

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SOLIDARITY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICANS

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the language phenomena in sociolinguistics, namely, language maintenance and solidarity. Language maintenance is the phenomena where the speakers of the language maintain to use the language without affected by other languages nearby. This language maintenance may be influenced by solidarity inside the language community. The analysis derived from my previous research of "English spoken in Oakland and Atlanta in movie *Romeo Must Die* and *Beauty Shop*". The phenomena were drawn from the context of the movies where the speakers used African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in their daily communication. African American is a minority language community in America compared to native speakers of American English. With a good solidarity among the black, they were not really influenced by English used by the White American although there is still a language contact among them. They tend to make a gap between their community and the outsider. Besides, their culture also influences the language maintenance among them. Rap and Hip-hop culture is everywhere in this world. It is also one of the reasons why AAVE is not only used by African American as the minority but also used by many people as the fan of these music genres. It creates more solidarity inside the community. This is also the reason African-American still use their AAVE in everyday communication in every situation with other different language speakers, too.

Keywords: Language Maintenance, Solidarity, African-American Vernacular English

Introduction

People use the language with different purposes. The motivation in using and learning the language is also different. According to Crystal (1997), there are seven conditions that may motivate someone to add the language, including invasion, economical motivation, immigration, adoption of religious belief, educational needs, occupational or social advancement, technology and cultural interest. Those conditions may motivate a language speaker to add or learn more languages to pursue the certain goals.

In using some languages, someone will interact to other language speakers. Interaction leads the speakers add the additional languages (can be called as third, fourth and so on) and foreign languages (Suville-Troike, 2006). As the result, a speaker becomes a bilingual or multilingual speaker because he/she masters two or more languages for communication. The phenomena may be happen in one speech community (speech community is a term used by Wardaugh, 2006:19-20), or other speech communities as long as the interaction exists.

In multilingual community, a chance of language contact is wide open. Many language speakers meet and communicate using a lingua franca but it does not close a chance for the language speakers to communicate using mother tongue or second language. The contact creates a tendency where speakers from different mother tongue use their own languages or not to use them at all. The interaction leads different decision at the end. Speakers tend to maintain the language use or they do not to use it at all.

When speakers decide not to use the language in a speech community they tend to hide the mother tongue for prestige reason. The prestige of a language is inseparable from the prestige of those who speak it (Skvirskaja in Besters-Dilger, 2009:186). The difference of mother tongue also refers one's ethnicity. Ethnicity is something crucial and sensitive because it deals with ideology in certain area where the ethnic groups live. It links with culture, norm and belief (Fought, 2006). In certain ethnics, some of them try to maintain the language as their own culture; this language is to show their identity in the society.

Community is a crucial aspect for someone's life. Someone can show the existence in the community as well a group of people (Gilechrist, Bowles, and Wetherell, 2010: 8). Therefore, language is one of the ways to show an ethnic existence. Language is the way to show the culture and tradition of certain groups especially the minority. A minority group of language speakers of commonly has a high solidarity since the existence may be discriminated by the majority. For instance, African-American is the minority group in America compared to White American. Traced back from the history of African-American ancestor, this

ethnic was the slaves that migrated to America. This phenomenon is not easily to be eased because it was the tradition; even it was the bad one.

The discrimination that happen leads the minority creates the new communicative strategy to reflect the group identity. Communicative strategy increasing participation in public affairs leads to the introduction of terminologies and discourse patterns modeled on those of the community at large which come to exist and be used alongside more established forms (Gumperz and Gumperz, 1997:6). African-American shows the existence through the language that they use and the rebellion through songs. The *rap* culture is one of the expressions against discrimination toward this ethnic. But, finally, in the last decades, their music culture is well-known in all over the world as well as in America. As the result, people use AAVE to show the prestige that they are a *cool* person to communicate with others among youth.

The raise of African-American culture in music proves that a high solidarity among the ethnic members cause a good language maintenance in certain speech community. Higher solidarity makes the speakers proud to the language and uses it to the outsiders. Therefore, one of the ways to maintain a language in a minority group is to increase the nationality and solidarity inside the group itself.

This article aims to describe the AAVE maintenance as the result of a high solidarity among African-Americans that influenced by some factors. The data will be obtained through the movie context analysis which will draw African-Americans everyday's life in using AAVE as a vital means on their communication.

Literature Review

Language Contact

Language contact occurs when speakers of different languages interact and their languages influence each other (Matras, 2009). Since language is a means of communication, to achieve the purposes speaker must interact to other language speakers with different mother tongue.

Language as a means of communication motivated someone to add the language in wider communication. The diversity of languages used by different speakers caused a phenomenon called multilingualism. Multilingualism is a phenomenon where someone can master more than one language in a certain community. In multilingual community, the language contact that happens may influence the language use and its maintenance.

In a multilingual society, there are several language speakers that have interaction everyday in many chances of situation; the language contact with other speakers may cause an acculturation, and the language shift. Interacting with different speakers with different culture may cause a different attitude toward the first language. Most of the speakers who think that the language has a low prestige; they will not use the mother tongue with other language speakers, especially to the majority. The minority will feel ashamed and unconfident in using mother tongue to the outsiders. Therefore they tend to choose speaking with the lingua franca or the national or international one.

By the existence of various language speakers whose mother tongue is different, it may also create two kinds of groups namely, minority and majority, as mentioned above. The minority is just like some of small groups with different mother tongue and cultural background. Thus, they often experience the discrimination from the majority group. For instance, the case of African-Americans before their right was approved; they were discriminated by White Americans for decades. As the unpleasant history, it seems that the negative culture of slavery spread into American culture life. It needs a long struggle in fighting the right to be equally approved by American people and all people around the world.

Language maintenance

Languages are considered as if they were living things. Therefore, we can see the reincarnation of language as we can see in Chinese culture. The terms are language maintenance, shift, decline, death and revival (Edwards, 2009:61). When someone masters more than one language, it means they want to pursue some purposes. As explain in the previous point, language-contact that happen in a speech community cause a different attitude toward the mother tongue. If the speakers are a minority group, then the language use is also in a small scope. On the contrary, if the language is used by other speakers whose mother tongue is different, the language will be maintained.

The status of a language internationally can contribute to the positive attitudes (Holmes, 1992:69). For instance, French is one of the international languages. Therefore, to maintain French in Canada is not a difficult thing since there are a lot of speakers who speak it around the world. Another phenomenon also happened to the use of AAVE. The status of AAVE, nowadays, has changed. This language has reached its popularity among the speakers in all over the world, not only in America where the language was born.

The international status of AAVE comes along the popularity of Hip Hop and R&B culture among the youth. The culture also comes into the movie business. Mentioned in Billboard chart of the world, there are

ten best hip hop movies; include, 8 Mile (2002), Beats Rhymes & Life: The Travels of a Tribe Called Quest (2011), Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap (2012), etc.

Moreover, AAVE is used by the youth who are crazy about the music genres. They are "cool" when they use AAVE and dress in Hip Hop style. It is similar to the use of slang to certain groups.

Solidarity

Solidarity explains a degree of a relationship of speakers in using the language. It shows the distance among speakers how intimate the relationship is. Solidarity is one of social dimensions in the relation of the language users. If the situation is more intimate and the language use is casual in informal style, it shows a high solidarity among speakers in that language group. On the contrary, if the situation is less intimate and the formal style is used, it shows a low solidarity among speakers (Holmes, 1992: 12).

In a high solidarity, the politeness is not truly considered when the speakers are communicating. According to Brown (in McKay and Hornberger, 2009:251), politeness is a special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other person's feelings. It means that what one says politely will be less straightforward or more complicated than what one would say if one wasn't taking the other's feelings into account. In a high solidarity situation, speakers will use the simplified language and straightforward expression. They will not feel offended although the speakers use less polite language; even some swear words in the conversation.

Solidarity, or common group membership, is an important social force that has a major impact on language (Spolsky, 1998:35). If we use the language that indicates the group, we will be considered as the member of the group. The solidarity is often found in some groups who speak with the jargon marked by the rejection of formal language.

Edwards (1982:20) state that another dimension, called in group solidarity or language loyalty, reflects the social pressures to maintain languages/language varieties, even one without social prestige. A high solidarity leads to language maintenance because the speakers feel the same way living in the same tradition and culture. The bond among the members will be stronger if they feel comfortable to talk and being a part of that community. They will show the identity to the outsiders and suppose the language as them. Therefore, they feel that the language has a high prestige to be used in daily communication.

We take an example of American English in America. American English is the primary language in America although there are many English dialects caused by the different ethnic and language background like African-American English, Indian-American English, Spanish-American English, etc. The different background of language and culture, however, trigger a negative attitude towards their own languages. Sometimes, it caused by the discrimination and gap among the members of society. As the result, the language prestige is decreased.

As discussed in the previous explanation about the language maintenance, the language that has an international status will live longer. There is a little chance to disappear because the users are increased. For instance, AAVE nowadays has an international status because of the influence of the advancement in entertainment industry. The youth use AAVE as the language that bring them into the 'cool' thing. It means something that makes them more

African-American Vernacular English

In 1619, when Africans were first introduced into the North American English settlements, they came as trade commodities. But in their minds and hearts, they carried the living cultures of Old Africa (Jackson, 1995:2). The history of African-American Vernacular English (will be mentioned as AAVE) can be traced by the history of African great migration from South Africa to America in 1669. The Dutch sent Africans to Virginia for the slavery needs in that continent.

The racism and discrimination was extremely high because of the skin color difference. The language contact between Native American speakers and Africans created the different language. The language used by African-American as the ancestor of African people is the mixed language between West African language and American English. Both languages influenced each other. For instance, the word *okay* used by West Africans become *OK* in American English (Olson, 1979:38-41).

AAVE is the language used by African-American in America. It has a lot of names, such as Black English, Ebonics, Spoken Soul, African American English, etc (Fought, 2006:45). Some experts agree that this language is just American English dialect of American English due to the similarity of the language features. But the language is ethnic identity marker. It is not as simple as turn back the palm of one's hands if we say the language is a language or just a dialect. AAVE reflects African American identity among multicultural speakers in America.

The special features of AAVE that makes it different from American English such as simplification, deletion and casual-impolite vocabularies (Wolfram, 1970; Seli, 2011; Wardaugh, 1992; Riksfors, 2000).

The special features in phonology can be found in the simplification of some phonemes in the final position like *something* /sʌmɪn/ to *some n* /sʌm/. In their pronunciation, inflectional suffix *-ed* is also deleted. The linking verbs *want to* and *got to* are contracted to *wanna* and *gotta*. The casual-impolite words they use in everyday conversation are filled by some swear words. But the swear words they use indicates the intimacy among them. They are also functioned as something to break the ice.

Nowadays, the use of AAVE is not only among the native speakers but also it is used by people around the world as the result of the popularity of Blacks in entertainment world. African-Americans art forms started from the popularity of Jazz music in the late eighteens. But before this genre of music, there was Ragtime, a piano music that composed in Black rhythmic dynamism. The earlier Jazz was in the nineteenth century. And these years were known as Jazz Age.

The well-known music genres today are hip-hop and R&B. Music in African American is a vital instrument for their lives. These music genres are identical with drums. As we know drums in Africa indicates African tradition. When brought to America, drums were used for communication among the Blacks. Drums were used as something to yell out their identity to the outsiders (Sullivan, 2001). The used of drums as something essential to the Blacks can be found in new form music genre today, such as hip hop and R&B. These genres insert the drums as the main music elements.

Hip Hop culture has its own blackness inside the intrinsic component (Williams, 2007:6). It reflects who the Blacks are with the authenticity of Black street culture with many violence, drug dealers and action and sex (Harkness in Williams, 2015:168) as well as reflected in *Beauty Shop* and *Romeo Must Die*. It shows who African-Americans are and how is the culture. Therefore, AAVE is a symbol that African-Americans are not the minority.

About *Beauty Shop*

The movie was released in 2005 and directed by Bille Woodruff. *Barber Shop* was a comedy movie that tells about the story of an African-American woman who fights for life after moved to Atlanta.

Gina Norris (Queen Latifah) is a long way from the Barbershop - she's moved from Chicago to Atlanta so her gifted daughter can attend a prestigious music school and made a name for herself at a posh salon with her cutting-edge hairstyles. But when her egotistical boss (Bacoy) takes credit for her work, she leaves the salon, shampoo girl (Silverstone) in tow, to open a shop of her own. Gina buys a rundown salon and inherits a motley group of headstrong stylists (including Woodard), a colorful clientele (including Suvari and MacDowell), and a sexy piano-playing electrician (Hounsou). It's a rocky road to fulfilling her dreams, but you can't keep a good woman down.

The casts are Queen Latifah as Gina Norris, Alicia Silverstone as Lynn, Andie MacDowell as Terri, Alfre Woodard as Ms. Josephine, Mena Suvari as Joanne, Sherri Shepherd as Ida, Kevin Bacon as Jorge, etc.

About *Romeo Must Die*

Romeo Must Die is a 2000 American martial arts action film directed by Andrzej Bartkowiak in his directorial debut, and also fights choreography by Corey Yuen, and starring Jet Li and Aaliyah. The film was released in the United States on March 22, 2000.

The film's plot is loosely related to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but instead of the last name, the families' feud over race and the main characters are respectively black and Chinese. The film's setting is Oakland, California, but other than a few establishing shots, film production was entirely in Vancouver, British Columbia. This film was the debut of late R&B singer Aaliyah as an actress.

Two rival gangs, one Asian, the other African American, are locked in a fierce and brutal turf battle, vying for control of Oakland's waterfront properties. But when the first casualty is the Asian warlord's son Po, the gang war becomes more dangerous than either side ever imagined.

News of the murder gets back to Po's big brother Han (Jet Li - *Lethal Weapon 4*, *Kiss Of the Dragon*), a legendary ex-cop currently imprisoned in a Hong Kong jail. In a world of vicious rivalries and violent betrayals, Han has no choice but to escape and declare war himself. But unlike others, who can only use weapons, Han is a weapon. And falling into his sightlines can be a deadly mistake. The casts of the movie are Jet Li as Han Sing, Aaliyah as Trish O'Day, Isaiah Washington as Mac, Russell Wong as Kai, Delroy Lindo as Isaak O'Day, Anthony Anderson as Maurice, etc.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This essay is a qualitative case study exploring and investigating the assumptions mentioned and asked above. This essay wants to revealed and describe the language maintenance and solidarity among African-Americans. Based on some movies with the African-Americans as the stars, African-Americans always use AAVE wherever and whenever they talk with. They speak AAVE to whoever they talked to.

Therefore, it is interesting to describe the phenomenon of the language maintenance and solidarity that reflected by the movie.

The case study was done through the movie analysis based on the context of the language use or AAVE used by African-Americans in movie *Beauty Shop* and *Romeo Must Die*. The movies were chosen because they tell the story about Black community in Atlanta and Oakland. The movies were also starred by some famous Hollywood movie stars, including African-Americans movie stars like Queen Latifah, Alfre Woodard, Sherri Shepherd, Aaliyah, Delroy Lindo, Anthony Anderson, etc.

AAVE maintenance

The language maintenance can be seen clearly from the situation where an African-American woman named Gina talks to her customer, which is a White-American, by using AAVE. The relationship of both speakers is close but they are from the different ethnic background. Even so, Gina still uses AAVE in the conversation, as follow:

Situation 1

Gina : "Angel, angel, Joanne. I'm tellin' you don't do it. Or you know what? You'll be going hot and heavy with your boyfriend, he squeeze too hard, that thing fly right out your mouth."

The features of AAVE are in the use of nasal *-in'* in the final position, plurality deletion in *that thing fly* from *that thing flies*, and the idiom *fly out*. The second situation in the shop still show Gina in using AAVE in the conversation with her woman customer named Terri.

Situation 2

Gina : "Hey, Terri. How you doin'?" Come on, get comfortable."

Terri : "I'm having this major party for Steven and a few of his clients. And I just have to look remarkable, I just have to."

Gina : "I think I can conjure up somethin' for you. You know what? Lynn, I got this. Why don't you go finish setting Mrs. Dexter for me?"

Lynn : "I don't know. I was just supposed to shampoo till an available chair opens."

Gina and Terri's relationship is between a hairdresser and a customer. Just like between Gina and Joanne, it can be said that the relationship is close because they talk about Terri's family. Terri is also a White-American; even so Gina still uses AAVE to Terri. It can be seen from some features of AAVE in Gina's utterances. She uses *-in'* in the final position of *doin'* and *somethin'* instead of *doing* and *something* in American English.

In situation 2, there is a speaker 3. The speaker 3 is Lynn who standing near them. After talks to Terri, Gina speaks to Lynn to ask her continues Gina's work in doing a hair style to Mrs. Dexter, one of the customer. As it can be seen in the context, the speaker 3 with different ethnic doesn't seem to affects Gina in using AAVE no matter who the speakers are. Two situations above prove that AAVE is maintained in daily communication used to speak to different ethnic.

As we know that African-Americans in Atlanta is not the minority. According to atlanta.aresconnect.com (<http://atlanta.aresconnect.com/statistics.htm>), African-Americans are the majority in Atlanta. It is 61.39 % out of the total number of citizens there. The Whites is in the second place, namely, 33.22%. As the majority, indeed, the language maintenance in this area is an easy thing due to a high number of AAVE speakers.

To prove the language maintenance in another area, some situations will be explained, too. In this situation, the conversation took place in Trisha's house. The scene was in *Romeo Must Die* movie set in Oakland. The conversation happened between Trisha an African-American woman and Han a Chinese man.

Situation 3

Trisha : "Akbar, what the hell are you doing here?"

Han : "I need to ask you something."

From the context, it is known that Trisha and Han were just met, Trisha called Han as Akbar because he introduced his name so. One day, suddenly, Han came to Trisha's house to asking something. From the conversation, Trisha used AAVE by inserting 'the hell'. It is known as a fake infix in English when 'the hell' was inserted between *what* and *are you doing*. Even though they just met, Trisha used AAVE to Han who was a Chinese man.

From the three situations explained above, the African-Americans use AAVE to the different ethnic and language speakers in the informal situation. In the formal situation, they still use standard American English, as indicated in situation as follow.

Situation 4

Isaak : "You have my deepest deepest condolences."

Mr. Sing: "Thank you."

Isaak : "What happened to your son was tragic, very unnecessary. I want you to know I'll be looking into this myself personally."

Mr. Isaak is a business man who cooperated with Mr. Sing in a business project. The situation happened at the airport when Mr. Isaak wanted to stated his condolence to Mr. Sing's son who passed away. The language used by Mr. Isaak was standard American English. It is known by the expression of stating *condolences you have my deepest condolences* instead of *I'm sorry*. The use of time marker of past experience also used and it was indicated in statement *what happened to your son was tragic, very unnecessary*. As we know that AAVE does not really consider the use of time marker.

The use of standard American English also happened to Gina in *Beauty Shop*. Gina as the speaker of AAVE in Atlanta used formal language when she spoke to a bank officer just like in situation 5 below.

Situation 5

Bank Officer : "I can't approve this, not for this much."

Gina : "But didn't you read my business plan or my letters of recommendation?"

In the situation above, Gina wanted to propose a loan to open the salon. When she spoke to the bank officer, she did not use AAVE but used standard American English. The situation above is similar to situation 4 where Mr. Isaak an African-Americans businessman met Mr. Sing a Chinese business partner. Both situation took place in a public places. It can be concluded that AAVE use to other language speakers from different ethnics happened when they were in the informal situation. On the contrary, if the conversation happened in the formal situation, the African-Americans still consider about the language use. The language maintenance from the movies both set in Atlanta and Oakland is clearly reflected the language phenomenon.

Solidarity among African-Americans as AAVE speakers

The solidarity among African-Americans reflected in the context where conversation happens. The conversation takes place in the beauty shop with African-Americans as the member of the group. One White-American named Lynn is a hairdresser in the beauty shop. She is discriminated by them because she is the only one white in the group. The situation can be seen as follow.

Situation 6

Lynn : "Them girls don't like me so much, do they?"

Darnelle: "They don't even know you?"

Lynn : "How do you get to know someone without trying to get to know someone? Like askin' 'em to lunch."

Darnelle: "I mean, well, some folks just feel comfortable kickin' it with people they have somethin' in common with."

Lynn : "When I worked in my mama's shop in Blue Ridge, I did black, white, polka-dotted hair. It don't matter."

Darnelle : "Well, this ain't your mama's shop in Blue Ridge. This is the SWATS, the ghetto. And you need to show people that you tryin' to fit in, girl."

Solidarity, or common group membership, is an important social force that has a major impact on language (Spolsky, 1998:35). If we use the language that indicates the group, we will be considered as the member of the group. In the situation above, the conversation happens between two girls in Gina's beauty shop. Darnelle is an African-American girl and Gina's cousin. In the conversation it can be seen that Lynn feels she is discriminated by other workers because she is a White girl. But Darnelle said that Lynn have to adapt to their life style if they want to be known by the people in the group. By Darnelle statements, it is known that another ethnic has to adapt this life style in dressing and speaking therefore they will be accepted in African-American group. It shows a high solidarity among the users that the outsiders must "follow the rule" if they want to be accepted in the community.

To prove that solidarity set in Atlanta, situation 7 will shows the solidarity among African-Americans set in Oakland.

Situation 7

Silk : "Guns don't kill people. People kill people. For example, these two guys with the machine guns. If they start blastin' off...ain't none o' y'all goin' home! But you guy is disturbin' my business. So if your ass ain't black...you'd better get up out of here before it really get hot!"

In situation 7, the conversation happened in the night club owned by Silk. There was a fight between African-Americans and Chinese in the club caused by a Chinese boy who brought some girls while all of the members of the club were African-Americans. Silk was angry to the fight and asked the Chinese left the club. In the utterances, Silk used AAVE to the Chinese. The context shows a high solidarity among the Blacks. They will be unhappy if another ethnic disturbed the group. It can be seen from sentence *so if your ass ain't black...you'd better get up out of here before it really get hot* means if the people are not African-Americans then it is better for them not disturbing the group by making troubles.

By the description of two different situations above, the solidarity among African-Americans is not a joke. The background of discrimination unites them and makes them proud of who they are.

The influence of solidarity toward AAVE maintenance

Solidarity of people who live in groups is higher than people who live individually. Solidarity reflects the social pressure to maintain the language (Edwards, 1982:20). AAVE considered as something indicate and mark the existence as African-Americans. The discrimination caused their life in hard situation. They struggle their equal right for decades. During the fights they feel the same feeling of belonging.

Some situations above explained to us how strong the bound among African-Americans in maintain not only the language but also the whole tradition which indicates their ethnic. Moreover, the popularity of some music genres such as Jazz, Hip-Hop and R&B bring AAVE and Blacks culture creates a loyalty to the language that will support the language maintenance in a positive way.

Conclusion and Suggestion

There are a lot of studies related to AAVE since 19th century. The studies revealed the features of AAVE, the speech act and other problems in socio-pragmatics phenomena. AAVE is known as the simplified language which reflected the intimacy and casual style of language. The positive attitude toward the language protects AAVE from the influence of other major language such as American English.

Based on the case study in both movies *Beauty Shop* and *Romeo Must Die* set in two different areas in Atlanta and Oakland, the social phenomena were drawn clearly are the sense of belonging that trigger a high solidarity among the Blacks. As the result, AAVE maintenance is not a difficult thing for them. AAVE is still in a high prestige for them to communicate inside or outside the community.

Finally, the article is far from perfect. It still needs some revisions and deeper analysis as well as supporting theories related to AAVE study. AAVE study is always be an interesting case to be investigated since a language is like a living creature that maintained, shifted, dead and revived. Therefore, there are still many cases to analyze that may contribute to linguistics.

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