



# Multilingual Children's Speech Development

# **ENGLISH (African American)**

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**Presented by: Ida J Stockman**

# English (African American) Author

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# English (African American)



## ■ Commonly spoken in

- U.S. by persons with ancestral ties to imported slaves from Africa
- Most populous in southern states and the largest cities in all regions where African Americans are densely populated
- Excludes African American speakers of the Gullah and Geechee English dialects on the Atlantic coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia (Moody, 2015)

## ■ Dialects and variants

- Varies with geographical region, socio-economic status, educational level, gender, age, and social context

## ■ Writing

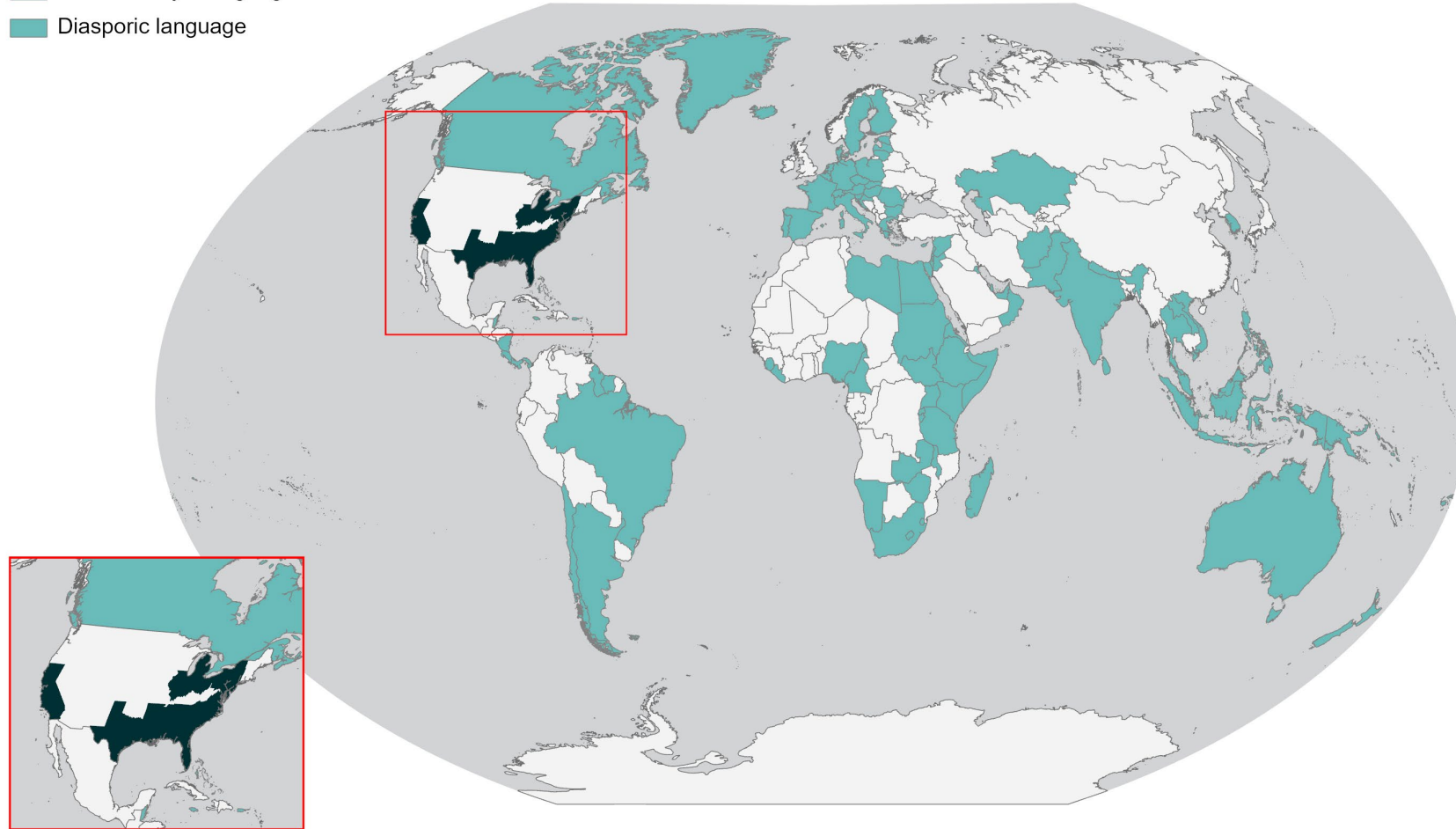
- Left to right. Modern Latin alphabet (Roman script)
- Orthographic script approximates the oral pronunciation of words

**Examples: ‘before’ → ‘fo’, ‘because’ → ‘cuz’**



# English (African American) Map

- Official / major language
- Diasporic language



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# English (African American) Speech Components

- **Consonants (24):** /m, n, ŋ, p, b, t, d, k, g, f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, h, w, l, j, ɹ/
- **Consonant Clusters (many):**
  - 32 word-initial sequences with two consonants /pr, bl, sn, st, sk/ and 6 sequences with three consonants, e.g., /str, skr/
  - 30+ word-final sequences within word boundaries: e.g., /mp, nt, lt, ks/
- **Vowels (13):** /i, ɪ, e, ε, æ, ɜ, ə, ʌ, u, ʊ, o, ɔ, ɒ/
- **Diphthongs (8):** 3 that change word meaning /aɪ, aʊ, ɔɪ/ and 5 that do not /ɪə, eɪ, εə, ʊə, oʊ/
- **Tones (0): None**
- **Phonotactic Structure:**  $C_{(0-3)}V_{(0-2)}C_{(0-3)}$
- **Prosody:** African American English (AAE) is a stress-timed language with words pronounced using the same stress patterns as General American English (GAE) with exceptions, e.g., 'POlice' versus 'poLICE'

# English (African American) Age of Acquisition

## ■ Consonants

- 2;0-3;0 Early [m, n, p, b, t, d, k, g, f, s, h, w, j] (Brand-Stewart, 2003; Stockman, 2008)
- 4;0-6;0 Middle [θ, z, v, ʃ, tʃ, dʒ, ŋ, l, ɹ] (Pearson et al., 2009)
- 7;0-12;0 Late [ʒ, ø] if used at all (Pearson et al., 2009)
- Earlier use of some sounds in AAE than GAE: word-initial [s, ɹ] and earlier mastery of word-final [k, g, t, d, v] in GAE than AAE (Pearson et al., 2000)

## ■ Consonant clusters

- 2;0: emergence (Brand-Stewart 2003); 3;0: readily observed in spontaneous speech (Stockman, 2008); 4;0-12;0: mastered (Pearson, et al., 2009; Macrae et al., 2022)
- Earliest consonant clusters combine stops [p, b, t, k, g] with sonorants [w, l, j, r] in word-initial [pl, pr, br, tw, kj] (Stockman, 2008; Pearson, et al., 2009; Macrae et al., 2022)
- Some word-initial consonant clusters are acquired earlier in AAE than GAE [pl, pr, bl, br]; others are earlier in GAE [str, θr, ʃr] (Pearson, et al., 2009)

## ■ Vowels

- primary inventory completed by 3 years (Pollock & Berni 2003) with little change in accurate production for 11 vowels up to age 20 (Kohn et al. 2021)
- Earlier rhotic vowels in AAE than GAE, if used in such words as bird, butter and fire (Pollock & Berni, 1997)

## ■ Tones Not applicable

# English (African American) Speech Development

## ■ Percentage Correct

- Consonants: 82% or higher in spontaneous speech at 3;6 years (Stockman, 2008), 90% or higher on single-word elicitation tasks at 3-6 years (Chung, et al., 2014) and 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade (Craig & Washington, 2004)
- Vowels: 82% at 18 - 23 months and 99% at 54-59 months (Pollock & Berni, 2003)

## ■ Intelligibility

- No studies to date

## ■ Common phonological patterns

- Before school age: Same patterns as other English speakers (e.g., final consonant deletion, cluster reduction, unstressed syllable deletion, stopping, and fronting (Stockman, 2008; Pearson et al., 2009; Macrae et al., 2022)
- School age: Some patterns (e.g., final cluster reduction, th-substitutions) persist but rate of use in spontaneous speech and oral reading declines, changing little between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades (Craig et al., 2003; Craig & Washington, 2004)

# English (African American) Children with Speech Sound Disorders

- **Also called**
  - phonological disorder, articulation disorder, childhood apraxia of speech
- **Research has focused on**
  - distinguishing **atypical** and **typical** AAE speakers because the same patterns can be used by both groups and by typical GAE speakers in their early development (e.g., /f/ for /θ/ substitution in 'bath')
- **Studies of African American children with speech sound disorders (examples)**
  - Prevalence of speech disorders at 5.3% (N=160) at age 6 yrs (Shriberg et al., 1999)
  - Smaller inventory of consonants and clusters than AAE age peers (Stockman, 1996)
  - Smaller vowel inventory than AAE peers (Chung et al., 2014)
  - Lower normed scores than AAE and GAE age peers on a standardized articulation test (Velleman & Pearson, 2010)

# English (African American) Speech Assessments

- **Fluharty Preschool Speech and Language Screening Test**  
(Fluharty, 2000)
- **Arizona Articulation and Phonological Scale**  
(Fudala & Seagull, 2017)
- **Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation**  
(Goldman & Fristoe, 2015)
- **Photo Articulation Test**  
(Lippke, 1997)
- **Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation Screener**  
(Seymour, Roeper, & deVilliers, 2003)

# English (African American) Speech Interventions

## ■ Eradicating speech sound disorders

- No research studies on efficacy of interventions used to eradicate speech disorders in AAE
- Best practices apply the same interventions used with GAE speakers
- The linguistic and cultural practices of AAE speakers respected when choosing intervention goals, activities and schedules (Hyter & Salas, 2023)

## ■ Expanding a linguistic repertoire to include General American English as an elective dialect

- No research on efficacy of any single intervention for teaching GAE pronunciation to typical or atypical AAE-speaking children
- Best practices apply strategies for achieving bi-dialectal proficiency and code-switching pronunciation skills as an intervention for typical and atypical AAE-speaking children
- Second language teaching principles embraced
- School curricula may incorporate GAE instruction as a second English dialect by collaboration between classroom teachers and speech-language pathologists (Byrd & Brown, 2021)

# Reference

## Book Chapter

- Stockman, I. J. (2025) English (African American) speech development. In S. McLeod (Ed.). *The Oxford handbook of speech development in languages of the world*. Oxford University Press.

## Presentation

- Stockman, I. J. (2023). *English (African American): Multilingual children's speech development*. Charles Sturt University, Australia.  
<https://www.csu.edu.au/research/multilingual-speech/languages>

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