

SPECIAL NOTE: VOCABULARY

African-American English shares the majority of its vocabulary with other English dialects, especially Southern United States English, although some lexical variations do exist. These include both unique words and words whose meanings differ from their usage in Standard American English (e.g., “threads” meaning clothes). Many words and phrases that originated in African-American English have become part of Standard American English, such as “chill out” and “funky.”

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS FOR LANGUAGE: MORPHOSYNTAX

Note: Sentences in italics are grammatical dialectal variations.

Feature	AAE	SAE	Examples
Present tense verb “to be”	Can be used, omitted, or substituted as determined by context and contractibility	Must always be included	<i>He a boy.</i> He is a boy. <i>He eatin’.</i> / He is eating. <i>The coffee bees cold./</i> The coffee is cold. <i>There go a bus./</i> There is a bus.
Past tense verb “to be”	Uses the same form (i.e., “was”) with all persons and numbers	Uses “was” for 1 st and 3 rd person singular and “were” for all other persons and numbers	<i>You was going to go./</i> You were going to go. <i>We was going to go./</i> We were going to go.
Habitual/continuative state	Allows for inflection of the verb “to be”	Expressed through adverbs and inflected forms of the verb “to be”	<i>He be waiting all day./</i> He waits all day. <i>She been buying me clothes./</i> She has been buying me clothes (for a long time).

Difference or Disorder?

Feature	AAE	SAE	Examples
Regular past tense marker: -ed	Omitted and optional tenses/phases permitted	Required in regular verbs	<i>He start crying an hour ago./ He started crying an hour ago.</i> <i>She been done./ She finished work (a long time ago).</i> <i>They been had that dog./ They had the dog (for years).</i>
Irregular past tense verbs	Past participle is substituted	Past tense verb is used	<i>She seen him./ She saw him. He knowed it./ He knew it.</i>
Modals	Uses double modals for "might," "could," "should"	Uses single modals	<i>I might could play./ I might be able to play.</i>
Present and past perfect verb forms	"Been" or "done" are used to show past action that has been completed recently or to emphasize that it was completed a long time ago	Uses "have, has, had" plus "been"	<i>I been there before./ I have been there before.</i> <i>I been finished./ I have finished./</i> <i>He been gone./ He's been gone for a long time.</i>
Future tense verbs	"Will" is not used and "fixing to" (minus the auxiliary verb) is substituted for "is going to"	"Will" is inserted before "be" or the auxiliary + ing is used	<i>They be here soon./ They will be here soon.</i> <i>He finna (also written fixina, fixna, fitna, finta, fittin) go./ He is going to go.</i>
Negation	Use of multiple negatives and the word <i>ain't</i> is permitted	Single negatives and the contractions <i>isn't, aren't, hasn't, don't, haven't</i>	<i>Nobody don't never agree with me./ No one ever agrees with me. I ain't goin./ I'm not going.</i>