NEW WAYS OF ANALYZING AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH:
EXAMINING THE SPEECH OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN WASHINGTON, DC

1. INTRODUCTION

- Though research on AAE and research on language and gender are both robust literatures, there is a gap in the study of language of women and girls of color
- There is also comparably less research on AAE as spoken in mid-Atlantic metropolitan areas, like Washington DC, than in settings in the urban Northeast, like Philadelphia and New York

2. THE SAMPLE

- Ten interviews with inner-city, “at risk” African American adolescent girls obtained by CM in 2006, from Carissa, a young white woman from Minnesota pursuing a graduate degree in sociology at North Carolina State University
  - From 2001-2, Carissa worked as a counselor at “Emmaus House” in Washington, DC—a non-profit founded in the 1970s to serve “at risk,” troubled, and homeless youth
  - In 2003, Carissa observed 60 teens and interviewed 20 teens for her master’s thesis
  - Semi-structured interviews centered on teens’ home and social lives, gender/sexual ideologies, and aspirations
  - Interview protocol contained questions like, “If you went to bed tonight and woke up as a boy, how would your life be different?” and “Picture for a minute the perfect woman. What would she look like?”
- Corpus of interviews with the 10 adolescent girls is 10 and 2/3 hours long and consists of 105,917 words

3. EXAMINING “INTERVIEW STYLE”

“...It was the feeling of the investigators that the recorded speech was not quite casual but also not formal. It was a good example of the speech used by children to adults ... and by adults to respected strangers. It could seldom be considered in-group speech, particularly for teenagers or adults. It is, nevertheless, one of the most important styles of speech used by Americans, for it is this style in which they make their moves up (or down) the social scale."
- Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1968: 28; emphasis added

4. SPEECH SAMPLE: KEISHA (dca_keisha_a, 336-372, 31.82 seconds)

Keisha: 336 The only person I get along with real real good, is my little sister. [gap 0.41]
Carissa: 338 How old is she? [gap 0.31]
Keisha: 340 Two. [gap 1.92]
Carissa: 342 Okay. [pause 0.29] And [she’s the] youngest one?
Keisha: 344 [And/] Yeah, [pause 0.08] I get along with her because [pause 1.59] she don’t like- she don’t like going to um like my mother, or my sister, or my brother. [gap 0.55]
Carissa: 345 Really? [gap 0.32]
Keisha: 352 She like coming to me. [pause 1.47] Yeah, I be making her beat up my little broth- [pause 0.09] well my oldest brother [pause 0.10] and my little other sister. [gap 0.22]
Carissa: 356 You make her beat them up? [pause 0.27] How? [gap 0.47]
Keisha: 358 Cause, [pause 0.34] I be saying beat them up, and she just <slap> hit them. [gap 0.35]
Carissa: 372 Really? [gap 0.21]
5. THE NORTH CAROLINA SOCIOLINGUISTIC ARCHIVE AND ANALYSIS PROJECT (NC SLAAP)

- Enables and explores new computer-enhanced techniques for sociolinguistic analysis
- Read more at:
  - http://ncslaap.lib.ncsu.edu/
  - Kendall’s (2007a) PWPL paper

6. THE DC GIRLS CORPUS: VARIATIONIST ANALYSIS

- Four features:
  - Third singular -s absence, as in *She walk for She walks*
  - Copula/Auxiliary absence with *is* and *are*, as in *She funny, She talking, They nice, They gonna go home*
  - Past tense *be* leveling in positive and negative contexts, as in *The girls was talking, They wasn’t home*
  - Velar nasal fronting, as in *runnin’* for *running*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Rates for Four Features by DC Adolescent Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absent/Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third singular -s absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula/auxiliary absence, <em>is</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula/auxiliary absence, <em>are</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense <em>be</em> leveling, positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense <em>be</em> leveling, negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velar nasal fronting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Comparable data from other urban AAVE studies:
  - Labov et al. 1968: Club Members (adolescent boys) had ~86% *was* leveling
  - Wolfram 1969: Lower working class age 14-17 had ~76% 3rd sg. -s absence and ~68% total cop/aux abs
  - Fasold 1972: Working class women and girls had ~65% 3rd sg. -s absence
  - Labov 1972: Black speakers with little white contact had ~72% 3rd sg. -s absence and ~50% total cop/aux abs; Jets (age 14-17) had ~31% *is* abs in single/group styles
  - Rickford 1994: Foxy Boston, age 18, had ~73% 3rd sg. -s absence and ~70% total cop/aux absence

- Note a new(?) copula complement category: Quotative *be like*
  - Ex.: She Ø like, “Stop!”
  - Ex.: They just Ø like, “Hi.”
  - In this corpus, 29 total cases of contractible cases of quotative *be like*, 17 of which were deleted (58.62%)
7. INTERVIEW SPEECH

“The equivalence of [sociolinguistic] interviews has generally been taken for granted…. It is assumed that each speech sample is equivalent even though it is obvious that an interview with a voluble, willing respondent produces not only more but also qualitatively different speech from that produced by an interview with a reluctant, nervous, or tongue-tied respondent. This problem has not received much attention except from those […] who have adversely criticized the quality of speech obtained in interviews…. The question of the comparability of the interviews has probably not arisen because the interviews as a whole have not been used as data. It is somewhat paradoxical that most of the speech collected in sociolinguistic surveys remains unanalyzed.” - Macaulay 1991: 4-5; emphasis added

8. QUANTITATIVELY DIFFERENT INTERVIEWS

Table 2. General Properties of Individual Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>3rd -s % Abs.</th>
<th>Cop/Aux % Abs.</th>
<th>Past be % Lev.</th>
<th>% ’-in’ for -ing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alayna*</td>
<td>31 (-)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61 (-)</td>
<td>66 (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calandra</td>
<td>91 (+)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86 (+)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latania</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantell</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55 (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirlisa*</td>
<td>18 (-)</td>
<td>19 (-)</td>
<td>38 (--&gt;)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 64.0
St. Dev.: 26.2

(-) and (+) indicates 1 standard deviation below or above mean value for a given feature, respectively
* indicates speakers with more than 1 standard deviation below the mean for three or more variables

9. ON TALK

Alayna, excerpt 1 (dca_alayna_a, 3880-3912)

Carissa: 3880So what does the- [pause 0.47] 3881what, [pause 0.56] 3881what would she actually [pause 0.41] 3881physically look like, if you envisioned [pause 0.36] 3881the, [pause 0.22] 3881the most beautiful woman.

Alayna: 3882Me! [gap 0.43]

Carissa: 3883She would look like you.

Alayna: 3884[pause 0.78] 3885Yeh. [gap 0.15]

Carissa: 3886But what about you would you say? [gap 0.94]

Alayna: 3887I’d say I’m a nice person. [pause 0.33] 3887Very pretty, nice complexion, [pause 0.12] 3887I dress well, [pause 1.24] 3887and I can speak [pause 0.14] 3887very well.

Alayna, excerpt 2 (dca_alayna_a, 2726-2741)

Alayna: 2726yeah, and- [pause 0.05] 2727and he said I was holding nice conversation. [pause 0.05] 2728So I just was blushing, so, [pause 0.84] 2728she said she, [pause 0.78] 2728So, [pause 0.07] 2728uh, [pause 0.54] 2728I can speak [pause 0.14] 2728very well.

Carissa: 2724[]laughter]

Carissa: 2725[]laughter>

Shirlisa (dca_shirlisa_a, 1102-1115)

Shirlisa: 1102my mom was trying to raise me [pause 0.12] 1103in 1103me not talking all [pause 1.79] 1104ghetto and 1105slang 1106[unintelligible.]

Carissa: 1107[MM-hm.] [gap 0.36]

Shirlisa: 1115She has a real problem with that.
10. QUANTIFYING INTERACTIONAL DIFFERENCES IN INTERVIEWS

Table 4. Median Pause Duration and Median Speech Rate by Speaker, Compared to Interviewer’s Pause and Speech Rate by Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Median Pause Dur. (sec.)</th>
<th>Median Speech Rate (σ/sec.)</th>
<th>Carissa’s Pause Dur. (sec.)</th>
<th>Carissa’s Speech Rate (σ/sec.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alayna</td>
<td>0.35 (-)</td>
<td>5.24 (+)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>3.96 (-)</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calandra</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.50 (+)</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>4.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>0.59 (+)</td>
<td>5.15 (+)</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latania</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantell</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>4.68 (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>4.05 (-)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirlisa</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.32 (-)</td>
<td>4.52 (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(-) and (+) indicates 1 standard deviation below or above mean value for a given feature, respectively

Table 5. Velar Fronting by Speaker, Compared to Interviewee’s % -in’ for -ing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>% -in’ for -ing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alayna</td>
<td>66% (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calandra</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>94% (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latania</td>
<td>94% (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantell</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawna</td>
<td>55% (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirlisa</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Dev.</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(-) and (+) indicates 1 standard deviation below or above mean value for a given feature, respectively

- Investigations of interaction and sociolinguistic variables show that combinations of Keisha, Shirlisa, Alayna, and to a lesser extent Shawna and Shantell, often stand out from the other girls in the corpus
- Qualitative and ethnographic data support these findings:
  - Carissa mentions Keisha as always knowing new slang
  - Alayna discusses her pride in how she can speak “well”
  - Shirlisa discusses her motivation not to speak “ghetto”
  - Shawna and Alayna are full siblings who live together
- The interactional and sociolinguistic data motivate a three-part focus on…
  - the aggregate corpus
  - clusters of speakers (core, periphery, other?)
  - individual variation

Figure 3. Carissa’s Median Speech Rate & Pause Duration by Interview
11. Situating Variation in Discourse

A. Shirlisa, graphicization and text: “Father”
(dca_shirlisa_a; line 809-933; time 731.65-865.87; dur. 134.22 sec.)

Shirlisa: 609 And we were all trying to find him and come to find out his truck had blew up. [gap 0.26]  
Carissa: 611 [Mmm.]  
Shirlisa: 615 [But thank] [pause 0.24] 616 God he wasn't there.  
Carissa: 618 Mm-hm.  
Shirlisa: 620 And so then after that he started to call more often. [pause 0.70] 621 As I got older- [pause 0.39] 622 when I got twelve, thirteen and fourteen, [pause 0.59] 623 he would prom- he promised that his- come, [pause 0.70] 624 to see me on my twelfth birthday and my thirteenth birthday and my fourteenth, [pause 0.32] 625 and he didn't come. [pause 0.56] 626 And, 627 and I promised some money and I haven't seen it yet. [pause 0.59] 628 So now I'm at the point [pause 0.23] 629 where [pause 0.75] 630 this year [pause 0.22] 631 school is- is about to start in August two- on August twenty seventh, [pause 0.57] 632 And um [pause 0.73] 633 my mom [pause 0.73] 634 she said she wants me to ask [pause 0.60] 635 only I want to ask 636 can I have some money to buy, cause my mom, she pays a lot. [pause 0.29] 637 I think every once in a while he could [pause 0.27] 638 you know [pause 0.32] 639 give me a little bit of money. [pause 0.79] 640 But I'm nervous 641 to him because [pause 0.57] 642 um [pause 0.93] 643 I might- I think that 644 he might not really give it to me.  
Carissa: 645 Mm-hm. [gap 0.40]  
Shirlisa: 646 And then another thing is [pause 0.21] 647 um [pause 0.19] 648 when I graduate [pause 0.31] 649 I, [pause 0.12] 650 I'm nervous to, [pause 0.12] 651 cause when at my school, [pause 0.44] 652 when you do the graduation you do a tribute to your parents [pause 0.62] 653 and 654 was nervous if I wanted to do a tribute to my dad 655 And then me even asking him to come, [pause 0.68] 656 I was nervous if he'll really come and-. [gap 0.44]  
Carissa: 657 So did, [pause 0.05] 658 how did that all play out, 659 [what happened]?  
Shirlisa: 660 actually come to find out he didn't come so  
Carissa: 662 [Mm-hm. [gap 0.12]  
Shirlisa: 664 [thankfully I did not] [pause 0.18] 665 put his name in there cause I didn't wanna say his name and he didn't-. [gap 0.58]  
Carissa: 668 He wasn't there. [gap 0.46]  
Shirlisa: 670 [And so]  
Carissa: 672 [Okay.] [gap 0.61]  
Shirlisa: 674 then I was real hrt 675 and, [pause 1.07] 676 I was just like, I said to myself I can’t stay mad at him for 677 long. [pause 1.02] 678 But after that, um [pause 0.69] 679 he just started calling me again [pause 0.59] 680 recently. [pause 0.61] 681 And I talked to him, he called 682 every Saturday 683 early in the morning 684 when I'm half asleep, [pause 0.53] 685 But I still talk to him [pause 0.76] 686 and for some reason this time I believe him that he wants to [pause 0.72] 687 start over. [pause 0.60] 688 But then, it's always something in me that says [pause 0.73] 689 I'm not all that sure. [gap 0.16]  

B. Shirlisa, graphicization and text: “Boys and Boyfriends”
(dca_shirlisa_b; line 1379-1502; time 1193.25-1289.47; dur. 96.22 sec.)

Carissa: 1379 So what do you [pause 0.10] 1388 call [pause 0.28] 1389 your relationship with him? [gap 0.35]  
Shirlisa: 1393 Actually, 1395 I'll tell you, 1397 it's a good one but 1398 we having kind of the 1399 techan-, [pause 0.12] 1400 we, we got some problems going on. [gap 0.03]  
Carissa: 1406 You have [pause 0.11] 1408 problems already? [pause 0.11] <laughter>  
Shirlisa: 1410 Okay. 1413 It's not like a issue, it's like a funny problem because [pause 0.27] 1415 he thinks, [pause 0.12] 1417 okay boys say [pause 0.42] 1419 or girls 1420 either one, 1423 say, 1424 you can get you whipped. [pause 1.13] 1425 Meaning-.  
Carissa: 1428 So that's what that whole whipped [what was you?  
Shirlisa: 1433 [Oh you was in there?]  
Carissa: 1435 [That was you?]  
Shirlisa: 1439 [laughter]  
Carissa: 1441 [That I did not pick up /Shirlisa/. [gap 0.84]  
Shirlisa: 1442 Meaning-. [gap 0.06]  
Carissa: 1443 So what does he- okay, yeah, you explain to me. 1449 <hhh>  
Shirlisa: 1450 [Okay. [pause 0.19] 1451 It- this is how this goes.  
Carissa: 1452 [laughter] [gap 1.11]  
Shirlisa: 1460 Say, for instance, [pause 0.20] 1463 all his home boys was in here, [pause 0.23] 1464 everybody, his friends. [pause 0.52] 1465 And 1466 I wanted to come in [pause 0.36] 1467 and sit down for a little while and just you know see what he talking about. [pause 1.23] 1468 And then he say, 1469 go get me a drink or “get out the room,” or something. [pause 0.15] 1470 And you got [pause 0.29] 1471 That’s when you got controlled.  
Carissa: 1472 [Mm-hm. [gap 0.18]  
Shirlisa: 1474 But I don’t do that! [pause 0.10] 1475 Ain’t nobody gonna control me. [pause 0.23]  
Carissa: 1476 Okay. [gap 0.56]  
Shirlisa: 1478 So he’s like, [1485 he keeps-]  
Carissa: 1486 [So does he think you’re whipped? [gap 0.01]  
Shirlisa: 1488 No. [pause 0.20] 1489 He-, he-.  
Carissa: 1490 [He was just] playing.  
Shirlisa: 1494 [I just-] 1496 I don’t know but I’m a get that straight, [pause 0.14] 1497 cause [pause 0.10] 1498 he ain’t getting me whipped, [pause 0.14] 1499 sorry. [pause 0.35] 1499 And I, and I’m like saying but I just be joking, I don’t, I don’t [pause 0.52] 1499 it’s not, it’s n- I don’t see a relationship if you got, 1499 if you’re controlling the [person.  
Carissa: 1499 [Mm-hm. [gap 0.59]  
Shirlisa: 1499 And like you heard us say [gap 0.11]  
Carissa: 1499 [laughter]  
Shirlisa: 1499 [A person [pause 0.18] 1499 is with me because they know they gotta be. 1499 It ain’t, 1499 it’s cause I want to.  
Carissa: 1499 <hhh> 1500 That’s very f-  
Shirlisa: 1502 [That’s] why I was [laughter]  
Carissa: 1505 [That’s] very funny now that I know that he was talking about you. [gap 0.05]
12. CONCLUSIONS

- We have incorporated new quantitative dimensions to analyzing interactional aspects of these data:
  - Analysis of features by speakers relative to the interviewer (e.g., verbal fronting)
  - Analysis of new features not traditionally studied by variationists and other sociolinguists (e.g. speech rate and pause; cf. Kendall 2007b)
  - Visualization of constellations of features in new and more powerful ways (e.g., graphicalization of interview data)
- We have also incorporated mixed methodological approaches to these data in ways that yield rich findings
  - We have presented variationist aggregate data, variationist individual data, substantive content from the interviews, and general data about the interviews (like word count, turn time, interviewer variable productions, etc.)
  - In combination, the data seem to tell a (quantitative and qualitative) story about not only how people speak, but how, and how much, speakers and the interviewer accommodate to the idea of “interviewing” and “being interviewed”
  - The range of data allow for further/deeper exploration of the relationships between the linguistic individual, clusters of speakers, and the broader group

13. SELECTED REFERENCES

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14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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