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African American English
a linguistic introduction

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1 Lexicons and meaning

Focal point Certain words and phrases have a specialized or unique meaning in AAE: *saditty, kitchen, pot liquor, get my praise on*. Some of these words and phrases are used by African Americans from a range of age groups, while others are common to speakers of a particular age group. One way of adding phrases to the AAE lexicon is by the productive process in which a word of the appropriate grammatical class such as noun or verb is inserted into a template.

That evening the women brought bowls of pot liquor from black-eyed peas, from mustards, from cabbage, from kale, from collards, from turnips, from beets, from green beans. Even the juice from a boiling hog jowl.

[Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*]

1.1 Introduction

A study of the lexicon and semantics of AAE should reveal information about the type of meaning that is associated with lexical items (words and phrases) in the language system, and it should also reveal information about unique meaning in the variety. The lexicon is the repository for words and phrases in a language system, and semantics refers to the ways in which sounds and meanings are related. The lexicon can be described as an abstract dictionary in which meanings and other information such as pronunciations of words can be found. When speakers know a language system, they have access to the lexicon of that system, so speakers who know AAE know the unique meanings of elements in the lexicon of that system.

The claim that the lexicon of AAE includes items that are unique to it will be explored in this chapter. It is often the case that AAE is characterized in informal terms, at least in part, by the vocabulary that is used by some African American adolescents, teenagers and young adults and that is generally not accepted in the marketplace in mainstream America.[1] This is an important part of the characterization of AAE, but by no means is it the only part. It is impossible to give an accurate description of AAE by focusing only on its unique words, phrases and meanings, but this is a good place to start because

it is often easy to identify some of the vocabulary items that are used differently by African Americans.

In the wake of controversy about and interest in AAE and questions about its validity, it is beneficial to engage in a discussion about the content and structure of the lexicon in AAE. The discussions about content naturally focus on what is in an African American lexicon, and the structural description provides information about unique lexical entries and the way they may be stored in the lexicon. In addition, the description should be able to make precise statements about differences between the use of words and phrases in the African American lexicon and that of other varieties. Finally, the description should help us recognize some of the possible sources of misunderstanding that can result when speakers and listeners are not familiar with meanings associated with elements from the African American lexicon. The entries in this lexicon are also English words that occur in other varieties of American English, but they have different meanings and may be used in different linguistic environments. This unique vocabulary brings groups of people together, while it serves as a stratification device between other groups. To be sure, "One of the many fascinating features of black vocabulary is how sharply it can divide blacks and whites, and how solidly it can connect blacks from different social classes" (Rickford and Rickford 2000, p. 93). Later in this chapter, I will present an example from a large lecture class which illustrates how the black vocabulary can divide blacks and whites.

What I have found is that this unique vocabulary can be partitioned into two broad categories: words and phrases used by members of all age groups and those more likely to be identified with members of a certain age group. Class is not a major factor in categorizing the items; however, some of the words and phrases that are currently used by adolescents and young adults do vary from geographical region to region.

Characterizing the lexicon in AAE presents an interesting problem. African Americans from different regions, age groups, educational status and socioeconomic classes will know many of the words and phrases that are discussed in this chapter but may not identify themselves or be identified as AAE speakers. While they may know these unique words and phrases, they may not be as familiar with the syntactic, semantic and phonological properties of AAE. As a result, I will refer to the African American lexicon without claiming that African Americans who use words and phrases from this lexicon are speakers who necessarily use features from the sentence structure and sound systems of AAE. In effect simply using or knowing words from this lexicon does not automatically make a person an AAE speaker, but AAE speakers will necessarily know words and phrases from the black lexicon.

Some studies have been conducted on the acquisition of lexical items by speakers of mainstream English; however, to my knowledge, there are no comparable studies on the acquisition of words and phrases by speakers of AAE.[2] The result is that we have no account of the age at which speakers acquire the unique words and phrases that cross generational boundaries. I am not suggesting that African American children across the United States acquire the meanings of these words and phrases at the same time, though research on this acquisition question would contribute to the work on the African American lexicon in general and AAE in particular.

1.2 Lexicons and AAE: a review of three types

A review of the research on the lexicon of AAE reveals that it has been presented in at least three ways: (1) as a list of lexical items that occur in the variety, (2) as a list of lexical items that are subdivided into thematic topics and (3) as a repository of words, distinct from slang, that are part of the African American community. These different approaches highlight unique lexical items and the way they are used by a group of people, or they focus on the relation between the lexical items and some part of community life.

Major (1994) and Smitherman (1994) represent the first type of lexicon, and the titles of their works serve as introductions. Major compiles words and phrases under the heading of *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*, and Smitherman uses *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. Both titles suggest that the words and phrases that will be explicated in the books span a considerable time period and are used in secular and religious contexts. "From juba to jive" encompasses the time period from as early as the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. *Juba* refers to a dance performed by a group of slaves (1790s–1900), and *jive*, as it is still used today, refers to cool talk or talk used to put someone on. "From the hood to the amen corner" covers words and phrases that are used in the secular world as well as those used in religious contexts, and includes words and phrases that may be used in both environments. Both approaches show quite convincingly that what is referred to as black talk surpasses the boundaries of the most current lexical usage by teens.

Major classifies all of the words and phrases he lists as slang, noting that "black slang is an American language with distant roots in the ancient coastal tribes of central west Africa, as well as, indirectly, in Anglo-Irish culture and elsewhere" (pp. xxxiii–xxxiv). Anticipating that calling this type of talk slang might suggest that it should not be taken seriously as a means of communication, Major sets out "to help bring to the language we call slang a better name, a better reputation; and also to suggest, by the example of this dictionary, how intrinsic it is to the quest of human culture to express and to renew itself" (p. xxvii). The work invites the reader to consider the semantics and vocabulary of AAE as a component of the AAE grammar that is deeply rooted in African tradition, but that is also very much a part of American culture. He categorizes the vocabulary items into four groups: (1) Southern rural during slavery, (2) slang from 1900–1960 of sinner-man/black musician, (3) street culture, rap and hip-hop, (4) working class. The categorization of these items suggests that members of the AAE community who are from different backgrounds and age groups use Major's slang.

Smitherman (1994) makes a very clear statement about the relationship between participation in different parts of the African American culture and the use of "Black Talk." As she puts it,

> Basic in *Black Talk*, then, is the commonality that takes us across boundaries. Regardless of job or social position, most African Americans experience some degree of participation in the life of the COMMUNITY – ... This creates in-group crossover lingo that is understood and shared by various social groups within the race ...
>
> [p. 25].

Smitherman, like Major, emphasizes the unifying nature of "Black Talk," some aspects of which are shared by African Americans who are members of different social groups and networks.

Major (1994) and Smitherman (1994) converge on a number of issues and entries. Consider, for example, the words *ashy*, *kitchen* and *saditty*, which are used by African Americans from all age groups. These three words occur in Smitherman (1977, 1994) and two of them, *kitchen* and *saditty*, appear in Major (1994). In Smitherman (1977), *ashy* is defined as "the whitish coloration of black skin due to exposure to the Hawk (cold and wind)" (p. 67). *Kitchen* is defined as "the hair at the nape of the neck which is inclined to be very kinky" (p. 64), while *saditty* refers to "uppity-acting blacks who put on airs" (p. 68). Smitherman's (1994) update of the AAE lexicon records virtually the same meanings for these words, an indication that they are still used the way they were used when they first entered the lexicon. It should also be noted here that Smitherman (1994) is careful to label what she takes to be older terms, but *ashy*, *kitchen* and *saditty* do not bear that label, another indication that the forms are still used today. While slang is basically ephemeral, these terms have resisted change and remained in the black communities. It is understandable that *ashy* and *kitchen* have remained in black communities, as they refer to type of hair and hue of skin that are associated with blacks; however, it is not immediately clear why *saditty* has not been adopted by others.

The following is evidence that *ashy* is still used today: In June 2000, I ordered a book about natural healing and as a supplement and free gift, I received a pamphlet which explains treatment for conditions that may be specifically associated with dark skin. I randomly flipped to page 19 and found the bold title, "Get ASHY SKIN Glowing Again," with *ashy skin* in capital letters. The article begins as follows:

> It's enough to make you want to hide your gorgeous legs under pants: Your shins look as if you've just stepped off a dry, dusty road, not to mention your knees that look as if they're coated with chalk. But you can shed that ashy skin and get the glow back.
>
> THAT AWFUL ASH
>
> 'Ashy skin is really a slang term, not something I'd diagnose medically,' says Dr. Herriford. 'But it's a common concern among many of my African-American patients.' Actually, the gray, chalky film we call ash, which most commonly occurs on the arms and legs, can result from two different skin conditions . . .
>
> [Shannon Faelton, *Prevention Health Books*, 1999]

I do not know the editors of the section on ashy skin or Dr. Herriford, but I would venture as far as to say that they have had close experience with ash. Their description is vivid and on point and could certainly be used as a definition in a lexicon such as Major's or Smitherman's. The article goes on to describe the dry skin that can result from insufficient oil or accumulation of dead cells. We can infer a strong linguistic point that is made by the editors and physician: The word *ash/ashy* is specifically associated with African Americans and is not widely used outside that group. In addition, the physician labels the word slang, suggesting that, on the one hand, it is not used in the mainstream and that the word does not refer to a threatening skin condition. The article targets African American women (and other women of color) and addresses a

general problem that has been labeled by African Americans and that is referred to by speakers from all classes and a range of age groups.

I also found the word *kitchen* in print in a popular magazine. Further confirmation that *kitchen* is used today comes in the form of a segment on hair, "Our Crown," in the December 1999 issue of *Essence*, a magazine for women but with particular appeal to black women. In a reminiscent tone, the relevant line reads: "And girl, if your mama could catch up your kitchen in those tiny plaits, she could find herself braiding everybody's child" (p. 24).

Returning to the discussion of Major's lexicon, we find that the entries which are given below include the part of speech (e.g., n. for noun), time period during which the lexical item was recorded, definition and geographical locations where the words and phrases were most popular.[3]

kitchen n. (1940s) nappy hair around the nape of the neck, especially on women or girls. SU. [p. 271]

seddity n., adj. (1960s–1980s) bourgeois black person; snobbish and pretentious. SNU. [p. 391]

Major characterizes *kitchen* as being used mostly by speakers in the South and *seddity* as being used by African Americans in the South and North. The definitions in both Major (1994) and Smitherman (1994) are virtually the same. The difference is in the spelling; Smitherman spells *saddity* with an *a* in the first syllable, while Major spells it with an *e* in the first syllable. Such variations are a result of there not being spelling conventions in AAE, a system that has been used predominantly in oral contexts.

Works such as these are important in that they serve as sources for words and phrases that entered the African American lexicon during different periods and by different methods. They also provide information about words and phrases which are used by African Americans in different parts of the United States and who are of different age groups and social backgrounds. Taken together, these works are a window into a part of the history of the semantic and lexical component of AAE, providing information that helps to draw conclusions about the ways in which parts of the lexicon have changed and remained the same throughout the centuries. On history, Major says that

> Not only has there been, historically speaking, geographically determined diversity to African-American slang, but the Africans who made up the language out of Portuguese Pidgin, Bantu, and Swahili, primarily, created what was known early on as Plantation Creole. The persistence of Africanisms in the formation of black slang and African-American culture generally can be seen as a grand testimony to the strength of the human spirit and to the cultural strength of that polyglot group of Africans dumped, starting in 1619, on this continent to work the land . . . Black slang is an *American* language with distant roots in the ancient coastal tribes of central west Africa, as well as, indirectly, in Anglo-Irish culture and elsewhere.
>
> [xxxiii–xxxiv]

One of the differences between the two lexicons is in the time periods they cover. Major's dictionary covers a time period from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, while Smitherman's terms are argued to be "in current use by Blacks from all walks of

life" (p. 39). Perhaps this is why Major includes an entry for *Crow Jane* (1900s–1920s) a black or dark complexioned woman (p. 122), *anigh* (1630s–1890s) close or near and *pot liquor* (1860s–1940s) juice from greens (but not limited to juice from greens as noted in Morrison's use at the beginning of the chapter), and Smitherman does not.

The second type of lexicon, which subdivides lexical items into thematic topics, is exemplified by the work in Folb (1980). This work is not intended to speak in general about AAE, as the research is limited to data collected from black teenagers in south central Los Angeles. Folb's research leads her to conclude that the lexicon of black teenagers has a unifying effect, serving to link teens across geographic and socioeconomic boundaries. She notes:

> My involvement with teenagers who lived in the ghetto and on the Hill suggests that being black in white America is probably the basic connection among blacks across geographic, economic, and linguistic boundaries. There is a well-formed black vernacular lexicon which is known and used by middle-class and ghetto teenagers alike. However, the day-to-day life experiences of the affluent black and the ghetto black are not the same – and even the most politically active or culturally identified young black is not going to know those words and phrases that are 'ghetto-specific' unless he or she lives there.
>
> [p. 201]

The topics that are the major focus of Folb's ethnographic work are name terms in the black community, forms of manipulation, male and female interaction and the vocabulary of drugs. They are argued to reflect the activities in which teenagers are involved and the type of relations they have. The name terms range from those for close associations (e.g., *cuz, play sister)* to outsiders such as the police (e.g., *the man*). Words and phrases that are subsumed under forms of manipulation are related to territorial control and power, and it is under this heading that words used in gang territory and other spatial phenomena fall. For example, Folb includes "throw some blows" as a descriptive term for fight. Concepts of love and sex are included in the section on male and female interaction. This section, like the one for terms in the black community, includes names for males and females alike; however, they often make reference to physical attraction. Folb's study is limited to social use and social interaction, and the factors that are argued to affect the use of these lexical items are age, gender, peer associations, experiences, socioeconomic background and region.

The goal of the third type of lexicon is to distinguish lexical items that belong to the African American community from those that are more closely associated with a particular social domain. Dillard (1977) takes such a distinction to be important and criticizes other lexicons on the basis of not making it. According to him, "To differentiate between a Black lexicon and usage of terms in domains like pimping is perhaps the most important objective not achieved by Major and the others" (p. xiv). To the extent that Dillard's lexicon arranges lexical items into categories, it is similar to the kind of lexicon presented in Folb (1980). It differs from the others in its attempt to separate those items that are a part of the linguistic system of AAE from those that are considered slang. For him, an example of the former terminology would be concepts related to religion and church such as *funeralize*, which means to conduct funeral services.[4] Dillard

believes "a great deal of 'Black' slang to belong to the rackets (pimping, prostitution, narcotics hustling, general underworld activities) rather than to the Black community as such" (p. 110). In characterizing the systematic nature of the AAE lexicon, he notes that African American authors William Wells Brown and Charles W. Chesnutt give accurate representations of black vocabulary in their works.[5]

A number of other sources give information about lexical items that are argued to be part of the AAE lexicon, although they do not focus on terms used almost exclusively by African Americans. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*) and several volumes of the *Publication of the American Dialect Society* (*PADS*) identify lexical entries of words that were used by African Americans during certain time periods. The *DARE*, a publication of the American Dialect Society, includes in its volumes from A–O a survey of lexical items and phrases used in the various dialect areas in the United States. Some items in the *DARE* that are identified as being used or having been used by African Americans are *ashy*, *kitchen*, *get over*, *outside child* and *call and sponse* (i.e., *call and response*). *DARE* defines *ashy* as being used by Africans to refer to the whitish color of their skin resulting from dryness or exposure to the cold, and it also cites the explanation from Smitherman (1977). However, it also indicates that the word was used by whites to refer to "the greyish color of the Negro's skin when he is sick or frightened" (vol. I, p. 96). According to *DARE*, *get over* means to succeed, get by or achieve a goal by whatever means necessary and was used exclusively by African Americans in certain areas in the United States (vol. II, p. 665).[6] In addition, the *DARE* makes reference to call and response, a rhetorical strategy used in African American church services (overwhelmingly Baptist) in which the congregation responds to the preacher's call by uttering a short response. This strategy will be discussed in chapter 5, in the section on speech events and African American church services. The following entry is given under *call*: "In a song or rhyme: a solo line or stanza which is followed by a response or refrain – often used in the phrase call and sponse" (vol. I, p. 516). The *DARE* gives every indication that the call and response strategy was strictly tied to religious contexts; however, we know that it is also used in the secular world.

Each volume of the *PADS* is dedicated to some topic related to language use or dialectal patterns. These volumes are not as broad in scope as the *DARE*, but they also provide valuable information about the type of lexical items that were used by African Americans (and other groups) in certain parts of the United States. For instance, *PADS* no. 40 (Babcock 1963) considers lexical items in the works of Zora Neale Hurston that were used by African Americans in the South.[7] Such items are *color struck* or being conceited because of the color of one's skin or having an affinity for certain skin tones and *gospel bird* or chicken, so named because preachers were said to enjoy it as a meal. Other lexical items listed in *PADS* and specifically recorded as being associated with African Americans are *mind* (to mean attention, *He didn't pay me no mind*. 'He didn't pay me any attention,' [no. 6, Woodard 1946]) and *dicty*, *tief*, *ting an' ting* and *yard axe* (no. 14, Bradley 1950). The words from Number 14, as the pronunciations are represented in English orthography, are from Gullah, spoken in South Carolina. *Dicty* is synonymous with *saditty*, as it also means uppity. The verb *tief* means to steal, and the adjective *ting an' ting* means same or exactly alike, as in

Dem two chillun is ting an' ting (p. 67) 'Those children are exactly alike.' *Yard axe* is a noun that refers to a preacher of little ability. *Tote*, to carry, is also one of the words from Gullah that is listed in *PADS* no. 6. Turner (1949), in his study of the African element in Gullah records *tote* as originating from the Kikongo *tota*, which means 'to pick up.'[8]

The overlap in representation of lexical items and phrases and the convergence in meaning of these items in the three types of lexicons represented by Major (1994) and Smitherman (1994) (type 1), Folb (1980) (type 2), Dillard (1977) (type 3) and the *DARE* and *PADS* reinforce the claim that there are lexical items and phrases that are or were used almost exclusively by African Americans. These items, then, are part of the African American lexicon. But in addition to meaning, how much and what type of information should be included in the lexical entry? Should variables such as age, geographical region, socioeconomic class and thematic topic be included? Folb considers age to be an important factor – and naturally so given that her study centers around terms and inner city life – while Major includes as prominent information the time period in which the word or phrase was used in a certain geographical area. Although this information is not explicit in Smitherman's lexical entries, the thread that weaves together the entries in her lexicon is the unifying role of the vocabulary. So as the vocabulary items cross boundaries, variables such as age, class and region are not always paramount although Smitherman recognizes and elaborates on the role of rap and the hip-hop generation, specifically associated with a certain age group.

1.3 Structuring the lexicon

The picture of the African American lexicon that I will present is one that is consistent with the traditional view of lexical entries, one that involves identification of semantic and lexical properties of the linguistic system. By isolating semantic and lexical patterns and showing the environments in which lexical items occur, I will move toward presenting AAE as a system, giving a picture of the way its parts work. In response to the question raised at the end of the preceding section, I think that information indicating age, class and region is important, but it does not have to be redundantly stated for each lexical entry if it is established that the words and phrases cross age, class and regional boundaries. However, those lexical items that are restricted to a specific age group, class or region should be labeled as such.

Information about words and phrases in the AAE lexicon is stored in the brains or mental dictionaries of speakers and retrieved when necessary. African Americans will know some words and phrases that are represented in the African American lexicon, including their meanings and the environments (i.e., place in the sentence) in which they occur, but they will not necessarily know all of them. For example, I did not grow up hearing and using pot liquor, but many African Americans in my age group did.

Discussions about the structure of this mental dictionary of black vocabulary can lead to very complicated questions that would take us too far afield in this study, but it is worthwhile to raise certain issues. African Americans will know words and phrases in the African American lexicon, but they will also have access to the general

American English lexicon. In such cases, do speakers have two lexicons, one for African American-specific words and phrases and another for general American English, or do they have only one lexicon in which both groups of words and phrases are listed?[9] Whatever the structure, the African American and general American English lexicons vary in that there are lexical items that sound the same but have different meanings. For example, the word *kitchen* is used by African Americans in the same way it is used commonly by other speakers of American English, but it is also used uniquely by African Americans to refer to the hair at the nape of the neck. Other examples would be *mannish* and *womanish* which could be used to refer to characteristics of a man and characteristics of a woman, respectively, the general American English definitions. However, these words can also be used to refer to boys and girls, respectively, who are seen as behaving inappropriately for their young ages. These terms, in the sense of the African American lexicon, usually carry negative connotations in that they refer to a type of mature behavior that is unbecoming of children. But they do not always have to be negative. For example, *mannish* can be used to describe the behavior of a baby or young boy who is particularly advanced or independent for his age. A baby boy who figures out how to get his bottle from a hard-to-reach place can also be called *mannish*.

The African American lexicon includes the same type of information that is found in general American lexicons. The difference is that the former lexicon will have entries for words that sound like words in general American English; however, the meanings and perhaps other information will be different from the corresponding homonyms in general American English lexicons.

I am suggesting that the following four types of information be given in lexical entries: pronunciation, grammatical class or part of speech, linguistic environment (i.e., place in a sentence) in which the word or phrase occurs and meaning. In the examples in (1), I illustrate these four types of information by using lexical entries from the African American lexicon. Immediately following the lexical entries, I present grammatical and acceptable as well as unacceptable sentences in which the word or phrase is used. Glosses are also given to show the meaning correspondences between that in the African American lexicon and mainstream and other varieties of English. The symbol '#' indicates a possible meaning, but not the meaning that corresponds to the definition in the entry, and the symbol '*' indicates that the sentence is ill-formed; the combination of words violates the specifications in the African American lexicon. The following abbreviations are used: Prep (preposition), V (verb), V-*ing* (verb ending in *-ing*, e.g., *singing*), V-*ed* (verb ending in *-ed*, e.g., *watched* or an irregular past tense verb, e.g., *broke*), N (noun), Adj (adjective), Adv (adverb), VM (verbal marker), Asp (aspect), AspM (aspectual marker). Aspect will be mentioned later in this chapter in connection with verbal markers and discussed in chapter 2.

The lexical entries in (1) give the phonetic representations of the words, showing how they are pronounced, and the grammatical class or part of speech to which they belong.[10] They also include the linguistic environment(s) in which the term can occur, that is, whether it precedes a verb or a member of another grammatical class. The line (—) indicates where the lexical element occurs with respect to other elements. The environment is represented as being either obligatory or optional. If the following grammatical

class (e.g., verb, adverb, noun) indicating the environment is in parentheses '( ),' it is optional, but if it is not in parentheses, it is obligatory. In cases in which the lexical item can precede elements from different grammatical classes, those classes are indicated in curly brackets '{}.' For example, *stay* can precede an adverb, preposition, verb or adjective, as shown in (1g). In a given sentence, it must occur in an environment in which it precedes a word from one of those classes. Finally, the lexical entries provide definitions for each word or phrase in the lexicon. I provide glosses or sentences in mainstream English for corresponding sentences with terms from the African American lexicon.

(1) Lexical entries for terms in the African American lexicon

a. *get over* [gɪt ovə] V, — (Prep-*on*). Take advantage of, to succeed by using wit but little effort.
   (1) #The students tried to get over the teacher.
   (This sentence has an acceptable reading, but not one that is consistent with the definition in the lexical entry).
   (2) The students tried to get over on the teacher.
   (3) The students tried to get over.
   Gloss: The students tried to take advantage of the teacher. For example, the students tried to outsmart the teacher by submitting a two-page assignment that was double-spaced as opposed to single-spaced.

The phrase *get over*, meaning to take advantage of someone or a situation, is a verb unit that is composed of a verb plus a preposition or particle element. The unit precedes the preposition *on* if it is not at the end of the sentence.

b. *call – self* [kɔl sɛəf] V, — {V-*ing*, Noun, Adj}. In the opinion of others, making an attempt to do something (or be someone or something) but not quite doing it as the observer thinks it should be done; an observation that the person is not meeting perceived standards.
   (1) She call herself a queen.[11] (cf. #She call herself the queen.)
   (2) He call hisself cooking.
   Gloss: He thinks he's cooking, but he's merely playing around in the kitchen. That is, he isn't doing anything remarkable.
   (3) He call hisself a basketball player, and can't even dribble the ball.
   (4) They call theyselves friendly, and they won't speak to people.[12]

In the phrase *call -self*, *my-*, *her-*, *his-*, *they-* are always attached to *-self*, depending on the subject. The pronoun (e.g., *my*, *her*, *his*, *they*) in the *call -self* phrase agrees in gender and number with the subject. This means that in the case of a plural third person subject i.e., *they*, the reflexive pronoun (pronoun which ends in *-self*) *theyself* (*theyselves*) will be used: *Them boys call theyselves playing basketball*. In the case of the singular third person feminine subject (*she*), *herself* will be used.

In considering the meaning of *call -self*, note that the sentence #*She call herself the queen* involves a different use of *call -self*, thus it is flagged by '#.' As indicated by the meaning in the lexicon, *call herself* cannot simply be used to mean that a person uses

a particular title, such as queen, to refer to herself. In all of the grammatical sentences for this particular use of *call -self*, the phrase is used to express disapproval about a person's actions or perceived attitudes. (Also see Wolfram [1994] for a discussion of *call -self*.)

c. *come* [kʌm] VM,— V-*ing*. Expresses speaker indignation.
   #They came carrying their suitcases and books.
   (This sentence has a grammatical reading but not one in which *come* necessarily indicates speaker indignation.)
   (1) He come walking in here like he owned the damn place. (Spears 1982, p. 852)
   (2) We sitting there talking, and he come hitting on me for some money. (Spears 1982, p. 854)
   (3) He come coming in here, raising all kind of hell. (Spears 1982, p. 854)
   (4) Don't come telling me all those lies.
   (5) I asked him if there were any other malls around here, and he come naming all those other ones that are far out. (bf, 30s)
   (6) I called him in November when I was in Chicago, and he never called me back. Then like January, he come calling me. (bm, 30s)
   Gloss: . . . In January, he had the nerve to call me.

The marker *come* is discussed in Spears (1982) and Baugh (1988), and it is taken to be a semi-auxiliary in that it shares at least one property with auxiliary verbs: it precedes main verbs ending in *-ing*. It is referred to here as a verbal marker. *Come* in the first sentence in (c) is used in the appropriate linguistic environment (i.e., preceding V-*ing*) specified in the entry, but it does not have the meaning in which it expresses speaker indignation. Also, *come*, in this example, is used in the past form (*came*), which is not usually the case in sentences in which it is used as a verbal marker. Here *came* simply means movement into an office, thus the sentence is flagged with '#'.

d. *mash* [mæʃ] V, — {N, Prep} to press something.
   (1) Mash the button again so the elevator will come to this floor.
   (2) Mash the accelerator all the way to the floor.
   Gloss: Press the accelerator all the way to the floor.

The verb *mash* is used to mean press or apply light pressure to an object to achieve results, as in pressing a button to call the elevator to a certain floor. In the examples in (d), *mash* does not mean to crush or destroy. This item is used by speakers of African descent, and it is also used by white speakers in the Southern United States.[13]

e. *-own-* [on] Adj, Pronoun — self, qualifier, intensifier for reflexive pronoun.
   (1) *I don't know what's wrong with herownself.
   (2) She don't know what's wrong with herownself. How can she help me?
   (3) He cooked his food hisownself.
   (4) I don't need any help; I can do it myownself.
   (5) Let them clean it theyownselves.
   Gloss: Let them clean it all by themselves.

The infix *own* serves as an intensifier that expresses the independence of someone or reinforces the individuality of a person in taking responsibility for an action. The intensifier is inserted or infixed (thus it is called an infix) in the environment between the two parts of a reflexive pronoun (e.g., *her-OWN-self*). The reflexive pronoun has to agree with or match the pronoun to which it refers (see *call -self* in (b)). The reflexive *herownself* does not match the pronoun *I* in the first example sentence (instead, it matches *she*), so it is ungrammatical.

f. *some* [s∧m] Adv,— {Adj, Adv}, very; to a great extent. Southern United States.
   Note: The adverb *some* is generally pronounced with stress.
   #I really want some candy.
   (This sentence has an acceptable reading but not one in which *some* occurs in the environment above.)
   (1) Kareem Abdul Jabar is some tall.
   (2) She can cook some good.
       Gloss: She can cook very well.

As an adverb, *some* serves to indicate the extremity of a state or action; it has the meaning of *very*.

g. *stay* [ste] V, VM,— {Adv, Prep, Verb, Adj}. (1) Live; abide in a place. (2) To frequent a place. (3) To engage in activity frequently. (4) To be in some (emotional) state on most occasions.
   #They stay for a long time.
   (The sentence has an acceptable reading, but not one that is in line with the meaning above.)

   (1) I stay on New Orleans Street.
       Gloss: I live on New Orleans Street.
       Gloss: I always go on New Orleans Street.
   (2) She stay in that bathroom.
   (3) She stay running.
   (4) He stay in the air.
       Gloss: He's a frequent flyer; he travels by airplane regularly.
   (5) He stay hungry.
       Gloss: He's always hungry.

The word *stay*, a verb (or verbal marker) which precedes either an adverb, preposition, verb or adjective, can be used to mean to live in/at a place, or it can be used to express habitual meaning, as in sentences (2–4).[14] If a person says *He stay hungry*, the meaning is that the person is often hungry. *Stay*, as it is used in the first sentence (*#They stay for a long time*), has a meaning that is different from the ones given in the definition; the sentence is not acceptable given the specified meaning, so it is flagged by '#'.

h. *steady* [stɛdI], [st∧dI] VM,— V(*-ing*). Has function of indicating that an action or process specified by the verb is carried out in an intense, consistent and continuous manner.

Notes: The subject of the sentence cannot be an indefinite phrase that consists of the article *a* followed by a noun. (*A person was steady talking.)
The verb cannot indicate a state; it has to indicate an action. (*He steady having money.)

(1) Ricky Bell be steady steppin' in them number nines.[15] (Baugh 1984, p. 4)
(2) He steady be tellin' 'em how to run they lives. (Baugh 1984, p. 4)
(3) All the homeboys be rappin' steady. (Baugh 1984, p. 4)
(4) Her mouth is steady runnin'. (Baugh 1984, p. 4)
Gloss: She is talking nonstop.
(5) When I would talk to her, she wouldn't pay me any attention.
She would just steady drive.

Steady, a verbal marker that precedes a V-(*ing*), is used to describe the manner in which something is done. In the first ungrammatical sentence (**A person was steady talking*), *steady* adheres to the specification in the lexicon in that it precedes a verb that ends in -*ing*, so we must look elsewhere for the source of unacceptability. As the 'Notes' indicate, the problem is the indefinite subject with the weak determiner *a* (*a person*).[16] The second sentence in the 'Notes' (**He steady having money*) is ungrammatical because the verb *having* indicates a state and not an activity such as talking or running. Although *steady* usually precedes verbs ending in -*ing*, it can also follow them, in some cases, as shown in the third example sentence. In addition, *steady* can also precede verbs that do not end in -*ing*, as in the environment in (5). (Also, see Baugh [1984, 1999] for a discussion of *steady*.) *Steady* is like the verbal marker *come* in that it precedes V-*ing*, but it also differs from *come*, as it can occur in other environments.

Lexical entries are important because they provide necessary information for the correct pronunciation and use of words and phrases. The view is from the African American lexicon, so only items that are used 'uniquely' by African Americans are discussed here. As AAE shares patterns with other varieties of English, some words in the mental dictionaries of African Americans have the same meanings they have in other varieties of English. For example, in varieties of English, the word *steady* can be used as an adjective to mean sure in movement or lack of interruption of movement. Likewise it can have this meaning in the African American lexicon. As such African Americans may use the *steady* as in (h), and they may also use the *steady* that occurs in other varieties of English.

In a brief review of the lexical entries in (1a–h), note that only major categories have been indicated for the entries, so a number of subtle constraints and properties have been omitted or just briefly mentioned. For instance, the definiteness constraint on the subject in *steady* constructions is mentioned in a brief note under the entry for *steady* and in a footnote. Here the definiteness constraint simply refers to the preference for using *steady* with definite subjects (e.g., *the girl*) as opposed to indefinite subjects (e.g., *a girl*).

Verbal markers, which are often discussed in the literature on AAE, are not generally included in discussions of African American lexicons and dictionaries.[17] As the markers often express unique meanings, they should be indicated in the lexicon

of AAE. The syntax of these markers will be discussed in chapter 2, but their lexical entries are given below. Without going into too much detail, I give some corresponding mainstream English sentences in single quotes (‘’) as a means of elucidating the meaning for those who are not familiar with the verbal markers. These verbal markers in AAE indicate certain properties about the way an event is carried out or completed. The markers that will be represented in the African American lexicon here are *be*, *BIN*, *dən*, *be dən* and *BIN dən*.[18]

(2) Lexical entries for verbal markers

a. *be* [bi], AspM— {V-*ing*, V-*ed*, Adj, Prep, N, Adv, AspM, end of sentence}. Marks the recurrence of an eventuality.[19]

(1) *They be wake up too early.
(2) They be waking up too early.
‘They usually wake up too early’
(3) Half of them things that be showed on TV don’t be happening.
‘It’s usually the case that half of the things that are shown on TV do not happen’ (Green 1998a, p. 52)
(4) Those shoes be too expensive.
‘Those shoes are usually too expensive’
(5) I think the puppies be in the garage sometimes.
(6) When we play school, he be the teacher.
(7) Call whenever you want to; they always be there.
(8) They be den finished the aerobics session.
(9) That’s the way they be.

b. *BIN* [bín], AspM— {V-*ing*, V-*ed*, Adj, Prep, N, Adv, AspM}. Situates the eventuality or the initiation of the eventuality in the remote past.
Note: The verbal marker *BIN* is pronounced with stress, as indicated by the accent over the symbol ‘ɪ’(ɪ́).

(1) *They BIN is early.
(2) They BIN waking up too early.
‘They have been waking up too early for a long time’
(3) They BIN left.
‘They left a long time ago’
(4) The shoes at that store BIN too expensive.
‘The shoes at that store have been too expensive for a long time’
(5) I think the puppies BIN in the garage.
(6) He BIN a teacher.
(7) They BIN there.
(8) They BIN dən left.

c. [*dən*], AspM— V-*ed*, marks a completed eventuality or an eventuality that is over (occurred in the past).
Note: The verbal marker *dən* is pronounced with an unstressed or weak vowel, which is indicated by the schwa (ə). It is distinguished from the pronunciation of *done* (in which the vowel is stressed) in the sentences *The food is done* and *She (has) done her homework*.

(1) *They dən leaving.
(2) They dən left.

d. *be dən* [bi dən], AspM— V-*ed*, (1) marks an eventuality as having ended by some point in the future. (2) marks an eventuality as habitually having ended by some time. (3) indicates a conditional meaning.
(1) *They be dən leaving.
(2) They'a be dən left by the time I get there (definition 1).
'They will have already left by the time I get there'
(3) They be dən left when I get there (definition 2).
'They have usually already left by the time I get there'
(4) They be dən stole your seat before you know it (definition 3).
'They will steal your seat as soon as they have the opportunity'

e. *BIN dən* [bÍn dən], AspM— V-*ed* marks an eventuality as having ended by some point in the remote past.
(1) The instructors BIN dən left.
'The instructors left a long time ago'

The lexical entries for the verbal markers in (2) provide the same type of information (phonetic representation, grammatical class, syntactic environment in which the marker occurs, meaning) that is given in the entries for the words and phrases in (1). 'AspM' stands for aspectual marker, a term that is used to characterize these markers and that will be discussed in chapter 2. Examples of grammatical and ungrammatical (flagged by '*') uses of the markers are also given. I will return to a more detailed discussion of these markers and relevant examples in chapter 2, in which their semantic and syntactic properties will be discussed. Also, in chapter 2, it will become clear that the lexical entries for *be dən* (2d) and *BIN dən* (2e) may be redundant because the second meaning of *be dən* given in definition 2 can be derived from the compositional meaning of *be* and *dən*, and the meaning of *BIN dən* can be derived from the compositional meaning of *BIN* and *dən*. In that chapter, I will explain the conditions under which the verbal marker *be* can precede a verb ending in -*ed* (e.g., *be watched*).

The section of the African American lexicon for verbal markers such as those in (2) is the locus of elements which have unique verbal properties in AAE. This is one area in which the African American lexicon differs from lexicons of other varieties of American English: it includes elements that mark the way events are carried out. For example, in AAE the verbal marker *be* can be used to show that an event occurs from time to time, and the verbal marker *BIN* can be used to talk about an event that started in the distant past. Mainstream American English and other varieties of American English use adverbs such as *always* and *usually* to convey the meaning contributed by *be*, and they use phrases such as 'a long time ago' and 'for a long time' to convey the meaning associated with *BIN*. It is interesting to note that Hiberno English (a variety of Irish English) uses *be* in ways that are similar to the uses in AAE, a point that will be explored in chapter 2.

The next section considers slang in the African American lexicon, lexical items that are associated with a particular age group and also with different geographical areas.

1.4 Slang: adding words to the lexicon

"In a culture driven by the ever-evolving slanguistics of rapspeak, 'whoa!' is to modern hip hop vernacular what prime-time game shows are to TV land: something so old fashioned that it's new again" (Mao 2000, p. 161). Black Rob, who uses the term *whoa* in his single "Whoa!" defines the word in a 2000 *Vibe* article in the following way: "There's nothin' else that you can say; when something is lookin' so good for you, it's just 'whoa!'" (p. 161). *Whoa* is one of the lexical items that is found in that part of the African American lexicon in which words and phrases are used by speakers in a particular age group, may vary from geographical region to geographical region and may be short lived. Finally, a large number of these lexical items originate in and are perpetuated through hip-hop culture, including music.

Attempting to give an account of slang in any work presents very interesting challenges. Perhaps the most formidable problem is that slang changes rapidly, so it is virtually impossible to give an accurate account of current slang items. It is certain that by the time this book is completed, many of the lexical items that are presented in this section will be obsolete. When I first started collecting information for a project related to this book in the early to mid 1990s, *phat* (adjective meaning extremely nice, good looking or of good taste) was popular among African American adolescents, teens and young adults. In 1999 and probably long before that, the word was no longer popular according to students in a large introductory lecture class in African and Afro-American studies. In the fall of 1999, I gave a guest lecture on the topic of AAE in that class and found that black and non-black students differed in their recognition and classification of words in the African American lexicon. For example, black students gave the correct definition of *saditty*, and while *phat* was taken to be in vogue by some white students, none of the black students shared this view or at least admitted to sharing it. Another point that the *saditty* and *phat* examples make is that these lexical items often divide blacks and whites, as noted by Rickford and Rickford (2000, p. 93).

The goal of this section is not to give a complete account of current slang. However, it is to use some selected examples to make two points about that part of the lexicon that constantly changes: (1) Slang items can be divided into categories and (2) new slang items can be added to the lexicon by applying productive processes of creating phrases. These two points can be illustrated just as well with items that are no longer in use, but more current words and phrases will be used in the discussion.

1.4.1 Labeling people, money, and actions

In a discussion of language used by adolescents, Teresa Labov (1992) notes three categories of slang: (1) those for labeling people, (2) those for painting people, activities and places positively or negatively and (3) those for ways of spending leisure time, focused upon having fun. Teresa Labov's data are based on responses to a questionnaire that was completed by adolescents from different high schools in the United States. In one part of her data analysis, she compared the use of slang by whites and African Americans, and found that of the thirty-three slang terms (in the speech of her

informants) that show significant social difference "eight show 2.5 times or greater likelihood of African-American usage, and 25 at least three times or greater white usage. Social types account for five African-American terms (*bougies*, *homies*, *mondos*, *freaks*, and *rednecks*); *fresh* and *bad* in 'approval' sense; and the phrase *to be busting out* 'looking good'" (p. 351). Teresa Labov's data are consistent with Rickford and Rickford's claim that such vocabulary items serve as dividing lines between the groups.

More current terms fit into the same types of categories discussed by Teresa Labov. One of the largest categories for slang terms today is that for referring to people. Folb (1980) also reported this finding in her ethnographic research on the use of specialized vocabulary by adolescent African Americans. The slang terms in (3) are used to refer to females, and those in (4) are used to refer to males:

(3) Terms for females

a. bopper
b. dime
c. honey
d. hot girl
e. ma
f. shorty
g. wifey

(4) Terms for males

a. balla
b. cat
c. cuz
d. dawg (also dog)
e. fool
f. homes
g. hot boy
h. kinfolk
i. mark
j. money
k. player (playa)
l. scrub
m. slick

The first observation is that the list for females is shorter than that for males. The term *bopper* is used to refer to a woman who is preoccupied with material gain, and a term that has come to have a similar meaning is *chickenhead*. Although women may use general terms (e.g., *girl*, in *Hey, girl*) to address each other, the names in (3) are not used in that way; they are labels for females. On the other hand, the majority of the terms in (4) are used by males as terms of address for other males. Two exceptions are the terms *balla* and *scrub*. *Balla* is used to refer to a man who has acquired money and material possessions, and *scrub*, which is derogatory, refers to a male who is not self-sufficient, so he depends on others for his livelihood. The

term *dog* also has a negative connotation when it is used to refer to a male who mistreats females, but *dog/dawg* is used by males as a term of address, without negative import.

The terms for males (4) may be used as common nouns or as terms of address, and, as the latter, they share some properties of names.[20] Consider the term *money* (4j), which can be used as a common noun (5a) and as a term of address (5b).

(5) a. That's my money (as in That's my friend).
b. What's up, money? (as in What's up, man/Bruce?)

According to some males who use this term, *money* cannot be used in all the ways in which a common noun such as *man* can be used. For example, the following is not acceptable: *#Look at that money* (cf. *Look at that man*). The same is true for *slick* and *homes*: *#Look at that slick standing over there* (cf. *Look at that guy standing over there*.). *#Look at that homes* (cf. *Look at that guy*.). Although I have not conducted extensive research on the different constraints on uses of these items, one suggestion is that they cannot occur in this environment because they may be used most often in cases in which males are familiar with each other. As such, the sentence *#Look at that slick standing over there* may be unacceptable because it makes reference to an unfamiliar male. One possible indirect argument against this hypothesis, however, is given in Brathwaite (1992), in which it is noted that *homes* is also used in addressing someone whose name one does not know.[21] Also, the terms *dawg* and *money* (see (5a)) can be used in possessive noun phrases ('my dawg,' 'my money'):

(6) a. That's my dog.
b. That's my money.

But this is not a general rule that can be applied to all terms for males. The use in (7) is unacceptable:

(7) #That's my slick.

There are also regional twists on labels for people. The members of the New Orleans-based rap group Cash Money have filled their lyrics with terms and phrases that are now associated with that geographical area. So for a member of Cash Money, his dawg or comrade is whoadie.

As is apparent in current hip-hop music, another category to which terms are frequently added is money (as in currency). One of the rappers from the hip-hop group OutKast makes his point by using three terms for money in the course of a sentence. He says, "I want greens, bills, dividends is what I'm talking about" ("Git Up, Git Out"). Other terms for money are given in (8):

(8) Terms for money
a. benjis (benjamins)
b. cabbage
c. cheese
d. cream

e. duckets
f. franklins
g. paper
h. scrilla

Brathwaite (1992) lists at least eight terms for money, with only one being cross-listed with a term in (8): *bucks*, *dead presidents*, *dime*, *paper*, *cash money*, *dividends*, *dough* and *knot*. *Dime* and *knot* have more specialized meanings, in which the former refers to ten dollars, and the latter refers to a wad of money.

One recurrent theme in rap and hip-hop is material gain, and to that end, terms for material possessions, in addition to money, are used robustly. Two such terms are *ice*, which refers to diamonds, and *bling bling*, which can be used broadly to refer to jewelery or platinum. The latter term is the title of a single in which the artist attests that guys wear jewelery that is "the price of a mansion round [their] neck and wrist" ("Bling Bling," B.G.).

A very broad category that can be subdivided into groups according to topics is that for lexical items referring to actions. Included in the list of terms for actions are (1) Terms for leaving: *bounce*, *push off*, *murk*; (2) Terms for expressing or showing envy: *playa hatin* (or *hatin*, *hatin on*), *balla blockin*; (3) Terms for communicating or connecting: *feel*, *we're here* (with gesture pointing to eyes); (4) Terms for making advances toward a member of the opposite sex: *push up on*, *get wit(h)*, *holler at that*, *sweatin*; (5) Terms for labeling that which is good, exciting, etc.: *off the hook/chain*, *krunk* (used in the South in the early 1990s and revived in 2000), *banging*, *too stupid*.

The next subsection considers a productive process which is used to coin phrases that mean to engage in some activity.

1.4.2 Productive process of adding elements to the lexicon

A common phrase that was used in the early to mid 1990s is *get your groove on* to mean to get something going, as in dance. The phrase has become extremely productive, not necessarily by using words to mean dance, but by inserting different words in the phrase, as indicated below:

(9) *get* – possessive pronoun – noun – *on*
'to become engaged in some activity'
a. get my chill on
'to rest'
b. get my drink/sip on
'to drink'
c. get my eat/grub on
'to eat'
d. get my mac (mack) on (usually refers to males toward females)
'to engage in acts such as dancing with numerous partners, getting phone numbers, etc.'

e. get my praise on
   'to praise or worship'
f. get my sleep on
   'to sleep'

Forming phrases based on the template in (9) has become a productive process to create phrases used to express the meaning 'to become engaged in some activity.' The general rule is to insert a word that can be used as a verb in the position following the possessive pronoun and preceding *on*. The phrase (*get* – possessive pronoun – noun – *on*) is used as a verb and consists of four elements: the verb *get*, a possessive pronoun (usually *my* or *your*, but other possessive pronouns can occur here), the inserted verb (e.g., *sleep*) which is also used as a noun in the phrase and the preposition or particle *on*. What is of interest here are the words that name the actions and that are inserted between the possessive pronoun and *on*. The words *chill* (a), *drink/sip* (b), *eat/grub* (c), *mack* (d), *praise* (e) and *sleep* (f) are commonly used as verbs to name some type of action (e.g., *Jack* ***eats*** *apples*, *It's easy to* ***sip*** *this shake with this wide straw*, *I just want to* ***chill*** *for a minute*). But when these verbs occur in the phrase in the position of the 'X' in *get my X on*, they must be used as nouns because they follow the possessive pronoun *my*. A word that follows a possessive pronoun is a noun, as in *my* ***shoes***, *your* ***house***, *his* ***table*** and *her* ***book***.

The get-my/your-X-on phrases are attested in everyday speech and in the media such as television and radio. They also occur in print in magazines such as *Essence*. For example, the following line appears in one of the articles in the leisure section of the January 2000 issue: "Michelle chills at the Spa Atlantis, where she got her hydrotoning on" (Burford 2000, p. 116). Obviously, the reference is to a woman who engaged in the activity of hydrotoning at the Spa Atlantis. Also, the hip-hop group Cash Money plays on the productivity of this construction in the single "Get Your Roll On," a song that encourages listeners to go out and do what is pleasing to them. In the video, people get their roll on by 'rolling' in expensive cars, those that are nice or off the chain, such as the Bentley and Lamborghini.

Summary

The general picture of the African American lexicon that has been developed here is one that is broadly sectioned into three components: (1) general words and phrases that cross generational boundaries and are likely to span regional and class boundaries, (2) verbal markers and (3) current slang items used by adolescents and young adults. These components are summarized in the figure below: Each component can be further subdivided into more narrowly defined categories, and in addition to pronunciation, grammatical class, linguistic environment and meaning, specialized meaning (e.g., whether the lexical item is used in or originated in a particular region) will be indicated in the lexicon, as indicated in the entry for *whoadie*. Obviously, the African American lexicon differs from lexicons of other varieties of English in that it combines a range of lexical items or meanings that are not included in other English lexicons.

GENERAL WORDS AND PHRASES	
saditty, [sədIDi], Adj __ (N). Conceited.	(1) cross generational boundaries (2) used in religious and secular environments (3) reflect relationship between AAE and West African languages (e.g., Turner 1949)
VERBAL MARKERS	indicate way eventuality is carried out
BIN [bŒn], AspM __(V-*ing*, V-*ed*, Adj, Prep, N, Adv, AspM). Situates the eventuality or the initiation of the eventuality in the remote past.	
CURRENT SLANG	associated with age group linked to popular culture; may be associated with a particular region
whoadie [wodi], N __. Comrade (New Orleans usage).	

Sketch of the African American lexicon

However, one of the most notable differences may be the inclusion of the verbal markers (e.g., *be dən*) that indicate the way an event is carried out. An important observation is that the vocabulary can serve as sharp dividing lines between groups of people, as noted by Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Teresa Labov (1992) and exemplified in the responses from the large lecture class.

Two of the goals of this inquiry about the nature of the African American lexicon are simply to show that the lexical items which have unique meaning may be compartmentalized in certain ways and that the African American lexicon does not just consist of slang. An interesting complication is that African Americans must also have access to a lexicon that includes words in general American English, many of which are homophonous with words in the African American lexicon. The more general goal is to present AAE as a unified system with a lexical component as well as other components, and the first step to that end was to explain what is meant by the African American lexicon and to present the type of information that speakers know when they know elements from it.

Exercises

1. The *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*) presents information about regional dialect forms. Consult the *DARE* as a means of researching the following lexical items:

   a) ashy
   b) be (verbal marker)
   c) get over

Now that you have read the entries for the terms, present a general discussion (not to exceed two pages) about them. Include in your discussion meaning, geographical area in which the item was used and speakers who used the item. What types of patterns emerge from the data (e.g., Do the speakers who use the lexical items live in a certain region? Are the speakers members of certain age groups?).

2. Name another category (in addition to labels for people and money) for slang terms in AAE and give examples of the items that fall under it. Do speakers of other varieties of English use different (or any) slang items in this category? If so, what are the slang items?

3. What are other tests that can be used to determine the grammatical class of the Noun (X) in the phrase get-my-X-on? It has already been noted that nouns follow possessive pronouns. What are some other ways of proving that the element in the position of 'X' is a noun?

4. Conduct an informal survey to determine whether there are current terms for money in the AAE lexicon that are not on the list in (8) or mentioned in this chapter. What are they?

5. In this chapter, it was noted that *saditty* has basically remained in African American communities. Conduct an informal survey targeted to people who may, as well as to those who may not, have ties to African American communities to determine whether this is the case. What definitions for *saditty* did respondents in your survey give?