

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého

**Subject Verb Agreement in African American
Vernacular English**

(Bachelor Thesis)

2018

Matěj Mikolajský

**Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého

**Shoda přísudku s podmínkem v afro americké
vernakulární angličtině**

(Bakalářská práce)

2018

Matěj Mikolajský

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Subject Verb Agreement in Afro American Vernacular English
(Bakalářská práce)

Autor: **Matěj Mikolajský**

Studijní obor: Anglická filologie

Vedoucí práce: **Ph.D Jeffrey Keith Parrott**

Počet stran: 59

Počet znaků: 76,047

Olomouc 2018

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně a uvedl úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

V Olomouci dne 11.5.2018

Podpis:.....

Motto: Ad Astra...

I would like to thank my supervisor Ph.D. Jeffrey Keith Parrott for his time, patient guidance, and valuable advice without which I would not be able to finish this thesis.

V Olomouci dne 11.5. 2018

Matěj Mikolajský

Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with syntactic description of subject-verb agreement of variation of English spoken by African-American speakers predominately in the United States of America called African American Vernacular English. The description follows the theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology and incorporates the function of Impoverishment Rules that allows different phonological environments to arise with the same semantic interpretation. The main focus is laid upon a contrast of varieties regarding the subject-verb agreement of third person singular on finite lexical verbs.

Key words

Subject-verb agreement, African American Vernacular English, Syntactic Description, Variation, Lexical verbs, Distributed Morphology, Impoverishment Rules.

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá syntaktickým popisem shody přísudku s podmětem ve variaci angličtiny, jež afroameričtí mluvčí praktikují převážně ve Spojených státech amerických, která se nazývá afro americká vernakulární angličtina. Tento syntaktický popis vychází z teoretického rámce distribuované morfologie a zahrnuje ochuzovací pravidla, která umožňují vznik různorodých fonologických prostředí se stejným sémantickým významem. Hlavní předmět této práce je rozdíl mezi variacemi týkající se shody přísudku finitních lexikálních sloves s podmětem ve třetí osobě jednotného čísla.

Klíčová slova

Shoda přísudku s podmětem, afro americká vernakulární angličtina, syntaktický popis, variace, lexikální slovesa, distribuovaná morfologie, ochuzovací pravidla.

1	INTRODUCTION	9
2	VARIATION.....	11
2.1	INTER- VS. INTRA- INDIVIDUAL VARIATION	11
2.1.1	<i>Intra-individual variation in morphosyntax (Parrott 2007, 295).....</i>	<i>11</i>
3	OVERVIEW OF AAVE	13
3.1	HISTORY OF AAVE	13
3.2	OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH	14
4	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	17
4.1	DISTRIBUTED MORPHOLOGY	17
4.2	DESCRIPTION OF MP.....	17
4.3	DESCRIPTION OF DM	18
4.3.1	<i>The Y Model</i>	<i>18</i>
4.3.2	<i>List 1: The Formative List (Terminals) (Embick & Noyer 2007, Harley 2014).....</i>	<i>19</i>
4.3.3	<i>List 2: The Vocabulary.....</i>	<i>20</i>
4.3.4	<i>Impoverishment</i>	<i>21</i>
4.3.5	<i>List 3: The Encyclopedia.....</i>	<i>22</i>
5	GENERAL AMERICAN ENGLISH PRESENT TENSE AGREEMENT...24	
5.1	MORPHOSYNTAX OF ENGLISH PERSONAL PRONOUNS.....	24
5.2	SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT OF GENERAL AMERICAN ENGLISH	25
6	ANALYSES.....	32
6.1	PARADIGM OF LEXICAL VERBS IN AAVE	32
6.1.1	<i>Leveling.....</i>	<i>32</i>
6.2	EXAMPLES OF AAVE SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT	33
6.3	HYPOTHETICAL DESCRIPTION OF AAVE SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT.....	34
6.4	IMPOVERISHMENT RULES DRIVEN BY MARKEDNESS HYPOTHESIS.....	34
6.4.1	<i>Impoverishment Rule for AAVE Subject-Verb Agreement.....</i>	<i>39</i>
6.4.2	<i>Impoverishment Analysis.....</i>	<i>39</i>
6.4.3	<i>Description of Subject-Verb Agreement of AAVE.....</i>	<i>40</i>
6.5	THE LANGUAGE CONTACT HYPOTHESIS.....	44
6.6	DISCUSSION.....	48
7	CONCLUSION	50
8	RESUMÉ.....	53
9	WORKS CITED	55

1 Introduction

This chapter acquaints the reader with the main purpose and structure of this bachelor thesis.

Languages vary across the world and subsequently there are different types of variation in a language itself (Mihalicek and Wilson 2011, 408). The main language in question of this thesis is English language and linguistic variation, namely a differentiation of subject-verb agreement between General American English (GEA) and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Both aforementioned linguistic varieties have their own specific grammatical rules, as Green (2002, xi) argues regarding AAVE, for the fact that the speakers are acquainted with not just specialized and unique terms or phrases when speaking but follow systematic rules as in any other natural language.

Terms of standard versus non-standard English ought to be use with care since this thesis is interested in linguistic differences not sociological differences, thus Parker and Riley (1994, 148) state; “we want to emphasize that identifying a dialect as standard or nonstandard is a sociological judgment, not a linguistic one” the reader should differentiate between social judgments and linguistic view on the problem ahead since these are two completely different point of views.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term General American English to address the prototypical form used in most academic writings and this variety will also serve as a model to comparison. This does not entail that this specific variety of English —“General American English”— is somewhat better than the other one and vice versa. It simply means that there are linguistic differences and social and cultural impacts among these varieties. For reasons of representing the linguistic reality, I will also distance myself from the vague term “Standard English” which carries with itself a degree of superiority and self-entitled correctness.

This work tries to answer the question on how it is possible for AAVE speakers to omit inflectional morpheme *-s* on finite lexical verbs regarding 3rd person singular personal pronouns. To answer this question, therefore, this thesis describes

how the subject-verb agreement functions from the morpho-syntactic point of view in both given varieties of English language. I will try to uncover how the subject-verb agreement operates in AAVE and what overt morpho-syntactic differences of both given varieties are.

Chapter 2 describes and defines linguistic variation to introduce the problem ahead. Chapter 3 provides brief historical development and overview; syntactic patterns of AAVE are given to acquaint the reader with essential knowledge of this variety of English language. Chapter 4 focuses on theoretical approach to the syntactic description of subject-verb agreement. This work is inspired by the Minimalist Program description of subject-verb agreement of GAE (Chomsky 1995 et seq., and related work), and especially approaches in (Radford 2004, 146-166) and (Adger & Smith 2005). The theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, Embick & Noyer 2007, Bobaljik 2015) and Impoverishment rules further expand the Minimalist Program. The description of agreement itself focuses on finite lexical verbs, namely the agreement of third person singular and finite lexical verbs and the omission of the verbal inflectional morpheme *-s* in AAVE. Chapter 5 describes how the subject-verb agreement operates in GAE from the point of view of aforementioned frameworks. Chapter 6 provides possible grammatical structures of agreement in AAVE that demonstrate the formal properties of agreement in this specific variety. These structures are demonstrated on attested examples used by AAVE speakers. The description of AAVE subject-verb agreement is based upon two hypothetical approaches; one is morpho-syntactic and the second is based upon historical-linguistic approach. Chapter 6.6 discusses the analysis of the previous chapter and identifies obstacles that may occur and provides a hypothetical solution. Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of all discussed phenomena and its outcomes.

2 Variation

This chapter describes differentiation of distinguished types of variation.

2.1 Inter- vs. Intra- individual variation

There are distinguished two types of linguistic variation, Inter-individual variation which describes a difference among different speech communities and Intra-individual variation which is concerned with a difference among individuals themselves.

Intra-individual variation otherwise known as inherent variation, sociolinguistic variation, or Labovian variation, or morphosyntactic variation, means that "speakers use different forms to express the same meaning" (Labov 1995, 115), in other words, when speakers use different means to express the same grammatical relationships. A detailed definition applied to this morphosyntactic variation is provided below (1).

2.1.1 *Intra-individual variation in morphosyntax (Parrott 2007, 295)*

(1)

- a. (Populations of) individuals use variant morphosyntactic forms
- b. The variant forms appear in the same morphosyntactic environment (variants are not allomorphs in complementary distribution)
- c. The variant forms do not express different lexical or truth-conditional semantics, nor different morphosyntactic functions.

Therefore, Intra-individual variation is not allomorphy. Allomorphy can be defined as an appearance of a different morpheme with the same meaning depending on the morphosyntactic or morpho-phonological environment in which it appears. On the other hand, linguistic variation appears in the same environment, it is "the non-deterministic choice of form" (Adger 2006), hence, allomorphs appear in complementary distribution, whereas, variation does not.

Intra-individual variation therefore expresses the same grammatical meaning with a different morphological form, but at the same time expresses a very different social meaning. Different types of variation have a different social impact on the listener and they are closely related to the social factors such as ethnic group, economic class, social position, and education of the speaker. In other words, a speaker using some form of variation might be socially judged by listeners outside of the speaker's social circle.

As mentioned above, this work however tries to describe linguistic differences only and focuses purely on the mechanism of language faculty and its use by speakers and thus the sociological issue is not primary goal of this bachelor thesis.

3 Overview of AAVE

This chapter introduces hypothetical theories that account for historical emergence of AAVE and also describes its main grammatical distinctions from GAE.

3.1 History of AAVE

Afro American Vernacular English, African American English, Black English, Black English Vernacular, Ebonics and other names all describe the same variety of ethnicity based language diversity spoken by African-American population in the United States. Its origin and history are controversial and both arise from long and horrific suffering inflicted by the hands of white “masters”.

Speakers of this variety lived for a long time in a secluded society and this seclusion only reinforced the emergence of a new variety of English. Historical-linguists and sociolinguists are still not sure of the origin and history of AAVE. There are few hypotheses: Anglicist Hypothesis, Creolist Hypothesis, Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis, and Substrate Hypothesis.

The Anglicist hypothesis states that the slaves first spoke their own languages when they were transported from their homeland but throughout the course of several generations only some minute parts of their languages remained and they tended to learn the regional and social varieties of present white speakers as they acquired English (Wolfram 2004, 219).

Creolist hypothesis argues that AAVE arose from Creole languages such as Krio which is used in Caribbean or Gullah. It is used on isolated Sea Islands near South Carolina and Georgia. This particular Creole was spoken among slaves on southern plantations; however, this Creole was not spoken by whites to any extent. When the speakers of this Creole came in contact with surrounding dialects, it became more like other variables of English in a process called Decreolization. Even though most of the features were stripped of the variety, some features of Creole language might still be present in AAVE. For example, copula absence (e.g. *You beautiful*) argues (Wolfram 2004, 221). However, a broad range of data, such as letters and

audio recordings by ex-slaves points against this hypothesis and therefore a more detailed research is needed.

These aforementioned data gave rise to a new hypothesis, Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis. This hypothesis reasons that AAVE speakers learned English but as they were secluded they innovated their specific features. Its features are the result of some evolution of the language in the secluded society (Wolfram 2004, 222). In other words, new rules were added and some features were lost as a result of language acquisition and evolution.

The last hypothesis is based on Substrate Effect where the influence that one language has on another or a language contact situation that lasts beyond the original contact circumstance. The Substrate Hypothesis therefore argues that the substrate effect probably came from the contact between speakers of African languages and English, as Wolfram (2004, 223) argues. The slaves might have had contact with Creole speakers and this might have influenced the development of AAVE. There is no definite answer so far. More detailed study of the origins of this variety is needed.

As the slavery was abolished in 1865, the African-American population begun to migrate to the North of the country and contemporary urban AAVE was thus established.

3.2 Overview of African American Vernacular English

AAVE is variation of English spoken throughout the United States of America. It is a systematic and rule based variety as any natural language is, thus, it has a set of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical rules. Therefore, when speakers know AAVE, they have a systematic inventory of sounds, word and sentence structure (Green 2002, 1).

As mentioned above in chapter 2, there are even variation differences between the speakers themselves depending on the region they come from. As Green states, a speaker from Louisiana pronounces certain vowels differently than that of a Texas one. There is also a difference in use of syntactic patterns among speakers from Pennsylvania and those from Southern regions (2002, 1). However, this paper focuses

solely on the intra-individual variation as mentioned in 2.1.1. It is also crucial to note that no one seems to claim that the omission of the verbal inflectional morpheme –s is regional. To my knowledge, it is shared throughout the variety.

There is a number of interesting patterns in syntax of AAVE that varies from GAE as shown in (2). The patterns are exemplified first on AAVE pattern followed by an English equivalent. These examples were created by the author. The following phenomena are well studied throughout the literature.

(2) Syntax patterns of AAVE

The auxiliary BE is omitted only in specific syntactic environment, e.g. future going to, progressive –ing, subject complement adjective, location, noun phrases (Salikoko, et al. 1998, Green 2002).

a. The Omission of BE

She a real good girl

She is a really good girl

Aspectual BE indicates habitual meaning and it occurs before verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, adverbs, done and at the end of sentences. The Habitual BE follows negation and requires Do-Support (Collins 2006, Green 2002).

b. The habitual BE

I be at home on weekdays

I am always at home on weekdays

Multiple negative constructions are possible to be used in one clause and the whole clause is interpreted as negative (Salikoko, et al. 1998, Green 2002).

c. The double negative

Ain't nobody gonna do nothing about that

Nobody is going to do anything about that

The verbal marker *dən* indicates that the action of a verb was finished. It precedes the past participle inflection *-en* (Salikoko, et al. 1998, Green 2002).

- d. The perfective DONE

They done bought all the headphones by Dre

They have bought all the headphones by Dre

The remote *Been* situates the action of a verb into a remote past and it is stressed (Salikoko et al. 1998, Green 2002).

- e. The remote BEEN

I béen got a job

I got a job a long time ago

- f. The absence of verbal inflectional *-s*

He walk to school every day

He walks to school every day

However, for reasons of space, this paper focuses only on the leveling on finite lexical verbs with 3rd person singular subject-verb agreement, where the number distinction is neutralized and this results in using the same form throughout the paradigm (Labov 1972, Labov 1972, Wolfram, 2004, 2008, Salikoko, et al. 1998, Green 2002 and other works).

4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Distributed Morphology

This chapter describes the theoretical frameworks of Minimalist Program (MP) and Distributed Morphology framework (DM) and Impoverishment Rules on which the proposed description of the subject-verb agreement is grounded in.

4.2 Description of MP

This program was developed by Chomsky in 1993. It proposes that language is systematic and universal to humans. It is internal to the brain/mind of the speaker, I-Language. The most important proposition made by this program is that all syntactic operations can be reduced (minimalized) to a single syntactic operation: Merge.

Merge takes two syntactic objects out of unspecified set, these are either primitives or whole phrases, and merges them together to form hierarchically larger new object: $\dots x, y \dots \rightarrow Z=[x, y]$. This set can be merged again; therefore, merge is recursive since it takes its output as its input. The syntactic structures created by merge are afterwards spelled out into two interfaces, for interpretation to Logical Form (LF) and for externalization to Phonological Form (PF). The proposed thesis in the minimalist program by Chomsky, Strong Minimalist Thesis (SMT), suggests that “language is an optimal solution to legibility conditions” (Chomsky 2000, 97). In other words, Chomsky’s thesis suggests that there is perfect matching between the external articulatory/perceptual system PF and internal system of thoughts LF. The syntactic structures are spelled out to LF for interpretation and PF externalizes this computation. The SMT must be false for PF, as Embick argues (2007, 4), “since phonological features such as syllabification, prosodic structure, and a great deal of phonology, introduce elements not present in lexical items.” These features are added after syntax. Late insertion, mentioned below, violates the SMT as well. The main proposition by this fact is that externalization to (PF) is the main source of variation.

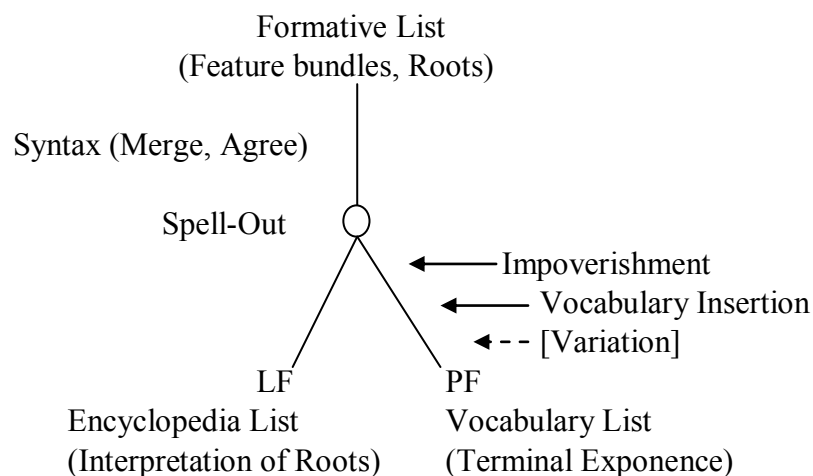
4.3 Description of DM

This particular theoretical framework was introduced by Halle & Marantz around the same time as the MP. Distributed Morphology also uses the syntactic operation of Merge. The word formation processes—traditionally thought as Morphology—are distributed throughout this model; hence the name, and most importantly the processes are syntactic: Syntax All The Way Down (Bobaljik, 2015). The framework thus argues that both words and phrases are created in syntax. The framework also argues that there is no lexicon in the sense of some pre-syntactic module where words are built prior to syntax since Merge is what builds hierarchical structures; therefore, there is no need for the lexicon. It also argues against the lexicon in the sense of some pre-syntactic location for storage of phonological, grammatical, semantic and categorical features.

Another argument proposed by this framework is that phonological exponents for terminals are determined post-syntactically. Therefore, there are no phonological features inserted prior to syntax and these features are added only after a syntactic structure is created. This operation is called Late Insertion. Distributed Morphology thus combines both these operations, Syntax All The Way Down and Late Insertion, together. Instead of lexicon, there are three lists in this framework as illustrated on the Y model (Halle & Marantz 1993, Embick & Noyer 2007, Bobaljik 2015) (3) below.

4.3.1 The Y Model

(3) The Architecture of MP-DM Y Model



The Y model in (3) represents the internal generative syntactic process of a speaker. The process starts with the formative list, the objects from the formative list are taken and merged together to form a new larger hierarchal structure, this is then send to LF and PF for interpretation and articulation.

4.3.2 List 1: The Formative List (Terminals) (Embick & Noyer 2007, Harley 2014)
(4)

- a. Roots: No phonological, grammatical, semantic or categorical features. Ex: $\sqrt{089}$, $\sqrt{099}$, these are language specific.
- b. Abstract Morphemes: Grammatical and Categorical features=Non-phonetic features. Ex: v, T [\pm Past], Num [\pm sg]. These are Universal; therefore, part of (UG).

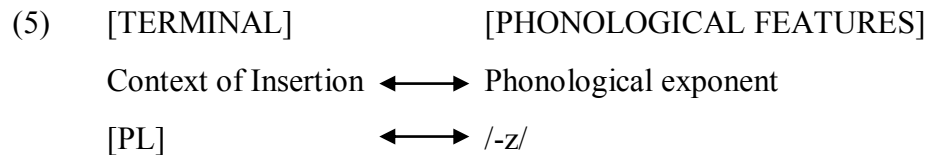
Roots and feature bundles are Merged and these can be afterwards Merged into bigger phrases. It is important to note that roots must be categorized by a head, they must be headed by the category as Embick (2007, 5) argues. Roots are therefore always headed by the category they merge with. Subsequently, the syntactic operation Agree is possible to be implemented. Agree is a feature checking operation which will be discussed in a detail later in this paper.

4.3.2.1 Spell Out to PF

Syntactic structures, which are hierarchical, merged and checked by Agree, must be linearized in order to be pronounceable. PF operations, Embick (2007, 4) argues, are responsible for linearization of hierarchal structure since it creates a medium between syntax and the articulatory/perceptual systems. The mechanism that supplies phonological features to morphemes is called Vocabulary Insertion. “The Vocabulary is the list of phonological exponents of different abstract morphemes of the language, paired with conditions on insertion” Embick (2007, 7). The vocabulary list provides the speaker with an instruction for pronunciation. This particular pairing of phonological exponent and morpho-syntactic context which the exponent is inserted into is called Vocabulary Item (5).

4.3.3 List 2: The Vocabulary

4.3.3.1 The Scheme of Vocabulary Item



As mentioned above, Vocabulary Insertion serves the purpose of adding phonological features to abstract morphemes. The scheme in (5) is a visual representation of this phenomenon. It describes the fact that plural in English is expressed by the insertion of the inflectional nominal suffix /-z/.

4.3.3.2 The Subset Principle

Different Vocabulary items are able to compete for insertion into a particular terminal node. Since only one can be inserted into the terminal, the Vocabulary Items are thus in competition for insertion. The Subset Principle in (6) provides a resolution for this problem.

(6) The Subset Principle (Halle 1997, 428)

“*Subset Principle*: The phonological exponent of a Vocabulary Item is inserted into a position if the item matches all or a subset of the features specified in that position. Insertion does not take place if the Vocabulary Item contains features not present in the morpheme. *The Maximal Subset Clause*: where several Vocabulary Items meet the conditions for insertion, the item matching the greatest number of features specified in the terminal morpheme must be chosen.”

4.3.3.3 Contextual Allomorphy

There are different exponents for the plural node in English than just that in (5). The following examples in (7) illustrate the fact that the specified environment matters for the externalization and supports the claim in (6) that the more specified environment wins the competition for insertion.

- (7) Contextual Allomorphy (Embick & Noyer 2007, 8)
- a. [pl] ↔ -en /{ √OX, √CHILD, ...}
 - b. [pl] ↔ -∅ /{ √MOOSE, √SHEEP √FOOT,...}
 - c. [pl] ↔ /-z/ / elsewhere

The examples in (7) illustrate the fact that in the environment of the root √OX the plural morpheme has the phonological exponent of *-en*, in the environment of the root √MOOSE, the exponent is *-∅* and the default */-z/* is applicable everywhere else.

4.3.4 Impoverishment

Impoverishment is a feature deletion mechanism. The deletion is executed prior to Vocabulary Insertion and this creates systematic syncretism as Embick (2007, 16) argues. Example (8) serves to demonstrate this phenomenon. Deletion of features consequently causes the impossibility of insertion of a more specified vocabulary item into the specific node stated by the Impoverishment rule in order to satisfy the Subset Principle (6), and thus a less specified [default] item must be therefore inserted. In other words, the item with deleted features cannot be inserted and thus the less specified item is chosen.

- (8) Categorical [\pm sg] Impoverishment rule for General English T [\pm past ϕ]

$$[\pm\text{sg}] \rightarrow [\emptyset] \quad / \quad [+part \text{ -auth } __]$$

This Impoverishment Rule in (8) states that the number feature [\pm singular] on the terminal morpheme T is deleted whenever T has person phi features valued [+ part, -auth] from Parrott & Nevins (2010, 1142).

- (9) Vocabulary for [BE ϕ +past], GAE (Parrott & Nevins 2010)

$$[+\text{sg}] \quad \leftrightarrow \quad /w\text{ə}z/$$

$$\text{elsewhere} \quad \leftrightarrow \quad /w\text{ɜ}:/$$

The example in (9) shows the PF vocabulary list of English Aux BE in General English for past tense. The impoverishment rule in (8) states that the number feature is deleted; therefore, in order to satisfy the condition stated by the Subset Principle in (6), the exponent /wəz/ cannot be inserted. The only possible outcome is the default/elsewhere form /wɜː/. The personal pronoun *you* has these inherent features [+participant, -author, ± singular] (13). Hence, whenever there is an environment of [+part, -auth] the number feature is deleted (8) and the only possible outcome, in General English, is *you were* and not **you was*.

When all the morphemes are supplied with all their phonological features, the hierarchical structure is linearized and thus the pronunciation can be executed by the articulators. In other words, at the end of the computation each morpheme is supplied with a set of phonological features which serve as instruction for the articulatory system as Embick (2007, 6) argues. This supports the fact that there are no phonological or semantic features on the morpheme prior to the vocabulary insertion.

4.3.5 List 3: The Encyclopedia

The interpretation of Roots and grammatical features is realized in the third list: The Encyclopedia. The roots and the syntactic relationship between the roots have a different meaning in different morphosyntactic context (10). In other words, there are different interpretations for a root according to what morphosyntactic context it is located in. This knowledge of the morphosyntactic contexts has to be learned and stored in the “Encyclopedia” of a speaker.

(10) Interpretation and Externalization (Harley, 2014)

a. LF instructions (list 3)

[√89] ↔ physical appearance / [__ N]

[√89] ↔ expect or await / [[__ v] adv forward]

[√89] ↔ directing eyes and perceive / [[__ v] p at]

b. PF instructions (list 2)

[√89] ↔ /lʊ k/

The example in (10) shows that the root number $\sqrt{89}$, note that the number is arbitrary, is interpreted according to what morphosyntactic context it is located in. Therefore, the root has a different interpretation when it is in the morphosyntactic context of a noun, where the interpretation is a physical appearance and the root has all the morphosyntactic features of the nominal category. In the environment of a verb and a preposition the root yields a different interpretation with different features on the root. Different morphosyntactic environments yield different interpretation for roots.

It is important to note that the grammatical features, e.g. $[\pm \text{sg}]$, $[\text{+participant}]$, $[\text{-author}]$ are interpreted the way they are. They have their own semantics and they are interpreted that way. They do not need to be sent into LF.

To sum up, this chapter describes the theoretical framework of DM and its main points. There are three lists in DM which substitutes the lexicon in its most traditional sense. DM argues that syntax operates from the sub-word level to phrases. In other words, the morphology is distributed throughout the model. The hierarchal composition is enabled due to the syntactic operation called Merge. The word formation starts in the Formative list, feature bundles are merged with root and this morpheme can be then merged again into a more complex unit. This morpheme or unit is sent to be Spelled-Out, Impoverishment rules apply if necessary, the Vocabulary list assigns a phonological exponent to the terminal; this operation is called Vocabulary Insertion and linearizes the hierarchical structure. In parallel at LF, the morpheme is interpreted according to the Encyclopedia list. Subsequently, the morpheme is pronounced by the articulators.

5 General American English present tense agreement

5.1 Morphosyntax of English personal pronouns

Personal pronouns have inherent grammatical features of person and number. These features are called by Chomsky (1995) ϕ (phi) features. These ϕ -features are interpretable features e.g. on personal pronouns that identify conceptual distinctions, note that these features are taken from the feature bundles from the formative list 4.3.2., the features distinct whether the speaker is one or there are more speakers, if he is a participant in the speech act or not and whether he is an author of the speech act. Since there is no dual number marked in English, these binary features could be represented as follows

(11).

(11) [singular: \pm] ; [participant: \pm] ; [author: \pm] (Adger, 2006)

This binary representation yields a feature co-occurrence restriction (12). As Adger (2006, 508) argues, when pronoun is specified [participant: +] it must be specified for [author] as well since there is no pronominal form that distinguishes between addressee and author.

(12) Feature Co-occurrence Restriction (FCR) (Adger 2006, 508).

A lexical item is specified for [participant:+] if it has a specification for [author].

This results in the third person never being specified for the feature [+author] in English. The binary features thus yield a following set (13).

(13) ϕ -Features Paradigm of English Personal Pronouns (Adger 2006, 9)

$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: +} \\ \textit{participant: +} \\ \textit{author: +} \end{array} \right) I$	$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: -} \\ \textit{participant: +} \\ \textit{author: +} \end{array} \right) WE$
$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: +} \\ \textit{participant: +} \\ \textit{author: -} \end{array} \right) YOU$	$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: -} \\ \textit{participant: +} \\ \textit{author: -} \end{array} \right) YOU$
$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: +} \\ \textit{participant: -} \end{array} \right) HE/SHE/IT$	$\left(\begin{array}{l} \textit{singular: -} \\ \textit{participant: -} \end{array} \right) THEY$

5.2 Subject-Verb Agreement of General American English

The minimalist program proposed by Chomsky (1995, 2000) suggests that the agreement relation works based on an equation where a *probe* α with interpretable ϕ -features (e.g. *+singular*, *+participant*, *-past and others*) searches for a nearest *goal* β with uninterpretable semantic ϕ -features, represented by *u*, (e.g. *ucase*). The uninterpretable features must be checked before reaching LF, otherwise the computation crashes as Adger (2005, 1) suggests. In other words, the presence of the uninterpretable feature triggers the syntactic dependency. Consequently, uninterpretable features are deleted before Spell-Out by the Agree operation and thus the goal agrees with the probe and this then results in surface agreement. Therefore all uninterpretable features are deleted and only interpretable features remain. When the probe values are checked, they are the same as the goal values. The sole purpose of this work is to focus only on agreement of finite lexical verbs with personal pronoun subjects, especially that of third person singular.

Features are schematically represented as [Feature: Value] (Adger 2005, 2). Uninterpretable features are preceded with a prefix *u*. The checking operation is demonstrated with a strikethrough and a value as represented in (14).

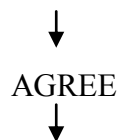
(14) [~~u~~feature: value]

When it comes to personal pronouns their interpretable ϕ -features are those features stated in (13) and on the other hand their *u*interpretable ϕ -feature is [*u*case:]. Finite lexical verbs express tense and agree in number and person with its subjects. This is expressed in narrow syntax by the abstract syntactic terminal T with ϕ -features of T being [tense:, *u*case: nominative, *u*number:, *u*participant:, *u*author:]. The finiteness of T expresses nominative case; it assigns nominative case onto the pronoun. “An unvalued case feature on a goal is valued as nominative by a probe carrying finite tense if probe and goal match in ϕ -features” Radford (2004, 149). As it is mentioned above, the uninterpretable ϕ -feature of the pronoun [goal] must be checked with the ϕ -feature of T [probe]. The operation Agree then checks the interpretable and uninterpretable features and subsequently deletes them. This syntactic operation is indicated by arrows in (15).

(15) Agreement checking operation

[PROBE= T[Tense: -Past, *u*case: NOM, *u*number:, *u*participant:, *u*author:]]

[GOAL=PRN[number: +sg, participant: +,author:, *u*Case:]]



[PROBE= T[Tense: -Past, ~~*u*case~~: NOM, ~~*u*number~~: +sg, ~~*u*participant~~:+, ~~*u*author~~:]]

[GOAL=PRN[number: +sg, participant: +, author:, ~~*u*Case~~:NOM]]

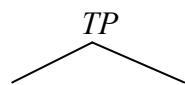
The example above in (15) shows the theoretical approach to Agreement. I will now try to describe the agreement of General America English on an intransitive lexical verb which agrees with a pronominal subject (16).

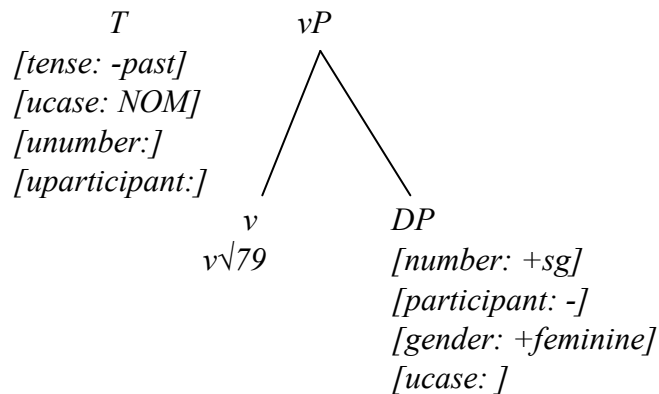
(16) *She sings*

The syntactic operation starts with a speaker choosing root $\sqrt{79}$ from the formative list, again note that the number is arbitrary. This root is then Merged with a categorizing head ν forming $\nu\sqrt{79}$. The speaker chooses which tense he wants to use, our example in (16) state present. Tense terminal T is therefore selected. The terminal has an interpretable ϕ -feature: [Tense: -Past], marking the tense present. It has also uninterpretable ϕ -features: [u Num:], [u Participant:], [u author:], [u case:]. The finiteness of the tense terminal assigns nominative case to T [u case: NOM]. We can leave the feature [u author:] out of the computation as the Feature Co-occurrence Restriction in (12) suggests. The root $\nu\sqrt{79}$ is then merged with T creating a larger unit TP. The abstract syntactic terminal T is a probe searching for its goal. The speaker then chooses from the formative list a pronoun and merges it with a categorizing head D forming DP [determinative phrase] with interpretable ϕ -features [number: +sg], [participant: -] [gender: +feminine] and an uninterpretable ϕ -feature [u case:]. The DP is then Merged with the root $\nu\sqrt{79}$ creating VP [verb phrase] and this phrase is afterwards Merged with the T and even more complex phrase is created; TP [tense phrase] as seen in .

(17).

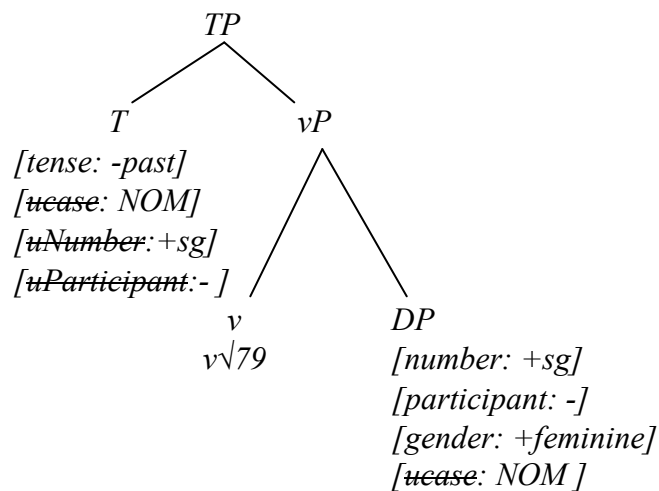
(17)





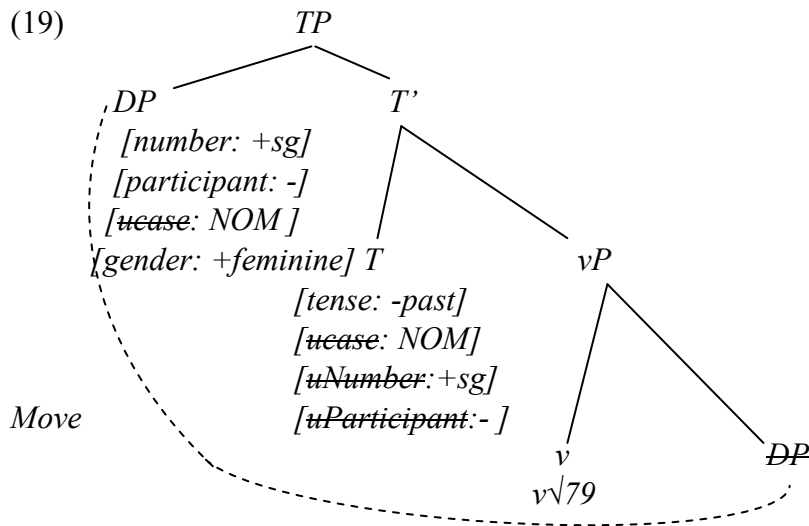
The syntactic operation Agree triggers mutual checking of the uninterpretable ϕ -features between T and DP . The DP is valued for nominative case and T is valued for number and participant feature. All the features that were valued are marked with a strikethrough (18).

(18)



Before moving on, another feature must be mentioned that T contains. In order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle/EPP: “A finite tense constituent T must be extended into a TP projection containing a subject” Radford (2004, 42). This principle states the fact that English requires over subjects. To satisfy this condition, the DP needs to Move into the specifier position of TP . The movement of the DP from the VP complement position is possible due to the syntactic operation called Move as described in (Chomsky, 1995). When the movement is executed a trace marked with a

struckthrough \overline{DP} is left in the initial position. The DP is still at the same position, a complement of v , with the same features but it is left unpronounced. The operation Move is represented by dotted line in (19). When the DP moves to the specifier position of TP, the original TP is marked as T' .



This computation is sent afterwards into the PF for realization of the abstract features into pronounceable morphemes (20a) and it is also sent into the LF for semantic interpretation (20b). Note that DP and T are interpreted as they are stated. The mean what they mean according to the features they are assigned.

- (20) a. PF list
 DP[3sg,F,Nom] ↔ /ʃ i/
 T[-past, +sg] ↔ /-z/
 v $\sqrt{79}$ ↔ /sɪ ŋ/

- b. LF list
 v $\sqrt{79}$ ↔ production of melodious sound with the voice / [_V]

The abstract interpreted features of *DP* are sent into the PF branches and it yields /f i/. The abstract interpreted features on *T* are also sent into PF and this yields the verbal inflectional morpheme /-z/. The root $v\sqrt{79}$ is sent into PF and LF, since it is in the environment of verb, it is interpreted as /sɪ ŋ/.

5.2.1.1 Lowering

According to Chomsky (1995, 198), Modern English has weak finite Tense affix *T* on lexical verbs. Compare with French, which has a strong *T* feature and allows V-to-T movement (raising). We can see that the lexical verbs in French precede negation in (21), this is not possible in Modern English (22) since it has, as Chomsky argues, the weak finite Tense affix. The raising is blocked and thus the Tense Affix must be lowered onto the closest head which it c-commands, in our case *vP*. In other words, the *T* is lowered onto *v*.

(21) FRENCH

Jean (n') aime pas Marie

Jean not love NEG Marie

John does not love Mary

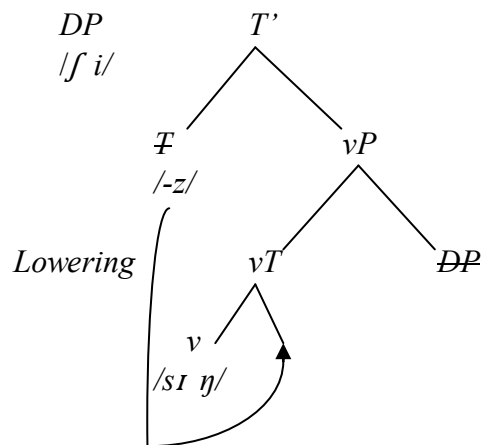
(22) GAE

*John loves not Mary

John does not love Mary

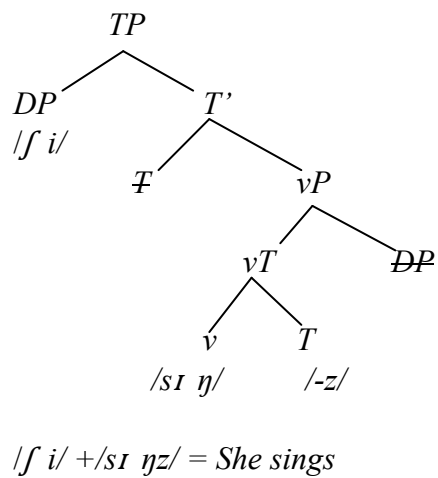
There is a trace left marked with a strikethrough \cancel{T} . This will thus reflect on the syntactic tree as follows (23).

(23) \cancel{TP}



When all the syntactic operations, Agree, Move, Lowering, are executed, the phonological form and logical form are both interpreted, the linearization occurs and the speaker pronounces with the articulators *she sings* (24).

(24)



Consequently, this description of the agreement could be stated as a scheme of Distributed Morphology for vocabulary of finite lexical verbs in the following diagram (25).

- (25) Vocabulary for T [$v\sqrt{-}$ past] GAE
 [+singular, -participant] \leftrightarrow $/-z/$
 [elsewhere] \leftrightarrow $/\emptyset/$

The scheme (25) states that whenever the ϕ -features of [+singular, -participant] appear in the environment of T on finite lexical verbs in present tense, in General American English, the exponent on PF results in /-z/ on *T* since it is more specified. Whenever different ϕ -features appear, the exponent on PF is /- \emptyset /. This yields following results according to (13).

(26) Paradigm of General American English present tense

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	\emptyset	\emptyset
2	\emptyset	\emptyset
3	-s	\emptyset

This description of agreement thus supports the paradigm of General American English for present tense agreement (26).

6 Analyses

6.1 Paradigm of Lexical Verbs in AAVE

As mentioned in 3.2, morphosyntactic characteristic of AAVE is the usage of $-\emptyset$ morpheme on finite lexical verbs for both singular and plural subjects, in other words leveling 6.1.1, as illustrated on (27). As Wolfram (2004, 122) argues, the percentage of omitting the inflectional verbal morpheme $-s$ is so high for younger AAVE speakers involved in sociolinguistic studies that sometimes it reaches levels between 75-100 percent.

Attested examples of this phenomenon are shown in (28). This phenomenon is in direct contrast with GAE pattern where the inflectional morpheme $-s$, as mentioned above, emerges as an exponent in the phonetic terminal whenever the subject has features of 3rd person singular [sg +, -participant], in other words, in the environment of those features.

6.1.1 Leveling

As Parrott (2007, 297) suggests, this descriptive term describes the well attested fact of sociolinguistic variables where one morphological form appears variably in the environment of other morphological form or forms. The example in (27) illustrates this phenomenon, where we can see that the – \emptyset morpheme is “leveled” throughout the paradigm.

(27) Paradigm of AAVE present tense

	Singular	Plural
1	\emptyset	\emptyset
2	\emptyset	\emptyset
3	\emptyset	\emptyset

6.2 Examples of AAVE subject-verb agreement

As mentioned in 6.1, AAVE subject-verb agreement is prototypical with its omission of the inflectional verbal morpheme –s on finite lexical verbs as following attested examples from different linguistic spheres demonstrate.

These four following example are taken from former slave narrative from South Carolina.

(28)

- a. One day he see some of us over on another plantation.
Brooks (2013, 210)
- b. Pa Oudjo say, when he see me, he ben so happy, he pray and he cuss. Say, he thank the Lord for savin' me and he thank the devil for lettin' me loose.
Federal Writers' Project (2007, 108)
- c. She know she ain't his lawful wife.
Federal Writers' Project (2007, 181)

- d. One day he laugh and say;...
Federal Writers' Project (2007, 259)

These following examples are excerpts from the HBO tv-series called The Wire.

(29)

- a. The king stay the king. (D'Angelo, 1.3)¹
That boy want Omar bad. (Cheese, 5.3)
Trotta (2011, 20)

These following examples are excerpts from songs made by AAVE speakers.

(30)

- a. You know how it go.
Cole, J. (2014, No Role Modelz, 2:14)²
- b. Cole outside and he say he got a gun.
Cole, J. (2014, G.O.M.D, 0:17)
- c. She pay us no mind.
Lamar, Kendrick (2011, Tammy's song, 0:24)

6.3 Hypothetical description of AAVE subject-verb agreement

I try to point out two approaches and their limitation that arise when dealing with the problem of description of AAVE subject-verb agreement. Evidently, there has to be a systematic approach of speakers since the pattern itself is invariable and appears repeatedly.

To my knowledge, there has not been made any accepted syntactic study of third person singular agreement which incorporates Distributed Morphology and

¹ The dialogue is from the HBO TV show The Wire and it is in the following format: Character, Season, Episode.

² These are fragments taken from lyrics of a song demonstrating AAVE properties. The description is in the following format: name of the artist, the year of release, name of the song, and time occurrence of the fragment in the song.

Impoverishment Rules in AAVE before, therefore, I discuss the problems ahead and provide a hypothetical solution.

I propose these two hypothetical solutions. First I consider the dialect option where the variation could be explained by some kind of variable Impoverishment Rule triggered by Markedness and secondly I propose a type of language contact hypothesis where the omission of the inflection could be explained by language contact and second language acquisition reinforcement which would create a different type of Vocabulary for the speakers.

6.4 Impoverishment Rules Driven by Markedness hypothesis

Markedness originated as a theory of phonological differentiation between voiced/marked and voiceless/unmarked features in Prague-School linguistic circle. The pioneers of this approach were Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1939) and Roman Jakobson (re-printed 1995). Jakobson afterwards suggested that the notion of Markedness could be applied to semantic and grammatical categories as well. This paper focuses on morphological inflectional Markedness (Greenberg 1966, Croft, 2003).

To exemplify the claim of marked vs. unmarked, let's take a look at English plural where the singular is unmarked but the plural is overtly marked with the nominal inflectional plural morpheme *-s*. Grading of adjectives supports this claim as well where we have the unmarked positive form in comparison with the marked comparative *-er* and even more marked superlative *-est*.

I acknowledge the Inflectional Potential, Croft (2003, 97), which argues for the fact that marked value will have at least the same amount of formal distinctions in the paradigm as the unmarked value. Thus marking the singular as unmarked for the lexical verbs for the fact that it has more distinctions [3rd sg *-s*, elsewhere *-Ø*, *past -ed*].

However, I propose somewhat radical approach to this claim based on (Battistella, 1990). It seems rather perplexing that the least marked case [nominative] and the least marked tense [*-past*] and the least marked person [*-participant, +sg*] should have an overt inflectional marked form *-s*. It seems that English personal

pronouns have a form of Markedness Reversal where the marked form appears in the unmarked environment in the context of personal pronouns. This is possible to be explained by Markedness Assimilation and Markedness Complementarity (Battistella, 1990).

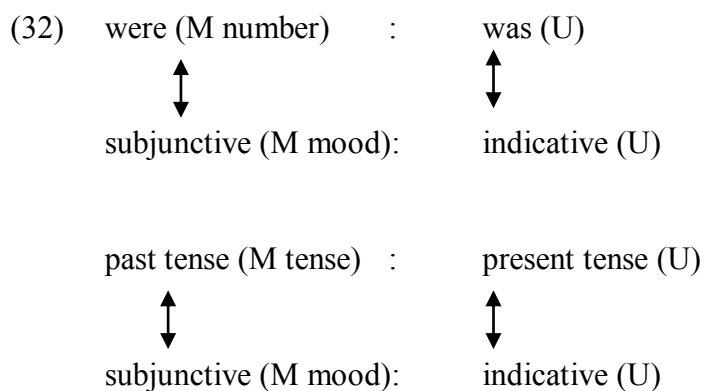
Markedness Assimilation proposes that linguistic [subjunctive vs. indicative] or sociolinguistic context [formal vs. colloquial] is able to reverse markedness value (Battistella 1990, 69). Markedness assimilation is tightly connected with neutralization. “In unmarked contexts, the expected neutralization will be to the unmarked term; in marked contexts, the expected neutralization will be to the marked term” Battistella (1990, 70). The neutralization can be represented on the example of the marked subjunctive mood. The past vs. present opposition is neutralized, and the marked past tense is used instead of the present tense. The number opposition is also neutralized in the marked subjunctive mood (31).

(31) Subjunctive mood neutralization

I wish he knew better x *I wish he knows better

I wish he were here x *I wish he is here

Hence the marked number is used instead of the unmarked number. This could be represented as a scheme in (32). The opposition between marked (M) and unmarked (U) categories is represented by a colon and the alignment is represented by a double arrow.



As Battistella (1990, 70) argues, the scheme states that the relationship of marked form (were) and the unmarked form (was) is aligned with the relationship of the marked subjunctive mood and the unmarked indicative. The same goes for the relationship of the marked past tense and the unmarked past.

Following Battistella (1990), where he argues that indeed the expected Markedness pattern where singular is unmarked and plural is marked holds true for nouns, he argues for the ability of singular nouns to refer to plurals; “*The beaver builds dams*” (1990, 84), however, the values might be reversed for English personal pronoun system where the pattern is reversed; hence, singular is marked and the plural is unmarked. He argues that plurals could be considered as unspecified for singular. Consider examples where the plural *we* substitutes singular number (33).

(33) Stylistic/Pragmatic use of We (Battistella 1990, 85)

The editorial we:	As we can see in example no. 5
The monarch’s we:	We are not amused
The hospital we:	How are we feeling today?
The kindergarten we:	We are going to behave well, aren’t we?
SAE fixed expression:	We’ll see you later.

Consider also the fact that the unmarkedness of the 3rd person plural is able to refer back to singular antecedents for 3rd person singular (34).

(34) Everybody should have their tickets.

Following Battistella (1990, 111), Markedness complementarity could possibly explain why there is an overt marked inflection –s in the least marked environment. Why is the 3rd person the one that receives the inflection, moving for the purposes of discussion aside the Impoverishment Rule, and not any other person in the singular? If we adopt the generally accepted paradigm where the plural is marked and the singular

is unmarked then the values for the person number paradigm, as Battistella (1990) argues, is as follows (35).

(35)		SINGULAR		PLURAL
	1 st person	M person U number		M person M number
	2 nd person	M person U number		M person M number
	3 rd person	U person U number		U person M number

However, as argued in (33) and (34) the markedness might be actually reversed in the pronominal system and the paradigm might be represented as follows (36) Battistella (1990).

(36)		SINGULAR		PLURAL
	1 st person	M person M number		M person U number
	2 nd person	M person M number		M person U number
	3 rd person	U person M number		U person U number

Thus the paradigm in (35) holds true for English verbs and non-pronominal nouns, whereas the paradigm in (36) holds true for English personal pronouns.

Battistella argues for singular being unmarked for verbs due to the neutralization in (37) in which the singular is found rather than the plural.

(37) Neutralization of Verbs

Where's my shoes? Battistella (1990, 112)

There's a lot of problems to be dealt with.

Who is taking care of us?

Who is getting on the stage?

This neutralization confirms the generally accepted pattern of Markedness for number in verbs where the singular is unmarked and the plural is marked. To satisfy the generally accepted view of markedness by Jakobson, Greenberg, Croft, the overt marked inflection could be explained as follows. As Battistella (1990) argues, since the third person singular is considered to be the least marked person-number category and every other person has at least one marked value, the English system compensates this by the overt formal marking and thus reversing the pattern of alignment. Hence

the unmarked category of third person singular in present tense has overt marked inflection –s and the marked number has an unmarked expression.

Consider the genitive in English, as Battistella (1990, 113) argues, “the marked category of genitive case has a marked expression in the singular unmarked number and an unmarked expression in the marked plural number” for nouns thus the Markedness relation are aligned in the common case but are reversed in the genitive case, however, for verbs the relation is complementary. The unmarked present tense has a marked overt inflection in the category which is unmarked and shows zero inflection in the category which is marked.

I will thus argue that 3rd person singular is marked for it shows a marked inflection in the unmarked environment, the 3rd person plural *they* can refer anaphorically to singular antecedents and the substitutive plural *we* can also refer to singular.

6.4.1 Impoverishment Rule for AAVE Subject-Verb Agreement

The leveling variation of AAVE in present tense agreement paradigm (27) of finite lexical verbs arises from Impoverishment Rule which is triggered by a markedness of the feature [+sg].

6.4.2 Impoverishment Analysis

I propose the following Impoverishment Rule for present tense lexical verbs in AAVE (38).

(38) Variable number Impoverishment Rule, AAVE

[+sg] % → Ø / T [[v√ -past] -participant __]

The rule in (38) states that the marked interpretable ϕ -feature [+sg] becomes variably, the percentage sign stands for variability, deleted when in the environment of finite lexical verbs in present tense which are specified for ϕ -features [-participant, +sg]. In other words, variably delete number feature [+sg] on lexical verbs in the environment of [-participant, +sg]. For more clarity, this can also be represented as in (39).

(39) Morphological impoverishment of number ϕ -feature in AAVE

She [+sg, -participant] ... T[[v $\sqrt{\quad}$ -past] -participant, +sg]



IMPOVERISHMENT



She [+sg, -participant] ... T[[v $\sqrt{\quad}$ -past] -participant, \emptyset]

The result of (39) is that the otherwise expected form of the verbal inflectional morpheme *-s* cannot be inserted into the terminal $T[v\sqrt{\quad}\text{-past}]$ because the terminal no longer bears the number ϕ -feature [+singular] and thus is not suitable according to the Subset Principle (6) to compete for insertion. “An important consequence of the interaction between the Subset Principle and Impoverishment theory is that Impoverishment will yield a terminal ineligible for its expected Vocabulary item and hence a less-specified, usually elsewhere item will be inserted” Parrot & Nevins (2010, 1142). This is demonstrated on the Vocabulary for AAVE (40).

(40) Vocabulary for T [v $\sqrt{\quad}$ -past], AAVE

[+singular, -participant] \leftrightarrow /-z/ \longrightarrow IMPOSSIBLE FOR INSERTION

[elsewhere] \leftrightarrow /- \emptyset /

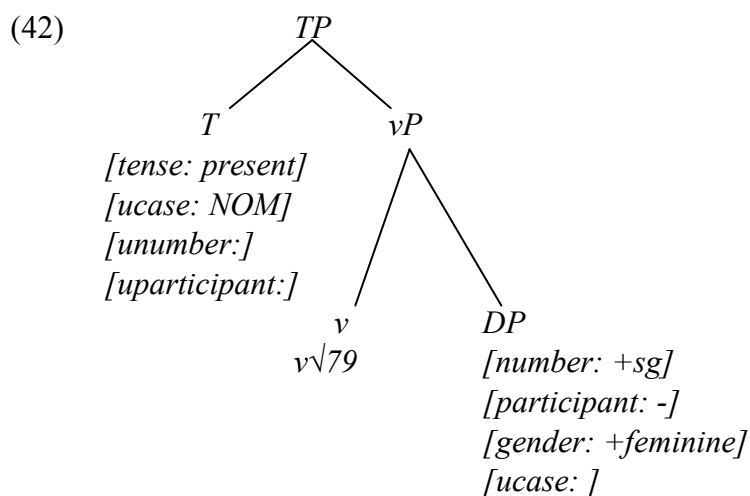
6.4.3 Description of Subject-Verb Agreement of AAVE

Following the steps from example (16), I will now describe the agreement of AAVE on a finite intransitive lexical verb which agrees with a pronominal subject (41) incorporating the impoverishment rule (38).

(41) *She sing.*

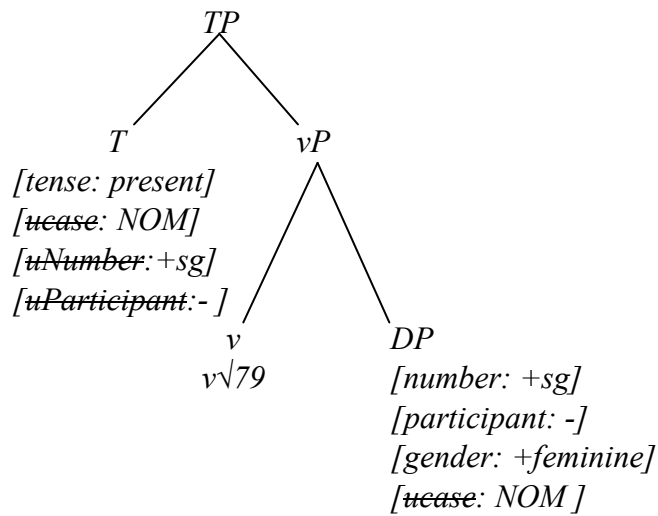
Once again, the syntactic operation starts with a speaker choosing the root $\sqrt{79}$ from the formative list. This root is then Merged with a categorizing head v forming $v\sqrt{79}$. Tense terminal T is selected. This terminal has an interpretable ϕ -feature: [Tense: Present], marking the tense present and thus making the terminal finite. It has also uninterpretable ϕ -features: [u Num:], [u Participant:], [u author:], [u case: NOM]. The

finiteness of the tense terminal assigns nominative case to *T*. We can leave the feature [*u*author:] out of the equation as the Feature Co-occurrence Restriction in (12) suggests. The abstract syntactic terminal *T* is a probe searching for its goal. The speaker then chooses from the formative list a Pronoun and merges it with a categorizing head *D* forming *DP* [determinative phrase] with interpretable ϕ -features [number: +sg], [participant: -] [gender: +feminine] and an uninterpretable ϕ -feature [*u*case:]. The *DP* is then Merged with the verb creating *VP* [verb phrase] and this phrase is afterwards Merged with the *T* and even more complex phrases is created; *TP* [tense phrase] as seen on (42).

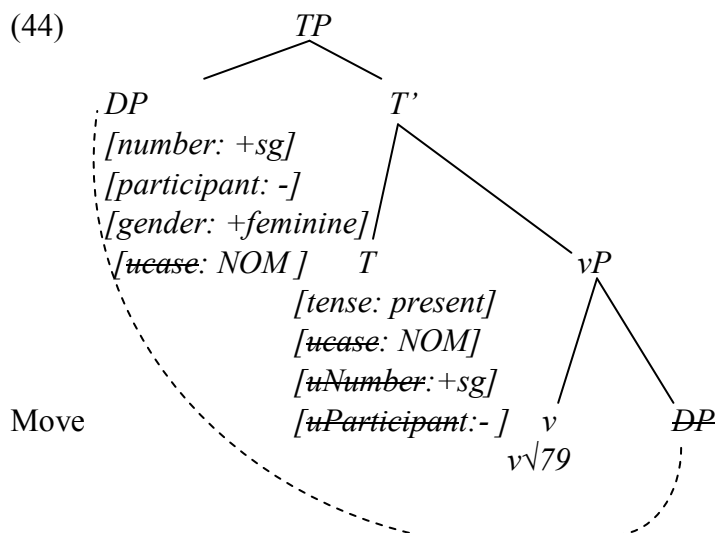


Once again, the syntactic operation Agree triggers mutual checking of the uninterpretable ϕ -features between *T* and *DP*. The *DP* is valued for nominative case and *T* is valued for number and participant feature. All the features that are valued are marked with a strikethrough (43).

(43)

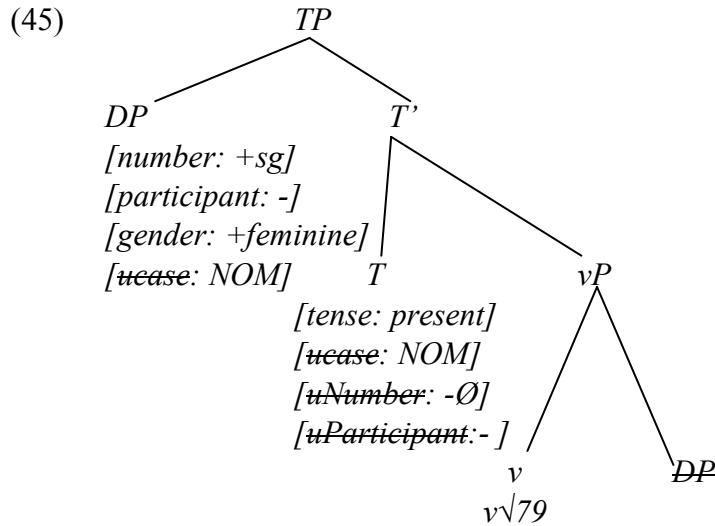


The Extended Projection Principle/EPP, this principle states the fact that English requires over subjects. To satisfy this condition the *DP* needs to MOVE into the specifier position of *TP*. The movement of the *DP* from the *VP* complement position is possible due to the syntactic operation called Move, Chomsky (1995). When the movement is executed a trace marked with a strikethrough \overline{DP} of the Determinative Phrase is left at the initial position. The \overline{DP} is still at the same position, complement of *v*, with the same features but is left unpronounced. The operation Move is represented by dotted line in (44).



Until this point everything seems to be as expected, however, this variety of English incorporates the variable impoverishment rule (38) and since the *DP* is valued

for features [+ sg, - participant] this triggers the impoverishment rule and deletes the number feature [+sg] from the *T* terminal. This is represented in (45). Note that this syntactic operation is triggered before being sent into the PF and LF from for interpretation.



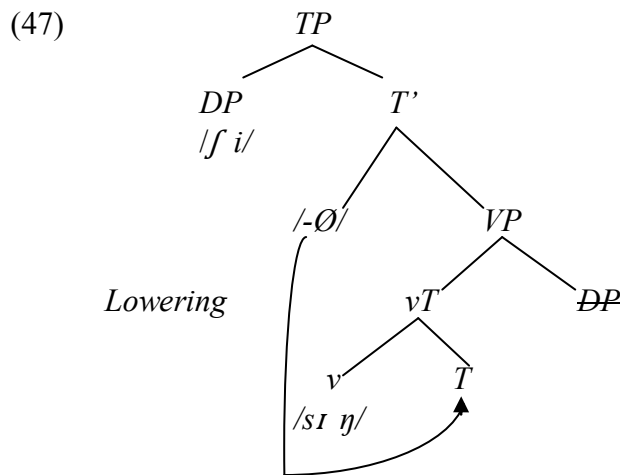
This computation is sent afterwards into the PF for realization of the abstract features into pronounceable morphemes (46a) and it is also sent into the LF for semantic interpretation (46b). The abstract interpreted features of the *DP* are sent into the PF branches and it yields /f i/. The abstract interpreted features on *T* are also sent into PF and this yields, to satisfy the subset principle in (6), the elsewhere form /-∅/. Note that -s cannot be inserted because the impoverishment rule deletes the number ϕ -feature [+sg] and thus less specified [default] form -∅ needs to be inserted otherwise the computation crashes. The root is in the environment of verb as is thus interpreted as /sɪ ɨ/.

- (46) a. PF list
 DP[3sg,F,Nom] ↔ /f i/
 T[-past, +sg] ↔ /-∅/
 v√79 ↔ /sɪ ɨ/

- b. LF list

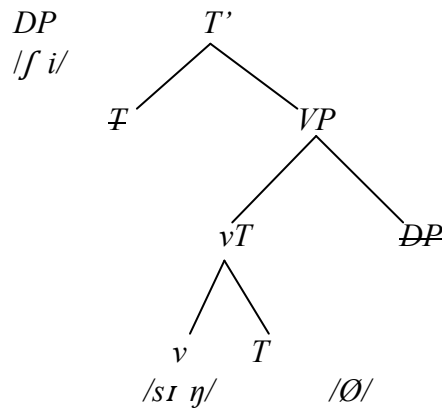
v√79 ↔ production of melodious sound with the voice / [_V]

Following the same pattern, the weakness of the syntactic terminal *T* as discussed above in 5.2.1.1(19), triggers the syntactic operation Lowering. The terminal *T* is then lowered on to the *v* as seen in (47).



When the *T* is lowered a trace is left in its position marked with a strikethrough \cancel{T} . Finally, when all the syntactic operations, Agree, Move, Impoverishment, Lowering, are executed, the phonological form and logical form are both interpreted, the linearization occurs and the speaker pronounces with the articulators *she sing* (48).





/f i/ +/sɪ ŋ- ∅/ = She sing.

6.5 The language contact hypothesis

Although this is not the primary focus of this thesis, I promised back in the introductory chapter to base the subject-verb description of AAVE also on historical-linguistic approach incorporating it into the framework of DM. Since there is only vague evidence to the origin of AAVE 3.1, I will discuss a language contact hypothesis and second language acquisition reinforcement in this subchapter to argue for the overregulation or simplification, the loss of the inflectional verbal suffix *-s*, and for the rise of variation.

There are few regions in the United Kingdom, more specifically East Anglia, where the omission has been well documented since as early as 15th C. and this phenomenon is used in this specific region to this day. Trudgil (1974) argues that dialects that have this feature comprise of Norfolk, Suffolk and northern Essex regions. This feature is the most evident in the city of Norwich.

As I argued above, the Modern General English system is typologically very unusual among other languages for the fact that it has an overt marked form in the least marked environment. As Trudgil (1998) argues there is no surprise that many dialects of English, including AAVE, Caribbean and West Africa creoles as well as South Pacific pidgins, English of Saint Helena and the institutional second languages like that of Singapore all simplify and delete this feature.

All these non-British examples of variation have in common some form of historical language contact and Trudgil (1998) argues that adult language contact leads to simplification and regularization and therefore to the loss of the *-s* inflection, more in Gass & Selinker (2008, 403), Wardhaug (1986, 74).

There were two competing verbal inflections in the Middle English the southern interdental *-th* and the northern alveolar *-s*. Trudgil (1998) suggests that the East Anglia dialects either included the *-s* inflection and it simplified with language contact or it never had this intermediate stage and the *-s* inflection was never included in the grammar of the East Anglia speakers.

(49) Hypothetical evolution of the inflection *-s* of East Anglia

- a. *-eth* > *-es* > - \emptyset
- b. *-eth* > - \emptyset

Norwich was one of the biggest cities in the United Kingdom during the mediaeval times and therefore it had social and cultural impacts on adjacent area. The events of the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648) had impact on linguistic evolution of the dialects of East Anglia. King Philip of Spain sent an army to fight off the uprising against Spanish and Catholic rule to the Low-Countries (nowadays Belgium and The Netherlands). Many people fled to the protestant England and a large number of these people fled to the one of the biggest cities at that time, Norwich. "The population of Norwich in 1579 was 16,236. Of that number, approximately 6,000 - about 37% - were Dutch and French-speaking aliens" Trudgil (1998, 143). One could say that there was an immense language contact in Norwich at the turn of the 16th C.

The Dutch and French speakers assimilated through time and spoke English. Note that the Dutch and French spoke English not only to native speakers but they had to use it to communicate among themselves as well. Trudgil (1998) argues that the origin of the East Anglia dialects is the result of language contact which arose from large number of non-native speakers in Norwich at that time. These non-native speakers used English as lingua franca among themselves and the native speakers, and as it is frequent among second language acquisition learners, they failed to master the marked form in unmarked environment in the English person-number system and thus

simplified the rule. The arrival of these aliens co-occurred together with the phonetic change from –eth to -es that were occurring at the same time. There were three language communities and this reinforced the usage of the – Ø morpheme. As Norwich was one of the largest cities and had a cultural impact, the feature diffused to the whole region of East Anglia.

This thus supports the Anglicist Hypothesis where the slaves arguably could be in contact with British speakers who immigrated to the colonies from the region of East Anglia and thus bringing with them their specific variety of British English which lacks the inflectional verbal morpheme –s. I argue that the leveled subject-verb agreement of AAVE could be a result of language contact.

To fit this hypothesis into the DM framework, I argue for the possibility of AAVE speakers having a different vocabulary list for interpretation of finite lexical verbs based on the language contact hypothesis. The subset principle in (6) clearly states that it does not tolerate variation, either the highly specified item or the default item that is inserted, and therefore, the vocabulary for finite lexical verbs for AAVE speakers could be represented as follows.

(50) Vocabulary for T [$v\sqrt{\text{ -past}}$] in AAVE based on language contact

[± singular, ±participant]	↔	/-Ø/

[+singular, -participant]	↔	/-z/
elsewhere	↔	/-Ø/

The scheme in (50) states that the morpheme /-Ø/ appears throughout the paradigm of all pronominal features. As Parrott (2017, 17) argues that the dotted line represents vocabulary items that are learned later in life; speakers must learn the “supplemental items”, in other words, add it into their vocabulary list if they want to use them. They may or may not use it; the supplemented item is socially motivated and does not compete for insertion and thus does not hinder the Subset Principal (6).

In this chapter I argued for the impoverishment analysis where I took a somewhat radical point of view on the Markedness of personal pronouns where I assumed that there is a form of Markedness reversal in the system of English personal

pronouns. The argument for the reversal is that plural pronouns are possible to refer anaphorically to singular pronouns and also the fact that the only personal pronoun in GAE that has an overt verbal inflectional morpheme is in the singular number. If the singular were indeed unmarked, the impoverishment rule could not be triggered, for impoverishment rules require some form of marked environment that triggers them. In other words, if one does not accept the existence of Markedness reversal in English personal pronouns, the hypothesis crashes.

Regarding the second hypothesis, I argued for the language contact hypothesis where the speakers as learners of a second langue did acquire a different type of vocabulary, note that by vocabulary I mean a list of morphemes that are inserted into terminals according to their specified environment, which was reinforced throughout the generations.

6.6 Discussion

This chapter discusses possible problems for the hypothetical analyses that I was concerned with above.

There arises a problem of how to approach different functions of the verbal inflectional morpheme *-s* in AAVE since it is possible to appear leveled throughout

the paradigm in specific morpho-syntactic contexts. The speakers use this verbal marker as conversational historical present (CHP) (Wolfson, 1982) as in (51).

(51) Judge: What happened?

Woman: He had called me Wednesday afternoon and asked, “Do you want to go the movies” . . . so I gets in the car (Green 2002, 100).

The morpho-syntactic environment of the sentence in (51) is clearly set in past as *had*, *called*, and *asked* suggests; however, the speaker then describes the past narration in present tense, which isn't that surprising since GAE uses this phenomenon of (CHP) as well (Wolfson, 1982). What is unusual is that the inflection *-s* is leveled throughout the paradigm of person number features.

Another morpho-syntactic environment where the verbal marker appears leveled is habitual one (52 a, b, c).

- (52) a. When I think about Palm Sunday, I gets excited.
b. The devil haves us in a state of sin.
c. I sits and rides (Green 2002, 100).

The inflection thus appears, in the morpho-syntactic context of past narration [+habit], throughout the paradigm of all person and number features. In other words, the inflection is leveled throughout the paradigm (53).

(53) Paradigm of Historical Present and Habitual *-s* in AAVE

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	-s	-s
2	-s	-s
3	-s	-s

I propose a hypothetical description of the vocabulary list for AAVE speakers as follows in (54).

(54) Hypothetical vocabulary for T [$v^{\sqrt{}}$ -past] AAVE

[+habitual]	↔ /-z/
elsewhere	↔ /-Ø/

[+singular, -participant]	↔ /-z/
elsewhere	↔ /-Ø/

I therefore propose a slightly changed scheme from that one in (50) to incorporate the habitual/narrative morpheme. The scheme in (54) states that the vocabulary list for *T* on lexical verbs in present tense in AAVE is arguably as follows.

The inflection /-z/ is inserted throughout the paradigm only when the aspectual head [+habitual] appears on *T*, this habitual morpheme then also occurs in the environment of narration of past events in present tense (CHP), the /-Ø/ morpheme is inserted everywhere else and finally /-z/, as mentioned above, is the supplemented item inserted in the morpho-syntactic environment of [+singular, -participant] and does not compete for insertion. There raises a question of what are the semantic/pragmatic consequences for using habitual morpheme for both habitual and conversational historical present environment at the same time. Further study of this problem is needed.

7 Conclusion

As stated in the introductory chapter, the main goal of this bachelor thesis was to syntactically describe the variable subject verb agreement of English variation spoken

by African-American speakers in the United States of America called African American Vernacular English.

The distinction was made between inter-variation and intra-variation, where this paper focuses purely on intra-variation, that is; a variation among the speakers of a language. There also needs to be a distinction made between social approach and solely linguistic one. Where the social approach examines the impacts variation has on a listener, variation is to a certain degree stigmatized by different listeners of a different background, class or race, whereas, linguistic approach is considered purely in the language facts and cuts through the core of a problem without being biased in any way.

This bachelor thesis thus focuses only on the language faculty and use and examines the problem ahead in that very fashion. Different hypothetical historical approaches that are concerned with the emergence of the variety in question are briefly mentioned to acquaint the reader with the variety.

The definition of theoretical frameworks follows in order to allow me to describe the agreement and variation of the agreement as precisely and in great detail as possible. This description is based upon the syntactic theoretical framework of Distributional Morphology with the focus on Impoverishment Rules and how these rules can be used as an explanation for insertion of phonological exponents into different terminals, however, with the same semantic interpretation and thus creating a systematic variation. The Impoverishment Rules are triggered by a certain marked feature; however, there arises a problem since the well-established theory of markedness considers nominative, third person singular and present tense as unmarked environment. I take a rather radical point of view and argue for singular being in fact marked environment for personal pronouns since plural forms are possible to refer or substitute singular forms. There is markedness reversal in English personal pronoun system.

I then argue for two possible ways that variation arises. First hypothesis argues for an Impoverishment rule being triggered by the markedness of singular number of personal pronouns. Distributed Morphology suggests that the phonological features

are lately inserted into their exponents only after all the syntactic operations are executed. Impoverishment rules are triggered by marked features, in our case the interpretable number ϕ -feature [+sg] on a pronominal subject, which subsequently deletes ϕ -feature, in our case number ϕ -feature on the T[ense] terminal. In other words, the feature that is supposed to be deleted is specified by the rule and the marked environment triggers it. In order to satisfy the subset principle, only the less specified form, the default form, must be inserted into the exponent when the feature is deleted by the Impoverishment Rule otherwise the computation crashes and this results in ungrammaticality. This theoretical approach is then represented on a simple Subject-Verb agreement example, namely finite lexical verb agreeing with a pronominal subject with features of third person singular since this personal pronoun shows the most visible contrast between the varieties. Syntactic trees are used in order to help us to grasp the idea more easily.

The second hypothesis argues for a type of language contact situation that occurred when the African slaves were brought to the colonies and were in contact with the speakers of English. The black speakers failed to master the second language, as is so frequent in the studies of second language acquisition for a learner of any race, and their seclusion only worked as catalyst of reinforcement of this phenomenon, which was then further reinforced by following generations until specific variation emerged and is today called African American Vernacular English. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that similar anomaly occurred in the region of East Anglia where the second language learners of Dutch and French origin, who fled from religious persecution, assimilated through time into the community and came in contact with English speakers. They failed to master the language and this gave rise to the omission of the inflection which is still prominent until this day in this region among the working class speakers. The hypothesis is further supported by the fact that other varieties of English around the world share this specific phenomenon as well. This hypothesis is then incorporated into the framework of DM. This then supports the Anglicist Hypothesis where it could be possible for the slaves to be in a contact

with speakers from the East Anglia region and thus incorporating the missing *-s* into their vocabulary.

The problems that arise are subsequently discussed and a hypothetical solution is provided.

8 Résumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá morfo-syntaktickým popisem shody přísudku s podmětem ve variaci angličtiny, jež afroameričtí mluvčí praktikují převážně ve Spojených státech amerických, která se nazývá afro americká vernakulární angličtina.

Tento morfo-syntaktický popis vychází z teoretického rámce distribuované morfologie a zahrnuje ochuzovací pravidla, která umožňují vznik různorodých fonologických prostředí se stejným sémantickým významem.

Teoretický rámec Distribuované morfologie popisuje vnitřní gramatický generativní proces utváření slov a vět v mysli mluvčího a to pomocí syntaktických procesů sloučení a pohybu. Tento teoretický rámec zamítá existenci mentálního lexikonu a namísto toho využívá třech modulů.

Syntaktický modul, který obsahuje terminální uzly, tedy gramatické kategorie i kořeny slov. Je nutné si uvědomit, že tento modul ovšem neobsahuje žádné fonologické, gramatické či sémantické prvky. Prvky ze syntaktického modulu terminálních uzlů se sloučí, aby vytvořila složenou strukturu, ve které je určitá hlava v čele a kategorizuje tuto strukturu, po ukončení této syntaktické operace je tato struktura paralelně odeslána do dvou interpretačních modulů. Gramatické prvky v terminálu uzlů jsou univerzální, tedy součástí Univerzální gramatiky, avšak kořeny jsou pro každý daný jazyk rozdílné.

Sémantický modul interpretuje kořeny dle toho jaká hlava je v čele, tedy v jakém morfo-syntaktickém prostředí se jistá složenina vyskytuje. Tento abstraktní morfém je poté interpretován dalším modulem. Zde je si nutno uvědomit, že gramatické kategorie jsou interpretovány svým významem a tudíž nemusí být odeslány do sémantického modulu.

Fonologický modul obsahuje seznam výslovnosti abstraktních morfémů. Tato operace je postsyntaktická a pouze dodává fonologickou informaci do terminálních uzlů a nazývá se pozdní vkládání norem. Právě tato funkce umožňuje vznik variací.

Vkládání morfologických forem je řízeno principem podmnožiny, jež stanovuje, že nejvíce specifikovaný prvek nebo jeho podmnožina je vložena do terminálu pro výslovnost a pokud neobsahuje alespoň jeho podmnožinu tak je použit

výchozí terminální uzel jakožto nespecifikované prostředí. Ochuzovací pravidla pak mohou vymazat v určitém kontextu gramatické kategorie z terminálního uzlu a z toho důvodu jsou pak vloženy právě výchozí terminální uzly.

Hlavním předmětem této práce je popsat a odůvodnit vynechání slovesné přípony *-s*, která vyjadřuje přítomný čas na finitních slovesech u podmětu třetí osoby jednotného čísla, která se vyskytuje ve standardní angličtině, afroameričtí mluvčí tuto příponu ovšem vynechávají. V této bakalářské práci popisují dvě možná hypotetická řešení tohoto problému.

V prvním případě argumentují pro zahrnutí ochuzovacího pravidla, které odstraňuje gramatickou kategorii čísla zájmena třetí osoby jednotného čísla, kdykoliv se toto zájmeno s těmito gramatickými kategoriemi objeví v gramatickém kontextu finitního slovesa v přítomném čase. Dle principu podmnožiny poté může být vložen pouze výchozí terminální uzel, tedy přípona $-\emptyset$.

V druhém případě argumentují pro hypotézu kontaktu mezi dvěma jazyky. V 16 století proběhla v Nizozemsku revoluce, která donutila francouzské a nizozemské protestanty přemístit do jihovýchodní Anglie do města Norwich. V Anglii v té době docházelo ke změně výslovnosti verbální přípony ze severního interdentalního *-eth* na jižní alveolární *-s*. Vliv mluvčích cizího jazyka, kteří se časem asimilovali do společnosti, a jejich nedokonalé ovládnutí angličtiny vedlo k úplnému vynechání této přípony, které je v tomto regionu přítomno dodnes. Otroci mohli být v kontaktu právě s mluvčími tohoto dialektu a jejich odloučení od společnosti pravděpodobně jenom posílilo úplné vynechání této verbální přípony. V poslední části této práce diskutují o možných problémech svých hypotéz a poskytují možná řešení. Terminologie distribuované morfologie (Ziková, 2017).

9 Works Cited

Adger, David, and Jennifer Smith. 2005. Variation and the minimalist program. *Syntax and Variation Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 2005, 149-78. Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Adger, David. 2006. *Combinatorial variability*. *Journal of Linguistics* 42: 503-530.

Battistella, Edwin. 1990. *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language*. Albany, State University of New York Press.

Bobaljik, Jonathan David. 2015. "Distributed Morphology." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*.

Brooks, Keith. 2013. *Slave Narratives Interviews with Former Slaves South Carolina, Part 2*. Keith W Brooks Publishing, USA.

Cole, J. "No Role Modelz." *Forest Hills Drive*, Dreamville Records/Columbia Records, 2014. CD.

Collins, Chris. 2006. "A Fresh Look at Habitualbein AAVE." *Structure and Variation in Language Contact Creole Language Library*, pp. 203–224. New York, NY, USA: New York University.

Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 1999. *Derivation by phase*. Boston, USA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Linguistics.

Chomsky, N. (2000). 'Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework', in R. Martin, D. Michaels & J. Uriagereka (eds.), *Step by Step: Essays in Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*, pp. 89-156. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.

Embick, David & Rolf Noyer. 2007. *Distributed morphology and the syntax/morphology interface*. In Gillian Ramchand & Charles Reiss (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Croft, W. 2003. *Typology and Universals*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Federal Writers' Project. 2007. *South Carolina slave narratives*. Native American Book Publishers. USA.

Greenberg, J.H., 1966. *Language Universals, with Special Reference to Feature Hierarchies*. The Hague: Mouton and Co.

Green, Lisa J. 2002. *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge UP.

Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. 2008. *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group.

Halle, Morris & Alec Marantz. 1993. *Distributed morphology and the pieces of inflection*. In Ken Hale & Samuel Jay Keyser (eds.), *The View from Building 20: Essays in Linguistics in Honor of Sylvain Bromberger*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.

Harley, Heidi. 2014. On the identity of roots. *Theoretical Linguistics*. 40(3-4): 225-276.

- Jakobson, R., 1995. *On Language*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Lamar, Kendrick. "Tammy's song". *Section.80*. Top Dawg Entertainment, 2011. CD.
- Labov, William. 1972. *Language in the inner city: studies in the Black English vernacular*. Philadelphia, PA, The University of Philadelphia Press.
- Labov, William. 1995. The two futures of linguistics. In *Ik-Hwan Lee (ed.), Linguistics in the Morning Calm 3: Selected Papers from SICOL-1992*, 113-148. Seoul: Hanshin Publishing Co.
- Mihalicek, Vedrana and Christin Wilson. 2011. *Language files: materials for an introduction to language and linguistics*. Columbus, USA: Ohio State University Press.
- Radford, A. 2004. "Agreement, Case and Movement." In *English Syntax: An Introduction*, 146-166. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge UP.
- Parker, Kathryn A. Riley. 1994. *Linguistics for Non Linguists: A Primer with Exercises*. Boston, USA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Parrott, Jeffrey K. 2007. *Distributed Morphological Mechanisms of Labovian Variation in Morphosyntax*. Doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University.
- Parrott, J. K. and Nevins, Andrew (2010). *Variable rules meet Impoverishment theory: Patterns of agreement leveling in English varieties*. *Lingua*, 120, 1135-1159.

Parrott, Jeffrey K. 2017. Post-syntactic mechanisms of pronominal case variation in (North) Germanic. Workshop on Case-impooverished Germanic. Lun University.

Radford, Andrew. 2012. *Minimalist syntax: exploring the structure of English*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Salikoko, S. Mufwene, Rickford, R. John, Bailey Guy and Baugh John. 1998. *African American English, Structure History and Use*, London, U.K.: Routledge.

Trotta, Joe, and Oleg Blyahher. 2011. *Game Done Changed: A look at Selected AAVE Features in the TV Series The Wire*. *Moderna Språk*, 105 (1), 15-42.

Trubetzkoy, Nikolai. 1939. *Principles of Phonology*. Translated by Christiane A. M. Baltaxe. 1971. LA: University of California Press.

Trudgill, Peter. 1974. *The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge: CUP.

Trudgill, Peter. 1998. "Third-person singular zero: African American vernacular English, East Anglian dialects and Spanish persecution in the Low Countries", *Folia Linguistica Historica* 18.1-2: 139-48.

Wardbaugh, Ronald. 1986. *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wolfram, Walt. 2004. "The grammar of urban African American Venacular English." In Bernd Kormant and Schneider, Edgar, *Handbook of varieties of English*. 111-132. Berlin. Mouton De Gruyter.

Wolfram, Walt. 2008. "Urban African American Vernacular English: morphology and syntax." In Schneider, Edgar, *The Americas and the Caribbean*. 510-533 Berlin. Mouton De Gruyter.

Wolfson, Nessa. 1982. *CHP: The Conversational Historical Present in American English narrative*. Dordrecht. Foris Publications.

Markéta Ziková (2017): *Distribovaná Morfologie*. In: Petr Karlík, Marek Nekula, Jana Pleskalová (eds.), *CzechEncy - Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny*. URL: [https://www.czechency.org/slovník/DISTRIBUOVANÁ MORFOLOGIE](https://www.czechency.org/slovník/DISTRIBUOVANÁ_MORFOLOGIE)