Features of African-American Vernacular English in Present-day American Music

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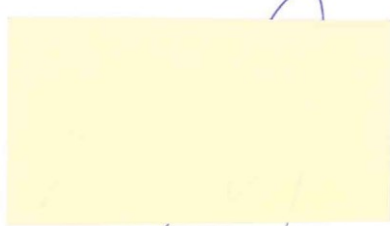
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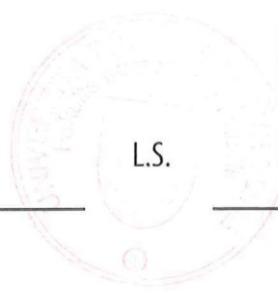
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá rysy afro-americké angličtiny v současné americké hip-hopové hudbě. Práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teoretická část slouží jako úvod do problematiky afro-americké angličtiny, přičemž jsou popsány její charakteristické rysy. Součástí teoretické části je také charakteristika hip-hop kultury. Praktická část je zaměřena na analýzu vybraných skladeb americké hip-hopové hudby za účelem zjistit, zda se ve skladbách rysy afro-americké angličtiny vyskytují.

Klíčová slova: afro-americká angličtina, standardní americká angličtina, slang, hip-hop kultura, hip-hop hudba

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis examines features of African American Vernacular English in the contemporary American hip-hop music. The thesis is divided into theoretical and analytical part. The theoretical part serves as an introduction to African American Vernacular English including the description of its characteristic features. The theoretical part also includes the description of hip-hop culture. The analytical part is devoted to the analysis of selected songs of American hip-hop music in order to identify if they include features of African American Vernacular English.

Keywords: African American Vernacular English, Standard American English, slang, hip-hop culture, hip-hop music

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

African American Vernacular English is a language variety spoken by most African Americans living in the United States that has unique lexical, grammatical and phonological features.

The aim of this thesis is to examine features of African American Vernacular English in the selected songs of contemporary American hip-hop music. The thesis is divided into two parts, theoretical and analytical part. The theoretical part provides the introduction to African American Vernacular English including the description of its lexicon, grammatical features and phonological patterns. The theoretical part also includes the introduction to the hip-hop culture and its language, since African American Vernacular English and the hip-hop culture are closely related, thus the hip-hop music is used for the purposes of the analytical part.

The analytical part deals with the linguistic analysis of selected songs of contemporary American music, specifically the hip-hop songs. The occurrence of the African American Vernacular English features is examined through the songs by American hip-hop artists, namely Snoop Dogg, Kayne West, Kendrick Lamar and Asap Rocky. For the purposes of the analysis, the lyrics of songs by these artists are gathered to serve as a corpus. The main intention is to find out if features of African American Vernacular English are present within the hip-hop songs. The secondary intention is to demonstrate that African American Vernacular English is not an inferior variety of Standard American English, but a unique linguistic system with its rules.

I. THEORY

1   AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH IN GENERAL

Languages are never completely homogeneous, but they are diversified into many different forms, which are called language varieties. According to Hudson (1996, 22), a language variety is "a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution," which in other words means that a language variation is often associated with a regional background, social class, age, gender or race. With regard to those definitions, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be characterized as a language variety spoken by most African Americans in the United States that has set morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and phonological patterns (Green 2002, 1).

It is also important to mention that not all African Americans speak AAVE and not all those who speak it are African Americans (Amberg and Vause 2009, 154). Speakers of AAVE are also affected by regional differences which means that the forms of speech of AAVE are individual. For example, speakers of African American Vernacular English in areas in Texas and Louisiana share similar syntactic patterns while some pronunciation patterns may be different (Green 2002, 1).

It is not possible to define an exact number of African American Vernacular English speakers, but according to the estimation of linguists, African American Vernacular English is spoken approximately by 80% of African Americans in the United States (Portland State University 2008). Speakers of African American Vernacular English use African American Vernacular English dialect and Standard American English dialect (SAE) as well. This phenomenon is characterized as bidialectalism, which is the speakers' ability of using two dialects of the same language (Collins English Dictionary 2014).

Apart from the term African American Vernacular English there exist other terms that refer to this language variety. As Green (2002, 5) states, the labels given to this particular language variety have been changing through time and they have been usually associated with a current social climate in the United States. In general, the labels that are used to refer to the language variety are identical with the ones that are used for its speakers. The labels also serve as a general description of the linguistic patterns of the specific language variety (Green 2002, 5).

Green (2002, 6) gives a list of labels for African American Vernacular English demonstrating the changes of labels throughout the history:

- Negro dialect
- Nonstandard Negro English

- Negro English

- American Negro Speech

- Black communications

- Black dialect

- Black folk speech

- Black street speech

- Black English

- Black English Vernacular

- Black Vernacular English

- Afro American English

- African American English

- African American Language

- African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

In spite of the fact that a lot of terms exist and some of them are relatively different, all of them refer to the same language variety. As Green (2002, 7) states, the most common are African American English, African American Vernacular English or African American Language.

One term which is not mentioned among others is the term Ebonics. This particular term was coined by the American psychologist Robert Williams in 1973 and it is derived from words *ebony* (very dark brown exotic timber) and *phonics* (the study of sounds) with the intention to refer to the black sound (DeBose 2005, 15). The reason why the term Ebonics is not mentioned in the previous list is that it is not only related to African Americans in the United States but to the multitude of languages throughout the African Diaspora (Lanehart 2015, 4).

The attitude toward African American Vernacular English had changed a lot, since earlier it was regarded as an abbreviated form of Standard American English. According to Amber and Vause (2009, 157) it was considered ungrammatical and lacking any system and grammar rules. However, as Lanehart (2001, 1) states, the perception of African American Vernacular English started to transform in the 1960s and 1970s, when linguists began to analyze it more deeply. The analyses proved that African American Vernacular English is not a degraded version, but a different form of Standard American English full of complex grammar (Amberg and Vause 2009, 157).

2   ORIGIN OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

According to Wolfram and Thomas (2002, 12–14), several different theories can be found in examining the historical origin of African American Vernacular English and linguists are still not able come to an agreement on one of them. It is difficult to verify these theories because there exist very few documented evidences of spoken language from the period of the origin and development of AAVE (Amberg and Vause 2009, 155). The origin of African American Vernacular English is possible to study for example through the ex-slave narratives, which were collected as a part of the Federal Writer's Project in the 1930s or the hoodoo texts, which are pieces of writings dealing with magic practices and witchcraft (Green 2002, 8).

As Rickford and Rickford (2000, 129) state, the point in the history which was pivotal for the origin of African American Vernacular English was the arrival of Africans as slaves to the United States. These African slaves were not able to speak English and because they were brought to the United States from a number of different locations, their native languages are considered to have been different (Amberg and Vause 2009, 155). The theories about the development of African American Vernacular English that linguists take in consideration are the pidginization, the creolization, the Anglicist theory and the Neo-Anglicist theory (Wolfram and Thomas 2002, 12–14).

2.1 Pidginization

The first theory about the possible origin of African American Vernacular English is devoted to the pidginization process. In this case, Africans brought to the United States as slaves were exposed to the influence of native languages of slave traders, mainly to English, but also to Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch (Amberg and Vause 2009, 155). Rickford and Rickford (2000, 132) suggest that for the purposes of rudimentary communication, slaves may have created a form of a pidgin, a language including the elements of their native languages mixed with the elements of slave traders' languages. The resulting language had reduced vocabulary, the morphological structures were simplified, and the syntactic and phonological properties were not complex as well (Mufwene et al. 1998, 156).

2.2 Creolization

As Amberg and Vause (2009, 155) state, creolization occurs when descendants of those who speak pidgin languages are born, however according to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 133), creoles are not entirely limited to the purposes of a rudimentary communication, but their

usage is much broader, compared to pidgins, and for those reasons they usually develop a larger vocabulary and more complex grammar. Green (2002, 9) claims that the evidence that AAVE originated as creole is the similarity of certain patterns with characteristic patterns of creole varieties of English, such as Jamaican Creole or Gullah, which are used in the Sea Island.

2.3 The Anglicist Theory

The Anglicist theory, also referred to as the dialectologist theory, claims that AAVE has its roots in British dialects due to the similarity of certain characteristic features of African American Vernacular English with characteristic patterns of these dialects (Wolfram and Thomas 2002, 12). According to this theory, the language of Africans brought to the United States was strongly influenced by various dialects of white immigrants living in the south of the United States who had come from the East Anglia during the Colonial era in US history (Smitherman 2000, 30).

2.4 The Neo-Anglicist Theory

The modification of the Anglicist theory, the neo-Anglicist theory, also suggests that the African American Vernacular English had originated from British dialects, but since then it has diverged and evolved in its unique way (Wolfram and Thomas 2002, 14). This idea is supported by Poplack (2000, 27) who also claims that African American Vernacular English originated as English, but it developed specific features as the African American community became more solid.

3 AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH LEXICON

One of the reasons why African American Vernacular English is unique is its lexicon. Green (2002, 12) claims that speakers of African American Vernacular English use certain words and phrases with specialized unique meanings, compared to Standard American English. According to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 93), another characteristic feature of AAVE is its power to divide blacks and whites and connect all African Americans of different social status.

African American Vernacular English lexicon could be divided into two main groups. The first group includes lexical items generally known by all African American speakers, no matter what age group they belong to, and the second group includes lexical items used by speakers of a certain age group (Green 2002, 13).

As Green (2002, 20) states, African American Vernacular English is different from Standard American English since certain lexical items have unique meanings, although they are spelled identically. In other words, the types of information included in the African American Vernacular English lexicon, namely pronunciation, grammatical class, linguistic environment and meaning may differ, compared to Standard American English (Green 2002, 20).

Green (2002, 20) shows the uniqueness of African American Vernacular English lexicon on the word *kitchen* which, apart from its ordinary meaning, refers to the hair at the nape of the neck in AAVE. Another example could be the word *soul*, which next to its Standard American English meaning refers to the African American food and music (Portland State University 2008).

Rickford and Rickford (2000, 95) point out that many speakers of African American Vernacular English often do not realize that the words they commonly use are not included in the Standard American English lexicon. The example, which Rickford and Rickford (2000, 95) provide, is the situation in which a group of African American speakers were not aware of the fact that word *ashy* with its intended meaning of dry skin does not exist in Standard American English.

Sometimes, the lexical items that originated as the components of African American Vernacular English lexicon became commonly used by speakers of Standard American as well (Portland State University 2008). The examples could be the phrase *chill out* which means to relax and calm down or the word *dig* which means to understand something (Portland State University 2008).

Apart from the words and phrases that are generally known by all African Americans, slang is an inseparable part of African American Vernacular English lexicon. As Green (2002, 27) states, it is mainly used by speakers of a certain age and it could be influenced by the geographical regions. In addition, since slang changes rapidly over time and it is the most dynamic aspect of a language, it is practically infeasible to provide a complete record of present slang items and new studies will be necessary always (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 93).

According to Green (2002, 30–31), a characteristic feature of AAVE lexicon is its productivity, since a common pattern of forming new phrases in AAVE is the insertion of a word, which can be used as a verb, in the position following the possessive pronoun and preceding *on*. Green (2002, 30) shows this pattern on a phrase *get your groove on*, whose original meaning was to get something going, but thanks to replacing certain words with new ones, the phrase has become productive and new phrases have been formed, for example *get my chill on* which means to rest or a phrase *get my eat on* which means to eat.

A stereotyped claim connected with AAVE is that it has no dictionary, however, according to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 93) it is not entirely true as many guides glossaries devoted to AAVE have appeared since linguists started to analyze it more deeply. Rickford and Rickford (2000, 96) also claim that the African American Vernacular English lexicon includes a large variety of domains, but the major areas are music (*jazz, boogie*); religion (*shout, Amen corner*); sex (*johnson, mack*); superstition and witchcraft (*voodoo, mojo*); street life including drugs, gangs, fights, and cars (*cracked out, numbers, bus a cap, hog*); people (*posse, saddity/seddity*); abbreviations (*CP time, HNIC*); and slang of youth culture (*fresh, bustin out*). Green (2002, 28) claims that the largest category of AAVE lexicon are the terms used to refer to males (*balla, cuz, fool, kinfolk, scrub, etc.*) and females (*bopper, honey, ma, shorty, wifey, etc.*).

4 AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH GRAMMAR

As it is previously mentioned by Green (2002, 12), African American Vernacular English differs from Standard American English since certain words have unique meanings and in addition, the uniqueness is often connected with changes in grammar and syntax and therefore certain words can be found in different environments in the sentence in comparison to Standard American English. Many speakers of Standard American English consider these differences ungrammatical and for this reason the speakers of AAVE are considered unintelligent, which according to Green (2002, 34) is wrong, since African American Vernacular English has well established syntactic features and speakers of African American Vernacular English follow them. The most significant grammatical features of AAVE are the characteristic usage of verbs (auxiliary verbs, verbal markers, preverbal markers, negation, etc.) and the unique properties of nouns and pronouns (genitive case, existential constructions, etc.).

4.1 Auxiliary Verbs

The usage of auxiliary verbs in African American Vernacular English is different, compared to Standard American English. Green (2002, 36–38) presents an overview of the verbal system to demonstrate a unique behavior of auxiliary verbs in African American Vernacular English in certain environments, see Table 1 below.

Table 1 Verbal System of AAVE

Present tense			
Person, number	*Present*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st, 2nd,3rd sg, pl	drink	do drink	don't drink
Past tense			
Past		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
drank		did drink	din (didn't) drink
Past tense			
			Negation
			ain('t) drink/drank
Preterite had			
Preterite had (Past)		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
had drank		-	-

Future tense			
Future		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
a' drink		will drink	won't drink
Future tense			
Person, number	*Future*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st sg 2nd, 3rd sg, pl.	I'ma drink gon drink	-	I ain't gon/ I'm not gon ain't gon/ not gon
Present progressive (auxiliary be)			
Person, number	*Pres prog.*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st sg.	I'm drinking	I am drinking	I'm not/ I ain('t) drinking
1st pl, 2nd sg, pl, 3rd sg, pl	we, you she, they drinking	is drinking	ain('t)/not drinking
3rd sg neuter	it's shining	it is drinking	it's not shining it ain('t) drinking
Present copula be			
Person, number	*Present*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st sg.	I'm thin	I am thin	I'm not thin/I ain't thin
1st pl, 2nd sg, pl 3rd sg, pl	we, you, she, they	is	ain('t)/not thin
3rd sg neuter	it's thin	it is	It's not thin/it ain('t) thin
Past progressive			
Person, number	*Past prog.*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	was drinking	was drinking	wadn't (wasn't) drinking
Future progressive			
	Future prog.	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
	'a be drinking	will be drinking	won('t) be drinking
Present perfect			
Person, number	*Present perf.*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	drank	have drank	ain('t)/ haven't drank

Past perfect			
Past perf.		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
had drank		had drank	hadn't drank
Present perfect progressive			
Person, number	*Pres, perf. prog.*	*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	been drinking	have been drinking	Ain('t)/ haven't been drinking
Past perfect progressive			
Past perf. prog.		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
Had been drinking		had been drinking	hadn't been drinking
Modal perfect			
Modal perfect		*Emphatic affirmation*	*Negation*
should'a been drinking		-	shouldn'a been drinking

Source: Data from Green (2002, 36–38)

4.1.1   Verb Be

The unique behavior of verb *to be* is the next characteristic feature of AAVE (Green 2002, 38). According to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 114), there exist two types of verb *be* in AAVE, the first type is labeled as conjugated or inflected, and its forms are influenced by person and tense and the second type is labeled as invariant *be*, since it is not influenced by person or tense and it does not vary. The conjugated *be* can be omitted in certain environments and this phenomenon is referred to as the zero copula, which is as Rickford and Rickford (2000, 114) state the evidence that the grammar of African American Vernacular English is systematic and governed by rules. Rickford and Rickford (2000, 114) show the phenomenon of zero copula on the sentence *She in the same grade*, which is identical to *She is in the same grade* in SAE. According to Green (2002, 38–39), the environments in which the usage of conjugated *be* is optional, are the first person plural *are*, second and third person singular and plural *is* and *are*. In addition, Rickford and Rickford (2000, 114–5) state that the conjugated *be* is not possible to omit in the first person singular *am* and in the past tense forms *was* and *were*.

Considering the invariant *be*, according to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 113) there exist three different types of it, the first type is used in imperatives (*Be good!*), infinitives (*He tried to be good*) or following helping verbs (*He must be good*) and its usage is similar to

Standard American English; the second type is produced in the sentences, in which the contracted forms of *will* or *would* are omitted (*I be glad*) and the third type is referred to as invariant habitual *be* (*He be talkin'*), which will be discussed more in detail in the following chapter 4.2 Verbal Markers.

4.2 Verbal Markers

Verbal markers, occasionally referred to as aspectual markers, are similar in form to the auxiliary verbs in Standard American English, which according to Green (2002, 44) may lead to misunderstandings between speakers of Standard American English and African American Vernacular English. As Green (2002, 35–45) claims, African American Vernacular English speakers use verbal markers *be*, *been* [bɪn] and *done* [dən] to indicate a certain type of meaning, however, Green also notes that verbal markers are not used only in African American Vernacular English, but they occur in other varieties of English as well, for example in Southern States English or Hiberno English.

4.2.1   Habitual Be

Habitual *be* is used to refer to an activity that is performed regularly and habitually (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 113). As Green (2002, 35–47) claims, habitual *be* is followed by a verb in a progressive form and unlike the auxiliary *be*, the omission of habitual *be* is not possible, since it may lead to ambiguities and incorrect interpretations. Green (2002, 47) demonstrates the phenomenon of habitual *be* on the following sentences:

Bruce run.   *Bruce runs on occasions.*

Bruce running.   *Bruce is running now.*

Bruce be running.   *Bruce usually runs.*

All sentences can mean that the activity is performed regularly, but the first and the second example can have also different interpretations, while the meaning of the third example is always habitual (Green 2002, 47).

4.2.2   Been

As Green (2002, 54–55) states, verbal marker *been* [bɪn] is used to describe an activity or a state in a remote past that continues up to the moment when the utterance is produced. Green (2002, 55) also points out that the spelling of verbal marker *been* [bɪn] is identical with the

spelling of *been* [bən], but they differ both in pronunciation and meaning, see the following examples:

She been [bɪn] running.	*She has been running for a long time.*
She been [bən] running.	*She has been running.*

4.2.3   Done

Verbal marker *done* [dən] indicates an activity that has already ended (Green 2002, 60) and as Rickford and Rickford (2000, 120) state, it is pronounced without stress and it cannot be used with negatives. Green (2002, 60–62) also points out that verbal marker *done* is often followed by verbs ending in *-ed* form:

I told him you done [dən] changed.	*I told him that you have changed.*
I done [dən] finished that already.	*I have finished that already.*

4.3 Preverbal Markers

Speakers of African American Vernacular English also use preverbal markers *finna, steady* and *come*, however Green (2002, 70) notes that their analysis is not as complex, as the analysis of verbal markers *be*, *been* and *done*.

4.3.1   Finna

Preverbal marker *finna,* and its variants *fixina*, *fixna* or *fitna*, are used to describe an event which will happen immediately (Green 2002, 70). As Rickford and Rickford (2000, 121) state, it had developed from the phrase *fixing to* which is used in American English commonly, while in African American Vernacular English its reduced form is used. Green (2002, 70) notes that *finna* is usually followed by non-finite verbs which are not marked for tense and agreement, as it is visible from the examples below:

I'm finna leave.	*I'm getting ready to leave.*
Y'all finna eat?	*Are you getting ready to eat?*

4.3.2   Come

According to Green (2002, 73), preverbal marker *come* is used to accentuate the indignation of the speaker and it occurs with the verbs ending in *-ing*, which is the fundamental

difference between *come* as the preverbal marker and *come* as the main verb in Standard American English. Green (2002, 73) mentions the following examples:

You the one come telling me it's hot. I can't believe you got your coat on. (AAVE)

You're the one who had the nerve to tell me that it's hot. I can't believe you've got your coat on. (SAE)

Don't come acting like you don't know what happened and you started the whole thing. (AAVE)

Don't try to act as if you don't know what happened, because you started the whole thing. (SAE)

4.3.3   Steady

Preverbal marker *steady* expresses an activity which is performed in an intense or continuous manner and equally as the preverbal marker *come*, it is followed by verbs in their progressive forms that convey an activity, see the examples below (Green 2002, 71).

They want to do they own thing, and you steady talking to them. (AAVE)

They want to do their own thing, and you're continuing to talk to them. (SAE)

People be on them jobs for thirty years just steady working. (AAVE)

People usually stay on those jobs for thirty years, working consistently. (SAE)

4.4 Omission of the Third Person Singular Present Tense -s

The tendency to omit the third person singular present tense suffix -*s* is another characteristic feature of African American Vernacular English (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 111). However according to Green (2002, 38), the omission of suffix -*s* in the third person singular present tense is not used by all speakers of AAVE, since this rule depends on the social background of the speaker. Rickford and Rickford (2000, 112) provide the following examples to illustrate this particular phenomenon:

John go.   *John goes.*

John have a car.   *John has a car.*

In addition, Green (2002, 100–101) points out that speakers of African American Vernacular English occasionally use the verbal suffix -*s* as a narrative marker in the context of the narration of events or as a habitual marker to express regularity, see the following examples:

I sits and rides.	*I sit and ride.*
Well, that's the way it bes.	*Well, that's the way it usually is.*

4.5 Negation

The way how African American Vernacular English speakers create the negative sentences is one of the most significant differences compared to Standard American English. According to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 122), the most discussed aspects of forming a negation are the usage of the negative indicator *ain't*, multiple negation and negative inversion.

4.5.1   Negative Indicator Ain't

A common way of forming a negative sentence in African American Vernacular English is the usage of the negative indicator *ain't*, however as Rickford and Rickford (2000, 122–3) state, it is also used in other varieties of American English, but its distribution in AAVE is wider, since it is the common equivalent of *be + not* and *have + not*, while in AAVE it also corresponds to *do + not,* see the following examples:

I ain't lyin'.	*I am not lying.*
He ain't never had a job in his life.	*He hasn't ever had a job in his life.*
He thinks I ain't got no more aces.	*He thinks I don't get no more aces.*

4.5.2   Multiple Negation

According to Lanehart (2015, 366), African American Vernacular English is a negative concord language which means that there is no limit for the number of negators in one sentence. Green (2002, 77) notes that in contrast to Standard American English, in which the general rule states that the double negatives make a positive and the interpretation of the sentence is therefore positive, African American Vernacular English speakers may use two or more negative morphemes and the sentence remains negative. Green (2002, 78) refers to the additional negators as pleonastic, since they do not bring any additional negative meaning into the sentence or clause and she demonstrates this phenomenon on the following examples:

Bruce don't want no teacher telling him nothing about no books. (AAVE)

Bruce doesn't want any teacher telling him anything about any books. (SAE)

Sometimes it didn't have no chalk, no books, no teacher. (AAVE)

Sometimes, there weren't any chalk, any books or any teacher. (SAE)

4.5.3 Negative Inversion

As Green (2002, 78) states, the negative inversion is a phenomenon linked to the multiple negation in African American Vernacular English. Green (2002, 78) claims that speakers of AAVE often replace the indefinite noun phrase that follows the initial negated auxiliary by its negative counterpart, see the following examples:

Don't no game last all night long.   *No game lasts all night.*

Don't nothing come to a sleeper but a dream.   *Nothing comes to a sleeper but a dream.*

4.6 Questions

While speakers of Standard American English use the inversion of the auxiliary and the subject when forming a question, the inversion of the auxiliary is not necessary in African American Vernacular English (Rickford and Rickford 2000, 124). As Green (2002, 83) states, a sufficient signal to mark a declarative sentence as a question is the rising intonation of African American Vernacular English speaker, see the following examples:

You know her name?   *Do you know her name?*

He sleeping in the car?   *Is he sleeping in the car?*

4.7 Past Morphology

As Green (2002, 95) states, the forms of the simple past tense and the present perfect tense are often identical, however, the only environment in which is the distinction visible, is the emphatic affirmation, in which the auxiliary *have* occurs. Green (2002, 96) provides the following examples of sentences, which can have therefore two possible interpretations in Standard American English:

The mirror been broke.   *The mirror has been broken for a long time.*

     The mirror broke a long time ago.

His pants been tore.   *His pants have been torn for a long time.*

     His pants tore a long time ago.

4.8 The Possessive 's Suffix

Rickford and Rickford (2000, 112) claim that the omission of *'s* suffix in the possessive case is a feature that is unique to African American Vernacular English and cannot be found in any other language varieties of American English. As Rickford and Rickford (2002, 112) state, speakers of African American Vernacular English express the possession by placing the name of the possessor in front of the thing possessed and they demonstrate this phenomenon on the following example:

Girl house   *Girl's house*

4.9 Existential It and Dey

According to Rickford and Rickford (2000, 111), speakers of African American Vernacular English use the constructions including *it* and *dey* in order to express the existence of something, instead of the existential structure *there + be,* which is used in Standard American English. Green (2002, 80) also points out that existential elements *it* and *dey* are followed by inflected or aspectual *be*, *have* or *got*, which are referred to as linkers, since they link the existential elements to the noun phrases. Green (2002, 80) mentions the following examples of existential constructions and all of them can be interpreted as *There is some coffee in the kitchen:*

It's some coffee in the kitchen.
It got some coffee in the kitchen.
It have some coffee in the kitchen.
Dey some coffee in the kitchen.
Dey got some coffee in the kitchen.
Dey have some coffee in the kitchen.

5 AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

Apart from the unique morphological and syntactic features, speakers of African American Vernacular English also use pronunciation patterns that distinguish this language variety from Standard American English (Lanehart 2015, 403). According to Thomas (2007, 452), the most characteristic pronunciation features of African American Vernacular English are related to the domains of consonants, vowels and suprasegmental features. Lanehart (2015, 403) also points out that some of those pronunciation patterns are not used only within AAVE, but they may occur in other varieties of American English as well.

5.1 Consonants

5.1.1 Lexical Consonantal Variables

The lexical consonantal variables are not so frequent in AAVE, however as Thomas (2007, 452) states, they can be also found within this variety, such as the pronunciation of *ask* as [*æks*] or the metathesis of *sp* into *ps* in the word *wasp*.

5.1.2 R-lessness

R-lessness in AAVE, also labeled as non-rhoticity, is the production of *ə* sound instead of the *r* sound, occasionally the complete deletion of *r* sound, which occurs mostly in unstressed syllables or in word-final positions, where the *r* in preceded by a vowel (Thomas 2007, 453). Green (2002, 120) supports this claim by providing the following examples:

cout	*[kot]*	*court*
bea	*[bæə]*	*bear*
brotha	*[brʌðə]*	*brother*
toe	*[to]*	*tore*

5.1.3 Production of *t/d* and *f/v* Instead of *th*

According to Green (2002, 117), African American Vernacular English speakers often produce *t/d* and *f/v* sounds instead of Standard American English *th* sound and as Thomas (2007, 454–5) claims, the production of *f/v* sound occurs only in the medial or final word positions, however, the *t/d* sound can be produced in any word position, in addition, the production of *t/d* and *f/v* sounds is indirectly related with a social class, since the phenomenon occurs frequently among speakers of lower social status. Green (2002, 118) demonstrates this phenomenon on the following examples:

dat	*[dæt]*	*that*
baf	*[bæf]*	*bath*
smoove	*[smuv]*	*smooth*
mova	*[mʌvə]*	*mother*

5.1.4 Devoicing

As Green (2002, 116) claims, devoicing is a common feature among AAVE speakers, which may result in ambiguities and misunderstandings between speakers of AAVE and speakers of Standard American English, see the following examples:

cab	*cap*
feed	*feet*
pig	*pick*

5.1.5 Consonant Cluster Reduction

According to Thomas (2007, 455), the reduction of consonant clusters is a phenomenon which occurs in AAVE frequently and as Green (2002, 107) claims, this phenomenon is commonly regarded as the evidence that African American Vernacular English is an organized language variety with its system. Green (2002, 108–9) states that there are two theories explaining the existence of this pronunciation feature, the first theory regards the origin of AAVE and it is based on the fact that AAVE originated from languages where the final consonant clusters did not exist, while the second theory states that the consonant clusters are intact, and the reduction is only the result of a phonological process. Green (2002, 109) presents the following examples:

pos	*[pos]*	*post*
was	*[was]*	*wasp*
mas	*[mæs]*	*mask*
gif	*[gɪf]*	*gift*
adop	*[ədap]*	*adopt*
ban	*[bæn]*	*band*

5.1.6 Other Consonantal Variables

As Green (2002, 121) claims, some AAVE speakers produce the *n* sound instead of ŋ sound in words ending in suffix *-ing*, however, this feature occurs only in words with more than one syllable, see the following examples:

walkin'	*walking*
runnin'	*running*
thinkin'	*thinking*
listnin'	*listening*

Green (2002, 122) also mentions the production of *skr* in the initial positions of words where *str* is produced in Standard American English, see the following examples:

skreet	*[skrit]*	*street*
skrawberry	*[skrɔbɛri]*	*strawberry*
skraight	*[skret]*	*straight*

5.2 Vowels

According to Green (2007, 123) a few vowel patterns are associated with African American Vernacular English, however, she provides some examples of vowel variations, such as the production of the *oɪ* sound in environments where the *oa* sound occurs in Standard American English, as in words *coach* [*koɪtʃ*], *road* [*roɪd*] or *roach* [*roɪtʃ*] or the lowering of the *ɛr* in words as *care*, *hair* and *prepare*.

5.3 Suprasegmental Features

As Green (2002, 125) states, the suprasegmental features are important for the understanding and the correct interpretation of certain phrases and sentences in African American Vernacular English.

According to Thomas (2007, 466–7), many AAVE speakers have a tendency to put a primary stress on the first syllable in words that are stressed on other syllables in Standard American English, such as in words *December*, *July*, *police* or *hotel* and as Lanehart (2015, 421) claims, this phenomenon usually occurs in the speech of older AAVE speakers. Regarding the timing patterns, Thomas (2007, 467) states that present-day AAVE is stress timed, while the speech of ex-slaves was more syllable timed.

Thomas (2007, 467) claims that African American Vernacular English speakers use different intonational patterns compared to Standard American English speakers. According to Green (2002, 127–30), the example could be the production of questions, since *yes/no* questions traditionally have a rising intonation, while the intonation in AAVE is falling or neutral, however, the intonational pattern in *wh*-questions is similar to Standard American English, since these types of questions are produced with a lowering intonation occurring consistently in the whole question.

6   HIP-HOP CULTURE

The hip-hop culture was formed during the late 1970s within the urban African American communities of the South Bronx in New York City (Price 2006, 4). As Lanehart (2001, 187–8) claims, the ideology of the hip-hop culture is based on the African American cultural, social and political values built against norms of the dominant culture since it originated as the response of the youth to the political climate of the Reagan-Bush era, which was encouraging the abandonment of urban communities in the United States.

People often think that hip-hop is only a musical style, however, according to Price (2006, 21), the term hip-hop is much broader since it covers four subcultures, namely DJing, MCing, graffiti, and b-boying.

As Price (2006, 21) states, the DJing is a production of pre-recorded hip-hop music by the DJ, which is the abbreviation for the phrase *disc jockey*. The subculture of DJing is closely linked to the subculture of MCing since as Price (2006, 36) claims, the role of the MC (*the master of ceremony*) is to support the DJ during the performance by the rhymed speech, however, the subculture of MCing had gained more value as the MCs were able to perform without the presence of the DJs due to the development of technology such as the audiotapes and cassettes, thus the MCs became the headline performers and the phenomenon of rap music emerged subsequently. In addition, Price (2006, 28–32) also describes the subculture of b-boying, which is a dance style often called as *breakdancing* or *breaking* and additionally the subculture of graffiti, which is the urban visual art expressing a rebellion against the authorities.

As Lanehart (2001, 189) claims, the hip-hop culture had a great impact on the shaping of identity of urban African American youth, since the hip-hop artists often address the issues of morality and injustice. However, Lanehart (2001, 189) also points out, that the hip-hop culture is occasionally treated with negative connotations, since some of the hip-hop artists employ a profanity and a lot of vulgarisms into their pieces of work.

6.1 Hip-Hop vs. African American Vernacular English

According to Amberg and Vause (2009, 155), many people often interchange African American Vernacular English with the language of hip-hop culture, but these two terms are not the same, since hip-hop language is connected with a social background, while African American Vernacular English is determined by demographic factors. As Alim (2006, 71) states, the language of hip-hop culture has roots in African American Vernacular English,

however, it spread through different directions and nowadays it is used by various ethnic groups.

In other words, the hip-hop language can be described as the submerged area of African American Vernacular English, which is used within the hip-hop culture (Alim 2006, 74). Lanehart (2001, 190) also points out that the language of hip-hop culture is not used for the simple purposes of communication, but as the representation of hip-hop culture identity and beliefs.

6.2 Hip-Hop Language

As Alim (2006, 76) states, the syntax of hip-hop language is identical to the syntax of African American Vernacular English, however, according to Makoni et al. (2003, 45), slang is the most distinctive feature of AAVE within the hip-hop language and for this reason, little attention is paid to syntax. In addition, Makoni et al. (2003, 45) point out that many hip-hop artists include the grammar of Standard American English into their speech in order to get the attention of a broader audience.

Makoni et al. (2003, 46–53) argue that the features of hip-hop language are the most noteworthy within the lyrics of hip-hop music, however, these lyrics are not identical to the natural speech, since the every-day speech is spontaneous, while lyrics are written and constructed in advance and in addition, the occurrence of AAVE features within the lyrics of hip-hop music is also influenced by the target audience of the artist, which may be the community of African American street culture or different desirable group of the listeners.

As it was mentioned by Lanehart (2001, 190), the purpose of the hip-hop language is to construct a certain type of message, which represents the hip-hop culture beliefs and opinions. For this reason, hip-hop artists often deal with themes such as the place of origin of the artist, the development of the artist, or they refer to the events connected to the social or political climate, which is reflected in the usage of slang items (Hess 2010, 13–16).

Regarding the syntactic features of hip-hop language, as it was mentioned by Alim (2006, 76), they are identical to the syntactic features of AAVE, which is also supported by Smitherman (1997, 9–10) since she mentions several examples of hip-hop language syntactic patterns, namely habitual *be*, absence of copula *be* and *been* as the indicator of remote past. According to Lanehart (2001, 198), another typical hip-hop language phenomenon is the change of word class, which is demonstrated on the verb *fly*, which also functions as an adjective, the example is the sentence *Those boots sure are fly*. Regarding the phonological features, Lanehart (2001, 199) states that speakers of hip-hop language

often intentionally highlight regional differences in pronunciation, such as the phenomenon of consonant cluster reduction or shortening of vowel length.

II. ANALYSIS

7 INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS

The aim of this analytical part is to examine the selected hip-hop songs by contemporary artists in order to find out if they include features of African American Vernacular English which are described in the theoretical part and how frequently those features occur. My additional intention is to demonstrate that African American Vernacular English is not an ungrammatical variety of Standard American English, but a unique rule-governed system. I had two criteria when selecting the artists for the purposes of the analysis, the origin of the artist and the genre of music that the artist produces. I selected four contemporary artists, namely Snoop Dogg, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar and Asap Rocky.

7.1 Corpus

The occurrence of the African American Vernacular English features is examined through the lyrics gathered from the website RapGenius, where the transcriptions of the lyrics are provided. The transcriptions are moderated by the editors of the website, thus they are as accurate and correct as possible, however, minor discrepancies may occur, which are negligible for the final linguistic analysis. In order to analyze these lyrics in more detail, I used the printed versions of the lyrics, while listening to the songs simultaneously.

I analyzed the lyrics of three songs by each artist, which is 12 lyrics in total. The songs used to create the corpus for this analysis are *Let It Out*, *Those Gurlz*, *Do It When I'm in It* by Snoop Dogg; *Jesus Walks*, *Homecoming*, *All Day* by Kanye West; *The Art of Peer Pressure*, *M.A.A.D. City*, *Humble* by Kendrick Lamar and *Back Home*, *Praise the Lord*, *Babushka Boi* by Asap Rocky. The songs were chosen randomly from various albums that were released between the years 2004–2019. The list of the analyzed artists, songs and years of publication can be found at the end of this thesis. The analyzed corpus can be found on the enclosed CD.

Analyzed features of AAVE are listed based on the description in the theoretical part of this thesis. AAVE features which are not mentioned in the theoretical part, yet they occur throughout the lyrics frequently, are listed as well.

Even when analyzing the features of AAVE within the lyrics of hip-hop music, it is important to be familiar with each artist in order to understand the lyrics properly, thus each artist is introduced and his music is shortly described.

7.2 Artists

Despite the fact, that all investigated artists are African Americans and they are devoted to the production of hip-hop music, slight differences among their speech appear, since the language of artists may be influenced by factors such as their age, their social background or the target audience they appealed to.

7.2.1   Snoop Dogg

Snoop Dogg, originally Cordozar Calvin Broadus, is a rapper and songwriter who was born in California in 1971. He is significantly known for the production of hip-hop music with reggae elements, however, he has started to include the gospel features into the music recently. His songs are mainly about the usage of drugs or his religious beliefs. He has released seventeen studio albums in total, the most famous are *Doggystyle*, *Tha Blue Carpet Treatment* and *Tha Doggfather*. Apart from the music production, he is also an actor. With regard to the linguistic point of view, he is iconic for adding the suffix *-izzle* to the random words. (Biography, 2014.)

7.2.2   Kanye West

Kanye Omari West, or shortly Kanye, is an American rapper and a music producer who was born in Atlanta in 1977, but he moved to Chicago with his mother after his parents got divorced. He started as a music producer of famous artists, such as Jay Z, Beyoncé or Alicia Keys. However, he wanted to be a headline performer, thus he released his debut album *The College Dropout* in 2004, for which he received 10 Grammy nominations and won three awards. The album deals with topics such as consumerism, racism, education and his beliefs about religion. He is considered as a hip-hop phenomenon, since he has won 21 Grammy awards in total, which is more than any other rapper. However, he is often criticized for his controversial opinions and apart from the other artists which I analyzed, he grew up in a middle-class family and not within the African American urban community. He has released nine albums, the most famous are *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy,* previously mentioned *College Dropout* and *Yeezus*. (Biography 2014)

7.2.3   Kendrick Lamar

Kendrick Lamar was born in Compton in 1987. He is an American rapper, producer and songwriter and his songs deal with topics such as racism, injustice and politics. He is considered by critics as one of the most influential contemporary hip-hop artists. His 2015 album *To Pimp a Butterfly* and 2017 album *DAMN* both won Grammys for the best rap

albums. In addition, the album *DAMN* is the first rap album that was awarded by the Pulitzer Prize in 2018. (Biography 2014)

7.2.4 Asap Rocky

Asap Rocky, or Rakim Mayers in personal, was born in Harlem, New York in 1988. He is an American rapper and songwriter and his hip-hop songs are considered to be experimental, since they include features of various music genres. The acronym *Asap* has three possible interpretations, as *Always Strive And Prosper*, *Assassinating Snitches And Police* and *Acronym Symbolizing Any Purpose*. He deals mostly with themes such as urban street life, sex and drugs. He has released three studio albums in total, namely *Long.Live.ASAP*, *At.Long.Last.ASAP* and *Testing*. (Biography 2018)

8 LEXICON

When analyzing the lexical features of selected hip-hop songs, I found the lyrics significantly explicit, since they deal with topics such as street life, drugs and money, but also with topics connected to the religion, racism and feelings of injustice. What caught my attention during the analysis was the usage of slang expressions connected to these topics and the occurrence of vulgarisms and taboo words.

8.1 Addressing People

In the analyzed lyrics, the usage of expressions in order to address people is salient. The most noteworthy expression is *a nigga*, which occurs throughout the lyrics of each song frequently. This particular expression has usually a negative connotation, however as Lanehart (2015, 855) claims, the connotation among speakers of African American Vernacular English is positive, since it is used to refer to *your companions*. Even though the analyzed lyrics were released within the period of 15 years and they deal with various topics from the religious beliefs to the criminal offenses, the expression *nigga* is used throughout the analyzed lyrics consistently. The artists also use other expressions in order to address each other among males, such as *gangstas* or *homies,* however, the usage of these expressions is not so frequent.

(1) *I'm a gangsta.*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)
(2) *Me and the homies.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art of Peer Pressure)

Apart from the expressions that are used in addressing males, numerous expressions to address females also occur. The labels given to women have usually sexual connotations thus the women are frequently depicted as the objects of the sexual desire. The examples of such expressions are *dime*, *shortie*, *wifey* and *momma.* These types of labels are used by all of the analyzed artists, however, their usage is the most distinct within the songs by Snoop Dogg, since it is typical for the music he produces.

(3) *You a dime.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)
(4) *Shortie bad.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm in It)

8.2 Vulgarisms

My findings support the claims by Lanehart (2002, 189) that hip-hop artists often use a significant amount of vulgar expressions and taboo words. For this reason, the songs might be considered aggressive and thus inappropriate by many people, however, this phenomenon is connected rather with the language of the hip-hop culture than with African American Vernacular English and thus I did not analyze this aspect in more detail.

8.3 Other Slang Expressions

Since most of the analyzed lyrics deal with topics such as urban street life and money, I identified a few relatively unique expressions within them. The first example is the expression *po-po* that occurs within the song by Snoop Dogg in order to refer to the police. The second example is the word *nine* that occurs in two of the analyzed lyrics, where artists use it in order to refer to the *gun*. The last example is the expression *ends*, which occurs within the lyrics by Kanye West where he uses this particular expression to refer to *money*. (Urban Dictionary.com, n. d.)

(5) *And the po-po know…*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(6) *I'm workin' with a nine.*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(7) *Joey packed the nine.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D City)

(8) *… take away from my ends.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

Another slang expression that is identified within the corpus is the expression *Chi*, which is used by Kanye West in order to refer to his hometown *Chicago.* Based on the analyzed lyrics, the usage of this particular expression by Kanye West is consistent, since it occurs in all of his songs which I analyzed.

(9) *… the valley of the Chi.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(10) *And you say Chi city!*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(11) *I'm straight from the Chi.*   (Kanye West – All Day)

Based on the analyzed lyrics, I found out that the slang expressions occur more often within the older songs than within the newer ones, which may be influenced by the effort of the contemporary artists to appeal to the largest possible audience. However, certain expressions, as the word *nigga* or the labels used to refer to the females occur through the

analyzed lyrics consistently, regardless of their author or their release date, which supports the claim by Green (2002, 28) that terms used to refer to males and females are the largest category of African American Vernacular English lexicon.

9 GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

As it was previously clarified, African American Vernacular English speakers use different grammatical features in certain environments, which is supported by my findings. The majority of investigated grammatical features are described within the theoretical part, except of the future marker *gon'*, however, since it occurs throughout the lyrics frequently, it is listed as well.

9.1 Zero Copula

Based on the analyzed lyrics, I found the phenomenon of zero copula as one of the most noteworthy grammatical features of African American Vernacular English, since it is used by all of the investigated artists and in addition, it occurs in 11 out of the 12 analyzed lyrics. This particular finding supports the claim by Alim (2006, 76) that both the syntax of AAVE and the syntax of hip-hop language are identical and consequentially the claim by Smitherman (1997, 9–10) that the absence of copula *be* is typical for the language of hip-hop culture.

(12) *And they at my crib.* (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(13) *And we your number one…* (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(14) *… but my license invalid.* (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(15) *We at war.* (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(16) *… she talkin' 'bout me.* (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(17) *You an actor...* (Kanye West – All Day)

(18) *We on the mission.* (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(19) *When we in traffic…* (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(20) *… we playin' Tetris.* (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(21) *… but we your Lords.* (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

(22) *Benji in the safe.* (Asap Rocky – Babushka Boi)

As Rickford and Rickford (2002, 114) state, the phenomenon of zero copula is the evidence that AAVE is systematic and governed by rules, since the copula *be* can be omitted in the first person plural and in the second and third person both singular and plural, but never in the first person singular, which the analysis of hip-hop lyrics confirms.

9.2 Invariant Be

Considering the claim by Smitherman (1997, 9–10) that the invariant *be* is another typical feature of African American Vernacular English as well as the typical feature of hip-hop language, I assumed that the occurrence of the invariant *be* would be similar to the occurrence of zero copula, however, the analyzed corpus does not include many examples, since the invariant *be* is identified only within four lyrics. On the other hand, the phenomenon of invariant *be* is also used by all of the investigated artists.

(23) *We be Crip'n…*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(24) *They be askin' us questions…*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(25) *I still be the greatest.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(26) *Muh'fuckers be in the pictures.*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

9.3 Verbal Markers

As it is stated in the theoretical part, the identification of verbal markers depends significantly on their pronunciation, and therefore it was relatively difficult to identify them. However, one sentence including the verbal marker *done* occurs. In this sentence, the artist uses the verbal marker *done* in order to express an activity that has already ended.

(27) *I done came and crept up back…*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

9.4 Preverbal Markers

In the selected corpus, I found numerous sentences including the preverbal markers *finna* and *steady*, however, the preverbal marker *come,* which is also described in the theoretical part, is not used throughout the corpus at all. Regarding the usage of preverbal markers, the artists use *finna* to refer to an event, which will happen in the immediate future and *steady* to describe an activity, which is taking place continuously. Based on the analyzed lyrics, the preverbal markers occur more often within the lyrics of the younger artists, moreover, the preverbal marker *steady* is used solely by the youngest artist Asap Rocky.

(28) *I'm finna turn...*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(29) *I was finna hit...*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(30) *I'm finna slay…*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(31) *Finna get advantage on him…*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

(32) *Steady flowing, staying golden.*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

(33) *Steady taking shots...*   (Asap Rocky – Praise The Lord)

9.5 Omission of the Third Person Singular Present Tense *-s*

Based on the analyzed corpus, the structures lacking the suffix *-s* in the third person singular present tense are relatively frequent, since they are identified within eight lyrics and moreover, they are used by all of the investigated artists.

(34) *She say she just moved...*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(35) *She know about the digits...*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(36) *He hear me...*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(37) *... her face lit up.*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(38) *The universe love you today.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(39) *The whole city go against me.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(40) *She elaborate it.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(41) *Hate that make you feel worse...*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

What I found interesting when analyzing the selected lyrics was the occurrence of standard structures, in which the suffix *-s* was included. One of the possible reasons for the usage of standard structures within the analyzed lyrics may be the effort of the artist to appeal to the audience of Standard American speakers, or they use these structures simply for the rhythmic purposes, which is the case of *Homecoming* by Kanye West, where the word *seems* rhymes with word *beats*, and also of *Humble* by Kendrick Lamar, where the word *lives* rhymes with the word *counterfeits*.

(42) *It feels so good.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(43) *Jesus walks for them.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(44) *It always seems like she talkin'...*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(45) *...where my accountant lives.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

With regard to the additional features of subject-verb agreement, the artists occasionally use structures, in which the plural form of verb *be* is replaced with its singular counterpart. However, these structures are in most of the cases used only because of the rhythm and the flow of the song.

(46) *We rappers is role models.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(47) *...when we was eatin'.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(48) *...colors is doin' the same thing.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

9.6 Negation

When analyzing the negative structures, I found numerous examples of patterns that are unique to AAVE, however, the standard ways of forming a negation, such as *be + not* and *do + not* appear within the lyrics as well. The most prominent was the occurrence of negative indicator *ain't* as well as the occurrence of structures with multiple negators.

9.6.1 Ain't

Based on the analyzed corpus, the structures including the negative indicator *ain't* are salient, since the indicator *ain't* is used by all of the investigated artists.

(49) *I ain't talkin 'bout a gun…*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(50) *It ain't for the challenge.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(51) *I ain't here to argue...*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(52) *If you ain't with us...*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(53) *And we ain't askin' for no favors.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(54) *Nigga, that ain't no word.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(55) *That ain't right.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(56) *If I ain't the greatest…*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

(57) *I ain't duck sauce…*   (Asap Rocky – Babushka Boi)

However, the standard forms of negation, such as *be + not* and *do + not* are included in certain environments as well. The reason for the usage of standard forms is probably the effort to get the attention of the broader audience, which supports the claim by Makoni et al. (2003, 45) that many hip-hop artists include the grammar of Standard American English into their speech in order to appeal to the audience of Standard American speakers.

(58) *I don't let 'em play with me.*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(59) *I don't fabricate it.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(60) *This is not a rap.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

9.6.2   Multiple Negations

As it was previously clarified by Lanehart (2015, 366), African American Vernacular English is a negative concord language and therefore there is no limit for the number of negators in one sentence. This claim is supported by my findings, since the selected corpus contains numerous structures including multiple negators. With regard to the interpretations of such sentences, I assumed that they are negative due to the context of the lyrics.

(61) *Ain't no different…*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(62) *Ain't no Wifi.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(63) *I don't think there's notin' I can...* (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(64) *Then you wouldn't 've never.*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(65) *I can't no more.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(66) *It ain't nothin'.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(67) *Don't worry nothin'.*   (Asap Rocky – Praise The Lord)

(68) *Ain't no stains...*   (Asap Rocky – Babushka Boi)

9.7 Tense Marking

In the analyzed lyrics, I found numerous structures where only the participle is used as the sufficient marker of past tenses, which supports the claim by Green (2002, 95) that forms of the simple past tense and the present perfect tense are often identical. It can be assumed that the context of such structures is the sufficient marker when interpreting whether the intention of the speaker is the simple past tense or the present perfect tense.

(69) *Then I seen this girl.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(70) *I just seen Snoop.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(71) *How long you been high?*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(72) *We seen three niggas.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(73) *I seen the white car crash.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

In addition, three of four analyzed artists also used the future marker *gon'* to indicate an activity that is expected to happen in the future. With regard to the overview by Green (2002, 36–38) presented in the theoretical part, the future marker *gon'* is used in the second and third person both singular and plural, however, in one of the analyzed lyrics it occurs in the

first person plural. It can be assumed that the artist uses this feature simply for the purposes of good rhythm and flow of the song.

(74) *... they gon' wait in line.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(75) *...she gon' bust it down.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(76) *That's what he's not gon' do.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(77) *We gon' take it uptown one time.*   (Asap Rocky – Back Home)

In the selected corpus, the standard forms of future tense *will* also occur.

(78) *...will leave you breathless.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(79) *... will make your past haunt ya.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art Of Peer Pressure)

(80) *...but still will never know my life.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

9.8 Possession Marking

In the analyzed lyrics, the possessive *'s* suffix is occasionally omitted, which is another feature unique to African American Vernacular English. In addition, I found one case of usage of the personal pronoun *they* as the possessive pronoun *their*.

(81) *How you take away they shine.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(82) *Jeezy first album.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art of Peer Pressure)

(83) *His mama van.*   (Kendrick Lamar – The Art of Peer Pressure)

(84) *The driver seat.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

However, the standard usage of possessive *'s* suffix occurs within the lyrics as well. What caught my attention, is the occurrence of *'s* suffix within the song M.A.A.D. City by Kendrick Lamar, since he uses the suffix *'s* in one sentence and omits it in another. When analyzing this particular feature in more detail, I found out that the reason for the use of suffix *'s* is the rhythm of the song.

(85) *Of my momma's pad.*   (Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)

(86) *On your mama's couch.*   (Kendrick Lamar – Humble)

(87) *In stripper's place.*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

10 PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

When analyzing the phonological features of the selected songs, I used the transcriptions of the songs while listening to them simultaneously, in order to do the analysis properly.

10.1 R-lessness

The phenomenon of r-lessness was difficult to identify, however, a few cases, in which the artists pronounced the *ə* sound instead of the *r* sound were identified.

(88) *... super-duper[supə dupə].*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(89) *... last winter [wintə].*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(90) *... the block and over [oʊvə].*   (Asap Rocky – Praise The Lord)

10.2 Production of *t/d* and *f/v* Instead of *th*

The production of *t/d* or *f/v* sounds instead of *th* sound was also identified, as in *I ain't got nothing [natin]* (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out) or in *Guess when I heard that [dat]* (Kanye West – Homecoming). Occasionally, the complete omission of *th* sound occurred.

(91) *I don't let 'em play with me.*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(92) *I got 'em open.*   (Asap Rocky – Praise The Lord)

(93) *I delete 'em.*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

10.3 Simplification of *-ing*

When analyzing the phonological features, I found numerous examples of the simplification of pronunciation of words ending in *-ing*, which supports the claim by Green (2002, 121) that AAVE speakers produce the *n* sound instead of the *ŋ* sound in words with more than one syllable. The simplification was used by all of the investigated artists and occurred throughout the whole corpus.

(94) *I'll be sittin' waitin'.*   (Snoop Dogg – Let It Out)

(95) *I was just playin'.*   (Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz)

(96) *Never that stayin' in...*   (Snoop Dogg – Do It When I'm In It)

(97) *They be askin' us questions.*   (Kanye West – Jesus Walks)

(98) *I'm comin' home again.*   (Kanye West – Homecoming)

(99) *... everybody gettin' paid.*   (Kanye West – All Day)

(100)	*I was lookin' at him.*	(Kendrick Lamar – M.A.A.D. City)
(101)	*I'm countin' this.*	(Kendrick Lamar – Humble)
(102)	*Travellin' man…*	(Asap Rocky – Back Home)
(103)	*… don't worry nothin'.*	(Asap Rocky – Praise The Lord)
(104)	*Smokin' while…*	(Asap Rocky – Babushka Boi)

10.4 Consonant Cluster Reduction

I assumed that the occurrence of the consonant cluster reduction would be quite frequent, however, the analyzed corpus does not include many examples. The consonant cluster reduction is identified solely within the lyrics by Kanye West.

| (105) | *She got so cold [col] on me.* | (Kanye West – Homecoming) |
| (106) | *Gold [gol] for me.* | (Kanye West – Homecoming) |

CONCLUSION

The main intention of this bachelor thesis was to analyze the selected songs of American hip-hop music in order to identify if they include features of African American Vernacular English. As the topic of AAVE is wide in a range, the main focus was placed on the lexical, grammatical and phonological features.

With regard to the grammatical features, I found the phenomenon of zero copula as one of the most prominent ones, since it was used by all analyzed artists commonly. All artists also used the negative structures unique to AAVE, such as the negative indicator *ain't* and the sentences including multiple negators. The phenomenon of invariant *be* was used by all analyzed artists as well, however, it did not occur as frequently at the previously mentioned phenomena. Considering the verbal markers, the corpus included only one example, which was identified within the lyrics by Snoop Dogg. With regard to the preverbal markers *finna* and *steady*, I found out that they were used more often within the lyrics of the younger artists, furthermore, the preverbal marker *steady* was identified only within the lyrics by the youngest artist Asap Rocky. The analytical part also showed that the usage of AAVE grammar was occasionally inconsistent, since three of the analyzed artists, namely Snoop Dogg, Kanye West and Kendrick Lamar used the grammar of Standard American English as well, such as the *-s* suffix in the third person singular, the negative forms *be + not* and *do + not* and the future tense *will*. The reasons for such discrepancies were mainly the rhythmical purposes of the songs. In all other cases, the usage of AAVE features complied with rules described within the theoretical part of this thesis.

The analyzed corpus also included a variety of slang expression, the most noteworthy was the expression *nigga*, which occurred in all analyzed lyrics consistently. Apart from the lexical and grammatical features, the pronunciation patterns unique to AAVE were also included, such as the simplification of words ending in *-ing* or the phenomenon of r-lessness. The simplification of words ending in *-ing* was used by all artists, whereas the r-lessness occurred within the songs by Snoop Dogg, Kanye West and Asap Rocky.

In the lyrics which I analyzed, the features unique to AAVE were used commonly and their usage was governed by rules common for AAVE. However, for the reasons such as the effort to appeal to the audience of Standard American speakers or for the rhythmical purposes of the songs, the artists occasionally included the structures of Standard American English.

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Asap Rocky – Praise the Lord (2018)

Kanye West – All Day (2015)

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Snoop Dogg – Let It Out (2008)

Snoop Dogg – Those Gurlz (2008)

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APPENDICIES

Appendix 1 – Corpus of analyzed lyrics (see the enclosed CD)