

Southern and African American English

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The next three sessions

- Overview of (Socio)linguistics
What is linguistics, and why do we care?
- Today: Southern and African American English
What makes these varieties unique?
- 9/17: History and background of Gullah Geechee
Where does Gullah Geechee come from?
- 9/24: African American English today
Why do people feel strongly about language change?

Outline for today

- American English and mixed language
- Defining and describing the South
- Southern stereotyping and language subordination
- Charleston English
- African Americans in the US
- African American English
- Historical attitudes towards AAE
- Code-switching
- Contemporary attitudes towards AAE

Bailey 2004: American English: its origins and history

- Two extreme responses to situations of “mixed language”:
- *Purism*: reject usages detected as foreign
- *Multilingualism*: codeswitching, code-meshing, register-shifting, diglossia, bilingualism, bidialectalism, translingualism
- Most people somewhere between extremes: no two people speak “English” in the same way
- Early American history characterized by rapid borrowing, high amounts of multilingualism drawn from Caribbean, African, Amerindian, colonial European sources
- Early Americans had complicated attitudes towards the language situation: a highly multicultural/multilingual area that gradually became more monolingual post-WWI as a result of nationalism and immigration restriction

Defining the south

- Drawing a map is not a neutral exercise: regions are not absolutes
- Three main features in almost all southern varieties: expected by or used by outsiders in imitation:
 1. Pin-pen merger
 2. Monophthongization
 3. Y'all for second person pronoun
- Monophthongization of /ai/ to /a/ is first stage of Southern Shift: in Charleston wealthiest more likely to use /ai/, lower SES use /a/ more

The South eagerly defines itself against the North, advertising itself as more earthy, more devoted to family values, more spiritual, and then is furious to have things turned around, to hear itself called hick, phony, and superstitious. The South feeds the sense of difference and then resists the consequences.

Ayers et al. (1996: 63–64)²



South by isogloss and population

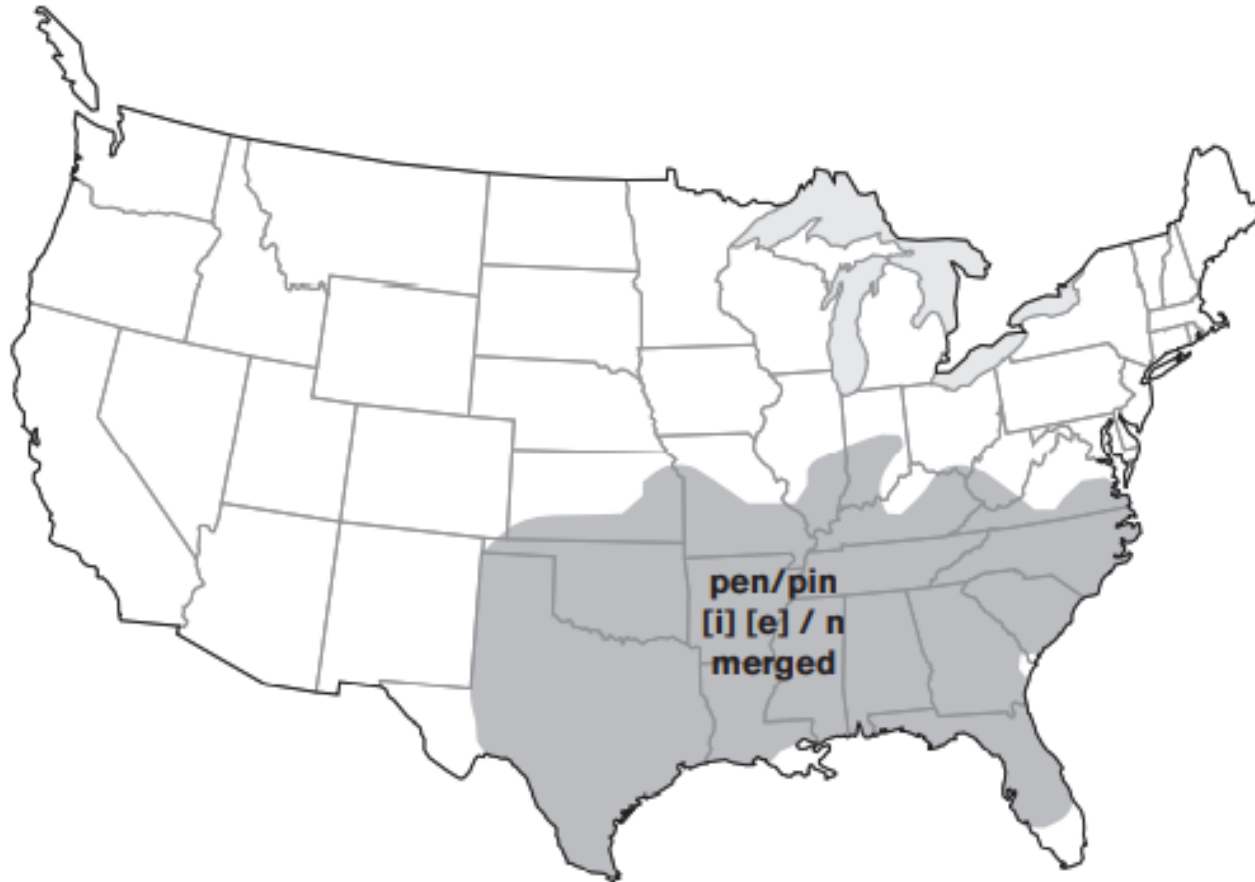


Figure 11.2 Approximate geographic area where words with an /i/ or /e/ before /n/ are realized as homonyms

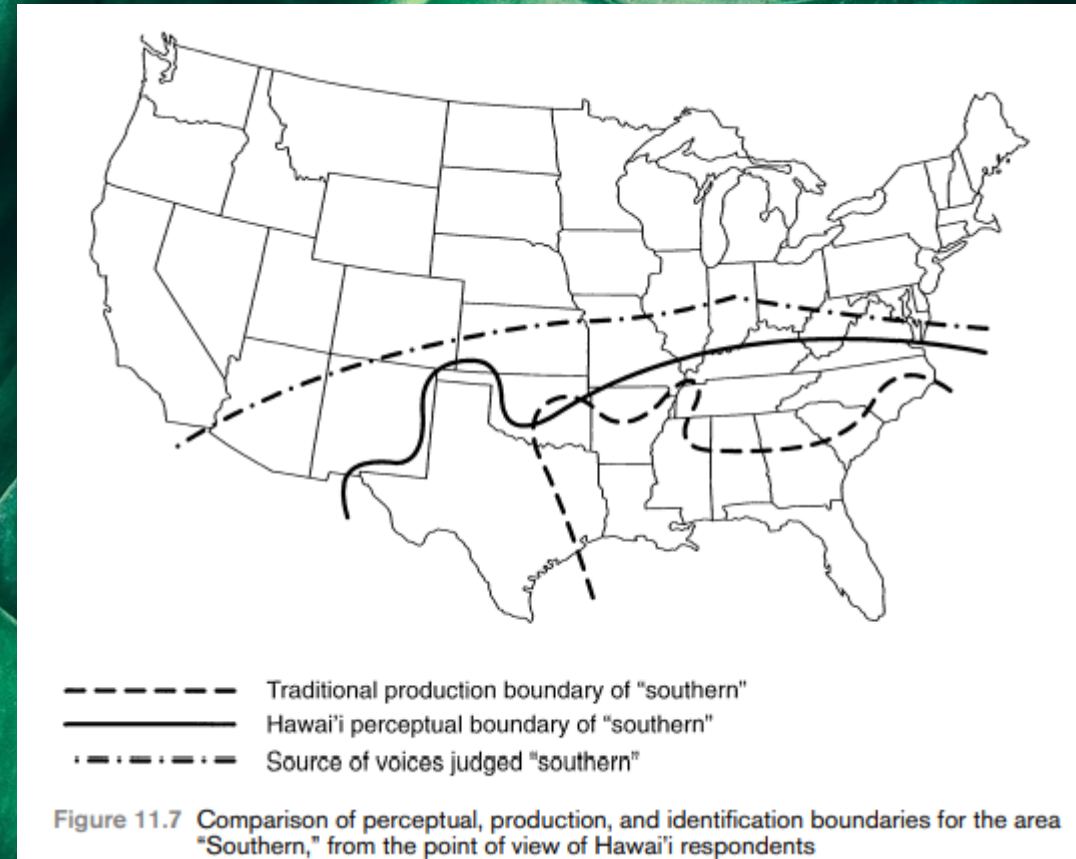
Table 11.1 Estimated population in the Southern States, 2009

State	Population
Alabama	4,625,354
Arkansas	2,830,047
Florida	18,182,321
Georgia	9,509,254
Kentucky	4,234,999
Louisiana	4,342,582
Mississippi	2,918,790
North Carolina	9,036,449
Oklahoma	3,606,200
South Carolina	4,403,175
Tennessee	6,144,104
Texas	23,845,989
Virginia	7,698,738
West Virginia	1,810,358
The South, Total	103,188,360
US total	307,006,550

Source: U.S. American Community Survey 2009

The map in the mind

- Linguistically, non-Southerners tend to draw rough distinctions between Southern trough and rest of Southern states:
- Outer South: TN and KY; TX exists independently; FL is hardly South; Southwest: may include TX but also may exclude NM and AZ who may be grouped with West region
- Northerners homogenize the South and imitate one particular (stereo)type of Southern when "sounding southern"



Variation within the South



Hostility with a smile



They say somebody's 'street smart.' I
feel like, if I got intelligence, it's just
a country smart.

— Dolly Parton —

AZ QUOTES

Language subordination

- Media depictions of southerners restrict southern accents to those who fit the stereotype
- “It is primarily on the basis of intellect linked to education that Northerners try hardest to convince Southerners that their language is deficient”
- “The fact that the stereotypes which underlie this reasoning are imaginary formations is irrelevant; their power is still real, and they are effective”
- Language subordination is most successful when targets become actively complicit

Charleston English

- Most important center of plantation culture
- From its start in 1670, very heterogeneous: English, Irish, Welsh; French Huguenots, Dutch; Massachusetts Baptists, Louisiana Quakers, Irish Catholics, Sephardic Jews
- Enslaved people from West Africa and the Caribbean; Barbadian planter class
- Largest mainland importer of African Slaves: by 1724 3x as many Black as white people
- High amount of language mixing with AAE: White Gullah speakers
- Charlestonian speech considered distinct: retains r-lessness, distinct vowels (price, lack of vowel breaking)



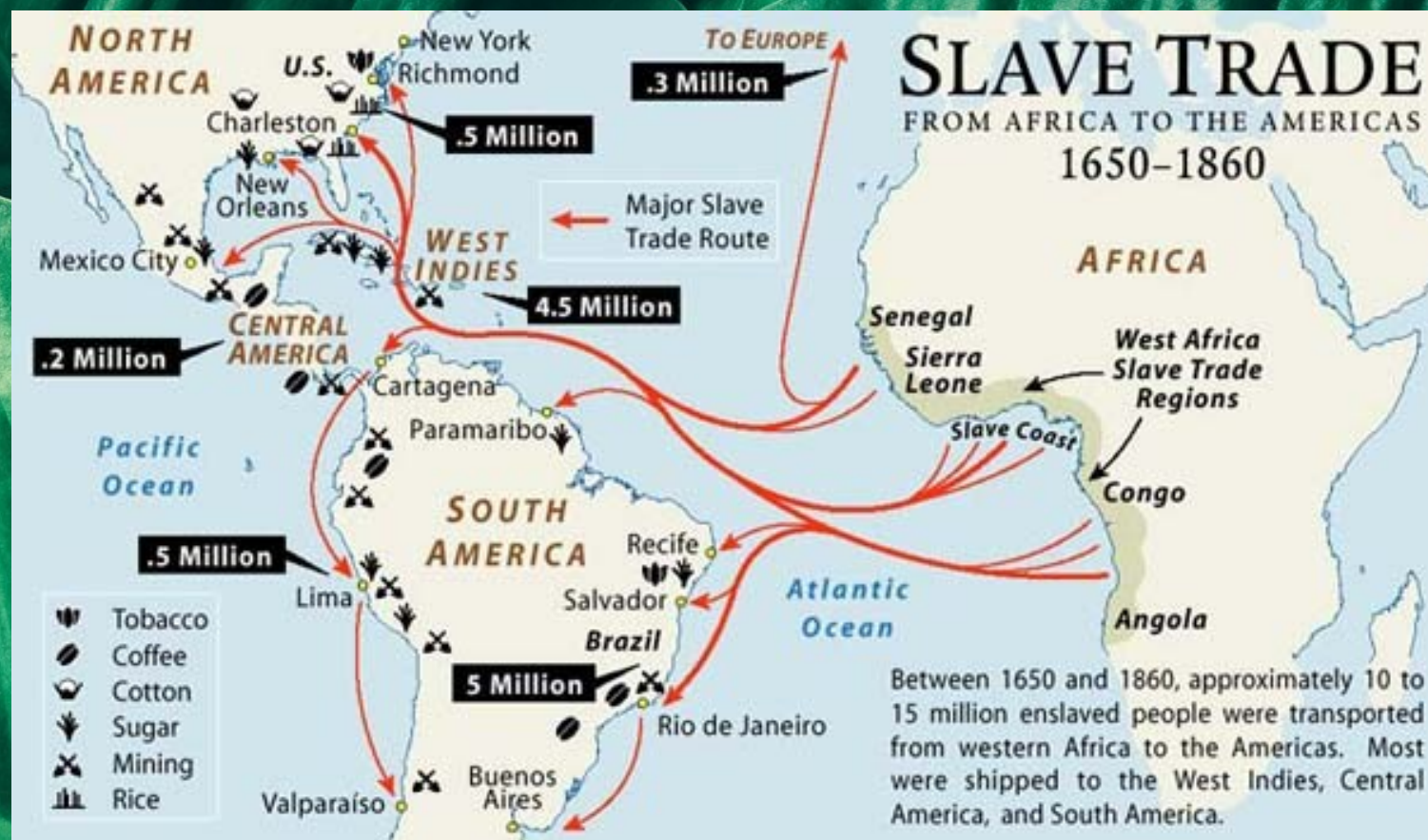
African-American English in the US

Historical background

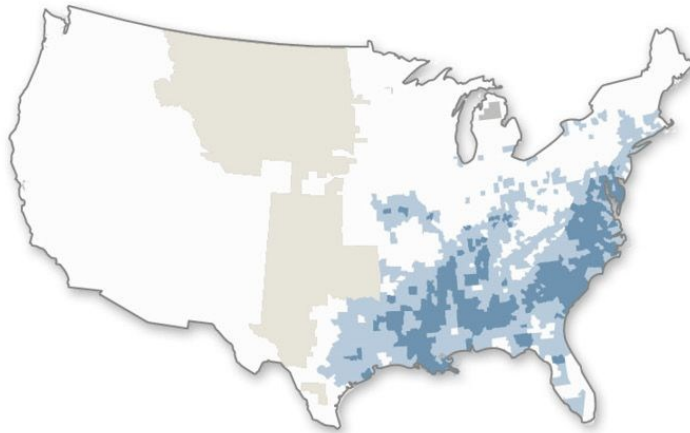
During the period 1650-1860, 500,000 African slaves were brought to British North America, representing around 5% of the total number of African slaves delivered to the New World (about 11 million).

Competing theories regarding the origins of the AAE:

- (i) African influence: similarities between AAE and varieties of West African English varieties spoken in Nigeria and Ghana.
- (ii) Appalachian influence: similarities between AAE and Scots-Irish varieties, due to contact.
- (iii) Creole hypothesis: patterns similar to general phenomena associated with Creole formation.



AAE: Demographics

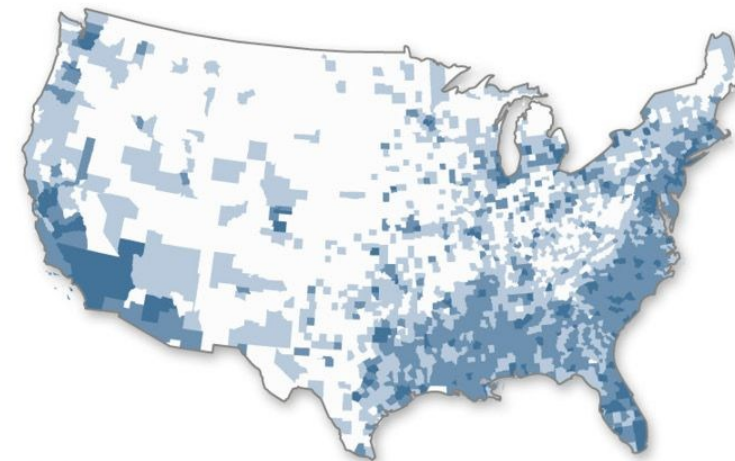


1860

On the eve of the Civil War, 89 percent of the nation's blacks were slaves, most living in the South; among free blacks, more than half lived in the South.

U.S. black population: 4.4 million (14.1% of total population)

Areas of African-American residence have expanded over the past 150 years, to the Northeast, Midwest, and West, due to racially inhospitable conditions in the South, and the opportunities to be had in other regions.



2010

Family ties and an economically stronger South have created a reverse migration in recent decades; 55 percent of blacks now live in the South, increasingly in suburbs.

Black population: 42 million (13.6% of total)

Alaska: 33,150 (4.7% of state total)

Hawaii: 38,820 (2.9%)

The representation of African-Americans among the general population has remained at around 14%, entailing that the population is less concentrated in a smaller area, and that AAE speakers interact more frequently with speakers of other varieties.

Historical background

“ Well, I dunno whe’r you b’lieves in cunj’in’ er not, — some er de w’ite folks don’t, er says dey don’t, — but de truf er de matter is dat dis yer ole vimya’d is goophered.”

“ Is what?” I asked, not grasping the meaning of this unfamiliar word.

“ Is goophered, — cunju’d, bewitch’.”

Historical background

During Reconstruction, emancipated slaves remained mostly in former Confederate states

- After the departure of US Federal troops, local white supremacist radicals quickly overturned any accommodations made to liberated slaves

Later opportunities in large cities to the North and West encouraged dispersion of insular communities ("The Great Migration")

- This dispersion also had linguistic effects: previously, African Americans interacted little with white Americans. Therefore, little was known about AAE by whites (and less was understood).
 - But also AAE speakers saw their variety as unmarked
 - AAE has increasingly been incorporated into every level of American English since this dispersion (either assimilation/commodification/appropriation)

AAE: Linguistic properties

Like any ethnic or regional variety of a language, AAE has distinctive phonological, lexical, and syntactic features. In this respect, for instance, AAE /r/-deletion is comparable to NYC, Boston, and Charleston.

Table 1. Consonantal variation in AAE.

Consonant variation	
Name	Examples
ask/aks alternation	I aks him a question
ing/in alternation	He's runnin' fast
/r/ vocalization or deletion	occurs in words such as in <i>four, father, car</i>
/l/ vocalization or deletion	occurs in words such as <i>school, cool, people</i>
final consonant reduction in clusters	<i>find</i> as <i>fine</i> ; <i>hand</i> , as <i>han</i>
single final consonant absence	<i>five</i> and <i>fine</i> s <i>fie</i>
final consonants can be devoiced	<i>bad</i> as <i>bat</i>
initial /th/ as [d]; final /th/ as [d,t,s,z,f,v]	<i>they</i> as <i>day</i> ; <i>with</i> as <i>whiff</i> , and <i>with</i> as <i>wit</i>
/s/ as [d] before /n/	<i>Isn't</i> as <i>idn't</i> ; <i>wasn't</i> as <i>wadn't</i>
glide [j] as consonant	<i>computer</i> as <i>compooter</i> ; <i>Houston</i> sas <i>Hooston</i>
/t/ as/k/ in a <i>str</i> - cluster	<i>stream</i> as <i>scream</i>
Syllable stress can shift from the second to the first syllable	<i>POlice, UMbrella</i>