

The University of New Mexico



Department of Linguistics

is pleased to present

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Over Fifty Years of Research on African American English: What Happened to the Children?

The stream of research on African American English (AAE) has continued to flow steadily, stemming from the claim in the 1960s that the variety is a legitimate linguistic system. Over the course of the years, insightful revelations about the sentence structure, sound system, and composition of meaning have been made about AAE; however, issues related to the intersection of language of speakers in African American communities and social factors continue to be in the forefront. The emphasis on socio-political topics is motivated, at least in part, by current events in areas such as popular culture, education, and the justice system and the way African Americans are discussed in relation to them. The picture of AAE that has emerged over the past fifty years is dominated by images of cycles of topics with common themes, such as equal access and education and the achievement gap, that resurface periodically and are often guided or fueled by reports about the state of some aspect of the lives of people in AAE-speaking communities. More recently, current events and AAE have been related to the justice system, as captured by headlines such as “DEA Wants to Hire Ebonics Translators” from CNN.com, “Are Philly Court Reporters Accurate with Black Dialects? Study: Not Really.” from The Inquirer, and “Speaking Black Dialect in Courtrooms Can Have Striking Consequences” in The New York Times. Despite the advances in research on the study of AAE, recalcitrant myths about the linguistic variety remain, especially owing to the glaring absence of work in the area of development and acquisition of AAE by children who are acquiring it as their native language. In this talk, I will frame the past fifty years of research on AAE in terms of cycles and then discuss research on linguistic patterns in children developing AAE, speakers who are often overlooked. I discuss myths about child AAE and explain the importance of acquisition research, especially in countering the growing epidemics of the preschool to prison pipeline and the “adultification” of African American girls.

Monday, November 9th, 2020

10:00 AM

Zoom Meeting: <https://unm.zoom.us/j/93551576813>

Password: Green



Interpreter provided