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Ranyme Ghidhaoui: *Embracing blackness*: The on-screen representation of African American English by white American actors
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Embracing blackness: The on-screen representation of African American English by white American actors

Storms of controversy have always surrounded entertainment media. The stereotypical representations projected through films are generally known for involving inaccurate depictions of people, which may not be evident to the viewer, resulting in tacitly comprised misconceptions about languages or dialects. Associated with slavery and the underclass, AAE has historically been perceived as a low-prestige variety. Unconventionally, actors of non-African descent have become users of AAE, a phenomenon Rampton (1997) calls "language crossing"; however, they seemingly adopt it to portray certain characters. This issue was the cornerstone of the present research investigating this questionable use of AAE. A language attitude inquiry was conducted to analyze the speech of three white American actors employing AAE. Based on the findings, it was revealed that AAE was implemented when the character is a miscreant with a propensity toward criminality but abandoned when playing the role of a lawman. This was indicative of outsiders' perpetuated stereotypical treatment of AAE, impressionistically regarding it as an uncultivated substandard variety.

Keywords: films, AAE, language crossing, white American actors, stereotypical

1 Introduction

Over the past few years, considerable attention has been steered toward the distinct spoken dialects of English. The structural and functional variations among these dialects have resulted from the hybridization of English and the complex changing realities of human experience. Notably, race and ethnicity were two driving forces that prompted the development of a variety exclusively pertinent to the African American people. With the advent of the socio-political phenomenon known as political correctness, the nomenclatures of Black English (BE) or Black English Vernacular (BEV), i.e., Labov (1972) had to be revised. Today, African American English (AAE) is widely used as an accepted terminology, and often, the word vernacular is attached to it, so African American Vernacular English (AAVE[1]) was added.

[1] AAE and AAVE are used interchangeably in the present article.

With the globalized spread of English, light has been shed on a phenomenon called "language crossing," which is encapsulated in the idea of speaking the dialect or variety that is not expected from its user "because it is not normally thought to belong to them" (Rampton, 1997, p. 16). As the film industry is notoriously known for the dominance of American productions, the process of distributing movies draws attention to the daunting task language performs. The intentionality of utilizing a language or dialect over the other lies in delivering audiovisual content that communicates specific cultural and ideological references, which, through media discourse, will inevitably shape the viewer's impression of the character performing.

But what if the latter, having a different ancestral background, speak a dialect that is racially germane to a specific group of individuals? Mainly, how is AAE conveyed through film by users not necessarily of African descent? Are there any justifiable reasons why a white character would have an accent that is not supposedly 'theirs'? That is telling of what exactly? These vexed questions segued into the undertaking of the present research, which sought to investigate how AAE is depicted in media, especially in the cinematographic discourse of non-African American movie actors, and examine its application reflecting on the user's background.

2 Theoretical and empirical background

2.1 History of AAE

Language is affected by social differences, including gender, religion, age, power, economic status, education, race, and ethnicity (Labov, 2001, p. 246). These factors translate into distinct linguistic identities and speech patterns called dialects or varieties. Ethnicity, being one of these social determinants, prompted the emergence of a unique dialect associated with African Americans called African American English (AAE), "which is so politically 'hot' that it has been constantly labelled and re-labelled" (Holmes, 2013, p. 418). The arrival of Africans to European America meant bringing their own cultural beliefs and ideals, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of a distinctive language system proper to them called "Black English," more impolitically known as "Negro English" or Ebonics. This speech style, now encompassing alternatively less-pejorative labels, namely AAE and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), represents the linguistic identity of black people and has strong ties with their Africanity and life experience in (white) America.

AAVE initially emerged as a code of communication among ex-slaves to grow into a culturally motivated variety eventually. When researching the historical background of AAE, two major schools of thought discuss AAE's origins. These include the creolist hypothesis that is supported by Stewart (1967), Dillard (1972), and Rickford (1998), and the Anglicist view which is advocated by Ewers (1995),

Kautzsch (2002) and Poplack (2006). Both camps are based on monolithic theories of how AAE gradually surfaced where "arguments in favor of one or the other hypothesis have at times triggered quite polemical discussions" (Ewers, 1995, p.1).

2.2 The language system of AAE

AAE is assumed to be a flawed language full of mistakes and mispronunciations when, in fact, it is rule-governed and internally systematized. Even though it is not always socially approved, AAE is still as complex and valid as Standard American English (SAE) or Mainstream American English (MAE) with its own logical linguistic regularities. In this respect, AAE has been empirically demonstrated to have specific phonological, syntactic, morphological, and lexical properties, establishing it as a variety in its own right.

Based on Green's (2002) framework, the phonology of AAE includes a wide array of distinctive traits, namely "*th*" sound patterns where the sounds (*t, d, f, v*) occur in positions in which the *th* ([θ], [ð]) sounds occur in MAE, i.e., ting→[tiŋ]→thing, dese→[diz]→these; liquid vocalization which is when the "*r*" and "*l*" sounds follow vowels within words, they are produced as an unstressed vowel, if any sound at all, i.e., brotha→[brʌdə]→brother, pia→[piə]→ pill; "-*in*" sound pattern where the sound ng (ŋ) in -*ing* suffix is realized as *n* in multisyllabic words, i.e., runnin'→running; "-skr" sound pattern is when *skr* occurs in syllable initial position where *str* occurs in MAE, i.e., skreet→[skrit]→street. Regarding grammar, AAE has its own sense of syntactic structures. Table 1 shows the AAE properties suggested by Green (2002), Wolfram (2004a), Green (2004), and Wolfram (2004b). (see Appendix 1)

As far as vocabulary is concerned, Widawski (2015) proposes a list of distinct lexical attributes associated with AAE, namely *'candy'* which signifies cocaine, i.e., *you mad at me cause I'm ballin' and I got that* ***candy*** *cane, 'big time'* which means *totally,* i.e., *somebody fucked us up* ***big time*** *man*!, *'in the house*' which is another term for among us, i.e., *the entire family's* ***in the house,*** 'paper' which denotes money, i.e., *that's a lot of* ***paper*** *dawg, 'house nigga' which refers to* an African American who acts subserviently toward a white employer, i.e., *Uncle Colin was a* ***house nigga*** *did what massa Bush told him to do*, etc.

2.3 Language crossing

Rampton (1997) defines language crossing as when a person uses "a language which isn't normally thought to belong to them" (p. 16). He describes this phenomenon as "a sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries" and that "through crossing people evoke social images/personae they admire, desire, fear, despise, etc." (p. 16). This sociolinguistic practice is thus representative of those who align with a culture

that is not theirs by employing a speech pattern that contradicts their ethnic background.

Teenagers identifying with African culture use linguistic elements associated with AAE in their speech because, to them, it is considered a 'flavored' way of speaking. Their affiliation with AAE is influenced by the black culture, specifically hip-hop and rap music, which have increasingly gained prominence. AAE, on the other hand, as Bucholtz (1999) comments, "becomes a commodity that urban-identified European American youth can easily appropriate" (p. 445). This is to stress that when adopting a distinct language style because it is trendy, it becomes not only a matter of linguistic appropriation but more of an issue of stripping the cultural significance of that dialect because it was not approached with awareness.

2.4 A sociolinguistic vantage point

The environment in which most Americans are brought up does not allow for linguistic tolerance and inclusion of varieties like AAE, which is constantly denigrated. Green (2002) delves into this issue and notes that it is a question of espousing a socio-political exclusionary ideology where:

> "Social attitudes toward AAE can be summarized by statements such as [..]: People should go back to their own country if they can't speak proper English. You can speak your own language, but don't force somebody else to have to suffer and listen to it." (p. 217)

Based on the fallacy of received language prestige, how a group speaks can be contingent on several factors, including their social background. For instance, the speech pattern of an elite group is highly thought of in comparison to a factory worker's. However, nothing is inherently right or wrong about how underclasses use their language to communicate. Within this context of societal schism, Wolfram (2004b) argues that:

> "The dichotomy between standard and vernacular may be viewed as the symbolic token of a class struggle [in that] those who speak less standardly do not value standard speech [..] rather, they use vernacular speech forms as a symbolic expression of separation from the upper classes with whom they conflict." (p.63)

The stigmatized reputation of AAE has branded it as a socially unacceptable pattern of communication and prevented its speakers from being integrated into the majoritarian American society and labor market. Baugh (2004) comments that "classifications of African American linguistic behavior as "a dialect of English" or

"a language apart from English" have tremendous political, educational, and financial implications" (p. 309).

2.5 Standard Language Ideology (SLI) and sociolectal variation

Lippi-Green (2012) defines Standard Language Ideology (SLI) as "a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and […] drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (p. 67). Standard language varieties, hence, like MAE, are held in high regard because of the white privileged majority of its users in contrast to AAE, which is accorded low prestige considering the historical legacy of slavery and racism Africans had to face; therefore, it is thought of as the variety of the 'powerless' and the 'uncultured.' Lippi-Green (2012) comments that:

> "Dominant institutions promote the notion of an overarching, homogeneous standard language [and this] language is primarily white, upper-middle class, and middle American; it is often claimed to be "unaccented." But of course, it is accented, like all other language varieties. It just happens to be the accent of the mainstream." (p. 294)

In this regard, Holmes (2013) points out that English standard varieties, including MAE, are social dialects that are distinguishable not only by their grammatical structures and sentence patterns but also by the social and regional variations (p. 140). The uncompromising dogmatic mantra of nationalism to speak uniformly that the majority group argues for makes, in the words of Lippi-Green (2004), the need for "linguistic assimilation to an abstracted standard" crucial and thus "portrayed as a natural [process], necessary and positive for the greater social good" (p. 294), which may actually lead to the ghettoization of linguistic minorities, i.e., AAE.

2.6 AAE in cinema

Given the consequences of misrepresenting, stereotyping, and mischaracterizing African Americans, moviemakers also have practically built a subjective perception of AAVE. Green (2004) points out that "one strategy [they] employ to represent blackness could be called "figurative blackface," which differs from literal blackface in minstrelsy [where] actors literally went through a process of making up their faces with black paint and their lips with red lipstick" (p. 88). The notion of "figurative blackface" implies that, unlike minstrelsy, the traditional conception of 'acting black' becomes the modern stereotype of 'sounding black' where the only difference is that minstrelsy is an explicit racist act, whereas 'sounding black' may not be made as evident to the viewer, yet, in both cases it remains an upholding of the status quo.

Over the past few decades, American cinema has witnessed some evolution in its inclusive approach to involve different speech styles. Due to rap, hip-hop, and jazz cultures, which popularized many words associated with the black community, AAE became relatively less marginalized by Hollywood. However, its use in some movies remains grounded in negative defamatory stereotypes. The socially advantaged white caste in the US is a representative example of how AAE is prejudicially perceived and promoted. Because the white caste controls most entertainment media, they have a say in deciding which dialect is favorable. In other words, the depiction of AAE in cinema crucially depends on the perspective of those who do not speak it but own the platform. In filmmaking, building a movie persona involves not only the character's physical appearance and social profile but also its linguistic background. Pao (2004) argues that:

> "Once a character's ethnic identity is [..] communicated to the audience, the actor's physical appearance alone becomes inadequate as a marker and what is universally recognized as one of the most important defining features of an ethnic group—its language and speech—becomes the dominant material indicator of cultural identity." (p. 355)

In the same context of how social ideas are embodied, Bratteli (2001) further interprets that "stereotyping is often accomplished through [...] accent which is not only an important tool to signal a certain character's membership with a group, but also to imbue the character with attributes that are linked with the accent" (p. 29).

2.7 Pertinent studies

Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) studied the linguistic style of white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea, who uses features associated with AAE in her music, but not in other public speech. The inquiry presents a variationist analysis of copula absence, a distinctive trait of AAE that the rapper exaggeratedly employs in her lyrics. The authors concluded that the "overzealous application of AAE features in her music, in order to create a specific linguistic style, enables a success that rests ultimately on the appropriation of African American language and culture, and the privilege that whiteness affords" (p. 303).

Bucholtz (1999) worked on language crossing centering on the narrative of a white boy who affiliates with the African American youth culture and adopts a similar speech behavior. She asserts that "crossing into AAVE […] is a semiotic resource for the construction of identity" (p. 444), where the obtained data reflect ideological associations of successful masculinity to physical power and especially violence, power and violence primarily to blackness as opposed to whiteness and AAVE both to blackness and to masculinity.

Distinctively, Lippi-Green (2012) examined accent usage and representation in Disney movies, analyzing over 300 characters. The results highlight the movie industry's negative attitude towards dialects. The findings revealed that every AAE speaker was in animal rather than humanoid form; worse yet, they were portrayed as smart-mouthed, lazy, and disrespectful characters. Interestingly, she even found out that a positive persona (playing a doctor) in the movie *Atlantis,* who is clearly African American in appearance, did not use AAE speech but rather SAE so "that another correlation is maintained: powerful, educated = SAE" (p. 123).

It is precisely these issues that this research seeks to address. As illustrated in the aforementioned studies, AAE implementation is either ideologically, socially, or culturally motivated. Every AAE crosser in these studies has their own rationales for using AAE speech. By linking the obtained data to the linguistic literature, this study answers the question of how out-member speakers approach AAE in movies.

3 Research design

A sociolinguistic analysis of movie dialogues was carried out using six cinematographic materials. The investigation was concerned with the speech attitude of three white American actors depicting two opposing characters. The primary purpose of this research was to show how out-member speakers stereotypically employ certain varieties like AAE to portray specific social profiles in films. Therefore, with respect to this rationale, the approach employed was based on language attitude research, namely Societal Treatment Studies (STS). Garrett (2010) defines STS as "studies of attitudes to language as they are evident in sources available in public social domains" (p. 229). He stresses its usefulness in obtaining insights into the stereotypical associations and social meanings of language varieties, stating that "it involves analyzing the content of various sources in the public domain, such as prescriptive (or proscriptive) texts, language policy documents, media texts and various kinds of advertisement" (p. 51).

Following a qualitative approach, the present research was guided by the following research questions: what are the arguments evidencing the adoption of AAE speech patterns by non-black movie characters? And is it only a matter of linguistic appropriation rationalizing the white persona's dialectal assimilation of blackness or a question of impressionistic typecasting? The aims were first to look at the linguistic features used by white movie actors implementing AAE speech and second to debunk the stereotypical treatment in their use of AAE to attribute particular personalities and social identities to their characters.

3.1 The movie corpus

In choosing the cinematographic sources, the main guidelines set included that each movie had to be of American nationality (the US as the country of co/production) and that the characters had to be played by white American actors. Since this study deals with popular media, it makes sense for the sampling to be developed on Google, YouTube, and The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb[2]) searches. The corpus comprised similar-genre films (i.e., crime, thriller, action, etc.) released between 1993 and 2018. The focus was on the characters of *Carlito Brigante*/ *Will Dormer*, *Bobby Mercer*/ *James Silva*, and *Shawn MacArthur*/ *John Cale,* who represent the study subjects, respectively, played by acclaimed American actors Al Pacino, Mark Wahlberg and Channing Tatum. The characters were selected based on having the same actor play the role of a delinquent in one movie and a lawman in another to identify which speech style was adopted in each film. Table 2 shows the actor and their character and the corresponding social identity of their role.

Table 2. Actors and characters' background

Actor	**Movie title**	**Character**	**Role played**
Al Pacino	Carlito's Way	Carlito Brigante	A drug dealer
	Insomnia	Will Dormer	A police detective
Mark Wahlberg	Four Brothers	Bobby Mercer	A convict
	Mile 22	James Silva	A CIA operative
Channing Tatum	Fighting	Shawn MacArthur	A counterfeiter/ street fighter
	White House Down	John Cale	US Secret Service agent

3.2 Data collection

The collection process included approximately 50 hours of viewing (including re-watching time) with the closed-caption transcripts. For reliability reasons, e-copies of the movie scripts were also retrieved from *Scripts.com*, which is a member of *STANDS4 LLC*[3]. The movie script of *Mile 22* was taken from *Springfieldspringfield.co.uk*[4]. as it was not published on the former website. The following step was classifying the scripts according to the actor and the role played (positive or negative). Next, utterances of the character in question were extracted separately from the movie script, and then instances of using AAE linguistic features were highlighted.

[2] *IMDb* is the world's most popular source for movie, TV and celebrity content, designed to help fans explore the world of movies and shows and decide what to watch.

[3] *STANDS4 LLC* is "a leading provider of free online reference resources, serving millions of unique visitors worldwide with *genuine content* through its network of reference websites and content partners."

[4] Accessed February 26, 2020

3.3. Data analysis

A total of nine characters were examined; thus, nine movie dialogues were investigated using the theories of AAVE linguistic characteristics proposed by Green (2002), Wolfram (2004a), Widawski (2015), Green (2004), and Wolfram (2004b). Data was then categorized depending on the AAVE feature used with respect to the latter sources. Lastly, the same actor's dialogues were reviewed and compared based on the role played, applying Holmes's (2013) theory of social dialects that classify variety use into different social groups. The linguistic output of each actor was then analyzed to determine whether he used the same speech style to portray the two personas.

4. Research findings

4.1. Linguistic features

Various grammatical, phonological, and lexical attributes of AAVE in the characters' utterances were heavily present, evincing AAE implementation. Table 3 details AAE's use in relation to the profile of its speakers. (see appendix 2). It shows that a total of 37 AAE properties were employed. Al Pacino's negative character, *Carlito*, used 21 features, of which four are phonological, six morphosyntactic, and 11 are lexical, whereas his positive persona, *Will*, did not employ any. Actor Mark Wahlberg's character *Bobby* has the highest number of feature usage in comparison to the other negative characters, applying a total of 27 features, of which four are phonological, six morphosyntactic, and 17 are lexical. Yet, he did not implement these speech patterns when assuming the character of CIA operative *James*. Playing the role of street fighter *Shawn*, actor Channing Tatum used 14 features, of which four are phonological, six morphosyntactic, and four are lexical. At the same time, his positive persona, *John*, did not apply any of these AAE elements[5].

4.2. AAE implementation

As seen in Table 4, Al Pacino's negative character *Carlito* used different morphosyntactic features of AAE including pronominal apposition, negative concord, verbal marker *been*, etc.

[5] Except one occurrence of pronominal apposition.

Table 4. Illustration of Al Pacino's character using AAE morphosyntactic features

Character	*Carlito Brigante*: a drug dealer					
AAE morpho-syntactic feature	Pronominal apposition	Non-standard/ no use of auxiliaries	verbal marker *been*	Negative concord	Verbal -s	Demonstr-ative *them*
Example(s)	"But David Kleinfeld, ***he*** ain't scared no more."	" If you ***was*** a broad, I'd marry you." "Everybody ***Ø*** dancin'."	"I ***been*** here before" -"Who you ***been*** with?."	"***Don't*** take me to ***no*** hospital, please."	"You pull the hook back she ***catch*** that bullet square"	-"He was workin' as a clerk for one of ***them*** big mob lawyers"

Table 5 shows the AAE phonological properties used by Al Pacino's negative character Carlito. These include *th* sound patterns, liquid vocalization, *in-* sound patterns, and *skr* pronunciation.

Table 5. Illustration of Al Pacino's character using AAE phonological features

Character	*Carlito Brigante*: a drug dealer			
AAE phonological features	*th* sound patterns	Liquid vocalization *'r'* & *'l'*	*-in* sound pattern	*skr* sound pattern
Example(s)	"Somebody's pullin' me close to ***the*** ground." [də] "Look at ***these*** suckers scramblin' around." [diz]	"They ***still*** don't know" [stɪə] "I gotta visit my aunt ***later***," [leɪtə]	"thank you, sir, for ***makin'*** the tapes in an illegal fashion" [meɪkɪn] "The kid's ***walkin'*** in there with $30,000" [wɔkɪn]	"Same as when I got popped on 104th ***Street"***. [skrit] -"I ain't goin' back to the ***street.***" [skrit]

Table 6 lists the lexical features performed by Al Pacino's negative character, *Carlito*. He used AAE vocabulary items like pop, dope, candy, etc.

Table 6. Illustration of Al Pacino's character using AAE lexicon

Character	*Carlito Brigante*: a drug dealer
Example(s)	"Sons of bitches always ***pop*** you at midnight"
	"What I'm trying to do, Saso, I mean Ron, is save your ***ass***."
	"Never convicted on no ***dope***."
	"That was no line of crap, ***man***."
	"Five minutes from now we'll be on the streets...with $30,000 worth of very sweet ***candy*.**"
	"…as soon as I make my $75,000...I'm ***splittin'***."
	"$35,000 or $40,000 more, and I'm gone, ***daddy***, gone."
	"Who you been with? Chain-snatchin', ***jive-ass***, Marcin motherfuckers."
	"Gotta know ***fo' sho***."
	"You gonna fuckin' die ***big time***!"
	"Bring these guys the best champagne we got in t***he house***."

Table 7 shows the AAE morphosyntactic properties used by Mark Wahlberg's negative character Bobby, namely pronominal apposition, non-standard/no use of auxiliaries, negative concord, etc.

Table 7. Illustration of Mark Wahlberg's character using AAE morphosyntactic features

Character	*Bobby Mercer* : a convict					
AAE morpho-syntactic feature	Pronominal apposition	Non-standard/ no use of auxiliaries	verbal marker *been"*	Negative concord	Verbal -s	Demonstr-ative *them*
Example(s)	"Your grandma, ***she*** adopted me and Uncle Jack"	" ***l'ma*** kill you right here and now!" " He ***Ø*** breathin'"	"Y'all ***been*** upstandin' citizens" "I ***been*** tryin' to call you all day"	"I ***ain't*** come back for ***no*** funeral"	"The only thin' that ***scare*** people"	"I bet you ***them*** girls look like dudes too"

As seen in Table 8, Mark Wahlberg's negative character *Bobby* implemented different AAE phonological features, including liquid vocalization, *in-* sound pattern, *skr* pronunciation, etc.

Table 8. Illustration of Mark Wahlberg's character using AAE phonological features

Character	*Bobby Mercer*: a convict			
AAE phonological features	*th* sound patterns	Liquid vocalization *'r'*& *'l'*	*-in* sound pattern	*skr* sound pattern
Example(s)	- "I could tell by the looks of ***things*** when I drove in" [tɪŋz] - "Let's show ***these*** guys some fuckin' skills" [diz]	- "I'm a freakin' college ***professor***, Jack" [prəˈfɛsə] - "Yo, little ***brother***!" [brʌðə]	- "The ***buildin'*** is condemned" [bɪldɪn] - "This is the ***listenin'*** part, so shut your mouth" [lɪsnɪn]	- "..cops like you guys couldn't find tits in a ***strip*** joint." [skrɪp]

Table 9 shows the lexical AAE characteristics performed by Mark Wahlberg's negative character, Bobby. The latter employed different AAE terminologies, including *man*, *black-ass*, *paper*, etc. (see Appendix 3). Tables 10, 11, and 12 describe the distinct morphosyntactic, phonological, and lexical attributes of AAE employed by Channing Tatum's negative character, *Shawn*, and provide examples of feature use. Table 10 shows Tatum's negative character, *Shawn*, applied the AAE morphosyntactic features of pronominal apposition, demonstrative *them*, etc.

Table 10. Illustration of Channing Tatum's character using AAE morphosyntactic features

Character	*Shawn MacArthur:* a counterfeiter/ street fighter					
AAE morpho-syntactic feature	Pronominal apposition	Non-standard/ no use of auxiliaries	verbal marker *been*	Negative concord	Verbal -s	Demonstr-ative *them*
Example(s)	"Zulay, ***she***'s nice, man."	" This thing ***don't*** even fit me!" " ***Ø***You remember me?"	"I ***been*** here for a while."	"I ***ain't*** gonna go down there ***no more***."	"She ***seem*** sweet." "Your hair ***smell*** good."	"Kids love ***them*** things" "You want one of ***them*** things?"

As presented in Table 11, Tatum's negative character, *Shawn*, used different AAE phonological properties AAE such as *th* sound pattern, *in*- pronunciation, etc.

Table 11. Illustration of Channing Tatum's character using AAE phonological features

Character	*Shawn MacArthur:* a counterfeiter/ street fighter			
AAE phonological feature	*th* sound patterns	Liquid vocalization *'r'*& *'l'*	*-in* sound pattern	*skr* sound pattern
Example(s)	"***Thi*s** is all I got left." [dɪs] "Look, I feel bad about ***that*** book." [dæt] "***Thanks***, man" [tæŋks]	- "..that was your ***daughter***?" [dɔtə] - "Hey, that notice that was on your ***door***." [dɔ]	- "How you ***doin'*** today?" [duɪn] - "You know what I'm ***talkin'*** about." [tɔkɪn] - "It ain't ***rainin'***." [reɪnɪn]	- "You better give me $5,000 if I walk across the ***street***." [skrit]

Table 12 lists the lexical items employed by Channing Tatum's negative character, *Shawn MacArthur*. He used different AAE vocabulary elements such as *break, for real, y'all, etc.*

Table 12. Illustration of Channing Tatum's character using AAE lexicon

Character	*Shawn MacArthur: a c*ounterfeiter/ street fighter
AAE lexicon examples	"That's your problem, ***man***, you don't trust nobody."
	"Why you gotta ***break*** everythin' ***down***?"
	"So, this thing's ***for real***?"
	"Where are ***y'all*** goin'?"

5. Discussion

The language choices of each actor highlight the sociolinguistic element in character construction. Different AAE properties were used in the movies where the performers played a negative character. The two rival-character narratives allow us to notice that the three performers opt for different language styles, changing the dialect according to their roles. The speech style used in the dialogue extracted from the movies where the actors played the positive characters of *Will*, *James*, and *John* doesn't fit into AAE linguistic patterns. Instead, it seems to follow the language paradigm of MAE. On the other hand, the examples in the excerpts from the movies where they played the negative personas of *Carlito*, *Bobby*, and *Shawn* depict several characteristics that belong to AAE. The actors linguistically profiled their personas through a speech pattern that they do not usually implement yet employ when they portray a criminal-like character. The performers playing a negative character did not use any[6] AAE features when assuming *James*, the CIA operative, *Will*, the Police detective, or *John*, the US Secret Service agent.

[6] Channing Tatum's positive character *John* did apply pronominal apposition, but it was only one occurrence and no other AAE feature was employed so the finding is insignificant to claim that he adopted AAE as his speech style.

Regarding grammar, the AAE feature aspectual/verbal marker *been* (BIN) occurs in the dialogue of Al Pacino's character *Carlito*. Still, he does not implement it when playing Detective *Will* in *Insomnia*. For example:

Will: "You're the same distorted pathetic freak **I've been** dealing with for 30 years"
Carlito: "*I know a lot about cars**. I been** stealin' 'em since I was 14*"
The lexical feature of AAE "-ass," which refers to "self," was used by *Carlito* on various occasions, but Al Pacino's positive Character *Will* did not employ it and instead chose the MAE form "self." Such examples include:
Will: "*Now, are you going to tell us who that somebody might be? Or are you so fucking stupid you're going to leave **yourself** as the last person to see Kay Connell alive?*"
Carlito: "*What I'm trying to do, Saso, I mean Ron, is save **your ass**.***"***

In the case of actor Channing Tatum, the use of AAE lexis in the dialogue passages of his character *Shawn* in *Fighting* seems to correspond to what is described in the linguistic literature. For example, as seen below, in his positive persona, *Shawn* employed the AAE feature "for real," but his positive character, John, implemented the MAE version, which is "really," that corresponds to "for real" in AAE.

Shawn: "*So, this thing's **for real**?*"
John: "***Really**? Did you check Walker's personal records? His computer, his e-mails?*"
Concerning grammar, Channing Tatum's negative character uses four AAE characteristics, including demonstrative "them," which was implemented twice, i.e., "*You want one of **them** things?*" but this feature did not occur in the utterances of his positive persona, *John*.

As far as actor Mark Wahlberg is concerned, in *Mile 22*, to address his team members, his character *James* (the CIA operative) does not use *y'all* like the actor's character *Bobby* (the convict) does in *Four Brothers*, but instead, he uses the standard form *yo*u.

Bobby: "***Y'all** better run, man, these white cops are crazy*!"
James: "***You** got 90 seconds, make it quick*"

Employing the grammatical feature of negation, *James* uses the standard form of negation, for instance, "*That story **does not** work for me*," as opposed to Bobby, who uses negative concord, for example, "*This **ain't no** homeless shelter*." Furthermore,

regarding AAE vocabulary, Wahlberg is the only performer among the other actors whose character, *Bobby*, heavily relies on AAE lexicon. What is both exceptional and abrupt about his implementation of AAE is the use of the term *house nigga*. This terminology is considered extremely "offensive unless used by African Americans," who employ it to reproachfully refer to "an African American who acts subserviently towards a white employer" (Widawski, 2015, p. 206).

Based on the findings, our actors do not exhibit the same speech behavior when assuming positive characters. The 'adjustment' of their speech critically depends on whether their role belongs to a positive or negative character, more precisely a law enforcement officer or a criminal. This shift of variety usage allows us to question the actors' biased stance against AAE as they integrate it essentially to portray negative characters while they use their natural 'white' speech, i.e., MAE, in depicting positive personas. Table 13 summarizes the use of AAE by the white actors, which is contingent on the nature of their role. When depicting criminal-like characters, i.e., convict, drug dealer, and counterfeiter/street fighter, they adopt AAE speech however, these very same actors switch to the mainstream variety when portraying the personas of secret service agent, CIA operative, and police detective.

Table 13. AAE in relation to the user

The profile of the movie character	**AAE use**
Drug dealer	Yes
US Secret Service agent	No
Police detective	No
Counterfeiter/ street fighter	Yes
Convict	Yes
CIA operative	No

The findings of the present analysis indicate that a form of linguicism is practiced against AAE being viewed as an improper sociolinguistic identity for the role of a lawman but an appropriate choice for the characters of drug dealer and convict. This finding goes with Holmes's (2013) claim that since "non-standard forms are associated with the speech of less prestigious social groups, the label inevitably acquires negative connotations" (p. 141), which is conveyed in the stereotypical use of AAVE by the three actors. What evinces that they consider AAE an inferior substandard dialect of English is that they utilize it as a characterization tool for voicing their criminal-like persona because the entertainment business is, in fact 'aware' of the power of languages and dialects and what they evoke. Against this background, Holmes (2013) further argues that "the prejudices of the wider community tend to be reinforced by [..] the subtle reinforcement of negative attitudes provided by the depiction of AAVE users in TV shows and movies as less well-educated, down-at-heel and often unsavoury characters" (p. 418). Such

cinematographic content, thus, pushes for the continuous reproduction of structural and cultural inequalities between African Americans and MAE speakers, hence perpetuating the myth of SLI.

6. Conclusion

Previous studies have probed into the use of AAE and the profile of its users from a broader exploratory perspective, essentially in everyday interactional social encounters. Still, this research strand attempted to further look at specific instances of questionable AAE use. The fundamental purpose of this inquiry was to draw attention to the stereotypical application of AAE by non-black characters to portray a specific occupational profile.

The findings of the present inquiry substantiate the industry's subtle favoritism for particular dialects and that, by reducing the use of AAVE to lower social classes as if concomitant only with such profiles, namely people portrayed as criminal-like characters, MAE is launched as the standard dialect spoken by the cultivated elite. From this, it follows that the viewer will automatically classify African Americans to particular social groups, i.e., delinquents and convicts, because their language is employed explicitly by actors only when presenting these negative characters, hence creating assumptions and misconceptions about dialects and people, and as a result reinforcing established stereotypes.

It is ultimately hoped that this sociolinguistic analysis of cinematographic content will provide an enlightened understanding of AAE movie usage and sensitize people to the issue of how, in some cases, adopting a specific accent or variety is not as inadvertent as it may seem. Many angles of language attitude research on AAE have yet to be investigated. An extension of the current inquiry is to consider other non-linguistic variables, such as age, gender, movie genre, etc., that could provide additional insights into accent or variety used in movies. Given the debates always surrounding language phenomena, the representation of AAE in media will continue to be controversial, hence further scientific inquiry.

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Appendix 1

Table 1

AAE grammatical features proposed by Green (2002), Wolfram (2004a), Green (2004) and Wolfram (2004b)

a. Negative concord: When different negators such as *don't*, *ain't*, *no* and *nothing* are used in a single negative sentence for more reinforcement.
Example*: If you don't do nothing but farm work, your social security don't be nothing.*

Green (2002)

b. Pronominal apposition: Placing pronouns after nouns or names of people.
Example: *My mother, she's coming to school* as opposed to *My mother's coming to school.*

Wolfram (2004a)

c. Verbal "-s": Producing sentences in which the verb that occurs with third person singular is not marked with an *-s*. (subject-verb disagreement)
Examples: *When he come down here, I be dən talked to him.*

Green (2002)

d. Specialized auxiliaries:
   - Copula absence: the absence of an explicit auxiliary form of the verb/copula be.
     Examples: *They Ø walking too fast* / *He sleeping in the car?*
   - Subject-verb disagreement: a single verb form may be used with both singular and plural subjects.

Person/Number	Past Progressive	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st,2nd,3rd sg, pl	was eating	was eating	wadn't (wasn't) eating

Green (2002)

e. Demonstrative "*them*": extending the objective form *them* for attributive demonstratives.
Examples: *She likes them apples* / *I love them shoes.*

Wolfram (2004b)

f. Verbal markers: verbal markers *be* and *BIN* can precede verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, and adverbs, but *dən* can precede only verbs.
   - _ *be* Indicates a recurring activity or state. *Sometimes they be sitting in the conference room in the library*.
   - _ *BIN* (pronounced with stress) Situates an activity or state in the remote past. *They BIN sitting in the conference room; they didn't just get there*.
   - _ *dən* (pronounced without stress) Indicates a completed activity whose resultant state holds now. *He dən read all the* Little Bill *books*.

Green (2004)

Appendix 2

Table 3
Presence VS absence of AAE linguistic features in the selected dialogues.

		Al Pacino playing a		Mark Wahlberg playing a		Channing Tatum playing a	
		Drug dealer *Carlito*	Police detective *Will*	Convict *Bobby*	CIA operative *James*	Counterfeiter / street fighter *Shawn*	US Secret Service agent *John*
Phono-logical features	'*th*' sound patterns	X	-	X	-	X	-
	Liquid vocalization *'r'*&*'l'*	X	-	X	-	X	-
	'*-in*' sound pattern	X	-	X	-	X	-
	'*skr*' sound pattern	X	-	X	-	X	-
Morpho-syntactic features	Negative concord	X	-	X	-	X	-
	Pronominal apposition	X	-	X	-	X	X[7]
	Verbal '-s'	X	-	X	-	X	-
	Specialized auxiliaries	X	-	X	-	X	-
	Demonstrative '*them*'	X	-	X	-	X	-
	Verbal marker 'been'	X	-	X	-	X	-
Lexical features/ Vocab	*'man'*	X	-	X	-	X	-
	'pop'	X	-	X	-	-	-
	'big-ass'		-	X	-	-	-
	'-ass'	X	-	X	-	-	-
	'bitch-ass'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'black-ass'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'dope'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'candy'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'big time'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'split'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'daddy'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'jive-ass'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'fo' sho'	X	-	-	-	-	-
	'in the house'	X	-	-	-	-	-

[7] This AAE property applied once by Channing Tatum's positive character *John* is not supported by other AAE feature occurrences therefore it was only reported as a finding but not considered for analysis or interpretation.

Table 3
Continued

Lexical features/ Vocab	*'break down'*	-	-	-	-	X	-
	'for real'	-	-	-	-	X	-
	'cracker'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'paper'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'some'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'burner'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'po-po'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'motherfucker'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'down'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'yo'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'house nigga'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'melon'	-	-	X	-	-	-
	'y'all'	-	-	X	-	X	-

Appendix 3

Table 9
Illustration of Mark Wahlberg's character using AAE lexicon

Character	*Bobby Mercer*: a convict
Example(s)	"You full of shit, ***man***."
	"Let's ***pop*** this motherfucker right now."
	"..the last thin' she's doin' is thinkin' about your ***black-ass."***
	"Angel get your ***ass*** in here!"
	"You do got ***some*** big-ass teeth, Jerry."
	"Imma light your lil ***bitch-ass*** on fire."
	"The ***popos*** is here!"
	"You do got some ***big-ass*** teeth, Jerry."
	"You wanna take ***Cracker*** Jack with you?"
	"You got a ***burner***?"
	"***Yo***. What's up?"
	"I got this ***motherfucker*** now!"
	"It's a real shame that little Jackie's the only one ***down*** to ride."
	"There, some ***paper*** right there."
	"Angel tells me you one of Victor Sweet's boys now. Hear he's runnin' shit like his uncle treatin' you like a ***house nigger***."
	"I'm gonna go in there and bust that ***melon*** and find out what he's thinkin'"
	"Y'all been upstandin' citizens."