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PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY AND THE ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY: ON NARRATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

An honors paper submitted to the Department of English, Linguistics, and Communication
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Sabia Carly Prescott
May 2015

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05/01/15

Perceptual Dialectology and the Attribution of Responsibility: On Narrating Sexual Violence [1]

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Abstract

African American Vernacular English has a distinct set of grammatical and phonological features that are given social meaning by listeners, often associating its speakers with ideas about the African American community at large. Studies have shown that social ideologies surrounding a dialect may strongly influence perceptions of the speaker. In turn, the very ways the speaker is understood may have tangible consequences. The present study analyzes data collected from an online survey to determine the effects of language ideologies and dialect perception on attribution of responsibility to victims of sexual violence. The text focuses specifically on how perceptions of a victim's dialect can affect the extent to which they are held responsible by study participants. Survey takers (n=32) were asked to answer five questions after reading a fictional story told in first person, either in Standard American English or African American Vernacular English. Results show that female participants overall were more likely to attribute responsibility to the narrator than to the speaker of the standard dialect. Additionally, those who read the passage in standard English indicated more responsibility of the victim.

Perceptual Dialectology and the Attribution of Responsibility: On Narrating Sexual Violence

Introduction

In recent years, sexual violence and rape have emerged at the center of public discourse, proceeding a decades-long focus of feminist scholars who have studied the issue through various lenses. Relevant to the present study, many language-centered analyses of sexual violence have resulted in apparent trends in attribution of fault. Specifically, several studies have shown that a victim's age and race, social status, and perceived respectability influence heavily the responsibility attributed to them (Aronson & Jones, 1973; Dupuis & Clay, 2013). This pilot study suggests that dialect is indicative of and prominent in each of these factors and as such, may have implications on the responsibility attributed to a victim.

Spoken language, in addition to conveying meaning and achieving a task, acts as an indicator and representation of the speaker's social identity. Dialect is a central feature of sociolinguistic ideology and one of the most influential factors in the perception of speakers by those with whom they interact (Evans, 2013). Members of any given language community possess covert knowledge with which they can recognize different registers, dialects, and accents even if they are unable to consciously articulate the differences (Van Dijk, 2006). Even nuances in sounds and grammar can immediately identify a speaker as belonging to a specific social group without the speaker or listener consciously aware of this process (Holmes, 2013). These variations in speech serve as a basis of judgement in determining difference and assessing social otherness. Once a speaker is designated by the listener to a specific group, they are then associated with a variety of connotations of that identity. Both the speaker and the content of their discourse are then seen through the sociolinguistic lens specific to the group with which the

listener associates them (Bucholtz, 1999). It is possible, and even commonplace, for these social connotations to affect the listener's attitude toward and perception of the speaker, especially when discriminating against the speaker (Lippi-Green, 1997).

Particularly in the case of sexual violence, linguistic attitudes towards the victim may seriously affect their emotional recovery process and ability to be heard. The present study will draw on these ideas about linguistic difference in connection with gender and race by using fictional narratives of acquaintance rape. Several studies have shown that men are more likely to blame a rape victim than are women, whereas others have reported that women attribute greater fault to a rape victim than do men (Dupuis & Clay, 2013, p. 1086). In addition, victims of acquaintance rape are frequently held more responsible than victims of stranger rape (Dupuis & Clay, 2013, p. 1085). Because nearly 73% of sexual assaults are perpetrated by a non-stranger (RAINN, 2009), it is clear why the topic has received much public and scholarly attention.

In determining how a narrator's dialect affects listeners' attribution of responsibility to them, the social connotations of both rape victims and of speakers of dialects associated with disadvantaged populations must be considered. As Williams (1984) suggests, reactions to victims of crime and their definitions are products of socially constructed public attitudes. Public ideas about dialect and speech, and their associations do not reflect an essential truth about their speakers, but rather common stereotypes. These social ideologies are a key factor in the harrowing national statistics on rape cases.

The two dialect variations under consideration in this study are Standard American English and African American Vernacular English, hereafter referred to as SAE and AAVE, respectively. The former was chosen because it is commonly considered the normal, preferred,

and unmarked dialect in American society, even by nonnative speakers (Holmes, 2013). SAE is

frequently regarded as the professional, unmarked dialect used by newscasters, politicians, and

other public figures (Holmes, 2013). Its name alone suggests that it is thought of as the standard

dialect from which others deviate. AAVE, also known as African American English or Black

English, is a dialect spoken overwhelmingly by African Americans in the United States which

has a complex set of grammatical and phonological rules as well as a rich history of associations

with undesirable characteristics (Holmes, 2013). AAVE frequently associates its speakers with

ignorance, a lack of education, and linguistic inability, to name a few (Holmes, 2013, p. 418).

These ideologies are maintained ubiquitously in the U.S. and play heavily into the ways in which

speakers are perceived. This study will make use of the grammatical features of these two

dialects in identifying their effects on linguistic perceptions. This work aims to not only draw

connections between dialect perception and the attribution of responsibility, but also to determine

the extent to which dialect variation alone can influence perception. In the cases used in this

study, subjects were given no explicit indicators of the narrator's social identity in order to

distinguish the limits of dialect on perception of character.

After establishing the focus of this study, I wish to make clear the reason for this topic.

Responsibility of the victim in instances of sexual violence can be crucial in the legal

proceedings, as well as emotional and physical recovery following an incident. Since

responsibility may be affected by perception of the speaker, it is important to know the ways in

which speakers are perceived. In this essay, I will first review the previous scholarship relevant

to my argument. I will then outline and explain the methods and procedure used in this pilot

study. Finally, I will provide the numerical results as well as a discussion of the implications of my findings.

Literature Review

Recent research has suggested that the way we talk about sexual assault shapes how we understand and treat the issue (Hockett, McGraw & Saucier, 2014). Many of the previous language-centered analyses of sexual violence have been concerned with textual and discourse features of language used in discussing the topic. In addition, many studies have been conducted on both AAVE ideology in domains outside of sexual violence and ideology in the abstract (Evans, 2013; Mufwene, 1992; Wolfram, 1998). The impetus for this study is an apparent gap in sociolinguistic literature concerned with the effects of dialect on perception of narrators of sexual violence. The link between speech-based perceptions of the speaker and rape is a critical one because it may offer insight into how an issue so important may be affected before it is even articulated. This study draws on previous research in three areas: features of AAVE, sociolinguistic ideologies of AAVE, and language, respectability, and sexual violence.

Features of AAVE

Two passages were constructed for use in this survey study, one in AAVE and one in SAE, each making use of the appropriate grammatical and phonological features. In particular, precise detail was used in constructing the AAVE passage to ensure credibility. To create a grammatically and phonologically correct narrative, I relied on extensive research on usages, implications, and effects of AAVE as a dialect, as a social identity marker, and as a communicative practice. Jacquelyn Rahman (2008) uses online surveys, subjective reaction tests, and interviews to gauge subjects' reactions to the linguistic varieties available to them for

creating a professional image. The author concludes that her findings have implications for the

field of sociolinguistics at large, claiming that linguistic variants influence perceptions that

listeners receive. Also important is the author's suggestion that listeners are constantly involved

in a process of judging and evaluating language, and giving meaning to what they hear. In the

present study, this meaning is critical. Not only does Rahman's article ground the assumption

that AAVE is generally excluded from professional domains, reaffirming the preferred status of

SAE, but it is also key to this study for two practical reasons: it outlines groundwork theories

about AAVE and sounding black, and it indexes grammatical features of the dialect. The passage

that makes use of AAVE in the present study uses dialect features from Rahman's work, which

itself relies on fundamental research from many accredited sociolinguists (Green, 2002;

Rickford, 1999).

One such sociolinguist is Walt Wolfram who penned not only some of the first work on

AAVE dialectology (1969), but extensive literature since that has contributed to the credibility of

his findings. Wolfram's 2000 study on the historical evolution of AAVE and its documentation

makes a tabular comparison of various dialect features based on their frequency in previous

documentation and transcription. The present study takes from this list four of the most

frequently used features to compose a passage for the survey. These features are described in

detail in Table 1.

Dialect Ideology

A shift in sociolinguistic interest in the past twenty years has led to extensive research on

the constructions of modern language identities not only in identifying features, but also in

exploring the ways in which dialects are used to create these identities (Dunstan, 2010; Holmes,

2013; Wolfram, 2000; 2003). Betsy Evans (2013), in her work on perceptual dialectology, describes the concept as the study of what nonlinguists believe about language variation (p. 64). As discussed, the factors of social identity influence perceptions of AAVE speakers. Fundamental to this argument is Evans's suggestion that certain social categories are tied to dialect variation. In addition, the author lays out a useful definition of language ideology taken from Irvine (1989): "the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests." Although this work is outside the realm of sexual violence and AAVE, the concept of perceptual dialectology is essential to this study.

Providing a complementary idea, Mary Bucholtz's 1999 study on white masculinity explores ideas about American social norms against which identities, including linguistic, are judged. Bucholtz makes two points particularly relevant to this study: the understanding of traditional sociolinguistic research about whiteness and masculinity as ideologically privileged has been more recently appropriated as a starting point for studying the "other." That is, these social categories would not be privileged without the existence of their counterparts, blackness and femininity. While no explicit information is provided about the AAVE narrator in the present study, the common assumption is that it is a black female based on both the dialect and general knowledge of the frequency of male-on-female sexual violence. Secondly, Bucholtz points out that social categories are not mutually exclusive. Perceptions of a speaker are likely influenced by the intersection of their perceived characteristics and of the characteristics of the listener. This consideration illustrates the many factors that contribute to a speaker's perception.

Language, Respectability, and Sexual Violence

In addition to literature on dialect variation and its implications, current scholarship on sexual violence suggests broadly that perception, response, and understanding of the issue and the victim may be heavily influenced by language.

Language and Sexual Violence. A 2003 study by Young and Maguire suggests that the limited scope of lexical choices available to narrators of sexual assault may impede their recovery process (Young & Maguire, 2003, p. 40). As the subjects of this study negotiate narration with limited word choice, the authors imply that other linguistic obstacles may exist which make it more difficult for victims of sexual violence to narrate their experiences. Dialect ideologies may very well be one of these obstacles. Other types of obstacles are explored in a 2008 study by Toni Irving, which points to socio-historical contexts in which African American women face preliminary discrimination based on the intersection of their race and gender. Irving posits that the social ideologies surrounding black women — low-income, uneducated, and at high-risk for crime and drug use — pave the way for gender-biased media coverage of sexual violence crimes committed against them. This poor media coverage reinforces the notion that for black women, sex is never against their will (p. 108). It is here that my study aims to make a connection: because perception of language is a major contributor to social ideology, I will suggest that it may help perpetuate the discriminatory cycle Irving describes.

Henley, Miller & Beazley (1995) provide a comparable model for the methods and procedure for the present study. In the author's third case study, they prepare mock news reports, two each about robbery, battering, and rape. When constructing the rape vignettes, eight variables were identified that might affect attribution of responsibility (p. 74). Of these variables,

one variable, victim's clothing, is addressed in my survey questions. Additionally, the present study will suggest that the victim's dialect should be considered one of these variables.

A 1994 study by Wood and Rennie notes the difficulty of eight female subjects in labeling their experiences "rape" and highlights the importance of the ability to articulate experiences with rape in order to cope with and process the emotional repercussions. They therefore indicate that the narrator's ability to talk about their own experiences is instrumental to their health and well-being. Following this notion, the present study will propose that the ability to be heard is critical to a narrator of sexual violence. If victims' narratives are obstructed by linguistic ideologies contributing to the discrimination against them, they may face sizable disadvantages in being able to articulate experiences, and therefore in being able to recover.

The use of AAVE in this study is particularly important as it relates to grammatical structure. Gerd Bohner's 2001 study of the influences of active versus passive voice in recounting rape scenarios suggests that grammatical construction can affect the ways in which listeners attribute fault:

> It therefore seems desirable to examine more spontaneous and less reactive indicators of perceived responsibility of victim and perpetrator. In everyday discourse, beliefs that women are somehow responsible for becoming victims of sexual violence are likely to be expressed in many ways, not only in direct, explicit judgments. These beliefs may as well transpire in subtle features of the language people use when talking or writing about sexual violence (p. 516).

This study will suggest that one of the subtle features worth considering is dialect. Not only has dialect been proven to affect other social situations, as discussed in the previous section, but it can be inherently linked to agency and fault. If passive voice can have an influence in this situation, so might dialect.

The present study makes use of this previous research with the assumption that discursive features of language surrounding rape are able to affect both the outcome of the situation, in cases of rape, and the perception of the speaker, in cases of rape narratives. In addition, AAVE as a dialect has a long tradition of associations with specific stereotypes and connotations which affect speaker perception. It is plausible then, that sociolinguistic features, as well as discourse and other linguistic features, may affect the perception of AAVE-speaking narrators of sexual violence.

Respectability and Sexual Violence. In an engaging study on the relationship among race, respectability, and attribution in acquaintance rape, Dupuis and Clay (2013) illustrate the role of rape myths and social factors in victim blaming. Critical to the present study for several reasons, this work considers factors such as respectability, often thought to be indicated by dialect. In addition, the authors point out that victims of acquaintance rape are usually held more responsible than victims of stranger rape (Dupuis & Clay, 2013, p. 1085). Cases are often studied using the Rape Perception Framework, which investigates various victim, perpetrator, and situational factors that lead to victim blaming. Using written vignettes similar to those of the present study, this work found that less respected Black victims were held more responsible than less respected white victims.

A similar study preceded the work of Dupuis and Clay by nearly forty years. In a preliminary case on attribution of fault in relation to victim respectability, Jones and Aronson (1973), laid out a framework that would be replicated and revised for years to come. After reading case accounts of rape, participants were asked to recommend a prison term for the convict, followed by a questionnaire in which they rated the extent to which the victim was at

fault. This study was based on the "just world" notion cited from Melvin Lerner in which an individual is seen as deserving of an unjust crime perpetrated against him because he is an intrinsically bad person or because his actions merited the outcome (Lerner, 1965; Lerner & Simmons, 1966). Working with the aim of disproving this notion, the present study suggests that perception of character as intrinsically good or bad has much to do with how the victim is perceived socially, which has much to do with their variety of speech. In addition to this suggestive link between respectability and dialect, this study offers an interesting finding. The more respectable the victim, the more serious the crime was perceived to be by participants. If this is the case, speaking a nonstandard dialect could cause an individual to be seen as less respectable, and there could be a greater chance that the offense against them will be taken less seriously.

Finally, a 2009 study by Alina Korn results in similar conclusions about the systematic way fault and responsibility are attributed to victims. This case study is concerned with the attribution of responsibility of in-group and out-group members of social groups among Jewish and Arab university students in Israel. Korn focuses on victim blaming and how it is influential in considering responsibility through three lenses: subjects' gender, subjects' ethnicity, and victim and perpetrator's ethnicity. Conceptions of ethnicity and race are so deeply embedded in conceptions of rape and women that these ideas can hardly be separated. Lastly this study found that the gender and ethnicity of the subjects played heavily into how they attributed responsibility to the victim; individuals are more likely to reject rape myths if those myths reflect poorly on the individual's own social category.

Methods and Procedure

Before collection of data for this study began, I sought approval by the University of

Mary Washington Institutional Review Board. Following an online ethics training and proposal

submission, this study was approved.

Methods

Participants. Participants for this study (n=32) were recruited via Facebook to complete

an online survey on SurveyGizmo. To achieve greatest possible demographic diversity,

individuals were asked to take the survey themselves as well as share it on their own accounts to

make it available to everyone they know. In this regard, the survey had a greater chance of

reaching populations who are not of the same age group, racial group, or educational

background. It was important that this survey had the possibility of reaching participants who

had little or no familiarity with issues of sexual violence or language ideology because the very

knowledge of such topics may affect their answers.

Participants overwhelmingly self-identified as caucasian, with 6% (n=2) indicating

caucasian and an additional racial identity, and 3% (n=1) not caucasian. Of the survey takers,

78% (n=25) identified as female and 22% (n=7) as male. More than half the participants were

between the ages of 50-59 (53%, n=18), while the next largest age group was 21-29, accounting

for 19% (n=6) of the survey takers.

Stimuli. Two fictional reports were written, one making use of the grammatical and

phonological features of Standard American English, the other of African American Vernacular

English. With the exception of these linguistic variables, the reports were similar narratives of

the same fictional account of sexual violence by a male perpetrator. The age, race, and gender of

the speaker were not provided, although it is possible that the speaker was perceived

automatically as female by the subjects, given the male perpetrator indicated in the narratives by

masculine pronouns. The grammatical and phonological features used in the AAVE passage were

chosen on the basis of frequency and ability to be orthographically represented. Because there

are many phonological features of AAVE which are highly difficult to convey in a written

passage to nonlinguists, this study makes use of a select number. These features, commonly

known as postvocalic 'r' deletion, g-dropping, and word-final consonant cluster reduction, are

easily recognizable by nonnative AAVE speakers. For example, there is much overlap in g-

dropping between AAVE and less formal registers of SAE. The phonological features of AAVE

included in this passage can be found, along with the grammatical features, in Table 1[2].

Table 1. *Grammatical and phonological features used.*

Grammatical Feature	Example from Passage
Negative Concord	*I can't do nothin'*
Ain't	*He ain't gon do nothin' here*
Copula Deletion	*but I know he mad*
Subject-verb Disagreement	*we was yellin' at each other*

Phonological Feature	Example from Passage
Word-final consonant cluster reduction	*Jus' standin' there*
Word-final unstressed -ng	*I was gettin' scared*
Postvocalic r deletion	*waitin' fo' me*

The questions following the passage make use of terms such as *at fault, innocent,* and

accountable to articulate the concept of responsibility in different ways, both directly and

indirectly. Questions 1 and 2 ask explicitly about culpability and Questions 3-5 about agency. To

be responsible for any given situation, a person must possess a certain amount of agency with

which they can control the outcome of the situation. Since women are so commonly admonished

for wearing provocative clothing, thereby purportedly "asking" for sexual violence in the face of

purportedly uncontrollable violent masculinity, they are often held responsible for its occurrence.

Addressing this common trope, Question 3 is designed to illustrate through its responses how

social perceptions (such as dress) of a person are made through their dialect alone. Question 4,

regarding narrator accountability in the situation, reiterates again the responsibility of the

speaker. To be accountable, by definition, is to be responsible for a situational outcome

(Accountable, 2015). Question 5 emphasizes again agency in the instance described. The ability

to prevent a situation implies an ability to control it, and therefore a certain measure of

responsibility. In the next sections, the varying answers in response to this underlying theme will

become apparent through the data results.

Procedure

Participants were asked to voluntarily complete an online survey in which they indicated

their age, race, and gender identities. They were then randomly shown either the SAE passage or

the AAVE passage by the survey program (see Appendix A). After reading the passage, they were

shown a series of five questions, each one a statement about the victim's responsibility.

Participants were asked to rate each statement on a five-point scale, with 5 indicating *strongly*

agree and 1 *strongly disagree* (see Appendix B). These methods were designed to elicit subjects'

attitudes arising from language ideologies.

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Results

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The results of the survey show a breakdown of data by gender, passages, and question

type. Of the 25 self-identified female participants, 56% (n=14) received the AAVE passage and

44% (n=11) received the SAE passage. Of the 7 self-identified male participants, 43% (n=3)

received the AAVE passage and 57% (n=4) received the SAE passage. In total, 53% of

participants (n=17) received the AAVE passage and 47% (n=15) received the SAE passage.

Each of the five questions in this survey (see Appendix B) was rated by the participants

on a five-point scale, ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). A *disagree* or

strongly disagree answer for questions 1 and 2 would indicate responsibility attributed to the

narrator, while a *disagree* or *strongly disagree* answer for questions 3, 4, and 5 would indicate no

responsibility. In other words, questions 1 and 2 required a confirmation of the statement to

indicate that the victim was not responsible for the event described in the passage. Questions 3,

4, and 5 required a denial of the statement to indicate the same: not responsible. The amount of

responsibility attributed by participants was measured using the number of dispreferred

responses, that is, responses that indicate responsibility. Results show that females gave

responsibility-attributing answers 5.6% of the time and males 2.9%. Additionally, when

considered by passage, participants who read the AAVE passage attributed responsibility to the

narrator 4.7% of the time and those who read the SAE 5.3%. These figures are illustrated in

Table 2.

Table 2. *Victim responsibility attributed by demographic category.*

Demographic Category	Percent Responsibility Attributed	
Male	*.029*	*(2.9%)*
Female	*.059*	*(5.9%)*
AAVE Passage Readers	*.047*	*(4.7%)*
SAE Passage Readers	*.053*	*(5.3%)*

Results for questions 1 and 2 show that participants indicated the least amount of

responsibility attributed to the victim. In these questions, few participants (n=3) indicated that

the victim was responsible. Conversely, answers to questions 3, 4, and 5 indicated a higher and

more consistent level of responsibility attributed to the victim than in questions 1 and 2. When

asked questions 1 and 2, participants' answers indicated attribution of responsibility to the

narrator 4.7% of the time. When asked questions 3, 4, and 5, answers indicated responsibility

5.2% of the time. In other words, participants indicated greater responsibility of the victim when

asked questions in which an agreement with the statement would indicate responsibility.

Participants indicated less responsibility when asked questions directly about culpability,

questions in which a disagreement with the statement would indicate responsibility. These

figures are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. *Total victim responsibility attributed by question type.*

Question	Percent Responsibility Attributed	
Questions 1 and 2 (total)	.047	(4.7%)
AAVE	.029	(2.9%)
SAE	.033	(3.3%)
Male	0	-
Female	.06	(6%)
Questions 3, 4, 5 (total)	.052	(5.2%)
AAVE	.059	(5.9)
SAE	.044	(4.4%)
Male	.083	(8.3%)
Female	.03	(3.0%)

The most salient results of this study can be summed up in general statements about the

ways in which participants answered. Answers provided by females overall indicate a higher

level of attribution of responsibility to the narrator than those of males. Answers from

participants who read the AAVE passage indicate less responsibility attributed to the narrator

than those answers of the participants who read the SAE passage.

Discussion

Previous research examining the overlap among respectability, race, and responsibility

has varied in claims about correlation among the three. In addition, there has been very little

research done on dialect as a factor of victim responsibility in cases of sexual violence. The

present study was a pilot experiment attempting to measure the responsibility attributed to a

sexual violence narrator based on victim's dialect. The results show that participants' answers

counter what might be expected based on the existing dialect literature. While this study posited

a research question in lieu of a hypothesis, the collection of work outlined in the literature review

would indicate that negative associations of AAVE would cause more responsibility to be

attributed to the victim. Three possible explanations may account for this: 1) It is possible that

male participants or participants who read the AAVE passage attributed less fault to the narrator

of the AAVE passage so as not to seem racially or gender-biased; 2) the type of blame attributed

to the narrator may have been influenced by the perceived level of respectability of the victim.

As Anderson (1999) points out, when a rape victim is perceived as more respectable, participants

have difficulty attributing blame to the victim's character and therefore must attribute it to their

behavior. SAE is commonly thought of as more respectable then AAVE and therefore its

speakers might have more responsibility attributed to them by participants; 3) this pilot study

was small and it is possible that the percentage of attributed responsibility would be different

with a larger or more diverse subject pool. In addition, the results showing that females overall

attributed more fault regardless of the passage they read is similar to the findings of some

previous research (Acock & Ireland 1983), and counter to others (Grubb & Harrower 2009).

Survey studies have a number of features to ensure the quality of responses. As Podesva

and Sharma (2013) describe, indirect elicitation of language attitudes may help counteract the

effects of self-reporting (p. 105). Indirect elicitation is also a viable way to discern direct

attitudes towards language and indirect attitudes towards the speaker. Additional reasons for the

survey method are due to its nature and length. Because the survey is short (average completion time 3:23), participants are more likely to be willing to take it and to finish it. Because it was administered online, it was easily reachable by everyone who accessed it through social media, and taking it alone minimized likelihood of distractions from other participants.

Disadvantages of this method include issues of logical connection. Podesva and Sharma point out that there is no guaranteed connection between participants' answers and the actual sociolinguistic ideologies that they maintain (2013). Only inferences can be made based on their answers. Another issue is that the passages used in this study were not taken from naturally-occurring language. In addition, the AAVE passage was written by a nonnative speaker of the dialect, albeit with much scholarly direction. This may affect the ways in which the language is perceived in this study.

The final disadvantage in selecting this methodology was the inability to account for differences in linguistic register. Because SAE is widely considered correct and educated, it arises frequently in professional or legal speech events. The register is somewhat formal, although not strictly reserved for formal situations. Conversely, AAVE, with its vernacular status and marked grammatical structure, arises most frequently in informal speech events. Situations in which speakers are outside of the workplace, among friends, or engaging in pastimes. This inherent difference in register might play a role in perceptions of these dialects as desirable. To account for this difference, the two passages were constructed as similarly as possible, relying upon differences of the grammatical and phonological features listed above.

Conclusion

In this study, I first outlined common ideologies of AAVE, identifying the possibility of a victim's dialect impacting the outcome of their experiences with sexual violence. Specifically, nonstandard dialects of a victim may be reason for others to attribute responsibility to them, as a social factor of ideology, which may in turn affect their emotional recovery. I then discussed my reason for and goals in examining this subject, citing the lack of sociolinguistic scholarship linking dialect with responsibility in cases of sexual violence. It is likely that further sociolinguistic research within the domain of sexual violence would prove helpful in understanding any correlation between dialect and perceived victim's responsibility. In addition, many previous studies have pointed to respectability as a key factor in the amount of responsibility attributed to the victim. Sociolinguistic scholarship would benefit from examining correlations between dialect and respectability as they pertain to sexual violence.

End Notes

1. Young and Maguire (2003) as cited in this work, have outlined different meanings, emotional

   effects, and usages for lexically collocative terms referring to rape. While they distinguish

   among sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape, as well as between victim and survivor, the

   conscious word choice in this study serves a practical and inclusive function. So as not to

   obstruct the readability of this text with repetitive language, I will use the term sexual violence

   to encompass all instances which may be characterized under sexual violence, sexual assault,

   or rape. The choice of term in the literature review is in line with the terms used in the

   previous research being described. The term violence was selected for the title in order to

   emphasize the nature of the events which I aim to address.

2. Table 1 makes use of AAVE features based on the frequency with which they arose in a 2000

   study by Walt Wolfram titled *Issues in Reconstructing Earlier African-American English.*

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Appendix A

Survey Passages

African American Vernacular English Survey Passage

I'm comin' out the store, carryin' my groceries and there he is. Jus' standin' there, waitin' fo' me. I remembered the last time I seen him, we was yellin' at each other. He came right up to the car and I'm thinkin,' 'He ain't gon do nothin' here, not where everybody can see.' He got closer though and I'm gettin' scared. I went and started the car but he came right up on me and cornered me. I can't do nothin' but I know he mad. He grab my hand and we went around the corner of the store, where nobody can see. That's where it happened. Afterwards, I didn't know what to do. I was scared.

Standard American English Survey Passage

I was coming out of the store, carrying my groceries and there he is, just standing there, waiting for me. I remembered the last time I'd seen him, we'd had an argument. He approached my car and I thought to myself, 'he wouldn't do anything here, not in this crowded parking lot in broad daylight.' He got closer though and I was getting scared. I went to start the car but he came right up to me and cornered me. I couldn't do anything but I knew he was mad. He grabbed my hand and pulled me around the corner, just behind the store in an area just out of sight of other shoppers. That's where it happened. Afterward, I didn't know what to do. I was scared.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

1. The speaker is probably not at fault.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Unsure
Agree
Strongly Agree

2. The speaker is probably completely innocent.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Unsure
Agree
Strongly Agree

3. It is likely that the speaker was wearing clothing that evoked attention from the perpetrator.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Unsure
Agree
Strongly Agree

4. The speaker should be held accountable for the event described in the passage.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Unsure
Agree
Strongly Agree

5. The speaker probably could have prevented this situation.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Unsure
Agree
Strongly Agree