st singular	Plural & 2 nd singular	3 rd singular
<i>be</i>	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.1%)	1 (0.3%)
<i>am</i>	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>'m</i>	2 (2.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>are</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>'re</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<i>is</i>	0 (0%)	4 (4.3%)	39 (13.1%)
<i>'s</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.0%)	18 (6.5%)
null	63 (87.5%)	82 (88.1%)	212 (76.9%)
<i>was</i>	5 (6.9%)	3 (3.2%)	8 (2.9%)
<i>were</i>	0 (0%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0%)

A multiple regression analysis⁷ of copula absence fails to return significant values for the predicate factor but returns a nearly significant value for subject person/number ($p = .0535$). This result obtains because 3rd person singular subjects take an overt copula – full or contracted *is* – considerably, even if not significantly, more than 1st singular and plural & 2nd singular subjects. No other factors (e.g. subject type, preceding phonological segment, etc.) are selected as significant during multiple regression.

Despite the fact that predicate is not selected as a significant predictor of absence, the rates of absence by following grammatical environment were calculated to facilitate comparison with other learner Englishes and, in chapter six, other varieties relevant to the origins and development debate. These rates are plotted below in Figure 5.1.

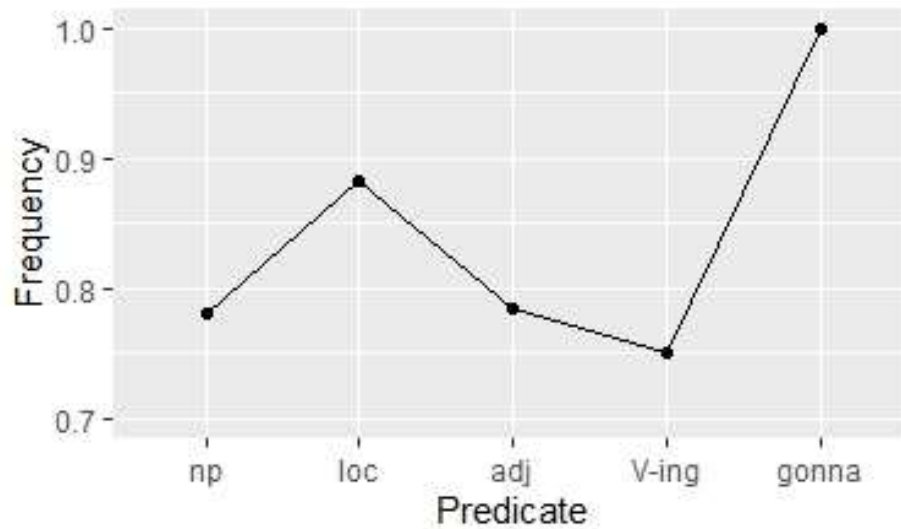


Figure 5.1. Percentage copula absence in Yoruba English by predicate type

The first thing that stands out about Kossola's predicate cline is that *gonna*, which Hurston records as *gointer* (n=1), *gwine* (n=2), *goin'* (n=31), and *go* (n=4) (see examples 32-35), is categorical in its preference for copula absence. Yoruba has nasalized vowels, so first language transfer is certainly a possibility both in terms of morphology *and* phonology. As such, it is best not to make any assumptions about the phonetic shape of YE *gonna* since it is possible that Hurston records /n/ where Kossola has a nasalized vowel.

(33) He gointer be later on, dat doan reachee me. (p. 20)

(34) It gwine rain. (p. 92)

(35) I goin' tellee you. (p. 104)

(36) He go git down on top. (p. 107)

Even still, in only one instance (example 32) does any citation intimate that *gonna* is anything other than a monomorphemic futuritive marker, "which behaves exactly as a non-inflecting modal" (Bickerton 1971:490) much like Guyanese Creole and other Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora.

Setting *gonna* aside as they categorically prefer copula absence, LocPs outrank all other predicates, including *V-ing*, with respect to the prevalence of null. In fact, *V-ing* falls

at the end of the continuum as least likely to feature absence, albeit null is still more common than an overt copula in this context by a large margin. But it is clear that somewhat lower rates of absence with *V-ing* in 1st person singular contexts is driving this disparity (Figure 5.2).

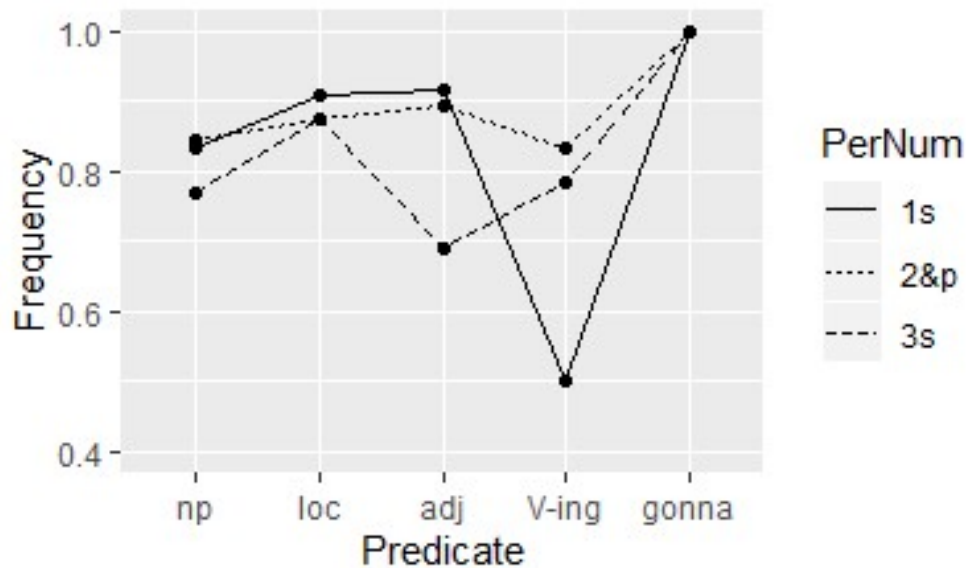


Figure 5.2. Percentage copula absence in Yoruba English by subject person/number and predicate type

Absence occurs in all predicate contexts at rates of 75% or greater, leaving little doubt that there is no underlying copula in this learner English variety. The high rate of copula absence across all predicate types offers evidence from one speaker to support the assumption of Winford’s language shift hypothesis – that, rather than creole copulae like *a* and *de*, “restructured varieties contain[ed] no copula” (1998:112) at all. Indeed, absence is the norm, and YE, at least that of this particular speaker, is characterized by fairly infrequent insertion of superstrate copula. To the extent that we can assume that this adult learner variety of English bears similarities to the earliest forms of English spoken by New World Africans, this additionally bolsters the case that absence was very possibly “the original norm” (114) not only for Gullah but also for AAVE’s predecessor (Winford

1992:35; McWhorter 1995). And the variation in Kossola's copula system is also suggestive about the process of superstrate copulae integration into YE. *Is* represents the most well-established of the overt copulae, appearing with both 3rd person singular and plural & 2nd person subjects. Similarly, Earlier AAVE (i.e., that of the nineteenth century as defined by Kautzsch 2002) featured considerable use of *is* with plural & 2nd person subjects (Brewer 1974). I suspect that *is* (full and contracted) is the first superstrate copula introduced into New World Black Englishes (i.e., YE, Gullah, and AAVE) because co-territorial White vernaculars used it with both 3rd singular and plural & 2nd singular subjects. More on this in chapter six.

As such, I propose the following de-basilectalization process depicted in Table 5.3 for YE. In the first stage, YE adopts null copula with all predicate types and subjects in both past and present tenses. In this stage, there is no morphological past tense. In a second stage, *is* begins to be integrated into the system and some verbs morphologically marked for past tense begin to emerge. During this stage, *was* appears with some frequency irrespective of subject person/number. Kossola's speech is characteristic of this stage. In a third stage, *am* integration begins in earnest probably via a style-shifting scenario like that found in Trinidadian Creole (Winford 1992). Kossola's rate of *am*-absence is considerably higher than that recorded for Earlier AAVE and may very well have been socially marked. In the final stage of de-basilectalization, *are* integration occurs with some instances of *were* appearing in past tense contexts. In each stage, the available copulae accumulate so that by Stage 4 null exists alongside all of the superstrate copulae. Assuming that Kossola's English is closer to the AAVE norm than his community members, it is entirely possible that a Stage 0 in which L1-transferred or creole copulae were typical.

It makes sense that *is* integration would occur first given that White and Black vernaculars in the South applied *s*-marking in more contexts than English varieties elsewhere in the United States (i.e., *was*-leveling in the past tense and *s*-marking on plurals in the present tense occurred throughout the South in the nineteenth century). It likewise makes sense that *are* integration would occur last. /r/-vocalization and /r/-lessness would have an inhibiting effect on *are*'s progress as would alternative forms of verbal agreement (e.g. the Northern Subjects Rule) that applied *s*-marking in “*are*” contexts.⁸

Table 5.3: De-basilectalization of mid-nineteenth century YE

	Present Tense	Past Tense
Stage 0.	?	Ø
Stage 1.	Ø	Ø
Stage 2.	<i>is</i>	<i>was</i>
Stage 3.	<i>am</i>	<i>was</i>
Stage 4.	<i>are</i>	<i>were</i>

Table 5.4 shows Kossola's pattern of copula absence with respect to predicate type along with those for several other L1 Englishes reported by Sharma and Rickford (2009). It is important to note that Kossola's target variety is not Standardized English and probably not even a co-territorial White vernacular. More likely than not, his target variety is AAVE, especially that of Free George, who held a special status among the African-born not only by virtue of being a free man but also because of the kindnesses he showed to their community. In this respect, the YE shown here is not completely comparable to the other L1 Englishes in the table. Whereas, the target variety for mid-nineteenth century YE features copula absence, those of the other L1 Englishes do not.

Even still, Kossola's cline does not correspond to what we would expect given what we know about Earlier AAVE and Yoruba; what is hypothesized about the acquisition of verbal morphology; and what has been observed in African American Diaspora varieties

and Caribbean English Creoles (CECs). Although absence with *V-ing* is high compared to the other predicate types, it is the least likely to feature null copula. Thus, a factor that typically conditions AAVE and CEC copula absence is not shared by this particular system. Null is the underlying form with a smattering of overt, English-based copulae inserted only occasionally and sporadically. This virtual lack of variation places the YE copula system at the basilectal extreme since “the middle of a continuum will tend to show more variation” than the margins (Bickerton 1971:465).

Table 5.4 Ordering of predicates by frequency of copula absence in various learner Englishes (adapted from Sharma & Rickford 2009)

	Ordering of predicate contexts (lowest to highest rate of zero copula)					
19 th c. Yoruba English	<i>V-ing</i>	< NP	≈ ⁹	AdjP	< LocP	< gonna
Indian English (Indo-Aryan L1s)	gonna	< AdjP	< NP	< LocP	< <i>V-ing</i>	
South African Indian English (Mesthrie 1992, Indo-Aryan L1s)	LocP	< AdjP	< NP	< <i>V-ing</i>		
South African Indian English (Mesthrie 1992, Dravidian L1s)	LocP	< AdjP	< <i>V-ing</i>	< NP		
Singapore English (Platt 1979, Malay-medium)	<i>V-ing</i>	≈ NP	< AdjP	< LocP		
Singapore English (Platt 1979, Chinese-medium)	<i>V-ing</i>	≈ NP	≈ LocP	< AdjP		
Singapore English (Platt 1979, English-medium)	LocP	≈ NP	< <i>V-ing</i>	< AdjP		
Singapore English (Ho 1986, Chinese L1)	LocP	≈ NP	< AdjP	≈ <i>V-ing</i>		
Spanish Learner of English (Butterworth & Hatch 1978)	NP	≈ AdjP	≈ LocP	< <i>V-ing</i>		

If Kossola's speech is representative of mid-nineteenth century YE, then it would have an appreciable impact on the prevalence of absence in the feature pool where such varieties existed (e.g. Mobile, Alabama and Brazoria County, Texas). So, it could have reinforced absence in AAVE while exerting countervailing pressure on the true copula/auxiliary distinction since no such distinction existed in YE and, indeed, rates of absence in true copula contexts are higher than *V-ing* contexts. As such, this restructured variety is not likely to be the source of the AAVE predicate cline, forcing us to look elsewhere for its origin.

This chapter has shown that the pockets of mid-nineteenth century YE hypothesized to have been operative in a language shift scenario are probably not responsible for the predicate control or the predicate cline observed in AAVE. In all likelihood, the social ecology did not favor the maintenance of L1-transferred or creole copulae since the density of Earlier AAVE speakers would have been high by comparison to that of speakers of learner English and the social pressure to acculturate to the American-born Black population would have been great for new arrivals. As such, a mesolectal variety like Earlier AAVE would have formed the target for newly arrived Africans guiding their language acquisition and inhibiting the emergence of L1-transferred or creole copulae. This is not to say that restructured, learner varieties did not exert *any* influence over Earlier AAVE. For one, such varieties could have reinforced absence in true copula environments. Additionally, surface differences reflected in overall rates of absence like those observed in chapter four might be owing to restructured varieties. Recall that East Texas, where learner Englishes are suspected to have co-existed alongside AAVE, exhibited higher overall rates of absence than West. To draw conclusions about the possible origins of

specific linguistic constraints on AAVE copula absence and the development of the AAVE copula system over time, one must look elsewhere than YE, and this is where we turn in the subsequent chapter.

¹ Recall from chapter three that East Texas AAE vowel acoustics correspond more closely to those of Southern Alabama than those of West Texas (Jones 2020).

² Part and parcel to the creole origins position is the assumption that copula absence (particularly its linguistic conditioning cannot simply be attributed to universal processes in the adult language acquisition of English. As Sharma and Rickford (2009) explain, Winford (1998), among others (McWhorter 2000; Wolfram 2000), suggests that the copula system of AAVE might be at least partially accounted for via the “imperfect second language learning” characteristic of all adult learners of English (i.e., via universal processes of second language acquisition).

³ This ship, its storied past, and especially the people it carried have received a dramatic uptick in interest lately owing to that the vessel had been discovered in the Mobile River in the spring of 2019.

⁴ I use the word “ostensible” here because, while Hurston and Kossola are both Black, the distinction between American-born Blacks and African-born Blacks was significant to Kossola for much of his life, though it is not clear that this continued to be the case at the time of interview as he is convivial, congenial, and seemingly unguarded in his interaction with Hurston. No doubt, some of this is due not simply to her apparent in-group membership but to her skill as a fieldworker.

⁵ I am thankful to the Nigerian graduate students at Texas A&M University who shared their understanding of the grammar of sentences like those above even though I remain skeptical about Kossola’s use of African copulae.

⁶ Plant (p.c.) says of the war song (Hurston 2018:40):

This passage has two parts: 1) There are the lyrics: "When the day breaks ... ". 2) And there is the interpretation of the lyrics.

The first part is Hurston's transcription of the song, in the language of the establishment (or what most folk call "standard English").

The likely scenario--likely because, so far, we don't have the actual taped recording of Hurston's sessions with Kossola--is that Kossola sang the song in its original language, and then translated the song for Hurston, in his vernacular language. Rather than transcribe the song in Kossola's vernacular, Hurston transcribed the song in establishment English. So the first part of this passage (the transcription of a translation that is implied) is a kind of combination of both Kossola's and Hurston's expression; i.e., Kossola translates the song, in his vernacular tongue, for Hurston; then Hurston transcribes Kossola's translation in establishment English form.

In the second part, where Hurston begins "The actual meaning is," represents Hurston's interpretation of the transcribed lyrics.

Part one is transcription (and implied translation). Part two is interpretation. Both represent Hurston's linguistic stylistics--note, for instance, the consistency of the verb "shall" in both parts.

As you point out, Brandon, the linguistic aspects of Hurston's narrative-Kossola's story have much to reveal to us. One of the things I am pretty consistent about, anymore, is reminding people that Kossola was taken from Bantè when he was 19. He spoke some version of Yoruba. How is it that when Hurston meets him, he is speaking a black vernacular with an Alabama inflection. Everything about the "how" of this linguistic transformation is encoded in the language Kossola comes to speak. The whole history of the trafficking is there. Hurston preserved this history for us.

⁷ It probably goes without saying, but mixed effects modeling lends no advantage for an analysis involving a single speaker because the factor levels are more limited (i.e., only one speaker) and no extralinguistic factors dependent upon the speaker are included in the model.

⁸ *Are* contexts when judged against Standardized English; not *are* contexts when judged against vernacular Englishes where the Northern Subjects Rule was operative (see chapter six).

⁹ \approx refers to roughly equal rates of absence.

CHAPTER 6

AAVE COPULA ABSENCE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: THREE DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES

As noted in earlier chapters, there are three features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) copula absence that have been central to the debate over AAVE's likely origin (or rather, origins). These relate to copula absence's sensitivity to 1) subject person/number, 2) subject type (i.e., personal pronoun versus noun phrase), and 3) predicate type (i.e., true copula versus auxiliary contexts). As we saw in chapter five, the last of these does not appear to be associated with nineteenth century Yoruba English (YE) – a restructured, learner variety that would have exerted some influence on AAVE where the two coexisted (undoubtedly in Mobile, Alabama (Hurst 2018) and perhaps also Virginia [Dillard 1972:78; also Rickford 1997:329] and Texas [chapter two]). And the subject constraints AAVE shares with YE are also found in other English varieties. As such, it is unlikely that there is any single source for these three constraints. Rather, as the comparisons in this chapter will show, it is more likely that multiple sources have together influenced the system of AAVE copula absence, giving it its distinctive profile. I arrive at this conclusion via a comparison of the language varieties relevant to the origins and development debate – nineteenth century YE, Earlier AAVE, African American diaspora varieties, West Indian creoles, early twentieth century AAVE, late twentieth century AAVE, early twentieth century Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE), and late twentieth century SWVE. But before launching into a comparison of these varieties, a word about copula absence (or the lack thereof) in Old English (OE), Middle English (ME), and

Early Modern English is warranted to establish the uniqueness of copula absence as a New World phenomenon.

6.1 Copula absence in Earlier Englishes

Outside of AAVE, learner Englishes, and Caribbean English Creoles (CECs), copula absence is at best a marginal phenomenon in English prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Evidence for absence in OE and ME is scant. Reviewing Visser's (1963 [1984]) citations of the null form, Clements (2005) concludes that, although a handful of instances are recorded, "the deletion of the copula in Old and Middle English seems to be a minor tendency employed at time for prosody or variable contraction of unstressed auxiliaries and vowel elision, which is conditioned by prosody (Selkirk 1984)" (Clements 2005:63 sic.).¹ And a closer review of those citations reveals, just as Clements (2005) and Selkirk (1984) suggest, that absence is associated with very different linguistic constraints than those of English varieties of the African Diaspora. For one, many involve the absence of uninflected *be* as in "Nealles Hetware hremge þorfton Ø fedewiges. [By no means did the Hetware need (to be) boastful about foot battles.]" (Beowulf 2363). Often when uninflected *be* is realized as null, it is implied from a preceding clause in which an overt copula *does* appear. For example, "and lat us wyues Ø hote barley breed [and let us wives (be) called barley bread]" is immediately preceded by "Lat hem be breed of pured whete seed [Let them be bread of pure wheat seed]" (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* D144-5). Citations from OE and ME provided by Visser (1984) are given below. Excluded are instances of copula absence involving uninflected *be*, verbal negation, and interrogative contexts. Although Clements (2005) notes that Visser was only able to locate a handful of citations featuring copula absence, Visser makes no claim that his citations are comprehensive.

Old English

- (1) Wundur Ø hwar þonne earl ellenrof ende gefere lifgesceafta. (*Beowulf* 3062)
It (is) a wonder that a courageous man would meet the end of life.
- (2) Wite þu eac, hu wid and sid Ø helheoðo dreorig. (*Crist and Satan* 698)
Know also how broad and wide (is) the horrid vault of hell.
- (3) forðon ðusend zeara Ø beforan eazum ðinum swa swa dæz zestræn. (*Junius Psalter* [Brenner] 89, 4)²
For a thousand years (are) before your eyes just like yesterday.
- (4) ðu soðlice Ø se hehsta on ecnesse dryhten. (*Junius Psalter* [Brenner] 91, 9)³
But you yourself (are) exalted unto eternity, Lord.
- (5) neh ondrædendum hine Ø hælo his. (*Junius Psalter* [Brenner] 84, 10)⁴
Near to those fearful of him (is) his salvation.
- (6) staðolas his Ø on muntum halzum. (*Junius Psalter* [Brenner] 86, 1)⁵
His foundations (are) on a holy mountain.

Middle English

- (7) þeh he Ø alre lourdes louerd ... (*Homl.* [Morris] ii, 89)
He (is) all lords' lord.
- (8) Howe þai lay in droupand drede And non Ø so zhepe a worde to zelle. (*Gosp. Nicodemus* [A.] 1796)
How they lay in sinking dread, and none (was) so sharp to yell a word.
- (9) Hayl Marie ... y-blissed Ø þou ine wymmen, and y-blissed Ø þet ouet of þine wombe. (*Ayenbite* [Morris/Skeat, Spec. II p. 106])
Hail Mary ... blessed (are) you among women, and blessed (is) the fruit of your womb.
- (10) þyn angel-hauyng Ø so clene corteȝ. (*Pearl* 754)
Your angelic being (is) so cleanly courteous.
- (11) þe beme of god ȝeueth to vs liȝt, but Ø I veyled. (*De Propr. Rerum* 8a/a)
The trumpet of God shows us light, but I (am) veiled.
- (12) Bothe twoo has goode fatt belles and Ø wele fed. (*King Ponthus* [ed. Mather] 97, 24)
Both two has good fat bellies and (is/are) well fed.
- (13) No man Ø more welkom in this world wide. (*Cov. Myst.* 370)
No man (is) more welcome in this wide world.

- (14) Noon Ø so hardy to presume in my hey presence To onlose hese lyppys. (*Cov. Myst.* 290)
No one (is) so bold to presume in my very presence to open his mouth.

In fact, this list is probably not exhaustive but is very likely representative, both with respect to distribution and relative frequency. As Visser (1984) notes, “There are no frequency counts. I have tried to express the relative frequency of the various structural patterns by means of the relative lengths of the lists of citations: the shorter the list, the less frequency; the longer the list; the greater the frequency” (vii). The relative frequency for OE (8/45) and ME (10/45) can be adduced by comparing the number of citations for these two periods with those for Modern English (27/45), which has over twice as many citations than the two earlier periods combined. Added to this, many of the citations from OE that Visser provides are, in fact, translations of Latin citations that contain no copula, which in many cases are themselves translations of Hebrew citations that likewise contain no copula. As such, we can reasonably conclude that copula absence in OE and ME was a marginal phenomenon, at least as far as the documentary evidence shows.

Given the few citations that Visser records for OE and ME, it is dangerous to make any broad generalizations about the distribution of copula absence. Nevertheless, what we find in these fourteen citations is that: 1) absence with 3rd singular subjects is more frequent (n=9) than absence with 1st singular (n=1) and plural & 2nd person subjects (n=5). The ranking that obtains is 3rd singular > plural & 2nd singular > 1st singular, which contrasts directly with the pattern that we find in AAVE and some varieties of SWVE. Additionally, absence with NPs (n=7) and non-personal pronouns (n=3) taken together is more frequent than absence with personal pronouns (n=5). Again, this contrasts with the pattern found in American English varieties. The only point of overlap between the copula absence of OE

and ME and that of American English varieties is with respect to the frequency of absence in true copula contexts where AdjP predicates (n=11) are more likely than LocP (n=2) and NP (n=2) predicates to feature absence. Thus, with respect to true copula contexts, null's favoring of AdjP predicates fits fairly well with what we find in AAVE and some varieties of SWVE. This apparent similarity is diminished significantly when auxiliary contexts are considered. Of the hundreds of citations for *be* + *-ing* (in OE *-ende*, *-ande*, *-ing*), Visser (1984) returns none before the seventeenth century that feature absence of the auxiliary, so absence was comparatively rare in OE and ME compared to Early Modern English and occurred only in true copula contexts.

While the citations provided by Visser (1984) for copula absence in Early Modern English are more numerous, the linguistic contexts of absence are more constrained. When comparing the copula absence documented in OE and ME with those for EModE, Visser (1984) concludes “that older English was considerably freer [with absence] than later English, where the ‘omission’ has practically become confined to such exclamatory phrases as ‘Happy the man who...’; ‘Fine old oak this!’; ‘Who so reckless...?’” (190). Absence of auxiliary *be* is likewise constrained. In these contexts, absence tended to occur in “clipped” sentences (Visser 1984:2025-26) the majority of which are questions (n=22/34) with subjects frequently omitted as well. And, significantly, null copula was, for lack of better words, altogether absent in the Early Modern English varieties associated with the American colonies. No evidence for null has yet been produced for settler varieties. For example, Wright returns no citations from the Early Modern London prison narratives out of Bridewell and Bethlem – the first institutions to send prisoners to

Jamestown (2001, 2002). And remarkably, it does not appear to have emerged in SWVE until *after* the Civil War.

There is no evidence that copula absence was a feature of mid-nineteenth century SWVE. *Private Voices* is a corpus of Civil War era correspondence penned by “transitionally literate” writers (Berry, Ellis, & Montgomery) who were unencumbered by the pressure of learned conventions to adhere to mainstream spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Thus, they wrote, as they spoke, in their own vernaculars. At present, the corpus – also referred to as the *Corpus of American Civil War Letters* – consists of over 10,000 letters and totals more than five million words. And only two instances of copula absence have been found in the entire corpus (Ellis, p.c.). Both are shown below in examples 14 and 15. The first is a case of null copula in a past tense, true copula context with existential *they*. The second is a case of null copula in a present tense, auxiliary context with a plural, pronominal subject – *we*.

- (15) thay was a battle faught here last weorsday eavening thay Ø a good maney killed
on boath sides tho a great maney more on the enimys side than thay was on ours.
(James Booker April 19, 1862, *Booker Coll.* UVA) Pittsylvania County, VA
- (16) we Ø laying by waiting amovement of they yankees. (W. H. Brotherton Oct. 10,
1862, *Brotherton Papers* Duke) Catawba County, NC

Given the size of the corpus and that only two instances of null copula appear in its entirety, it is unlikely that absence was a feature of mid-nineteenth century SWVE at all.

Copula deletion is rare pretty much to the point of non-existence. [...] It is so rare that it is possible that [the examples above] are just examples of a slip of the pen. [...] By contrast we have dozens of examples of deletion of aux[iliary] *have*, so my feeling is that if writers had omitted the copula we would have encountered it more than once. (Ellis, p.c.)

Taken together with the OE and ME evidence, we can safely conclude that the copula absence we observe in SWVE in the early twentieth century and afterward is not a relic of an earlier variety of English (Clements 2005:64).

To summarize, copula absence as we observe it in AAVE or CECs has little to no precedence in OE, ME, EModE, or even mid-nineteenth century SWVE. It is safe to say, then, that copula absence in AAVE is not British English in origin, bolstering the case for an English-external source. Even so, as will be demonstrated shortly, the patterns of absence that we observe in AAVE do not neatly match Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora, nor do they match those of YE (see chapter 5). In what follows, I show via a granular analysis of the three linguistic constraints identified in chapter 4 that the unique profile of AAVE copula absence must be the outcome of multiple, converging streams of influence.

6.2 Comparison of relevant varieties along three key parameters

Subject person/number

One key linguistic constraint on AAVE copula absence (like that revealed for the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech (CAACS) in chapter 4) is the subject person/number (i.e., 1st singular, 3rd singular, and plural & 2nd person). This division roughly corresponds to the inflected forms *am*, *is*, and *are*.⁶ Table 6.1 shows the rates of absence across all three subject persons/numbers for relevant varieties. The Table, like those that follow it in this chapter, is organized by varietal grouping (e.g. restructured, learner English; SWVE; AAVE; CECs), which have been further subdivided so that they are arranged in ascending chronological order. The two key points that I wish to emphasize here are 1) that AAVE has since the nineteenth century exhibited remarkable consistency with respect to the

ordering of subjects persons/numbers by their preference for copula absence – an ordering that is *not* shared by all English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora – and 2) that in spite of differences in the relative ranking of subjects by preference for null copula, *most* English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora exhibit non-negligible rates of absence with *all* subject persons/numbers, setting them apart from co-territorial White varieties.

In early twentieth century Afro-Texan speech (i.e., the data analyzed in chapter 4), we observe that absence occurs across all subject types resulting in 1st singular subjects being less likely than 3rd singular to feature null copula and 3rd singular subjects being less likely than plural & 2nd singular to feature null copula (or 1st < 3rd singular < plural & 2nd singular). The same ordering of subject persons/numbers by frequency of absence is observed in comparable AAVE varieties of the same period elsewhere, in Texas (Bailey & Maynor 1987) and in rural North and South Carolina (Weldon 2003b), but rates of absence differ.

The frequency of null with 1st singular subjects in CAACS is fairly low at 3%, but non-negligible and comparable to those for documented in the Brazos Valley (Bailey & Maynor 1987) and rural Carolina AAVE (Weldon 1998). And, crucially, it is likewise found in Earlier AAVE, ranging from 3% on the low end (Bailey 1987:34) to 6% (Kautzsch 2002) on the high end.

Other English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora likewise feature copula absence across all persons and subjects, but the frequency of absence by subject person/number and rank ordering often differ significantly. Nineteenth century YE (discussed in chapter 5) and several CECs not only have significantly higher frequencies

of absence across all subject persons/numbers but also have different frequency rankings than that observed in the AAVEs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Table 6.1 Percentage copula absence in various dialects of AAVE and related varieties by subject person/number

	Variety	1s	3s	Plural & 2s
19 th c. Learner	Yoruba English	88	77	88
Earlier AAVE	AFS recordings (Bailey 1987:34)	3	12	58
	Ex-slave narratives & hoodoo texts (Kautzsch 2002:100,110)	6	20	67
Diaspora	African Nova Scotian English (Walker 2005:92)	1	20	39
	Liberian Settler English (Singler 1991:138 & 140)	64	54	86
Early 20 th c. AAVE	Texas AAVE (CAACS)	3	19	52
	Texas AAVE (Bailey & Maynor 1987) ⁷	1	6	58
	Rural Carolina AAVE (Weldon 1998:155)	3	27	71
Early 20 th c. SWVE	Texas adults (Bailey & Maynor 1985b)	1	2	36
Creole Varieties	Trinidadian Creole [Groups] (Winford 1992:34)	85	41	83
	Trinidadian Creole [Interviews] (Winford 1992:41)	28	20	64
	Gullah (Weldon 2003a:50, 54, 59)	47	49	69
Late 20 th c. AAVE	Texas kids (Bailey & Maynor 1987) ⁸	1	15	52

Whereas absence with 1st singular subjects is fairly uncommon in AAVE, in YE absence is the *norm* across *all* subject persons/numbers. Additionally, 1st singular and

plural & 2nd singular subjects are equally likely to co-occur with copula absence (both at 88% absence), together outranking 3rd singular (at 77% absence). And the subject ranking that obtains as a result is 3rd singular < 1st & 2nd singular and plural, which is similar to Winford (1992) TC group results.

Rates of absence in English-influenced creoles of the African Diaspora and in Liberian Settler English are likewise high across all subject types though not nearly as high as YE. One exception is Trinidadian English, where the frequency of absence for group interactions (Winford 1992:34) approaches that of YE. Absence with 1st person subjects occurs “in Barbadian, Jamaican, Trinidadian, and other Caribbean creoles (see Rickford and Blake 1990)” (Rickford 1998) as well as Gullah (Weldon 1998; 2003a). It is also found in African American diaspora varieties including Samaná English (at a rate of 10% Poplack & Sankoff 1987:302) and Liberian Settler English (at a rate of 64% Singler 1991:134; 1993). And rates of absence with 3rd singular subjects are considerable in all of these varieties. This strongly suggests that, at least with respect to subject person/number, copula selection was not backward looking (i.e., dependent on subject person/number) in YE, CECs, Gullah, or African American diaspora varieties.

As noted above, the subject person/number ranking found in AAVE and all other African Diaspora varieties stands in direct contrast with what we observe in OE and ME, where a ranking of 1st singular < plural & 2nd singular < 3rd singular obtains. Moreover, null was not a viable form in Colonial English(es) and, most importantly, early nineteenth century SWVE. When it does emerge in SWVE (i.e., sometime after the Civil War), the same cline obtains as that which we find in AAVE (both Earlier and twentieth century

varieties), but absence with 1st singular subjects is negligible and with 3rd singular subjects, while non-negligible, is marginal (Bailey 1987).

Earlier AAVE likewise features absence with all subject persons/numbers albeit significantly less with 1st singular. Absence with all subject persons/numbers is noted by Kautzsch (2002) even though he reserves his more granular analysis for 3rd singular subjects, which he does for two reasons. For one, absence in *is* environments distinguishes AAVE from White Non-Standard English (WNSE) in the twentieth century (Wolfram 1969). Additionally, he reckons that an analysis of absence with plural & 2nd person subjects is dubious because detection of copula absence versus /r/ vocalization is difficult even for the trained linguist without the aid of instrumental analysis, which is impossible for most pre-twentieth century data. Nevertheless, Kautzsch notes that the rate of 6% absence that he finds with 1st singular subjects is “not really negligible” (2002:102), and I am inclined to agree. He proceeds to identify a regional pattern based on the use or nonuse of zero copula with the 1st person subjects. States where zero copula never occurs with 1st person include Arkansas, Louisiana, Maryland, and Texas (see also Brewer 1974:55). States where zero copula is an established variant with 1st person subjects (i.e., $\geq 8\%$ absence) are Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. And the states occupying an intermediate position between these two include Florida, Tennessee, and Georgia. While Earlier AAVE exhibited some variation with respect to absence with 1st person subjects lending credence to the theory of differential development, it is important to note that a total lack of absence with these subjects is restricted to the periphery of the South. The Lower South, save for Louisiana, consistently shows at least some absence with 1st singular subjects. To the extent that there is a regional pattern in

Earlier AAVE, it centers on the distinction of the Old South (to the exclusion of Georgia), which appears more basilectal with respect to absence in 1st singular environments, from the New South, which appears more acrolectal. But, contrary to what Kautzsch finds for Earlier AAVE in Texas, CAACS data for the early twentieth century do show some absence with 1st person singular subjects albeit infrequently (i.e., 3.1% or 3/96).

Absence with plural & 2nd singular subjects is typically more frequent than with “other subjects in early twentieth century and modern AAVE, as well as in contemporary Trinidadian English (Winford 1992:34)” (Rickford 1998). We see in Earlier AAVE and subsequent varieties exactly what we would expect given that *is* integration into the copula system consistently outpaces any other overt copula in YE and in Anglophone creoles. The low rates of absence in Earlier AAVE and subsequent varieties are what we would expect given that Earlier AAVE has had one hundred and fifty to two hundred years of contact with WNSE or, possibly more importantly, Earlier Standard AAE to adapt a concept from Spears (1988:103).

The findings for Afro-Texan Vernacular English based on CAACS are somewhat similar to the Afro-Texan AAVE described in Bailey (1987) and Bailey and Maynor (1987) at least with respect to 1st singular and plural & 2nd singular subjects. We find a bit more absence with 1st singular subjects in the Afro-Texan AAVE represented by CAACS but this is within the envelope of quantitative variation that one would expect for different interviewers, contexts, and speakers. The rate of absence with 3rd singular (19%), however, occupies an intermediate position between their findings for Texas (6-9%) and Weldon’s (1998) findings for rural Carolina AAVE (27%).

When the data for late twentieth century AAVE are situated against those for early twentieth century AAVE and Earlier AAVE, we see consistency across these periods and among related varieties (e.g. early twentieth century Afro-Texan AAVE exhibits very similar rates to late twentieth century Afro-Texan AAVE). These kinds of superficial, quantitative differences were also observed for East versus West Texas AAVE as documented in chapter four, but recall that the same underlying linguistic constraints governed absence in both varieties. That is to say, differential development was reflected in surface-level differences but not in deep structural differences between the two varieties.

Absence in AAVE occurs with plural & 2nd person subjects as well as 3rd singular and, to a lesser extent, 1st singular subjects whereas in White varieties it is typically restricted to plural & 2nd person subjects only. Cukor-Avila (2003; also Cukor-Avila 2001) reports that absence with “singular copula absence” (i.e., null copula with singular subjects?) is a shared feature of older varieties of AAVE and SWVE, but her data for older SWVE come from a single speaker whose interactional patterns with AAVE speakers is either unknown or simply unreported. To be fair, the absence observed for plural & 2nd person subjects in SWVE does exhibit similar patterning to that found in AAVE, but “similar patterns in white English contemporaries of AAVE tell us little about the origins of the patterns we find because what we find in white vernaculars could very well have their origin in AAVE not the other way around” (McCafferty 2014:448?).

To summarize, similarities across all varieties of AAVE include the integration of an overt copula in 3rd singular environments. It always outpaces integration of overt copula in plural & 2nd singular environments. And Winford’s (1992) findings for Trinidadian English are particularly illuminating because they reveal the effect that context can have

on rates of absence, particularly with 1st singular subjects. Style shifting is significant in this context with rates of absence dropping dramatically from the group sessions to the interviews (85% versus 28%). If style shifting similarly affects the other varieties that we are interested in here, it is possible that the rates of absence with *I* would be higher in group sessions than what Table 6.1 shows given that most of the CAACS data analyzed were gathered in interviews. This – the effect of style shifting on absence in general not with 1st singular subjects specifically – is one of the things, I think, that Baugh (1979a) was suggesting when he referred to “the stifling effect that the interview can have on the vernacular corpus” (1). Assuming, like Bell (1984:151), that style shifting is rooted in sociolinguistic variation, absence with 1st person subjects may very well have distinguished varieties of Earlier AAVE as absence in these contexts was replaced by full and contracted *am*, lect by lect.

Subject type

Table 6.2 shows the rates of copula absence with NP versus pronoun subjects as reported in studies where such a calculation was made or was made possible by the reporting of raw figures. These studies differ significantly with respect to the factor levels they include (e.g. the number of levels for subject type) and with respect to the “don’t count” cases they exclude, many of which are also related to the preceding grammatical context (e.g. *WIT* tokens, 1st singular subjects). Fortunately, many of them provide raw counts reported in such a way as to facilitate calculation or recalculation by their readers. For many early studies, Labov Deletion – which calculates absence as a proportion of contracted and absent copulae – was regularly used, whereas many of those cited above have used Straight Deletion – which calculates absence as a proportion of all copulae (full, contracted, and

absent). This decision, as it turns out, is not only consequential with respect to the ranking of predicates according to rates of absence (see Rickford et al. 1991) but also the ranking of subject types. In every case where I calculated absence using both Straight and Labov-style calculations (i.e., Trinidadian English group sessions and interviews, Gullah, Rural Carolina AAVE), I found that Labov Deletion reversed the Straight Deletion ranking of subject types to pronoun > NP. Thus, it is remarkable that Baugh (1979b) finds pronoun > NP in spite of using the Labov Deletion calculation.

Table 6.2 Percentage *is* absence in various dialects of AAVE and related varieties by subject type (adapted from Singler 1991:133)

Variety		NP	Pronoun
19 th c. Learner	Yoruba English	62	86
Earlier AAVE	Ex-slave narratives & hoodoo texts (Kautzsch 2002:121)	17	29
Diaspora	Liberian Settler English (Singler 1991:133)	61	69
	Samaná English (Poplack and Sankoff 1987:304)	15	20
Early 20 th c. AAVE	Afro-Texan AAVE (CAACS)	18	22
	Los Angeles (Baugh 1979b:178) [Labov Deletion]	36	64
	Rural Carolina AAVE (Weldon 2003b:184)	47	65
Creole Varieties	Trinidadian Creole [Groups] (Winford 1992:34)	56	71
	Trinidadian Creole [Interviews] (Winford 1992:41)	23	48
	Gullah (Weldon 2003a:55)	36	63
Late 20 th c. AAVE	Detroit Working Class (Wolfram 1969:170)	25	51
	New York City: T-Birds, Cobras, & Jets (Labov 1972b:84)	12-18	51-67

While absence occurs more frequently with NP subjects than pronouns in basilectal varieties of Caribbean creoles (cf. Trinidadian English), the reverse is true for all the varieties shown above including YE. But for a study of AAVE origins, Gullah is the most important among the creoles given that it is the only known Afro-English creole of the North American mainland. And here Weldon (1998:111) documents much higher rates of absence with pronominal subjects than NPs (NP 36% and personal pronouns 63%). Rural Carolina AAVE shows the same subject type ranking (47% versus 65%) as contemporary varieties of AAVE, Earlier AAVE, and AAVEs of the late twentieth century. Thus, AAVE is consistently dissimilar from basilectal creoles but similar to mesolectal varieties with respect to the subject type constraint.

Alternatives to subject person/number concord are likewise found in White vernaculars of English in the mid-nineteenth century. Ellis (2017) identifies three such patterns. The first involves “a plural, conjoined, or collective noun phrase subject with *is*, *has*, or a verb with suffix *-s*” (Ellis 2017:4). This is strongly associated with the Midland and South and “most likely entered the Midland hearth in the eighteenth century with large numbers of immigrants from Northern Ireland” and “spread westward from Pennsylvania into the North Midland and southwestward through the Valley of Virginia into the South and South Midland” (4). The Scotch-Irish provenance of this pattern has been established dating back to seventeenth century Ulster (Montgomery 1990) and fourteenth century Scotland (Montgomery 1991). It is found throughout the Midland and the South in the mid-nineteenth century and densely clustered in Appalachia (Ellis 2017).

A second pattern of non-concord associated with the Scots-Irish but introduced to the American colonies as early as 1607 (Wright 2003:51) involves the use of an *-s* form

(i.e., *is*, *has*, or verbal suffixing) with a non-adjacent pronoun, what Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse (1993) terms the “proximity to subject constraint” (337). This too is associated with emigrants from Northern Ireland who populated the Midlands and South; but, while the aforementioned pattern – the subject type constraint – persisted in the Midlands, this adjacency pattern “appears to have declined or disappeared outside of the South” (Ellis 2017:10) by the mid-nineteenth century.

While many studies have analyzed subject type constraints by subdividing the grammatical classes of subjects into groups containing personal pronouns, other pronouns, and NPs, the Northern Subject Rule’s subject type constraint does not recognize this partitioning. Instead, virtually all third person subjects favor *-s* marking on the verb while only the personal pronoun *they* favors zero marking (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993). The sole exception to this generalization is the case of non-adjacency, when a verb is not immediately preceded by its subject pronoun.

Table 6.3 reports the raw numbers of copula forms that occur with 3rd person plural subjects in CAACS.⁹ *WIT* tokens are excluded as they almost categorically prefer contracted *-s*, and in this table NPs include all subjects except the personal pronoun *they* because this is the chief distinction relevant to the subject type constraint as it operates in the Northern Subject Rule and in Earlier AAVE (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993).¹⁰

Table 6.3 Copula forms with 3rd person plural subjects in CAACS

	NP	<i>they</i>
<i>is</i>	31 (72%)	9 (21%)
<i>are</i>	7 (16%)	10 (23%)
Null	5 (12%)	24 (56%)

As the reader will note, full and contracted forms of *is* are preferred for 3rd person plural subjects (n=40) when compared to full and contracted *are* (n=17) and when compared to the null copula (n=29).¹¹ Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse (1993) finds that 42% of NP subjects in Earlier AAVE have *is*, rather than *am* or *are*, as their copula form but the rate of *is* with *they* comes to only 9%. If null is counted among other copulae, the rate of plural NP subjects with full or contracted *is* in CAACS is much greater than Earlier AAVE (72%) as is the rate of *they* with full or contracted *is* (21%). Inclusion of the existential pronouns *there* and *they* (n=2), which was done to follow Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse (1993), drives much of the increase in the NP group. These existentials are the only other third person plural pronouns that occur in CAACS besides the personal pronoun *they* and *WIT* tokens; and when plural, *there* occurs only once with null. By contrast, it occurs with full or contracted *is* 95.4% of the time (21/22). Compare this to the 71% reported for all verbal *-s* in Earlier AAVE (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993:346). Thus, the inclusion of existential *there* and *they* results in a quantitative gap between subject types that is much greater for rural Texan AAVE than that observed for Earlier AAVE. Nevertheless, the point that remains is that evidence of a subject type constraint similar to that of the Northern Subject Rule persists into the early twentieth century for at least some varieties of AAVE and compared to Earlier AAVE it is clear that the *they* constraint is not in decline (c.f. Wright 2003:60).

In contexts favorable to verbal *-s* according to the Northern Subject Rule, we find less absence. And in contexts unfavorable to verbal *-s*, we find significantly more absence. As such, there is fairly strong evidence to suggest that aspects of the Northern Subject Rule have left an imprint on the profile of copula selection in rural Texan AAVE and probably

other AAVEs as well specifically through the introduction of a subject type constraint that favored *is* with NPs and disfavored *is* with *they*. Additionally, *are* is a distant second in both environments, lending some support to the idea that it was introduced later in AAVE than null and *is* (Brewer 1974:47). Recall that *is* was the most common copula apart from null in the learner English of an first language (L1) Yoruba speaker (chapter 5) with *are* occurring only 3 times, and only one of these with a third person plural subject. When *is* was introduced, it was integrated into the copula system based on the pattern of co-territorial White varieties, favoring NPs and occasionally appearing with *they*. Because Earlier AAVE had a null copula, the NSR converges with rules for copula absence, producing high rates of absence with *they* and high rates of *is* with NPs and existentials. This notion of convergence of systems is “a satisfactory explanation [...] because it reflects what is known about the way languages mix” (Holm 1991:233-34).

Predicate type

Of the internal, linguistic predictors that have been studied in analyses of the AAVE copula, the following grammatical environment has received the majority of the attention, and as chapter four shows, there is good reason for this not only because rates of absence with various predicate types might connect AAVE to other English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora but also because the predicate leads all other linguistic factors in predicting copula absence. As noted in chapter two, many of these studies have differed both because the varieties under investigation differ (some feature non-negligible rates of absence with *I* while others do not) and the theoretical orientations of the researchers differ (e.g. some have restricted their analyses to *is* environments while others have not). The rates of absence are reported in Tables 6.4 and 6.5.

Table 6.4 Percentage copula absence in various dialects of AAVE and related varieties by predicate type¹²

Variety		NP	LocP	AdjP	V+ing	gonna
19 th c. Learner	Yoruba English	78	88	79	75	100
	AFS recordings (Bailey 1987:35)	12	15	29	71	100
Creole Varieties	Jamaican Creole (Rickford 1996:363)	28	18	81	86	100 ¹³
	Jamaican Creole (Rickford 1999:151)	4	28	59	58	93
	Trinidadian Creole [Groups] (Winford 1992:34)	1	90	79	94	95
	Trinidadian Creole [Interviews] (Winford 1992:41)	1	53	30	70	100
	Barbadian English (Rickford 1992:191)	11	47	60	77	100
	Gullah (Weldon 1998:103)	16	56	27	72	83
Early 20 th c. AAVE	Afro-Texan AAVE (CAACS)	13	25	35	54	85
	Texas adults (Bailey & Maynor 1985b:210; 1987)	9	15	14	73	68
	Rural Carolina AAVE ¹⁴ (Weldon 1998:155)	15	53	32	59	41
Early 20 th c. SWVE	Texas adults (Bailey & Maynor 1985b:210)	2	8	10	34	54
Late 20 th c. AAVE	Detroit Working Class (Wolfram 1969:172)	37	44	47	50	79
	Texas kids (Bailey 1987:35; Bailey & Maynor 1987)	12	19	25	41	89

Table 6.5 Percentage *is* absence in various dialects of AAVE and related varieties by predicate type¹²

Variety		NP	LocP	AdjP	V+ing	gonna
19 th c. Learner	Yoruba English	77	90	76	69	100
	Earlier AAVE 1833-64 (Kautzsch 2002:141-2)	8	6	9	23	67
Earlier AAVE	Earlier AAVE 1865-94 (Kautzsch 2002:141-2)	4	6	9	42	74
	Ex-slave narratives (Brewer 1974:87)	20	9	18	27	27
	Earlier AAVE 1895-1905 (Kautzsch 2002:141-2)	4	13	21	31	82
	Rural Carolina AAVE (Weldon 2003b:184)	39	54	57	80	100
Early 20 th c. AAVE	Los Angeles (Baugh 1979b:180)	32-40	33	56	62	72
	Afro-Texan AAVE (CAACS)	11	7	20	29	81
Creole Varieties	Gullah (Weldon 2003b:182)	27	50	41	88	100
	New York City: Thunderbirds (Labov 1969:732; Labov 1982:192)	23	36	48	66	88
Late 20 th c. AAVE	New York City: Jets (Labov 1969:732; Labov 1982:192)	32	52	36	74	93
	New York City: Cobras (Baugh 1979b:180)	14- 57 ¹⁵	31	72	59	78

These rates are revelatory because, yet again, they exhibit a high degree of consistency across AAVE in at least one aspect – the apparent distinction between true copula and auxiliary environments. We see this in the earliest data (i.e., Earlier AAVE) to

the most recent (i.e., late twentieth century AAVE). Creoles are likewise consistent with the AAVE pattern, but the reader will recall that YE pays little respect to predicate type. Thus, the predicate control that we observe in AAVE could not have been a result of language shift from this variety of restructured, learner English, and it is unlikely that the true copula/auxiliary distinction emerged in AAVE as a result of substratum influence from YE. But Winford suggests something more specific – that copula absence with nominal predicates in AAVE is a result of language shift “with early AAVE affected by restructured varieties containing no copula in nominal environments” (1998:112). In other words, a variety like YE may have worked against such a strong distinction between true copula and auxiliary environments – a scenario that certainly seems plausible given the high rate of absence in these contexts for Kossola.

Many earlier studies made much of the AdjP/LocP ordering in the predicate cline, and for good reason. As explained in chapter two, adjectives are a subclass of verbs in several West African languages relevant to the AAVE origins and development debate (see Pfaff 1971 for examples). And the heterogeneity of AAVE with respect to this feature has been cited as though it puts the Creole Hypothesis in jeopardy. But, crucially, Winford and Weldon have each shown that this ordering does not hold for all relevant creoles. Weldon also observed the same ordering in Rural Carolina AAVE and noted that although the “pattern fails to approach the ‘high adjective’ ordering of creole varieties, it does suggest that these data are perhaps closer to the creole pattern than AAVE typically observed in studies of urban varieties. This finding, too, could have serious implications for the Creolist Hypothesis” (2003b:185). What to make of the heterogeneity within AAVE then? The obvious answer is differential development, which is exactly what we would expect were

pockets of creolized varieties to have existed throughout the South – varieties that, like the creoles discussed here, differed with respect to the ordering of AdjP and LocP. Clearly, the dominant pattern in AAVE is AdjP > LocP, but AAVE in the southeastern United States may very well have been influenced by a Gullah-like pattern of LocP > AdjP whereas AAVE elsewhere might have been influenced by other Afro-English creoles and restructured, learner varieties like Yoruba.

6.3 Summary and discussion

We began this chapter with a review of copula absence in OE, ME, Early Modern English, and White vernaculars of the mid-nineteenth century. It is clear from the review that began this chapter that copula absence operated only in true copula environments in OE and ME, emerged only in highly restricted contexts in Early Modern English, and was virtually non-existent in mid-nineteenth century White vernaculars. Meanwhile, copula absence was a regular occurrence in Earlier AAVE and operated in very much the same way as subsequent varieties of AAVE albeit with superficial differences related to the frequency with which null is found.

Significantly, there is no evidence for an English source of the copula absence we find in AAVE nor is there any evidence for an Irish English forerunner (McCafferty 2014:452; Montgomery p.c.). Some linguists have assigned a lot of significance to the fact that copula absence is also found in varieties of SWVE, but, as Rickford notes, it is telling that we only find copula absence in White varieties that were co-territorial with AAVE before the Great Migrations. And Dillard (1972) presses the point strongly, noting “contact with [AAVE] is [...] the prime fact about Southern white dialect” (216). While change from above is common enough, with speakers of prestige varieties initiating change

through the introduction of innovations that maintain the social distance between them and speakers of less prestigious varieties, Bright (1960) identified both phonetic and grammatical innovations that were initiated by speakers assigned lower social prestige before being taken up by those assigned greater social prestige. Thus, it is only if we find a significant amount of absence or similar patterning of absence in colonial varieties and their predecessors that the notion of English origins might be convincingly defended.

Because we find copula absence in AAVE throughout the nineteenth century and even before but do not find it in White varieties until the early twentieth century, this could only mean that copula absence emerged in some pockets of SWVE *after* the Civil War via accommodation to African American speech by White speakers (Wolfram 1974). On one hand this confirms Bailey's hypothesis that increased social interaction during this period exerted influence on the Englishes of the American South but on the other hand requires a revision to his hypothesis regarding the directionality of that influence – at least with respect to the copula. But the unique profile of AAVE copula absence cannot be attributed to a single source. "In other words, multiple causation was at work here" (Winford 1998:111). Comparison of relevant varieties across three controlling factors that frequently emerge in quantitative analyses of absence suggests that multiple streams of influence have converged to influence the AAVE copula system.

Tables 6.6-8 summarize the findings for the three diagnostic features in this chapter across all of the varieties discussed above. Mid-nineteenth century YE features a significant amount of absence in both present and past tense environments, which is quite different than twentieth century AAVE where low rates of absence in the past tense motivate linguists to exclude these contexts from analyses of variation (Blake 1997:59 & 61). The

picture is not entirely clear, however, for Earlier AAVE because few researchers have bothered to calculate the rate of absence in past tense contexts. But Brewer (1974) notes that “in early BE Ø can and does occur in past environments” (96) as does Kautzsch (2002). However, the latter only finds “some” absence in past environments and concludes that “variation virtually does not take place” (93). He does not provide the rate of absence in past tense contexts, but Ewers (1996:170-173) does, placing it between 2.9% and 4.3% for the Hoodoo texts. Note that the latter figure approaches one that Kautzsch (2002) has called “not really negligible” (102) when in reference to absence with 1st person singular subjects. At any rate, while Ewers’s (1996) rates of absence are considerably lower for past tense absence than for present, they do indicate that absence in past tense contexts is a feature of Earlier AAVE. It is found in in Rural Carolina AAVE (2%, Weldon 1998:184) and Gullah (9%, 126), and Rickford reports “a healthy amount of Ø” (369) for Jamaican Creole (JC). Absence in past tense environments is rare in mid-nineteenth century rural Texan AAVE but *does* occur.

With respect to the subject person/number constraint, AAVE shares with White vernaculars a similar ranking by frequency of copula absence – 1st singular < 3rd singular < plural & 2nd singular – but differs with respect to the rates of absence, particularly with 3rd singular subjects. Note, the subject type constraint operative in SWVE of the mid-nineteenth century (and probably before), created a highly variable context – one favorable for alternative copulae (i.e., null) – to be introduced, particularly with the plural pronoun *they*. Meanwhile, the virtually categorical use of *is* for 3rd person singular subjects in SWVE created a context that was less favorable for the introduction of null. Thus, taken together with the complete lack of absence in mid-nineteenth century SWVE, we can view

the low rates of absence in 3rd singular environments for SWVE relative to AAVE as evidence of how SWVE integrated copula absence into its system after the Civil War (i.e., probably beginning with plural & 2nd person subjects – an already highly variable context for White vernaculars – and making only minimal progress with 3rd singular subjects – a considerably less variable context).

Diachronically, the rates of absence in this context for AAVE were highest in the nineteenth century (3-6% overall and even higher in some areas [see Kautzsch 2002]), tapered down for the early twentieth century (from 1-3%), and are lowest in the late twentieth century (>1-1%). Absence occurs only rarely with 1st singular subjects in most varieties of AAVE. Diachronically, the rates of absence in this context for AAVE were highest in the nineteenth century (3-6% overall and even higher in some areas [see Kautzsch 2002]), tapered down for the early twentieth century (from 1-3%), and are lowest in the late twentieth century (>1-1%). Thus, it would appear that absence with *I* was more firmly established in the past. As noted above, the style shifting observed in Trinidadian English is illuminating because it suggests that absence in this environment had become socially marked assuming that style shifting is based on social variation (Bell 1984). This kind of markedness could easily be a precursor for the recession of null copula with 1st singular subjects. Thus, I do not believe that copula absence with 1st singular subjects is altogether irrelevant to the debate. It is, once again, evidence of differential development. More basilectal varieties of Earlier AAVE exhibited variable absence in these contexts, while more acrolectal varieties exhibited categorical presence, and this social variation very likely supplied a target for stylistic variation that is scarcely observable to us in the present due to the constrained contexts that produced the data for Earlier AAVE.

Table 6.6 Comparison of Copula Absence in Early Restructured English, Creole Varieties, and Diaspora Varieties

Variety		1s	Plural & 2s	3s	Present tense	Past tense	NP subject favors	Auxiliary favors
19 th c. Learner	Yoruba English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Creole Varieties	Jamaican Creole (Rickford 1996)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Jamaican Creole (Rickford 1999:152)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
	Barbadian English (Rickford 1992)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
	Trinidadian Creole [Groups & Interviews] (Winford 1992)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓
	Gullah (Weldon 1998; 2003a, b)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Diaspora Varieties	African Nova Scotian English (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:321)	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	~	✓
	Liberian Settler English (Singler 1991)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
	Samaná English (Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Hannah 1997)	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	~	✓

Table 6.7 Comparison of Copula Absence in Earlier AAVE and Early 20th century AAVE

Variety	1s	Plural & 2s	3s	Present tense	Past tense	NP subject favors	Auxiliary favors
AFS recordings (Bailey 1987:35)	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
Earlier AAVE AFS recordings (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991:321)	-	✓	✓	✓	?	~	✓
Ex-slave narratives (Brewer 1974:87)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	~	✓
Ex-slave narratives & hoodoo (Kautzsch 2002)	✓	✓	✓	✓	~	~	✓
Afro-Texan AAVE (CAACS)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Early 20 th c. AAVE Texas adults (Bailey 1987:35)	~	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
Texas adults (Bailey & Maynor 1987)	~	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
Rural Carolina AAVE (Weldon 2003b)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
LA adults (Baugh 1979b:180-1)	?	?	✓	✓	?	-	✓

Table 6.8 Comparison of Copula Absence in Late 20th century AAVE

Variety	1s	Plural & 2s	3s	Present tense	Past tense	NP subject favors	Auxiliary favors
Detroit Working Class (Wolfram 1969:172)		✓	✓	✓			✓
Texas kids (Bailey 1987:35)	~	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
Texas kids (Bailey & Maynor 1987)	~	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
New York City: Jets (Labov 1969; 1982:182)	-		✓	✓	-	-	✓
New York City: Thunderbirds (Labov 1969; 1982:182)	-		✓	✓	-	-	✓
New York City: Cobras (Labov 1969; Baugh 1979a, 1980)	-		✓	✓	-	-	~
East Palo Alto (Rickford et. al 1991:117)	?	✓	✓	✓	?	-	✓

Sensitivity to subject person/number is likewise shared by other varieties of the African Diaspora, but the ranking of subjects differs. We can conclude with strong certainty that the restructured, learner variety YE would have reinforced more frequent copula presence in *is* environments. But there is little doubt that this ranking is not universally shared by CECs (e.g. Trinidadian Creole, Winford 1992). Again, these differences between varieties point toward the likelihood of differential development. Undoubtedly, in their early stages, English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora featured absence with *all* subject persons/numbers but have since integrated mainstream copulae to differing degrees and at different rates when viewed through the lens of subject persons and number.

The subject type constraint observed for some varieties of AAVE is likewise a case of differential development as, again, the NP/Pro ordering is not universally shared across English-influenced varieties of the African Diaspora (e.g. JC, Rickford 1996). AAVE is remarkably consistent in this respect, favoring absence with pronouns and disfavoring it with NPs. Put plainly, the ranking that we find is consistent for the North American Mainland but distinct from the Caribbean creoles. The evidence here, then, is inconclusive. We find this pattern in both YE and in Gullah, so it is possible that neither restructured English nor Anglophone creoles are responsible for it.

As noted above, it is in this respect that White vernaculars of the American South have had the clearest impact on AAVE. The subject type constraint of AAVE can be linked to the Northern Subject Rule – an alternative to concord that extends back to fourteenth century Scotland and was imported to the Midlands and South during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by emigrants from northern Ireland. I suspect that where the Northern Subject Rule was common enough, it has left its imprint on copula absence primarily by

reinforcing a system that favored an overt copula in some environments (i.e., 1st person singular and 3rd person singular) and disfavored an overt copula in other environments (i.e., 3rd person plural, specifically with the personal pronoun *they*). Where the social ecology and, as a consequence, the feature pool characteristics differed, developmental processes and trajectories for the integration of copulae, likewise, would have differed.

Subject-related constraints shed significant light on the origins of AAVE's unique profile of copula absence, but one cannot forget that the predicate outranks all subject-related constraints in controlling copula absence (chapter four). In this respect, there is remarkable consistency across almost all varieties that feature copula absence in that true copula environments disfavor absence while auxiliary environments favor it. This departs from OE and ME where we find *only* true copula absence. And it departs from the restructured, learner Englishes, particularly YE.

As we saw in chapter five, YE, while replete with copula absence, fails to exhibit the all too familiar predicate cline of Anglophone creoles of the African diaspora or any historical or regional variety of AAVE, lending no support to an argument for the typological specificity of this kind of predicate control (c.f. Sharma and Rickford 2009). Compared across generations and regions, the rates of absence by following grammatical environment reveal that the true copula/auxiliary distinction was consistent across varieties of AAVE and continues to be relevant to the present. It is likewise found in the varieties associated with both the African American and the African diasporas. But YE shows no signs of it, nor is the predicate selected as a relevant factor at all during multivariate analysis. As such, YE could not have supplied the ranking of predicates commonly found in every other variety of AAVE. But this is not to suggest that restructured, learner varieties

have not had their impact upon AAVE. Instead, YE would have reinforced absence across all subjects and predicates, so the high rate of absence with NP predicates certainly could have reinforced absence in equative copula contexts just as Winford (1998) suggests. Thus, the indiscriminate absence found in YE would have been a counterweight to whatever forces had already acted upon the Earlier AAVE copula system to produce the true copula/auxiliary distinction. The likely source of this predicate conditioning is not YE but either some other learner variety or a creole. When it comes to the distribution of copula absence across different predicate types, then, the explanation for its origin and development is not either/or but both/and. A creole or creole varieties likely supplied and/or reinforced the cline that we observe, while a learner variety like YE reinforced null rather than creole copula.

Bailey's personal communication with Rickford is a good summary for what we have found support for in this chapter, so I will close with it.

“First, the exact order of the constraints of the following predicate on copula deletion is not really crucial to the creole hypothesis. The fact that the following environment matters at all is sufficient to prove that this comes from something other than English. In English the form of the verb always depends on the subject. Even in those dialects that do not have subject-verb concord, the form of the verb is determined by whether the subject is an NP or PRO. It is not surprising that there should be some discrepancies among AAVE and various creoles in regard to the exact effects of the following environment. After all they've had several centuries of independent development. Second, I think the differing effects of a preceding NP or PRO on zero copula has a simple explanation: it reflects the grafting of an English constraint onto a creole process. This constraint manifests itself in a number of ways in earlier AAVE, and with several centuries of contact, it is only reasonable to assume that other dialects of English affected AAVE just as AAVE affected them. Third, I'm convinced that the period from 1790-1840 saw a real reinfusion of these element [sic.]. More than half of the slaves imported to the US were imported after 1790 (most of these after 1793 and the invention of the cotton gin). With the westward expansion of the cotton kingdom, this was the most dynamic period of slavery.” (Guy Bailey p.c. in Rickford 1998:191)

¹ Try as I might, I could not come to the same count as Clements (2005) tallies (i.e., 43 instances of null copula). I get a total of 45 in Visser (1963) and Visser (1984), which are identical with respect to the citations given. Even excluding those prior to 1400 like Clements, which is odd given that she is generalizing over both OE and ME, I cannot make the numbers square. I get 31 instances for the post-1400 date range.

² The *Junius Psalter* (Brenner 1908) is a transliteration of the *Psalterium Romanum* with interlinear glosses of West Saxon influenced OE (Gretsch 2000). The Latin of this passage reads “qm̃ mille anni ante oculos tuos sicut dies hesterna.” In Hebrew, כי אלה שנים בעיניך כיום אתמול.

³ “Tu autem altissimus in æternum dñe.” In Hebrew, ואתה מרום לעלם יהיה.

⁴ “Verum tamen prope timentibus eum salutare ipsius.” In Hebrew, אך קרוב ליראיו ישעו.

⁵ “Fundamenta eius in montibus scis.” In Hebrew, יסודתו בהררי קדש.

⁶ I say “roughly corresponds” here because in some varieties of English *is* occurs with plural & 2nd person subjects.

⁷ Appears to be all subjects considered together. Article unclear. But compare to the same data for Bailey & Maynor (1987), which definitely separates 1s from 3s & 2p. Adding their findings for 1s and 3s & 2P together does not result in the figures given here, so honestly I have no clue what the discrepancy is. *Note – this probably includes ~2000 more tokens than the publication with Maynor reports. Results reported in Bailey & Maynor (1987) are cited at least twice elsewhere. Compared to those reported in Bailey (1987:34-35), the figures differ only slightly.

⁸ Numbers reported for adults differ by over 2000 tokens between Bailey (1987) and Bailey & Maynor (1987). Less so for the kids at only about 150 tokens different. In both cases, Bailey (1987) analyzes more tokens than Bailey & Maynor (1987).

⁹ In CAACS, 2nd person subjects never occur with full or contracted *is*, and there is only a single instance of *is* (a full form) with a 1st person subject. Thus, just as in Freedmen’s Letters (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993:346), there is little evidence of hypercorrection wherein -s marking is extended to other subject persons and numbers.

¹⁰ A similar phenomenon has been observed for third person singular subjects and interacts with copula deletion (Bailey and Maynor 1987, 1988; Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila 1989). This is, no doubt, what Bailey refers to in his personal communication reported in Rickford (1998) where he suggests that some aspects of copula absence evidence influence from vernacular White English.

¹¹ Whereas the Earlier AAVE recorded in the Freedmen’s Letters categorically feature *is* with third person singular subjects, the CAACS data depart from this with null copula also. Of course, the WPA ex-slave narratives feature null copula regularly (Brewer 1974; Kautzsch 200?), but only three or four clear instances of copula absence could be identified in the Freedmen’s Letters (Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993). But this disparity throws little doubt on the prevalence of null copula in nineteenth century AAVE. After all, “[...] however limited literacy was, its influence is undeniable [in the Freedmen’s Letters], at least on spelling. For grammatical features that do not show up in documents, we cannot assume that these did not occur in the speech of their writers” (Montgomery, Fuller, DeMarse 1993:344).

¹² See also Rickford (1998:190).

¹³ *Gwain* not *go*.

¹⁴ Includes 1st person singular and a large number of *'m gon* and *'m gonna*.

¹⁵ The former is the percentage of NP without a determiner, and the latter is NP with a determiner.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The emergence of more nuanced positions that allow for differential development represents an important turn in the origins and development debate. On its surface differential development simply seems reasonable; sociohistorical conditions, demographic profiles, and interactional norms differed from locale to locale producing a variety of social ecologies reflected in a variety of vernacular cultures and speech ways. With this in mind, in this dissertation I have endeavored to answer three questions via an examination of copula absence. These questions are:

1. Do we find evidence of a homogeneous system for copula absence in the early twentieth century African American Vernacular English (AAVE) of Texas?
2. Given the assumptions of the language shift position (i.e., that restructured, learner Englishes exerted substrate influence on AAVE where the two co-existed), what is the linguistic profile of copula absence in mid-nineteenth century Yoruba English (YE) and how does this compare with other varieties of the African Diaspora including AAVE?
3. What does a comparative analysis of copula absence in Texas AAVE and related varieties tell us about the origins and development of AAVE?

In what follows, I summarize my findings for each of these three questions, discuss some of the challenges encountered in the present study, and suggest possibilities for future research.

7.1 Copula absence in East and West Texas

As chapter two demonstrates, both social ecology and language motivate the separation of East and West Texas in a regional comparison of AAVE in the state. Like the vowel differences identified by Jones (2020) for East and West Texas AAVE, those identified here in the system of copula absence are minor. In chapter four, my analysis of the Corpus of African American Cowboy Speech (CAACS) data reveals that East and West Texas share the same basic deep structure and differ only slightly at the surface, with respect to overall proportion of absence. Model comparison shows that both varieties are characterized by predicate control with the effect of predicate type consistent across both. That is, true copula contexts disfavor absence while auxiliary contexts favor it. Furthermore, the ordering of predicate types by the frequency of absence is identical in the two varieties – NP < LocP < AdjP < V+*ing* < *gonna*.

East and West Texas AAVE differ only with respect to secondary effects. Statistical and hierarchical modeling of the latter reveal a significant effect for subject person/number whereas the same modeling for the former does not. Thus, in a continuum of lects, West Texas AAVE is slightly more acrolectal than East because the latter shows no evidence of subject control with respect to copula absence, which is what we would expect given the sociohistorical information provided in chapter two and Schneider's (1989) findings for Upper Southern versus Lower Southern AAVE. And because the CAACS interviews were collected by a single, ostensibly in-group researcher, this eliminates the possibility that this difference between East and West Texas is the result of some kind of fieldworker effect or inconsistencies introduced by a variety of fieldworks, which might have been the case for the regional differences observed for North Carolina versus South Carolina rural AAVE

(Weldon 1998:267). It would appear, then, that there is only some evidence of differential development with respect to the overall proportion of absence and, perhaps, secondary constraints. Note, however, that the mixed model for East Texas did select subject person/number as significant in an early run, but this factor was removed because when other significant factors were included in the model, subject person/number failed to return a significant effect. Recall that mixed models are more conservative and that when compared to normal linear models are more prone to Type II errors (i.e., not selecting a significant factor as such). More data could resolve this issue and would very likely reveal that East and West Texas are, in fact, identical with respect to a secondary effect for subject person/number.

7.2 The shape of a substrate – Yoruba English

Although AAVE exhibits remarkable consistency with respect to the linguistic characteristics of copula absence, there are still important differences that point toward some of the key assertions of the hybrid positions espoused by Mufwene, Schenider, Kautzsch, Winford, and others – namely, the shared emphasis on differential development. The position of Winford, specifically, is intriguing because it suggests that adult learner varieties of English, rather than creole varieties, might have been a conduit for substrate transfer. But, as chapter five shows, the restructured, learner English of a mid-nineteenth century Yoruba speaker lends only marginal support to the language shift hypothesis. Although the raw frequency of absence appears to exhibit a similar subject type preference (i.e., absence is more frequent with pronouns than NPs) and subject person/number preference (i.e., absence is less frequent with 3rd singular subjects), *no* linguistic factors were selected as significant during linear regression (i.e., no factors can be said to “control”

copula absence). Moreover, YE lacks the predicate sensitivity that is characteristic of all other varieties of the African Diaspora with *V+ing* least likely among all other predicate types to feature absence. Thus, in pockets throughout the South where such speech communities existed as we know they did in Alabama and suspect they did in Brazoria County, Texas, their influence upon copula absence would have been to reinforce null across *all* linguistic contexts. Thus, substrate transfer from restructured, learner Englishes of the African Diaspora (at least that of YE) could not have been responsible for the distinct linguistic profile that we consistently observe in AAVE copula absence.

7.3 The possible origins of three key factors

Similarly, historical varieties of English are not the likely source for the copula absence that we observe in AAVE (Poplack 1999:20). Absence was rare and operated along different linguistic parameters in Old and Middle English and occurred only in highly restricted contexts in Early Modern English. Moreover, absence is virtually unattested in mid-nineteenth century White vernaculars of the American South. Thus, the absence that has been observed in early twentieth century White vernaculars is very likely owing to influence from AAVE. “Since there is no substantial historical evidence of copula absence [...] in British English, and if [it is] not [an] American innovation, then the only other dialect, which could have influenced Southern speakers, is African-American Vernacular English or African- American English” (Clements 2005:70). In other words, to the extent that the southern social ecology supported mutual influence between Southern White Vernacular English (SWVE)s and AAVEs, the direction of influence as it regards the copula saw SWVEs drifting toward AAVE as copula absence spread from the latter to the former beginning in environments that favored /r/ vocalization and /r/-lessness and in

environments favorable to zero marking according to the Northern Subject Rule (e.g., with the personal pronoun *they*).

This is not to say that White vernaculars had no impact upon the copula absence that we observe in AAVE, Gullah, some Caribbean English Creoles (CECs), and YE. The preference for null with pronominal subjects was very likely influenced by varieties in which the Northern Subject Rule was active. There can be no doubt that this rule, which assigned verbal *-s* with NP subjects and a bare verb form with pronoun subjects, was widespread in the American South by the first half of the nineteenth century (Ellis 2017). Its prevalence in co-territorial White vernaculars is very likely responsible for the subject type constraint that we observe in AAVE, Gullah, YE, and some, but significantly not all, CECs.

Nevertheless, predicate control distinguishes AAVE from all other known varieties of English and connects it with Anglophone creoles of the African Diaspora. And it is in this respect that the creolist hypothesis maintains its persuasiveness. It is unlikely that AAVE, which was spread over such a vast area with a diversity of social ecologies and linguistic feature pools, had its origin in a creole or semi-creole as Holm (1991) suggests. What is more likely is that in addition to restructured, learner Englishes, Earlier AAVE was subject to persistent substrate influence from creoles and semi-creoles since no other language variety has yet been identified as the probable source for predicate control. Other than varieties of AAVE and those that are known to be related to it (i.e., those of the African American diaspora), CECs of the African Diaspora are the only New World Anglophone varieties to exhibit this predicate control of copula form.

7.4 Challenges

There are inherent and intractable challenges to working with the kind of data analyzed in this study – a type of “found” data.¹ This dissertation has made extensive use of interview data that have been collected with non-linguistic purposes in mind. Oral histories can be a valuable resource for linguistic research by virtue of both the sociohistorical information that they provide and the speech ways that they document. But they are often poorly suited for eliciting the kind of intraspeaker variation that would reveal an individual’s stylistic range. There are no minimal pairs or reading passages. And oral histories are one-on-one and group-based but rarely both for the same consultant. The physiological cues outlined in Labov (1972a) are some help in identifying type A contexts, but many of these cues are irretrievable from a tape recorded conversation or transcript and they were intended to be used in conjunction with the carefully outlined procedure of the sociolinguistic interview. Thus, there’s no telling how the speech described in chapters four and five differs from that which might have been documented for the same individuals in the linguistically controlled contexts of the sociolinguistic interview or in peer group settings.

Additionally, the immediate contexts of the interviews must be taken into account to fully appreciate the language that emerges. I have opted to analyze data collected by African American fieldworkers in order to avoid some unwanted interlocutor effects. But these fieldworkers are outsiders nonetheless. Kossola may have been giving Hurston what she was looking for in terms of “Africanisms.” Although he has an “American” name, she calls him by his Yoruban name. And she makes it clear to him that her purpose, among others, is to document his experience as an African. But, I think it is more likely that Kossola may have shifted toward AAE for Hurston. He is aware that his speech differs

from hers and states his attempt to modify it for her benefit (Hurstons 2018:19). And he may have wanted to demonstrate his ability to use AAE as he notes on more than one occasion that he was among the most capable communicators of the African-born community. Thus, he may have inserted *is* and *'m* and avoided creole or first language copulae while speaking with her – a well-educated African American anthropologist and writer. The performance we observe in *Barracoon* might have differed considerably from that which might have been documented when Kossola was telling stories to his grandchildren or interacting with members of the Africatown community. In Brazoria County, archaeological digs of one early Black homesites found that the bulk of African-influenced artefacts were inside rather than outside of the domicile (Brown & Cooper 1990:12). It stands to reason that the most basilectal forms of Yoruba English might have been similarly distributed – more often with intimates and community-insiders and less often with unfamiliar and community-outsiders.

When there are interviews with a number of individuals from the same community, the question of how the individual is linguistically situated relative to the social network is easier to answer. In chapter four, interspeaker variation could be measured and intragroup variance could be determined because we had enough speakers to do so. In chapter five, we were more limited because, as yet, no comparable oral histories like Kossola's have been collected (to our knowledge). If data for nineteenth and early twentieth century AAVE are scarcer than that for White vernaculars, how much more so that for nineteenth century learner varieties (especially those most central to the development debate)? Nevertheless, I am hopeful that more will emerge. We now know that Kossola was not, in fact, the last survivor of the *Clotilda*. At least two others are known to have outlived him and have also

been interviewed. One of them – Redoshi – even briefly appeared in a film by the United States Department of Agriculture. When more data are located for nineteenth century Yoruba English (and other West African learner varieties of English), Kossola’s speech ways will be an important point of comparison to begin to define the envelope of YE’s variation and develop a more complete profile of this learner variety.

7.5 Future directions

This dissertation has proposed a method of identifying surface-level versus deep structural differences between language varieties, using a combination of statistical modeling and hierarchical modeling. Mixed effects modeling and tests of variable importance based on the random forest approach provide a quantitative means for conclusively determining a variety’s grammar (i.e., what controls surface-level phenomena) while virtually eliminating the risk of misidentifying insignificant factors as significant. Undoubtedly, this approach is preferable to those rooted in descriptive statistics or even traditional linear regression. Comparative analysis of East and West Texas AAVE’s mixed models and tests of variable importance reveals that differences between the two are only surface-deep, solely related to overall rates of absence and not to their respective grammars. But the division between East and West Texas is a minor dialect boundary at best. Subsequent studies using model comparison like that used here might find greater success examining the major boundaries in African American regional dialects. Jones (2020) provides a good starting point for identifying relevant dividing lines.

While the present study focused on the structural homogeneity of Texas AAVE’s present tense copula system, the same approach could be extended to other, related aspects of the grammar including *was/were* variation and plural *is*. And it could be applied to other

grammatical features like verbal *-s* marking, unmarked possessives, unmarked plurals, and *ain't* for *didn't* as well as pronunciation features. Utilizing mixed modeling and tests of variable importance for comparative purposes can likewise be applied to diachronic questions to shed light on how linguistic factors that control variable phenomena change over time.

Additionally, the CAACS data present many opportunities for exploring other questions germane to sociolinguistic variation. Among these is how an individual's identification with a particular place is reflected in their linguistic repertoire. During his interviews, Searles – the researcher and sole fieldworker responsible for CAACS – specifically probed the intensity of his consultants' attachment to Texas. Thus, it would be interesting to see if a strong sense of attachment to Texas among the CAACS consultants corresponds to any of the linguistic markers of regional affiliation identified by Bailey et al. (1991) – markers emanating from North Texas and believed to be predominantly associated with Whites. Recall from chapter three that Bailey and his colleagues assume a strong sense of regional affiliation based on a consultant's wearing cowboy boots and hat, driving a pickup truck, and so forth, but their sample is skewed against rural Blacks (i.e., those most likely to score high on Bailey et al.'s metric) due to their sampling methodology.

CAACS can additionally be useful for exploring how affiliations with particular communities of practice are performed and/or constructed linguistically. For example, one female CAACS consultant objects to being called a *cowgirl* – an appellation that she associates with inauthentic, outsider appropriations – preferring instead to be called a *cowboy*. Thus, she simultaneously delegitimizes some performances while legitimizing her own. And similar such boundary policing occurs with male consultants positioning

themselves as authorities by dismissing so-called *drugstore cowboys* or those with formal education. One consultant draws a distinction between “true cowboys” and those who have received a formal education.

Well they was more like, the guys that was working there was guys that had been to A&M [Searles: Oh is that right?] yeah, they wasn't really a true cowboy [Searles: Oh.] they had been educated [Searles: Uh-huh.] yeah, they was them kind of cowboys. (AAMC2)

Finally, just as Black Geographies have contributed to my sociohistorical analysis in chapter two, CAACS can contribute to Black Geographies. The recordings are a valuable resource for understanding Black place-making in Texas during the early twentieth century. Consultants share specific details about community composition, important leaders, significant events, and locations of schools, churches, cemeteries and the like, which would be useful for mapping, preservation, and planning of the type undertaken by Roberts (2017) and her team.

¹ Data collected for purposes other than those they serve here.

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APPENDIX A

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE: THE BLACK COWBOY IN EAST AND WEST TEXAS

Oral Interview of _____

Racial/Ethnic _____ Age _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Date of Interview _____

Setting of Interview _____

Time of Day _____

Others in Attendance _____

Name of Interviewer _____

Racial/Ethnic _____ Age _____

(The above information will be read into tape recorder prior to conducting interview.)

Introduce myself and explain my purpose for conducting the interview

- a. Union Graduate Learner (PhD program)
- b. P.D.E. (dissertation)
- c. Cowboy Mike presentations

Following this interview I will review with you and leave a copy of a release form which will state where this tape and possible transcript may be housed and the usage that can be made of them. I will need your written permission to use this interview and other possible interviews for my PhD program. I would like to ask you a few questions about your birth, your years growing up and your work as a cowboy. If as I ask you questions, you either have something else to say or feel that I have left something out, please let me know. If, on the other hand, you wish to end this interview at any time, you have the right to do so.

May I have the full name given to you at birth?

When were you born?

Where were you born?

How long have you lived in Texas?

Is there anything special about Texas that appeals to you?

How many different towns/places have you lived?

How many black folk lived in your town/area?

- a. Did the black population increase, decrease, or remain the same?
- b. Did most black folk live in one section?

How much of the population was Anglo, whites other than Anglo, Mexican, Indian, and black?

Did you ever live in or visit any black towns?

IF THE INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. What was the name of the town?
- b. How would you describe the town?
- c. How many people lived in the town?
- d. Were there many businesses?
- e. Was there a black church?

How did the Anglos and Mexicans feel about the town?

Describe the family in which you grew up?

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Did any other relatives or non-relatives live in your household when you were growing up

- a. Did any relatives live nearby?
- b. Did you have much contact with relatives?

How would you describe your childhood?

Were you accepted/liked when you were growing up?

- a. In your family?
- b. In your community/area?
- c. Outside your community/area?

What was Texas like when you were growing up or when you arrived?

Were there any black churches in your community/area?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. What denomination(s)?
- b. Do you remember the name(s)?
- c. Did you or your family attend?
- d. How often were services held?
- e. Was the pastor full time?
- f. How far was the church from where you lived?
- g. How would you describe the church services?
- h. What songs did they sing?
 1. Do you remember any of them?
 2. Can you sing a little of one?
- i. Did you attend any camp meetings?
 1. What were they like?
 2. How long did they last?
 3. Did Anglos, Mexicans, or Indians attend?
- j. What year was it?

What were schools like when you were growing up?

Did you attend school?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. When did you start school?
- b. Who were your teachers?
- c. Where were you living?
- d. Did Anglos, Mexicans or Indians attend your school?
- e. What were schools like?

Do you remember any black social organizations, fraternal orders or benevolent associations when you were growing up or when you first came to Texas such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, or Elks?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Did any member of your family belong?
- b. Did anyone in your community belong?
- c. Did you join?
- d. What year was it?

Were there organizations like the National Afro-American League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Urban League when you were growing up or when you arrived in Texas?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. About what year was it?
- b. What kind of things did they do?
- c. Did blacks, Anglos, Mexicans, Indians, belong?
- d. Did any members of your family belong?
- e. Did you belong?
- f. What was the reaction of the Anglo community?

Do you remember hearing about organizations such as the Farmers' Improvement Society of Texas, the Truck Grower's Union, and/or the Colored Farmer's Alliance of Texas?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. About what year was it?
- b. What do you remember?
- c. Did anyone in your family belong?
- d. Did anyone in your community belong?
- e. Did you belong?
- f. What kinds of things did they do?

Was there any black political activity when you were growing up or when you arrived in Texas?

Up until the 1920s many blacks who could vote supported Republicans in national elections. Was this true for black folk in Texas where you lived?

Were blacks in your community permitted to vote between 1900 and 1930?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. During this same period what had the greatest influence on the black vote?
- b. Were blacks who worked for whites influenced by them to vote a particular way?
- c. Did any black candidates run for political office?
- d. What issues gained the greatest attention in those early elections?
- e. Do you remember any harassment of blacks for being involvement in politics?
- f. Do you remember hearing about the Jaybird-Woodpecker Feud?

What was the response of blacks in Texas to lynching?

IF INFORMANT GIVES A RESPONSE, ASK

- a. Do you remember hearing about or seeing a lynching?
- b. Was it a local lynching?
- c. Did you know the person lynched?
- d. For what "offense" was the person accused?
- e. About what year was it?
- f. Were there any other incidents of violence?

Do you remember hearing about the Brownsville Raid, August, 1906?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. What do you remember?
- b. When did you hear about it?
- c. How did you hear about it?
- d. What do you think caused the raid?
- e. Do you think that the soldiers were treated fairly?
- f. What was the community reaction?
- g. Was the black reaction the same as the Anglo?
- h. Was there a response from the Mexican community?

What effect did race riots in Houston, Tulsa, Chicago, and East St. Louis from 1917-1921 have on black folk in Texas?

Do you remember the Scottsboro Boys Case of the 1930s?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. What do you remember?
- b. When did you hear about it?
- c. How did you hear about it?
- d. Were the Scottsboro Boys treated fairly?
- e. Were any monies or supported given by blacks in your part of Texas?
- f. Do you think that something similar to the Scottsboro Boys case could have happened in Texas?

When did you first hear about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)?

IF INFORMANT RESPONDS AFFIRMATIVELY, ASK

- a. Did any member of your family have personal encounters with the Klan?
- b. Was it known who was in the Klan?
- c. Were there any whites, blacks or Mexicans who stood up to the Klan?
- d. Do you know anyone beaten or killed by the Klan?
- e. Do you know of any blacks who assisted/helped the Klan?

What memories of segregation do you have?

Do you remember the film "Birth of a Nation?"

- a. Can you recall what it was about?
- b. Did you see the film?
- c. Was there any reaction in your community?

Do you remember hearing about the Jack Johnson's fight in Reno, Nevada on July 4, 1910?

- a. Can you remember the result of the fight?
- b. Was there any reaction in your community?

Did you see any black newspapers when you were growing up? (Dallas Express, Wharton Elevator, San Antonio Advance, Oakland Helping Hand, Galveston Gazette, Texas Freeman, Galveston New Idea, Houston Informer, Chicago Defender, Pittsburgh Courier)

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Did you or any member of your family read a black newspaper?
- b. When do you first remember seeing a black newspaper?
- c. What kind of things were printed in those newspapers?
- d. Do you have any old black newspapers?

Are you familiar with and/or were influenced by:

Norris Wright Cuney
Henry Flipper
"Nigger" Jim Kelly
D.W. "80 John" Wallace
Matthew "Bones" Hooks
Richard Henry Boyd
Scott Joplin
Bill Pickett
Jack Johnson
Rube Foster
Antonio Maceo Smith

Ida B. Wells
the UNIA (Marcus Garvey)
Chief Alfred C. Sam
Booker T. Washington
Ma Rainey
Paul Robeson
Mary McCloud Bethune
YMCA
Bessie Smith
Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter)
Etta Moten

What did your family do to have fun and entertainment?

In what social activities did the community participate?

Did blacks, Anglos, Mexicans, and Indians participate together?

Was baseball popular?

Did you have rodeos?

Did you attend square dances or other kinds of dances?

What night was the most popular for going out?

Which of the following holidays were celebrated and how were they celebrated?

Emancipation Day (January 1st)
Juneteenth
Independence Day (July 4th)
British West Indies Emancipation
Do-Ro-Loc
Thanksgiving Day
Christmas
Was there any other special day?

Were any special foods eaten on holidays?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Who was responsible for their preparation?
- b. Were there family recipes that were passed down?
- c. Were there any cooking competitions or fairs?
 - 1. Who sponsored them?
 - 2. Did all racial groups participate?
 - 3. Did any members of your family participate?
 - 4. Did you participate?

When and where did you see your first black cowboy?

- a. What was your first impressions?
- b. How old were you?

When did you know that you wanted to be a cowboy? Why?

Was there something special about being a cowboy?

Were any members of your family cowboys?

Did women do cowboy work?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Under what circumstances did they work?
- b. Did they wear skirts or pants?
- c. Did any women in your family do cowboy work?
- d. How did the community react to this?
- e. How did cowboys react to women doing this work?

At what age did you begin to do cowboy work?

Did you ever get lost while cowboying?

How did you feel about the land and open spaces?

How did you feel about living out in nature away from towns?

Were there many black cowboys in your community?

Was there an "apprenticeship" that cowboys went through in terms of the jobs they were given?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. What would you have to do to progress from a green hand to a top hand?
- b. Did you ever become a top hand or foreman?
- c. Did you ever fire brand cattle?
- d. Did you ever participate in an old fashion cattle drive?
- e. Did you ever have any experience with rustlers?
- f. Were you ever a wrangler?
- g. Were you ever a cook?

What gear did cowboys own?

What kinds of clothes did cowboys wear?

Was there a distinction made between a cowhand and a cowboy?

On the ranch(es) that you worked, what percentage of the cowboys were Anglo, Mexican, Indian, and black?

Were there any sheepherders in your area/community?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. How did ranchers feel about sheepmen?
- b. How did cowboys feel about sheep herders?
- c. Were there any incidents between cowboys and sheep herders?
- d. Did you ever herd sheep?

How did cowboys and farmers get along?

Did you ever hear about the Panhandle Cowboy Strike of 1883?

How well did cowboys get along?

In what ways did cowboys share and cooperate?

What issues caused cowboys to fight?

Did you ever experience prejudice as a cowboy?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Was the incident or remark made by a/an
 - 1. Another cowboy

2. Ranch owner
3. Town person
4. Someone else

What work did a cowboy do by seasons?

How long a day would you work?

How much pay did you receive?

Would black, Anglo, Mexican, and Indian cowboys receive the same pay for the same work?

How long a day would you work?

Did you ride a horse each day?

Did you own your own horse?

Was there much competition among cowboys concerning riding and roping?

I have heard that the best riders and horse wranglers were black – Do you think that was true?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Why do you think that black cowboys had so much "horse sense?"
- b. Who was the best rider and/or horse handler you've ever seen?
- c. Did you ever feel that you had to be better because you were black?

Were you ever the only black cowboy in an outfit?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. How did that make you feel?
- b. Were you ever lonely?
- c. While in this situation, did you visit or travel to communities where there were other black folk?
- d. How did you pass the time away?

Did you ever marry an Anglo, Mexican or Indian woman?

How did white cowboys and town's people feel about a black cowboy courting a white or Mexican woman?

Did black, Mexican and Anglo cowboys go to saloons together?

Did black, Anglo, and Mexican cowboys go to the same houses of prostitution together?

Did they go to separate houses of prostitution?

By what name did cowboys refer to these houses?

If blacks and Anglos did sometimes frequent the same houses of prostitution

- a. How did white cowboys feel about it?
- b. What was the reaction of the town?
- c. How did the houses of prostitution feel about black customers?
- d. Were black and white prostitutes employed in those houses?
- e. Did black cowboys select black prostitutes?

Did cowboys gamble?

IF INFORMANT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Could you gamble on the job during off hours?
- b. What games of chance would you play?
- c. Did you visit saloons or other places to gamble?

Did cowboys curse or use profanity?

What games of amusement did cowboys play among themselves?

Do you remember any cowboy songs?

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS YES, ASK

- a. Were the songs sung by black cowboys the same as those sung by white cowboys?
- b. Do you remember any of those songs?
- c. When would cowboys sing?
- d. Can you sing one of those songs for me now?

How often were rodeos held?

Did you participate?

What were rodeo like back then?

About what years were these rodeos?

Did you know any black rodeo "stars?"

When did you decide to stop cowboying?

Why did you stop?

Why did you settle here?

How would you describe your life?

What would you change if you could?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Do you have any photographs that date back to your childhood or when you were cowboying?

I want to thank you for your time and go over the release with you. I will read the release to you if you like or you can read it yourself.

GET RELEASE SIGNED

I want to thank you again for your time and information.

Interviewer's Comments

Time Interview completed

Mood of Interview

Secondary Characteristics

APPENDIX B

A BASIC PROTOCOL FOR EFFICIENT ORTHOGRAPHIC TRANSCRIPTION

1. There is no such thing as a “perfect” or “completely accurate” transcription—only different versions designed for different kinds and levels of use. This guide outlines how to produce a simple, searchable orthographic transcript to serve either as a finding aid for many purposes (e.g. to identify words to examine for post-vocalic *r*) or as a basis for more refined, exacting transcription (e.g. to indicate pauses, intonation contours, and so on). The model outlined here is designed to prevent the ever-present, all-too-consuming desire to produce a flawless final product, a text that can never actually exist, if for no other reason that the recording itself remains the primary one for many points of reference. Using this guide, it should be possible to produce the reliable draft of an hour-long recording in eight hours. This protocol works.
2. It is often helpful to listen to the first few minutes of an interview, to familiarize oneself with and get a “feel” for the voice(s) of the speaker(s).
3. Transcribe verbatim what is on the recording. Do not re-order words, even if it appears that the revision improves clarity. It is not the content of the speech that is important to transcribe, but its form. Thus, do not revise ‘He *give* it to her’ to ‘He *gave* it to her,’ or ‘There ain’t nothing the matter with him any much’ to ‘There ain’t nothing much the matter with him.’
4. As a general rule, employ standard spellings of words. Do not attempt to represent pronunciation by altering the spelling (e.g. *goin’* for ‘going’ or *’em* for ‘them’). Most pronunciations are commonplace and predictable, so they need not be indicated. Employing variant spellings is time-consuming and next to impossible to achieve consistency. Exceptions to this general practice, though discouraged, are permitted in three respects. One exception is found in point #11 below. A second exception is when an argument can be made regarding an individual basis. In transcribing recordings from Appalachia, here are two candidates for exceptions: *hit* ‘it’ (as in ‘*Hit* don’t make no difference’) and *they* ‘there’ (as in ‘*They’s* nothing wrong with that’). It should go without saying that a log should be kept for exceptions chosen. This log may have many further uses, including the raising of questions of linguistic interest.
5. A third type of exception involves verb principal parts, where the main vowel can be very important (e.g. *shuck* ‘shook’ or *tuck* ‘took/taken’). Do not use apostrophes to indicate the absence of a sound (which sometimes was never pronounced in the first place!), except in the case of common contractions (*you’re*, *that’s*, *don’t*, &c.) Less-conventional contractions involving *will* and *would* (e.g. *horse’ll* for “horse will” and

horses'd for *dogs'd* 'dogs would') should be rendered only when one is absolutely confident. This issue pertains also to the contraction of *was*. In the initial transcription process, it is little more than a drain on time to decide between *I was* and *I's*, because one or more intermediate spoken forms are very common. One can always return to a transcription later and do a far better job of spelling contractions consistently. Even so, instrumental analysis is optimal for contraction of all kinds.

6. Pay special attention to the presence or absence of suffixes that represent morphological information. For example, some speakers will leave *-s* off plural nouns (*ten year ago* 'ten years ago') or will add *-s* to plural verbs (*few people goes* 'few people go'). Some speakers may also add *-ed* on certain verb forms (*drownded, borned, runned, &c.*) These suffixes are usually heard easily. Some endings that represent neither morphological information or an additional syllable are common (e.g. *-t* added to *once* or *across*), but often difficult to detect consistently.
7. Transcribe partial words, such as "false starts," words begun but not completed (as in 'His name was *Ro-*, Robinson').
8. Transcribe filler words, whether spoken by the interviewer or by the interviewee. These include *uh, hmm*, and the like. Do not use the unclear forms *uh-uh* or *mm-mm*, but instead *uh-huh* for 'yes' and *huh-uh* for 'no,' even if some nasalization is present.
9. Do not use periods in abbreviations (*J. J. Smith*) and spell out forms of address (*Mister*).
10. Always spell out numerals, both cardinal (especially dates) and ordinal ones, and commonly abbreviated titles such as Dr.
11. When one or more words are unintelligible upon first listening, audit them again. But if they remain unclear after three or four reviews, insert the flag notation *xx* and go on. It is often helpful to listen to a few more seconds of speech beyond the unclear portion in order to obtain further context of the meaning (especially for names of people and places). If a name is uncertain, put *??* at the end of it. Do not worry about inserting too many *xx*'s after listening three or four times, as the recording can always be re-audited. In some cases the transcriber may need to consult with others more experienced in observing or transcribing mountain speech, in order to ensure that as many words as possible have been captured.

P Reed, February 2018 (adapted from M Montgomery)