Age of Second Dialect Acquisition and Linguistic Practice Across Ethno-racial Boundaries in the Urban Midwest

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1 Introduction

When examining dialect differences and investigating social circumstances that facilitate dialect contact, diffusion, and change across larger scale speaker samples, it is instructive to also examine the linguistic behaviors of individual speakers who are at the potential forefront of linguistic change due to their exogamous social contacts. Speakers who have meaningful and regularly occurring interactions with those outside of their regional, ethnic, or social groups may come to adopt linguistic features that are distinctive from their native dialects through processes of second dialect acquisition (SDA) and dialect shift.

African American English (AAE) and other ethnically-linked dialects of American English, as well as varieties of American English spoken by whites are considered to be distinctive dialects that vary from one another along differing linguistic parameters across regions and speech communities. Instances of use of AAE by whites are often interpreted as acts of linguistic *crossing* (cf. Rampton 1995) or linguistic appropriation, but in some cases this linguistic usage is more robust and systematic than the designation *crossing* allows for. The current research considers the linguistic results of contact between speakers of differing ethno-racial groups from a second dialect acquisition perspective by examining the distribution of use of morpho-syntactic and phonological features associated with AAE by white women who have significant social, kinship, and residential contact with African Americans in Columbus, Ohio. Speakers in this sample differ from one another with regard to their qualitative and quantitative patterns of use of features aligned with African American English. They also differ from one another with regard to the ages at which they began to have regular and meaningful contact with African Americans. This paper seeks to isolate and consider one important strand of the multitude of factors that shape their linguistic practices: the age of acquisition (AoA) of what can be considered their second dialect and how thoroughly AoA as a variable can account for speakers' patterns of use of AAE-linked features.

2 Second Dialect Acquisition

Much research on second dialect acquisition (SDA) has argued that complete acquisition of a second dialect, much like the acquisition of a second language, must occur before the critical age period of early adolescence (cf. Payne 1976; Trudgill 1986; Chambers 1988). Siegel (2010) surveys research across the field, and presents a nuanced picture of how age functions with regard to the acquisition and use of non-native dialect features. Studies such as Schockey 1984, and Omdal 1994 show that overall, adults as well as children can acquire second dialect features. However, the literature on SDA as a whole, like the literature on second language acquisition (Johnson & Newport 1989), shows that children are more successful with their attainment of the second dialect features than adults, especially when they have an AoA before adolescence.

The age at which acquisition of a second dialect takes place has also been shown to affect the attainment of phonological and morphological features differently. Kerswill (1994), Ivars (1994), and Omdal (1994) show that morphological features an be acquired and used regularly by speakers who did not gain exposure to the second dialect until adolescence, and in the case of Omdal's study in Norway, even by speakers in their twenties. But with regard to phonological features, these same studies show that the optimum age of acquisition for phonological features is usually lower than for morphological features. Age seven is the cut-off point for most speakers to

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attain native-like phonological proficiency in their second dialect, with few speakers attaining this fluency with an AoA past fourteen. This finding that age is less of a barrier to the acquisition of morphosyntactic features than phonological features is also corroborated by SLA studies such as Flege, Yeni-Komshian, and Liu (1999). They find that while non-native speakers with higher AoAs do tend to show less attainment of the morphosyntatctic features of their second language, this is usually the result of speakers using their second language with less frequency; when frequency of use of L2 is accounted for, the effect of AoA on attainment of L2 morphosyntax is found to be statistically insignificant. However, Flege et al. do find that AoA matters for phonological attainment. These parallels between SDA and SLA are striking, as the social, affective, and pedagogical dimensions of attaining a second dialect as versus a second language often differ for speakers. And while the process of attaining an L2 certainly involves identity work (Norton and Mckinney 2010), the process of SDA is often understood to be entwined with a more overt shift of social identity.

SDA has been studied in situations of cross national, regional, ethnic, and cultural contact, but specifically of interest to this inquiry are studies that consider the acquisition of ethnically-marked dialect features by outgroup members. A broad overview of this literature shows a variety of SDA outcomes. Sweetland (2002) shows qualitative evidence of full attainment of the AAE morphological system by Delilah, a young adult white woman with predominantly African American social networks, but reports that Delilah uses AAE phonological features conservatively. Studies by Ash and Myhill (1986), Bucholtz (1997, 2011), Cutler (1997, 2002), and Hatala (1976) show white speakers using various subsets of mainly phonological AAE linked features, but none of these speakers show the morphosyntactic attainment of Delilah. However, the speakers studied by Bucholtz and Cutler did not have the same dense African American social networks as the speakers studied by the other authors, and Delilah seems to have had the lengthiest and most comprehensive social ties with African Americans of all the speakers across studies. Sebba (1993) and Baugh (1992) both find evidence of misadaption, overgeneralization, and hypocorrection in white adolescent D2 speakers' use of ethnically marked varieties of English, London Jamaican and AAE respectively. Stanford (2007) reports from Southwestern China on Sui women who have married exogamously into families with different dialects than those of their home, and finds pervasive patterns of D1 maintenance rather than acquisition of D2 features. Stanford interprets the lack of D2 acquisition among Sui women as oppositional "linguistic acts of clan identity" (2007:iii) that reinforce their own family's clan identity rather than those of their husbands. As a whole, these studies consider how linguistically successful second dialect acquisition and use is constrained by social factors such as contact, access, and agency.

When considering how successful D2 attainment comes about, it is also useful to consider the relationship between second dialect acquisition and speech accommodation. Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles and Powesland 1975) accounts for specific instances of intraspeaker variation by considering how speakers change the way they speak according to their interlocutors. In order to decrease social distance and build solidarity, a speaker may subconsciously alter his or her speech to match that of his or her interlocutor. Applying accommodation theory to a model of SDA, Trudgill 1986 argues that many types of SDA are the result of repeated instances of speech accommodation over long periods of time. If speech accommodation instances are frequent and repeated, they can lead to the acquisition of second dialect features. The speakers in this sample are understood to have acquired the AAE features through their regularly occurring instances of positive and socially intimate face-to-face interaction with African Americans over long periods of time across social situations. To summarize, based on the findings across SDA studies in general, the expectation is that women in the sample who began to have close contact with African Americans in their youth and early adolescence would show the most complete and regular use of AAE-linked features, including more complete phonological attainment of AAE. Speakers with later AoAs would also be expected to show more advanced attainment of AAE morphosyntactic features than they would for phonological features.

3 Speaker Sample and Data Collection Methodology

The speakers in this sample are fourteen adult white women, ranging in age from their late teens to their mid sixties, living in the Midwestern city of Columbus Ohio. They all have significant long-term ties to African Americans and the African American community through marriage and partnerships, friendships, neighborhoods of current residence and upbringing, and institutional and social affiliations such as church attendance and workplace. Speakers were recruited by the author through both the friend of friend approach as well as during field-based observations when speakers were located in predominately African American community spaces with African American friends, partners, or kin. Recorded speech data were collected though individual and group sociolinguistic interviews; within group interviews, speakers' African American partners, kin, and/or friends were present and participatory to varying degrees. Some speakers also participated in interactional recording sessions with their African American kin and friends.[1]

The speakers in the sample are united as a group by having degrees of social contact with African Americans that most white American adults do not have. However, they differ from one another with regard to the specifics of their social lives, individual relationships, the trajectories of their contact with African Americans throughout their lives, their linguistic behaviors, and the specific ages at which they came to have regular interaction with African Americans in their daily lives. Table 1 presents information about each speaker, including their age at the time of the interview and the age at which they began to have regular contact with African Americans, and ostensibly, AAE; this is considered to be their age of acquisition.

Speaker, Age	Age of acquisition of AAE/Significant contact with African Americans
Gabrielle, 17	Age 5 or below *(early childhood)*
Stacy, 22	Age 11 *(early adolescence)*
Paula, 24	Age 5 *(early childhood)*
Monica, 27	Age 8 *(childhood)*
Belinda, 31	Age 15 *(adolescence)*
Tiffany, 32	Age 4 or below *(early childhood)*
Melissa, 33	Age 14 *(adolescence)*
Dana, 37	Age 11 *(early adolescence)*
Nicole, 40	Age 7 *(childhood)*
Jesse, 40	Age 19 (*early adulthood)*
Pam, 43	Age 12 *(early adolescence)*
Kathy, 54	Age 18 (*early adulthood)*
Ann, 56	Age 20 (*early adulthood)*
Rebecca, 65	Age 17 (*early adulthood)*

Table 1: Speaker Information

4 The relationship between speakers' D1 & D2

The relationship between language varieties associated with African Americans and whites in the U.S. certainly vary across time and place, both with regard to community and region, as well as at the level of the individual speaker. Not all African Americans are AAE speakers (Spears 2001), nor are all speakers that use AAE features African American. Imposing a rather simplistic set of designations on what is actually much more complicated linguistic terrain, the first dialect of this speakers in this study is considered to be some version of White Midlands English (WME) and their second dialect to be AAE. Speakers' D1 is designated as White Midlands English because all speakers reported growing up in homes in Columbus with white parents who had few, if any,

[1] As the author/interviewer is white and speaks North Midlands AE, there was the capacity for speakers to accommodate linguistically and make use of fewer features associated with AAE. Group interview contexts provided the opportunity for this potential effect to be balanced, and data were coded were culled from multiple contexts for each speaker when possible.

African American ties.[2] Varieties of white midlands English (WME) and AAE share features at both the phonological and morophosyntactic level, including features that differ from other varieties of Mainstream American English. For the purposes of this study, speakers' use of D2 features that are not shared with D1 are of predominant interest. Table 2 presents a qualitative inventory of morphosyntactic features of AAE (Labov 1972, Wolfram and Fasold (1974), Baugh (1983), Rickford 1999, Spears 2001, Green 2002, Moody 2010). The left column lists the morphosyntactic features that are present in AAE, but not present in WME. These features have been shown to be used overwhelming by African Americans as opposed to whites, although there are certainly whites who make use of many or some of these features as shown by Hatala (1976), Ash and Myhill (1986), Bucholtz (1997, 2011), Cutler (2002), Sweetland (2002), and Fix (2011). The right column of this table lists the features that are shared by AAE and WME, but that are distinct from SE.

AAE (D2) features distinctive from WME (D1)	**AAE (D2) features shared with WME (D1)**
Copula absence (*is*, 3rd person *are*)	*Ain't*
Habitual *be*	Multiple modals
Unmarked 3rd person singular verbs	2nd person *are* copula deletion
Remote-time *bin*/*been*	Perfective *done*
Aspectual *Steady*	Demonstrative *them*
Preterite *had*	1st/2nd person —s
Ain't for *didn't*	Irregular preterites
Unmarked possessives	Negative concord
Negative inversion	*Y'all*
If-clauses with auxiliary verb inversion	Expletive *it*
Associative plural *em*/*nem*	*Was* for *were*
Gõ/gon as a past tense marker with negative evaluation	
Wh-questions without auxiliary/*do* support	

Table 2. Distinctive and Shared D2 & D1 morphosyntactic features

Table 3 presents information about distinctive and shared AAE phonological features in the same format as above.[3]

AAE (D2) phonological features distinctive from WME (D1)	**AAE (D2) phonological features shared with WME (D1)**
Reduction of word-final consonant clusters: (-sk)	Coronal stop deletion
Realization of word final vowel+nasal as a nasalized vowel	Realization of final velar nasal as an alveolar nasal in gerunds
Deletion of stops post-vocalically in stop-fricative# clusters	/l/ vocalization and deletion in coda position
Devoicing of word-final voiced stops after a vowels	Substitution of interdental fricatives; Realization of voiceless *th* as [t] or [f], and voiced *th* as [d] or [v]
Realization of *thr* as *th*, especially before [u] and [o]	/ai/ monothongization
Substitution of interdental fricatives; Realization of voiceless *th* as [t] or [f], and voiced *th* as [d] or [v]	u/ and /o/ fronting
	Merger of [I] and [E] before nasals
African American Vowel Shift	Stress on first syllables of certain lexical items
AAE intonational patterns	

Table 3. Distinctive and Shared D2 & D1 phonological features

5 The impact of AoA on use of AAE morphosyntax

Only a subset of the speakers in the sample show use of distinctive AAE features. Table 4 illustrates the qualitative distribution of use of these features among speakers—the grey shading

[2] Several of the speakers in the sample have one or more parent who immigrated to Columbus from a Appalachian region of Ohio, West Virginia, or Kentucky; thus, we can consider their home variety, or D1, to be South Midlands English (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006).

[3] cf. Bailey and Thomas 1998, Bigham 2004, Dodsworth, Durian, and Schumacher 2010; Green 2004; Jun and Foreman 1996; Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006; Rickford 1999; Tarone 1973; Thomas 1993, 2007; Wolfram and Christian 1976.

highlights the speakers that make use of these distinctive D2 features. Distinctive AAE morphosyntactic features tended to be used at low rates by the speakers who made use of them at all. For example, Tiffany, who made use of the greatest number of instances of copula deletion, showed only 5 of instances in over 2 hours of interview and interactional data.

	3rd sing. –s absence	Preterite *had*+ *ed*	Copula absence	Assoc. pl. *dem/nem*	Stressed *BEEN*	Unstressed *been*	Habitual *be*	Future *be*	Negative inversion	Wh-Qs w/o *aux/do*
Tiffany, AoA 5	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	-
Gabrielle, AoA 5	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
Paula, AoA 5	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
Nicole, AofA 7	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Monica, AoA 8	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
Jesse, AoA 19	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Melissa, AoA 14	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kathy, AoA 18	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dana, AoA 11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stacy, AoA 11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pam, AoA 12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belinda, AoA 15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rebecca, AoA 17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ann, AoA 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4. Qualitative distribution of AAE morphosyntactic features by speaker

In a Pearson's *r* test of correlation between the AoA of each speaker and number of distinctive AAE features they used, a high degree of significance is reached (P<.01), illustrated in Figure 1. This means that overall, the adult women who show the greatest ranges of use of AAE morphosyntactic features in adulthood have the earliest AoAs, as they have had contact with African Americans and AAE since childhood. Speakers with later AoAs tend to show low ranges of use of AAE morphosyntactic variables.

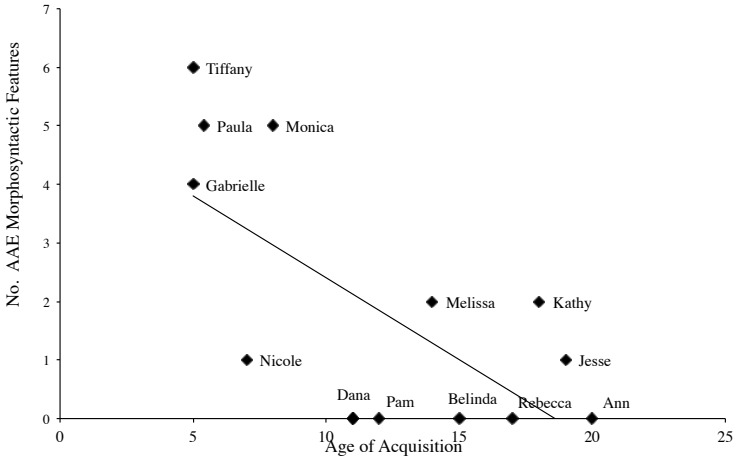


Figure 1: AoA and Range of AAE Morphosyntactic features used

This finding illustrates that AoA is certainly an important contributing factor to the acquisition of the morphosynatic features of AAE as second dialect by the speakers in this sample. However, throughout the literature on SDA and SLA, AoA has not been found to be as significant barrier to acquisition of morphosyntactic features, as per the findings of Kerswill (1994), Ivars (1994), and Omdal (1994), who found more advanced acquisition of D2 morphosyntax with speakers who had AoAs during and after adolescence.

6 The impact of AoA on use of AAE Phonology

When the number (range) of distinctive AAE phonological features used by speakers are run in a Pearson's *r* test of correlation with AoA, the result is not quite significant (p=.068). Figure 2 shows the relationship between AoA and the number of features used for all speakers, and trendline suggests there is some correlation. Note that all the speakers except for Jesse—who will later be discussed at greater length—adhere to the pattern of the earlier the AoA, the greater the range of AAE phonological features used. In fact, a when a Pearson's *r* is run with Jesse removed, the relationship between AoA and range of AAE phonological features is found to be highly statistically significant (p=.0005).

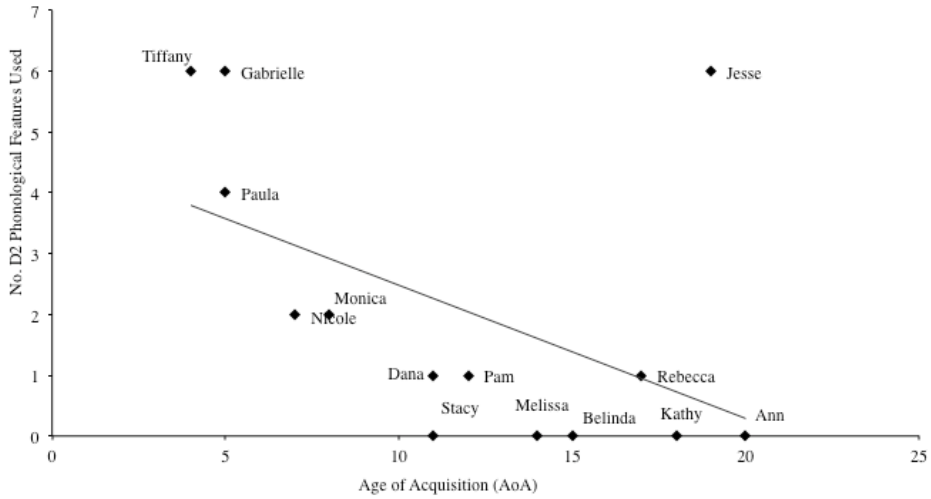


Figure 2: AoA and qualitative range of AAE phonological features.

Part of what represents a speaker's successful attainment of a second dialect is the range of D2 features that they make use of, as well as the rates with which they make use of each variable. Rather than focusing on a quantitative analysis of one exemplary variable, a phonological index based on speakers' rates of use of 5 different AAE-linked variables is computed. This index is based on a D2 morphological index operationalized by Kerswill (1994).

The following 5 phonological AAE-linked features considered in this index score are:

1. *Nasal lenition and nasalization of preceding vowel*
2. *Substitution of initial and medial fricatives ('baf' for 'bath'; 'dat' for 'that')*
3. *Consonant cluster simplification: Final coronal stop deletion*
4. *Consonant cluster simplification in stop+s/z clusters ('it's' 'that's")*
5. *L vocalization and deletion*

While coronal stop deletion and L vocalization are not unique to AAE, but they have been found to be used at higher rates and according to differing internal constraints by AAE speakers

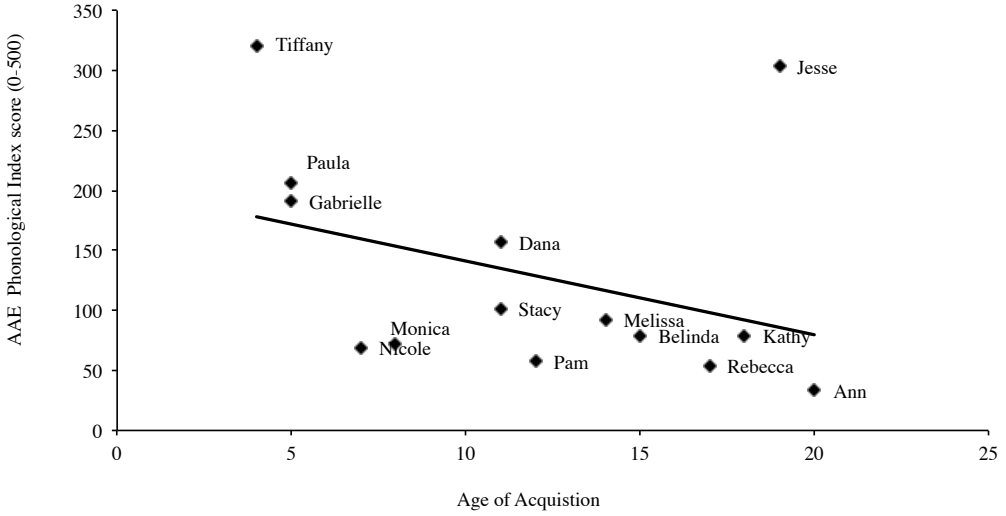
compared whites across several data sets (cf. Wolfram and Fasold 1974; Guy 1980; Durian 2008; Fix 2004).

The D2 phonological index score in this study is computed by taking the sum of percentage of use of each of the five variables for each speaker, yielding a possible index score ranging from 0-500. It is instructive to consider that no speaker of AAE would have an index score of 500, as each of these realizations is variable. Table 4 shows each speaker's percentage of use of each variable and their computed D2 phonological index scores.

	AofA	AAE Phonological index score	*%Nasal lenition*	*% CC simplication of stop+s/z*	*% Substitution of Fricatives*	*% Final coronal stop deletion*	*% L vocalization*
Tiffany	4	320.7	*40*	*80*	*66.7*	*70*	*64*
Paula	5	205.6	*0*	*50*	*46.7*	*51.2*	*57.7*
Gabrielle	5	191.1	*0*	*it's' [Is]*	*40*	*43*	*48.1*
Nicole	7	69.1	*0*	*0*	*0*	*33.8*	*35.3*
Dana	11	156.7	*0*	*60*	*23.3*	*43.8*	*29.6*
Monica	11	71.3	*0*	*0*	*0*	*43.8*	*27.5*
Pam	12	79	*0*	*0*	*0*	*29.1*	*28.8*
Melissa	14	92.6	*0*	*0*	*0*	*58*	*34.6*
Belinda	15	79.1	*0*	*0*	*0*	*57.5*	*21.6*
Rebecca	17	54.6	*0*	*0*	*0*	*29.1*	*25.5*
Kathy	18	79	*0*	*0*	*0*	*52.5*	*26.5*
Jesse	19	303.6	*35*	*83.3*	*55.8*	*57.5*	*72*
Ann	20	33.8	*0*	*0*	*0*	*28.8*	*5*

Table 4: Speakers' rates of use of phonological features and phonological index scores

The majority of speakers do show a trend of higher D2 phonological index scores with lower AoAs, but the Pearson *r* test does not show a statistically significant correlation between speaker AoA and their phonological index score ($p > .2$) when all fourteen speakers are considered.



The lack of statistically significant correlation between AoA and the Phonological Index can be attributed to the presence of the Jesse's extremely high index score (303.6) and late AoA and Jesse compared to the rest of the speaker sample (303.6 respectively), coupled with the low index score of Nicole (69.1), a speaker with an early AoA. Once again though, when Jesse is removed from the Pearson's *r* test, a high degree of statistical significance is reached between AoA and phonological index score for the remainder of the speaker sample ($p = .005$).

Jesse, who has a relatively late AoA of 19, but a high phonological index score, is an

anomaly to the SDA literature, which has shown more limited use of features among speakers with late AoAs. Nicole, a speaker with a childhood AoA, but a low Phonological Index score, also disrupts the general pattern across the participant set. Contrary to other SDA findings, use of AAE phonological features among the speakers in this sample is not statistically correlated with AoA.

7 Outliers

The key to understanding the patterns of use of AAE-linked phonology lies in part with outliers within the sample who provide additional insight into the life circumstances beyond AoA that impact SDA attainment. Jesse and Nicole emerge as outliers within the data set, with their linguistic behaviors and trajectories of use of AAE that run opposite to one another.

Nicole is a teacher who was referred to me by an African American friend because of the "way she talks and acts" around African Americans. With an AoA of 7, she grew up in an almost entirely African American community, encountered few white children at school, has maintained a network of African American friends since elementary school, and her romantic partnerships have been with only African Americans. However, she uses a qualitatively narrower range and lower rates of D2 features than might be expected based on her AoA in her recorded data set, which consisted entirely of a one on one interview with the white female author. Nicole does speak openly about the ways in which her later-attained profession of teaching has led to an conscious change of her self presentation (see Fix 2011:304), but she might also be an adept style shifter, or she accomplishes much of the phonological work of "sounding black" through use of AAE prosodic features (cf. Tarone 1973, Jun and Foreman 1996), as Sweetland (2002) describes of Deliah. Regardless, the more tempered use of ethnically-marked D2 features by a speaker who could potentially use more is not as remarkable as the converse, a speaker who has acquired and uses more D2 features than would be expected.

Jesse shows a greater range and rate of use of D2 features than would be predicted by her relatively late AoA of 19, especially phonological features. She was raised in rural Ohio around very few African Americans, but moved to Columbus after high school for employment and became involved with an African American man who would be a long term partner and parent to her older daughters. This romantic union had a transformative impact on her social networks. Early in their relationship she moved with her partner to Columbus' predominantly African American near southeast side, less than a block away from her partner's mother, and was in close, constant, and positive contact with her partner's family. Jesse was employed with several of his family members and enjoyed the company of her partner's mother and sister on a daily basis. While that partnership ended eventually, Jesse is currently married to another African American man and lives in a predominantly African American community with her husband and three children who are biracial. Her linguistic behaviors in an interview with me and with her family members and a friend present show a wide range of use of AAE lexical items, discursive strategies, prosody, and phonological features.

Jesse has one of the highest phonological index scores in the sample. In comparison to other speakers described in the SDA literature who began to acquire a dialect as adults (and the SLA literature as well), Jesse shows a much more advanced attainment and use of AAE phonology than would be expected based on her AoA, including the distinctive AAE features of nasal lenition, substitution of fricatives, and consonant cluster simplification. In this sense, she is an outlier in the SDA literature. Jesse's linguistic behaviors point to the importance of what is immediately observable with regard to her experiences: the strong social motivation to attain a D2 because of ample, positive, and intimate contact with D2 speakers. Jesse's linguistic behaviors and attainment of AAE phonology also show that advanced post-adolescent attainment of D2 phonological features is possible under the appropriate social circumstances. Furthermore, Jesse's attainment of AAE may be due in part to her construction of an adult identity that is positively aligned with African American identity. However, because phonological features rather than morphosyntactic are "doing the work" of Jesse of indexing her African American social ties, the social barriers to acquisition and use of AAE morphosyntactic features should also be considered outside of an acquisition framework, as this may be due to their social salience.

8 Conclusions

AoA is a statistically significant social factor when we consider the use of ethnically-marked dialect features by ethnic outsiders, that is, whites who have acquired AAE as a D2. It is the case that speakers in this study who had the earliest significant social contact with African Americans (leading to the earliest ages of access to and acquisition of AAE) who show some of the greatest qualitative range of AAE morphosyntactic features. Many of these same speakers also show the widest qualitative range and highest rates of use of AAE phonological features. These findings are certainly in keeping with the findings of other second dialect acquisition studies. Circumstances of contact with African Americans in speakers' youths and sustained contact with African Americans and AAE throughout their lives have shaped their linguistic behaviors. But while much of the literature on second dialect acquisition has shown a late AofA limits a speaker's attainment of D2 phonological features, one speaker in the sample, Jesse, departs from this trend, as she shows use of a range of AAE phonological features and make use of them at rates similar to or exceeding those speakers with much earlier ages of acquisition. Jesse represents something of an anomaly to the SDA literature in this respect. Ultimately, while AoA is a factor that certainly is illuminating with regard to this data set and speakers' use of of AAE as a second dialect, factors beyond age of acquisition must be considered, especially those that inhibit use of AAE features for some but encourage it for others.

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