Chapter 9, Part II

American Dialects and American Attitudes

Max Weinrich: "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy."

American Attitudes

- In America, economic advantage and social success are strongly associated with command of Standard American English (SAE).

- Doesn't mean anything is wrong with Southern English, Cajun, Gullah, AAVE, Spanglish—just that they are playing by different rules, and those rules are not all the same as on the SAE field.

- Linguistic difference is often a source of discrimination, prejudice, and anxiety. It can be a source of pride as well.

Who holds these attitudes?

- **Mothers** often more likely to feel this way
- People with **lower levels of educational attainment** are often likely to feel this way
- People who **politically self-identify as conservative** are more likely to feel this way
- People who **self-identify as "traditional Americans"** are more likely to feel this way

DIALECTS: SUBsets of a language

- Linguists define **dialect** as the specific form of a language used by a speech community; that community may be defined by geography, ethnicity or racial identity, class, cultural values, or other boundaries.
- The general public often considers dialects to be "a substandard, low status, often rustic form of a language, lacking in prestige. Dialects are often being thought of as being some kind of erroneous deviation from the norm - an aberration of the 'proper' or standard form of language."
- Dialects may have distinct phonological, morphological, syntactic, and/or lexical characteristics.
- Most linguists will argue that dialects of a language are mutually understandable.

VARIETIES

- Sociolinguistic term; allows **coexistence** of regional, social, stylistic and diachronic varieties of a particular language. (Thus, you could say OE, ME, and EModE are varieties of English.)
- Less pejorative than some of the other terms
- Large umbrella term that covers many of the subset terms
- Often used to describe different national versions of English—takes out the political and sociocultural arguments
- "Standard American English" (SAE) is a variety of English

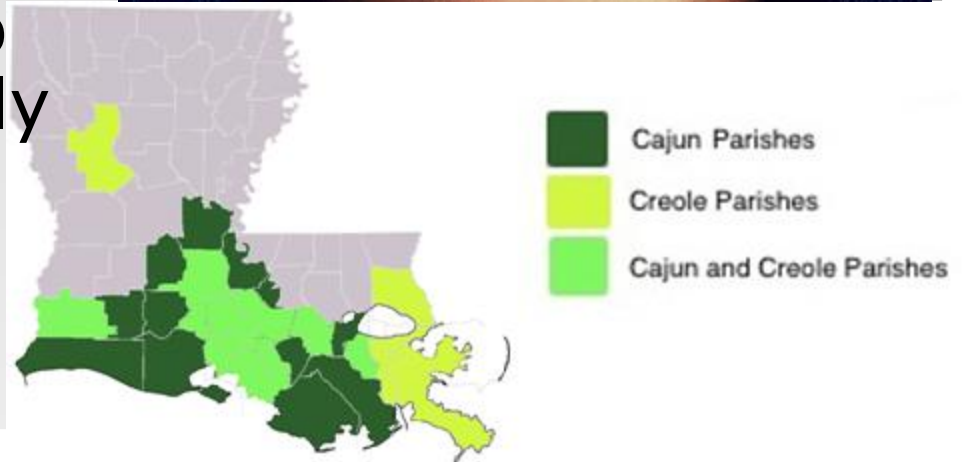# LINGUA FRANCAS AND PIDGINS: Stages of Development

- A **lingua franca** is a language used by speakers of different languages to simplify crosscultural communication. Latin was the *lingua franca* of the Middle Ages; English is the *lingua franca* of the Internet age.

- A simplified language derived from two or more languages is called a **pidgin**.
  - It is a contact language developed and used by people who do not share a common language in a given geographical area. It is used in a limited way and the structure is very simplistic. "Me Tarzan, you Jane."
  - Dominant language is called the **superstrate**
  - Secondary contributing languages are called the **substrates**

- Since pidgins serve a single simplistic purpose, they usually die out. But….

CREOLES

- When pidgins survive and a new generation starts to speak them, they develop a more complex structure and richer vocabulary. Once the pidgin has evolved and has acquired native speakers (the children learn the pidgin as their first language), it is then called a **creole**. (This process is called **creolization**.) Examples: Louisiana Creole, Haitian Creole, Liberian Kreyol, Hawaiian Creole English (HCE) [which confusingly is sometimes just called 'Pidgin'].
- As expected, creoles are usually found in areas that had a lot of trade and cultural commingling (islands, port cities, formerl colonial states)
- Some linguists theorize that over time, a creole language may reconverge with one of the standard languages from which it originally derived, especially if the standard language has more prestige. This is called **decreolization**.

Studying Dialects

- Ethnographic techniques
- Draw on some WPA interviews
- Development of sophisticated recording and analysis methods
- Contemporary video and audio tools really improving these studies

Eski Mauriciens gagne honter pou koz kreole?

Cajun Parishes
Creole Parishes
Cajun and Creole Parishes

Wolfram's Principle

- "Principle of linguistic gratuity" argues that linguists should give back to the communities who provide data for them
- Often, these projects aim to document and celebrate the importance of local history and culture of the community, often through documentaries, audio recordings, books, and museum exhibits.

THE GULLAH EXPERIENCE
Arts Center of Coastal Carolina 2009
AMIRI GEUKA FARRIS GULLAH DAY
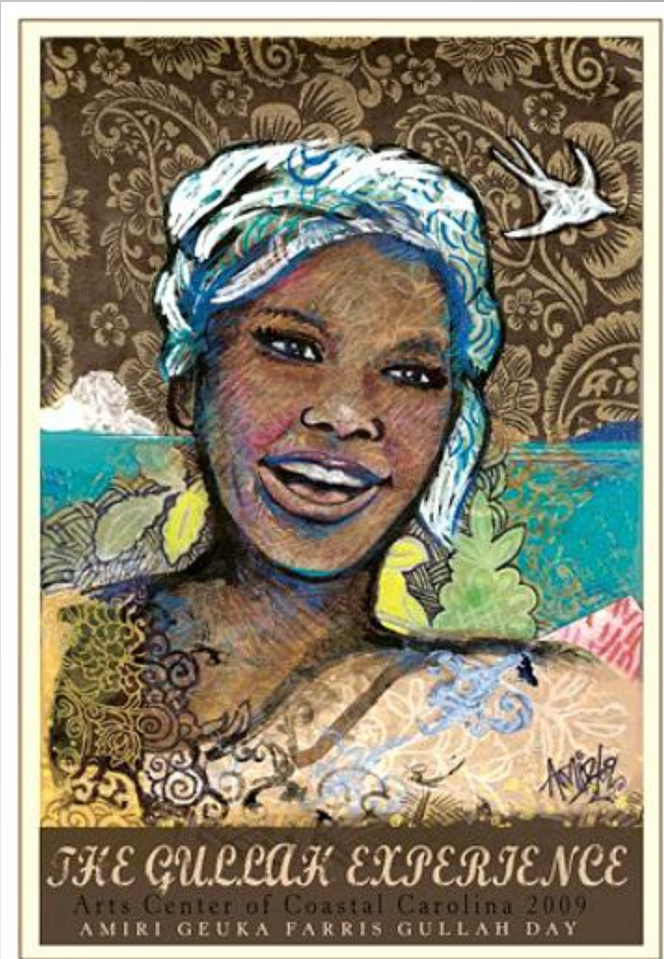
American Regional Dialects

- DARE

- Linguistic Atlas of US projects

- Phonological Atlas of US

- Map of US Dialect areas:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGxlxO
  cS-tE
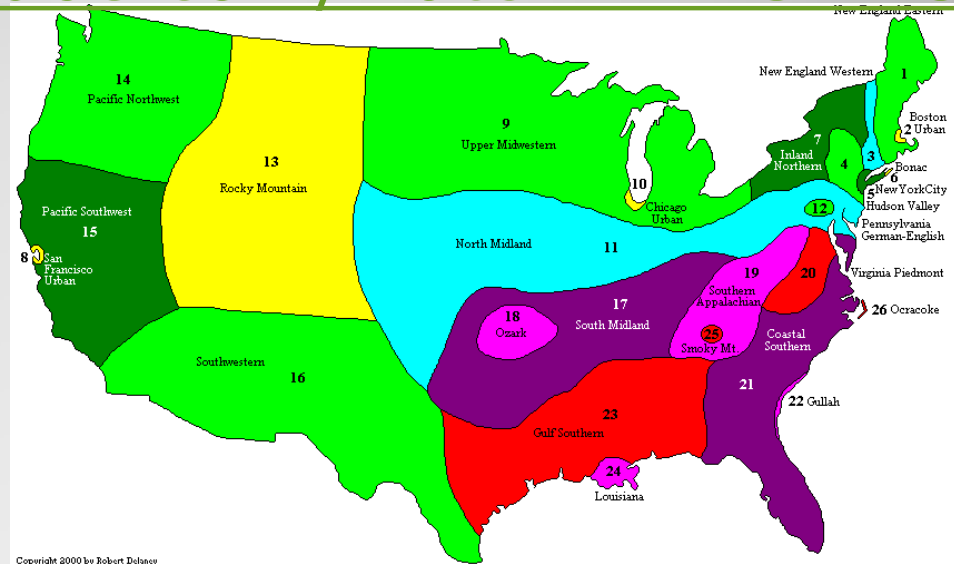
AAVE: The Red Flag Dialect

- As with all spoken languages, AAVE is extremely regular, rule-governed, and systematic.
- The heart of AAVE is its phonology and grammar. These are the parts that tend to be less often diffused to other groups and that are the most lasting and the most regular.
- Recent studies suggest that upwards of 80% of African Americans speak some form of AAVE (Redd 2005)
- Many people regard "difference" as "deficient" when it comes to AAVE (see Delpit 2002; Craig 2009; Hill 2009).
- Non-specialist attitudes towards AAVE can be negative, especially amongst African Americans, as it both deviates from the standard and its use is interpreted by many as a sign of ignorance or laziness.

TERMINOLOGY

- **Black English** (term used by linguists from the 70s through the 90s)

- **Ebonics** (associated with non-linguists, political movement of late 80s into the 90s; picked up by a lot of attack media and still used by them)

- **African American Vernacular English (AAVE):** term adopted by linguists in late 90s and now widely embraced

GOOD RESOURCES ON AAVE

- William Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 1972
- Victoria Fromkin and Rodman, *An Introduction to Language*, Sixth Edition, Harcourt Brace, 1998
- Salikoko S. Mufwene , Rickford, Bailey, and Baugh. *African-American English - Structure, History and Use*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998
- John R. Rickford, *African American Vernacular English - Features, Evolution, Educational Implications*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1999
- Walt Wolfram. "The grammar of urban African American Vernacular English." In Bernd Kortmann and Edgar Schneider (eds.), *Handbook of Varieties of English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004: 111-132. (God bless Walt; he puts PDFs of almost all his articles on his web page!)
- See our class reserve list

In teaching contexts, see

- Craig, H.K. et. al. "African-American English speaking students: An examination of the relationship between dialect shift and reading outcomes." *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 52(2009): 839-855. Print.

- Dowdy, J.K., Ovuh Dyuh and Laura Delpit (eds.). *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts On Language And Culture In The Classroom.* 3-14. NY: Norton, 2005. Print.

- Hill, K.D. "Code-switching pedagogies and African-American students voices: Acceptance and Resistance." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 52.3 (2005): 120-131. Print.

- Redd, T.M. and K.S. Webb. *A Teacher's Introduction To African-American English.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2005. Print.

- Wolfram, Walt. "Repercussions from the Oakland Ebonics Controversy- The Critical Role Of Dialect Awareness Programs." In C.T. Adger, D. Christian & O. Taylor (eds.) *Making The Connection: Language And Academic Achievement Among African-american Students. W*ashington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1999. 61-80. Print.

ORIGINS & USERS

- "Creole" theory: AAVE arose from one or more slave creoles. These in term rose from slave/captor pidgins. Major proponents: William Stewart, John Dillard, John Rickford, Walt Wolfram
- "Decreolization"—AAVE has features of many regional varieties of English, just in different combination, moving more closely back towards SAE.
  - Not all African Americans speak AAVE, and not all AAVE speakers are African American. A significant number of whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans who live and work closely together speak dialects that can be characterized as AAVE.
  - In some Southern communities, the differences are more attitudinal than ethnic, phonological, etc.

THE ANN ARBOR CASE (1979)

- Excellent historical background: http://comppile.org/archives/fforum/fforum3(1)files/fforum3(1)Bailey.pdf

- Court recognition of differences between spoken and written Englishes

- Court ordered school district to educate teachers about Black English and to identify students who were Black English speakers and "use that knowledge in teaching such students how to read standard English."

EBONICS

- The term was first used in a book called *Ebonics: The true Language of Black Folks*, by Robert L. Williams (1975). It was actually coined two years earlier at the conference whose proceedings were published in that book.

- The term was defined by the editor, Robert Williams (p. vi) as "the linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represents the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States idioms, patois, argots, ideolects, and social forces of black people ... Ebonics derives its form from ebony (black) and phonics (sound, the study of sound) and refers to the study of the language of black people in all its cultural uniqueness."

- Term today is politically loaded; its use is very divisive; much of this is due to the Oakland case.
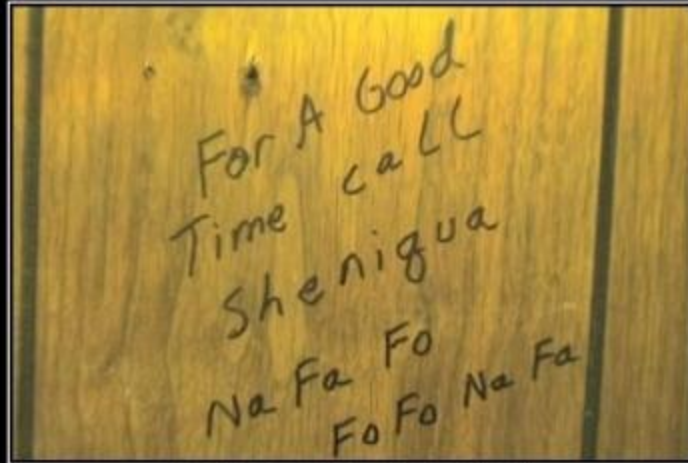
THE OAKLAND CASE

- December 1996: The school board for the Oakland school system voted unanimously to recognize Ebonics as a second language, and the primary language of its African-American students, for "maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language... and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills."

- Intention was that teachers would be trained to recognize when students were using Ebonics, and would translate it into standard English, like they did with Hispanic students or others for whom English is a second language, thus teaching them English as a second language.

- Major political firestorm, both in California and nationally; U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley argued, "Elevating Ebonics to the status of a language is not the best way to raise standards of achievement in our schools and for our students."

- Oakland was denied any federal funding to implement the program. Ebonics remains a heavily politicized term and idea.
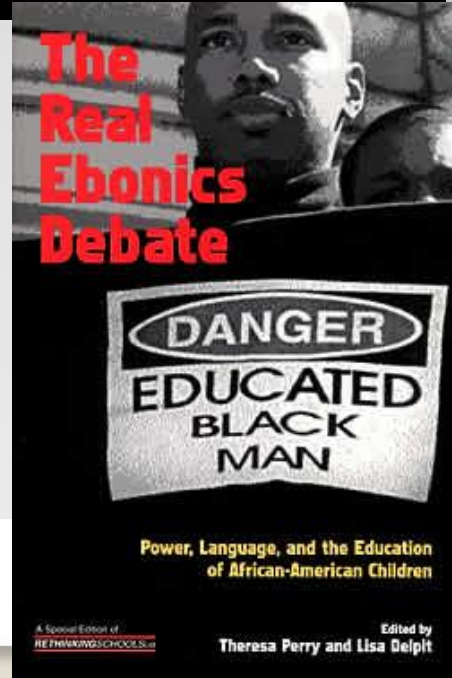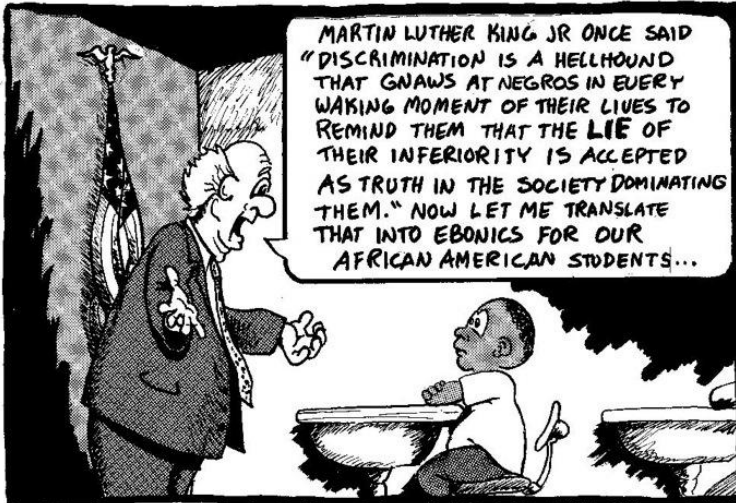
What did the Oakland Case show?

- According to Walt Wolfram,
  - the intensity of people's beliefs and opinions about language and language diversity,

  - the persistent and widespread level of public misinformation about the issues of language variation and education

  - the need for informed knowledge about language diversity and its role in education and in public life.
    - "Language Ideology and Dialect: Understanding the Ebonics Controversy", *Journal of English Linguistics* 26 (1998):108-121.

Most changes in AAVE are similar to earlier changes in English

- We see morphological and syntactic simplification
- We see phonological levelling
- We see changes in form to simplify and reduce confusion
- There are regional variations—e.g. Southern, urban AAVEs (see http://bit.ly/1a8BRZm).
- These suggest that AAVE may be evolving consistent with the history and development of English

8 SALIENT FEATURES OF AAVE: Deletion of the copula 'be'

- Probably the most common feature of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). 'Is' and 'are' are deleted when they stand in positions where they can be contracted in Standard American English (SAE).
- This feature is specific for AAVE, that is, it cannot be found in any other American dialect, but it is a feature in many Caribbean creoles
- Consistent with simplification of tenses across diachronic history of English language.
  - Examples: "She going to church with her momma." "They at Tina's house."

Invariant or Habitual 'be', a/k/a consuetudinal 'be'

- 'Be' can in AAVE be used to distinguish between habitual action, and something which is just going on just at the moment. In SAE this distinction cannot be made, other than by adding words like "generally", or "at the moment". In AAVE, on the other hand, 'be' is used instead of 'is' or 'are` to indicate that what is going on is something which happens quite often (Rickford 1999: 6).

- This feature is not identifiable in any other American vernacular, but it occurs in many other languages. It has been suggested that the use of consuetudinal 'be' is the result of a mixture of features similar to this one, which can be found in African, Creole and Irish English (Fromkin and Rodman 1998: 415).
  - Examples: "She been working at Piedmont (for a lot of years)" vs "She working at Piedmont" (she's working there now). "He be nasty" (that's his typical way of being) vs "He nasty" (that's how he is right now)

Collapse of Forms in past tense of 'be'

- In AAVE the singular past forms of 'be' are used with plural and second person subjects as well. (Rickford 1999: 7)

  ◦ Example: "We was watchin' television."
  "They was over at the house."
  "Was you home last night?"

Loss of 3rd person singular verb inflectional morphemes

- Consistent with English tradition of simplifying the affix system.
  - Examples: "He drive a fine ride."
    "She not say where she going."
  - The incidence of 3rd sg. *-s absence is so high* for younger AAVE speakers in some sociolinguistic studies of core vernacular adolescents – reaching levels of between 75–100 percent for some speakers – that it has prompted several researchers (Labov et al. 1968; Fasold 1972) to speculate that contemporary urban "AAVE has no concord rule for verbal *-s" (Fasold 1972:* 146). (Wolfram: 122)

- This also explains AAVE use of 'don't' instead of SAE 'doesn't' and 'have' instead of SAE 'has'.
  - Example: "She don't live here."

Leveling: Loss of Inflectional 's morphemes

- The absence of possessive *-s* in sentences, especially where another adjective signals possession.This is a relatively stable feature in AAVE wherever it is found in the US: *She my baby mama.*

- Very common pattern of *–s deletion: I got 50 cent _* and *It's four mile_ from here.*(Wolfram:124-25)

Pronoun changes

- AAVE features regularization of the reflexive *hisself* as in *He washed hisself,*
- the extension of the objective form *them* for attributive demonstratives such as *She likes them apples,* and
- the use of objective forms in coordinate subjects as in *Me and him got style.*
- It shares benefactive datives as in *I got me a new car* with Southern dialects. (Wolfram: 125-26)

Final ŋ Pronounced as 'n'

- This feature is sometimes called 'g-dropping', and takes place in gerunds, where the final 'ng' is pronounced [n]. A form of levelling.
- Characteristic of a number of American regional dialects.
- Some linguists, such as Rickford, contend it's not dropping, but an alveolar nasal being used as a substitute for a velar nasal (Rickford 1999: 13).
- Example: "He bein' fictitious." "She goin' to the store now."

Multiple Negation

- In Standard American English, as in mathematics, two negatives make a positive. This is not the case in AAVE, where a sentence like "I don't know nothing" (SAE "I don't know anything") has negative meaning, in spite of the two negatives. In this respect, AAVE looks back to Middle and EModE, before the schoolmastering that led to the double negative rule for SAE.

- This feature can also be found in the speech of Americans from other ethnic groups, particularly in colloquial speech, and among the working class. Nevertheless, Rickford claims that this feature, and other features that can be identified in dialects other than AAVE as well, are more common in AAVE, and are used in a greater variety of linguistic situations (Rickford 1999: 11).

- Examples: "Didn't nobody tell me nothing about nobody there." "He don't do nothing I tell him."