



## An Investigation of the Grammatical Feature Usage of African American Vernacular English in Justin Bieber's Songs

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### ABSTRACT

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a distinct variety of English that exhibits unique phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. However, the focus of this study was on the grammatical aspects of AAVE. The objectives were to identify and analyze the predominant grammatical features of AAVE employed by Justin Bieber in his songs from 2009 to 2021 and to examine and describe the specific syntactic features of AAVE found in Justin Bieber songs. The data was collected and compared over a span of several years. The grammatical features were analyzed based on the theories proposed by Wolfram (2004) and Rickford (1999). The results indicated that the three most frequently observed features were Negation Forms, which occurred 79 times over a period of 9 years, Specialized Auxiliaries, which appeared 44 times over 9 years, and Copula Absence, which was present 34 times over 7 years. Additionally, the study identified several other AAVE features over a 10-year span, including Copula Absence, Invariant "be," Remote "been," Specialized Auxiliaries, Subject-Verb Agreement, Nominals, Negation Forms, and Question Formation. Upon comparison, it was observed that the number of AAVE features decreased in the last five years compared to the first five years. Consequently, this research provides valuable insights into the grammatical features of AAVE and highlights the variations in the syntactic characteristics of AAVE that have an impact on popular music.

**Keywords:** African American Vernacular English (AAVE), grammatical features, syntactic characteristics, language variation, popular music, Justin Bieber

## Introduction

Humans employ language to exchange knowledge, beliefs, ideas, wishes, and culture. Languages can also reveal humans' identity, where they come from, or their nationalities. English, one of the international languages, is divided into two main parts: Standard English and Non-Standard English. The task of defining language varieties of English without associating them with Standard English (SE) poses considerable challenges. This is primarily due to SE acquiring standardized and codified forms accepted by dominant societal groups. In contrast, dialects are categorized as non-SE and can be distinguished from SE based on differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a well-known Non-Standard English in the United States of America. When comparing AAVE accented speakers to Standard American English (SAE), they are consistently devalued based on status-related characteristics such as education or wealth (Cargile, 2004). AAVE is a distinct dialect characterized by its own phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and usage systems. The classification of AAVE as a dialect has been subject to ongoing debate. AAVE is spoken in various regions across the United States. Speakers of AAVE exhibit regional variations in speech patterns. Notably, their phonological features are influenced by the specific regional context, resulting in unique pronunciation patterns (Green, 2002). Additionally, the terms of AAVE have several forms, such as Black English, and Black Vernacular English. However, AAVE is the most popular form because it is used the most by many authors (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006).

Although AAVE is often associated with hip-hop music and primarily employed by black artists, emphasizing the linguistic heritage of speakers who may confront perceptions of inferiority when compared to SE (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015), Justin Bieber, despite not being a native speaker of AAVE, chose to incorporate elements of AAVE into his pop songs and received numerous awards. Therefore, studying the grammatical features of AAVE in his songs can provide valuable insights and explanations for English learners interested in understanding the syntactic characteristics of AAVE as portrayed in popular music.

## Research questions

1. What are the predominant grammatical features of AAVE utilized by Justin Bieber in his songs from 2009 to 2021?
2. What are the syntactic characteristics of AAVE found in the songs by Justin Bieber?

## Research objectives

1. To identify and analyze the predominant grammatical features of AAVE employed by Justin Bieber in his songs from 2009 to 2021.
2. To examine and describe the syntactic features of AAVE found in Justin Bieber songs.

## Definition of terms

Standard English (SE) refers to a variety of English language universally accepted as the generally correct form.

Standard American English (SAE) refers to a variety of English languages mostly used by American people in written papers and daily communication.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) refers to one of the languages used by African-American people in the USA. It is used mostly in rap or hip-hop songs.

Popular music or pop music refers to music made by any kind of instrument, but the main features are catchy and upbeat.

Justin Bieber refers to a famous Canadian singer and songwriter. He debuted as a 15-year-old singer in 2009.

### Scope of the research

In this research, the grammatical features in the syntax would be concentrated to study the number of each feature and the frequency of AAVE features in the list of 64 Justin Bieber's songs on Billboard Chart from 2009 to 2021 in the category of Digital Song Sales. To create data richness in AAVE grammatical features, two frameworks by Wolfram (2004) and Rickford (1999) have been selected as the main instrument. Wolfram (2004) describes copula absence, invariant be, completive done, sequential be done, remote been, simple past, specialized auxiliaries, irregular verbs, subject-verb agreement, negation: "ain't" and "won't", nominals: the deletion of possessive –s and possessive pronouns, and question formation: subject-verb inversion, while Rickford (1999) explains the use of double modals, conjugated form, alternation of past tense forms, nominals: the use of "and em" or "nem" and appositive pronouns, negation: the use of "ain't but" and "don't but", and questions: the deletion of "if" and "whether". In combining these two frameworks, twelve grammatical features of AAVE are as follows:

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Copula Absence          | 2. Invariant "be"           |
| 3. Completive "done"       | 4. Sequential "be done"     |
| 5. Remote "been"           | 6. Simple Past "had + verb" |
| 7. Specialized Auxiliaries | 8. Irregular Verbs          |
| 9. Subject-Verb Agreement  | 10. Negation Forms          |
| 11. Nominals               | 12. Question Formation      |

The choice to utilize the frameworks proposed in this study was based on their clear and well-defined structures, as well as their established utilization in previous research on song analysis (Magnusson, 2008; Rajič, 2018; Vričánová, 2020). This study did not examine certain grammatical features of AAVE that were not explicitly covered in the selected frameworks. Consequently, further research is warranted to investigate these unexplored features, utilizing alternative criteria or frameworks, to enhance our understanding of AAVE's linguistic characteristics.

### Significance of the research

This research offers readers a comprehensive understanding of the grammatical features of AAVE and its significant influence in popular music. Additionally, the study's findings are served as a valuable resource for language learners and English users who wish to explore AAVE further.

The findings and discussions provide valuable resources for educating individuals about AAVE. Incorporating AAVE examples in language teaching materials and curricula fosters inclusivity and appreciation for different language varieties.

Due to a limited number of research papers on the grammatical feature usage of AAVE (Yodkiree, 2014; Pongkaew, 2017), the ongoing research can enhance Thai learners' critical thinking and analytical skills of AAVE in popular music.

### Limitation of the research

This study specifically examines the grammatical features of AAVE in Justin Bieber's song lyrics. It focuses on sections where Bieber performs solo or collaborates with other artists. However, it does not delve into the phonological, morphological, semantic, or lexical aspects of

AAVE. Additionally, lyrics contributed by other artists in collaborative songs are not included in the analysis.

This research focuses on the grammatical features of AAVE in Justin Bieber's songs from the "Digital Song Sales" category on the Billboard chart. It covers 64 songs released between 2009 and 2021. However, it is important to note that this study solely examines Justin Bieber's songs and their grammatical features and does not provide evidence that all popular songs will exhibit similar linguistic characteristics to AAVE.

## **Literature Review**

### **Standard American English (SAE)**

SAE is widely accepted as an idealized norm, and it is chosen as a model of a written language in language academics composed of vocabulary, grammar, and usage. These characteristics of SAE are more prestigious than local standards (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015), and the pronunciation of SAE users permits them to be perceived as an educated or high social class: therefore, speakers often prefer this language to improve their social image. On condition that the language is widespread, the features will be collected and developed until it becomes a formula for speaking or learning by language learners (Jenkins, 2014). There are many discussions about the concept of 'standard' in the English language. The same as Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015), Crystal (1994) and Chun et al. (2019) have explained the definition of SAE as a variety of English.

Furthermore, SAE is the main accent that coordinates correlation between different varieties of English language, and it is also applied to study for foreigners and media (Hughes et al., 2013). SAE is chiefly a written form of English, so it is used in lectures, written papers, speeches, and presentations. However, there are still many arguments about the concept of SAE.

### **African American Vernacular English (AAVE)**

The history of AAVE was derived from pidgin or creole, similar to other dialects in the Caribbean, or it came from slaves or servants who came to the United States by trade agreement in the 17th to 19th centuries. Since the middle 1960s, AAVE was interesting to scholars, and it was the most popular subject for researching because AAVE language could identify the evolution of the ethnic identity, from Negro to Black and then African American. In the early 1970s, it was called Vernacular instead of Non-Standard for changing to a positive attitude (Rickford, 2003). According to Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015), AAVE is the term to be used the most. In addition, there are other names such as Black English, Black Vernacular English, and African or Afro-American English.

AAVE is a distinctive language with both grammatical and phonological features. In grammar, it has more rules such as multiple negations "he ain't goin nowhere nohow". In phonology, the most unique feature is the usage of ain't instead of didn't. Furthermore, Ebonics is a dialect that is similar to AAVE. However, it differs from the root language of the Caribbean and West African varieties (Rickford, 2003).

The usage of AAVE was found in several areas in the United States such as Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and Texas (Green, 2002). However, AAVE is looked upon as 'wrong' 'ignorant' and 'improper' by Americans (Reyes, 2010). Additionally, Ueland (2020) stated that the period of age between 18 to 29 years accepted the usage of AAVE in music and society. Otherwise, the group of older age dissent AAVE since they viewed the grammar of AAVE as an inferior language. According to the people who speak AAVE are teenagers more than adults and it is used in an informal conversation among African Americans themselves as friends. On the other hand, the usage of AAVE is rarely found in conversations between African Americans and white people because they are mostly strangers (Rickford, 2003).

## **African American Vernacular English Theories**

There are many AAVE theories and many scholars mention the feature usage of AAVE, for example, Jenkins (2014), Green (2002), Rickford (2003), Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015). However, the frameworks of Wolfram (2004) and Rickford (1999) have been selected as the main instrument for this research. They are as follows:

### ***The framework of Wolfram (2004)***

Wolfram (2004) outlined some distinguish grammatical features of AAVE as follows:

Pre-verbal markers, mood, and aspect

#### **1. Copula Absence**

The auxiliary “is” and “are” in the position of copula such as “You happy” for “You are happy”.

#### **2. Invariant “be”**

Invariant “be” is also known as “habitual be” or “non-finite be”. It is a contraction of “will” or “would” and uses only the verb “to be”, for example, in AAVE, they say “I be walking”, but in SE, the sentence will be “I will be walking”.

#### **3. Completive “done”**

This feature is used in the meaning of the perfect tense. Completive “done” can be found before the past tense forms of the verb in auxiliary position. It is used in past situations that have already been completed, for example, “We done slept”.

#### **4. Sequential “be done”**

The use of “be done” can occur in the meaning of future perfect tense forms in Standard English such as “My grandfather be done slept when we arrive at his home”. It states a future condition meaning an inevitable consequence or a specific situation.

#### **5. Remote “been”**

Remote “been” is the use of “been” instead of the form of the present perfect tense. For example, “he been sad” for “he has been sad.” in SE. This feature is used in the meaning of the distant past, and that is still happening.

#### **6. Simple Past “had + verb”**

This feature is used in the meaning of simple past tense. For example, in AAVE, they will use “She had walked there” for “She walked there” in SE.

#### **7. Specialized Auxiliaries**

There are many specialized auxiliaries in AAVE varieties such as the use of “finna”, “steady”, “come”. “Come” is used with movement verbs in the form of V.-ing to express the feeling in the negative way such as “She come drivin’ on the road as if she built that road”. “Steady” is used to emphasize the continuity of events. “Finna” is used to express near future events.

#### **8. Irregular Verbs**

The conjugation of tense does not relate with the conjugation of SE. There are the use of the past participle instead of past tense forms (V.-ed): He seen her, and the infinitive verb instead of past tense forms: she breaks the window last weekend and the uncommon conjugation as “clumb” for SE “climbed”.

#### **9. Subject-Verb Agreement**

The 3rd subject does not have the verbal -s or subject-verb agreement in main verbs of sentences following SE such as “He don’t eat it”. The chosen word “is” uses instead of “am” and “are” in sentences of present tense and “was” is chosen instead of “were” in any sentences of past tense.

#### **10. Negation Forms**

“Ain’t” is used instead of “is/am/are not”, “has/ have not”, and “did not”, and “won’t” for “wasn’t” and “weren’t”. Additionally, there are Multiple Negations and Negative Inversion. Multiple Negations are the combination of 2 negation markers used together, such as “She didn’t

do nothing” and Negative Inversion is the pattern of inversion of the negative auxiliary and indefinite subject such as “Don’t nobody loves him” for “Nobody loves him” in SE. The last is the use of “ain’t but” and “don’t but” that means “only” in SE, for example, “She ain’t but sixteen years old” but SE uses “She’s only sixteen years old”.

#### 11. Nominals

Firstly, the possessive -s is deleted in noun phrases such as “Lilly\_house” for “Lilly’s house” in SE. The second is the contraction -s of plurals, for example, “She picked many pen\_.” for “She picked many pens” in SE. Redundant marking was found in the form of Irregular Plurals such as two firemens and childrens. There is also the reduction of “em” and “Y’all” and “youse” from plural noun forms or Second-Person Plural Formation. Furthermore, many possessive pronouns in AAVE differentiates from SE such as “They” are used instead of “Their” and “mines” instead of “mine”.

#### 12. Question formation

AAVE forms a question without subject-verb inversion such as “What I shouldn’t pick?” for “What shouldn’t I pick?” in SE.

### ***The Grammatical framework of Rickford (1999)***

The framework proposed by Rickford (1999) was employed to corroborate and reinforce the theory put forth by Wolfram (2004) in the following manner:

#### Verbal markers of tense

##### 1. The use of double modals

In this variety, they can use double modals in the sentences such as “may can”, “might can”, and “might could”, for SE “might be able to”. Additionally, there is “must don’t” in AAVE for SE “must not”.

##### 2. “Don’t” and “have” are not conjugated

“Don’t” is used instead of “Doesn’t”, for example, they use “He don’t like” in AAVE for SE “He doesn’t like” and “have” is used instead of “has”.

3. Past tense forms (V.-ed) used as past participle (V.-en) or past participle (V.-en) used as past tense forms (V.-ed). For example, the perfect tense of SE “They have eaten” for AAVE will use “They have ate” and this grammar is able to use vice versa.

##### 4. Verb stem can be used instead of Past tense forms (V.-ed)

The verb stem can be used in the past meaning in AAVE such as “She walk in here the day before.” for SE “She walked in here the day before”.

##### 5. Nominals

###### a) The use of “and em” or “nem”

It will be used after someone’s name to emphasize associative plurals such as “Sindy an’ em” or “Sindy nem” for “Sindy and her friends”.

###### b) Appositive pronouns

For example, “That librarian, he stop walking”.

##### 6. Questions Formation

The sentence deletes “if” and “whether” in embedded questions and uses the auxiliary verb inversion instead, for example, AAVE uses “My mom asked her would she like to be here” instead of “My mom asked her if she would like to be here” in SE.

### **Popular music**

Popular music is any type of music such as pop, indie, R&B that has many fans, and sells the most downloads. The point of popular music’s production gives the audiences positive feelings such as enjoyment, excitement, and delight (Wall, 2013). In the past, there was an advertisement for promoting popular music via printing media such as newspapers, posters, and handbills. When popular music was in the technology advancements period, popular music became an important

part of broadcast advertising such as radio, television, cinema (Shuker, 2017). According to Wall (2013), popular music will help the audience experience more feelings and moods; therefore, it is famously used as soundtracks for product advertisements (Shuker, 2017).

### Why is Justin Bieber's song?

The selection of Justin Bieber's songs as a sampling source for studying the AAVE grammatical features is based on the following reasons.

Firstly, Justin Bieber, a famous Canadian singer and songwriter, is a highly successful and influential artist, especially among the younger generation. He released his debut album in November 2009, and the number of sales of this album is more than 137,000 copies within a week (Biography.com Editors, 2022). His songs have gained immense popularity worldwide. He released the next full-length album "My World 2.0" in 2010, which debuted at number one on the Billboard album chart. The title track of this album is "Baby", featuring a great rapper "Ludacris", which reached the top 3 of Billboard's singles chart and became the first music video that amassed more than 500 million views on YouTube. In 2012, Justin released the album "Believe" which sold more than 374,000 copies in the first week of being on sale. He made a comeback in 2015 with the album "Purpose", which became his fifth million-selling album. Next, the album "Changes" was released in February 2020, making Justin the youngest artist to have seven albums reaching the top spot on the Billboard Hot 200 at the age of 25 years old (Biography.com Editors, 2022). By analyzing the lyrics of his songs, we can explore how AAVE grammatical features are integrated into mainstream popular music, and how they may influence the English standard used in contemporary music.

Furthermore, Justin Bieber's songs present a unique opportunity to examine the interaction between language and culture in a popular music context. Justin Bieber collaborate with many African American singers or rappers; for example, with *Ludacris* in two songs "Baby" and "All around the World" (Biography.com Editors, 2022). His music reflects the cultural and linguistic expressions of a particular demographic, and analyzing the AAVE features in his lyrics allows us to investigate the cultural influences and expressions within African American communities.

By studying the AAVE grammatical features in Justin Bieber's songs, the results will provide insights into the dynamics of language variation and the role of popular music in shaping linguistic norms.

### Related Studies

Firstly, Magnusson (2008) examined AAVE in white and black rapper lyrics. The purpose of the research investigates the usage of grammatical, phonological, and lexical features of AAVE in white and black rapper lyrics and provides the characteristics of AAVE in rap music. The hypothesis is that white and black rappers use different languages. The researcher selected 16 lyrics of four famous male rappers who have the same race including two black and two white, Snoop Dogg, Kanye West, The Beastie Boys, and Eminem. Additionally, these randomly-picked rappers were successful contemporaries. The results present the hypothesis that white and black rappers use different languages is true. Therefore, AAVE features in black and white lyrics were found to be similar and different. Furthermore, Multiple Negation feature was found in all of the lyrics. Magnusson also discovered that black lyrics mostly used the feature Zero Copula, Ain't, and Subject-Verb Non-Agreement the same as in white lyrics, disregarding the Zero Copula. As white rappers are relevant to the same community and black rappers' culture, they are influenced by using AAVE features in their lyrics. Therefore, it implicitly caused cultural assimilation. The strength of this research lies in its ability to provide a detailed comparison of the grammatical features between the languages used by black and white rappers. However, the methodology

employed in this study lacks clarity regarding the specific criteria or limitations utilized for the selection of these particular rappers.

Secondly, Rajič (2018) aims to study AAVE in contemporary songs. The researcher devoted a linguistic study of AAVE features found in song lyrics of a hip-hop, R&B, and pop performer, Beyoncé, more specifically, with her latest solo album *Lemonade*. The research finding shows that most grammatical features discovered are Zero Copula, Unstressed *been*, Future markers *will*, *gon(na)*, and *I'ma*, Verbal *-s*, Leveling to *is* and *was*, and Negation *ain't*. Next, for an example of lexical features, the word “bitch” appeared in the song lyrics 8 times and it is used to address women as well as men. Additionally, it is used in a positive, negative, or generic manner depending on the context. This study encompasses both strengths and limitations. On one hand, it not only identifies the grammatical features of AAVE but also explores the representation of African American cultural and social aspects (lexical features) in Beyoncé's songs from her latest album. However, the study does not delve into the phonological and morphological aspects of AAVE.

Thirdly, Vříčanová (2020) studies the features of AAVE in present-day American music. This research aims to examine features of AAVE in contemporary American hip-hop music and the occurrence frequency of those features. The researcher selected 12 hip-hop songs by four contemporary artists, namely Snoop Dogg, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar and A\$AP Rocky. The songs were chosen randomly from various albums released between the years 2004-2019. This research focus investigates the lexical, grammatical and phonological features. The result presented that AAVE speakers have their grammatical features. The AAVE features found were Zero Copula, Invariant “be”, Verbal Markers, Preverbal Markers, Omission of the third person singular present tense *-s*, Negation, Tense Marking, and Possession Marking. However, some results showed that the usage of AAVE grammar was inconsistent. Moreover, the result showed that African American artists also used grammar of SAE in their lyrics. It is mainly because of the rhythmical purpose of the songs. This research exhibits two main aspects: theory and analysis. By presenting the research concept and findings in a step-by-step manner, readers can easily comprehend the content. However, there are certain limitations to consider. Firstly, the study solely focuses on American music, specifically hip-hop songs performed by four artists. Furthermore, the analysis primarily concentrates on three specific areas: lexicon, grammatical features, and phonological patterns, while other linguistic fields are not included in this research.

Moreover, the study of the syntactic characteristics of AAVE in the movie “FENCES” was done by Pongkeaw (2017). The objectives are to find AAVE features and to compare syntactic characteristics of AAVE and SE. His research is based on the theories of Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002). It showed various Negative Forms of AAVE found most in Troy Maxson the protagonist's utterances, and composed of the use of *ain't*, Double Negation, Negative inversion. The next is Omission of Copula and Auxiliary that appeared when the character recognizes events from his past, Completive “done”, Subject-Verb Agreement, Habitual “be”. Question Formation was found only once. The result implies a low social class of the identity of this language variation to which society gave an inferior image because Troy Maxson is a pessimistic character and has low socioeconomic class. The character explains his background through the AAVE language and is able to imply uncommonly the notion of AAVE. This research demonstrates its strength in the comparison drawn between AAVE and SE, facilitating readers' comprehension of the differences between these language varieties. However, this analysis does not delve into other linguistic domains such as phonology, morphology, semantics, or lexicon.

## Research Methodology

### Research design

This research aimed to investigate the grammatical features of AAVE. The objectives of this research are to identify and analyze the predominant grammatical features of AAVE employed



by Justin Bieber in his songs from 2009 to 2021 and to examine and describe the specific syntactic features of AAVE found in Justin Bieber songs. Therefore, the quantitative data were adopted.

The context of this study was 64 Justin Bieber songs from the category “Digital Song Sales” on the Billboard chart in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, and 2021. This category was chosen because it represents the popularity and commercial success of songs based on digital sales. This research investigates the grammatical features of AAVE that were found only in the lyrics of Justin Bieber and the lyrics which they sing together. However, if there are duplicate words in a hook that replays one more time, the researchers count the word just once in each new situation.

## Data sources

The data was collected from the lyrics of Justin Bieber’s songs in the category “Digital Song Sales” on the Billboard chart. The lyrics used to categorize and analyze were from the official site (<https://genius.com/artists/Justin-bieber>). There are 64 songs as follows:

There are 7 songs in 2009

- |                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1. One Time             | 2. First Dance   |
| 3. One Less Lonely Girl | 4. Bigger        |
| 5. Down To Earth        | 6. Favorite Girl |
| 7. Love Me              |                  |

There are 7 songs in 2010

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Baby              | 2. Somebody to Love |
| 3. Never Say Never   | 4. Never Let You Go |
| 5. Eenie Meenie      | 6. U Smile          |
| 7. That Should Be Me |                     |

There are 6 songs in 2011

- |  |                |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Mistletoe   | 2. Pray        |
| 3. Born to be Somebody                                     | 4. Drummer Boy |
| 5. The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire) |                |
| 6. All I Want for Christmas Is You (SuperFestive!)         |                |

There are 7 songs in 2012

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. As Long as You Love Me                | 2. Beauty and a Beat |
| 3. Boyfriend                             | 4. Die in Your Arms  |
| 5. All around the World                  | 6. Right Here        |
| 7. Turn to You (Mother's Day Dedication) |                      |

There are 14 songs in 2013

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Heartbreaker                      | 2. Nothing like Us  |
| 3. Boyfriend (Acoustic)              | 4. All That Matters |
| 5. As Long as You Love Me (Acoustic) |                     |
| 6. Hold Tight                        |                     |
| 7. Wait for a Minute                 | 8. Recovery         |
| 9. Bad Day                           | 10. All Bad         |
| 11. PYD                              | 12. Roller Coaster  |
| 13. Change Me                        | 14. Confident       |

There are 8 songs in 2015

- |                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Love Yourself | 2. Where Are U Now   |
| 3. Sorry         | 4. What Do You Mean? |
| 5. I'll Show You | 6. The Feeling       |
| 7. Mark My Words | 8. Purpose           |

There is only one song in 2017 which is “Friends” and two songs in 2019 which are “10,000 Hours” and “I Don't Care”

Next, there are 7 songs in 2020

- |                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| 1. Intentions   | 2. Holy    |
| 3. Lonely       | 4. Yummy   |
| 5. Stuck With U | 6. Monster |
| 7. Forever      |            |

And in 2021, there are 5 songs that reached the Billboard chart

- |            |            |
|------------|------------|
| 1. Stay    | 2. Peaches |
| 3. Ghost   | 4. Anyone  |
| 5. Hold On |            |

## Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researchers will analyze and identify the grammatical features of AAVE present in Justin Bieber's lyrics in the category “Digital Song Sales” on the Billboard char. Each identified instance of AAVE grammatical variation, based on the theoretical frameworks of Wolfram (2004) and Rickford (1999), will be categorized and recorded.

The researchers will utilize the analytical table below to record the data of syntactic differences. The theory of Rickford (1999) is not appeared in the table, but the grammatical theory will support the use of theory of Wolfram (2004) in analysis. This table was adapted from the research of Pongkeaw (2017) including categories such as copula absence, invariant “be,” completive “done,” sequential “be done,” remote “been,” simple past “had + verb,” specialized auxiliaries, irregular verbs, subject-verb agreement, negation forms, nominals, and question formation.

Once the categorization is complete, the researchers will count the number of instances for each grammatical feature category. This data will be organized and presented in a table, named “Analyzing Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE,” comparing the frequency of AAVE grammatical features in each year's songs that achieved top positions on the Billboard charts.

Copula Absence = CA	Invariant “be” = IB
Completive “done” = CD	Sequential “be done” = BD
Remote “been” = RB	Simple Past “had + verb” = SP
Specialized Auxiliaries = SA	Irregular Verbs = IV
Subject-Verb Agreement = SV	Negation Forms = NF
Nominals = N	Question Formation = QF

**Table 1**

*Analyzing Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE*

Songs	Data	Syntactic Characteristics											
		C	I	C	B	R	S	S	I	S	N	N	Q
		A	B	D	D	B	P	A	V	V	F		F

The researchers compiled and organized the data on grammatical features of AAVE. This information was then juxtaposed with the grammatical structure of SAE. Ultimately, the researcher arrived at several conclusions regarding the syntactic variations present in Justin Bieber's songs, highlighting the disparities between AAVE and SAE. These findings were subsequently explored in detail, emphasizing the contrasting manner in which AAVE deviates from the norms of SAE.

## Results and Discussion

### The results of the number of grammatical feature usage of AAVE

Vocabulary levels and lexical coverage were first analyzed to explore the vocabulary use. The results are in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*The result of a number of Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE*

Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE	Number of Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE									
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020	2021
1. Copula Absence	1	1	-	8	11	1	-	1	5	6
2. Invariant “be”	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
3. Completive “done”	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Sequential “be done”	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Remote “been”	-	-	-	1	2	-	1	-	-	-
6. Simple Past “had+verb”	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Specialized Auxiliaries	3	4	2	4	23	3	-	1	1	2
8. Irregular Verbs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. Subject-Verb Agreement	1	-	2	-	6	1	-	-	1	-
10. Negation Forms	4	8	3	14	21	1	-	4	12	12
11. Nominals	7	-	1	2	9	1	-	1	-	-
12. Question Formation	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	19	15	8	29	73	7	1	7	19	20

**Table 3**

*Markers of Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE*

Syntactic Characteristics of AAVE	Description	Total
1. Copula Absence	Copula “is” and “are” is often dropped. It is omitted only in the states and actions in present tense.	34
2. Invariant “be”	Ongoing or general states are marked by uninflected “be”	3
3. Completive “done”	The form of have (already)+ past participle	0
4. Sequential “be done”	The form of “be done”	0
5. Remote “been”	Incorrect usage of “been”	4
6. Simple Past “had+verb”	The form of had + past participle	0
7. Specialized Auxiliaries	The use of specialized auxiliaries	43
8. Irregular Verbs	The use of irregular verbs	0
9. Subject-Verb Agreement	Incorrect usage verb form in subject-auxiliary agreement	11
10. Negation Forms	The use of “ain’t” Multiple negation Inversion negation	79
11. Nominals	Appositive pronouns Possessive pronouns Second-person plural formation	21
12. Question Formation	Wh-questions + subject-auxiliary inversion	3

In the data description provided in Tables 2 and 3, the selected data from Justin Bieber's 64 songs is tabulated. Upon analyzing the data, several findings regarding the syntactic characteristics of AAVE in his songs were observed. The most frequent indicator was the use of negation forms, such as “ain’t,” multiple negation, and inversion negation, which appeared 79 times throughout the songs. Specialized auxiliaries were the second most prominent indicator, occurring

43 times in the collected data. The absence of the copula was the third indicator, appearing 34 times in the lyrics. Additionally, there were 21 instances of nominals, including appositive pronouns, possessive pronouns, and second-person plural formation. Subject-verb agreement was observed 11 times, while the remote use of "been" appeared four times. Furthermore, both question formation and the invariant "be" were found three times each in the grammatical features of AAVE. However, the completive "done," sequential "be done," simple past "had+verb," and irregular verbs were not found among the 64 songs by Justin Bieber.

### The Dissimilarity of syntactic characteristics of AAVE in Justin Bieber's songs from Standard American English (SAE)

The tabulated data presented in Table 3 was analyzed to examine the eight syntactic characteristics of AAVE identified in the songs performed by Justin Bieber. The analysis yielded result examples, ranked in descending order of frequency: Negation Forms, Specialized Auxiliaries, Copula Absence, Nominals, Subject-Verb Agreement, Remote "been", Invariant "be", and Question Formation. The following section showcases the examples for each characteristic accordingly.

#### Negation Forms

Table 4

##### Examples of Negation Forms

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song (year)
1	Negation Forms			
	1. The use of <i>ain't</i>	1.1 And I just can't believe we <i>ain't</i> together.	And I just can't believe we aren't together	Baby (2010)
		1.2 And girl, you <i>ain't</i> my runner-up.	And girl, you aren't my runner-up.	Favorite Girl (2009)
	2. Multiple Negations	2.1 The D.J.'s playing my favorite song, <i>ain't</i> no chaperones.	The D.J.'s playing my favorite song, there are no chaperones.	First Dance (2009)
		2.2 You <i>ain't</i> seen <i>nothing</i> yet.	You haven't seen anything yet.	U Smile (2010)
	3. Inversion Negations	3.1 <i>Can't nobody</i> throw shade on your name in these streets.	Nobody can throw shade on your name in these streets.	Intentions (2020)

The most prevalent syntactic variation in AAVE was identified as negation forms, which can be attributed to the influence of popular music, particularly a specific genre known for evoking heightened emotional experiences (Wall, 2013). Notably, a majority of the songs examined belonged to the love song repertoire performed by Justin Bieber directed towards an individual he harbors romantic feelings for, aiming to reciprocate his affection. However, his sentiments appear to be disregarded by the recipient. This distinctive characteristic tends to be more frequently employed by speakers of AAVE in comparison to most white Americans (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

## Specialized Auxiliaries

**Table 5**

### Examples of Specialized Auxiliaries

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song (year)
2	Specialized Auxiliaries			
	1. The use of <i>tryna</i>	1.1 Now if you're <i>tryna</i> break my heart. 1.2 <i>Tryna</i> catch the beat, make up your heart.	Now if you're trying to break my heart. Trying to catch the beat, make up your heart.	That Should Be Me (2010) Confident (2013)
	2. The use of <i>I'ma</i> or <i>I'mma</i>	2.1 <i>I'ma needa</i> get straight to it. 2.2 But <i>I'ma</i> be under the mistletoe. 2.3 Saying nothing gets you nowhere fast, <i>I'mma</i> hold it back inside	I'm going to need to get straight to it. But I'm going to be under the mistletoe. Saying nothing gets you nowhere fast, I'm going to hold it back inside	Drummer Boy (2009) Mistletoe (2011) Recovery (2013)
	3. The use of <i>gon'</i>	3.1 So we <i>gon'</i> keep, keep climbing to the mountain	So we 're going to keep, keep climbing to the mountain	One Time (2009)

In this study, the second syntactic characteristic involves the utilization of specialized auxiliaries, such as "tryna," "I'ma" or "I'mma" and "gon." According to Green (2002), a particular phonetic feature of AAVE involves the substitution of the /ŋ/ sound with the /n/ sound in words ending in the suffix "-ing," although this occurs exclusively in polysyllabic words. Consequently, in songs, some AAVE speakers transform "trying" into "tryna," and "going to" into "gon." Green further emphasizes the distinct behavior of auxiliary verbs within AAVE within specific linguistic contexts. Specifically, when expressing future tense in the first person singular (I), AAVE employs the construction "I'ma" or "I'mma."

## Copula Absence

**Table 6**

### Examples of Copula Absence

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song(year)
3	Copula Absence			
	1. The absence of "is"	1.1 That's right, I think she $\emptyset$ foreign 1.2 Nasty but she $\emptyset$ fancy	That's right, I think she is foreign She is nasty but she is fancy	Confident (2013) Confident (2013)
	2. The absence of "are"	2.1 'Cause we $\emptyset$ both so distant now 2.2 What $\emptyset$ you doing to me, you're taking him where we use to go? 2.3 We $\emptyset$ at a party	'Cause we are both so distant now What are you doing to me, you're taking him where we use to go? We are at a party	Down to Earth (2009) That Should Be Me (2010) I Don't Care (2019)

Copula absence or the deletion of be was found 34 times. The technical term for the auxiliary verb is copula, which presents in the form of be, been, being, am, are, is, and were (Green,

2002). According to Wolfram (2004), the auxiliary “is” and “are” in the position of copula. This feature is often found in urban AAVE.

## Nominals

**Table 7**

### Examples of Nominals

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song (year)
4	Nominals			
	1. The absence of the possessive -s	1.1 And the sound of <i>children laughter</i> fills the air	And the sound of children's laughter fills the air	All I Want for Christmas Is You (SuperFestive!) (2011)
	2. The reduction of “em”	2.1 let's write a fairytale and show 'em how we feel 2.2 Can you give 'em one today?	let's write a fairytale and show them how we feel Can you give them one today?	Favorite Girl (2009) Pray (2011)
	3. Plural noun forms	3.1 How many I told <i>you's</i>	How many (times) have I told you?	One Less Lonely Girl (2012)
	4. The use of “possessive pronouns”	4.1 <i>Them lips</i> won't let me go 4.2 ... and how they like to run <i>they mouths</i>	Their lips won't let me go ... and how they like to run their mouths	Hold Tight (2013) All Bad (2013)

Nominals can be found in several songs. The songwriter employs the absence of possessive “-s,” contractions of plurals using “-s,” and reductions of plural noun forms like “em,” “Y'all,” and “youse” for Second-Person Plural Formation. In the song titled “One Less Lonely Girl (2012),” the sentence “How many I told you's” features the variant “You's,” which represents Second-Person Plural Formation. This variant is derived from expressions like “youse,” “you guys,” or “youns.” Moreover, AAVE showcases distinct usage of possessive pronouns compared to SE, with instances like “them” or “they” replacing “their” in the songs (Wolfram, 2004).

## Subject-Verb Agreement

**Table 8**

### Examples of Subject-Verb Agreement

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song (year)
5	Subject-Verb Agreement			
	1. The chosen word “is”	1.1 There's so many thoughts. 1.2 I know <i>there's</i> good times beyond that pain	There're so many thoughts. I know there're good times beyond that pain	First Dance (2009) Pray (2011)
	2. The 3rd subject does not have the verbal -s	2.1 And <i>it don't</i> make no sense, to be that bad 2.2 <i>She like</i> planes, trains, chains with icicles	And it doesn't make no sense, to be that bad She likes planes, trains, chains with icicles	PYD (2013) Confident (2013)

According to the theory of SAE, it is essential that the verb must agree with the subject. However, in AAVE, the verb form remains invariant for both singular and plural subjects. For instance, expressions like "I was," "she was," "we was," "you was," and "they was" are commonly used (Trudgill & Hannah, 2017). Moreover, the 3rd subject does not have the verbal -s or subject-verb agreement in main verbs of sentences following SAE (Wolfram, 2004).

### ***Remote "been"***

**Table 9**

*Examples of the Remote "been"*

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song (year)
6	Remote "been" The use of "been"	1.1 She <i>been</i> raised right, being patient 1.2 Since you <i>been</i> away  1.3 You hit it right on the head, only <i>been</i> missing my lover 1.4 Know you're wonderin' why I <i>been</i> callin'	She has been raised right, being patient Since you have been away  You hit it right on the head, I have only been missing my lover Know you're wonderin' why I have been callin'	Right Here (2012) Heartbreaker (2013)  All That Matters (2013) Friends (2017)

Remote "been" refers to the utilization of "been" in place of the present perfect tense form. This linguistic feature serves to convey the idea of a distant past that continues to have an ongoing impact. In this study, this syntactic variation is used in four different songs with three different subjects: she, you, and I.

### ***Question Formation***

**Table 10**

*Examples of the Question Formation*

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song(year)
7	Question Formation A question without subject-verb inversion	1.1 How many I told you's?  1.2 How many tears you let hit the floor?  1.3 How many bags you packed, just to take them back?	How many (times) have I told you? How many tears have you let hit the floor?  How many bags have you packed, just to take them back?	One Less Lonely Girl (2009) One Less Lonely Girl (2009)  One Less Lonely Girl (2009)

AAVE forms a question without subject-verb inversion such as "What I shouldn't pick?" for "What shouldn't I pick?" in SAE. Furthermore, it tends to appear mainly with wh-questions and simple sentences. (Green, 2002).

***Invariant "be"*****Table 11***Examples of the Invariant "be"*

No	Features	AAVE	SAE	Song(year)
8	Invariant "be"			
	It is a contraction of "will" or "would" and uses only the verb "to be."	1.1 I <i>be trying</i> a chill	I will be trying a chill	Never Say Never (2010)
		1.2 They <i>be trying</i> to sour the thrill	They will be trying to sour the thrill	Never Say Never (2010)
		1.3 The wrong thing, they <i>be worrying</i> about	The wrong thing, they will be worrying about	All Bad (2013)

Invariant be is also known as "habitual be" or "non-finite be". There are three items from two different songs used this type of grammatical feature in the study.

**Conclusions**

From the results of this research, the numbers of AAVE features were mostly found in 2013. The features which were found in this research are Copula Absence, Invariant "be", Remote "been", Specialized Auxiliaries, Subject-Verb Agreement, Nominals, Negation Forms, and Question Formation.

Additionally, there are four features that can be subdivided including Specialized Auxiliaries, Nominals, Negation Forms, and Question Formation. Firstly, Specialized Auxiliaries was divided into "finna", "come", "tryna", and "gon." However, the researchers found "tryna" and "gon" in the lyrics. Secondly, Nominals was divided into the possessive -s, the contraction -s of plurals, Redundant marking, the reduction of 'em', Second-Person Plural Formation, possessive pronouns of AAVE, the use of "and em" or "nem", and Appositive pronouns. Nevertheless, this research found five Nominals consisting of Appositive pronouns, Second-Person Plural Formation, possessive pronouns of AAVE, the use of "and em" and possessive -s. Next, Negation Forms were divided into "Ain't", Multiple Negations, and Negative Inversion. As the result, the researchers found "Ain't", Multiple Negations, and Negative Inversion. Lastly, Question Formation was divided into the forming question without subject-verb inversion and the deleted "if" and "Whether" in embedded questions and using the auxiliary verb inversion instead. From the investigation, the researchers only found the forming question without subject-verb inversion.

The four specific features examined by the researchers, namely the Completive "done," the Sequential "be done," the Simple Past "had+verb," and the feature of "Irregular Verb," were not found in the analyzed songs. Wolfram's explanation in "The Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English" (2004) suggests that while the Completive "done" can be considered a part of urban AAVE, it is more commonly used in rural versions and even occurs in Caribbean creoles. Additionally, the Sequential "be done" is not frequently used in AAVE, as observed among AAVE speakers. Moreover, the occurrence of the "had+verb" feature decreases with the age of AAVE speakers. Lastly, finding the feature of "Irregular Verb" in its original form, except in rural Southern varieties, proves to be challenging. These factors likely contribute to the disappearance of this feature in recent years.

In the previous related research, AAVE was often used in rap songs, and hip-hop music (Vričanová, 2020) or black people, who were stereotyped. They also used AAVE variety to convey the implication of low status of African American protagonist who suffered from prejudices and unfair life (Pongkeaw, 2017). Additionally, one of the related studies, Magnusson (2008), found



that the lyrics of the black rappers have more AAVE features usage than in the lyrics of the white rappers. The use of non-native speakers of AAVE is due to the fact that white people are influenced by their entry into the rap industry because most of the language in rap music they encounter is AAVE (Alim, 2006).

This research demonstrates that AAVE is not only utilized in the rap industry but has also become prevalent in pop music. AAVE, previously referred to as Vernacular Black English, has often been considered inferior to SE due to its higher error rate (Green, 2002). The objective of this study was to examine the presence of AAVE characteristics in popular songs and investigate its usage in popular music. The research findings revealed numerous grammatical features associated with AAVE in the lyrics of Justin Bieber. These results also indicated that AAVE, which has traditionally been stigmatized in society, is commonly employed in music media, endorsed by famous singers, and utilized more extensively than in previous limited contexts. These patterns persisted until the year 2021. This study highlights the acceptance of AAVE within the media and how this linguistic variety is presented in songs. In the future, AAVE is likely to be perceived as the norm in popular music, despite a recent decrease in AAVE characteristics over the past five years. This reduction can be attributed to a new trend in collaboration among singers, where rap lyrics from other artists are incorporated into almost every song, as observed in the present investigation. Moreover, a prominent linguistic feature in AAVE identified in this research is the use of negation forms, such as "ain't" and double negation. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted by Magnusson (2008), Pongkeaw (2017), and Rajič (2018). Importantly, these markers raise awareness about the presence of AAVE within songs.

### Recommendations for future research

Based on the results and conclusion of this research, the following recommendations are made for future research. First, future research can explore a wider range of music genres beyond hip-hop to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how AAVE is represented linguistically in different musical styles. Second, to gain further insights, future research can consider incorporating a comparative analysis that examines AAVE features in the songs of both AAVE and non-AAVE native artists, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic landscape. Moreover, while the current study focused on grammatical features, future research can delve into other linguistic domains such as lexicon, phonological patterns, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics to provide a more holistic analysis of AAVE in the context of music.

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