Grammatical Analysis of African American Vernacular English in *The Eminem Show* Album: A Linguistics Perspective

Ichwan Suyudi[1*], Agung Prasetyo Wibowo[2], Luthfi Chanafiah Pasha[3]

[1]*Gunadarma University, Depok, Indonesia. E-mail:* ichwan@staff.gunadarma.ac.id
[2]*Gunadarma University, Depok, Indonesia. E-mail:* agungpwpw@gmail.com
[3]*Gunadarma University, Depok, Indonesia. E-mail:* luthfipasha19@student.gunadarma.ac.id
*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Albeit the research on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as nonstandard form of English spoken by African Americans in lower socioeconomic classes has been documented by many scholars, little is known about it from the perspective of Wolfram's theory. To fill this lacuna, the present study aims to elucidate the grammatical elements of Eminem's lyrics song in the album "The Eminem Show." This single case study showcased 32 lyrics song from Eminem's album with that seven grammatical features such as copula/auxiliary absence, the invariant be, the remote been, the subject verb agreement, the negation, the question formation, and the nominals. The findings found that negation is the most common grammatical features whereas the invariant be is the least common. The findings indicated that songs serve as a platform for asserting identity and criticizing diverse social, cultural, political, and economic issues. The performers are free to improvise in accordance with the tendencies and interests of the critic. Thus, the song can serve both to identify the current social crisis and as a catalyst for the crisis itself.

Keywords: *AAVE; African American; Eminem; Language; Vernacular English*

1. Introduction

The study of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has long attracted the attention of the scholars around the globe. For example, Rickford (2016) revealed that most black people in the USA and Canada speak AAVE, a form of English distinct from standard English. The difference can be observed in style, generation, and geographical context. In this regards, Labov (1972) was the main pioneer in the study of AAVE who made significant contributions to the development of different versions of this English dialect, including synchronic features, diachronic features, speech events, verbal artistry, and even how AAVE is adopted for teaching and learning, advocacy in court, and contentious public issues. In the same vein, Lanehart's (2022) study showcased that AAVE is a sociolect of middle-class and lower African Americans in urban areas with unique accent, grammar and vocabulary features. The distinctive feature of this grammar is the use of a "zero" copula such as "he my father" instead of "he is my father" (Kim, 2022), omission of the genitive clitic (Lavidas &

Tsimpli, 2019), the complexity of verb aspects and tenses, the metathetical use of *aks* instead of *ask* (Jones et al., 2019), and diphthongs simplification (Djumaboyeva, 2022). Similarly, studies by Kurinec & Weaver III (2019) and Carter (2013) indicated that not all black Americans use AAVE in communication and that not only black persons employ those linguistic features. The primary aspect of AAVE that sets it apart from the others is the way it uses grammatical and phonological elements such the usege of habitual 'be' (e.g. 'We be going out' to signify that 'We habitually go out') or changing the /t/ in /str/ clusters to /k/ sound (e.g. pronouncing 'street' as 'skreet'.

To date, research on AAVE has been extensively documented, but less is known about the use of AAVE in Eminem Song from the theory of *Wolfram*. Prior study frequently employs a variety of viewpoints. The first is the use of AAVE to legal examinations in court (Craig & Grogger, 2012; Frumkin, 2007; Kurinec & Weaver III, 2019). The findings of their study demonstrate that judges' perceptions of AAVE language users are still unfavourable since they are viewed as weak, uneducated, and of a low social status. This, therefore, has an impact on his court judgment, either directly or indirectly. Second, the application of AAVE in higher education to combat discrimination nested on race and social class (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Hankerson, 2022). The findings of their study suggest that students' written language proficiency in AAVE could be enhanced by a writing program in tertiary institutions that emphasizes critical language awareness. With writing being devalued as a result of language racism, linguistic hegemony, and systematic injustice in writing education, this seeks to end their feelings of worry, humiliation, and pressure. The third trend looks at AAVE as a legitimate language with a strong linguistic and stylistic tradition in verbal and written communication (Hankerson, 2022; Perryman-Clark, 2013; Weldon, 2021). Following their study's findings, students who spoke AAVE were equally proficient in phonology and grammar as those who spoke standard English. The prior studies show that the use of AAVE language in Eminem's songs from a linguistic perspective is still scarce.

To fill this lacuna, this present study aims to elucidate the use of AAVE in Eminem's album using Wolfram's theory. One question posed in this research is how AAVE is used in Eminem's album? It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the reader's understanding of how African American English is used in songs and new insight into the operationalization of Wolfram's theory in the context of songs. In addition, the readers might gain valuable insights into the language and cultural dynamics presented in the AAVE-speaking community.

Grammatical Characteristics of AAVE

African American Language, which has undergone a number of name changes over the years—from Negro Non-Standard Vernacular English to Black English to Ebonics to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to AAE or AAL—is a collection of languages with specific rules that are used by the majority of black people in the US. Like other English languages, this dialect contains phonology, morphology, and syntax. It also has its own language functions that are unique when it comes to communication (Peele-Eady & Foster, 2018). Following Wolfram's theory (2004), our study focuses on employing AAVE's grammatical characteristics, which is divided into 13 kinds. The grammatical characteristics are: 1) Copula/auxiliary absence; 2) Invariant be; 3) Completive done; 4) Sequential be done; 5) Remote been; 6) Simple

past had + verb; 7) Specialized auxiliaries; 8) Irregular verbs; 9) Subject-verb agreement; 10) Other verb phrase structures; 11) Negation; 12) Nominals; and 13) Question formation. The Table 1 shows the details of grammatical characteristics.

Table 1. Grammatical characteristics

No.	Grammatical characteristics	Details
1	Copula/auxiliary absence	The absence of copula and auxiliary for contractible forms of is and are. For the example "She gon' need another fella", "She 'bout 30 years old."
2	Invariant be	Invariant be marks a unique aspect referring to an intermittent activity, hence the reference to habitual be, it indicates a habitual event or action or an event distributed intermittently in time as in "She be here in a minute", "She told me that she be worried"
3	Completive done	The use of done with the past tense of the verb "I done told you not to mess up" it's referring to an action completed in the recent past, but it can also be used to highlight the change of state or to intensify an activity. For example: "He done made enough off us", "I done told you not to mess up "
4	Sequential be done	AAVE may also show a combination of be and done together in sentences such as "My ice cream be done melted by the time we get there," marking a resultative or a future conditional state.
5	Remote been	The stressed use of been with a past tense form of the verb may denote a special aspectual function that marks an activity in the distant past. For the example, "She been married" or "I been there" It refers to an event that took place, literally or figuratively, in a distant time frame.
6	Simple past had + verb	The use of the auxiliary had with a past or perfect form of the verb (see the section on irregular verbs) to indicate a simple past tense action. For the example, "They had went hangout and then they had messed up the Bar"
7	Specialized auxiliaries	These auxiliary-like constructions are the use of come to indicate a state of indignation, the use of steady to mark a continuative intensifying activity, and the use of finna to indicate an immediate future or planned event. The use of

		come with v-ing in the sentence *He come walkin' in here like he owned the damn place.* Another apparent camouflaged form is *steady* in sentences such as *Ricky Bell be steady steppin' in them number nines*, where the adverb *steady* indicates an intensified, persistent activity. The specialized auxiliary *finna* in *I'm finna go*, related to the generalized Southern form *fixin' to* (also *fixta, fitna,* and *fidda*), refers to an immediate future or planned event.
8	Irregular verbs	The irregular verbs of urban AAVE follow those found in other vernacular varieties of English, in particular, rural Southern white varieties. These include the extension of past as participle (e.g. *I had went down there*), the participle as past (e.g. *They seen it*), the bare root as past (e.g. *They run there yesterday*), and regularization of past tense (e.g. *Everybody knowed him*). Unlike rural Southern varieties, it does not tend to retain some of the older different irregular forms (e.g. *hearen* for *heard* or *clumb* for *climbed*).
9	Subject-verb agreement	Two aspects of subject-verb concord are prominent in urban AAVE, one relating to the attachment of the verbal suffix *-s* and the other relating to the conjugated forms of past and present *be* forms. *-s* absence in sentences such as *She walk* for *She walks* and *She have money* for *She has money.* The second concord pattern affecting urban AAVE is the regularization of present and past forms of conjugated *be*. AAVE is much like the vast majority of other vernacular varieties of English in its use of *be* leveling; in the present tense, *are* and *am* level to *is*, as in *The folks is home* or *Y'all is here*, while past tense *be* levels to *was*, as in *The folks was there* or *Y'all was here* (Thomas, 2020).
10	Other verb phrase structures	There are other types of verb structures that distinguish AAVE, but these are restricted to particular lexical verbs and their complements (Cukor-Avila & Bailey, 2020). For example, the verb *beat* in AAVE may function as an intransitive verb, as in *We beat* for 'won', whereas it is required to co-occur with an object

		in other varieties of English as in We beat the team. A verb plus particle may function together lexically as in blessed out for 'scold' or 'swear at' in She blessed him out. The use of say to introduce a quote, as She told him, say, "Where you been?" is similar to its use in some creoles, prompting speculation that it is a vestige of creole influence
11	Negation	The formation of negation in AAVE is not particularly distinct from other vernacular varieties of English in the US and beyond. To begin with, it participates in negative concord, or multiple negation, in which a single negative proposition may be marked both within the verb phrase and on postverbal indefinites, as in It wasn't nothing or They didn't do nothing about nobody having no money or nothing like that. AAVE also participates in a type of negative concord that involves a preverbal indefinite and verbal negative as in Nobody don't like him, which is equivalent to the standard sentence Nobody likes him. Like other vernacular dialects, AAVE uses ain't as a general preverbal negative for present tense be (am not, isn't, aren't) and for the perfect auxiliary haven't/ hasn't as in She ain't here or She ain't been there lately (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 2020). The generalized past tense variant wont for wasn't and weren't in I wont there yesterday, found in some Southern vernacular varieties, is not typical of urban AAVE. Finally, ain't and don't may be used with but to indicate 'only' or 'no more than' as in She ain't but three years old or He didn't take but three dollars.
12	Nominals	Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is the absence of inflectional -s on possessives and plurals. The formation of plurals in AAVE is noteworthy for several reasons. Chid (2020) describes that there is the pattern of -s absence related to measure nouns with quantifiers, as in I got 50 cent and It's four mile from here. The absence of possessive -s in sentences like The dog tail was wagging or The man hat was old. Examples: "Show some attitude and bitch I won't show" "Not checkin' my statement 'til I got 4 mill"

| 13 | Question formation | There are two aspects of question formation that distinguish AAVE syntax, both involving subject auxiliary inversion. First, questions may be formed without subject-auxiliary inversion, as in Where that is? or Why I can't go? While the productive use of simple non-inverted question order may be receding, it is still quite common in some fixed phrases such as What it is? or Who that is? At the same time, embedded questions may retain subject-auxiliary inversion, as in I asked her could I go with her, contrasting with the standard pattern in which if or whether is used with non-inverted order, as in I asked him if I could go with him. |

2.   Method

This single case study focused on analyzing the grammatical structure of Eminem's album "The Eminem Show" lyrics. Even though it has fifteen songs, we tend to choose seven songs as the data because they are considered to contain AAVE grammatical features. Data collection is conducted by analyzing Eminem's album. Data analysis was performed using Wolfram's AAVE theory, encompassing 13 AAVE features. The procedures to analyze data encompass reading song lyrics, sorting and identifying line by line of the song lyric that contains AAVE characteristics, and examining data using Wolfram's AAVE theory. We chose this theory because it is appropriate for analyzing lyrics from the album The Eminem Show by Eminem. The findings were also explained and compared to standard syntactical use and the formation of common Standard English (SE) grammar rules. Finally, a conclusion was drawn based on the analysis.

3.   Findings and Discussion

3.1.   Findings

The findings indicate that this album contains many AAVE grammatical features. Seven grammatical features were found in the lyrics, including *copula/auxiliary absence, invariant be, remote been, subject verb agreement, negation, question formation*, and *nominals*.

3.1.1.   Copula/Auxiliaries Absence

One of the most frequently mentioned structural features of AAVE is the absence of copula and auxiliary for contractible forms of is and are. Although there are certain descriptive and explanatory aspects of copula absence that are still up for debate, such as whether it results from grammatical or phonological processes, there is considerable consensus regarding its status as an ethnolinguistic feature. AAVE and other Southern white rural vernacular English varieties lack the copula, although there are notable qualitative and quantitative distinctions as well (Wolfram, 2004, p. 117).

Excerpt (1):
Witnessin' your mama poppin' prescription pills in the kitchen

The writer classified the utterance above it using auxiliary absence, because there is no auxiliary between the word "*mama*" and "*poppin'*." It should be "*Witnessin' your mama is poppin' prescription pills in the kitchen*". It should be adding the auxiliary "*is*," because, based on Standard English, the primary purpose of the auxiliary verbs is to expand the meaning of the main verb in a phrase. Auxiliaries can communicate tense, mood, person, and number information. When a main verb is an infinitive or participle, an auxiliary verb is used with it.

Excerpt (2):
You a selfish bitch, I hope you fuckin' burn in hell for this shit!

The utterance above indicates use auxiliary absence because there is on an auxiliary verb before the word "selfish". The word "selfish" is an adjective, in the Standard English, we use auxiliary verb when we want to convey or judge someone. The utterance above should be "*You're a selfish bitch, I hope you fuckin' burn in hell for this shit!*"

3.1.2. Invariant Be

Invariant be, according to (Trudgill, 2000, p. 55) is the usage of the verb form "be" as a finite verb. The term "invariant be" is solely used in AAVE to denote "habitual aspect", or an occurrence that is recurrent but not continuous. Wolfram also concurs with Trudgill's assertion (2000, p. 118) to start, it is important to distinguish between the use of "habitual" be or be and a number of other uses of the word be, such as those that result from phonological processes that modify contracted forms of will and would.

Excerpt (3):
But all they kids be listenin' to me religiously

The author refers to the utterance as a "invariant be" because it shows how habitual be or be must be distinguished from a number of other uses of be, such as those obtained through phonological processes that impact contracted versions of *will* and *would*. The utterance should be "*But all they kids would be listenin' to me religiously*"

3.1.3. Remote Been

Wolfram (2004, p. 120) states the stressed form of been may indicate an unique aspectual function that designates an action that occurred in the remote past. When someone says, "I've had it for around three years" or "I've known him," they are referring to a past occurrence, either literally or metaphorically. The form may be understood in some instances as the deletion of a contracted form of the perfect. I have, I been protested and demonstrated against

From the utterance above, the writer describes the lyrics as a remote been, because the song writer removes the word "*have*" before the word "*been*". It also denotes a special aspectual function that marks an activity that took place in the distant past. The utterance should be "*I have, I have been protested and demonstrated against*"

Excerpt (4):
All this time, me and Dre been fuckin' with hats off

Based on the utterance above, the writer describes the lyrics as a remote been, because the song writer removes the word "*have*" before the word "*been*". Moreover,

it designates a unique aspectual function that identifies a past action. "*All this time, me and Dre have been fuckin' with hats off,*" should be said.

3.1.4. Subject Verb Agreement

In urban AAVE, there are two features of subject-verb agreement that stand out: one has to do with the verbal suffix -s and the other with the conjugated past and present be forms. The regularization of the present and past forms of the conjugated be is the second concord characteristic that affects urban AAVE. AAVE uses be levelling similarly to the vast majority of other vernacular English dialects; in the present tense, are and am level to is, whereas be levels to was in the past tense. In AAVE, past tense be regularization is significantly more prevalent than present tense regularization, as it is in almost all variants of colloquial English. (Wolfram, 2004, p. 122).

Excerpt (5):
Let's do the math: If I was black, I would've sold half

Because the lyrics feature a pattern that affects urban AAVE, which is the regularization of present and past forms of conjugated be, the writer characterized the aforementioned utterance as a subject verb agreement. It is grammatically valid to say *if I were*, *if he were, if she were*, and *if it were* in Standard English when followed by the verb be. Yet, these constructions are also frequently heard with was, particularly in the he/she form. utterance should be "*Let's do the math: If I **were** black, I would've sold half*"

Excerpt (6):
A plaque and platinum status is wack if I'm not the baddest

The writer describes the utterance above as a subject verb agreement because based on Wolfram's theory, the second concord pattern affecting urban AAVE is the regularization of present and past forms of conjugated be. AAVE is much like the vast majority of other vernacular varieties of English in its use of be levelling; in the present tense, *are* and *am* level to *is*. Therefore, the utterance should be "*A plaque and platinum status **are** wack if I'm not the baddest*" because "*a plaque and platinum*" is a plural not singular, thus, the utterance should use of be "*are*".

3.1.5. Negotiation

In comparison to other common English dialects in the US and abroad, the development of negation in AAVE is not particularly unique. First off, it takes part in multiple negation, also known as negative concord, where a single negative proposition can be signaled on both the verb phrase and postverbal indefinites. AAVE utilizes ain't as a generic preverbal negative for the present tense be (am not, is not, are not), as well as for the perfect auxiliary *haven't/has not*, like other vernacular dialects. Although it is concealed by other, widespread uses of ain't, this particular use of AAVE is rather common in urban dialects. For *wasn't* and *weren't*, use the generic past tense variation wont. Last but not least, ain't and don't can be combined with but to mean "*only*" or "*no more than.*" (Wolfram, 2004, p. 123).

Excerpt (7):
"*'Cause Congress keep tellin' me I ain't causin' nothin' but problems*"

The use of the words "ain't" and "negative concord," or double negation, in the lyrics led the author to classify them as a negation. Due to the fact that Standard English does not allow double negation, Trudgill (1999, p. 125) asserts that this characteristic is never employed or accepted in any type of Standard English formulation (negative concord). A common preverbal negative for the present tense *be am* not is used in the sentence as *ain't*. Following the negative verb phrase is a negative postverbal indefinite nothing, creating a double negation in the sentence. Thus, the equivalent in Standard English is "*Because Congress keep telling me, I am not causing anything but problems*"

Excerpt (7):
"I ain't have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know that"

The utterance above is a negation since the lyric contains the use of *ain't*. The utterance uses ain't as a general preverbal negative for past tense verb "*did not*". Therefore, the equivalent in Standard English as "*I did not have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know that*"

3.1.6. Question Formation

There are two characteristics of question creation that distinguish AAVE syntax, both utilizing subject auxiliary inversion. First, questions can be created without the need of auxiliary subjects. Simple non-inverted question order is still frequently used in some fixed phrases like "*What is it?*" and "*Who is that?*" even though its usefulness may be waning. Embedded inquiries, in contrast to the typical pattern where if or if is used with non-inverted order, may preserve subject-auxiliary inversion, as in I asked her whether I could go with her. This is a consistent pattern that several vernacular variations share. (Wolfram, 2004, p. 126).

Excerpt (8):
"You high, baby?"

The writer classified the utterance as a question formation because the utterance is missing of auxiliary be **are** before the noun *you*. African American often miss the auxiliary be or auxiliary verb in their conservation. Therefore, the utterance should be "*Are you high, baby?*".

Excerpt (9):
"You want me to tell you something?"

The writer describes the utterance above as a question formation since the utterance is missing of auxiliary verb **do** before the noun *you*. Wolfram (2004, p. 126) states the questions may be formed without subject-auxiliary inversion. Therefore, the utterance should be "*Do you want me to tell you something?*".

3.1.7. Nominals

According to Wolfram (2004, p. 125) perhaps the absence of inflectional -s on possessives and plurals is the most notable of them. The way plurals are formed in AAVE is important for a number of reasons. The pattern of -s absence in relation to measure nouns with quantifiers comes first. AAVE may also lack the -s plural in a broader sense that is unconstrained by the category of the word. "'Til I created **so much** motherfuckin' **turbulence**"

The writer classified the utterance above as nominals since the absence of inflectional –s plural in the word of *turbulence*. It should be *turbulences* because after the verb *created,* there is a determiner or pronoun *so much*, which indicates a quantity or a great amount of something. Therefore, the utterance above equivalent Standard English as "*until I created many turbulences*."

Excerpt (10):
"The track is on some battlin' raps, who wants some static?"

This utterance consists the absence of inflectional -s on plurals since the word *static* is a singular, while the word should add an inflectional -s because based on the utterance above, *some* mean amount of something which is a plural. Thus, the utterance above should be "*The track is on some battlin' raps, who wants some statics?*"

3.2. Discussion

The findings reveal seven grammatical constructions in the album: *copula/auxiliary absence, invariant be, remote been, subject verb agreement, negation, question formation,* and *nominals*. Among the seven findings, negation is the most grammatical feature that is found in the album. Eminem frequently uses this phrase to emphasize its negative meaning to reflect the cultural and linguistic background of the AAVE community. This song was written to refute the notion that African American English speakers are unintelligent, belong to a lower social class, and cannot write proper English as well as white people. According to Haliday, the function of negation is to deny or refute the other person's statement that the speaker considers false. Therefore, this song was created as a protest against reality.

Artists frequently express social criticism through songs, music, poetry (Pennesi, 2021), and literary works (Xie, 2022). Sometimes, despite what might seem to be entertainment, the lyrics to songs covertly make social critiques (Stundžienė, 2022). As Roderick Wallace (2023) demonstrated, this occurs throughout the world, including among African Americans. According to him, African-Americans used hip-hop as a medium to express their trauma caused by the social inequality they endured in response to social conditions. Damien Dempsey is an Irish artist, social critic, and advocate for the rights of underrepresented and disenfranchised groups (Dillane, 2021). Brazilian musicians and songwriters freely improvise in order to express criticism of the country's escalating authoritarianism (McNally, 2021). Globally, content producers use Tiktok and Youtube to criticise COVID-19 policies and practises from a sociopolitical standpoint (Pennesi, 2021).

Songs are used to spread cultural values, ethical teachings, and other messages of virtue to be preserved by future generations, as demonstrated by Nureni Aremu Bakenne and Olanrewaju John Ogundeyi (2023). Songs are also used to express social criticism. Because of this, religious groups in Nigeria denounced hip-hop songs as having inappropriate values for the younger generation (Adeniyi, 2020).

If songs, as part of verbal art (Pennesi, 2021), are synonymous with moral messages and social criticism, then it is natural for song genres and tendencies to evolve and deviate from society's popular style based on specific interests. The desire to convey certain messages and criticisms can manifest itself in a variety of ways to reflect the producer's identity and tendencies, which are influenced by the context and background, as well as the community's past history (Stundžienė, 2022). For example,

country music, the music of the white South American working class, was adopted by native Australians to express political views critical of colonial rule (Martin, 2019). Song lyrics and certain musical genres frequently spark debate because they are said to convey different messages and impressions to listeners. Religious groups in Nigeria, for example, oppose hip-hop music because it may cause their young generation to become permissive, whereas other groups believe hip-hop serves an important function and cannot be sued (Adeniyi, 2020).

Songs reflect the identities and tendencies of a community and can also affect how people react to social life situations, such as shifts in culture and economic politics (Ongur & Develi, 2022), gender roles among urban youth (Esson et al., 2021), and other social phenomena. Guerra et al., (2020) concluded as a result that music can serve as a social barometer for modern society. Songs and music are tools for promoting social change as well as cultural expression. In addition, it is claimed that the song is both a result of and a cause of the current financial crisis.

4. Conclusion

The use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Eminem's album "The Eminem Show" presents an interesting subject of analysis. Eminem, a White American rapper, incorporates elements of AAVE into his lyrics, which adds a unique linguistic dimension to his music. After analyzing the data, we found there are seven grammatical features of AAVE in the album. There are *copula/auxiliary absence, invariant be, remote been, subject-verb agreement, negation, nominals,* and *question formation*.

The album "The Eminem Show" focuses heavily on the negotiation aspect, which demonstrates an effort to critique social phenomena that are a universal phenomenon. Artists improvise song lyrics, music, and works of art based on their individual interests, which are occasionally carried out freely and deviate from conventional wisdom. In an effort to fend off various forms of injustice and oppression perpetrated against specific individuals and communities, it also serves as a medium for affirming and negotiating identity.

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