



RESEARCH PAPER

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and African American Identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: A Stylistic Analysis

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: October 07, 2021	The objective of the paper at hand is to show Celie (Walker's protagonist of her novel <i>The Color Purple</i>) as an embodiment of African American identity. The paper explicates that her identity can be explored through her use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and departures from the Standard English. The paper aims to establish the link between Celie's use of AAVE and her African American identity as the major themes of the novel. This is achieved with the help of stylistic analysis of the linguistic evidences from the data novel: <i>The Color Purple</i> basing on the linguistic categories borrowed from Tottie (2002), Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Green (2002). Therefore, the paper designing a grid of linguistic categories of AAVE from the work of the above mentioned linguists locates the examples from the novel and fully showcases Alice Walker's protagonist Cellie whose identity is found to be marked by her exclusive and persistent use of her African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
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Introduction

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), is the story of a poor, uneducated, young black woman of South: Celie, who is sexually molested, while hardly reaching puberty, by her step-father. After giving birth to two children with him she is thrown into a loveless marriage with a complete stranger Mr. _____. As Mr. _____ is amorously attracted towards Celie's younger sister Nettie, he punishes her with unending hard work at home, disrespect and gender discrimination. Nettie in the given circumstances leaves for Africa as a missionary only to rejoin her sister almost after forty years. However Celie copes with her loneliness, disrespect, and gender discrimination by writing letters to God and her sister Nettie. She is also consoled by

her husband's mistress, the beautiful Blues singer: Shug Avery with whom she discovers new horizons of sexual awareness and self-esteem. The triangle finally resolves the complexities of human relationships and learns to coexist with peace.

Walker touches upon the gender issues of her society in *The Color Purple*. Though criticized for her unfair portrayal of black men, her main concern remains "to suggest what women need is knowledge of their own bodies, someone to treat them gently and teach them about more than having babies" (Donnelly, 2011, p. 90). Celie starts writing to God when she is fourteen thus giving God the room of a character in the novel, suggesting the inevitability of God's help and solace to its creatures. Despite the doldrums of the circumstances, Celie remains stable in her need for a God by constantly confiding in Him through her letters till the last of the novel. Walker has also highlighted the racial discrimination between whites and blacks where she has indicted her own race for gender discrimination. She has just touched upon this theme of race through the events of Sofia's imprisonment caused by her denial to work for the white people. Apart from the above mentioned themes another theme of the novel needs to be explored: the expression of black identity through the use of black vernacular English known as African American Vernacular English (referred to hereafter as AAVE). This theme of language and identity is established by the present paper and is supported with linguistic evidences from the data sample.

The Color Purple is a difficult book to read as it has an unusual style of Language (AAVE) and Form (Epistolary Novel). Walker does not narrate the story rather the novel consists of the series of 90 undated letters without any obvious time frame: the first letter is written by Celie at the age of fourteen and the last when she is in her fifties. The time span of the novel consists of almost forty years which can be time-lined only after very close reading by noting the allusions towards social attitudes, customs and fashions as described in the novel. The close reading of the novel makes the reader realize that there are gaps between letters and sometimes the gaps are as long as five years. Moreover, the letters written by Celie are not written in Standard English rather in AAVE. The uneducated Celie writes exactly in the language she speaks. Celie is writing to God in an honest tone about the terrible, painful and unhappy events in her life to seek guidance and strength to carry on in life. Initially she does not sign her letters probably to show her insignificance and it takes long before Celie wields enough of the self-esteem to sign her name. By the end of the novel Celie experientially grows into a whole human being: mature and sober. She holds on with her use of AAVE, a language that renders her an identity in the wake of all the injustices and hardships she endures. Hence the novel is a potential body of work for stylistic analysis.

Walker uses the technique of epistolary novel. The novel consists of 90 letters in all written by two characters in the novel: Celie and Nettie who are sisters by blood and of African American origin. Both the sisters use two different varieties of language as their modes of expression. Celie writes 70 letters in pidginized variety

known as AAVE whereas Nettie writes 20 letters in Standard English. This ratio of 70:20 letters suggests Walker's preference for choosing Celie as the protagonist of the novel whereas giving Nettie and her experiences of life a secondary place. This ratio also suggests Walker's preference of AAVE over Standard English as a potential vehicle for transmitting the thematic values of the novel. Celie, a roughly educated person, never gives it a try to learn as well as use the Standard English throughout the novel. Nettie on the other hand, an educated lady, prefers to use Standard English. Walker has shown Celie as an authentic epitome of African American identity by her consistent adherence to the use of AAVE. Thus it is the use of language that helps Celie carve her identity and take pride in her-self.

This study addresses the following questions: What linguistic features of AAVE are used on lexical level to portray African American identity of Celie?; What grammatical features of AAVE are used to portray Celie's African American identity?; and What individual features of Celie's Language, if any, are used giving her a specific idiolect going beyond her use of AAVE? With the help of these questions the objective of the study is to explore the linguistic evidences from Celie's language to bring out the similarities and differences between her usage and AAVE usage. The study focuses on lexical and grammatical levels in the data sample collected from significant letters of Celie.

Literature Review

A lot has been written on Walker's *The Color Purple*. A fraction of criticism is pointed to here to foreground the lacuna for the study at hand. Ross (1988) describes Celie's desire for Selfhood by explaining two scenes in which she stands in front of mirror as evidences in which Celie forms her ego in different stages. Berlant (1988) investigates the problem of race, gender and nation in the novel by maintaining that it represents a national culture that operates according to womanist values rather than patriarchal forms. Bobo (1989) describes the critical differences the novel and Steven Spielberg's film of it had when both arrived in the market in 1982 and 1985 respectively. Walton (1990) explores the novel as a comedy having the elements of comedy of manner and comedy of ideas. Juneja (1990) describes Walker's contribution to liberate woman from oppression through her writing. Proudfit (1991) evaluates walker's novel by using the technique of psychoanalysis and concludes that Nettie has a fake self while Celie has a true self because she goes through the different stages of the development of self. Andujo (2009) unfolds the identity of African American woman within the framework of African American literature by highlighting religion as a focal point of influence to bring in her vigor, character and dedication towards familial and communal ties. Bayindir (2009) compares Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* with Walker's *The Color Purple* from the feminist perspectives.

There is paucity of language-based-stylistic analyses of this novel which takes AAVE and African American identity as its central themes. African American

identity is conveyed through Celie's constant use of AAVE. The present research fills this gap by contending that the major theme of the novel is African American identity achieved through AAVE language. The paper projects systematic linguistic evidences to support this stance.

Theoretic Framework

Although 'Style' has remained a serious concern for thinkers and philosophers since the times we can trace back the recorded history of human civilization, 'Stylistics', as an autonomous discipline, is relatively a recent phenomenon. Stylistics attempts at providing a generalized code of analysis for determining a relationship between linguistic form and literary function. Therefore, stylistics is a tendency to explore for pattern and system below the surface forms of language; to search for the principles of meaning and language use which activate and control the code. Nevertheless this tendency uses the empirical methodology and terminology to bridge the gap between both the ends of style: aesthetic and linguistic. The present stylistic analysis of *The Color Purple* is a move in this direction to develop an interpretation, as much objective in its nature as a linguistic based approach can allow.

According to Tottie (2002) the citizens of America with their African origins speak a peculiar variety of English that is given many different labels. Labov named it as non-standard Negro English. Nevertheless the negative connotations of 'Negro' made the room for changing the label on the part of linguists. Therefore the language spoken by African Americans is variously labeled as Black English Vernacular, Vernacular Black English, Black Vernacular English, Black English, African American Vernacular English, Ebonics, Black Folk Speech or African American English. However the label African American Vernacular English is more acceptable to its speakers and does not have any negative connotations. So the label has currency among the linguists today as well. The present research also uses the said label.

AAVE has a distinct phonology due to the characteristic use of consonant system. The grammar of AAVE departs from Standard English in its dealing of the Verb Phrase and The Noun Phrase particularly. The vocabulary, however, of AAVE is less distinctive than its phonology and grammar. All the African Americans do not speak it to the same extent because of the social, economic, age, gender and class differences. The African American youth is more inclined to speaking and retaining the variety as their ethnic identity. The AAVE divergences from Standard English are getting more currency, thus making both the varieties: Standard English and AAVE more distinct from each other. The present research, seeking guidance from the rules of AAVE as highlighted by AAVE linguists: Tottie (2002), Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Green (2002), makes an effort to retrieve linguistic evidences from the data sample to maintain that Walker bestows upon Celie her African American identity through her use of AAVE and that language and identity is the main theme of the novel.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Lexical Level

The lexical data is presented in table form. The table is divided in four columns. The first column contains the lexical items of AAVE extracted from the novel. The second column presents the phonetic transcription of the lexical items according to AAVE. Then in the third column Standard English equivalents to the AAVE lexical items are presented. The fourth column presents the phonetic transcription of Standard English equivalents to the AAVE lexical items. The data has been divided into seven categories. Each category is explained individually. However within each category further smaller categories are made to facilitate the data analysis.

Categorization of Data

The data is analyzed graphologically. As our data sample is a text of a novel therefore the phonological deviations in Celie's language are shown through graphological deviations in the particular lexical items. These particular lexical items serve as our data for the study for the given portion of research. Thus the particular lexical items from Celie's language are described through phonological deviations represented in graphological terms in the text of the novel.

Categories

The data is analyzed on the basis of following categories borrowed from Tottie (2002), Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Green (2002).

- 1- Final consonant sounds
- 2- Soul vocalization in syllables
- 3- Devoicing
- 4- Sound patterns and 'th'
- 5- 'r' and 'l': Liquid vocalization
- 6- Additional phonological patterns
- 7- Individual linguistic features of Celie's language

Presentation of Data

The following lexical items have been taken for the phonological analysis entailing graphological analysis.

S#	Celie's use of AAVE	Phonological Transcription	Standard English	Phonological Transcription
1-	Kine	/kain/	kind	/kaind/
2-	Fine	/fan/	find	/faɪnd/

3-	Mine	/maɪn/	mind	/maɪnd/
4-	An	/æn/	And	/ænd/
5-	Ole	/əʊl/	Old	/əʊld/
6-	Cause	/kəʊz/	because	/bɪkəʊz/
7-	Bout	/baʊt/	About	/əbaʊt/
8-	Round	/raʊnd/	around	/əraʊnd/
9-	Sides	/saɪdz/	besides	/bɪsaɪdz/
10-	Tween	/twi:n/	Between	/bɪtwi:n/
11-	Cuse	/kju:z/	accuse	/əkju:z/
12-	Hind	/haɪnd/	behind	/bɪhaɪnd/
13-	Thout	/ðaut/	without	/wɪðaut/
14-	Nuff	/nʌf/	enough	/ɪnʌf/
15-	Spect	/spekt/	expect	/ɪkspekt/
16-	Cross	/krɒs/	Across	/əkɒs/
17-	tention	/tenʃən/	attention	/ətənʃən/
18-	Stead	/sted/	instead	/ɪnstəd/
19-	Cept	/sept/	Except	/ɪksept/
20-	preshate	/pri:ʃeɪt/	appreciate	/əpri:ʃeɪt/
21-	miration	/məreɪʃən/	admiration	/æməreɪʃən/
22-	Ast	/æst/	Asked	/æskəd/
23-	Kilt	/kɪlt/	Killed	/kɪld/
24-	Dis	/dɪs/	This	/ðɪs/
25-	Dat	/dat/	That	/ðat/
26-	Cuss	/kʌs/	Curse	/kɜ:rs/
27-	Suh	/su:h/	sir	/sɜ:r/
28-	motocar	/moutəka:r/	motorcar	/moutərka:r/
29-	Gal	/ga:l/	girl	/gɜ:rl/
30-	Cryin	/kraɪn/	Crying	/kraɪɪ/
31-	somethin	/sʌmθɪn/	something	/sʌmθɪɪ/
32-	learnin	/lɜ:rnɪn/	learning	/lɜ:rnɪɪ/
33-	Doin	/du:ɪn/	doing	/du:ɪɪ/
34-	Naw	/na:/	no	/nəu/
35-	Git	/gɪt/	Get	/get/
36-	sposed	/spəʊzd/	supposed	/səpəʊzd/
37-	Then	/ðen/	than	/ðæn/
38-	Mens	/menz/	Men	/men/
39-	Tho	/ðau/	though	/ðou/
40-	Gon	/gɒn/	Going to	/gəʊɪŋ tu:/
41-	Yeah	/jeə/	yes	/jes/
42-	Nary one	/nari wʌn/	Anyone	/eni wʌn/
43-	knowed	/nəʊd/	knew	/nju:/
44-	embroder	/ɪmbrədər/	Embroider	/ɪmbrɔɪdər/
45-	embrody	/ɪmbrədi/	embroidery	/ɪmbrɔɪdəri/

46-	bidniss	/bidnis/	business	/biznəs/
47-	setting	/setɪŋ/	sitting	/sɪtɪŋ/
48-	Fer	/fər/	for	/fɔ:r/
49-	No how	/nəʊ hau/	Any how	/eni hou/
50-	gitting	/gɪtɪŋ/	Getting	/getɪŋ/
51-	Spouse	/spɒz/	Suppose	/səpəʊz/
52-	nother	/nəðər/	the other	/ðə ʌðər/
53-	Womens	/wɪmɪnz/	Women	/wɪmɪn/
54-	Toofs	/tu:fs/	feet	/fi:t/
55-	one nother	/wʌn nʌðə/	one another	/wʌn ənʌðə/

This section deals with the analysis of data on Lexical Level. The data has been presented in the form of tables previously now the analysis is done on various levels i.e. Consonant level, Vowel level and additional phonological patterns.

Consonant Level

The difference between Standard English and AAVE is most noticeable in the consonants. AAVE is r-less or non rhotic, just like the dialects of New England and old south. The Consonant Level is analyzed on various levels.

Final Consonant Sounds

Consonants are speech sounds in the articulation of which the egressive or ingressive air stream encounters either a closure or a constriction which may or may not cause audible friction (Malmkjaer, 2004, p. 31). The data for the present study reveals that the consonant sound in the final position is frequently altered by Celie. As Celie is representing an African American character so she frequently uses AAVE in her speech. As far as the final consonant sounds are concerned, they are frequently altered on two levels: consonant cluster reduction and reduction of final sound.

Consonant Cluster Reduction

Consonant cluster reduction is a process in which the final consonant group or cluster, composed of two consonant sounds, is reduced to a single consonant sound. (Green 2002, p. 107). This is illustrated below, where 'C' stands for consonant.

CC → C
 ||
 nd → n
 Kind → Kin

The consonant cluster 'nd' (CC) is reduced to 'n' (C), so the word 'Kind' is produced without the final 'd' sound: 'kin' (Green 200, p. 108). As evident from the data, the following five lexical items fall under the category of consonant cluster reduction:

AAVE	Phonological Transcription	Standard English	Phonological Transcription
Kine	/kam/	Kind	/kaɪnd/
Fine	/faɪn/	Find	/faɪnd/
Mine	/maɪn/	Mind	/maɪnd/
An	/æn/	And	/ænd/
Ole	/əʊl/	Old	/əʊld/

As evident from the data, it is an accepted phenomenon that AAVE speakers reduce the final consonant cluster. In some cases the phonetic transcription and pronunciation is the same but graphological representation is different. From the data five lexical items fall under the category of final consonant cluster reduction. In the word 'kind' final consonant cluster (cc) is reduced to 'kine'. In the second lexical item 'Find' the pronunciation is same in both AAVE and Standard English but the graphological presentation is different. In AAVE phoneme 'e' is added to Standard English 'Find'. It shows that sometimes Celie is showing her own identity by deviating from the usual norm. In the third lexical item 'mine' consonant cluster reduction is again seen. In the word 'mine' the consonant cluster (cc) is reduced to (c). In the fourth lexical item 'and', again consonant cluster reduction is found. The conjunction 'and' is commonly used most of the times. In the data the lexical item 'and' is reduced to 'an' in AAVE. Most of the times in Standard English as well when 'and' is spoken the speakers usually delete the final sound as a result of elision, but in this context as the character is maintaining her African American identity she reduces the final consonant sound of 'and' (cc) to 'an' (c). In the final lexical items 'old', consonant cluster reduction is found as the lexical item of 'old' is reduced to 'ole'. The process of consonant cluster reduction of the data can be presented in the form of the following table:

Standard English	Consonant Cluster	AAVE	Consonant Cluster Reduction
Kind	CCC	Kine	CC
Find	CCC	Fine	CCC
Mind	CCC	Mine	CC
And	CC	An	C
Old	CC	Ole	C

The analysis shows that the productions of the words such as 'kine' (kind), 'fine' (Find), 'mine' (Mind), 'an' (And) and 'ole' (Old) lean towards West African origins and postulates that speaker has such pronunciation, not because the final consonant sound is deleted in some environments, but the languages from which AAVE originated do not have final consonant clusters. So the lexical items reduce the final consonant cluster as a process.

Soul Vocalization in Syllables

Soul vocalization in syllables has been a frequent phenomenon in black folk speech. The data for the present study also reveals this phenomenon. Soul vocalization is actually a process in which the blacks place the stress on the first rather than the second syllable, as in 'po-lice', 'ho-tel', or the fact that blacks (especially older ones) delete the unstressed initial and medial syllables in the words like '(a)bout', '(be)cause', '(a)fraid' and 'sec(re)t(a)ry' more often than whites do (Rickford and Rickford, 2000). As evident from the data the following sixteen lexical items fall under the category of soul vocalization in syllables:

AAE	Phonological Transcription	AE	Phonological Transcription
Cause	/kɒz/	Because	/bɪkɒz/
Bout	/baʊt/	About	/əbaʊt/
Round	/raʊnd/	Around	/əraʊnd/
Tween	/twi:n/	Between	/bɪtwi:n/
Sides	/saɪdz/	Besides	/bɪsaɪdz/
Cuse	/kju:z/	Accuse	/əkju:z/
Hind	/haɪnd/	Behind	/bɪhaɪnd/
Thout	/ðaut/	Without	/wɪðaut/
Nuff	/nʌf/	Enough	/ɪnʌf/
Spect	/spekt/	Expect	/ɪkspekt/
Cross	/krɒs/	Across	/əkɒs/
Tention	/tenʃən/	Attention	/ətənʃən/
Stead	/sted/	Instead	/ɪnstəd/
Cept	/sept/	Except	/ɪksept/
Preshate	/pri:ʃeɪt/	Appriciate	/əpri:ʃeɪt/
Miration	/məreɪʃən/	Admiration	/æməreɪʃən/

As evident from the data it has been found out that Celie deletes the first and the second syllable which is unstressed. In the word 'because' initial and second

unstressed syllable is deleted and so because changes to 'cause' in AAVE. Similarly in the second lexical item 'about' the initial unstressed syllable is deleted so 'about' changes to 'bout' in AAVE. In the third lexical item from the data the initial unstressed syllable is deleted so 'around' changes to 'round' in AAVE. In the fourth lexical item from the data, the lexical item 'between' which is the preposition changes to 'tween' in AAVE by the deletion of initial and second unstressed syllable. The excess of data falls under this category of soul vocalization in syllables. The lexical items of Standard English like 'besides' 'accuse' 'behind' change to 'sides', 'cuse' and 'hind' in AAVE by the deletion of first and second syllables in 'accuse' and by the deletion of first two syllables in 'behind'. As evident from the data the lexical items 'without', 'enough' and 'except' are reduced to 'thout' 'nuff' and 'spect' in AAVE by deletion of first two syllables in 'without' and 'expect' and by deletion of initial syllable in 'enough'. As evident from the data in the lexical items 'across', 'attention' and 'appreciate', the first initial sound 'a' is deleted and 'across' changes to 'cross', 'attention' changes to 'tension', and 'appreciate' changes to 'preshate' in AAVE. In three of these lexical items the initial 'a' sound is deleted. The data shows that the lexical items, 'instead', 'accept', and 'admiration' are reduced to 'stead', 'cept', and 'miration' by the deletion of first two unstressed syllables. It has been seen that Celie frequently deletes the first and second unstressed syllables. As this soul focalization in unstressed syllable is a phenomenon of black folk speech so Celie is truly confirming to be an embodiment of black folk identity and the above data confirms it. The analysis reveals that the deletion is seen in the initial or first two unstressed syllables of the data. Although as mentioned by Rickford and Rickford (2000) the deletion can also be seen in the middle of the lexical items in back folk speech, in our extracted data no deletion has been seen in middle of lexical items rather deletion is only found in the first and second position of the lexical items. Further it has been seen that the phonological deviations on the level of soul vocalization in syllables accrued at phonological and graphological level while semantically there is no difference in the data. Meanings are the same in AAVE and Standard English.

Devoicing

The process of consonant devoicing has been frequently seen in black folk speech. The data for the present research also reveals this phenomenon. Devoicing is actually a process that is making a voiced consonant voiceless. It is applied to some consonants at the ends of words. The voiced sounds of 'b', 'd', and 'g' become devoiced and change to 'p', 't' and 'k' respectively.

B	→	P
Voiced		Voiceless
D	→	T

Voiced		Voiceless
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G	→	K
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Voiced		Voiceless
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As evident from the data Celie also devoiced sound 'd' to 't'. From the data only two lexical items were found. In the word 'asked', Celie changes ending 'd' sound to 't'. 'AST' is used instead of 'asked' changing the voiced 'd' sound to voiceless 't' sound. Similarly in the word 'willed', Celie devoiced ending 'd' sound and 'kilt' is used by Celli instead of 'willed'. The data analysis can be presented in this form:

Asked	→	AST
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D		T
---	--	---

(Voiced)		(Voiceless)
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Killed	→	Kilt
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D		T
---	--	---

(Voiced)		(Voiceless)
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Sound Patterns and 'th'

The sound patterns and 'th' is another important aspect of AAVE. It has been seen that t/d sound and f/v sound is produced in AAVE where 'th' sound occurs. In Standard English it has also been observed that there the sounds of t/d or f/v are not used randomly rather they are systematic because they are chosen on phonetic properties. To explain this category it is essential to give the detail of the articulation system. The articulatory system of a consonant includes three important aspects:

1. State of the glottis in the production of the consonant (Noising).
2. Place of articulation of the consonant.
3. Manner of articulation of the consonant.

The state of glottis means that whether the sound is voiced or voiceless. A place of articulation describes the place in the mouth at which the sound is made, and the manner of articulation identifies the way the sound is made. This can be explained

with the help of this diagram:

Sound	State of Glottis vocal folds apart Voiceless	Place of Articulation alveolar	Manner of Articulation
T	Vocal folds apart Voiceless	Alveolar	Stop
D	Vocal Folds Together Voiced	Alveolar	Stop
F	Vocal Folds apart Voiceless	Labiodental	Fricative
V	Vocal Folds together voiced	Labiodental	Fricative

The place of articulation for the 't' and 'd' is sound B alveolar because they are made by touching the ridge behind the top teeth (alveolar ridge) with the tip of the tongue and labiodental is the place of articulation for f and v because they are formed by touching the bottom lip with the top teeth i.e. labiodental, lip and teeth. The 't' and 'd' sounds are stopped because the air is stopped at the alveolar ridge when they are produced and the 'f' and 'v' are fricatives because when these sounds are made, friction B is produced, as the air escapes through the very small opening between the lip and teeth. After clarifying this detail it is essential to give the description of 'th'. It has been noted that t/d and f/v occur in the same environments in which 'th' sounds occur in Standard English. These are two 'th' sounds but they are both represented by one spelling 'th'. Two different phonetic symbols are used to refer to these sounds.

Sound	State of Glottis	Place of Articulation	Manners of Articulation
Th (o) (Thin)	Voiceless	Interdental	Fricative
Th (o) (Thin)	Voiced	Interdental	Fricative

Both are interdental and fricative but one is voiceless and the other is voiced which is a very important distinction.

This detail was essential to understand the discussion. The data for the present research also fulfills this reality. As evident from the data 'dis' is used instead of 'this' and 'dat' is used instead of 'that' by Cellie. This discussion highlights that speakers of AAVE make substitution for the 'th' sounds (that occur in Standard English) because they cannot produce these interdental fricatives ('th' sounds). The same speakers who produce t/d and f/v in some environments in which 'th' occur in Standard English also produce the 'th' sounds in some environments. It has been seen that speakers do not use 't' in environments in which voiceless 'th' begins a word in English. The data for the present research also reveals this but only two lexical items have been found that fall under this category. This can be analyzed with the help of this diagram:

Celie's use of AAVE	Phonetic Transcription	Standard English	Phonetic Transcription
Dat	/dat/	that	/ðat/
Dis	/dis/	this	/ðis/

'r' and 'l': Liquid Vocalization

Liquid Vocalization is a very prominent feature of AAVE. The liquid vocalization is found in 'r' and 'l'. It has been seen that 'r' and 'l' sounds are liquefied or omitted in AAVE. From the data the following lexical items fall in this category:

Celie's use of AAVE	Phonetic Transcription	Standard English	Phonetic Transcription
Cuss	/kʌs/	Curse	/kɜ:rs/
motocar	/moutəka:r/	Motor car	/moutərka:r/
Suh	/su:h/	Sir	/sɜ:r/
Gal	/ga:l/	Girl	/gɜ:rl/

From the data the following generalization can be made. First of all in all the examples the 'r' and 'l', if they were pronounced, would follow vowel sounds. Secondly it has been seen that a schwa sound is found at some places which means fully liquid vocalization is missing as in 'moto car'. This is basically the explanation of the term vocalization which means that liquid in these environments take on vowel like qualities, so instead of full liquid ('r' and 'l') a schwa (vowel sound) is used in black folk speech it is very common that 'r' and 'l' is liquefied vocalized and the data also confirms it that Celie omitted the 'r' sound. So 'curse' became 'cuss', 'motor car' became 'moto car', 'Sir' became 'Suh' and 'girl' became 'Gal'.

Additional Phonological Patterns

Reduction of Suffix 'ing' to '-in'

In AAVE, the suffix 'ing' is reduced to '-in', giving 'n' sound. Celie fulfills this criterion:

Celie's use of AAVE	Phonological Transcription	Standard English	Phonetic Transcription
Cryin	/kraɪn/	crying	/kraɪŋ/
Somethin	/sʌmθɪn/	something	/sʌmθɪŋ/
Learnin	/lɜ:rnɪn/	learning	/lɜ:rnɪŋ/
Doin	/du:ɪn/	Doing	/du:ɪŋ/

These examples show that the final 'ing' sound is reduced to '-in' sound in AAVE.

Use of 'Skr' instead of 'str'

Another feature of AAVE is the use of 'skr' instead of 'str'. In black speech 'skr' occurs in the syllable initial position where 'skr' used in general English. For example:

AAVE	Standard English
skreet	Street
skrberry	Strawberry
skretch	Stretch
skraight	Straight

This feature is still under debate among linguists that whether it is a disorder or a dialectal pattern. No lexical items, falling in this category, were found in the data.

Individual Linguistic Features of Celie's Language

This section shows those linguistic items which are a part of data but do not fall under any category mentioned by Rickford and Rickford (2000), Green (2002) and Tottie (2002). So these words can be called as individual linguistic features as follows:

Celie's Individual use of AAVE	Phonetic Transcription	Standard English	Phonetic Transcription
Naw	/na:/	no	/nəu/
Git	/git/	get	/get/
Sposed	/spəʊzd/	supposed	/səpəʊzd/
Then	/ðen/	than	/ðæn/
Mens	/menz/	men	/men/
Tho	/ðau/	though	/ðou/
Gon	/gɒn/	going to	/gəʊɪŋ tu:/
Yeah	/jeə/	yes	/jes/
nary one	/nari wʌn/	any one	/eni wʌn/
Knowed	/nəʊd/	knew	/nju:/
Embroider	/imbrədər/	embroider	/imbrəɪdər/
Embroidy	/imbrədi/	embroidery	/imbrəɪdəri/
Bidniss	/bɪdnɪs/	business	/biznəs/
Setting	/setɪŋ/	sitting	/sɪtɪŋ/
Fer	/fər/	for	/fɔ:r/
No how	/nəʊ hau/	Any how	/eni hau/
Gitting	/gɪtɪŋ/	getting	/getɪŋ/
Spouse	/spɒz/	suppose	/səpəʊz/
Nother	/nəðər/	The other	/ðə ʌðər/
Womens	/wɪmɪnz/	women	/wɪmɪn/
Toofs	/tu:fs/	Feet	/fi:t/
one nother	/wʌn nʌðər/	one another	/wʌn ʌnʌðər/

Reduction in Syllable

In Celie's language certain syllables are reduced. For example in the word 'supposed' 'u' and 'p' is reduced and omitted. Similar reduction has been observed in words 'tho' and 'gon'. In the word 'though' in which 'ugh' is omitted and 'gon' is used instead of 'going to'.

Pluralizing of the Plural

Celie pluralizes the already plural words. She uses 'mens' instead of 'men' although 'men' is already the plural of 'man' but Celie pluralizes the plural 'men' by adding 's'. Similarly she uses 'womens' instead of 'women'. This category can be analyzed and explained with the help of the following diagram:

Singular word	Plural	Phonetic Transcription	Celie's pluralizing of the Plural	Phonetic Transcription
Man	Men	/men/	Mens	/menz/
Woman	Women	/wimin/	Womens	/wiminz/

It can be said after this analysis that Celie might have used it to show her individuality.

Change in Form of Words

It has been seen that the individual character Celie uses wrong forms of verb. For example she uses second form of 'Know' as 'knowed' instead of 'Knew'.

Extra Use of Nasals

Celie uses nasals where vowel sound is used. She uses 'nary one' instead of 'anyone'. Similarly she uses 'nother' instead of the 'the other'.

Miscellaneous

Apart from these above mentioned features that are peculiar to Celie there are other features as well. For example She uses 'Naw' instead of 'no' and 'yeah' instead of 'yes' other words are as follows:

Celies individual use in AAVE	Phonetic Transcription	Standard English	Phonetic Transcription
Embroider	/imbrədər/	Embroider	/imbrɔɪdər/
Embroidy	/imbrɔɪdi/	Embroidery	/imbrɔɪdəri/
Bidniss	/bidnis/	Business	/biznəs/
Fer	/fər/	For	/fɔ:r/

Gitting	/gitɪŋ/	Getting	/getɪŋ/
Spose	/spɒz/	Suppose	/səpəʊz/
Toofs	/tu:fs/	Feet	/fi:t/

The analysis on lexical level lists all the points on which AAVE is different from Standard English. Some lexical items do not fall into any category mentioned by Rickford and Rickford (2002), Green (2002), and Tottie (2002). They are Cellie's individuality. It can be said that Cellie is also conforming to her African American identity by conforming to all the categories mentioned by Rickford and Rickford (2002) and Green (2002). But there are some individual linguistic features of Celie's language which show her idiolect and individuality.

Syntactic Level

For Syntactic Level the data is presented in table form. The table is divided into two columns. The first column contains the verb phrases and the noun phrases of AAVE (used by Celie) which have been extracted from the data. The second column presents the Standard English of those Verb Phrases and Noun Phrases.

Categorization of Data

The data has been divided into two categories: The Noun Phrase and The Verb Phrase. Further smaller categories are made to facilitate the data analysis.

Categories

The data is analyzed on the basis of following categories borrowed from Tottie (2002).

1-The Verb Phrase

- i) The use of Copula 'be'
 - a) Copula Deletion
 - b) Retention of Copula in case of first person singular
 - c) Use of 'be' to indicate something as habitual
 - d) Use of 'steady/be steady' to show something as habitual
- ii) Subject Verb Agreement
- iii) Absence of Third Person Singular Marker

iv) Negation

2- The Noun Phrase in AAVE

- i) Treatment of Indefinite Article 'an'
- ii) Deletion of '-s' in the Genitive
- iii) Repetition of the Subject Noun Phrase

The Verb Phrase in AAVE

Tottie (2002) has observed that AAVE astonishingly distinguished itself from the Standard English in case of the grammar of the verb phrase. AAVE has a strikingly richer aspect system than all the other varieties of English because it has much potential in indicating whether any event is continuing, habitual or repeated, just finished or finished in the remotest past. This is reflected in the use of the verb "be". Walker makes Celie speak in AAVE not only to give her a particular voice but also to give her a particular identity. And that she does through her choice of using the AAVE.

The Use of Copula 'Be'

AAVE has a unique inconsistent use of Copula (the verb) 'be' whereas the Standard English has a regular and consistent use of Copula.

Copula Deletion

AAVE speakers tend to absent 'be' from their discourse more often than most. Any standard English user will find the sentence like "He Ø a man" as an aberration and a debasement of English language whereas AAVE has the above mentioned sentence structure as a hallmark feature. Nevertheless there is an exception in the case of the first person singular that AAVE speakers use the Copula similarly as the speakers of Standard English do. For example: "I'm a man". As the main aim of the research is to highlight Celie as a speaker of AAVE to prove her African American identity by sticking to the consistent use of AAVE, so it is pertinent to provide examples from Celie's utterances in the novel that capitalize on AAVE. Following are the examples showing the tendency of Copula deletion in Celie's language use:

Celie's Language	Standard English
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1-She Ø happy, cause she Ø good to her now. (Letter # 1)	She is happy because she is good to her now.
2-I see him looking at my little sister. She Ø scared. (Letter # 3)	I see him looking at my little sister. She is scared.
3-She Ø more pretty than my mama. (Letter # 6)	She is prettier than my mama.
4-She Ø so scared she go outdoors and vomit. (Letter # 7)	She was so scared that she went outdoors and vomited.
5-My little girl she look up and sort of frown. She Ø fretting over something. (Letter # 10)	My little girl looked up and sort of frowned. She was fretting over something.
6-Stead of being mad, she Ø glad to go. (Letter # 11)	Instead of being mad she was glad to go.
7- What Ø it made of, I ast. (Letter # 76)	What it is made of, I ask?
8-They act like this Ø the way it Ø always done. (Letter # 78)	They act like this as if this is the way it is always done.
9-Daisy try to act like she Ø glad to see us, but she Ø not. (Letter # 82)	Daisy tried to act like she was glad to see us, but she was not.
10- My skin Ø dark. My nose Ø just a nose, My lips Ø just lips. My body Ø just Ø any woman's body going through the changes of age. Nothing Ø special here for nobody to love. (Letter # 87)	My skin is dark. My nose is just a nose, my lips are just lips. My body is just like any woman's body going through the changes of age. Nothing is special here for anybody to love.

The above cited exemplary sentences from Celie's utterances, chosen from various junctures in the novel, clearly show Celie's adherence to the use of AAVE syntax patterns. What is interesting to note is that this tendency of Celie's speech is consistent throughout all her letters to God as well as to Nettie, which shows that how Walker is utilizing her knowledge of AAVE to incorporate her fictitious character to exist linguistically.

Retention of Copula in Case of First Person Singular

All the grammarians of AAVE like Rickford & Rickford (2000), Tottie (2002), and Green (2002) have maintained that where AAVE deletes Copula in general it retains Copula particularly in the case of the first person singular. Celie also, throughout her letters, retains Copula with first person singular:

Celie's use of AAVE	Standard English
a- <i>I am</i> fourteen years old. (Letter # 1)	I am fourteen years old.
b- But what <i>I am</i> sposed to put on? (Letter # 3)	But what am I supposed to put on? I am not scared of them.
c- I'm not scared of them. (Letter # 5)	
d- If <i>I was</i> buried, I wouldn't have to work. (Letter # 11)	If I were buried, I would not have to work.
e- Nettie, <i>I am</i> making some pants for you to beat the heat in Africa. (Letter # 76)	Nettie, I am making some pants for you to beat the heat in Africa.

Use of 'Be' to Indicate Something as Habitual

Walker, drawing from the grammar rules of AAVE, makes Celie use 'be' as the habitual meanings to actions without any references to the present time. As in the first sentence Celie is, by using 'be', referring to the habitual daily routine of water getting warm, food getting cold and the passing of whole day like always. The second sentence shows that Celie using 'be' to indicate that how Celie's sister Nettie frequently sits with her to shell peas and to help her children with their spellings.

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- By time I git back from well, the water <i>be</i> warm. By time I git the tray ready the food <i>be</i> cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it <i>be</i> dinner time. (Letter # 2)	By the time I get back from well, the water is like usual warm. By the time I get the tray ready the food is like usual cold. By the time I get all the children ready for school it is like usual dinner time.
b- She <i>be</i> sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling.(Letter #)	She frequently sits there with me shelling peas or helping the children with their spelling.

Use of 'Steady'/'Be Steady' to Show Something Habitual

The Speakers of AAVE occasionally use 'steady' or 'be steady' for expressing something habitual or usual. Likewise Walker has also made Celie use the expression in the following sentences:

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- No matter what happen, Nettie <i>steady</i> try to teach me what go on in the world. (Letter # 11)	No matter what happens, Nettie keeps trying to teach me what goes on in the world.

- | | |
|---|---|
| b- She finally working <i>steady</i> , singing at two or three clubs round town.
(Letter # 78) | She is finally working regularly by singing at two or three clubs round the town. |
|---|---|

In the above sentences from Celie's usage it is clear that Celie is using 'steady' after the AAVE tradition with the aspectual meaning of regularity or usualness.

Subject-Verb Agreement

AAVE is particularly vibrant in its use of disagreeing verbs with subjects. Standard English marks disagreeing verbs as mistakes or errors in the use of language whereas AAVE has standardized the disagreeing use of verb with the subject. This feature of AAVE gives it a different variety to convey a different identity: African American identity. Walker also gives Celie's usage this special feature as an indication to her African American identity:

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- My little sister Nettie <i>is</i> got a boyfriend is the same shape almost as pa. (Letter # 4)	My little sister Nettie has got a boyfriend has the same shape almost as pa.
b- She Ø scared she <i>go</i> outdoors and vomit. (Letter # 7)	She was so scared she went out doors and vomited.
c- I seen my baby girl. I knowed it was her. (Letter # 10)	I saw my baby girl. I knew it was her.
d- I don't have nothing to offer and i <i>feels</i> poor. (Letter # 10)	I don't have anything to offer and I feel poor.
e- If I <i>was</i> buried, I wouldn't have to work. (Letter # 11)	If I were buried, I wouldn't have to work.
f- It would be like old times, when you <i>was</i> singing at harpo's. (Letter # 76)	It would be like old times, when you were singing at Harpo's.
g- You <i>is</i> a wonder to behold. (Letter # 76)	You are a wonder to behold.
h- You know how tough I think I <i>is</i> . (Letter # 87)	You know how tough I think I am.
i- I have <i>love</i> and I have been <i>love</i> . (Letter # 87)	I have loved and I have been loved.
j- But they <i>was</i> wrong. (Letter # 87)	But they were wrong

Absence of Third Person Singular Marker

Celie's usage of AAVE has no marker of the third person singular as obvious in the following sentence:

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- He <i>act</i> like he can't stand me no more. (Letter #3)	He acts like he can't stand me any longer.
b- He <i>beat</i> me today cause he <i>say</i> I winked at a boy in church. (Letter # 5)	He beats me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church.
c- He <i>don't</i> say nothing. (Letter # 11)	He doesn't say anything.
d- She <i>work</i> late, <i>sleep</i> late, <i>git</i> up late. (Letter # 76)	She works late, sleep late, gets up late.
e- Nobody <i>cook</i> like shug when she <i>cook</i> . (Letter # 76)	Nobody cooks like shug when she cooks.

Negation

AAVE, as distinct variety, shows remarkable differences from Standard English in case of Negation. And these differences are part and parcel of Celie's language too. AAVE has double or multiple negations which is also known as negative concord. Therefore it is no wonder that one finds two or more negatives in one sentence without incurring any semantic change. AAVE uses 'nothing' and 'no' replacing the standard forms of 'anything' and 'any', as is notable in Celie's expressions:

Celie's use of AAVE	Standard English
a- But what I'm sposed to put on? I <i>Don't</i> have <i>nothing</i> . (Letter # 3)	But what I'm supposed to put on? I Don't have anything.
b- A girl at church say you get big if you bleed every month. I <i>don't</i> bleed <i>no</i> more. (Letter # 5)	A girl at church say you get big if you bleed every month. I don't bleed any more.
c- Pa call me. Celie, he say, like it <i>wasn't nothing</i> . (Letter # 8)	Pa called me. 'Celie', he said, like it was not anything.
d- I <i>don't</i> have <i>nothing</i> to offer and I feels poor. (Letter # 10)	I don't have anything to offer and I feel poor.
e- He <i>don't</i> say <i>nothing</i> . (Letter # 11)	He doesn't say anything.
	Just because I like her doesn't take away

f- I <i>don't</i> say <i>nothing</i> . (Letter # 83)	any of her rights.
g- Just cause I like her <i>don't</i> take away <i>none</i> of her rights. (Letter # 87)	The only thing that bothers me is she doesn't say anything about coming back.
h- The only thing bother me is she <i>don't never</i> say <i>nothing</i> bout coming back. (Letter # 87)	Plus, he is not a good influence for any child.
i- Plus, he <i>not</i> a good influence for <i>no</i> child. (Letter # 90)	

The Noun Phrase in AAVE

There are some remarkable digressions in AAVE from Standard English regarding the grammar of noun phrase. An effort has been made to locate these digressing features of AAVE in Celie's language as to strengthen our thesis premises that Walker has portrayed Celie as African American character through exploiting the variety of English known as AAVE. Following are some of prominent feature of AAVE differing from Standard English as listed by Tottie (2002). These differences in the noun phrase are highlighted with examples from the data.

Treatment of Indefinite Article 'An'

The striking feature of AAVE in the noun phrase is that the indefinite article is not always realized as 'an' before a vowel sound. It is an invariant happening in Standard English. Rather 'an' appears more often than most just as 'a':

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- Don't she look like <i>a</i> Olivia to you? (Letter #)	Does she not look an Olivia to you?
b- Here they building a dam so they can flood out <i>a</i> Indian tribe that been there since time. (Letter # 276)	Here they are building a dam so they can flood out an Indian table that has been there since time.
c- Being alive begin to seem like <i>a</i> awful strain. (Letter # 85)	Being alive begins to seem like an awful strain.

Deletion of the '-S' in the Genitive

Another feature of AAVE is that its speakers often omit the '-s' marker of the genitive case. The '-s' marker is used to show a relationship of ownership or association. Like the speakers of AAVE Celie also omits the '-s' marker in her

language:

Celie's use of AAVE	Standard English
a- With <i>God</i> help. (Letter # 3)	With God's help.

Repetition of the Subject Noun Phrase

Alice walker uses another feature of AAVE in Celie's language to make her a true African American. The AAVE Speakers have the tendency to repeat the subject noun phrase and so do we find Celie doing:

Celie's Language	Standard English
a- <i>My Little girl she look</i> up and sort of frown. (Letter #10)	My little girl looks up and sort of frowns.

The above example shows clearly that the subject noun 'girl' is immediately followed by 'she' pronoun which is unlikely to appear in Standard English. The analysis on syntactic level shows clearly the grammatical features of AAVE used by Celie to express her African American identity.

Conclusion

Language reflects identity. It comes true in case of Walker's *The Color Purple*. She has created a character that is uneducated and belongs to rural area. To give her character Celie an authentic identity, she has used language as a tool. Celie's usage fulfills the criteria of AAVE as our analysis proves. She preserves her African American identity by her speech. Walker, as a black African American author herself, has great love for African American culture and identity which is successfully reflected through her character Celie.

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