

AAE and EAE pitch accent types and frequencies: An apparent time perspective

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Perception experiments, production studies, and anecdotal evidence have suggested that varieties of African American English (AAE) may exhibit intonational patterns that differ from those of other varieties of English. There is, however, no consensus about what makes AAE intonation distinctive. Complicating this issue is the fact that previous studies have suggested that some features that make AAE intonation distinctive are restricted to yes/no questions or declaratives or that others are associated mainly with competitive speech acts (Tarone, 1973; Loman 1975). However, one must wonder, is there a unifying principle that accounts for these observed differences?

Using interviews with eight African American and six European American natives of Raleigh, North Carolina, as well as ten ex-slave recordings from the Sociolinguistic Archive Analysis Project (SLAAP), I test whether the differences are due to a more current distinction within these groups or remnants of longstanding differences. The examination of intonational contours using MAE TOBI shows that AAE F0 pitch accents commonly show contours with a noticeable drop. I examine the type and relative frequency of pitch accents found in AAE in Raleigh, North Carolina and among the ten ex-slaves and compare them with current European American cohorts. Though the findings in Thomas and Carter (2006) suggest that AAE and speakers of European American English (and varieties otherwise) are *becoming more similar* in prosodic rhythm, it appears that AAE speakers in Raleigh remain dissimilar in intonation. Based on the apparent time comparison of the pitch accents of modern AAE speakers to ex-slaves, I determine that these ex-slaves and current AAE speakers are similar in frequency and type, though it is still unclear if and what the unifying principle may be.