

INTERLINGUAL COMMUNICATION: AFRO-AMERICAN ENGLISH AS A TRANSLATIONAL BARRIER

Статтю присвячено актуальній темі дослідження відмінностей афро-американського варіанта англійської мови. Зроблено спробу класифікувати його характерні риси. Наголошено на напрямках вивчення афро-американського діалекту як важливої складової англійської мови – мови міжнародної комунікації. Робота спрямована на підвищення перекладацької компетенції студентів-лінгвістів та професійних перекладачів з англійської мови.

Ключові слова: *переклад, соціальний діалект, афро-американська англійська, стандартна англійська, мовний бар'єр, соціолінгвістична компетенція.*

Стаття посвячена актуальній темі дослідження отличий афро-американського варіанта англійського языка. Делается попытка классифицировать его характерные черты. Делается акцент на направлениях исследования афро-американского диалекта как важной составляющей англійского языка – языка международного общения. Работа имеет целью повышение переводческой компетенции студентов-лингвистов и профессиональных переводчиков англійского языка.

Ключевые слова: *перевод, социальный диалект, афро-американский англійский, стандартный англійский, языковой барьер, социолінгвістическая компетенция.*

The article deals with the distinguishing features of Afro-American English. An attempt is made to categorize its peculiarities and outline some research areas. Emphasis is put on the necessity to study the Afro-American dialect as a significant component of the language of international communication. The paper aims at improving the translation competence of linguistics students and professional translators from English.

Keywords: *translation, social dialect, Afro-American English, Standard English, language barrier, sociolinguistic competence.*

Introduction. The U.S. society and its public institutions are an important source of economic, political and cultural innovations affecting the world. Understandably, the socio-cultural characteristics of American English attract a growing interest on the part of those involved in translator/interpreter training, profession and associated studies. In recent years Standard American English has shown a marked tendency towards incorporating a number of social dialecticisms, particularly those from Afro-American English [11]. These linguistic changes reflect the U.S. policy of integrating Afro-American features into the mainstream culture. However, in Ukraine, there is an apparent lack of studies into the peculiarities of this social dialect.

In this article we research Afro-American (AAE), or Black Vernacular English, as a translational barrier, its pronunciation, grammatical and vocabulary aspects to highlight the possible areas of misunderstanding between bilingual foreigners or Standard English

speakers and AAE speakers. The linguistic characteristics make up the core content of the work.

The objectives of the work were to study the pronunciation peculiarities of AAE, to research the grammar peculiarities of AAE, to consider the vocabulary peculiarities of AAE and to show the necessity of including an AAE sociolinguistic component in curricula for translation students.

The illustrative material used in the study is the song lyrics, movies and interviews of representatives of the African-American rap culture.

The description of research. AAE is a social dialect of American English [4; 5; 15], originated and formed as a result of language interaction in the process of historical development. It was researched by such sociolinguists as R. D. Abrahams [6], J. L. Dillard [9], J. C. Baratz & R. W. Shuy [7], W. Labov [14], W. Wolfram [17], E. Dandy [8], G. Smitherman [16].

For centuries this dialect has been stigmatized as a sign of illiteracy and lack of education on the part of its users. Linguistically, it is a group of closely related dialects spoken by a large section of non-middle class Afro-Americans [10]. Its distinguishing features persisted due to social, educational, and economic reasons. The historical discrimination against Afro-Americans has created ghetto living and segregated schools [1]. Social isolation added up to divergences. In recent years, however, considerable changes have taken place. Afro-American culture represented in music, cinematography, and literature (e.g., *ebonic poetry*) penetrated the U.S. mass media. As a result, the dialect is no longer considered inferior. On the contrary, it has become fashionable among public figures to use AAE lexical and phraseological units [12]. The latter also appear on the pages of quality press, are often heard on national television channels. AAE has become an inherent integral part and background of the present-day American culture, which is increasingly gaining global popularity.

Nowadays, Standard American English has borrowed the AAE *bling-bling* to refer to the status of a pop star, *slam dunk* to name a devastating blow. Ex-president of the U.S.A. Bill Clinton used the Afro-Americanism *upside the head* in his anti-drug appeal to young Americans [3].

There can be no doubt that professional translators and interpreters in this country need to be aware of the present-day AAE peculiarities in order to understand and express the literal meaning of utterances, produce and understand utterances appropriately in its social context, improve communication or to compensate for breakdowns in it.

In the study, three aspects of AAE, such as **pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary**, were investigated.

A. Pronunciation.

A number of researchers [6–9; 14] indicate that AAE and Standard English pronunciation are sometimes quite different. These differences in pronunciation or accent are an object of study in the phonologic segment of sociolinguistics. It should be noted that English phonology has nothing to do with spelling. The way something is spelt is often not a good indication of the way it «should be», or much less is pronounced [1].

A1. Consonants.

When two consonants appear at the end of a word (for instance the *st* in *test*), they are often reduced: the final *t* is deleted. This happens, to some extent, in every variety of English including standard ones. In AAE the consonant cluster is reduced variably (i.e. it does not happen every time) and systematically.

At the beginning of a word, the voiced sound (e.g. in *that*) is regularly pronounced as *d* so «*the*», «*they*» and «*that*» are pronounced as *de*, *dey* and *dat*. When the *th* sound is followed by *r*, it is possible in AAE to pronounce the *th* as *f* as in *froat* for «*throat*».

A2. Vowels.

Nasalized vowels. When a nasal (*n* or *m*) follows a vowel, AAE speakers delete the nasal consonant and nasalize the vowel. This nasalization is written with a tilde (~) above the vowel. So «*man*» becomes *mã*.

Nasals consonants and front vowels. In many varieties of English, including standard varieties, the vowels *i* in *pin* and *e* in *pen* sound different in all words. In AAE, these sounds are merged before a nasal (like *n* or *m*). So in AAE *pin* and *pen* are pronounced with the same vowel. Most Southern US varieties of English merge these vowels too, so this is only a distinctive feature of AAE in the northern United States.

A3. Stress.

AAE has some peculiarities in the placement of stress in a word. So, while words like *police*, *hotel* and *July* are pronounced with stress on the last syllable in Standard English, in AAE they may have stress placed on the first syllable so that you get *po-lice*, *ho-tel* and *Ju-ly*.

Results.

In the material available to us for the purposes of the research we have found consonant changes in 55 % of 250 terms under examination, changed vowels constituted 35 %, and 10 % are words with the stress changed.

B. Grammar.

B1. Negation and double negation.

AAE has a number of ways of marking negation. Like a number of other varieties of English, AAE uses *ain't* to negate the verb in a simple sentence [13]. In common with other nonstandard dialects of English, AAE also uses *ain't* where Standard English uses «*haven't*». For example, standard *I haven't seen him* is equivalent to AAE *I ain't seen him*. Unlike most other nonstandard varieties of English, AAE speakers also sometimes use *ain't* for standard *didn't* as in the following examples:

I ain't step on no line.

I said, «I ain't run the stop sign», and he said, «you ran it!».

AAE also has a special negative construction which linguists call «*negative inversion*» and in which a negative auxiliary is placed before the subject:

Ain't no white cop gonna put his hands on me.

Can't nobody beat 'em.

B2. Absence of 3rd-person singular forms.

Standard English speakers got used to the forms like «*he / she does / doesn't*». However, the 3rd-person singular forms are absent in AAE. The following examples can illustrate this:

He don't have no choice. (He doesn't have a choice).

Granma don't play cards. (Grandmother doesn't play cards).

B3. Omission of the copula.

Standard English uses a conjugated *be* verb (called a copula) in a number of different sentences. (This may occur as *is, 's, are, 're, etc.*) In AAE this verb is often not included [2]. The frequency of inclusion has been shown to depend on a variety of factors. Here are some examples:

– In future sentences with *gonna* or *gon* a copula is often preserved:

...as long as i's kids around he's gon play rough or however they're gon playing.

– Before verbs with the *-ing* or *-in* ending (progressive) a copula is not usually included:

I tell him to be quiet because he don't know what he ___ talking about.

I mean, he may say something's out of place but he ___ cleaning up behind it and you can't get mad at him.

– Before adjectives and expressions of location a copula is practically never used:

He ___ all right.

And Mark, he ___ kind of big, you know?

– Before nouns (or phrases with nouns) a copula is regularly omitted:

He ___ the one who had to go try to pick up the peacock.

I say, you ___ the one jumping up to leave, not me.

B4. Omission of the auxiliary.

Some past events are conveyed by placing *been* before the verb. Speakers of Standard English and non-native speakers may mistake this for the Standard English «present perfect» with the «have» or «has» deleted. Therefore, it is important to remember that the AAE sentence with *been* is in fact quite different from the Standard English present perfect. This can be seen by comparing two sentences such as the following:

Standard English present perfect: *He has been married.*

AAE *been*: *He been married.*

In the Standard English sentence the implication is that he is now no longer married. However, in the AAE sentence the implication is quite the opposite: *he is still married.*

B5. Questions.

In AAE direct questions are formed without the inversion of the subject and auxiliary verb:

«Why I can't play?» or «They didn't take it?» («Why can't I play?» or «Didn't they take it?»).

Auxiliary verb inversion in embedded questions is without «if» and «whether».

«I aksed him could he go with me» («I asked him if he could go with me»).

Results.

We can conclude that double negation and copula omission are the most distinctive characteristics of the AAE grammar.

C. Vocabulary.

Obviously, AAE does not have a vocabulary separate from other varieties of English. However, AAE speakers do use some words and idioms which are not found in other

varieties and, furthermore, use some English words in ways that differ from the standard variety [2].

As dictionaries traditionally indicate, AAE speakers have a large repertoire of dialect words uncommon to Standard American English. Most of these dialect words were coined by jazz musicians and inner city rappers.

Some of the AAE lexical units differ from their Standard English equivalents in pronunciation and / or spelling. Their meaning can generally be figured out without a dictionary, for example,

– *cuz* – *because*; *dis* – *this*; *doc* – *doctor*; *doe* – *door*; *fella* – *fellow*.

Other vocabulary units are too distant in form or in meaning from their Standard English equivalents to be understood by the speaker of a non-AAE variety:

fa' sheezy, *fasheezi* – *of course*; *fittin*, *fixin* – *to be going to do smth*; *flashin* – *to be nervous*; *fuzzy* – *distorted*; *gaga* – *senseless, slightly crazy*.

The meaning of these words cannot be figured out without a dictionary.

Conclusion. AAE was originally created at the intersection of unique social, ethnic, and territorial dimensions. It has gone a long way from the language of the lowest class to one of the main sources of vocabulary innovations in what is arguably the most prestigious variety of English – contemporary American English. It continues to send a challenge to standards and still remains at the heart of public debate. One thing is, however, for certain: Ukrainian translation students have to study the peculiarities of AAE because this knowledge should constitute a significant part of their sociolinguistic competence.

Firstly, to qualify as a linguist and translator, one needs to study not only the language as a total entity but also its socially marked varieties which, taken together, constitute that language. Secondly, translators and interpreters have to address problems of comprehensibility with ideological, political, and social implications. Thirdly, principles of equivalence demand that translators and interpreters attempt to relay the full impact of social dialect, including whatever discursal force it may carry. However, for the sake of improved mutual comprehension, translators and interpreters tend to neutralize social dialect in translation. Then the question arises as to how far the translator/interpreter can legitimately go in attenuating the significance of social dialect.

One cannot reach the required level of equivalence if the stylistic peculiarities of the source text are neglected. Full translation adequacy presupposes the adequacy of style, i.e. the proper choice of stylistic means and devices in the target language to substitute for those observed in the source text. Stylistic peculiarities are rendered in translation by the target language translation equivalents with required stylistic coloring although there is no universal recipe for this problem [9].

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