

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is used in a variety of ways within the adaptation of certain contexts. According to Mallinson (2015)—a sociolinguist—our language works in the way we operate as individuals, members of communities, and within culture and societies fundamentally. Therefore, it is not surprising that even though there are many communities in one country speaking the same language, they may have different ‘linguistic characteristics’—given the richness of socio-cultural context in each community—and unique dialects that are defined as a diversity of language that belong to a certain territory or social community (Huang et. al., 2016).

Linguistic variations among various communities can also be seen in all countries, including in the United States—a country that is very heterogeneous. According to Mamedzade Sevinj (2015) there are three main dialects in the US, including: the Eastern English dialect; Southern dialect; and general dialect (Sevinj, 2015). Sevinj noted that the main differences between these dialects derived from its grammar, lexicon, and phonetic. However, he also explained that there is another US dialect and linguistic variation, namely Black English, a variety of English that is used by black community in the US. In more academic terms, Black English is also referred to as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Different from other linguistic variation in U.S., based on the history, AAVE developed during enslavement era as a medium of oral communication &

language taught from generation-to-generation while black people were not allowed to learn, write, and read. This historical context contributed to its unique character, setting it apart from standard English (Lewis:2008). Due to that case, inevitably, AAVE is systematically rooted in history and acts as an identity marker and expressive resource for its speakers (Rickford, et. al.: 2015). From time to time until in this modern era, AAVE is commonly spoken not just among black community in U.S, but also among the white people (McCrum, et.al.:1986).

The massive use of AAVE also occurs in literature works, for instance, songs. So far, there have been many famous singers around the world who insert AAVE pronunciation in their works, especially in the RnB and Hip - hop genres. As quoted by Alim (2006), Hip Hop Nation Language refers to a set of practices that are fundamental to the identity of African American youth. Supporting this idea, Cutler (2007) added that AAVE is used by Black artists to promote linguistic unity among Black communities and express their identities. Therefore, the use of AAVE by Black musicians and artists functions as: a means of self – expressed, a representation of community and unity, and/or a symbol of cultural resistance and pride.

Regarding of pronunciation, AAVE has a style of speaking that is different from Standard American English pronunciation. According to Trudgill (1983), singers like to change their inherent speech patterns—especially phonology—during performances, as the way to align with rhythmic and melodic requirements or to express a specific stylistic identity. The researcher conducted research about the different in AAVE pronunciation from Standard American English (SAE) in

three songs from two famous black singers. For the first black singer, the data gathers from three selected songs from Beyoncé's: *Get Me Bodied* (2006), *Video Phone* (2009), and *Me Myself and I* (2003) as the first object for researching AAVE's pronunciation. This pick based on the fact that Beyoncé is the one of the most popular black singers since early 2000s that are using AAVE frequently in her songs, hence she received the title *Queen of Bad Grammar* by her listeners. Secondly, the three songs titled: *Get Ur Freak On* (2001), *Ain't it Funny* (2004), and *I'm Really Hot* (2004) by one of the pioneers of American black woman - rapper & singer in early 20's, Missy Elliot caught the researcher's attention. The lyrics of the selected songs are the combination of the Standard American English (SAE)'s words and the AAVE's words, for example, the lyric 'let me *holla* at the DJ' in the song titled 'I'm Really Hot' by Missy Elliot. The chosen singers have their own style for pronouncing some English words, for example, the singers tend to removing phoneme 'ing' (/ɪŋ/) in final sounds from some words like 'walking' (/wɔːkɪŋ/) and 'doing' (/duːɪŋ/), and the pronunciation becomes /'wɔːkɪn/ (walkin) and /dun/ (doin). Beyoncé and Missy Elliott symbolize varying generations and subgenres of Black American music, but both also deliver unique pronunciation styles that reflect AAVE while highlighting their personal creativity. The way how both of the singers pronounce some words that distinguished them by SAE is making them fit as the main subjects of the researcher to be further detailed using the phonological process from phonology's view.

Phonology is the field that investigates the sound patterns of language, as stated by Peter Hawkins (2018). He also added that the primary goal of phonology

is to clarify the auditory or articulatory context of sounds, rather than to identify the patterns of sounds within a language or the connections among those sounds. Meanwhile, According to Fromkin (2011), phonological processes supply the phonetic information required for certain utterances. It can be concluded that numerous English contractions improve communication inside the language by looking at the words and song lyrics.

With this study, the researcher hopes that the identification of AAVE's pronunciation through phonological process using distinctive features approach from chosen black singers in those songs mentioned above can be employed; therefore, this study can be the addition to the increasing acknowledgment of AAVE as a valid linguistic framework, emphasizing its impact on mainstream culture driven by the world - wide reach of Black American music.

1.2 Research Questions

There are two research question raised in this study as follows:

- a. What kind of phonological processes are found in the selected songs from Beyoncé and Missy Elliot using distinctive features approach?
- b. Are the phonological processes found in the singers' pronunciation in accordance with the AAVE's theory by Green (2002)?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the type of phonological process found in selected songs from Beyoncé and Missy Elliott, explain the phonological rules used in the phonological processes, and to classified the type of phonological process into AAVE's phonological process theory. The researcher hopes that this

study will broaden the researchers' knowledge about phonological process in AAVE's pronunciation.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study limited to the discussion regarding the process of phonological in selected songs from Beyoncé and Missy Elliot. The researcher focused on the words from the lyrics that contain the AAVE's pronunciation when compared to how the words sound in Standard American English (SAE). From here, the researcher will be able to identify what kind of AAVE's phonological process in the selected songs using distinctive features approach.

1.5 Previous Studies

Research about the use of AAVE and its phonological process in popular music has been done by several researchers but the number is still limited. The first one is about John R. Rickford's research on Ebonics/Black English: 'Nonstandard Negro English'. Rickford (1999) explained that the term Ebonics itself was created in 1973 because of the black scholarship's reluctance to accept the term 'Nonstandard Negro English'. In addition, Rickford (1999) discovered that Ebonics possesses its own set of rules and systematic limitations, demonstrating that the grammatical deviations are not merely random. For the initial AAVE song study, it was conducted by Walter F. Edwards and Leslie Ash (2004)'s study about Tupac Shakur's selected album. Based on their findings, the use of AAVE is only present in Tupac's music because Tupac has different artistic and audience choices when it comes to music. This research also provided a solid argument that the use of AAVE in art will greatly depend on the market target of

the art itself. The next research is taken from the study by Estu Kuncoro Ismartono (2009), titled "A Phonological Analysis of Black English in 50 Cent's Song Lyrics in the Album 'Curtis'", examines the phonological processes found in 50 Cent's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The subject of the study is 50 Cent, a prominent African American rapper, and the object is the phonological features in the lyrics of his album Curtis. The researcher found several phonological processes—such as alveolarization, vowel weakening, deletion, and alveolar stop palatalization—that distinguish Black English from Standard English, concluding that these features contribute to the unique pronunciation patterns in AAVE.

For the next study of song from American's popular music based on AAVE's theory came from Khoirunisak Nur Islami (2017). In particular, Islami (2017) explores the use of AAVE in Nicki Minaj's song lyrics. Islami (2017) found that there are many AAVE's phonological processes and morphological processes in Nicki Minaj's songs. Despite the study included the AAVE's phonological processes, the study did not use the distinctive features' approach. The fifth previous study is by Puput Puji Astuti (2018), focusing on the application of AAVE in Logic's studio album 'Everybody'. Astuti (2018) found that Logic employs 11 out of 13 grammatical features of AAVE. The further finding was that the use of AAVE by Logic is caused by three reasons: (1) efforts to established positions in the hip-hop community; (2) environmental influences, because he lives in African-American household and neighborhood; and (3) a view that AAVE can be used a tool to represent himself as the part of black community.

Additionally, the next previous research is by Rajic Martina (2018) on the use of AAVE in Beyoncé's album, *Lemonade*. Martina investigates the morphosyntactic and lexical features of AAVE as occurring in the audio and visual album *Lemonade* of Beyoncé. This study found that some key characteristics of AAVE were not visible but several other AAVE features were still used both grammatically and lexically.

The following study regarding phonological analysis of song came from Siregar (2019). He analyzed about the phonological of Black English of the song's lyric in the album titled 'DAMN' which sung by the famous Black – American rapper, Kendrick Lamar. This study identified various phonological processes, with alveolarization occurring most often. Employing this framework helps in understanding the linguistic patterns found in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or Black English. The results also illustrate how these linguistic characteristics manifest in daily conversations among African Americans and others. Prior to the previous study, the researcher figured a journal by Intan Tia Ajeng Aryani from Universitas Airlangga (2020), using Rich Brian's songs, the Indonesian rapper who works in US' Music Agency: 88 Rising. Intan's (2020) study implies AAVE grammatical features in Rich Brian's song's lyric and she found seven out of thirteen AAVE grammatical features. Furthermore, Intan (2020) explains the underlying effect on Brian's use of AAVE. Still associated with the use of AAVE in songs, the next research is provided by El – Malti (2022). This study explores how African American Vernacular English (AAVE) features appear in rap lyrics by both African American (D.O.C., Kendrick Lamar and

Royce Da 5'9') and Caucasian American artists (Vanilla Ice, G-Eazy and Eminem). It focuses on phonological, grammatical, and lexical elements of AAVE, using sociolinguistic theory to examine the cultural and linguistic role of hip-hop language. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis using AntConc, the study compares how AAVE is used similarly or differently by the two groups of rappers. The last study of phonological processes on song is titled 'Contractions and Phonological Process in the Album 'Mezmerize' and 'Hypnotize' by System of a Down Band', taken from Amalia, et. al (2024). The study discusses categorizes the song lyrics into contractions and parted into three groups: standard contractions, negative contractions, and nonstandard forms. In addition to categorizing the contractions, the result also outlines the phonological processes involved in each group, such as assimilation, dissimilation, feature change, feature addition, assertion, and deletion.

Among all the previous studies that the researcher collected, the study which took the songs of the singer Missy Elliot, and selected songs in this study sung by Beyoncé as the object of study from the point of view of the phonological process is still very limited. Most of the studies about the use of AAVE by singer, only discussed about the grammar classification of AAVE that presented and the broaden sociolinguistics context behind the use. About the study of phonological processes in songs, it is still rare to examine changes in pronunciation using distinctive features. Therefore, in this study, the researcher will analyze and classify the pronunciation change in the selected songs by the chosen singers; Beyoncé and

Missy Elliot as representers of AAVE speakers, through phonological process using distinctive features approach.

1.6 Writing Organization

This thesis consists of five chapters, which as follows:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The first part of this thesis are parted into background of the study, research question, purpose of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, and writing organization.

CHAPTER II THEORY AND METHOD

The second part of this thesis covers some theories such as: American – English dialects, AAVE’s phonological theories, theory of phonological processes, and theory of distinctive features. Following that, this part also contains research method used for the research. This part concludes data and data sources, method of data collection, and method of data analysis.

CHAPTER III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part provides the results of the research question followed by the further discussion of the results.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

The section of study's final section summarizes the findings and comments from the prior chapter.

