

VARIATION AND CHANGE IN PAST TENSE NEGATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

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*For Susie Chestnut.*

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# ABSTRACT

## VARIATION AND CHANGE IN PAST TENSE NEGATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Sabriya I. Fisher

William Labov

This dissertation investigates the use of *ain't* for negation in past tense contexts in Philadelphia African American English [PhAAE]. This use of *ain't*, which varies with *didn't*, is a unique feature of AAE (Labov et al. 1968) and has implications for the expression of tense/aspect in the language. First, it further levels tense/aspect cues from auxiliaries in negative contexts. Second, whereas verbal complements of *didn't* are uninflected (1a), complements of *ain't* may either be uninflected or in preterit form (1b). This asymmetry indicates potential structural differences between *ain't* and *didn't*.

- (1) a. They **didn't play** yesterday.
- b. They **ain't play(ed)** yesterday.

Consequently, this dissertation joins a quantitative study of the social and linguistic factors conditioning use of *ain't* with a distributional investigation of its syntax and interaction with tense morphology. Toward that end, I analyze naturalistic speech data from 42 speakers in a corpus of casual conversations collected in the early 1980s from African American Philadelphians.

First, analysis of social conditioning on variation between *ain't* and *didn't* reveals that the use of *ain't* in this context is a recent innovation tied to the social setting of urban Northern cities like Philadelphia. Second, an investigation of following verbal morphology indicates that the construction *ain't*+base is preferred to *ain't*+preterit (used only 25% of the time). Apparent time analysis reveals that *ain't*+preterit is preferred by older speakers, suggesting that it may be an older construction. In combination with an analysis of linguistic conditioning on use of *ain't*, specifically verbal stativity, I argue that past tense *ain't* was reanalyzed from present perfect *ain't*, which varies with *haven't* and has the same form (2).

- (2) They **ain't played** since Monday.  
      “They haven't played since Monday.”

Based on these results as well as an examination of past *vs.* perfect constructions and associated verbal forms in PhAAE, I consider the hypothesis that inflection is generated in a functional head lower than tense in *ain't*+preterit constructions. Consequently, this dissertation demonstrates a difference in structure between *ain't* and *didn't* sentences and a distinction in the grammar of AAE compared to other varieties of English.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Research Questions and Outline

This dissertation uses methods in quantitative sociolinguistics and corpus investigations to examine the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts and its distribution with regard to following verbal morphology in a variety of African American English spoken in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This variety will be referred to as PhAAE. *Ain't* is potentially the most stigmatized word in the English language, though it has existed in many varieties of English across the globe for centuries (Anderwald 2002; Donaher and Katz 2015). African American English (henceforth AAE) developed a particular use of *ain't*, the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts. In this context, *ain't* varies with *didn't* as in the following exchange (1).

(1) **WH:** You knew him?

**Harold:** I **ain't** know him, but I had seen him before.

The use of *ain't* for *didn't* has been documented among speakers of AAE in various parts of the United States during the twentieth century (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969; Fasold and Wolfram 1970; Wolfram 2004), including Philadelphia (Ash and Myhill 1986). This use of *ain't*, believed to be unique to AAE, was most likely a language-internal innovation, argued to result from either the phonetic reduction of the initial /d/ in *didn't* (Fasold and Wolfram 1970) or from the reanalysis of *ain't* in other grammatical environments (Harris 2010; Smith 2015). The use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is also thought to have increased over the course of the twentieth century. Studies comparing

early, conservative, and rural varieties of AAE to more contemporary urban ones show *ain't* to be used instead of *didn't* at high frequencies by younger speakers in the urban North (Wolfram 2004; Myhill 1995; Howe 2005). A shift toward increased use of the variant in the twentieth century has been linked to the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to segregated Northern urban centers, known as the *Great Migration* (Labov and Harris 1986; Howe 2005), mirroring findings for other AAE variables (Bailey and Maynor 1987, 1989; Cukor-Avila and Bailey 1995; Myhill 1995; Rickford and Théberge-Rafal 1996).

Furthermore, the use of *ain't* in the past tense interacts with other areas of the AAE grammar. There has not yet been a study of how the use of *ain't* in the past tense fits within the overall grammar of varieties of AAE. It is well known that AAE does not always express tense and agreement overtly (Dechaine 1995; Yang, Ellman, and Legate 2015). Using *ain't* for *didn't* represents further leveling of tense-aspect distinctions that would normally be conveyed by auxiliaries. Levelling due to the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts has motivated claims that *ain't* is just negation and that tense/aspect in AAE is expressed by verbal properties like stativity (DeBose 1994). While this remains to be seen, there is an obvious interaction between use of *ain't* and the expression of tense/aspect in AAE, seen through variation in verbal morphology following *ain't* in past tense contexts (Fasold and Wolfram 1970; DeBose 1994; Green 2002). This may have important structural ramifications for AAE, specifically given the relationship between *DO* and the expression of tense morphology on main verbs in varieties of English (Embick and Noyer 2001). This dissertation investigates variation between *ain't* and *didn't* and associated verbal morphology using a sample of 47 recordings from the



Influence of Urban Minorities on Linguistic Change (UMLC) Corpus.<sup>1</sup> These recordings, collected by Wendell A. Harris, represent the casual, intimate speech of Black Philadelphians born between 1901 and 1969. The corpus will be used to address the following intertwined research questions about variation, change and grammatical structure in PhAAE:

1. Is there evidence that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts has increased over time within the Philadelphia speech community?
2. What are the social and linguistic origins of the use of *ain't* for *didn't*?
3. What social, stylistic, and linguistic factors condition variation between *ain't* and *didn't*? Do we find patterns in conditioning indicative of language change?
4. How does the use of *ain't* for *didn't* interact with the negation and tense/aspect systems of PhAAE? How does its use affect the morphosyntactic structure of PhAAE?

To these ends, a main goal of this dissertation is to apply quantitative, variationist methods in sociolinguistics to the study of *ain't~didn't* variation and change in the Philadelphia African American community. Consequently, the social, stylistic and linguistic factors that condition this variation will be modeled in order to address questions on the origin and nature of the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts and, furthermore, whether this use has increased over time. A second major goal of this dissertation is to understand how the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts interacts with

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other parts of the PhAAE grammar, namely the tense/aspect system. To study this interaction, this dissertation undertakes a distributional study of the syntax of sentences containing *ain't* and the morphology of verbs following *ain't*. Ultimately, this work provides a case study on grammatical innovation and expansion and the outcome such processes can have on the organization of a grammatical system.

The dissertation unfolds as follows: Chapter 2 provides the background for the corpus investigations of *ain't* in PhAAE undertaken in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, the apparent time paradigm (Labov 1972a; Bailey et al. 1991) is used to demonstrate change over time for the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts. This will be compared to stability over time in the use of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts. Next, the social, stylistic, and linguistic factors conditioning variation between *ain't* and *didn't* in the Philadelphia speech community will be analyzed using a generalized linear model in R. Examining linguistic factors like preceding phonological segment and verbal stativity will provide evidence that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts originated from its function in the present perfect. Examining social factors further reinforces that the increasing use of *ain't* resulted from residential segregation in the urban North after 1940. The data on social and stylistic factors also depicts the increase in *ain't* as a change from below, in keeping with its status as a vernacular variant. Accordingly, *ain't* is shown to co-occur with another vernacular variant, negative concord.

In Chapter 4, attention is turned to the morphosyntactic properties of *ain't*. Through a close examination of the distribution of *ain't* in the UMLC corpus, this dissertation shows that *ain't* has the distribution of an auxiliary in PhAAE. This confirms Weldon's (1994) approach contra DeBose's (1994) proposal that *ain't* is solely negation,

though distributional data also shows *ain't* potentially expanding further into other auxiliary domains. The investigation of *ain't*'s distribution unlocks discussion on the possible role *ain't* plays in the syntax of PhAAE and how that differs from the role of *didn't*. Then, Chapter 5 looks at morphological variation following *ain't*, and how the use of *ain't* in the past tense interacts with tense morphology compared to its auxiliary counterpart *didn't*. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that the majority of the time, *ain't* acts as a surface variant of *didn't* and interacts with the expression of verbal tense in much the same way. However, it will also be argued that 25% of the sentences expressing past tense meaning containing *ain't* are structurally similar to present perfect sentences. In these sentences, verbal inflection comes from a functional head other than Tense. Some possibilities on what the composition of this functional head might be will be offered. The idea that some sentences expressing past tense have the same structure as the present perfect in PhAAE is in keeping with a hypothesis whereby the past tense use of *ain't* is derived from its present perfect use. Added to this is the fact that older speakers in the corpus show a preference for sentences containing *ain't* that are present perfect in structure yet convey past tense meaning. Chapter 5 also outlines the aspects of the grammar of PhAAE that could have facilitated such a change, including participle-to-preterit leveling and the minimal use of *have* to express perfect meaning in both affirmative and negative contexts. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by reiterating the major findings of this dissertation, discussing some of the questions that remain open, and offering potential avenues of future research. One relevant issue that will be discussed is the importance of obtaining grammaticality or acceptability judgments to complement the production study undertaken in this dissertation.

## 1.2 A Note on Terms

### 1.2.1 African American English [AAE]

This dissertation will use the term *African American English* [AAE] to refer to the language spoken by African American speakers in the UMLC corpus. This language will be understood to contain a mixture of features shared with other varieties of English (*do*-support, *n't* negation), features shared with other regional or non-standard varieties of English (negative concord, pre-verbal *done*), and its own unique features (copula absence, habitual *be*). The term AAE is used in contrast to MAE, or *Mainstream American English*, which will be used to refer to the standard variety of English spoken in the United States. This variety can be defined as a “non-regionally specific variety of English that is shaped by the speech of middle-class, educated speakers” (McLaughlin 2014). The term AAE will be used instead of AAVE, or African American Vernacular English, in order to characterize the diverse linguistic profiles of Black speakers in the UMLC corpus, many of whom do not use or use to a limited extent the core set of vernacular grammatical features specific to African American speech (e.g., copula absence, verbal *-s* absence, etc.). While these features may be employed less frequently by some speakers, middle and upper class speakers in particular, other features specific to AAE, like phonological or prosodic features, may be readily employed. Furthermore, socially mobile speakers may suppress the use of features associated with AAE that they have acquired as they move into social spheres where MAE is privileged. The term AAE is meant to be non-regionally specific as well, representing features believed to be shared by African American speech communities across the United States. To refer to the

specific variety of AAE spoken in the city of Philadelphia and environs, the term PhAAE, or *Philadelphia African American English*, will henceforth be used. Occasionally, the term *varieties of English* or *varieties of American English* will be used to discuss linguistic features that are known to exist across all Englishes or all Englishes spoken in the United States.

### 1.2.2 Tense, Aspect, and Morphology

This dissertation will make use of several terms to describe tense and aspect categories and associated morphology. First and foremost, a distinction in terminology will be made between the syntax-semantics of past and perfect constructions and the forms used within those constructions. This distinction will attempt to account for the fact that the same form may be used in both past and perfect contexts, though it may typically be associated with only one of the two in MAE. For example, in MAE, there is a strong association between the perfect (as a syntactico-semantic category) and verbal participles (as a morphological category) and an equally strong association between the past and verbal preterit forms. In fact, the simple past tense is often referred to simply as “the preterit,” a practice that this dissertation will avoid. The MAE association between the past tense and preterit form can be seen in (2), while the association between the perfect (formed with auxiliary *HAVE*) and participle is shown in (2). The distinction in form is most noticeable with irregular verbs, as regular *-ed* verbs have the same form whether in past or perfect contexts.

- (2) a. We **did** our homework yesterday [PAST]  
b. We've **done** our assignments for the week already. [PERFECT]

However, in many vernacular varieties of English, including PhAAE, there is participle-to-preterit leveling following *HAVE* in perfect contexts such that the preterit form can be used in either the past tense or perfect contexts.

- (3) a. I never **did** tell her that. (Donette)[PAST]  
 b. She must've **did** really get it. (Janet) [PERFECT]

Additionally, due to the phonological process of final consonant cluster deletion, base form verbs (verbal forms without inflection) can appear in past and perfect contexts as well.

- (4) a. Don't even come and **act** like... (Arnie)[PRESENT]  
 b. Janet ain't say nothing... I **act** like I in't hear anything. (Janet) [PAST]  
 c. You should've **act** like you knew. (Trey) [PERFECT]

For these reasons, to the extent that it is possible, the terms (*simple*) *past* and (*present*) *perfect* will be used to describe syntactico-semantic items, while *preterit* and *participle* will be used to refer only to morphological form. Regular verbs will be said to have *-ed* form for both preterits and participles since these are indistinguishable on the surface.

The morphological terms used are outlined in Table 1 below.

	Morphological Form		
	Base	Preterit	Participle
<b>Regular <i>-ed</i> Verbs</b>	<i>walk</i>	<i>walked</i>	
<b>Irregular Verbs</b>	<i>see</i>	<i>saw</i>	<i>seen</i>
<b>Invariant</b>	<i>put</i>		

Table 1: Terms used to describe the morphological form of main verbs.

The fact that *-ed* forms are indistinguishable as either preterits or participles will play a major role in the morphological analysis in Chapter 5. On the other hand, irregular verbs have three separate forms. These forms will be referred to as *base*, *preterit*, and *participle* respectively. Table 1 also shows that some verbs, like *put*, have the same form across the

board. Still others (not shown in Table 1) have identical base and participle forms (e.g., *run-ran-run* and *come-came-come*).

### **1.2.3 Orthographic Conventions**

Finally, because the focus of this dissertation is on the morphosyntactic properties of PhAAE, phonological and morpho-phonological features of AAE that differ from MAE will not necessarily be captured orthographically. Instead, standard orthography is used for the most part, though different transcriber's renditions of speech may sometimes indicate morphophonological patterns, most notably variation between the velar and alveolar variants of ING (e.g., *cleaning* vs. *cleanin'*).

## Chapter 2: Background

### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 set out the four interconnected research questions for this dissertation. This chapter sets out the background that this dissertation will build on in its study of the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts, presenting what is known about variation between *ain't* and *didn't* up to this point in time. Section 2.2 describes the historical and contemporary use of *ain't* across varieties of English with a focus on the use of *ain't* in African American English. The use of *ain't* in past tense contexts, in particular, is revealed to be an innovation that is unique to AAE. Section 2.2 also describes the envelope of variation that will be analyzed in the quantitative corpus study in Chapter 3. Then, Section 2.3 evaluates the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts in AAE has increased during the twentieth century, setting the stage for the study of change over time with regard to this variable undertaken in Chapter 3. In light of the fact that *ain't* for *didn't* is considered to be an innovation in AAE, Section 2.4 considers three hypotheses for its origin. These hypotheses will be evaluated using corpus data in Chapter 3. Section 2.5 looks to other social and stylistic factors that may affect the use of *ain't* in AAE, while Sections 2.6. and 2.7 focus on the structure of sentences containing *ain't*. 2.6 discusses hypotheses on the morphosyntactic nature of *ain't*. 2.7 discusses potential links between morphological variation in the form of verbs following *ain't* and the tense/aspect meaning of sentences containing *ain't*. Finally, Section 2.8 offers a summary of this chapter.



## 2.2 *Ain't*

This section looks at the use and history of *ain't* in varieties of English with particular attention to AAE. *Ain't* has existed as a variant of negated auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* in varieties of English since the 1600s (Jespersen 1961; Anderwald 2002). However, this dissertation focuses on the use of *ain't* as a variant of the dummy auxiliary *DO*, most notably in past tense contexts, in varieties of African American English (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969; Fasold and Wolfram 1970). This use of *ain't* is considered unique to AAE and is believed to be a recent innovation in the variety (Wolfram 2004; Howe 2005). This section begins with a look at the use of *ain't* in varieties of English in general and concludes with a summary of the use of *ain't* in PhAAE.

### 2.2.1 *Ain't* in Varieties of English

The World Atlas of Varieties of English lists more than 30 varieties of English that currently employ *ain't* as a negative auxiliary that variably replaces forms of *BE*, *HAVE*, or *DO*.<sup>2</sup> Not only is the use of *ain't* pervasive among English varieties, *ain't* has a long history in the English language, dating back to at least the seventeenth century (Anderwald 2002).

*Ain't* evolved from negated contractions of copula *BE*, present-tense auxiliary *BE* (e.g., *amn't*, *isn't*, *aren't*), and present-tense negated auxiliary *HAVE* (*haven't*, *hasn't*).

Jespersen (1961) sets out the progression of sound changes leading to the development of homophonous variants in each context. For example, *ain't* in contexts of *haven't/hasn't*

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<sup>2</sup> Only varieties where the feature was listed as “pervasive or obligatory,” “neither pervasive nor extremely rare,” or “exists, but is extremely rare” were counted.

originated from Early Modern English pronunciations of the negated auxiliary. At that time, affirmative *have* contained a short vowel [hæv] as it does today, while negative *haven't* was pronounced as [heɪnt] with a long vowel and deletion of the medial fricative. Initial aspirant deletion eventually produced [eɪnt]. In contexts of *BE*, Jespersen proposes that the first-person-singular negative form *amn't* became pronounced as *ain't* through simplification of the nasal cluster, eventual deletion of the nasal, and diphthongization of the vowel. For contexts of *aren't*, the deletion of post-vocalic [r], would have been followed by diphthongization of the vowel, producing [eɪnt], while for *isn't*, deletion of [z] would have been followed by lowering and lengthening of the vowel to produce [eɪnt]. These forms would have converged into the [eɪnt] that we know today.

The fact that *ain't* developed from several negated auxiliary contractions is corroborated by evidence from the Oxford English Dictionary. Anderwald (2002) finds that the earliest tokens of *ain't* as it is spelled today appear in 1778 for negated *HAVE* and in 1835 for negated *BE*. However, alternative spellings for negated auxiliaries indicative of the sound changes outlined above are found as early as the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. For example, there are alternative spellings of negated *BE* dating to 1695 and to 1692 for negated *HAVE*. *Ain't* has therefore existed as a variant of the negated auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE* in English for centuries.

The fact that *ain't* evolved from contractions of these negated auxiliaries explains why it is found in precisely these contexts in varieties of English across the globe. The examples in (1) demonstrate that *ain't* is used in place of copula *BE* (1), auxiliary *BE* in the present progressive (1), and periphrastic future (1), and auxiliary *HAVE* in the present

perfect (1). The following examples from the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus<sup>3</sup> demonstrate the use of *ain't* among White (predominantly Italian American) speakers from South Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup>

- (1) a. At least when a cleaner **ain't** there, it looks like somethin's clean!  
    "At least when a cleaner isn't there, it looks like something's clean!"
- b. It's not like the old world, but people **ain't** starvin'.  
    "It's not like the old world, but people aren't starving."
- c. It **ain't** gonna work the way they're thinking.  
    "It isn't going to work the way they're thinking."
- d. You **ain't** seen him in a couple days or so.  
    "You haven't seen him in a couple of days or so."

The use of *ain't* preceding the predicate main verb *got*, as in (2) below, is considered a variant of the present perfect in varieties of English like that spoken in South Philadelphia.

- (2) My wife wants to go shopping... I **ain't** got a thing in the house.  
    "My wife wants to go shopping... I haven't got a thing in the house."

### 2.2.2 *Ain't* in PhAAE

The use of *ain't* in AAE is similar to its use in other varieties of English. For example, *ain't* is also used in contexts of copula *BE* (3a), auxiliary *BE* in the present progressive (3b) and periphrastic future (3c), as well as for auxiliary *HAVE* in the present perfect (3d). The following examples are from the UMLC corpus and reflect the speech of Black Philadelphians.

- (3) a. I'm still strong. Don't you think I **ain't**! (Mr. Valentine)  
    "I'm still strong. Don't you think I'm not!"
- b. This equipment **ain't** making me no money. (Sean)  
    "This equipment isn't making me any money."

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<sup>3</sup> NSF-funded research project 921643 (1972-2013), Principal Investigator: William Labov.

<sup>4</sup> Example sentences are from (1a) Pauline Lupotto, (1b) Ron Coppola, (1c) Joe Rossini, (1d) Nick Minelli, and (2) Pops Malloy. All names are pseudonyms.

- c. But you **ain't** gon read the paper anyway. (Arnie)  
 “But you aren't going to read the paper anyway.”  
 d. I **ain't** never told nobody since I lost it. I just kept it to myself. (Donette)  
 “I haven't ever told anybody since I lost it.”

However, there are some key differences between the use of *ain't* in AAE and the use of *ain't* in other varieties of English. For example, the use of *ain't* preceding the predicate main verb *got* is considered to vary with *don't* rather than *haven't* as in other varieties of English (See (2) above).

- (4) I **ain't** even got time for that. I'll talk to you later some day. (Camille)  
 “I don't even got time for that.”

This use of *ain't* in contexts of auxiliary *DO* is considered a unique feature of AAE. In other words, AAE is the only variety of English in which *ain't* may be used productively in place of *don't* or *didn't*.<sup>5</sup> The use of *ain't* in place of *don't* is reported as limited to contexts preceding *got* in much of the literature. Chapter 5 of this dissertation will show that, while it can be used with other lexical predicates in PhAAE, its use in the UMLC corpus is rare overall. In contrast, the use of *ain't* in place of *didn't* in past tense contexts is widely reported in the literature and examples are prevalent in the corpus (5).

- (5) a. You **ain't** turned the book yet, **did** you? (Trey)  
 “You didn't turn the book yet, did you?”  
 b. I **ain't** say I forgot it. I said I **didn't** think right. (Howard)  
 “I didn't say I forgot it.”  
 c. No, they **ain't** say it like that, you know, and I **didn't** say that. (Dee)  
 “No, they didn't say it like that.”  
 d. I **ain't** keep arguing with her because I **didn't** really wanna hit her. (Dee)  
 “I didn't keep arguing with her.”

The earliest citation of *ain't* used as a variant of *didn't* comes from Labov et al.'s (1968:255) Harlem, New York study (6).

<sup>5</sup> Low frequency use of *ain't* for *didn't* is reported for other varieties of English (See Singler 1998, Feagin 1979, Anderwald 2002), but no other variety makes productive use of this variation.

- (6) Well, he **didn't** do nothin' much, and I **ain't** neither.  
 “Well, he didn't do much, and I didn't either.”

Around the same time, the use of *ain't* for *didn't* was reported among Black speakers in other cities (Wolfram 1969; Fasold and Wolfram 1970) as well as among speakers of Puerto Rican English in New York who had extensive contact with the Black community (Wolfram, Shiels, and Fasold 1971).

### 2.2.3 The Envelope of Variation

The envelope of variation between *ain't* and other negated auxiliaries for this study of PhAAE will be outlined here. Using the principle of accountability dictates that values be reported for “every case where the variable element occurs in the relevant environments (Labov 1972a). As has been shown, *ain't* is used in various grammatical contexts in PhAAE. In some of these contexts, it varies with auxiliaries contracted with the negative item *n't*, while in others, it varies with auxiliaries contracted with the subject and negated by *not*. Table 2 below presents this distribution of negated auxiliaries in PhAAE.

Grammatical Context	<i>Ain't</i> -Negation	<i>N't</i> -Negation	<i>Not</i> -Negation
<b>Copula</b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>isn't, aren't</i>	<i>'m not, 's not, 're not</i>
<b>Present Progressive</b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>isn't, aren't</i>	<i>'m not, 's not, 're not</i>
<b>Periphrastic Future</b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>isn't, aren't</i>	<i>'m not, 's not, 're not</i>
<b>Present Perfect</b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>hasn't, haven't</i>	-----
<b>Main Verb <i>got</i></b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>don't</i>	-----
<b>Simple Past</b>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>didnt</i>	-----

Table 2: Envelope of variation for negated auxiliaries that vary with *ain't* in PhAAE.

Note that some auxiliaries (like *didn't* and *haven't*) only contract with *n't* in American English varieties. It remains an important question whether or not the *not*-negation variants exhibit structural variation with *n't*-contracted and *ain't*-contracted auxiliaries given that *not* and *n't* are different syntactic objects (Zwicky and Pullum 1983). Though this does require further consideration, for the purposes of this dissertation, the envelope of variation will be understood as describing functional equivalence between negated auxiliaries of both types and *ain't* (Chambers and Trudgill 1980; Wolfram 1991; Labov 1993). On the other hand, focusing on *didn't* allows us to side step this issue, as there is only one possible variant in opposition to *ain't* in past tense contexts.

It is also important to note that full auxiliary forms with *not*-negation will not be considered to participate in the envelope of variation. First, the preferred auxiliary form in spoken speech is a contracted auxiliary, either through contraction with the preceding subject or with *n't*. Second, full auxiliary forms are generally only used for emphasis (Green 2002). In negative contexts, full auxiliaries are often used in conjunction with *not* to emphasize that something is *not* the case (a contrastive use), as in the following examples from the UMLC corpus. Note that prosodic emphasis is on *not* in these cases.

- (7) **Nancy:** Well, I'll tell you something. Oil is better than gas. I **haven't** bought—  
**WH:** You really think so?  
**Nancy:** Oh yes! I **have not** bought any oil since March.
- (8) **Navid:** We went through a lot of experiences together. We liked the same music. We read the same literature. We **didn't** like—We **did not** like the same people.
- (9) **Malika:** No, it **wasn't**. To be honest, that **was not** the worst thing ever happened to me.

- (10) **Tariq:** In church, man. It frightened me. From, from ever since I can remember.  
**WH:** That happen now, in the mosque?  
**Tariq:** Do it happen in the masjid?  
**WH:** Yeah, the masjid?  
**Tariq:** No, the masjid **is not** a place that would harbor, uh, certain, uh, mysteries.

As full auxiliaries with *not* are used only for pragmatic effect, these negated auxiliary tokens will not be included in the envelope of variation. Chapter 3 of this dissertation will provide a quantitative study of variation between *ain't* and negated auxiliaries in the UMLC corpus using the envelope of variation described above.

### 2.3 Increase in *ain't* for *didn't*

Because the use of *ain't* for *didn't* is a unique feature of AAE, it is often thought to be an innovation, and some work supports this assertion (Howe 2005; Wolfram 2004). For example, Howe 2005 compiles several studies examining the frequency of use of *ain't* in the past tense in early and contemporary varieties of AAE. His data on early varieties of AAE come from the Ex-slave Recordings (Schneider 1989; Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila 1991) and the Virginian Narratives (Kautzsch 2000). Data from conservative varieties of AAE come from African Nova Scotia English and Samaná English (Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001).<sup>6</sup> He compares these rates of *ain't* for *didn't* to those in contemporary varieties, highlighting data from Labov et al.'s (1968) Harlem study, Ash and Myhill's (1986) study of Black speakers in Philadelphia, and Weldon's (1994) study

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<sup>6</sup> Birthyears and collection dates for these data sets are as follows: Ex-slave Recordings [dates of birth: 1844-61], Virginian Narratives [collected in the 1930s], African Nova Scotia English [dates of birth: 1902-37], and Samaná English [dates of birth: 1895-1910].

of Columbus, OH. Relative frequencies of *ain't* in the past tense context are shown in Table 3 for all varieties.

	African Nova Scotia English	Samaná English	Ex-slave Recordings	Virginian Narratives	Harlem, NYC	Philadelphia, PA	Columbus, OH
N	258	189	144	123	439	522	162
<i>ain't</i>	2%	6%	3%	5%	32-50%	20-60%	38%
<i>didn't</i>	98%	94%	97%	95%	68-50%	80-40%	62%

Table 3: Distribution of *ain't* in contexts of *didn't* for four varieties of early or conservative AAE and three varieties of contemporary AAE (from Howe 2005).

As Table 3 demonstrates, speakers of the early/conservative varieties of AAE use *didn't* near categorically (*ain't* used  $\leq 6\%$ ).<sup>7</sup> This contrasts sharply with contemporary varieties, where use of *ain't* averages as high as 50-60% in Harlem and Philadelphia.

The low usage of variables associated with modern AAE by speakers of earlier and conservative varieties has led some to posit that the use of *ain't* for *didn't* is a recent innovation in AAE. Howe (2005) argues that the rise in *ain't* for *didn't* “was initiated by urban African American baby boomers” by way of either (a) second language effects of early slaves learning English or (b) from Southern European American English (2005:187-88). On the other hand, Wolfram refers to use of *ain't* in the past tense as a “new and intensifying structure” in urban AAE (2004:127) based on comparison to features of rural AAE during the twentieth century and earlier AAE (from the nineteenth century). Indeed, many of the features considered unique to contemporary AAE are argued to be twentieth century innovations. For example, Bailey and Maynor (1987, 1989) track the development of habitual *be* among young speakers of AAE in East Central Texas, and Cukor-Avila and Bailey (1995) find semantic differentiation by age in the development for preterit *had* from the pluperfect construction in Springville, Texas.

<sup>7</sup> See also Myhill 1995 on the low use of *ain't* among speakers in the Ex-slave Recordings.



All of these findings fall in line with what is known as the *Divergence Hypothesis* or the *Divergence Controversy*, which argues that the features of AAE that differentiate it from other varieties (most notably in the domain of tense and aspect) are innovations. The logical outcome of these innovations is that AAE is becoming less like the vernacular varieties of English spoken in the White community, or diverging from White vernaculars. Typically, these innovations are believed to be the result of linguistic segregation in urban Northern cities during the twentieth century (Bailey and Maynor 1987; Labov and Harris 1986). This segregation would have been brought on by two population movements: First, the mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North (known as the *Great Migration*, roughly 1910 - 1970). Second, the subsequent flight of White residents from Northern urban centers (deemed *White Flight*) that resulted in the residential and linguistic segregation of Black residents in Northern cities.

Indeed, the high degree of residential segregation that developed during the twentieth century in Philadelphia is well documented by Massey (2001). Massey uses an index of isolation to show the percentage of Black residents residing in the geographic unit of the average Black person. Table 4 shows a steady increase in this rate over the period of the Great Migration. This increasing rate represents an increase in the likelihood that the average Black person would reside in a neighborhood where the majority of fellow residents are also Black.

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940 - 1960	1970	1980	1990
<b>Index of isolation</b>	16%	16%	21%	27%	---	68%	70%	72%

Table 4: Indices of Black/White segregation in Philadelphia (from Massey 2001).

The effects of residential segregation on the use of features of AAE in Philadelphia is addressed in Labov and Harris (1986) and Ash and Myhill (1986), two studies showing that individual speaker's social histories, particularly contact with the White community, influence their use of variants associated with AAE.<sup>8</sup> Most notably, Ash and Myhill show that speakers who have less contact with the White community use *ain't* in past tense contexts more often than those who have more contact. Labov and Harris look at verbal – s absence and come to a similar conclusion: speakers' social histories, described as “the kinds of social experience they have had in dealing with members of other groups, the way they have used language in their life” (1986:21), appear to have the biggest influence on their use of the AAE variant. Thus, contact or segregation does have an effect on the use of AAE variables. Given the segregation in the urban North developing as the Great Migration unfolded, linguistic innovations and increases in the use of more rare variants might be expected. This dissertation therefore hypothesizes that an increase in the use of *ain't* in the past tense context was an innovation sparked by residential segregation in the urban North during the period of the Great Migration. As a result, Chapter 3 of this dissertation will look at differences in the use of *ain't* for *didn't* over time, by speakers' degrees of contact outside of the Black community, and by region of origin. Looking at region of origin is an attempt to compare the linguistic behavior of speakers who grew up in segregated Philadelphia to speakers who grew up in the southern United States, where they may have had more contact with rural Whites.

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<sup>8</sup> These studies also used the UMLC corpus. Overlap between the data used in these studies and that used in this dissertation is discussed in Chapter 3.

## 2.4 Origins of *ain't* for *didn't*

This section presents three possible sources for the use of *ain't* for *didn't*. The first posits that *ain't* comes from the phonetic reduction of the initial /d/ in *didn't* following consonants (Fasold and Wolfram 1970; Rickford 1980). The second assumes that *ain't* in present perfect constructions was reanalyzed as conveying simple past meaning (Harris 2010, Smith 2015). The third proposes that the use of *ain't* in variation with *don't* allowed *ain't* to expand to other contexts of *DO* like *didn't*.

### 2.4.1 Phonetic Reduction of *didn't*

The first hypothesis for the origin of *ain't* in past tense contexts comes from Fasold and Wolfram (1970) who propose an origin story that mirrors the diachronic development of *ain't* in contexts of *BE* and *HAVE* through gradual phonetic reduction. Fasold and Wolfram (1970) posit that the phonetic reduction of *didn't* to [int] through a process of /d/-deletion, and the eventual convergence of [int] with the form *ain't* used in other contexts led to the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts. Rickford (1980) cites the prevalence of /d/-deletion of auxiliaries in English Creole languages and AAE as support for Fasold and Wolfram's hypothesis. Rickford proposes an initial /d/-deletion rule that operates when /d/ is preceded by another consonant (initial consonant cluster deletion). The rule proposes a sonority hierarchy of segments favoring deletion: Preceding sonorous consonants (especially nasals) and obstruents favor initial /d/-deletion the most, while preceding vowels and pauses favor deletion the least. Adding the assimilation of the second /d/ to the following nasal, this produced forms that eventually merged with *ain't*.

In order for speakers to have reanalyzed [int] as a token of something other than *didn't*, the rate of /d/-deletion in the language would have to have been high enough to provide enough input for such a reanalysis. In order for that to happen, the environment producing [int] through /d/-deletion would have to have been robust enough as well. We might also expect *ain't* to be used more often when there is a preceding consonant as a result, since the new variant would allow speakers to completely avoid consonant clusters. Accordingly, Weldon (1994) tests the prevalence of environments favoring Rickford's /d/-deletion rule on data from Black speakers in Columbus, Ohio. Though her results are not significant, she does find that preceding vowel environments show a preference for *ain't* over preceding sonorant or obstruent consonants. Weldon notes that this is the opposite of what would be expected if *ain't* was derived from the reduction of *didn't*. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the effect of the phonological segment preceding the use of either *ain't* or *didn't* will again be tested to determine the robustness of the environment responsible for /d/-deletion in spoken AAE. It is expected that, if /d/-deletion is the motivation for the reduction of *didn't* that creates *ain't* as a variant in past tense contexts, the environment that favors /d/-deletion (*didn't* preceded by consonants) will be robust in naturalistic speech. Additionally, it is expected that *ain't* will be most often preceded by consonants as it allows speakers to avoid consonant clusters all together.

#### **2.4.2 Reanalysis of *ain't* in Present Perfect Contexts**

The second hypothesis states that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts where it varies with *didn't* came about through the reanalysis of the use of *ain't* in present perfect

contexts where it varies with *haven't*. This hypothesis is supported in work by Harris (2010) and Smith (2015) and is the hypothesis that this dissertation will ultimately support. This reanalysis would have occurred due to overlap in both the semantics of the past and present perfect as well as the morphological form of main verbs used in these contexts.

First, this hypothesis relies on the fact that there is general overlap in meaning between the present perfect and simple past in varieties of English because they both can be used to describe past events. The following example shows a simple past sentence (11) and a present perfect sentence (11) in MAE. Both describe the same past event.

- (11)        a. I saw that movie (when I was 17 years old).  
              b. I've seen that movie (before—it was when I was 17 years old).

The fact that both the simple past and present perfect can be used to talk about events that took place in the past or states that held in the past produces semantic overlap that exists for many speakers of contemporary American English (Elsness 1997).

A difference in reference is traditionally understood to distinguish the simple past from the present perfect (Reichenbach 1947; Comrie 1976). For the purposes of this dissertation, tense and aspect will be defined as relationships between the point of Speech (S), the point of Event (E), and the point of Reference (R) for a particular utterance (Reichenbach 1947). Accordingly, the past tense describes an event that took place or a state that held in the past. Figure 1 below outlines the schema for the simple past tense according to Reichenbach (1947).

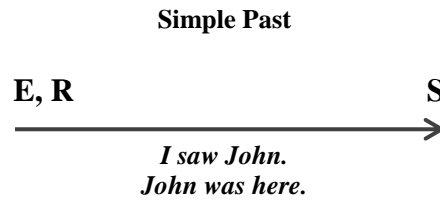


Figure 1: Schema for the simple past (Reichenbach 1947).

For the simple past, the event (E) takes place in the past, but at the time of speech (S) when the phrase is uttered, reference (R) is being made to that past tense event. The difference between the simple past and present perfect is thought to be that of reference (R). For the present perfect, (R) is understood to extend to (S), capturing the notion of present relevance that is often associated with use of the present perfect.

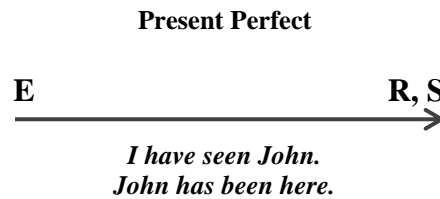


Figure 2: Schema for the present perfect (Reichenbach 1947).

However, present relevance is sometimes hard to establish. Present relevance is clearly seen when an event or situation extends up to the present time, as in the following example from the UMLC corpus. In (12), Donette describes not seeing an ex-boyfriend in a year. She does so using the present perfect (*haven't* + participle), describing a situation (not seeing him) that has persisted up to the present time. Additionally, WH has set the point of reference as the present by asking Donette if she is *still* seeing her ex-boyfriend.

- (12) **WH:** You still seein' him?  
**Donette:** I see him once in a while. I **haven't seen** him in a year now.

Though the notion of present relevance is indicated by context or temporal expressions in many instances of the present perfect, that is not always the case. In (13), the present

perfect is used to describe past experiences that do not necessarily extend into the present.<sup>9</sup>

- (13) **WH: What other jobs have you had?**  
**Joey: I've had** jobs in security, in transportation, in everything from, uh, delivering paint, to driving yellow cab.

For this reason, appeals have been made to other explanations for the difference between the simple past and present perfect as well as to different types of present perfects (Dowty 1979; McCawley 1993; Klein 1992; Elsness 1997; Kamp and Reyle 1993, to name a few). This dissertation will make use of Comrie's (1976) typology of present perfects in varieties of English, shown below in Table 5.

Type of Perfect	Description/Meaning	Example
<b>Perfect of Result</b>	Present state is referred to as being the result of some past situation	<i>John has arrived</i>
<b>Experiential Perfect</b>	Indicates that a given situation has held at least once during some time in the past leading up to the present	<i>Bill has been to America</i>
<b>Perfect of Persistent Situation</b>	Describes a situation that started in the past but continues into the present	<i>We've lived here for ten years</i>
<b>Perfect of Recent Past</b>	Present relevance of the past situation referred to is simply one of temporal closeness	<i>The Eagles have just won the Super Bowl!</i>

Table 5: Four types of perfect in English (Comrie 1976).

As Table 5 shows, for some types of perfect, the idea of present relevance is extended to include the recent past (Perfect of Recent Past) or only one occasion in the past (Experiential Perfect). This loosening on the restriction of present relevant may be a possible pathway by which present perfect constructions develop past tense meaning. Bybee and Dahl describe this development: “the part of [the present perfect’s] meaning that specifies that the past event is especially relevant to the current moment must be lost” (1989:74). Comrie additionally notes that the “[g]radual relaxation of the degree of

<sup>9</sup> Based on work on the present perfect, Labov (p.c.) notes that the present perfect is used when a past event or situation has changed the speaker such that they are today a different person. This may be a possible interpretation of the present relevance of experiential perfects.

recentness required for use of the Perfect seems to have been a key part of the development of the Perfect in many Romance languages to oust the Simple Past completely” (1976:61). He cites this development in Italian and Romanian where perfect constructions eventually supplanted the simple past. Likewise, Bybee and Dahl (1989) point to French, Southern German dialects, and Dutch where perfect constructions have developed into past or perfective markers. Interestingly, Elness (1997) reports that American English has even moved away from using the present perfect to describe situations located entirely in the past (like the experiential perfect), specifically when there is no clear definite time denoting expression in the discourse context. Thus, overlap between the present perfect and simple past is a cross-linguistic phenomenon that has led to the development of past tense constructions from present perfect ones in several other languages.

This dissertation further argues that the development of a past tense use of *ain't* from present perfect contexts would have been driven by dynamic verbs. In other words, the use of *ain't* in the past tense would have developed specifically through the use of dynamic verbs in present perfect contexts. Comrie describes the difference between states and events (dynamic situations) to be one of continuity:

“With a state, unless something happens to change that state, then the state will continue... With a dynamic situation, on the other hand, the situation will only continue if it is continually subject to a new input of energy... To remain in a state requires no effort, whereas to remain in a dynamic situation does require effort, whether from inside... or from outside.” (1976:49-50)

This dissertation draws on the fact that stative verbs in isolation have an inherent sense of continuation to argue that stative verbs in present perfect constructions will be interpreted as extending into the present, while dynamic verbs will be less so. This is of course in the



absence of temporal anchors. Note the difference in interpretation of (14) compared to (14) below.

- (14)      a. I've wanted to see that movie.                    [Stative]  
            b. I've watched that movie.                        [Dynamic]

The stative verb *want* in (14) gives the impression that the speaker still wants to see the movie, while the dynamic verb *watch* in (14) indicates only that they have seen the movie at some time in the past.<sup>10</sup> Comrie writes that many languages do not even allow stative verbs to have perfective meaning, and the ones that do limit its use to reference the inception and termination of the state (1976:50-51). Given this difference, we should expect to find *ain't* followed by dynamic verbs more often than by stative verbs in past tense contexts. We would also expect that this might be different from the nature of verbs following *didn't* since *didn't* is capable of expressing perfectivity on its own.

One final note before moving on: it was noted above that the interpretation of stative verbs as continuing into the present time reference was based on sentences with no temporal anchors. This is because simple past and present perfect sentences are distinguishable in English due to a peculiarity known as *Present Perfect Puzzle* (Klein 1992). The Present Perfect Puzzle describes the fact that the present perfect may not be used with adverbs that denote past time, even when it is used to describe past events or states (Klein 1992). In the following examples, both stative (15) and eventive verbs (16)

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<sup>10</sup> Note also the effect of adding the phrase *but I don't anymore* to the sentences. The stative sentence is ungrammatical, while the dynamic one is not.

- (1)      a. \*I've wanted to see that movie, but I don't want to anymore.                    [Stative]  
            b. I've watched that movie, but I don't watch it anymore.                        [Dynamic]

can have past or perfect meaning depending on the adverbs used. (17) shows that the present perfect cannot be used with an adverb denoting past time reference like *yesterday*.

- (15) a. I **wanted** to see that movie (**last week**, and I do this week too).  
b. I've **wanted** to see that movie (**since** it came out).
- (16) a. I **watched** that movie (**when** I was 17 years old).  
b. I've **watched** that movie (**before**—it was when I was 17 years old).
- (17) a. I **watched** that movie **yesterday**.  
b. \*I've **watched** that movie **yesterday**.

The fact that the English simple past and present perfect co-occur with different adverbs will be a recurring factor used to distinguish between the semantics of the two constructions in this dissertation.

In addition to the semantic overlap between the simple past and present perfect in varieties of English, there is an overlap in the morphological form of main verbs used in either context in AAE. Harris (2010) contends that *ain't* began being used in past tense contexts in AAE when the verbal forms associated with the past tense began to appear in contexts that had formerly been dominated by the present perfect. This was the result of a decline in the use of the present perfect with *have* in AAE and the loss of distinction between past and perfect contexts as well as the use of verbal forms associated with the past tense in perfect contexts. The decreased use of the present perfect with *have* in AAE has been remarked on in the literature time and time again (Loflin 1967; Labov et al. 1968; Dillard 1972; Rickford and Théberge-Rafal 1996). Additionally, several researchers have found preterit form verbs (e.g., *played*) to be used to convey perfect meaning instead of typical present perfect constructions (consisting of *HAVE* + preterit/participle) in AAE (Labov et al. 1968; Dechaine 1993; Dayton 1996; Green 2002;

Terry 2010). There is additionally participle-to-preterit leveling documented in varieties of AAE, meaning that when perfect constructions are used, they may be followed by a preterit (e.g., *We've already ate*) rather than a participle (e.g., *We've already eaten*) (Green 2002).<sup>11</sup>

Elsness (1997) believes that the preference for the simple past and associated forms is a trait of general American English. He proposes that increased use of the simple past and associated preterit forms may be due to two phenomena: First, the phonetic reduction (or omission) of *have*, which is generally contracted to 's or 've in speech. Then, the fact that regular *-ed* verbs have the same preterit and participle form. Thus, the same form used in the simple past sentence *They played outside* is used following *haven't* in the present perfect sentence *They've played outside*. If the contracted auxiliary 've is further reduced, the two sentences become identical in surface form.

If the use of *ain't* in simple past contexts had developed from the use of *ain't* in present perfect contexts, we might expect there to be overlap in form between the two contexts. Consequently, Chapter 5 of this dissertation evaluates this hypothesis of origin by investigating the use of present perfect *have* and the distribution of verbal forms in PhAAE to evaluate what grammatical conditions may have contributed to this shift.

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<sup>11</sup> The development of preterit *had* (Cukor-Avila and Bailey 1995, Rickford and Théberge-Rafal 1996) from the pluperfect or past perfect, which is followed by a participle form of the verb in MAE (e.g. *We had already gone to the store by the time you came home*) may have also played a role in leveling here. Preterit *had* is typically followed by preterit form verbs and conveys past tense meaning in narratives (e.g., *We had went to the store to buy some icecream*).

### 2.4.3 Extension from *ain't* in Present Tense Contexts

A third hypothesis comes from the use of *ain't* preceding predicate *got*. In this context, *ain't* functions as a variant of *don't* in contemporary varieties of AAE. Weldon (1994) reports that *ain't* is used 65% of the time in this environment among speakers in Columbus with *don't* used the other 35% (N=63). Early and conservative varieties of AAE use *ain't* categorically in this contexts (N=88) (Howe 2005). On the other hand, for White speakers of Southern English, *ain't* alternates with *haven't* preceding predicate *got* (N=29) (Feagin 1979). Among speakers of PhAAE, *ain't* is used 99% of the time in this context, with only one token of *haven't got* from a speaker born in 1910 (N=113). Thus it appears as if *ain't* shifted from varying with *haven't* to varying with *don't* preceding *got* in AAE.

Howe (2005) writes that “[t]he most reasonable explanation [for this shift] is that the use of *ain't* for [*haven't*] was favoured categorically before *got*, and that another alternation developed in [AAE], not between the auxiliaries *ain't* and *don't*, but rather between the main verbs *have* and *got*.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, *ain't* became an acceptable means of negating main verb *got* (as in *She got the job*) on analogy with its negating of the leveled participle *got* (e.g., *She ain't got the job yet*). As other main verbs were negated by *don't* (as in *She don't work from home*), *ain't* was interpreted as varying with *don't* when it negated *got* as a main verb.<sup>13</sup> Given that the use of *ain't* preceding *got* provides an

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<sup>12</sup> Howe (2005:183) points to variation in African Nova Scotia English like that in the example below for support.

(2) I never **had** a strapping. I never **got** a strapping.

<sup>13</sup> A similar reanalysis also happened with *supposed to*, where it was reinterpreted as a main verb from its use without a copula (Weldon 1994:383). The following example is from the UMLC corpus.

environment where *ain't* shifted from varying with *haven't* to varying with *don't*, it may have provided an avenue for *ain't* to be used in further contexts of *do* (like *didn't*) in AAE. However, in many reports of contemporary varieties of AAE, the use of *ain't* for *don't* is restricted to contexts of predicate *got*, though some recent work does find instances of *ain't* varying in present tense contexts (Howe 2005). In the UMLC corpus, there are two tokens of *ain't* that can definitively be judged as varying with *don't* and a few ambiguous cases. Because variation between *ain't* and *don't* is so infrequent in the corpus, this path of origin can be ruled out, especially given the high frequency with which *ain't* is used in contexts of *didn't*.

This section has outlined three hypotheses for the origin of the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts of *didn't*. This dissertation will ultimately argue for the second hypothesis presented, that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts resulted from the reanalysis of *ain't* in present perfect contexts. Chapter 3 will present evidence from the UMLC corpus supporting this theory of origin to the exclusion of the other two. Chapter 5 will go into detail about the grammatical conditions that would have facilitated this change.

## 2.5 Social and Stylistic Conditions on Use of *ain't* for *didn't*

This section provides background to the second research question treated in this dissertation: What are the social origins of this change and what social and stylistic factors continue to affect variation between *ain't* and *didn't*? Despite the widespread use of *ain't* in many varieties of English, it is undoubtedly a vernacular word, often

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(3) Man, you **don't supposed to** joke. You **don't supposed to** talk like that. (Wayne)

associated by English speakers with low social standing and lack of education (Donaher and Katz 2015; Hazen et al. 2015). Previous sociolinguistic studies of the use of *ain't* have revealed that its use is conditioned by socio-economic status/mobility (Rickford et al. 2015) and age (Labov et al. 1968; Ash and Myhill 1986) as well as by the type of sociolinguistic interview conducted (individual vs. group) (Labov et al. 1968).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, *ain't* has been shown to co-vary with other vernacular variables, like the use of negative concord (Fasold and Wolfram 1970, Weldon 1994). This section will treat each of these areas in turn.

There is some evidence addressing the use of *ain't* more generally in AAE and socioeconomic class or social mobility. Rickford et al. (2015), using a panel study, finds that use of *ain't* decreased as African American youth moved from higher to lower poverty neighborhoods through the Move to Opportunity program in five cities (Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York). Rates of use for those that did not move to new neighborhoods remained constant. Importantly, the neighborhoods the youth moved between did not change in ethnic/racial composition. Rickford et al. argues that other aspects of the new neighborhood's economic composition in addition to non-neighborhood factors may have produced this outcome, such as increased contact with high school and college educated adults and access to better quality schools.<sup>15</sup> This dissertation seeks to replicate these effects by investigating the relationship between

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<sup>14</sup> Linguistic conditioning is considered in other sections. See also Hazen 1996 for work arguing that the choice between *ain't* and its auxiliary counterparts may be influenced by the phonological structure (syllabification constraints) of the variants, with *ain't* being the favored variant against forms of *BE*.

<sup>15</sup> More integrated schools were also mentioned as a possible factor. Non-neighborhood factors included the head of household's motivation to enroll in the Move To Opportunity program. The decrease in grammatical factors of AAVE for the MTO study was not shown to be significant, though there were significant decreases in phonological features.

socio-economic class and the use of *ain't* in the past tense in the corpus study in Chapter 3. In this study, level of education will be used as a proxy for socio-economic class (Labov 2001; Gorman 2010).

Patterns of stylistic stratification often mirror patterns of social stratification (Labov 1972a). Accordingly, there is evidence linking the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts to more casual discourse settings such as group interviews (Labov et al. 1968) and linking its use to other vernacular variables, like negative concord (Fasold and Wolfram 1970, Weldon 1994). In Labov et al.'s study of AAE in Harlem, they find that *ain't* in past tense contexts is used more frequently among adolescent males in group interviews compared to their individual interviews with a field researcher. Both Fasold and Wolfram (1970) and Weldon (1994) have looked at the use of negative concord in conjunction with *ain't* as compared to *didn't*. Weldon finds that "the probability of *ain't* occurring in [negative past environments] is greater in multiple negation constructions than in non-multiple negation constructions" (1994:386-387). Though these results are not significant, they are suggestive of co-variation between *ain't* and negative concord that may indicate that *ain't* is used in similar stylistic contexts to negative concord. Since past studies of negative concord in AAE show that it is used in casual speech (Labov 1972b), Weldon's results provide confirmation that past tense *ain't* is as well. This dissertation seeks to replicate these results by examining the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts by interview type and by investigating its co-occurrence with negative concord in the corpus study in Chapter 3. Considering that *ain't* is a vernacular variant compared to *didn't*, this finding would be unsurprising, and such a result would be expected for all

uses of *ain't*.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, if negative concord is used near categorically in AAE (Labov 1972b), we might expect it to be used more with a variant specific to AAE, like *ain't*, rather than with *didn't* which is also found in MAE.

Another social factor that has been shown to influence the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is age. Ash and Myhill (1986) find an age effect in their data from Philadelphia. By focusing only on speakers with limited contact with the White community and dividing them into two age groups (under and over 20 years of age), they found that younger speakers with low White contact used *ain't* for *didn't* at much higher frequencies than older speakers with low White contact (younger = 63%, older = 37%). In fact, they report that their data actually shows that age is a stronger predictor of the use of *ain't* than contact with the White or Black community.<sup>17</sup> This age effect could mean one of two things. First, in generational situations of language change, each successive generation of speakers increments that change, or pushes it forward, while each individual's use of the variable remains stable over their lifetime (Wagner 2012). In sociolinguistics, generational change is studied using the *apparent time* construct (Labov 1978; Bailey et al. 1991). Since younger speakers are the ones pushing forward the change, they may “adopt quantitatively stronger manifestations of an innovation” (Wagner 2012:373), which may appear as higher frequencies of use in the case of a generational increase in use of a particular variable. On the other hand, situations of stable variation may show *age grading* whereby individual speakers change their

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<sup>16</sup> Though see Walker 2005 for a structural explanation of the relationship between *ain't* and negative concord.

<sup>17</sup> Because the use of *ain't* in the past tense is a feature unique to AAE, their original hypothesis was that use of *ain't* in the past tense was correlated with limited contact outside of the Black community, a hypothesis that held for the other features of AAE included in their study.



linguistic behavior over the course of their lifetime, but the community remains stable in their use of that variable (Wagner 2012). For example, it has been shown that younger speakers often peak in vernacular use, even for stable variables (Rickford and Price 2013).

Labov et al. (1968) also find age effects in their Harlem data. Three male adolescent groups (ages 16-18) used *ain't* for *didn't* at an average rate of 44% in individual interviews and 46% in group interviews. In contrast, pre-adolescents (9-13 years old) used *ain't* 32% in both styles, and adults used much lower rates.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the corpus study in Chapter 3 of this dissertation inquires whether there are differences in the use of *ain't* in the past tense by age using the apparent time paradigm. As the previous discussion indicates, a positive result for change in apparent time may not tell us definitively whether change has taken place. This issue will be discussed in-depth after close scrutiny of the age data in Chapter 3. As discussed in 2.3 as well, looking at speakers' region of origin will help in outlining the possible social origin of this change. In conclusion, the corpus study in Chapter 3 of this dissertation will not only examine whether change is taking place in this variable, but also clarify the social and stylistic profile of this change.

## 2.6 Syntactic Nature of *ain't*

With the rise in use of *ain't* in past tense contexts come new questions about the syntactic nature of *ain't*. The syntactic nature of *ain't* in AAE has been debated in the literature,

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<sup>18</sup> However, adults in the Harlem sample were “maximally distinct” from the younger groups in terms of social profile (Labov p.c.).

with some authors claiming it is strictly negation (DeBose 1994) and others claiming that it acts as an auxiliary (Weldon 1994; Harris 2010). This section will briefly review the major point of both hypotheses.

First, some basic points about *ain't*: *Ain't* is used for negation in AAE, but it is derived from negated auxiliaries specifically. Yet it differs from negated auxiliaries in quite a few ways. For one, *ain't* has no affirmative counterpart that surfaces in contexts absent of negation. For example, there is no form \**ai* that surfaces in response to the assertion in (18) below. In other words, to disagree with the statement that *We ain't like the same people back then* (18), a speaker of AAE would not say \**We ai like the same people back then* (18). They would instead use *DO* empathically as in (18).

- (18) a. We **ain't** like the same people (back then).  
      "We didn't like the same people back then."  
      b. We **did** like the same people (back then).  
      c. \* We **ai** like the same people (back then).  
      "We DID like the same people."

Since there is no affirmative form \**ai*, it is also unlikely that *ain't* can be separated into the negative morpheme *n't* and some type of auxiliary morpheme like other auxiliaries. For example, *isn't* can be separated into a morpheme expressing auxiliary *BE* (*is*) and *n't*. For this reason, Hazen considers *ain't* to be a lexicalized item, "no longer under the influence of morphological boundaries" (1996: 110). This dissertation agrees that, despite *ain't*'s origin as a bimorphemic auxiliary + *n't*-negation, it is not synchronically separable into two morphemes. However, this does not mean that *n't* in *ain't* is not cognitively distinguishable as a negative morpheme. This situation is not dissimilar to *won't* in English, which is a modal expressing future tense that also does not vary by

person or number. *Won't* is diachronically a contraction of *will* and *n't*, but synchronically, it cannot be separated into morphemes *\*wo* and *n't*.

Second, *ain't* does not inflect for tense or agreement, unlike other auxiliaries. Table 6 shows that *ain't* (in the final column) is more similar to modal *might* than to auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE* in this regard, though English is not a highly inflectional language in general and there is leveling in some environments in AAE (e.g., past tense contexts of *BE*).

	<i>be</i>		<i>have</i>		<i>might</i>		<i>ain't</i>	
	past	pres.	past	pres.	past	pres.	past	pres.
<b>I</b>	<i>was</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>You</b>	<i>was/were</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>(S)he/it</b>	<i>was</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>We</b>	<i>was/were</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>You (all)</b>	<i>was/were</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>They</b>	<i>was/were</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>ain't</i>	<i>ain't</i>

Table 6: Person/number and tense alternations for auxiliary *be* and *have*, plus modal *might* and *ain't*.

The fact that *ain't* does not inflect for tense has led some to label it as a tense/aspect-neutral negator. DeBose (1994), draws on the fact that AAE is the only variety of English where *ain't* is used in past tense contexts to assert precisely that. For DeBose, the fact that *ain't* in AAE has expanded to past tense contexts in addition to appearing in present tense contexts is evidence that it is a general negator. He points out that AAE *ain't* may be similar to invariant negative items in English Creole languages, like *eh* in Trinidadian Creole English, which is also derived from *ain't* and can be used in both present and past tense contexts. Claiming that *ain't* is tense/aspect-neutral allows DeBose to shift the responsibility for conveying tense/aspect meaning in AAE sentences to main verbs (see also 2.7 below). This not only allows him to draw further parallels between AAE, English Creole languages, and the African substrate languages that influenced them, it also

provides support for the idea that the AAE grammatical system is a separate system from that of MAE. DeBose believes that these two systems co-exist in the minds of speakers of AAE. This further allows him to claim the independence of the use of *ain't* in past contexts from a diachronic development from MAE *didn't* (as Fasold and Wolfram 1970 and Rickford 1980 propose).

Déchaine also classifies *ain't* as a “negative particle,” (1993:507). According to Déchaine, AAE does not contain either a negative or affirmative functional head. Instead, auxiliaries are directly inflected for negation and are base generated in T (in declaratives) or C (in *Yes-No* questions). She does not consider negated auxiliaries to originate in lower functional heads or move from T-to-C. Déchaine’s motivation for this claim is the fact that speakers of AAE do not always resort to T-to-C movement for questions.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, several people classify *ain't* as an auxiliary (Weldon 1994, Harris 2010, Smith 2015). Weldon (1994) uses some distributional corpus data to show that *ain't* surfaces in AAE as a variant of auxiliaries like *haven't/hasn't*, including questions and tag questions. She believes that *ain't* and the auxiliaries it varies with represent, “alternative surface realizations of the same underlying category” (1994: 388). She uses this approach to argue against DeBose’s bisystemic account of AAE, assuming instead that variation between *ain't* and negated auxiliaries is internal to the AAE grammar. To account for these surface realizations, she envisions three different *ain't*s that are specified for tense and polarity features, shown in Figure 3 below.

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<sup>19</sup> Déchaine’s claim is that T-to-C movement is only productive in *Yes-No* questions in AAE.

<i>ain't</i> <sub>1</sub> : <i>be</i>	[TNS: PRES] [POL: NEG]	<i>ain't</i> <sub>3</sub> : <i>do</i>	[TNS: PAST] [POL: NEG]
<i>ain't</i> <sub>2</sub> : <i>have</i>	[TNS: PRES] [POL: NEG]		

Figure 3: Lexical entries for *ain't* in copular, perfect, and *do*-support constructions (Weldon 1994:390).

Alternatively, Harris (2010) holds that *ain't* is a finite auxiliary negator that is underspecified for tense/aspect meaning. Harris appeals to morphological blocking to explain the less frequent alternation between *ain't* and past tense *BE* contexts and present and habitual contexts. Weldon achieves this through semantic specification of the underlying auxiliary categories that surface as *ain't*.

This dissertation revisits these claims, adding to Weldon's (1994) distributional study of *ain't* in AAE. These claims are worth revisiting in light of the existence of morphological variation in main verbs following *ain't* to be discussed in 2.7 below. Chapter 4 will provide a distributional study of *ain't* in the UMLC corpus that addresses these claims.

## 2.7 Morphological Variation of Main Verbs Following *ain't*

As discussed in Chapter 1, the morphological form of main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts will be referred to as base (e.g., *give*), preterit (e.g., *gave*), or participle (e.g., *given*) forms. The morphological shape of main verbs following *ain't* when it varies with *didn't* provides another area of variation. Fasold and Wolfram (1970) were among the first to note variation in the morphological form of main verbs and consider its relationship to tense/aspect meaning. Due to variations in form and the ambiguity in meaning between the simple past and the present perfect, they argued that both

morphological form and tense/aspect meaning can vary freely following *ain't* in AAE. Thus, the three sentences shown in (19), each containing a different form of the verb *do*, can all indicate either a simple past or present perfect meaning in AAE.

- (19)      a. He **ain't do** it.  
            b. He **ain't did** it.  
            c. He **ain't done** it.  
                “He didn't do it.” or “He hasn't done it.”

To explain this same variation and apparent lack of relation to tense/aspect meaning, Debose (1994) argues that AAE sentences derive their tense-aspect interpretation from the status of main verbs as either stative or dynamic, rather than from their morphological shape. DeBose's claim relies on what is known as the *Lexical Stativity Parameter* (DeBose and Faraclas 1993; Mufwene 1983), and were an attempt to link the semantics of AAE to African and Creole languages. According to DeBose's argument, whether the verb is stative or dynamic determines the tense/aspect meaning of the sentence and verbal morphology is inconsequential.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, if there are no contextual clues to the contrary, a stative verb will be interpreted as non-past and non-completive (i.e., present perfect), while a dynamic verbal predicate will be interpreted as past and completive (i.e., simple past). These interpretations are exemplified in (20) for the dynamic verb *take* and (20) for the stative verb *know*.

- (20)      a. She **ain't take/took/taken** the test.  
                “*She didn't take the test.*”  
            b. She **ain't know/knew/known** about that.  
                “*She hasn't known about that.*”

---

<sup>20</sup> Gilliank Sankoff (p.c.) reminds me that these ideas are closely linked to the Language Bioprogram Hypothesis (Bickerton 1984).

To test the hypothesis that dynamic verbs following *ain't* are always interpreted as simple past and stative verbs are always interpreted as present perfect, Weldon (1994) analyzes 162 simple past and 41 present perfect sentences containing *ain't* from speakers in Columbus. She finds that stative and dynamic verbs are used in both contexts. The following examples are from Weldon 1994. Example (21) illustrates that dynamic verbs can be used in present perfect contexts, and (21) shows that stative verbs are indeed used in simple past contexts.

- (21) a. I **ain't move** no place, up to now. Still here, around twenty-seven years now. (pg. 381, ex. 19)  
"I haven't moved anywhere up to now."  
b. I **ain't believe** you that day, man. (pg. 384, ex. 29)  
"I didn't believe you that day, man."

Weldon's study provides clear results that verbal stativity does not determine the tense/aspect meaning of sentences containing *ain't*, though it may be true that dynamic verbs lend themselves more readily to perfective interpretations when they appear in the past contexts (See 2.4.2). Green (2002) adds to the discussion of the relationship between verbs following *ain't* and tense/aspect meaning by reporting that variation is found mainly in past tense contexts. In extensive verbal paradigms, she provides the following entries for past tense and present perfect contexts negated by *ain't*.

- (22) [Simple Past]  
a. He ain't **eat**.  
b. He ain't **ate**.  
"He didn't eat."  
(23) [Present Perfect]  
He ain't **ate**.  
"He hasn't eaten."

Green’s paradigm demonstrates that variation is limited to simple past contexts in AAE.

This means that only simple past sentences should contain main verbs in base form, while both simple past and present perfect uses of *ain’t* may contain main verbs in preterit form.

The fact that simple past sentences can contain main verbs in preterit form is interesting considering that the use of *ain’t* in the past tense varies with *didn’t*, an instance of *DO*-support. In English, the dummy auxiliary *DO* has a rather strict relationship with the expression of tense on main verbs (Embick and Noyer 2001). In affirmative declarative simple past sentences (e.g., *They said*, etc.),  $T_{\text{PAST}}$  and V (*say*) are in a syntactically local relationship. As a result,  $T_{\text{PAST}}$  can combine with V through T-to-V lowering to produce the form *said* (informally *say* + *-ed*).

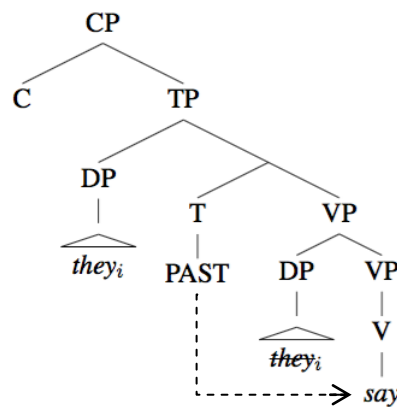


Figure 4: Tense-lowering in English (e.g., *They said*).

However, in the presence of sentential negation (NegP intervenes between T and V) or for question formation (T moves to C), T and V are in a non-local relationship, and T is blocked from lowering to V. Instead, *DO* is merged in T. Because of its local relationship with Tense, *DO* expresses tense morphology. Consequently, these two scenarios produce



the sentences *They didn't say* and *What didn't they say*, where tense morphology appears on *DO* rather than on the main verb; the main verb *say* remains in base form.

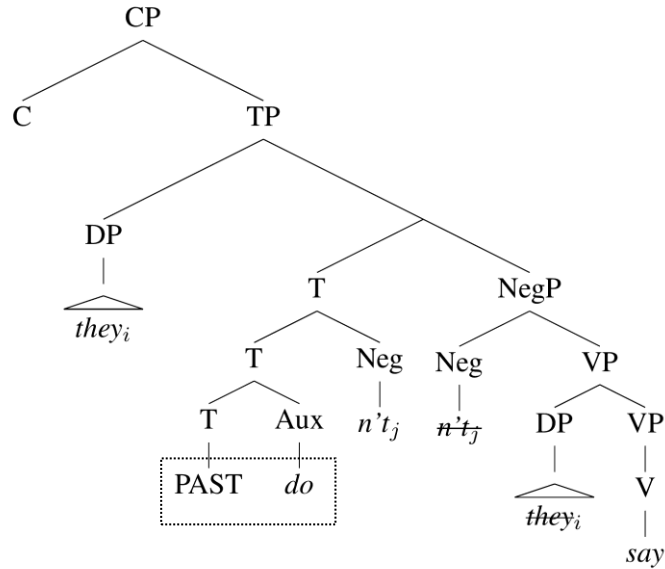


Figure 5: *DO*-support in the context of negation in English (e.g., *They didn't say*).

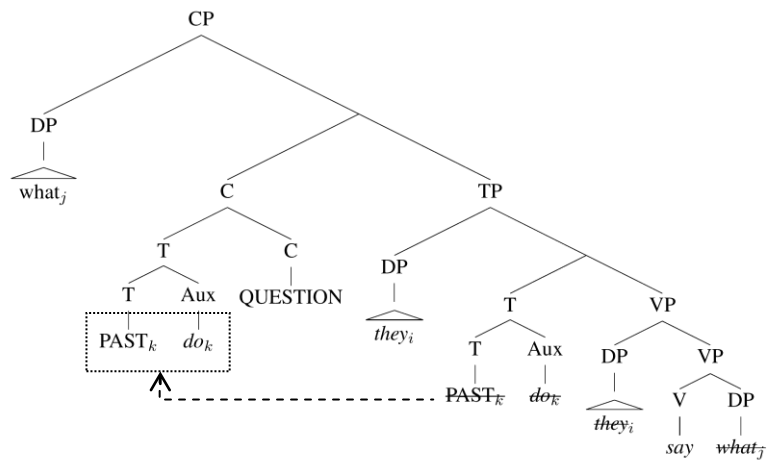


Figure 6: *DO*-support in the context of questions in English (e.g., *What did they say?*).

If *ain't* is a possible spell-out of T-Aux-Neg (like *didn't*), then there is a reasonable explanation for why verbs appear in base form following *ain't* in past tense contexts. In these cases, rather than *did* in Figure 5 above, *ain't* might be in T. However, in sentences with preterit main verbs like *They ain't said*, it appears as if tense morphology is still

being expressed on the main verb despite the fact that the relationship between T and V in the presence of negation should be non-local. This dissertation asks whether what looks like morphological marking for tense on verbs in such sentences is actually tense or another type of inflection.

## **2.8 Summary**

This background raises several questions that will be addressed in the rest of this dissertation. Chapter 3 will investigate claims of change over time for the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts using a corpus of naturalistic, vernacular speech from the African American community of Philadelphia. It will also examine the social, stylistic, and linguistic factors conditioning variation between *ain't* and *didn't* in this speech community through statistical analysis. Linguistic factors like preceding phonological segment and verbal stativity will be used to evaluate hypotheses on the origin of the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts. Likewise, examining social and stylistic factors will give further indications of the profile of this change and whether it has roots in the Great Migration to urban Northern communities. Meanwhile, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the structure of *ain't* sentences, looking at the syntax of *ain't* and variation in verbal morphology among its complements. Chapter 5 in particular uses evidence from the morphology of PhAAE to promote the theory that the past tense use of *ain't* derived from its use in present perfect sentences.

## Chapter 3: Corpus Study

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes Philadelphia speakers of AAE's use of *ain't* in the simple past context quantitatively, using a corpus of naturalistic speech from sociolinguistic recordings collected by Wendell A. Harris (WH) in the early 1980s. Data from simple past sentences was extracted and analyzed for frequency over apparent time.

Additionally, the linguistic, social, and stylistic factors conditioning use of *ain't* rather than *didn't* were tested in a generalized linear model. Results show that use of *ain't* in the simple past has increased at the expense of use of *didn't* during the twentieth century in this speech community. Social conditioning (speaker age and region of origin) reveals that younger speakers who grew up in Philadelphia have led this change. Further social and stylistic conditioning on *ain't* (specifically speaker level of education and co-occurrence with negative concord) is consistent with its status as a vernacular variant. Linguistic conditioning does not support the hypothesis that use of *ain't* in the past tense originated from a phonetic reduction of *didn't*. On the other hand, it does show a link between the use of *ain't* in perfective contexts and dynamic verbs.

Chapter 3 unfolds as follows: Section 3.2 provides an overview of the data and methods used in this study as well as the coding conventions. Section 3.3 presents results from the study of change over time (3.3.1) and the modeling of linguistic, social, and stylistic conditioning factors on the use of *ain't* (3.3.2). The section then goes on to look at these conditioning factors in more detail: linguistic (3.3.3), social (3.3.4), and stylistic

(3.3.5). Sub-section 3.3.6 introduces a discussion of variation in verbal morphology found for main verbs following *ain't*, to be continued in Chapter 5. Finally, Section 3.4 summarizes the major findings of the corpus analysis presented and concludes the chapter.

## **3.2 Data and Coding**

### **3.2.1 The UMLC Corpus**

This dissertation makes use of a corpus of casual conversations collected as part of the Influence of Urban Minorities on Linguistic Change Project (UMLC) from 1981–1984.<sup>21</sup> The UMLC Project resulted in four published articles on African American speech in Philadelphia: Labov and Harris 1986; Myhill and Harris 1986; Ash and Myhill 1986; Graff, Labov, and Harris 1986.<sup>22</sup>

The initial aim of the project was to examine inter-ethnic communication within the city of Philadelphia with a focus on language variation in communities of color. For that reason, fieldwork was conducted in areas of the city characterized by ethnic/racial residential segregation like Logan, a Black and Hispanic neighborhood in North Philadelphia, as well as in those areas characterized by integration, like Germantown. Speakers from areas of West Philadelphia and other neighborhoods around the city are

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<sup>21</sup> NSF-funded research project 8023306 (1981–1984), Principal Investigator: William Labov.

<sup>22</sup> Of the 42 speakers under study in this dissertation, 13 are identifiable as having been included in one of the 1986 analyses. Ash and Myhill 1986 in particular looks at speakers' rates of use of *ain't* in the past tense by their degree of inter-ethnic contact; However, the results reported in the article do not look at individual rates or other aspects of the linguistic and social context with respect to the variable, both of which are examined in this dissertation.

also included. The majority of speakers in the corpus are Black, and this dissertation focuses on those speakers.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 7: Map of Philadelphia showing the two test areas for the UMLC project field work.

The data in the UMLC corpus was collected by Wendell A. Harris (henceforth WH), a member of the Black community of North Philadelphia, then in his early 30s. WH utilized his social network to carry out much of the fieldwork, but also sought out to record speakers from different areas of the city who were previously unknown to him. Because of the fieldwork's original aim, the recordings represent a diverse cross section of African American experiences in Philadelphia with regard to inter-ethnic contact and social mobility, though most speakers are from working class backgrounds. At the same time, many of the speakers in the corpus primarily or exclusively interacted with other Black speakers on a daily basis and can thus be considered to speak a vernacular variety of African American English (Baugh 1983; Ash and Myhill 1986; Labov 2014). In

<sup>23</sup> The UMLC corpus includes a number of Puerto Rican and White speakers who have varying degrees of contact with other ethnic communities.

previous work, Labov refers to the dense social network such speakers made up as the “Core” speakers in the community (Labov and Harris 1986; Labov 2014; Labov and Fisher 2015). Furthermore, given the field researcher’s high degree of embedding within the community and his intimate familiarity with many of the speakers, the recordings themselves are representative of vernacular speech, characterized as “the style in which minimal attention is given to the monitoring of speech” (Labov 1972a). The vernacular nature of these recordings is reflected in the fact that they are best characterized as conversations, not as sociolinguistic interviews.

In this dissertation, I analyze data from 42 speakers in 47 recorded conversations. These speakers represent a subset of the corpus, chosen because they identified as Black and had grown up in either Philadelphia or the Southern United States.<sup>24</sup> The majority of conversations are approximately 45 minutes long—the approximate length of one side of the compact audio cassettes on which they were originally recorded, though some cover both sides of the cassette tape. Most recordings are of one-on-one conversations with the researcher, though some include multiple participants. A few speakers appear on more than one recording, either as a main or peripheral participant.<sup>25</sup> All speakers have been given pseudonyms, which are the speaker names that appear in this dissertation.

Years of birth for the 42 speakers range between 1901 and 1969, representing 68 years worth of data in apparent time. The sample is roughly split between speakers under

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<sup>24</sup> Though this sample represents only about a third of all recordings (not all recordings have been digitized), it does represent the majority of Black speakers in the UMLC corpus who grew up in either Philadelphia or the South. Other speakers were either African Americans who grew up in other areas of the country, Puerto Rican, or White.

<sup>25</sup> Some participants can be described as “peripheral” participants, meaning that they were not the researcher’s main conversational partner but were present for an extended period of the recording (either engaged in a parallel activity or listening in on the conversation). Such participants do make interjecting remarks from time to time.

30 years old (N=20 speakers) and those 30 and older (N=22 speakers), with the oldest speaker being 81 years old.

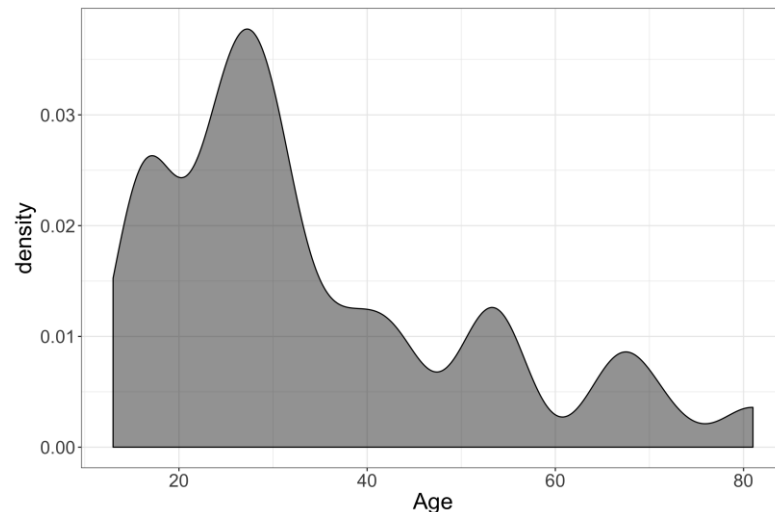


Figure 8: Density of corpus speakers by Age at the time of interview (1981-1983).

Social information on speakers was gathered from recordings as well as interview reports from the original fieldwork. Previous studies of the corpus as well as recorded fieldwork “journals” were also helpful in understanding the social networks and social characteristics of several speakers.

The recordings used in this dissertation were transcribed either by myself or by undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania who were familiar with AAE.<sup>26</sup> Undergraduate transcription was funded thanks to a Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant for Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences from the National Science Foundation. A portion of the recordings used in this dissertation had been previously transcribed as part of the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus.

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<sup>26</sup> Transcribers with “knowledge of African American language patterns” were recruited from Linguistics courses at UPenn and the University’s student job board. Students who qualified for an interview were given a semantic differential exercise for AAE constructions (*What’s the difference between ‘The bus be late’ and ‘The bus is late’*) and were asked to transcribe one minute of speech from a corpus speaker who used several features of AAE. Students who were able to complete both tasks with accuracy were hired as transcribers.

### 3.2.2 Coding Conventions

#### 3.2.2.1 Semantic Coding

This dissertation focuses on the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts in PhAAE. However, *ain't* is used in several additional grammatical contexts. As discussed in Chapter 1, *ain't* is also used for negation in copular sentences, in the present progressive, in the periphrastic future (*gon(na)*), in the present perfect, and preceding the main verb *got* in PhAAE. For that reason, particular attention was paid to the semantic content of each sentence containing *ain't* in order to distinguish past tense tokens of *ain't* from tokens of *ain't* in other semantic categories. Table 7 shows each category with example sentences. The last column shows the morphological form of verbs following that particular use of *ain't*. In the case of copular sentences, the following item is non-verbal.

Semantic Category	Token Count	Auxiliary Variants	Example Sentence(s)	Main Verb Morphology
<b>Copula</b>	380	<i>ain't, isn't, aren't, 's not, 're not</i>	They <i>ain't</i> here. / It <i>ain't</i> your birthday. / <i>Ain't</i> that nice?	Non-verbal predicates
<b>Present Progressive</b>	172	<i>ain't, isn't, aren't, 's not, 're not</i>	I <i>ain't</i> baking a cake for tomorrow.	V- <i>ing</i>
<b>Periphrastic Future</b>	143	<i>ain't, isn't, aren't, 's not, 're not</i>	She <i>ain't</i> gon make it to the party by 6.	<i>gon(na)</i>
<b>Present Perfect</b>	98	<i>ain't, hasn't, haven't</i>	We <i>ain't</i> had cake since Monday. / I <i>ain't</i> given you a gift yet.	V- <i>ed</i> or V- <i>en</i>
<b>Main Verb <i>got</i></b>	113	<i>ain't, don't</i>	You <i>ain't</i> got time to bake a cake?	<i>got</i>
<b>Simple Past</b>	888	<i>ain't, didn't</i>	I <i>ain't</i> play/played outside yesterday. / He <i>ain't</i> eat/ate the cake.	V- $\emptyset$ or V- <i>ed</i>

Table 7: Semantic coding of sentences containing tokens of *ain't*.

For most semantic categories, the complement following *ain't* distinguished it from other grammatical uses. For example, when *ain't* is used in present progressive contexts, the



following verb is always in *-ing* form (e.g., I *ain't* baking a cake for tomorrow). However, this method was not always useful in distinguishing present perfect instances of *ain't* from simple past instances. For one, Table 7 shows that there is overlap in the verbal forms following *ain't* in present perfect and past environments; in both contexts, *ain't* may be followed by *V-ed*, or a preterit form of the verb. Recall from Chapter 2 that the main difference between the simple past and present perfect is one of reference time. Both may describe events that took place in the past or states that held in the past, but the point of reference for the present perfect may extend into the present or just before it, in the recent past. Bear in mind that there is also sometimes semantic overlap between certain types of present perfect (most notably the experiential perfect) and the simple past use of *ain't*, especially in absence of adjacent temporal cues.

Given both the semantic overlap and overlap in the distribution of preterit form verbs following *ain't* in the simple past and present perfect, careful attention was paid to sentences that were semantically ambiguous between the two meanings. For example, the following sentence in (1) provides an example of an ambiguous use of *ain't*. In it, Donette, a 16-year-old woman, is discussing an incident with the police.

- (1) **Donette:** Yeah they had—they caught me and everything. So they um—  
**WH:** Were they roughing you up too?  
**Donette:** Yeah they were. The – especially whatever his name was, Officer Johnson. So he was getting all smart with me. I was like, “What you holding me for? I ain't got nothing. **I ain't do nothing.**”

Donette's utterance *I ain't do nothing* gives no clear designation of the point of reference (past or present).<sup>27</sup> This ambiguity is due, not only to the lack of tense/aspect information

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<sup>27</sup> The sentence could mean either *up to this point I haven't done anything* (present perfect) or *at no point in the past did I do anything* (simple past). It might be the case that the morphological form of the verb

provided by *ain't*, but to the lack of information given in the discourse context as well. Tokens from sentences like (1) where the tense/aspect meaning could not be disambiguated due to lack of contextual clues were considered “ambiguous.” There were very few ambiguous tokens (N= 32), which were set aside for separate analysis.

In order to determine which sentences have simple past meaning, the discourse context of the sentence was heavily relied upon. Often, simple past instances of *ain't* were located within narratives or other sequences of events and easily discernible. Such is the case in (2) where Greg, a 27-year-old man, discusses gang violence in Philadelphia when he was growing up.

(2) **WH:** That shit was rough back then, huh?

**Greg:** Yeah, it was crazy. It was madness, that's what it was.

**WH:** You didn't go through that when you lived on Apple Street.

**Greg:** No, not really [...] They used to mix it up, but um, **I ain't never had no problems down there.** I never had no problems when I always by myself, man.

In (2), WH is specifically asking Greg about the situation at the time that he lived on Apple Street, where he no longer lives. This sets the context for Greg's response that he *ain't never had no problems down there* as simple past—describing a past situation that is no longer relevant to the present.

The sentences in (1) and (2) contrast with a contextually present perfect use of *ain't* like in (3) where Gwen is conveying that she has never heard her dog, Peanut, bark in all of the time that she has had him, up to the current moment. The use of the adverb *since* in Gwen's first utterance clearly demonstrates the present perfect meaning.

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following *ain't* conveys the tense-aspect meaning. However, Chapter 5 will show that there is not always a clearcut correspondence between tense-aspect meaning and verbal form in past tense sentences containing *ain't*.

- (3) **WH:** That's why I wanted to give you one of them other dogs too, cause they grow up learning to bark more.  
**Gwen:** Peanut ain't bark since I had him, Pop.<sup>28</sup> That muhfucker will not bark for shit.  
**WH:** He used to bark all the time in the yard.  
**Gwen:** {Laughs} I ain't never heard Peanut bark.

Early on in the coding process, a coding confirmation test was performed on a sample of 100 semantically past, present perfect, and ambiguous sentences containing *ain't* with a fellow linguist native speaker of AAE. Coding agreement reached 90% for this subset of the data,<sup>29</sup> and I coded the remainder of the data. Additionally, only tokens of either *ain't* or *didn't* followed by a verb were included in analysis. Sentences of the type *No, she ain't* were excluded since they did not always provide any context from which to judge the tense/aspect meaning of the sentence. Equivalent sentences containing *didn't* (e.g., *No, she didn't*) were also excluded for balance. Semantic coding for sentences containing *didn't* was not considered as simple past *did* is distinguishable from present perfect *have*.

### 3.2.2.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is whether a speaker uses *ain't* or *didn't* for negation in a given simple past sentence. Thus, only sentences that were coded as semantically simple past according to the above criteria were included in the envelope of variation.

Past tense tokens were divided into tokens of *didn't*, *ain't*, and tokens that were either ambiguous or intermediate between the two (*in't*). As discussed in Chapter 1,

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<sup>28</sup> The field researcher, Wendell Harris, was called "Popcorn" by those who knew him intimately. Here, Gwen uses "Pop" a truncated form of that nickname.

<sup>29</sup> Of the two, I was the more conservative coder. In other words, I was more likely to code a sentence as ambiguous given the context.

tokens of *did not* were not included as these are used for emphasis in AAE. Any token that possessed an initial consonant [d] was coded as *didn't*. For *ain't*, only tokens that contained an initial diphthongal vowel [ɛɪ] [eɪ] were coded as *ain't*. There are a few cases where speakers uttered something that sounds more like [ɪnt] (N=51 or 6% of past tense tokens). In fast speech, such tokens are indistinguishable as either a truncated form of *didn't* or *ain't*. For this reason, these tokens were set aside for separate analysis.

In addition to the dependent variable of speakers' choice between using *ain't* or *didn't* in past tense contexts, this dissertation also briefly examines speakers' choice between *ain't* and its auxiliary variants in other grammatical contexts. This variation is laid out in Table 7 as well. After sentences were grouped by semantic category, they were then coded for the variant (*ain't* or *isn't/aren't*, *hasn't/haven't*) they contained. Token counts are also shown in Table 7. The rate of use of *ain't* in each environment was calculated as  $\% \text{ ain't} = \text{ain't} / (\text{ain't} + \text{other variants})$  and compared to the rate of use in past tense contexts, calculated as  $\% \text{ ain't} = \text{ain't} / (\text{ain't} + \text{didn't})$ . The only possible variant of *ain't* in first person singular contexts is *am not*. Thus speakers have a choice between saying *I ain't going* or *I'm not going*. They cannot say *\*I amn't going* in PhAAE. Thus contracted auxiliaries + *not* were also included in this estimate. However, future work will consider whether or not contracted auxiliaries + *not* should be counted as syntactic variants of *ain't*.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> There is reason to believe that *ain't* is not a structural variant of the auxiliary contracted variants because *n't* and *not* are generally agreed to be two different types of syntactic object (Zwicky and Pullum 1983).

### 3.2.2.3 Independent Variables

Several linguistic, social, and stylistic factors that may condition a speaker’s choice between *ain’t* or *didn’t* (the dependent variable) in past tense contexts were examined as independent variables. The factors conditioning variation on the use of *ain’t* in the other semantic categories was not investigated. Each sentence coded as simple past that contained a token of the dependent variable (either *didn’t* or *ain’t*) was extracted from recordings. The sentence was then coded for a number of linguistic factors as well as social factors related to the speaker and stylistic factors related to the speech event. These are factors believed to influence or condition a speaker’s choice of variant in simple past sentences. The motivation for investigating each factor’s influence is provided in the last column of Table 8 below. From the 42 speakers included in this study, 888 observations of either *ain’t* or *didn’t* were extracted and coded as described below.

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Motivation</b>
<b>Linguistic</b>	Preceding Phonological Segment	Fasold & Wolfram 1970; Weldon 1994
	Verbal Stativity	DeBose 1994; Weldon 1994
	Presence/Absence of Temporal Expressions	Sankoff and Thibault 1977; Klein 1992
<b>Social</b>	Speaker	
	Speaker Age/Year of Birth	Labov 1978; Bailey et al. 1991
	Speaker Region of Origin	Labov & Harris 1986; Bailey & Maynor 1987
	Speaker Gender	Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2009
	Speaker Years of Education	Gorman 2010; Labov, Rosenfelder, and Fruehwald 2013; Prichard 2016
	Speaker Contact w/ the White community	Ash & Myhill 1986; Fisher & Labov 2015
<b>Stylistic</b>	Interview Type	Labov et al. 1968, Wagner 2008
	Speaker Relationship to the Field Researcher	Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994; Rickford and Price 2013
	Presence/Absence of Negative Concord	Fasold & Wolfram 1970, Weldon 1994, Labov 1972b

Table 8: Linguistic, social, and stylistic factors examined.

### **Preceding Phonological Segment**

As for linguistic factors, the phonological segment preceding *ain't* or *didn't* was coded as either a vowel or consonant. Due to low token counts, consonants were grouped into one category, which may obscure differences in behavior between types of consonant according to sonority (Rickford 1980).

### **Verbal Stativity**

The lexical stativity of each verb following *ain't* or *didn't* was coded for its use in a given sentence. For example, the main verbs in *have money*, *deal with stress*, or *give a damn* would be coded as stative, where as the main verbs in *have sex*, *deal cards*, or *give a gift* would be coded as dynamic. Two tests were used to determine the lexical stativity of main verbs following *ain't/didn't* in usage: (1) Whether the verb refers to the actual present rather than a habitual or iterative activity when in the simple present tense (Levin 2009) and whether the verb can be used within the frame *What happened was...*, which only allows dynamic verbs (Jackendoff 1983). Though several other tests of lexical stativity exist (Lakoff 1966; Dowty 1979), these two were chosen for their robust ability to distinguish between stative *vs.* dynamic verbs (Levin 2009).

### **Temporal Expressions**

Finally, sentences containing either *ain't* or *didn't* were coded for whether or not they also contained a temporal expression. This category was divided into sentences that contained a temporal expression and those that did not. This simple coding was done with the intention that, should a difference be found between *ain't* and *didn't* with regard to

co-variation with temporal expressions, a more detailed examination of temporal expressions would follow. This, however, did not prove to be the case.

### **Year of Birth**

The approximate year of birth for each speaker was calculated by subtracting their age at the time of interview from the year at the time of interview (1981-1983). Year of birth was analyzed as a continuous factor in all models. For some representations of visual data, specifically to look at differences between older and younger groups of speakers, speakers' age at the time of interview was divided into two categories: younger than 30 years old, and 30 years old and older.

### **Gender**

The gender of each speaker was identified either by themselves or by the field researcher with the only gender identifications being Male or Female. There are about twice as many male as female speakers in the data (29 Male, 13 Female).

### **Level of Education**

For level of education completed, speakers were divided into three groups: those who did not finish high school (Less than HS = 16 speakers), those who finished high school (High School = 20 speakers), and those who went on to complete at least some higher education (Some Higher Ed = 6 speakers).<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that five of the sixteen speakers who had not completed high school were adolescents still in the process of

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<sup>31</sup> One speaker who completed his GED was placed in the High School category.

completing high school. This means that there is some overlap in the data between adolescents, who are high frequency users of *ain't*, and the category for Less than HS. The implications of grouping potentially different speaker profiles for this category will be discussed in the results.

In this dissertation, education is used as a proxy for social class following Labov 2001 and Gorman 2010.<sup>32</sup> Using level of education as a factor conditioning the use of *ain't* does not mean that speakers with less education speak differently than those with more education simply because they have completed fewer years of schooling. Using *ain't* is not a product of a lack of education. Rather, educational completion and the opportunity and academic support needed to go on to higher education are associated with higher social class and social mobility, two things that either put Black Americans in greater contact with the White community or at least the language standards and norms of mainstream White society.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, mastering the White-centric language norms of the mainstream community should be viewed as prerequisite to educational completion and advancement. Therefore, speakers who have completed high school, and especially those who have moved on to higher education, would be expected to have mastered these language standards to some degree. For this reason, speakers who have completed more levels of education are expected to use the patterns associated with vernacular speech, like *ain't*, less than those who have not done so.

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<sup>32</sup> Though the speaker's occupational trajectory is sometimes noted and some data on speaker Socio-economic Status [SES] is obtainable from some recordings, this information was not available for all speakers. Accordingly, a measure of SES was not included as a factor in this study.

<sup>33</sup> Within this context, *ain't* is most certainly an unwelcome visitor, my own kindergarten teacher warning us at the beginning of the year that "*ain't* isn't a word." Little did she know she was setting me up to write an entire dissertation on it!



## **Region of Origin**

Coding for region of origin was based on research demonstrating a correspondence between the Critical Period Hypothesis and the age of dialect acquisition (Payne 1980; Johnson 2007). Speakers were classified as either originating from Philadelphia or the Southern United States according to the region they had lived in the longest roughly between the ages of 5 and 18 (“the schooling years”).<sup>34</sup> Southern speakers came from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, or Virginia, in keeping with demographics for Southern migration to Philadelphia during the 1900s (Kopf 2016). The majority of speakers (N= 34) grew up in Philadelphia from at least 5 years old and up, and 8 speakers grew up in the South.

## **Inter-ethnic Contact**

The effect of contact with the White community was examined using the contact scores assigned to speakers in Ash and Myhill’s (1986) original study of the UMLC corpus. Contact scores were assigned according to answers to a questionnaire administered by WH during the original UMLC fieldwork. They include questions on the racial composition of speakers’ neighborhoods, childhood friend groups, and schools. Speakers received scores ranging from zero (no friends of other ethnicities/no White friends, for example) to two or three (all friends of other ethnicities/all White friends). Speakers are

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<sup>34</sup> Many speakers in their adult years spent time outside of their designated community (both within and outside of the United States) for a variety of reasons (e.g., military service and deployment, prison time served, temporary living situation, work, etc.). Other speakers, in keeping with the situation of the Great Migration, had family in both Philadelphia and the South and made frequent trips back and forth during their lifetime, sometimes staying in one place a couple of years before returning to the other. Although this dialect contact may have affected their speech, a detailed residential history was not available for all of the speakers.

broken into three groups for level of contact: high contact with the White community, low contact with the White community, and no contact score. Contact scores were available from the original UMLC study for nine of the 42 speakers examined in this dissertation and three additional speakers were given contact scores according to the original criteria based on information in their recordings. Because information on contact was not available for all speakers, contact is not looked at in the model.

### **Individual or Group Conversation**

Recordings were also coded for stylistic factors. Each recording was coded as either an individual or group conversation. The majority of recordings (35/47) were conversations between the field researcher and one participant. Group conversations included between two and four people in addition to WH. For the purposes of this dissertation, a participant was considered someone who verbally interacted in the interview. Peripheral participants (those who were present but did not talk) were not counted as participants, nor were passersby to the conversation. Future work may include a category for peripheral participants who may also serve as an audience for speakers (Bell 1984).<sup>35</sup>

### **Relationship to the Field Researcher**

The relationship to WH was coded as one of four categories: Family (9 Speakers), Friend (3 Speakers), Acquaintance (19 Speakers), or Stranger (10 Speakers). The coding process was aided by WH's commentary in recordings, information in the recordings themselves,

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<sup>35</sup> Additionally, some interviews included multiple people for only part of the interaction. For this reason, in the future, it might be better to code individual utterances by number of people present at the moment of utterance.

the social network studies provided in Labov and Harris 1986, and personal communications with Labov and Harris.

### **Negative Concord**

Finally, all past tense sentences were coded for whether or not they contained negative concord. Sentences were coded as either containing negative concord or not. All corpus utterances that contained either *ain't* or *didn't* used in conjunction with at least one other negative item were coded as containing negative concord.<sup>36</sup> Negative items included negative pronouns (*nothing, no, nobody/no one, neither, none*) or negative adverbs (*never, nowhere*). So-called “squatitives” (Horn 2001), sentences like *I knew he didn't have shit* or *He ain't did a daggone thing wrong* were also coded as instances of negative concord (N=7).

### **3.2.3 Overview of Quantitative Methods**

To study change over time, the frequency of use of *ain't* and *didn't* was calculated for each speaker who had more than 10 past tense tokens. As a result, change over time was examined using frequency data from 37 of the 42 speakers. On average, these 37 speakers produced between 17-30 past tense tokens over the course of one or more recordings, with some producing as many as 61 tokens. The frequencies of individual speakers were then plotted according to their year of birth. This method, referred to as *Apparent Time*, is used to infer linguistic change based on the fact that the grammars of most speakers are

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<sup>36</sup> No distinction was made between whether a sentence had more than one instance of negative concord, though this would be of interest to future studies of this variable.

reasonably stable after adolescence (Labov 1978; Bailey et al. 1991; Sankoff and Blondeau 2007). The speaker averages were then used to fit a linear model predicting *ain't* frequency from Year of Birth and Year of Birth squared.

This same method was also used to examine change over time in the use of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts. As Table 7 from 3.2.7 above shows, token counts in each of the other five contexts (between N=98 and N=380) were much lower than that found for past tense contexts (N=888). For that reason, these five categories were combined to look at change over time, and the frequency of each speaker was calculated as the percentage of *ain't* out of uses of *ain't* and all other variants combined.<sup>37</sup> In other words,  $\% \textit{ain't} = \textit{ain't} / (\textit{ain't} + \textit{isn't} / \textit{aren't} / \textit{'s not} / \textit{'re not} / \textit{'m not} / \textit{hasn't} / \textit{haven't} / \textit{don't})$ . Rates of use were calculated for 26 of the 42 speakers in the overall sample who used more than 10 tokens of *ain't* across these contexts. To confirm any effects by age and/or apparent time that might be found in the combined categories, the rates use of *ain't* in individual grammatical contexts was examined by age (younger than 30, and 30 and older). Data on the use of *ain't* in these grammatical contexts was not submitted to any further statistical analyses (results are reported in Figures 11 and 12).

To study the linguistic, social, and stylistic conditioning on the use of *ain't* or *didn't* in the simple past, the coded data was fit using a generalized linear model. The dependent variable was set as the choice between *ain't* or *didn't* and linguistic, social, and stylistic factors were included as independent variables (fixed effects). Because the variation and its conditioning operates at the level of the utterance (rather than at the level

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<sup>37</sup> As the comparison is between the rate of use of *ain't* in contexts of *didn't* compared to the rate of use of *ain't* in all other contexts, *didn't* was not included as a variant in this set.

of the speaker), the model is fit over the 888 past tense observations from all 42 speakers. Reference levels were set to those factor levels most likely to disfavor the use of *ain't* with the intention of illustrating the conditions that favor the use of *ain't* in the model's results. All models were then fit by maximum likelihood estimation using the `lmer` function in R. The data for this study was visualized and analyzed in R.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the overall small counts for past tense tokens, common with a syntactic variable, the category of Speaker is not included as a factor in statistical analysis. Research shows that mixed effects models with random factors sometimes do not converge when data is imbalanced (Eager and Roy 2017). Given the relatively low token count for this variable, there are some imbalances in the data (most notably a dearth of older speakers and older women with higher education). Additionally, small groupings of speakers into social categories leaves open the possibility that a group effect may be driven by a few individual's behavior. In light of these concerns, careful attention was paid to the distribution and visual inspection of the data over social categories, in conjunction with the results of statistical testing (Brezina and Meyerhoff 2014). This was done to ensure that statistical results reflected general patterns of use in this sample of the corpus, itself a sample of the PhAAE speech community. The details of each analysis and results are further discussed in the next section.

### 3.3 Results

Results from an apparent time investigation of the corpus data show that use of *ain't* in the simple past has increased at the expense of use of *didn't* during the twentieth century

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<sup>38</sup> Data was visualized using `ggplot2` and analyzed using `lme4`.

in this speech community. Results from a generalized linear model testing the effect of social, linguistic, and stylistic factors on the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts reveal several conditioning factors on *ain't*~*didn't* variation. The social conditioning on this variable reveals that younger speakers who grew up in Philadelphia are leading this change. This supports the hypothesis that use of *ain't* in past tense contexts increased during the period of the Great Migration for speakers of AAE in the urban north. Linguistic conditioning does not support the hypothesis that use of *ain't* in the past tense originated from a phonetic reduction of *didn't*. On the other hand, it does show a link between the use of *ain't* in perfective contexts and dynamic verbs. Finally, *ain't* is shown to co-vary with negative concord and be used more by speakers with less education, solidifying its status as a vernacular variant associated with casual speech.

### 3.3.1 Change over Time

The study of linguistic change in apparent time relies on the social category of Age. As discussed above, the frequency of use of *ain't* was calculated as  $\% = \text{ain't} / (\text{ain't} + \text{didn't})$  for each speaker. The 5 speakers with fewer than 10 past tense tokens were set aside for the age-related analysis, which was thus based on data from 37 of the 42 speakers. The overall frequency of use in the speech community is 22% (on 888 observations of past tense tokens, including all 42 speakers). The frequencies of individual speakers were then plotted according to their Year of Birth using the apparent time paradigm. Figure 9 shows the frequency of use of *ain't* in the past tense (y-axis) plotted by Year of Birth (x-axis) for the 37 speakers. Each point in the figure represents the frequency of use of *ain't* in the

past tense for one speaker.<sup>39</sup> The size of each point represents the token counts on which that particular speaker's frequency of use was calculated.

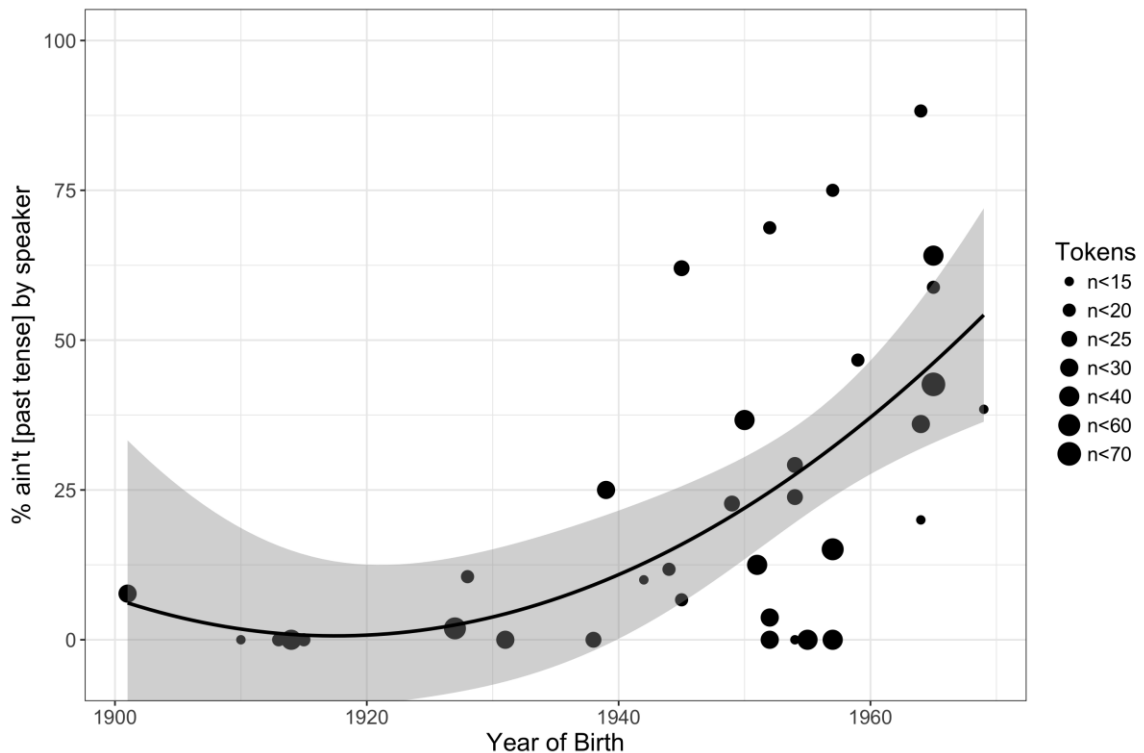


Figure 9: Increase of *ain't* in simple past contexts in apparent time for 37 speakers ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Figure 9 shows an increase in apparent time for the use of *ain't* in the past tense. A linear regression of the frequency of past tense *ain't* by age (using a quadratic term) is significant at  $p < 0.001$ . This result confirms an age effect for the use of *ain't* in this context whereby younger speakers use *ain't* at higher frequencies.

These results are consistent with the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* in the simple past tense is an innovation that increased over the course of the twentieth century in varieties of AAE. In 3.3.4.2 the possibility that this change occurred among African Americans residing in the urban North will be tested by looking at differences in use of

<sup>39</sup> Speakers with the same frequency of use are not distinguishable in Figure 9 if they also have the same birthyear; their points are overlaid. This fact does not affect the linear regression.

the variable between speakers born and raised in Philadelphia and those born and raised in the South who moved to Philadelphia during the Great Migration. Whether these results are also consistent with the age-graded pattern of increased use of vernacular variables among adolescents will be taken up in 3.3.4.1.

This change over time is especially interesting when compared to rates of use of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts (copula, present progressive, preceding *gonna*, present perfect, and present/preceding *got*) for the same set of speakers. Again, excluding speakers with less than 10 tokens combined over the five grammatical environments, Figure 10 shows that there is no change over time for these other uses, in contrast to speakers' use of *ain't* in the past tense.

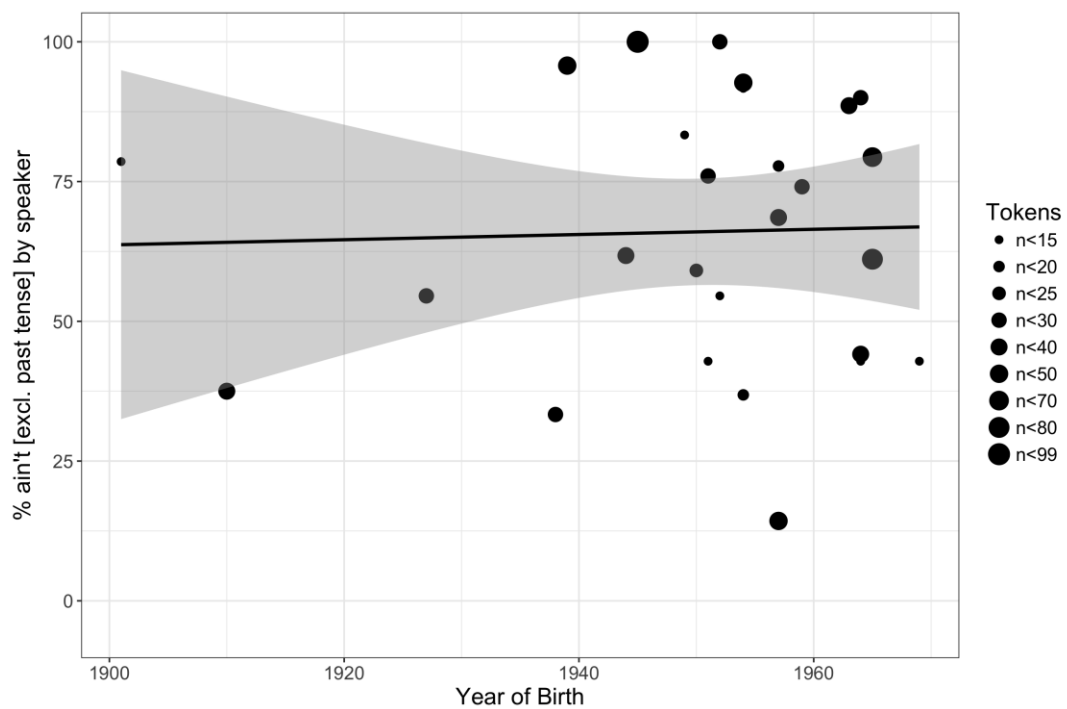


Figure 10: Stability in use of *ain't* across 5 (combined) grammatical environments in apparent time for 26 speakers ( $p > 0.05$ ).



Figure 11 further demonstrates that there is no change by age cohorts (older and younger than 30 years old) for the individual grammatical contexts combined above in Figure 9.

Token counts for each of the five individual contexts can be found in Table 7.

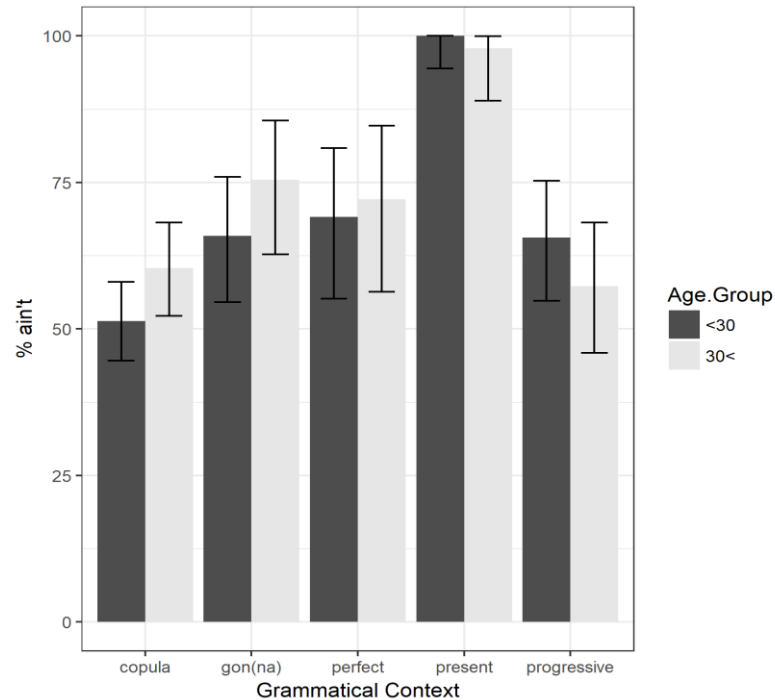


Figure 11: Stability in use of *ain't* across 5 grammatical environments in apparent time for 26 speakers.

Thus it appears that use of *ain't* is increasing in the simple past but is stable in other grammatical contexts. This result has interesting implications for the study of speakers' use of linguistic variants across grammatical contexts. For example, there is greater divergence among older speakers between rates of use for *ain't* in past tense contexts vs. other grammatical contexts than there is for younger speakers. In fact, a linear regression of the difference between speakers' use of *ain't* in the past tense compared to other environments (represented by the black line in Figure 12) shows a sharp decrease in apparent time (significant at  $p < 0.05$ ).

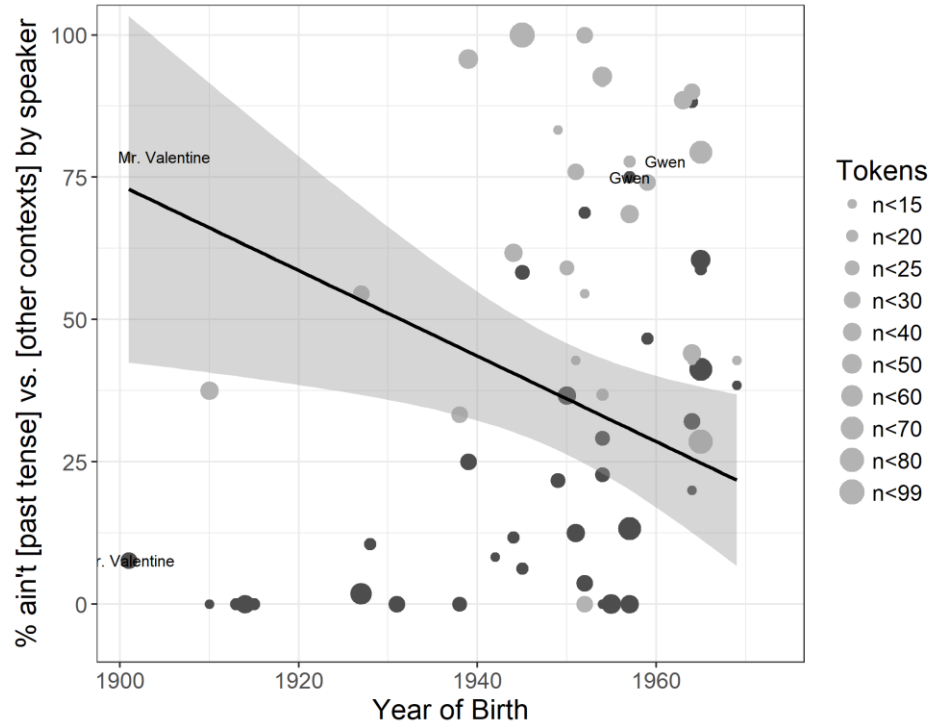


Figure 12: Difference in rates of *ain't* in two contexts. The solid black line is a linear regression ( $p < 0.05$ ) of the difference between these two rates for 23 individual speakers. Speaker rates of use for *ain't* in past tense contexts are represented by the black points. Speaker rates of use for *ain't* in other grammatical contexts are represented by the gray points.

In other words, the difference in rates of use between past tense and other contexts of *ain't* is greater for those speakers born earlier in the twentieth century. On the other hand, speakers born later in the century use *ain't* in different grammatical contexts at similar rates. This difference is illustrated by the two speakers labeled in Figure 12: 81-year-old Mr. Valentine uses *ain't* in other contexts 79% of the time, but uses *ain't* for *didn't* only 8% of the time, whereas 24-year-old Gwen uses *ain't* in the past tense just as much as she does in other contexts. In other words, change is also signified by the fact that younger speakers have integrated the past tense use of *ain't* into their grammars, using it at the same rate as they use *ain't* in other contexts.

### 3.3.2 Modelling *ain't*~*didn't* Variation

As discussed above, to test the linguistic and social conditioning on the changing use of *ain't* in the past tense context, a generalized linear model was fit to 888 observations of past tense tokens (*ain't* or *didn't*).<sup>40</sup> Likelihood ratio tests (lrtest function in R) were used to select the best fit model of the variation. Results for that model are shown in Table 9 below. Again, reference levels were set in order to illustrate the conditions that favor the use of *ain't* over *didn't*. Significant factors will each be discussed in the following sections.

		Estimate	Std. Error	Pr(> z )	
	(Intercept)	-8.44165	1.05257	1.06e-15	***
<b>Linguistic Factors</b>	Preceding Segment (Vowel)	1.68294	0.51534	0.00109	**
	Verbal Stativity (Dynamic)	1.08040	0.21099	3.05e-07	***
	Temporal Expression (yes)	0.44370	0.31530	0.15936	
<b>Social Factors</b>	Scale (Year of Birth)	1.20985	0.39840	0.00239	**
	Gender (Male)	0.49461	0.36121	0.17090	
	Region (Phila)	0.91450	0.41388	0.02713	*
	Education (Less than HS)	3.59408	0.76435	2.57e-06	***
	Education (High School)	2.94301	0.75639	9.99e-05	***
	Scale (YOB)*Gender (Male)	-0.07463	0.49906	0.88112	
<b>Stylistic Factors</b>	Interview (Group)	-0.13358	0.24101	0.57941	
	Negative Concord (yes)	1.62735	0.22495	4.68e-13	***

Table 9: Statistical results for generalized linear model of linguistic, social & stylistic factors conditioning speakers' choice between *ain't* and *didn't*.

### 3.3.3 Linguistic Conditioning and Origins

In sub-section 3.3.1, the initial finding that there is change toward increased use of *ain't* in the simple past context in PhAAE was confirmed. The model sheds light on the linguistic and social factors that condition the use of *ain't* in this context. This subsection will examine the linguistic factors shown to condition the use of *ain't* in more detail.

<sup>40</sup> Variant ~ scale(YOB) \* Gender + Education + Region + Interview Type + Negative Concord + Verbal Stativity + Preceding Segment + Temporal Expression

These factors include the phonological segment preceding *ain't* or *didn't* and the stativity of the verb following *ain't* or *didn't*. The lack of significant results for temporal expressions will also be discussed in addition to a study of the distribution of *ain't* vs. *didn't* with regard to predicate lexical item, not included in the model.

### 3.3.3.1 Preceding Phonological Segment

Chapter 2 introduced Fasold and Wolfram's (1970) hypothesis on the origin of *ain't* for *didn't*. They posit that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is due to the phonetic reduction of *didn't* to *in't*, which then converged with other uses of *ain't*. To explain the mechanism of phonetic reduction, Rickford (1980) proposes an initial /d/-deletion rule whereby less sonorant segments (like obstruents and nasal consonants) promote deletion due to Consonant Cluster Deletion (CCD) while more sonorant segments (like vowels) promote /d/-retention. Weldon (1994) predicts that if this environment gave rise to the use of *ain't* in the past tense, then we should find evidence of it in synchronic patterns of variation. In other words, we should find that *ain't* is preceded most often by consonants. Accordingly, she investigates the effect of preceding segments on the use of *ain't* for *didn't* among speakers of AAE in Columbus to test this hypothesis and finds that a preceding consonant does not promote the use of *ain't*, though her results do not reach significance. This dissertation also tests the effect of the preceding phonological segment on the likelihood that a speaker will use *ain't* vs. *didn't*, but approaches the issue from another angle: if *ain't* originated from the phonetic reduction of *didn't* when it was preceded by consonants, then this environment should be robust enough in natural speech

to result in the frequent application of the deletion rule. This would provide the necessary threshold of input for acquirers of AAE to reanalyze tokens of reduced *didn't* as *ain't*.

Recall that preceding phonological segment was coded as either vowel or consonant and that different types of consonant were grouped into one category. Results from the model, illustrated in Figure 13, show that, overall, preceding vowels favor the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts as in Weldon's study.

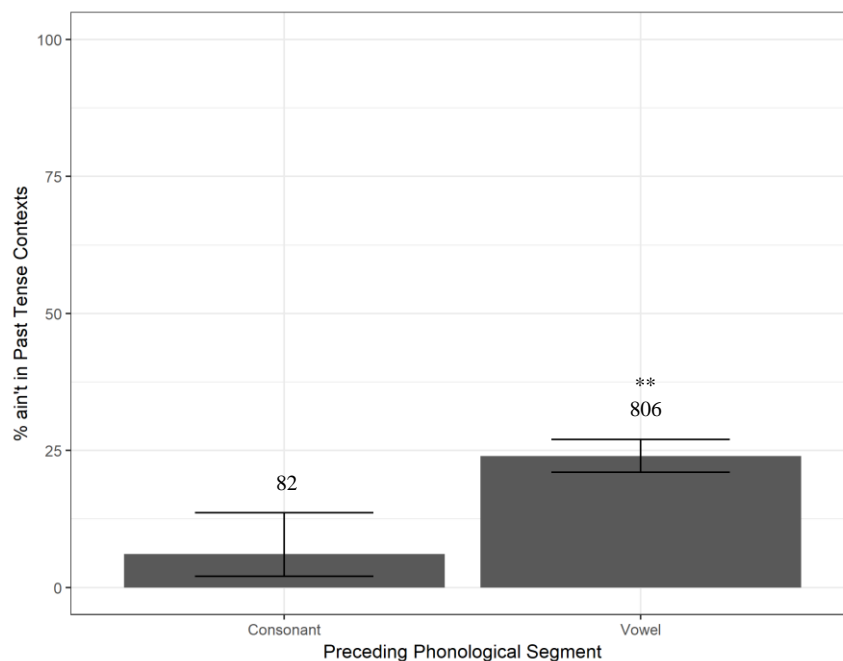


Figure 13: Rate of use of *ain't* (y-axis) by preceding segment (x-axis).

This is the opposite of what is expected if the use of *ain't* in the simple past originated from the phonetic reduction of *didn't* due to consonant cluster deletion.

Labov (1969), in looking at contraction in MAE and copula deletion in AAE points out that the factors of Type of Subject and Preceding Phonological Segment are linked: the majority of English pronouns end in vowels (e.g., I, you, he/she, we, they). There are only a few that end in consonants (e.g., *it*, *that*). Indeed, as the UMLC corpus illustrates, the majority of tokens of both *ain't* and *didn't* were preceded by vowels, and

this effect is driven by the prevalence of preceding subject pronouns in both contexts (Table 10 and Table 11).<sup>41</sup>

Preceding Segment	Subject Pronoun	Non-Subject Pronoun	Total
Consonant	40 (52%)	37 (48%)	77
Vowel	593 (97%)	20 (3%)	613
<b>Total</b>	633	57	690

Table 10: Cross-tabulations for subject type by phonological segment preceding *didn't*.

Preceding Segment	Subject Pronoun	Non-Subject Pronoun	Total
Consonant	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	5
Vowel	184 (95%)	9 (5%)	193
<b>Total</b>	185	13	198

Table 11: Cross-tabulations for subject type by phonological segment preceding *ain't*.

It is interesting to note that nearly all preceding consonants that are NOT subject pronouns are found preceding *didn't*. The prevalence of subject pronouns in *ain't* sentences coupled with the fact that *ain't* is more likely to be preceded by a vowel calls into question whether the environment needed for Fasold & Wolfram's (1970) theory of /d/-deletion was the primary origin of past tense *ain't*, we would expect the environment favoring it (preceding consonants) to be robust enough for *didn't* to be reanalyzed as *ain't*.

Fasold and Wolfram's theory is further called into question based on results from an analysis of intermediate tokens—tokens like *in't* that fall somewhere between *ain't* and *didn't* and may be the result of initial /d/-deletion of *didn't*. As mentioned above, tokens of negated auxiliaries in past tense contexts that were intermediate between *ain't* and *didn't* were set aside for this analysis. These tokens represented only 6% of the data (N=52, added to the 888 observations of past tense tokens). Not all speakers produced intermediate tokens, while some speakers produced a few. No speaker produced more

<sup>41</sup> Though in some cases there is intervening material that ends in a vowel: *she really ain't...*

than 6 intermediate tokens. Four speakers (Gwen, Valerie, Buddy, and Donette) each produced between 4-6 tokens of *in't*, and because this subset of the data is small, may be driving any effects seen here. Table 12 shows that speakers with low rates of use of *ain't* for *didn't* and speakers who grew up in Philadelphia produced the most intermediate tokens.

	Speaker rate of <i>ain't</i> for <i>didn't</i>			Total
	Low (0-20%)	Med (20-50%)	High (50% <)	
<b>Philadelphia</b>	9	12	15	36
<b>South</b>	15	0	0	15
<b>Total</b>	24	12	15	51

Table 12: Use of intermediate tokens by speakers' rates of use of *ain't* for *didn't* (low, medium, or high) and speakers' region of origin (Philadelphia or the South) for N=51 intermediate tokens (one speaker excluded).

The effect among speakers with lower rates of *ain't* for *didn't* is driven by speakers from the South. The most important takeaway from the data on intermediate tokens, however, is that 96% were preceded by a vowel, meaning that the use of *in't* rather than *didn't* is most likely not driven by initial consonant cluster deletion as Fasold and Wolfram (1970) and Rickford (1980) suggest. At least, the phonetic environment needed to produce such an effect does not seem to be robust enough in this data. The reduction of *didn't* to *in't* may simply be a byproduct of fast speech. However, this would require further investigation.

### 3.3.3.2 Lexical Stativity

Chapter 2 introduced a second hypothesis for the origin of the use of *ain't* for *didn't*. According to this hypothesis, supported by Harris 2010 and Smith 2015, the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts was the result of reanalysis of the use of *ain't* in present perfect contexts. This reanalysis would have occurred due not only to overlap in the semantics of

the past and present perfect but also due to the use of overlapping forms: preterit forms are used following *ain't* in the present perfect (*They ain't played outside since Wednesday*) as well as in affirmative simple past sentences (*They played outside yesterday*). Additionally, this hypothesis argues that this reanalysis would have been driven by the use of dynamic verbs with *ain't* in present perfect environments. Recall from Chapter 2 that DeBose (1994) proposes that main verbs following *ain't* will convey past tense meaning when they are dynamic verbs and will convey present perfect meaning when they are stative verbs. DeBose bases this hypothesis on the Lexical Stativity Parameter (Mufwene 1983, DeBose and Faraclas 1993), which asserts that stative predicates are interpreted as non-past and non-completive, while non-stative predicates are interpreted as past and completive. While this dissertation agrees that stative predicates typically express continuation into the present in isolation (Comrie 1976), it does not take the strong view that DeBose does. This stance is further supported by results from Weldon (1994) showing that stative and dynamic verbs occur in both past and present perfect contexts. This dissertation will also test the effect of verbal stativity on the choice between *ain't* or *didn't*.

For lexical stativity, verbs were coded as either stative or dynamic according to their use in a given sentence using the tests described above to determine their status (Jackendoff 1983, Levin 2009). Results of the model and Figure 14 show that use of *ain't* is favored when the predicate is a dynamic verb.



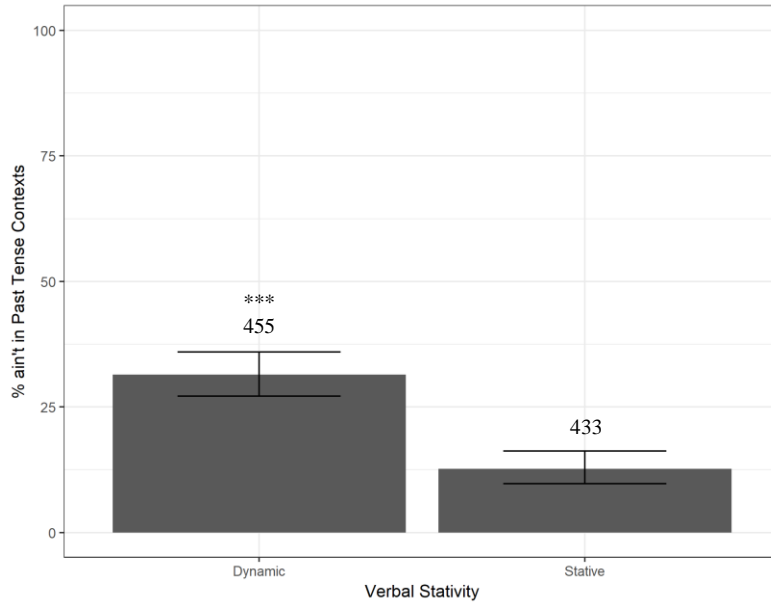


Figure 14: Rate of use of *ain't* (y-axis) by verbal stativity (x-axis).

While *ain't* is used with both stative and dynamic verbs, it is used preferentially with dynamic verbs, offering support for the *Lexical Stativity Parameter* and DeBose's idea that there is a link between dynamic verbs and simple past interpretations in AAE. Once again, however, the result is not categorical. More importantly, though, these findings are expected given the hypothesis set forth in Chapter 2. This hypothesis stated that the use of dynamic verbs following *ain't* would have driven the reanalysis of *ain't* as conveying past tense meaning because stative verbs are more likely to be interpreted as continuing into the present. This means that stative verbs may be more conducive to conveying perfect meaning and dynamic verbs more conducive to conveying perfective meaning (Comrie 1976). Thus, it is expected that dynamic verbs would be used more frequently in sentences that convey past perfective meaning.

If the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts originated from *ain't* sentences expressing present perfect aspect with dynamic verbs, it might further be expected that older

speakers are driving this preference for dynamic verbs and younger speakers are more likely to use either stative or dynamic verbs in this context at similar rates. To test this, speakers were grouped into age cohorts of “younger than 30” and “30 and older”. Results in Figure 15 shows that both older and younger speakers maintain higher frequencies of *ain't* with dynamic verbs compared to stative verbs.

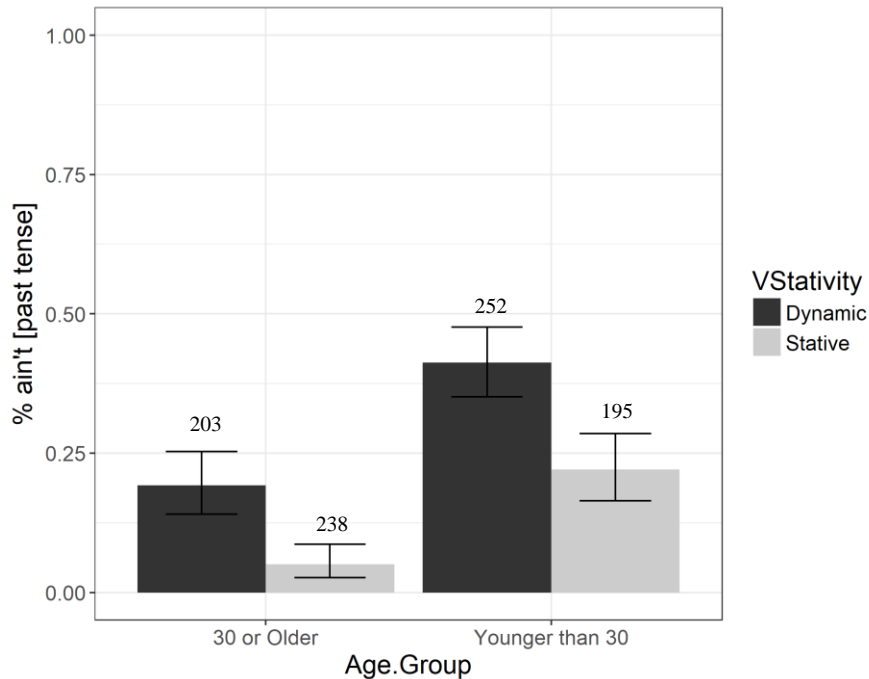


Figure 15: Rate of use of *ain't* (x-axis) by verbal stativity (black = dynamic, gray = stative) and age (y-axis).

On the other hand, these results might simply reflect the fact that, when *ain't* is used as an auxiliary, verbs must do some of the work formerly taken up by auxiliaries like *didn't* and *haven't* that clearly express tense/aspect meaning. Because *didn't* itself expresses default perfective aspect (since perfective is the default aspect for the past tense in English), when *ain't* is used instead, dynamic verbs are more likely to be used because they are better able to convey perfective aspect on their own. The reverse would be true

for stative verbs. When used with *ain't*, they would be preferred in perfect contexts because they are able to convey the idea of continuation up to the present in absence of *haven't*, which would normally take on that role. Likewise, this result also bears on the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* in variation with *don't* before *got* is the origin of the use of *ain't* for *don't* and *didn't*. In Chapter 2, this hypothesis was deemed implausible because, other than with the predicate *got*, *ain't* does not occur frequently enough in this environment in the corpus. Beyond that, reports of variation between *ain't* and *don't* with predicates other than *got* report that it is used primarily with stative predicates (Howe 2005). Thus, if the use of *ain't* for *didn't* originated from the use of *ain't* for *don't*, which favors stative predicates, we might expect to see a similar effect for stativity here. In other words, we might expect *ain't* to be used more often with stative verbs in the past tense, yet this is the opposite of what we find.

### 3.3.3.3 Temporal Expressions

Chapter 2 discussed the fact that the simple past and present perfect are distinct in the types of temporal expressions they can co-occur with. Specifically, the English present perfect cannot co-occur with temporal expressions that express past meaning, even when the event described in the sentence took place in the past (Klein 1992).<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the use of *ain't* for negation obscures tense/aspect distinctions that are apparent when an auxiliary like *haven't* or *didn't* is used. For this reason, it might be expected that use of *ain't* prompts speakers to use more temporal expressions that would disambiguate

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<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy (see Chapter 5) that this is also a means of distinguishing between past and perfect uses of the *passé composé* in French (Sankoff and Thibault 1977).

tense/aspect meaning. However, this study finds no evidence that temporal expressions are used more frequently with *ain't* than with *didn't*. In past tense contexts, *ain't* is accompanied by a temporal expression only 16% of the time, and *didn't* only 8%. Additionally, the majority of temporal expressions used in conjunction with *ain't* in the past tense can also be found in use with *ain't* in present perfect contexts: 19 out of 32 expressions are *never*.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.3.3.4 Predicate Lexical Item

Predicate lexical item was not included in the model due to the low frequency of most verbs (providing only 1 token each). As a result, whether certain main verbs tend to collocate with *ain't* rather than *didn't* and whether higher frequency verbs favor one or the other past tense auxiliary variant was not tested in the model. However, Table 13 shows that *ain't* is used with the top 10 most frequent verbs at roughly the same rate that it is used in the general population (22%). The category of “Verb” in Table 13 combines all morphological forms of a given verb used in the past tense context.

Rank	Verb	N =	% used foll. <i>ain't</i>
1	<i>have</i>	125	19%
2	<i>know</i>	110	19%
3	<i>want</i>	73	23%
4	<i>say</i>	53	51%
5	<i>get</i>	51	24%
6	<i>do</i>	49	33%
7	<i>go</i>	28	29%
8	<i>like</i>	27	7%
9	<i>tell</i>	27	30%
10	<i>see</i>	23	26%

Table 13: Top 10 most frequent main verbs following a past tense auxiliary w/ rate of use following *ain't*.

<sup>43</sup> In contrast, 79% of sentences containing *ain't* in present perfect contexts also contain a temporal expression. Though *never* is also popular, representing 61% of temporal expressions in the present perfect context, there are also others associated with perfect meaning like *since* and *yet*.

The rate of use following *ain't* is slightly elevated for more dynamic verbs (e.g., *do*, *go*, *tell*). There are two verbs whose rates of use following *ain't* deviate from the norm: *say* is used following *ain't* roughly half of the time, while *like* follows *ain't* only 7% of the time. The higher use of *say* following *ain't* could speak to the use of *ain't* in narratives. The low frequency of *like* following *ain't* is telling in light of Labov's (1996) finding that speakers are least likely to choose *didn't like* as a possible meaning for *ain't like*. In Labov's study, Black speakers with both high and low contact with the White community chose *didn't like* as a possible meaning less than 5% of the time compared with *isn't like* and *doesn't like*. Consequently, *like* may be dispreferred with *ain't* in past tense contexts.

To summarize, this subsection has looked at the linguistic factors conditioning the use of *ain't* in simple past contexts. An investigation of the effect of preceding phonological segment demonstrated that *ain't* is most likely to be preceded by a vowel in this grammatical context. The fact that subject pronouns, and therefore preceding vowels, are used most frequently preceding *ain't* means that the environment needed for the reduction of *didn't* to have given rise to *ain't* may not have been robust enough to produce such a development. Conversely, an examination of the verbal stativity of main verbs following *ain't* shows that *ain't* is used more often with dynamic verbs. Considering that stative verbs in present perfect contexts are more likely to be interpreted as non-past and that dynamic verbs are likely to be interpreted as describing past events, this finding may lend support to the idea that present perfect uses of *ain't* with dynamic verbs were reanalyzed as simple past in PhAAE. At the very least, it shows that dynamic

verbs are used with *ain't* in past tense contexts because they are better able to convey perfective aspect than stative verbs in the absence of tense/aspect cues from *didn't*.

In the next subsection, the social conditioning on the use of *ain't* will be explored.

### **3.3.4 Social Conditioning**

This subsection will examine the social factors shown to condition the use of *ain't* in more detail. Section 3.3.1 demonstrated that age (Year of Birth) has a significant influence on a speaker's choice between using *ain't* or *didn't*. This subsection will not only look more in depth at age in the corpus, but examine the additional social conditioning factors of a speaker's gender (Gender), geographical region of origin (Region) and years of education obtained (Education).

Results for Gender are inconclusive. Results for Region show that speakers born and raised in the Southern United States are less likely to use *ain't* in past tense contexts than those born and raised in Philadelphia, a finding in keeping with the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* for *didn't* is a twentieth century innovation in AAE. Additionally, results for Education confirm that it is speakers from backgrounds of lower social mobility who are advanced users of *ain't* in this innovative context. Although not included in the model, looking at speakers' level of contact with the White community shows that some of the most advanced users of *ain't* also have limited contact with the White community. Taken together, these findings suggest that the use of *ain't* in contexts of *didn't* is a change being advanced by young speakers of AAE who grew up in Philadelphia, have limited contact outside of the Black community, and fewer years of schooling.

### 3.3.4.1 Age

Subsection 3.3.1 showed an increase over time in the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts using a method known as apparent time (Labov 1978, Bailey et al. 1991, Sankoff and Blondeau 2007). The apparent time method has been used reliably in a number of sociolinguistic studies to infer linguistic change over time (Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009, Labov et al. 2013). On the other hand, Vaughn-Cook (1987)<sup>44</sup> highlights the need to study the community or speakers at two different points in time in order to label something a change. This is especially true in order to distinguish language change from language development among children and pre-adolescents (Wyatt 1995). Likewise, several studies have also shown age grading in the use of vernacular or non-standard features, where there is an increase in use during adolescence that tapers off into adulthood (Rickford and Price 2013). This leaves open the possibility that increases of a particular linguistic feature in apparent time are the result of age-grading with no overall community change (Sankoff 2005). This subsection will argue that the results in 3.3.1 do indeed show change over time based on three investigations: comparison to rates in earlier varieties of AAE, comparison to rates of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts, and analysis of speakers 20 years old and older (the community minus adolescents). Despite this stance, this dissertation acknowledges that a re-study of Philadelphia's Black community is the ideal method for definitively determining whether these results indicate language change or stable variation with age-grading.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See discussion in (Fasold et al. 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, a re-study of this particular community presents certain challenges, most notably that a field researcher similarly embedded in the community would need to be found to produce recordings with the level of intimacy apparent in this corpus.

Vaughn-Cooke's point that studying a community at two different points in time is important to definitively establishing that change is taking place is not trivial considering a comparison of the data in the UMLC corpus to that of Labov et al.'s (1968) Harlem study. The average rate of use of *ain't* in the past tense for co-ed speakers between 16-18 years of age in the UMLC corpus is 52%,<sup>46</sup> just slightly above that found in Labov et al.'s 1968 Harlem study of adolescent men (44% in individual interviews, 46% in group interviews for 14-18 year old speakers). This difference between the two sets of data is not statistically significant. Given their age, Labov's adolescent men would be comparable to male speakers in their late twenties and early thirties in the UMLC corpus, some of whom have comparable rates of *ain't* use (e.g., 29-year-old Howard at 69% and 32-year-old Tariq at 39%). However, the average for the cohort of men between 28 and 32 years old (7 speakers) is 21%, on par with the community average. The differences between the Harlem and UMLC data may then be due to the fact that the UMLC corpus is comprised of speakers with divergent social histories. This group of young adult men also includes speakers like Sam and Isaac, two of the field researcher's friends, both of whom are musicians with extensive contacts outside of the community—and internationally—and move within a wide range of social circles. Speakers of this type have rates of *ain't* between 0-4%.

On the other hand, considering the differences between these two studies, it should not be ruled out that the studies are not comparable because they took place in two different regions. We cannot be sure that regional variation does not explain the

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<sup>46</sup> There is one pre-adolescent in the Philadelphia study (Patricia, age 13) with a rate of use of *ain't* in the past tense of 38%. The adult average is 15%.



comparable adolescent rates between the two studies. It may be the case that the Harlem data reflects a more advanced stage of the shift toward use of *ain't* that Philadelphians only reached in the early 1980s, or that the pattern diffused from New York to Philadelphia.

The overall community frequency for PhAAE (22%) is also lower than that found in Weldon 1994 (38%). Weldon's community may be more advanced in their use of *ain't* in the past tense for several reasons. First, Weldon's speakers were predominantly working class and only one speaker had attended college. Additionally, Weldon's speakers were all born and raised in the Northern city of Columbus, Ohio. Since the UMLC data includes speakers with a wider range of socioeconomic experiences, educational completion, and regional background, the speakers represented therein may be more diverse in their linguistic repertoires. Lastly, the majority of Weldon's male speakers were under 20 years old, and the study was conducted roughly 10 years after the UMLC study. Given the vernacular nature of *ain't* and the possibility that it is a Northern urban innovation, one might expect younger, male speakers, who have not pursued higher education and grew up in the North to use *ain't* at higher rates. Differences in results between Weldon's corpus and the UMLC corpus could therefore be due to regional differences in the progression of the change or the fact that Weldon's community was at a more advanced stage in the change.

To show that the increase in use of *ain't* found in subsection 3.3.1 speaks to change rather than age grading, the data from PhAAE can first be compared to that collected for early and conservative varieties of AAE. Howe (2005) shows that the rate of use of *ain't* in past tense contexts in four early and/or conservative varieties of AAE is

less than  $\leq 6\%$ . Our community rate of 22% *ain't* then supports Howe's hypothesis of change over time. This comparison should come with the caveat that the studies of early and conservative varieties Howe presents do not include any adolescent speakers. On the other hand, additional support for the increase in use of *ain't* in apparent time indicating language change comes from the data presented in 3.3.1 on the rate of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts. If the expectation is that *ain't* as a vernacular variant increases in use among adolescents of every age cohort and there is no community change, then we might expect to find the same increase in apparent time for *ain't* in the other contexts where its used. Instead, the data in 3.3.1 show that variation between *ain't* and other auxiliaries is stable over time. Furthermore, we saw that younger speakers have similar rates of use of *ain't* across all contexts, including the past tense context. This implicates language change whereby younger speakers use of *ain't* in the past tense has "caught up with" their rates of use in other grammatical contexts.

Finally, there is some evidence of community change toward increased use of *ain't* in PhAAE. Speakers under 20 years of age have the highest rates of *ain't* use overall. When they are removed from the data, a linear regression with quadratic term still shows that age is a significant predictor of the use of *ain't* in the expected direction at  $p < 0.05$  (for 29 speakers). This result indicates that there is slight change over time in the general community, minus adolescents. In fact, some adults have higher than average frequencies of use of *ain't* for their age, including 24-year-old Gwen, 29-year-old Harold, and 37-year-old Trey. Although life span change may be a possible explanation, as we will see there are a variety of other social and stylistic factors that are likely contributors to their high rates.

Despite this very promising evidence, the idea that this data simultaneously speaks to both age grading (to explain very high frequencies among adolescents) AND community change over time must be considered. In other words, we may be seeing change over time that appears more accelerated due to the very high frequency use of some adolescents (an adolescent peak). A re-study of the PhAAE community (either panel or trend) would be the ideal means of obtaining definitive evidence of the relative contributions of change over time and age-grading to the use of *ain't* for *didn't*.

#### **3.3.4.2 Region of Origin**

Region of origin coding was based on research demonstrating a correspondence between the Critical Period Hypothesis and the age of dialect acquisition (Payne 1980; Johnson 2007). Speakers were classified as either originating from Philadelphia or the Southern United States according to the region they had lived in roughly between the ages of 5 and 18 (“the schooling years”). Speakers born in other geographic regions were not included in this analysis. Southern speakers came from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, or Virginia, in keeping with demographics for Southern migration to Philadelphia during the 1900s (Kopf 2016). It is possible that the ‘Southern’ designation obscured regional differences between Southern dialects, but there are not enough Southern speakers in this set of data to be able to examine region of origin in more detail.

The majority of speakers (N= 34) grew up in Philadelphia from at least 5 years old and up, and 8 speakers grew up in the South. The model shows that Region does significantly condition use of *ain't*: speakers who grew up in Philadelphia are more likely to use *ain't* as a variant in the simple past context.

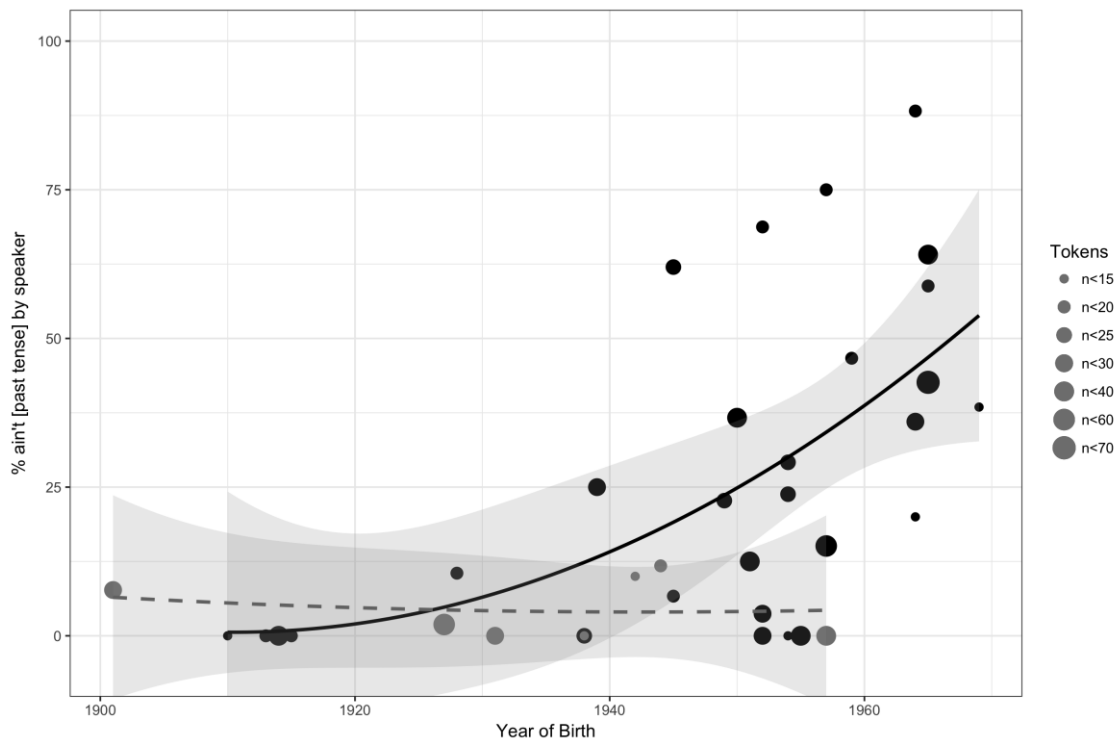


Figure 16: Frequency of use of *ain't* in the past tense by region of origin (Philadelphia = black, South = gray) in apparent time.

These results show the use of *ain't* in simple past contexts to be an innovation that arose among urban dwellers in the North (Philadelphia) during the period of the Great migration. Southern speakers do not use *ain't* in this context at as high rates, regardless of age. As a result, these findings are also in keeping with the Divergence Hypothesis for AAE as set forth in Chapter 2. Because there are so few Southern speakers, this represents an area that could be further developed in future research.

### 3.3.4.3 Gender

The gender of each speaker was identified either by themselves or by the field researcher with the only gender identifications being Male or Female. There are about twice as many male as female speakers in the data (29 Male, 13 Female).

Neither Gender nor an interaction between Gender and YOB are significant factors conditioning the use of *ain't* in the model. There is no difference in gender plotted over apparent time. In order to get a closer look at what might be happening, gender is divided into two age cohorts, which reveals conflicting patterns for younger and older speakers.

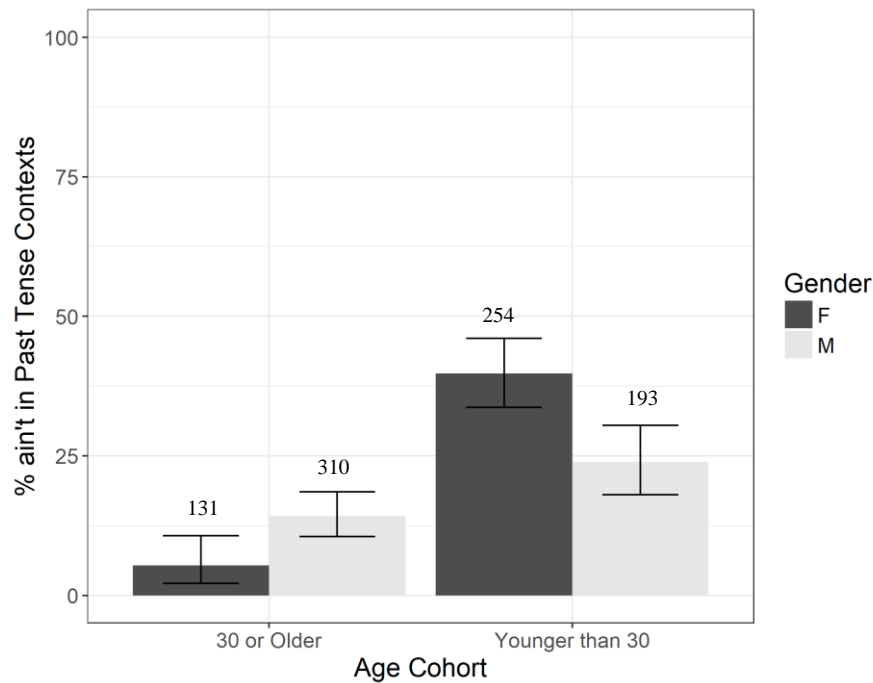


Figure 17: Use of *ain't* in past tense contexts by age and gender.

Figure 17 shows opposite patterns between the two age cohorts: younger women have higher rates of *ain't* compared to younger men, while older women have lower rates of *ain't* compared to older men. The results for younger speakers, with women leading, show the expected pattern for an innovative variant that is below the level of consciousness (Labov 2001). Given that *ain't* already exists in other grammatical contexts in PhAAE, it is unsurprising that the use of *ain't* in the past tense would fly below the radar for most speakers. Additionally, a 1984 survey of Black and White

speakers with regard to the meaning of *ain't* found that even Black speakers who primarily interacted with other Black speakers were not conscious of the past tense use of *ain't* compared to other uses of *ain't* in 1984 (Labov 1996). This most likely has to do with the fact that the use of *ain't* in past contexts was a change in progress at that time. It is unlikely that this use of *ain't* would be evaluated differently from other uses of *ain't* at the social level.

On the other hand, the results for older speakers are consistent with the gender pattern found for the use of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts (Figure 18). In other contexts where *ain't* is used, women consistently use *ain't* at lower rates than men. This pattern is found for stable linguistic variables, where there is no change over time and women use the vernacular variant less (Labov 2001).

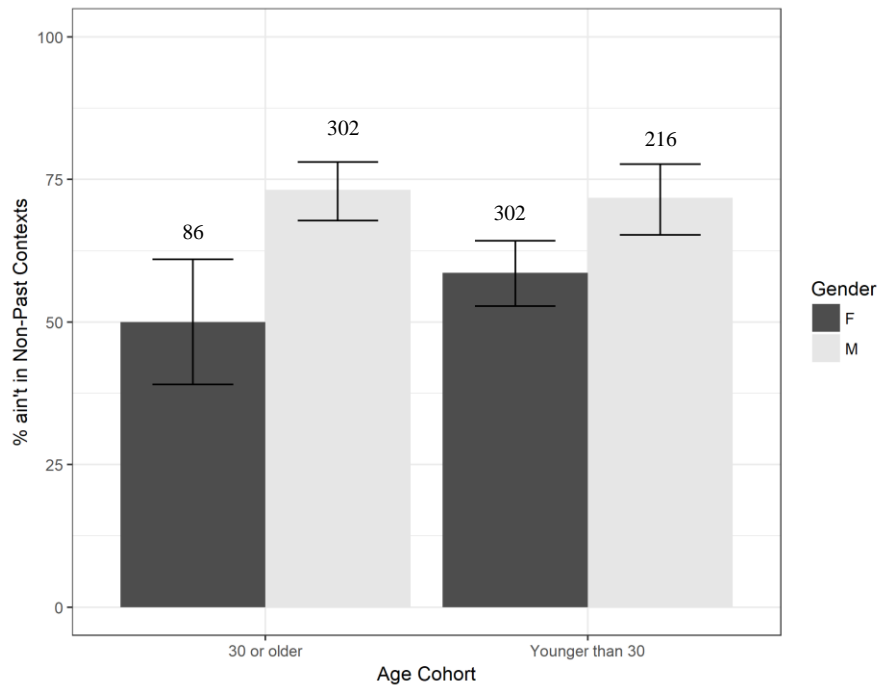


Figure 18: Use of *ain't* in non-past grammatical contexts by age and gender.

Thus, for or older speakers, the gender pattern fits the norm. It could then be that the pattern shown by younger speakers is driven by the core group of adolescent speakers, who are predominantly female. These speakers exhibited more *-s* absence (both third person singular and possessive) than other community members in Labov and Harris' (1986) paper. This may have to do with their linguistic experiences and contact with other ethnicities in combination with their age. Overall, a more in-depth study of the relationship between age, gender, and topic/style is necessary to tease out any gender affects that could be hiding in these results.

#### **3.3.4.4 Level of Education**

As previously discussed, education is used as a proxy for social class following Labov 2001 and Gorman's (2010) validation of Labov's education results. Speakers were divided into three groups for level of education completed: those who did not finish high school (Less than HS = 16 speakers), those who finished high school (High School = 20 speakers), and those who went on to complete at least some higher education (Some Higher Ed = 6 speakers). In the model, Education is found to be a significant conditioning factor with speakers who have not completed high school favoring the use of *ain't* the most. These speakers are followed by speakers who have completed high school favoring the use of *ain't* the next most. Speakers who have completed some higher education use *ain't* the least of the three groups, as expected.

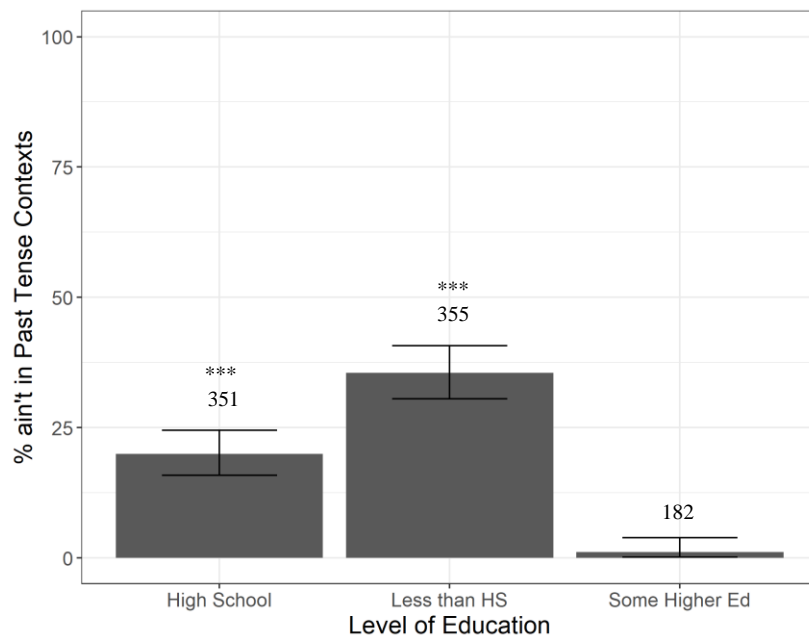


Figure 19: Use of *ain't* in past tense contexts by level of education.

Recall from the earlier discussion that five of the speakers grouped in the “Less than High School” category were adolescents who had not yet completed high school. Considering that their social profile may be quite different from a speaker who has chosen to leave high school, future work will group these adolescent speakers into their own category.<sup>47</sup> Note, however, that the inclusion of these speakers in the “Less than HS” category does not invalidate the results showing a difference in rate of use between speakers who have completed high school and those who have completed some higher education. Thus the speakers with the most advanced use of *ain't* in past tense contexts tend to be those who have either not completed high school or have not gone on to higher education after completing high school. This is in keeping with the social stratification expected in the use of a vernacular variable that is highly stigmatized like *ain't*.

<sup>47</sup> Although, it is noteworthy that three of the five high schoolers are close friends with another adolescent speaker, Paula, who has dropped out of school. These speakers represent the “core” group of speakers in this community, referred to throughout this dissertation.



### 3.3.4.5 Inter-ethnic Contact

Although the original focus of the UMLC study was the relationship between language use and inter-ethnic contact, information on Contact with the White community is not available for all speakers and is not included in the statistical analysis. However, the effect of Contact can be examined using the contact scores of speakers included in Ash and Myhill's (1986) study. In Figure 20 below, the light gray points represent speakers for whom there is no information on Contact. Speakers with a high degree of contact with the White community are represented by the black points, while speakers with low contact with the White community are the dark gray points. The box in the upper right corner shows that the majority of high frequency users of *ain't* received low contact scores in Ash and Myhill's study.

Figure 20 shows that the majority of speakers considered to have low degrees of contact outside of the Black community use *ain't* at very high frequencies, while the speakers with high contact with White speakers reside along the *x*-axis, using *ain't* at very low frequencies (< 4%) or not at all. The labeled speakers are part of the "core" group of PhAAE speakers (Labov and Harris 1986, Labov 2014). Within the box are the younger, female speakers in this group. This group differentiates itself from the rest of the speech community in their linguistic behavior, and may be the driving force in the steep age effect found in this data, though the community as a whole shows change as well. Labov and Harris write:

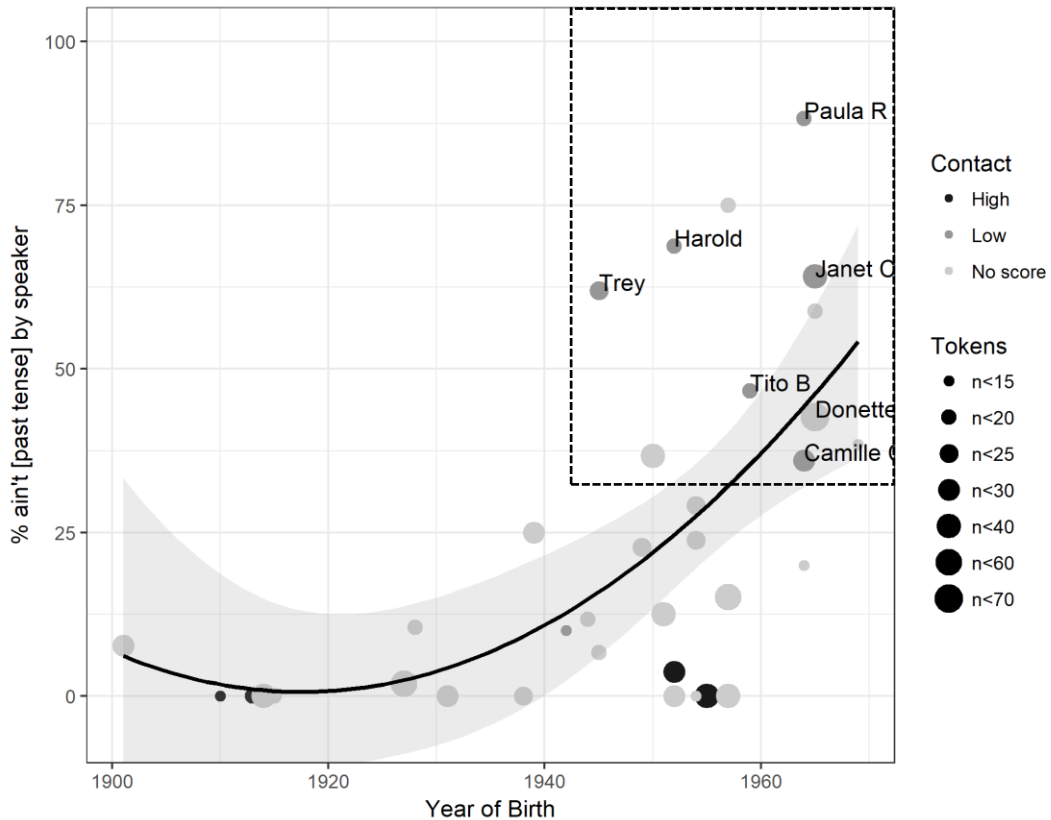


Figure 20: Use of *ain't* in past tense contexts by contact over time (Black = High contact w/ the White community, Dark Gray = Low contact w/ the White community, Light Gray = No contact score provided). The box in the upper right corner shows that the majority of high frequency users of *ain't* received low contact scores in Ash and Myhill's (1986) study.

“In the black community of Philadelphia, the core group remains apart, and is probably drifting further apart, in spite of the fact that members hear standard English dialects spoken four to eight hours a day: on television, radio, and in the schools. On the other hand, those speakers who engage in structured interaction with whites, where they use language to negotiate their position or gain advantages, show a profound shift of their grammatical rules.” (Labov and Harris 1986:20)

Labov and Harris make the point that the increasing residential segregation in the urban North during the period of the Great Migration resulted in linguistic segregation for many Black Americans, and that this linguistic segregation has led to innovations in AAE (like the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts) that make AAE more different from White vernacular varieties of English (the Divergence Hypothesis). These results on contact

offer support for this theory. However, despite the fact that there are speakers with very low levels of contact outside of the Black community who use *ain't* at very high rates, there are speakers with a great degree of White contact who still use *ain't* in past contexts, albeit at lower rates. For one, White contact may be something that happens later in life for speakers originally coming from highly segregated communities (Labov et al. 2016; Sankoff p.c.). Thus the low use of *ain't* may be the result of suppression of this feature. Further study of contact in this sample of the corpus will surely shed more light on this area. However, it is also unlikely that this profile of speaker would consider *ain't* to be a stigmatized form in the setting of these particular recordings.

### **3.3.5 Stylistic Conditioning**

This subsection will examine the stylistic factors shown to condition the use of *ain't* in more detail. The UMLC data was coded for three stylistic factors: Relationship to the field researcher, number of Participants in the recorded conversation, and Negative Concord. Neither Relationship nor Participants adequately characterized the variation in the data. However, Negative Concord was found to be used more frequently with *ain't* than with *didn't*, replicating previous results showing co-variation between these two vernacular features (Fasold and Wolfram 1970; Weldon 1994; Walker 2005).

Previous research has shown that speakers' use of linguistic variables is sensitive to their audience or interlocutor (Bell 1984, Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994). For this reason, the relationship between the field researcher and the primary person being recorded was examined as a stylistic conditioning factor to test the hypothesis that more intimate relationships would produce greater use of *ain't* for *didn't*. Relationship was

coded as one of four categories: Family (9 Speakers), Friend (3 Speakers), Acquaintance (19 Speakers), or Stranger (10 Speakers). The coding process was aided by WH's commentary in recordings, information in the recordings themselves, the social network studies provided in Labov and Harris 1986, and personal communications with Labov and Harris. Unfortunately, there was a high degree of co-linearity between Relationship and other social factors. For example, WH's friends, who one might assume would use higher degrees of *ain't* when conversing with him, had extensive contact with the White community as high profile musicians who travelled the world and, as a result, had low usage of *ain't*. This contrasted with some of the speakers labeled as WH's Acquaintances, who tended to be younger, female speakers who had high rates of *ain't* use. In conclusion, this investigation did not provide fruitful results.

Likewise, the investigation into whether the number of people participating in a conversation affected speakers' use of *ain't* did not produce any interesting results. Previous research demonstrates that speakers produce more casual speech (Wagner 2008) and use more vernacular variants (Labov et al. 1968) in group interviews as compared to individual interviews. For that reason, each recording was coded according to how many participants were involved (1-4 participants). The majority of recordings (35/47) were conversations between the field researcher and one participant. Surprisingly, the results are the opposite of what would be expected: *ain't* is used more in individual conversations than in group conversations. This may also be due to co-linearity. In future

work, a finer-grained coding system to account for the varying styles of participation of multiple interlocutors may be in order.<sup>48</sup>

One finding relating use of *ain't* to stylistic conditioning is its co-occurrence with negative concord. Previous studies have found that *ain't* in past tense contexts is more likely to co-occur with negative concord than *didn't* (Fasold and Wolfram 1970, Weldon 1994, Walker 2005). All corpus utterances that contained either *ain't* or *didn't* used in conjunction with at least one negative item like a negative pronoun (*nothing, no, nobody/no one, neither, none*) or a negative adverb (*never, nowhere*) were coded as containing negative concord. Figure 21 illustrates that negative concord is used more often with *ain't* than with *didn't* in PhAAE. This result indicates that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is appropriate in the same contexts where negative concord would be used. As a vernacular variant in many varieties of English, negative concord is used more often in casual speech styles (Labov 1972b).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, a participant was considered someone who verbally interacted in the interview. Peripheral participants (those who were present but did not talk) were not counted as participants, nor were passersby to the conversation. The exclusion of peripheral participants might need rethinking considering Audience Design (Bell 1984). Additionally, some interviews included multiple people for only part of the interaction. For this reason, in the future, it might be better to code individual utterances by number of people present at the moment of utterance.

<sup>49</sup> Labov (1972b) describes the categorical nature of negative concord in AAE. Labov (p.c.) and Walker (2005) mention that the use of negative concord with *ain't* may be a form of semantic reinforcement in the spirit of Jespersen's Cycle given that *ain't* is itself a weakening of negated auxiliaries like *haven't* and *isn't*.

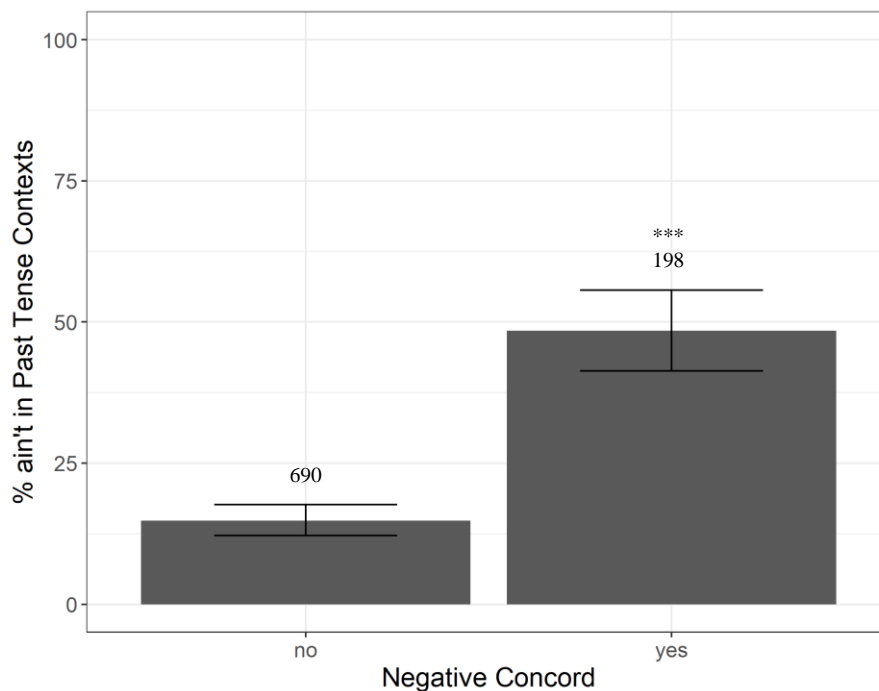


Figure 21: Use of negative concord with *ain't* in past tense contexts.

There is one last note on the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts with regard to style, specifically topic shift. It has been noted in previous research that speakers shift in their use of variables due to changes in topic (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994). One particular recording of WH's conversation with Tariq, the 32-year-old speaker introduced in the discussion of Age in 3.3.4.1, is noteworthy. Tariq is WH's brother-in-law. Over the first 29 minutes of Tariq's interview, as he talks about where he grew up and went to school, his relationships with his parents, his religious development, and getting into fights, his rate of use of *ain't* in the past tense is 11% (N=19). Tariq uses *didn't* most of the time.

- (4) **Tariq:** I really **didn't** have any money. I **didn't** have *no* money, man. And at the time I was going to school— I must've been about fifteen years old, you know— and uh, I **didn't** have to have a job or anything.

Then, at the 29-minute mark, there is a dramatic shift in conversational topic. Tariq starts to relay the story of his first sexual experience to WH. The entire conversation is held in hushed tones, to ensure that they are not overheard. The intimate conversation lasts for the last 15 minutes of the recording, during which time Tariq's rate of use of *ain't* for *didn't* climbs to 82% (N=11).

- (5) **Tariq:** Well, man, I **didn't**—believe me, man. I **didn't** know this was gonna happen. I **ain't** even—I **didn't** even want to look at her. I **ain't** know how to look at her cause I **ain't** know how to like... I **ain't** know where she was coming from, you know?

It seems that Tariq uses *ain't* most frequently when discussing the most intimate of topics. Tariq's use of *ain't* across his recording was compared to a recording from Wayne, also 32 years old and also referred to in the previous discussion on Age. Both Tariq and Wayne left high school after or during the tenth grade. Wayne is a member of WH's immediate family. Wayne's overall use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is 23%, and there appears to be no apparent pattern in his usage of the variable by conversational topic. These preliminary results highlight the need for a closer examination of both style shift, topic shift, and individual differences in the use of *ain't* in the past tense, which may be a rich area for further study.

### 3.3.6 Following Verbal Morphology

The alert reader of this dissertation may have noticed that the morphological form of the verbs following *ain't* when it occurs in past tense contexts can vary within the same verb. This variation is exemplified in the following examples from the UMLC corpus. In (6), Dee uses the base form of the verb following *ain't* (*say*), while in (7), Mr. Valentine uses

the preterit form of the verb (*said*). Both sentences, whether they contain *ain't say* or *ain't said*, convey past tense meaning.

(6) **WH:** Did they come down on you for hitting them, like [siblings] Brenda and Roy?

**Dee:** No, they **ain't say** nothing to me.

**WH:** She must'a told them.

**Dee:** She told them, but they **ain't say** nothing to me.

(7) **Mr. Valentine:** I'm still strong. Don't you think I ain't! But I hadn't ha- He come in one morning—late with the car, and I'm sh- talking back and forth or something and he called and says, "You're a liar!" ... I **ain't said** a word.

This variation in main verb form following *ain't* highlights a particular problem, introduced in Chapter 2, that will be taken up in the rest of this dissertation. The simple fact that past sentences contain main verbs in base form following *ain't* (e.g., *ain't say*) is unremarkable. This is the form of the verb that follows *didn't* as well (e.g., *didn't say*). The fact that simple past sentences can contain main verbs in preterit form (e.g., *didn't said*), on the other hand, is interesting considering that the use of *ain't* in the past tense varies with *didn't*, and there is a strict relationship between *DO*-support and the expression of tense on main verbs.

To briefly reiterate from Chapter 2, in affirmative declarative simple past sentences (e.g., *They said*, etc.),  $T_{\text{PAST}}$  and  $V$  (*say*) are in a syntactically local relationship. As a result,  $T_{\text{PAST}}$  can combine with  $V$  through T-to-V lowering to produce the form *said* (informally *say* + *ed*, the marker of the past tense). However, in the presence of sentential negation (where  $\text{NegP}$  intervenes between  $T$  and  $V$ ) or for question formation (where  $T$  moves to  $C$ ),  $T$  and  $V$  are in a non-local relationship, and  $T$  is blocked from lowering to  $V$ . Instead, *DO* is merged in  $T$  and expresses tense morphology. Consequently, these two scenarios produce the sentences *They didn't say*



and *What didn't they say*, where tense morphology appears on *DO* rather than on the main verb; the main verb *say* remains in base form. If *ain't* is a variant of *didn't* in past tense contexts, then there is a reasonable explanation for why verbs appear in base form following *ain't*. However, in sentences with preterit main verbs like *They ain't said*, it appears as if tense morphology is still being expressed on the main verb despite the fact that the relationship between T and V in the presence of negation should be non-local. This would not be allowed in an MAE grammar, but perhaps something about the grammar of PhAAE allows this to happen. Or, perhaps what appears to be tense morphology on main verbs is actually another inflectional category in PhAAE. In any case, in order to answer this question, we must first understand the syntax of *ain't* to understand how it might interact with verbal morphology in a way that is similar to or different from auxiliaries in other varieties of English. This is the undertaking of Chapter 4.

### **3.4 Conclusions**

This chapter looked at the use of *ain't*, primarily in past tense contexts, among African American speakers in the UMLC corpus. Based on this data, this chapter provides evidence of change over time toward increased use of *ain't* in past tense contexts in the Philadelphia speech community. A generalized linear model finds that the use of *ain't* is conditioned by social, linguistic, and stylistic factors. The strongest stylistic factor is the co-occurrence of *ain't* with negative concord, another vernacular variant. An analysis of social conditioning factors demonstrates that the use of *ain't* is influenced by speaker age,

region of origin, and years of schooling. Combined, these results confirm the status of *ain't* as a vernacular variant associated with casual speech, and they also lend support to the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* in the past tense is a 20<sup>th</sup> century innovation in the tense/aspect system of African American English in urban northern cities like Philadelphia. Linguistic conditioning sheds light on the linguistic origins on this change as well. Contrary to the hypotheses put forward by Fasold and Wolfram (1970) and Rickford (1980), the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts is most likely not the result of the initial /d/-deletion of *didn't* due to consonant cluster reduction when *didn't* is preceded by a consonant. Because of the high occurrence of *ain't* preceded by subject pronouns (and thus vowels), the phonetic environment necessary to prompt such a deletion is not robust enough in natural speech to provide the input for reanalysis. Instead, the investigation of verbal stativity provides support for the hypothesis that *ain't* in past tense contexts resulted from the reanalysis of *ain't* in present perfect contexts where *ain't* was used with a dynamic main verb. Or, at the very least, this finding underscores the relationship between dynamicity and perfectivity in absence of strong tense/aspect cues from *ain't* itself.

This chapter thus provided a variationist study of production data from a corpus of PhAAE, which shed light on the grammatical origins of the use of *ain't* in the past tense and the profile of the speakers pushing forward this change at the expense of *didn't*. Chapter 4 now turns toward the consequences this change may have had on other areas of the PhAAE grammar. For example, now that *ain't* can be widely used in past tense contexts in addition to present tense ones, has this changed its syntactic nature such that it is now just a marker of negation? How do we explain the prevalence of *ain't played*

sentences where main verbs appear to have past tense marking? Chapter 4 will primarily use corpus data to address this line of inquiry.

## CHAPTER 4: Syntax of *ain't*

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presented the idea that *ain't* in AAE may be a marker of negation that is neutral with regard to tense/aspect due to its use in past tense sentences (DeBose 1994). However, other work strongly suggests that *ain't* is better classified as an auxiliary, albeit a negative or negated one, rather than strictly as negation (Weldon 1994, Harris 2010, Smith 2015). This chapter examines both the hypothesis that *ain't* is a marker of negation and that *ain't* is a negated auxiliary (like *isn't* or *haven't*) by examining its distribution in PhAAE using the UMLC corpus. The findings of this corpus study build on Weldon 1994, which argues that *ain't* is an auxiliary that is semantically specified for tense and negation as a variant of the auxiliaries *HAVE*, *BE*, and *DO*. This dissertation will argue that the syntactic distribution of *ain't* is more similar to a negated auxiliary than to simple negation. In response, it offers some possibilities for a semantic specification that allows *ain't* to possess this dual role and expand into further grammatical contexts in AAE.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, Section 4.2 argues against an analysis of *ain't* as strictly negation in PhAAE by comparing it to the English negative markers *n't* and *not*, and to the negative marker *eh* in Trinidadian Creole English. Next, in Section 4.3, several syntactic tests are employed to show that *ain't* behaves like negated versions of the auxiliaries *BE*, *HAVE*, and *DO* in PhAAE. Specifically, *ain't* can invert with

subjects in *Yes-No* questions, *Wh*-questions, and Negative Auxiliary Inversion Constructions (NAIs), showing that it can move from T to C in the phrase structure. Section 4.4 ties up this analysis and offers a few possibilities for the grammatical structure that would allow *ain't* to serve as both an auxiliary and negation. Lastly, Section 4.5 will conclude the chapter.

As this chapter deals with syntactic data, a number of example sentences from the UMLC corpus and linguistic literature as well as constructed sentences will be presented. Example sentences from the UMLC corpus will be labeled according to their speaker's pseudonym. Corpus examples were used to illustrate each phenomenon to the extent that they were available. Examples from the literature will be cited with the appropriate source. These sentences will be complemented by constructed examples, which will bear neither of the aforementioned distinctive markings.<sup>50</sup> It should be understood that judgments from native speakers of PhAAE would be required in order to confirm that constructed examples are indeed grammatical in the variety, though they may be grammatical in other varieties of AAE.

## 4.2 Against *ain't* as Negation

This section examines the hypothesis that *ain't* is a form of tense/aspect-neutral negation (DeBose 1994). Accordingly, several hypotheses for the type of negation that *ain't* might be are explored. First, Subsection 4.2.1 demonstrates that *ain't* is incapable of negating

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<sup>50</sup> Constructed example will be based on my native competence in MAE and varieties of both AAE and general/regional American English spoken in urban and rural areas of "downstate" New York. It should be noted that, despite native competence with regard to some features of AAE, I would be classified as a speaker with extensive contact with the White community.

all types of predicates like the English negators *n't* and *not*. Furthermore, Subsection 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 show that *ain't* is not in SpecNegP (like *not*) or in Neg (like *n't*). The following subsection (4.3.4) compares *ain't* to *eh* in Trinidadian Creole English and suggests that they have very different distributions. Finally, Subsection 4.2.5 concludes the section by asserting that *ain't* does not share the distribution of a purely negative item, and is instead an auxiliary.

#### 4.2.1 *Ain't* as a Marker of Negation

In this subsection, the hypothesis that *ain't* is a general strategy of negation will be examined. DeBose's proposal that *ain't* is a "marker of negation" hinges on *ain't* being able to negate predicates across a wide range of tense/aspect contexts (1994:129). DeBose proposes that the ability of *ain't* to occur in sentences that have both present and past meaning makes it tense/aspect-neutral. Varieties of English have two tense/aspect-neutral markers of negation which can negate all predicates in declarative sentences, barring some idiosyncratic lexical restrictions: *not* and *n't*.<sup>51</sup> The following data show that, although *ain't* has negative semantics, it cannot be used across a wide range of predicational environments like other markers of negation in English.

The English markers of negation *not* and *n't* are used across a wide range of tense/aspect contexts, shown in Examples (1) and (2) for MAE.

- |     |   |             |
|-----|---|-------------|
| (1) | a. We're/are <b>not</b> watching it now.            | [PRES]      |
|     | b. He has <b>not</b> watched it yet.                | [PRES PERF] |
|     | c. They did <b>not</b> watch it yesterday.          | [PAST]      |
|     | c. I will <b>not</b> watch it for another few days. | [FUTURE]    |

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<sup>51</sup> For example, *may* does not typically occur with *n't* negation (*\*mayn't*) and *have* does not occur with *not* negation in most varieties of American English (*\*I've not*).

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| (2) a. We aren't watching it now.         | [PRES]      |
| b. He hasn't watched it yet.              | [PRES PERF] |
| c. They didn't watch it yesterday.        | [PAST]      |
| d. I won't watch it for another few days. | [FUTURE]    |

As discussed in Chapter 2, the sentences where full auxiliaries are used with *not* in the corpus are typically characteristic of emphatic or contrastive speech (3). Sentences containing an auxiliary and *n't*-contraction (*isn't*, *aren't*) as in (4) or those containing a contracted auxiliary and *not* (5) are used most commonly in the UMLC corpus.

- (3) **Tariq:** In church, man. It frightened me. From, from ever since I can remember.  
**WH:** That happen now, in the mosque?  
**Tariq:** Do it happen in the masjid?  
**WH:** Yeah, the masjid?  
**Tariq:** No, the masjid **is not** a place that would harbor, uh, certain, uh, mysteries.

- (4) There **isn't** as much overt racism, and even the, uh, covert racism **isn't** as heavy.  
 (Germaine)

- (5) **It's not** really a story so much as a group of White guys chased us. (Joey)

As was shown in Chapter 2, *ain't* negates sentences in a variety of present, past, and future tense contexts in the corpus. Present tense contexts include simple present sentences containing predicate *got* as well as present progressive and present perfect sentences (6a-c). Past tense contexts include the simple past (6d). Not shown here is the use of *ain't* in periphrastic future contexts of *gon(na)*.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| (6) a. I <b>ain't</b> even got time for that. I'll talk to you later someday.  | (Camille) |
| "I don't even got time for that."  |           |
| b. This equipment <b>ain't</b> making me no money.                             | (Sean)    |
| "This equipment isn't making me any money."                                    |           |
| c. I <b>ain't</b> never told nobody since I lost it. I just kept it to myself. | (Donette) |
| "I haven't ever told anybody since I lost it."                                 |           |
| d. I <b>ain't</b> say I forgot it. I said I <b>didn't</b> think right.         | (Howard)  |
| "I didn't say I forgot it."  |           |

In (6), *ain't* does not inflect for tense or aspect between the different tense/aspect meanings. This fact lends support to the hypothesis that *ain't* is tense/aspect-neutral. Despite this, the distribution of *ain't* across the entirety of tense/aspect contexts available in AAE is much more restricted than the distribution of *not* and *n't*. These restrictions are reported in the literature (Weldon 1994; Howe 2005) and no examples of *ain't* in these restricted contexts are not found within the UMLC corpus. For example, the corpus does not contain tokens where *ain't* negates past tense sentences containing auxiliary or copula *BE* (7). Likewise, though *ain't* can negate some aspect markers in AAE, there are no examples where it negates sentences containing habitual *be* (8).<sup>52</sup> *Ain't* is also not found to negate modals like *should* (9). In each example, sentences (b) and (c) show that *n't* and *not* can be used in all of these contexts. Bear in mind that when *not* is used in these contexts, it is for emphasis. An example with *not* in habitual *be* contexts could not be found in the corpus though such a sentence would be grammatical. Asterisks for sentence (d) in each example indicate that the use of *ain't* is ungrammatical in this context.

- (7) a. I didn't tell her whose it **was** neither, you know? (Dee)  
 b. I told her it **wasn't** mine. (Dee)  
 c. That **was not** the worst thing ever happened to me. (Malika)  
 d. \*I told her it **ain't** mine.  
 Intended: "I told her it wasn't mine."
- (8) a. Half the time we **be** at the car waiting on him. (Vanessa)  
 "Half the time we're usually at the car waiting on him."  
 b. I **don't be** trying to play that shit. (Greg)  
 "I don't usually try to play that nonsense."  
 c. I **do not be** trying to play that shit.  
 "I do not usually try to play that nonsense."  
 d. \*I **ain't be** trying to play that shit.  
 Intended: "I don't usually try to play that nonsense."

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<sup>52</sup>*Ain't* may not be able to negate sentences containing habitual *be* (which are typically negated by *don't*) because use of *ain't* is not used extensively in contexts of present tense *do* in the UMLC. However, see 4.4.



- (9) a. You **might** know Pearson... that's my mother's first husband. (Mr. Cairo)  
 b. And he **shouldn't** take it out on me. (Tommy)  
 c. I **could not** erase my understanding, and that's how I am today. (Malika)  
 c. \*I **could ain't** erase my understanding.  
 Intended: "I couldn't erase my understanding."

Examples (7) to (9) clearly demonstrate that the distribution of *ain't* is much further restricted than that of *not* and *n't*. Additionally, *ain't* is restricted to sentential negation whereas *not* can also be used in constituent negation in AAE, though there are no corpus examples of this use.<sup>53</sup> In (10), *not* negates the VP constituent *go to the party*. The negative tag question *couldn't she?* shows that the modal *could* in the matrix clause is not negated by the *not* in the matrix clause.

- (10) a. Cookie could [**not** go to the party,] couldn't she?  
 b. \*Cookie could [**ain't** go to the party,] couldn't she?  
 "Cookie could avoid going to the party, couldn't she?"

Example (10) provides another example of the restricted distribution of *ain't* when compared to other English markers of negation. This shows that *ain't* does not behave as expected for a tense/aspect-neutral marker of negation in a variety of English; it has a more restricted distribution.

The above data demonstrate clear differences in the range of distribution of *ain't* across tense/aspect contexts in AAE, compared to that of *n't* and *not*. It is possible that the restricted distribution of *ain't* is due to its more recent diachronic development in English. Thus, the hypothesis that *ain't* is a marker of negation will be further tested in

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<sup>53</sup> *Don't* can also serve as constituent negation in some Southern varieties of AAE (Roberts-Mack 2016). While this use of *don't* for constituent negation is acceptable in sentences with modal predicates, it is unclear if it can be used with non-modals. There is no data to confirm or deny whether this use of *don't* is possible in the UMLC Corpus. The example in (4) below is a constructed example.

- (4) Cookie could [**don't** go to the party,] couldn't she?  
 "Cookie could avoid going to the party, couldn't she?"

the following subsections. Specifically, these subsections will examine whether *ain't* occurs in either the specifier of a Negation Phrase (like *not*) or as the head of a Negation Phrase (like *n't*).

But first, a note on the hypothesis that *ain't* is a negative adverb similar to *never*: this hypothesis can be ruled out based on two pieces of evidence. First, *ain't* cannot adjoin to a TP constituent for negation as *never* does.

- (11) a. Cookie **never** didn't come to the meeting.  
Cookie [TP [AdvP never] [TP didn't [VP come to the meeting]]].  
b. \*Cookie **ain't** didn't come to the meeting.  
[TP [AdvP ain't] [TP didn't [VP come to the meeting]]].  
Lit.: "There was never a time when Cookie didn't come to the meeting."

Second, *ain't* is not deleted in VP-ellipsis, while adverbs like *never* and *hardly* can be (12).

- (12) a. Hakeem **ain't** auditioning singers and Jamal **ain't** neither.  
b. \*Hakeem **never/hardly** auditions singers and Jamal **never/hardly** neither.  
c. \*Hakeem **ain't** auditioning singers and Jamal **hardly/never** neither.  
d. Hakeem **never** auditions singers and Jamal **don't** neither.

The fact that *ain't* cannot be deleted in VP-ellipsis suggests that *ain't* is a functional head in the spine of the tree, not an adjoined element (like an adverb), which does not license VP-ellipsis (Roberts-Mack 2016).

#### 4.2.2 *Ain't* as SpecNegP

The English marker of negation *not* is in SpecNegP (Pollock 1989). The following data demonstrate that *ain't* can do things that an item in SpecNegP cannot (e.g., subject-verb inversion), and that the distributions of *ain't* and *not* do not overlap in AAE: specifically,

*ain't* cannot replace *not* in *to*-infinitives or when *not* negates auxiliaries. This data supports the conclusion that *ain't* does not occur in SpecNegP like *not*.

*Ain't* inverts with subject NPs in *yes-no* questions (13), *wh*-questions (13) and Negative Auxiliary Inversion [NAI] constructions (13). Because the copula in AAE is not always pronounced, *not* does appear to be able to occur in some of these environments of *ain't*, specifically in declaratives (14). However, *not* cannot replace *ain't* in *yes-no* or *wh*-questions (14) or NAI constructions (14).

- (13) a. You **ain't** no square from Delaware. (Arnie)  
 "You aren't a square from Delaware."  
 b. **Ain't** he too short? (Valerie)  
 "Isn't he too short?"  
 c. Who **ain't** been mistreated? (Ahmad)  
 "Who hasn't been mistreated?"  
 d. **Ain't** nobody gon beat me up. (Andrew)  
 "Isn't nobody going to beat me up."  
 [=Absolutely no person is going to beat me up.]
- (14) a. You **not** no square from Delaware.  
 "You aren't a square from Delaware."  
 b. \***Not** he too short?  
 "Isn't he too short?"  
 c. \*Who **not** been mistreated?  
 "Who hasn't been mistreated?"  
 d. \***Not** nobody gon beat me up.  
 "Isn't nobody going to beat me up."  
 [=Absolutely no person is going to beat me up.]

The fact that *not* cannot invert with subjects in *yes-no* questions and NAI shows that items in SpecNegP do not share the same distribution as *ain't*, which can invert in these contexts. Therefore, *ain't* must not be in SpecNegP. Similarly, *ain't* cannot occur in all of the environments that *not* can. Data in 4.2.1 above showed that *ain't* cannot occur with all predicates, nor can it be used as constituent negation. Examples (15) and (16) below

show that *ain't* also cannot be used in *to*-infinitives either as sentential or constituent negation.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, *ain't* cannot co-occur with auxiliaries (17).

- (15) a. Mimi decided to **not** go to the meeting.  
b. \*Mimi decided to **ain't** go to the meeting.
- (16) a. Mimi decided **not** to go to the meeting.  
b. \*Mimi decided **ain't** to go to the meeting.
- (17) a. Hakeem's **not** home/auditioning singers.  
b. \*Hakeem's **ain't** home/auditioning singers.  
"Hakeem isn't home/auditioning singers."

The presence of the auxiliary in (17) is important in establishing that *ain't* cannot replace *not*. As shown above, the copula may not always be pronounced in AAE. When sentences with unpronounced copulas are negated, they only contain *not*, as shown in (18) below. Sentences like that in (18) superficially give the appearance that *ain't* replaces *not*. However, the presence of the auxiliary in (18) and (18) shows that *ain't* is a substitute for both the auxiliary and *not* combined. *Ain't* cannot simply replace *not* on its own.

- (18) a. If you sign a contract, you **not** free. (Andrew)  
b. If you sign a contract, you **ain't** free.  
c. If you sign a contract, you're **not** free.  
d. \*If you sign a contract, you're **ain't** free.

Thus, these examples provide further evidence that the distributions of *ain't* and *not* do not overlap in PhAAE. Added to the fact that *not* cannot invert with subjects like *ain't* can, these data show that *ain't* is not a marker of negation like *not* and, consequently, it does not occupy SpecNegP.

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<sup>54</sup> There is no evidence from the UMLC corpus that *don't* can also be used in these environments.



CP in questions and NAIs.<sup>55</sup> The following figure illustrates the syntactic structure of the *yes-no* question (21) constructed from (21).

- (21) a. He **hasn't** seen Greg. (Betty)  
 b. **Hasn't** he seen Greg?

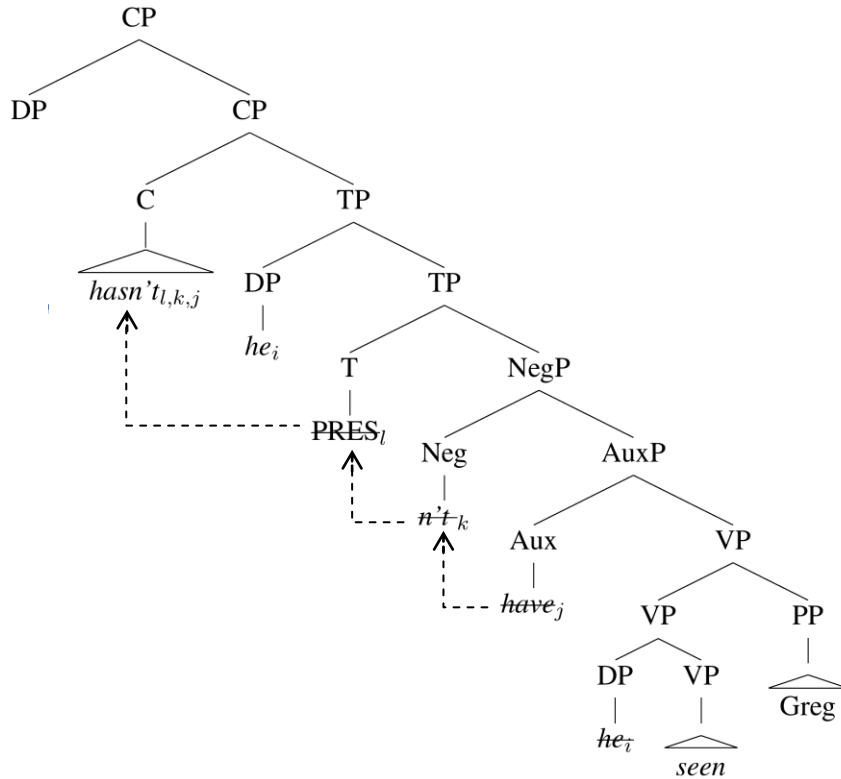


Figure 22: Head movement of negated auxiliaries in *yes-no* questions (e.g., *Hasn't he seen Greg?*).

<sup>55</sup> This dissertation assumes the structure for Negative Auxiliary Inversion constructions elaborated on in Green 2014. According to Green, the initial negative auxiliary (*don't*) is in C, specifically in Focus, thus providing an absolute or strong domain interpretation of the sentence.

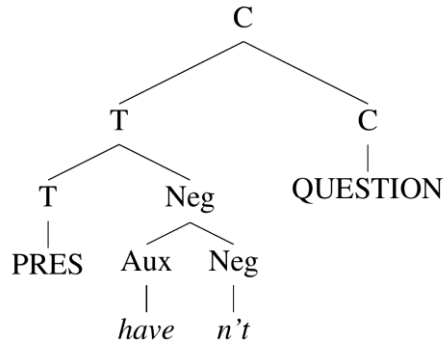


Figure 23: Internal structure of *hasn't* in the question *Hasn't he seen Greg?* following head movement.

Chapter 2 traced the historic development of *ain't* from complex heads like that shown in Figure 22 and Figure 23 that combine the heads Aux and Neg. It could therefore be the case that *ain't* is a complex head also combining Aux-Neg like *hasn't*, given that *ain't* replaces both negation and an auxiliary. On the other hand, because *ain't* is a free morpheme, it could also be the case that *ain't* is merged directly in Neg similar to *n't*. However, if that were the case, *ain't* would be able to co-occur with auxiliaries, like *n't* does in (21). The sentences in (17) from 4.2.2 above showed that *ain't* cannot co-occur with auxiliaries. The constructed examples in (22) provide additional evidence. When *ain't* co-occurs with an auxiliary, the resulting sentence is ungrammatical.

- (22) a. \*He's **ain't** seen Greg.  
       “He hasn't seen Greg.”  
       b. \*We've **ain't** seen Greg.  
       “We haven't seen Greg.”

The sentences in example (23) below reaffirm that *ain't* easily appears in environments where it replaces both an auxiliary and *n't*-negation.

- (23) a. He **hasn't** seen Greg. (Betty)  
       b. **Hasn't** he seen Greg?  
       c. **Ain't** he seen Greg?  
       d. I **ain't** seen you in a long time. (Gwen)

The fact that *ain't* replaces both an auxiliary and *n't*-negation is a crucial piece of evidence in establishing that *ain't* combines both Neg and Aux in a complex head.

In closing, this subsection provides evidence that *ain't* shares a distribution with *n't* only when *n't* combines with an auxiliary to form a complex head Aux-Neg. Though *ain't* contains Neg, it is doing more in the syntax of AAE than a tense/aspect-neutral marker of negation would.

#### 4.2.4 *Ain't* as *Eh*

Part of DeBose's (1994) argument that *ain't* is a tense/aspect-neutral negator in AAE comes from comparison with the Trinidadian Creole English (TCE) tense/aspect-neutral negator *eh*, which is also derived from English *ain't*. The TCE marker of negation *eh* has the forms [ε], [ẽ], [εn], [εnt], and occasionally even [e:int], which could be an importation from AAE (Winford 1983). In TCE, *eh* varies with Standard English forms by social and stylistic context in the following grammatical environments. Areas shaded in light gray in Table 14 illustrate contexts where *eh* can be used.

	<b>Predicate</b>	<b>Present Tense</b>	<b>Past Tense</b>
I.	NP, AdvP, AdjP, PP	<i>eh ~ not</i>	<i>wasn(t)</i>
II.	V-ing	<i>eh ~ not</i>	<i>wasn(t)</i>
III.	Stative V	<i>eh ~ doh</i> <sup>56</sup>	<i>di(d)n(t)</i>
IV.	Non-stative V	<i>eh ~ di(d)n(t)</i>	<i>eh ~ di(d)n('t)</i>
V.	Habitual (stative & non-stative)	<i>doh</i>	<i>eh ~ di(d)n('t) + use/wasn to</i>

Table 14: Use of *eh* for negation in Trinidadian Creole English, based on Table 2 in Winford 1983:209.

At first glance it appears that TCE *eh* has the same distribution as *ain't* in PhAAE. For example, *eh* is used in the present tense for both copular (I) and present progressive

<sup>56</sup> Standard English forms like *doesn't* and *don't* appear very rarely (Winford 1983:208).



sentences (II) and cannot be used in past tense contexts of *BE* as in PhAAE.<sup>57</sup> Most notably, *eh* is used to express the simple past tense (IV), but only for dynamic verbs. In TCE, stative verbs generally have a present interpretation (24), while dynamic verbs generally have a simple past interpretation (24), as DeBose predicts for AAE.<sup>58</sup>

- (24) a. The girl **eh know**.  
“The girl doesn’t know.”  
b. The girl **eh lie**.  
“The girl didn’t lie.”

Additionally, (24) shows that *eh* is used in an environment where *ain’t* is not widely used in the UMLC corpus: the simple present tense with main verbs other than *got*. Winford hypothesizes that forms of negation in TCE, including *didn’t* and *don’t*, are monomorphemic because, crucially, there is little evidence that *DO*-support is productive in question formation and forms like *don’t/do not* are extremely rare, even in formal speech styles. According to Winford, forms like *don’t* are calques of Standard English that map onto grammatical slots specified by a Creole grammar. *DO*-support appears to be productive in PhAAE, even for vernacular speakers, as shown by (25).

- (25) **Do** it happen in the masjid? (Tariq)

An additional difference between *eh* and *ain’t* is its position relative to the aspectual marker pre-verbal *done*. In TCE, *eh* can appear either before or after *done*. As will be shown in 4.3.2, *ain’t* can only appear before *done* in AAE (Green 2002). The examples in (26) are from Winford 1983: 204.

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<sup>57</sup> *Eh* can also be used in the periphrastic future (Winford 1983:204).

<sup>58</sup> Though Winford does find two instances of *eh* in use with stative verbs producing a simple past reading (e.g., *He was behind me, but all this time I eh know he there* (1983:210, footnote 2). Additionally, when stative verbs are embedded under *if* and *when*, they have a completive meaning, and Winford considers them to be dynamic in these contexts.

- (26) a. I **eh done** eat it yet.  
“I haven’t eaten it yet.”  
b. You **done eh** know.  
Roughly: “It’s obvious you don’t know.”

Further judgment data would be helpful in determining whether *eh* in TCE can invert in questions like *ain’t* or whether it is simply negation like *not* and *n’t*.<sup>59</sup> For the time being, it seems that *eh* and *ain’t* only partially overlap in distribution.

#### 4.2.5 Summary

This section has shown that *ain’t* is not strictly a marker of negation. First, the distribution of *ain’t* was shown to be more restricted than other markers of negation in English (*not*, *n’t*) because *ain’t* cannot negate all predicates. Second, it was shown that items in SpecNegP cannot invert with sentence subjects in questions and NAI constructions. Since *ain’t* can invert in these contexts, it cannot be in SpecNegP. Finally, it was shown that *n’t* can invert in questions and NAIs like *ain’t*, but that it cannot do so without an auxiliary. This last piece of evidence bolsters the hypothesis that *ain’t* is more than just negation; it combines both an auxiliary and negation. The following section will explore the hypothesis that *ain’t* is a negated auxiliary.

### 4.3 *Ain’t* as an Auxiliary

This section examines the hypothesis that *ain’t* is partly an auxiliary. This proposal is supported by Weldon (1994), Harris (2010), and Smith (2015) and was outlined in Chapter 2. As an auxiliary that also expresses negation, *ain’t* is most likely a complex

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<sup>59</sup> Weldon reports that *eh* is never used in tag constructions (1994:394, footnote 22, based on Winford p.c.).

head (Aux-Neg) like other negated auxiliaries in English. This dissertation treats copular *BE* as similar to auxiliary *BE* following Smith 2015 and (T. Payne 2010).<sup>60</sup> This section is divided into three subsections. First, subsection 4.3.1 demonstrates that *ain't* is able to pass several tests of English auxiliary-hood, while Subsection 4.3.2 shows that *ain't* may occupy T and move to C in PhAAE phrase structure, like other English auxiliaries. Subsection 4.3.3 summarizes and concludes this section.

#### 4.3.1 Tests of Auxiliary-hood

This subsection argues that *ain't* is a complex head combining Aux and Neg (similar to other negated auxiliaries like *isn't* and *hasn't*). First, it will be shown that English auxiliaries are in T in declarative clauses and C in questions and NAIs. Then, *ain't* will be subjected to three tests of auxiliary-hood: Subject-Verb Inversion, Tag Questions, and VP-Ellipsis (Pullum and Wilson 1977). These tests will show that *ain't* patterns like other negated auxiliaries in occupying a position above VP in T. To further demonstrate its position above VP, it will be shown that *ain't* does not require *DO*-support and can co-occur with VP constituent negation like negated auxiliaries. All examples will compare *ain't* to negated auxiliaries.

In English, there is a strict syntactic hierarchy of auxiliaries originating in various Auxiliary Phrases between TP and VP.

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<sup>60</sup> Copula *BE* follows “NICE” properties like auxiliary *BE*: Negation (w/ *not*), Inversion (w/ subjects), Contraction (w/ subjects and *n't*), and Ellipsis.

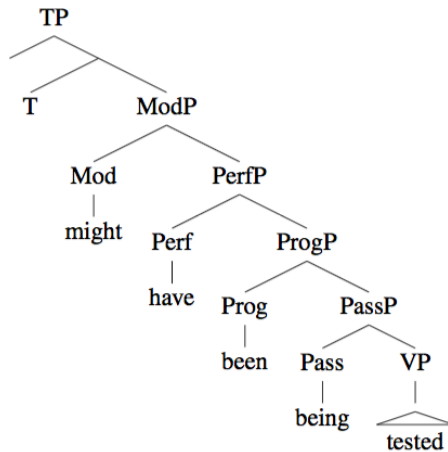


Figure 24: Hierarchy of Auxiliary Phrases in varieties of English.

In varieties of English, the highest auxiliary in the AuxP hierarchy moves to T. The dummy auxiliary *DO* does not occur in this hierarchy and is instead merged in T. An auxiliary's placement in T is evident because it is finite, showing tense and agreement with the subject, while the following auxiliaries remain non-finite.<sup>61</sup> Example (27) includes a modal, *should*, which does not show agreement. However, in (27) the highest auxiliary in the hierarchy is finite, showing past tense and agreeing with the third-person-singular subject Andre.

- (27)
- a. Andre **shouldn't** have been being tested (by Lucious).
  - b. Andre **hadn't** been being tested (by Lucious).
  - c. Andre **wasn't** being tested (by Lucious).
  - d. Andre **wasn't** tested (by Lucious).

The sentences in (28) show that only the highest auxiliary in the hierarchy is finite and moves to T, while example (28) shows that the highest auxiliary must agree with the subject.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Its placement is also evidenced through its ability to move to C, which will be discussed later.

<sup>62</sup> This example assumes a variety of English that does not have leveling to *weren't* in past tense contexts of auxiliary *BE*. PhAAE does not appear to be such a variety.

- (28) a. \*Andre **hadn't** was being tested (by Lucious).  
 b. \*Andre **wasn't** was tested (by Lucious).  
 c. \*Andre **weren't** tested (by Lucious).

This dissertation assumes this same basic phrase structure with regard to auxiliaries for PhAAE. The sentences in (29) provide evidence of this hierarchy. Both (29) and (29) involve the phonetic reduction or deletion of auxiliary *HAVE*.

- (29) a. You **should'a went** there. (David)  
 b. I  $\emptyset$  **been working** two jobs. (Dee)  
 c. One **was given** to her. (Donette)

However, *ain't* may not occur in any non-finite position, even when it stands in for auxiliary *BE* (30). It must be the highest negated auxiliary in the hierarchy, despite the fact that it does not inflect for tense or agreement with the subject, as discussed in Chapter 2. The sentences in (30) are ungrammatical because there is an auxiliary higher than *ain't* in the sentence.

- (30) a. It **ain't been done** to me. (Janet)  
 b. You **ain't been asking**. (Trey)  
 c. \*It's **ain't done** to me.  
 d. \*You've **ain't asking**.

Negation obviously plays a role in prohibiting *ain't* from occurring lower than at least the highest AuxP (which moves to T). In a sentence with sentential negation, only the highest Aux moves to Neg. Since *ain't* contains *n't*, it must at some point be the highest Aux. Overall, this data shows that *ain't* occurs in the finite position of T like other negated auxiliaries.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This pattern is very similar for the dummy auxiliary *DO*. Although the copula and auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE* can occur in multiple positions in the Aux hierarch (I haven't **been** filing the documents, I wasn't **having** the documents filed), auxiliary *DO* is only ever merged in the highest position. In varieties of English it is generally agreed that *DO* is merged directly in T.

Further evidence that *ain't* is an auxiliary and therefore in T in declarative clauses comes from the fact that *ain't* adheres to Pullum and Wilson's (1977) criteria for auxiliary-hood in English. Three criteria will be discussed here: Subject-Verb Inversion, Tag Questions, and VP-Ellipsis.<sup>64</sup> In questions and Negative Auxiliary Inversion (NAI) constructions, auxiliaries invert with sentence subjects. Syntactically, this inversion is known as T-to-C movement (Refer to Figure 22 in 4.2.3). Crucially, only items that have been in T can move to C. As shown earlier, auxiliaries in varieties of English invert with subjects in *yes-no* questions (31), *wh*-questions (31), and NAI constructions (31).

- (31) a. Hakeem **isn't** auditioning singers.  
 b. **Isn't** Hakeem auditioning singers?  
 c. Why **isn't** Hakeem auditioning singers?  
 d. **Isn't** nobody auditioning singers today.

English auxiliaries also appear in tag questions (32) and cannot be elided in VP-ellipsis (33). Both of these facts show that the auxiliary is in the position of a functional head, most likely T, above the VP. The auxiliary that appears in a tag question following a matrix clause is a copy of the matrix auxiliary but has the opposite polarity.

- (32) a. Hakeem **isn't** auditioning singers, **is** he?  
 b. Hakeem **is** auditioning singers, **isn't** he?
- (33) a. He **isn't auditioning singers** and Jamal **isn't auditioning singers** either.  
 b. He **isn't auditioning singers** and Jamal **isn't...** either.  
 c. \*He **isn't auditioning** singers and Jamal... auditioning singers either.  
 d. \*He **isn't auditioning** singers and Jamal... either.

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<sup>64</sup> Pullum & Wilson (1977) outline seven criteria for distinguishing auxiliaries from main verbs. Four of those strategies are not discussed in this dissertation. They include, the ability of auxiliaries to contract with the negative clitic affix *n't* and the ability of auxiliaries to reduce in form for contraction with subject NPs. *Ain't* does not pass these tests because it already includes a reduced auxiliary form and *n't* due to its origins. Pullum & Wilson also include the relationship between auxiliaries and quantifier *all* and adverbs like *hardly*, both of which *ain't* passes.

PhAAE has auxiliary inversion in *yes-no* and *wh*-questions as well as in NAIs (34).<sup>65</sup> It also has auxiliaries in tag question and ellipsis (35).

- (34) a. **Isn't this** something? (Malika)  
 b. Who **do I** think is the most happening person? (Camille)  
 c. **Didn't nobody** like him. (Sean)
- (35) a. You did too, **didn't you**? (WH to Tariq)  
 b. That's North Carolina, **isn't it**? (Nancy)  
 c. Andrew **got** more heart... or whatever than I **do**. (Donette)

Like these auxiliaries, *ain't* can invert in questions and NAI constructions (36).

- (36) a. **Ain't** he too short? (Valerie)  
 "Isn't he too short?"  
 b. Who **ain't** been mistreated? (Ahmad)  
 "Who hasn't been mistreated?"  
 c. **Ain't** nobody gon beat me up. (Andrew)  
 "Isn't nobody going to beat me up."  
 [=Absolutely no person is going to beat me up.]

There are few corpus examples where *ain't* appears in a tag question as an item of opposite polarity to a positive auxiliary in the matrix clause. However, there are examples of affirmative tag questions to matrix clauses containing *ain't* **Error! Reference source not found.**

- (37) They **ain't** succeed, did they? (Howard)

Weldon (1994) and Green (2002) both give examples of *ain't* used in tag questions, shown in (38). One example is found in the UMLC corpus as well (38). Still, the elicitation of a wide range of sentences with *ain't* tags would be necessary to conclude that *ain't* can be used in tag questions more generally in PhAAE.

- (38) a. That stuff is still in the refrigerator, **ain't it**? (Weldon 1994:378, ex. 13)

<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that inversion is not obligatory in varieties of AAE. Two other common strategies of question formation are *wh*-movement without subject-auxiliary inversion (e.g., *Where Janet('s) been?*) or using a declarative with question intonation (*Janet('s) been at work?*).

- b. Bruce eating, **ain't** he? (Green 2002: 43, ex. 25a)  
 c. You in the hole, **ain't** you? (UMLC: Trey)

As for VP-ellipsis, there are no corpus examples. Labov et al. (1968) provides the following example, demonstrating that *ain't* is a functional head, most likely an Aux. Again, elicitation methods would be needed to determine whether similar sentences are available to speakers of PhAAE.

- (39) Well, he **didn't** do nothin' much, and I **ain't** neither.  
 "Well, he didn't do much, and I didn't either."  
 (Labov et al. 1968:255, ex. 6)

Despite the lack of data in some cases, the data in (36) - (38) make a strong case that *ain't* is in a functional head above VP like other auxiliaries. Because *ain't* is able to move to C in inversion contexts, it must at some point be in T. The fact that *ain't* itself can move from T-to-C also explains why it does not require *DO* support in question and NAI formation. This is because *DO* is merged in T when there is no auxiliary through which T can be expressed (Pullum and Wilson 1977). *DO* and *ain't* cannot co-occur as the following ungrammatical sentences in (40) illustrate.

- (40) a. \***Do(n't) ain't** he too short? (Valerie)  
 "Isn't he too short?"  
 b. \***Who do(n't) ain't** been mistreated? (Ahmad)  
 "Who hasn't been mistreated?"  
 c. \***(Do)n't ain't** nobody gon beat me up. (Andrew)  
 "Isn't nobody going to beat me up."  
 [=Absolutely no person is going to beat me up.]

Lastly, the fact that *ain't* can co-occur with VP constituent negation demonstrates that it is in a position higher than VP, which has up to this point been established as T. The sentence in (41) provides the tag question *is she?* to demonstrate that *ain't* provides



sentential negation. The sentence is not negated by *not*, which provides constituent negation to the VP *gonna do anything*.

- (41) a. The woman **ain't not** gonna do anything. (Trey)  
"The woman isn't [not going to do anything]."  
b. The woman **ain't not** gonna do anything, **is** she?

In conclusion, this subsection has shown that *ain't* passes several tests of auxiliary-hood for English auxiliary verbs. Taken together, the data presented in this subsection supports the claim that *ain't* is a negated auxiliary that occurs in T in declarative sentences like other negated auxiliaries. In the next subsection, co-occurrence data will be used to further confirm that *ain't* occurs in T.

#### 4.3.2 Co-occurrence Arguments

In this subsection, the hypothesis that *ain't* is a negated auxiliary that moves to T is further supported with evidence showing that *ain't* occurs above AspP in AAE and cannot occur when there is another element occupying T (*to*-infinitives, modals, and finite auxiliaries). Data showing that *ain't* also cannot occur when there is no T (constituent negation) is also re-presented. Added to previous evidence showing that *ain't* occurs in T and moves to C, this subsection further establishes the status of *ain't* as a combination of an auxiliary and negation rather than just a marker of negation.

AAE has several aspectual markers that do not exist in MAE. Among them are *done*, *BIN*, and *BIN done*. *BIN* is typically transcribed in upper case letters to convey that it is stressed. *Done* is sometimes transcribed with a schwa (*dən*) to convey that it is unstressed. According to Green (2002), *done* expresses perfect and completive aspect while *BIN* expresses the remote past, or the idea that a state or event started or occurred a

very long time ago and continues through the present. On the other hand, *BIN done* expresses an event that ended a long time ago, representing a combination of the semantic meanings of its two constituent aspect markers. There are examples of *BIN* and *done* from the corpus (42). *BIN done* is harder to find. There is one sentence from Donette that may be an example of *BIN done* in terms of meaning, except *BIN* is not stressed.

- (42) a. I don't want nothing that my friends **done** had. (Janet)  
 b. I've heard of it, but it **BIN** dead. (Patricia)

- (43) My counselor, I never see him. Every time I send for him, he come three or four days later. I **been done** forgot what I wanted to talk to him about. (Donette)

Green 1998 proposes that double aspect markers like *BIN done* are accommodated by two Aspect Phrases within AAE:<sup>66</sup>

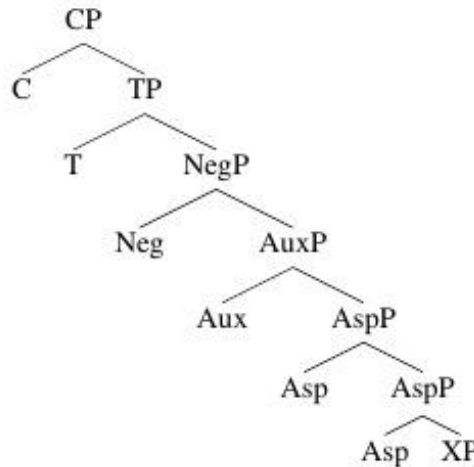


Figure 25: Phrase structure of AAE from Green 1998. XP represents either a VP or non-verbal predicate.

<sup>66</sup> AAE also has the double aspectual marker *be done* that may express habitual completive, future completive, or modal completive meaning (Green 2002) as in:

- (5) Gonna get jumped. I gotta leave these two guys alone. They **be done** tear my butt up! (Dee)

In AAE, aspect markers like *BIN*, *done*, and *BIN done* are distinguished from auxiliaries in their denotation of aspectual meaning, inability to invert with subjects, inability to carry negation, and the fact that they cannot be stranded in VP-ellipsis and VP-fronting (Green 1998).<sup>67</sup> These aspect markers can be negated by *ain't* (Green 2002).<sup>68</sup> *BIN* and *BIN done* can also be negated by way of auxiliary *HAVE*. Table 15 summarizes. There are no examples of negated aspect markers in the corpus.

Aspectual Meaning	Affirmative	Emphatic Affirmative	Negative
<b>Resultant State</b> “already”	<i>done ate</i>	? <i>HAVE done ate</i>	<i>Ain't done ate</i>
<b>Remote Past</b> (state, habit) “for a long time”	<i>BIN eating</i>	<i>HAVE BIN eating</i>	<i>Ain('t)/haven't BIN eating</i>
<b>Remote Past</b> (completion) “a long time ago”	<i>BIN ate</i>	<i>HAVE BIN ate</i>	<i>Ain('t)/haven't BIN ate</i>
<b>Remote Past Resultant State</b> “finished a long time ago”	<i>BIN done ate</i>	<i>HAVE BIN done ate</i>	<i>Ain('t)/haven't BIN done ate</i>

Table 15: Paradigm for AAE aspectual markers *done*, *BIN*, and *BIN done*, adapted from Green 2002:45-47.

It is unlikely that *ain't* can be pronounced after these aspectual markers (between AspP and VP) as in the sentences in (44). However, judgment data would be helpful in determining this definitively. Sentence (44) specifically contrasts with the data from Trinidadian Creole English *eh* (4.2.4, ex. 26b).

- (44) a. \*Andre **done ain't** ate.  
 b. \*Anika **BIN ain't** eating.  
 c. \*Hakeem **BIN ain't done** ate.  
 d. \*Hakeem **BIN done ain't** ate.

<sup>67</sup> For example, aspectual markers do not move to T. Instead, the auxiliary does, as the following examples from Green 2002 demonstrate.

- (6) a. **Do** they **be** running? (pg. 68, ex. 71a)  
 b. **Have** they **BIN** running? (pg. 68, ex. 71b)

<sup>68</sup> *Ain't* does not negate the aspect marker *be dən* as it does not negate the aspect marker of habituality, *be*.

Consequently, the data in (44) and Table 15 shows that *ain't* occupies a position above AspP. The fact that *BIN* and *BIN dən* can also be negated by auxiliary *HAVE + n't* highlights yet another area where the distribution of *ain't* overlaps with that of other negated auxiliaries in AAE. Again, speakers of PhAAE would need to accept such sentences as grammatical in order to conclude that *ain't* can negate the aspectual markers *done*, *BIN*, and *BIN done*.

In AAE, as in other varieties of English, there are a variety of items that are merged in T or move to T. We have already seen that this is the case for auxiliaries, which move from a lower Aux position to T (See 4.2.3). This is also the case for modals and *to* in *to*-infinitives. The following paragraphs will show that *ain't* cannot co-occur with any of these items. In other words, *ain't* cannot occur when there is something else in T.

Subsection 4.2.3 of the section on negation showed that *ain't* cannot co-occur with auxiliaries when it occurs either before or after the auxiliary (45).

- (45)
- a. \*He **ain't** 's seen Greg.  
"He hasn't seen Greg."
  - b. \*We **ain't** 've seen Greg.  
"We haven't seen Greg."
  - c. \*He's **ain't** seen Greg.  
"He hasn't seen Greg."
  - d. \*We've **ain't** seen Greg.  
"We haven't seen Greg."

The reason that *ain't* cannot co-occur with auxiliaries is because auxiliaries are in T in declarative clauses. Since *ain't* must also be in T, the two items cannot both occur. This also explains why *ain't* cannot co-occur with modals; modals occur in T.

- (46)
- a. You **can** go out when you wanna go out. (Valerie)
  - b. \*You **can ain't** go out when you wanna go out.

“You can’t go out when you wanna go out.”

Additionally, 4.2.3 showed that *ain’t* cannot negate *to*-infinitives, both in cases of sentential and constituent negation. Example (47) below shows sentential negation with *not*. (47) demonstrates that *ain’t* is not possible in this context when *to* is already in T. (47) shows that when *ain’t* is in T, *to* is not possible.

- (47) a. Mimi decided to **not** go to the meeting.  
b. \*Mimi decided to **ain’t** go to the meeting.  
c. \*Mimi decided **ain’t** to go to the meeting.

Finally, when there is no T available, *ain’t* cannot occur. This is the case when *not* is used for constituent negation as in (48). The sentences in (48) show that *ain’t* cannot be used in this same context.

- (48) a. Cookie **didn’t** [not go to the party,] **did** she?  
b. Cookie **ain’t** [not go to the party,] **did** she?  
c. \*Cookie didn’t [**ain’t** go to the party,] did she?  
d. \*Cookie could [**ain’t** go to the party,] couldn’t she?

Taken as a whole, this data clearly shows that *ain’t* cannot occur when T is not available, either because another item is in T or T does not exist.

To conclude, various data have been presented in this subsection to support the claim that *ain’t* is both an auxiliary and negation. Data was presented showing that *ain’t* occurs both above VP and above AspP in AAE and *ain’t* passes several tests of auxiliary-hood, the most crucial of which being its ability to invert with subjects in questions and NAIs. This fact alone provides evidence that *ain’t* occurs in T. Moreover, data was presented confirming the presence of *ain’t* in T, most notably that *ain’t* cannot occur when T is already occupied or otherwise not available. Some of the holes in the corpus data that would further support the argument made here can be obtained by eliciting

speaker judgment data from native speakers of PhAAE. This methodology and its advantages and disadvantages will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Although there is a wealth of evidence that *ain't* occurs in T, it is not yet known whether part of *ain't* is initially merged in a lower Aux position, like other auxiliaries before combining with Neg, or whether *ain't* is merged into T like *DO*. Section 4.4 will take up this discussion.

### 4.3.3 Summary

The data in this section by and large support the idea that *ain't* is partly an auxiliary. The syntactic distribution of *ain't* across PhAAE is more similar to that of a negated auxiliary than it is to that of a negative marker. Specifically, *ain't* is able to move from T-to-C, illustrating that it is in T like other auxiliaries. As an auxiliary that also expresses negation, *ain't* may be a complex head (Aux-Neg) like other negated auxiliaries in English. However, *ain't* differs from these auxiliaries in the fact that it is not separable into two morphemes: *\*ai* and *n't*. The next section will entertain some possibilities about what type of syntactic object *ain't* might be and whether or not it is merged in T or in a lower Auxiliary head like *isn't* and *hasn't* in varieties of English.

## 4.4 Thoughts on the Structure of *ain't* Sentences

The previous sections have lent support to the idea that *ain't* is a combination of an auxiliary and negation that occurs in T. This fact is intuitive: *ain't* expresses negative semantics and it behaves syntactically as an auxiliary would. However, if *ain't* contains

Aux, then part of it may be merged in a lower Aux position initially and move to T as is the case with other auxiliaries. This presents a problem because *ain't* is not separable into two distinct morphemes, \**ai* and *n't* as discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>69</sup> As a result, we may consider a claim like Déchaine's (1993) where *ain't* is merged directly in T. This section will therefore explore the possibility that part of *ain't* originates lower than T, as the head of an Auxiliary Phrase. As will be shown, relevant evidence that *ain't* may in fact partially originate as the head of Aux comes from verbal and non-verbal complements of *ain't*.

As has previously been discussed, *ain't* occurs in contexts of auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* in most varieties of English in which it occurs, including AAE. In these varieties, auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* are merged in Aux positions that are semantically specified and follow a strict, hierarchical order, as discussed in 4.3.1, with the highest auxiliary moving to T. This hierarchy is fixed and provides strong evidence that auxiliaries like *BE* and *HAVE* in varieties of English first occur in Aux positions lower than T. For example, if there is a modal auxiliary in the sentence, all following auxiliaries are non-finite (49).

- |      |  |           |
|------|--|-----------|
| (49) | a. It <b>could be</b> something wrong, you know? | (Donette) |
|      | b. I know what <b>should've</b> happened.        | (Laura)   |
|      | c. I'm not saying it <b>might not be</b> true.   | (Ahmad)   |

The data in (49) show that these auxiliaries are merged in a position lower than T and only move to T when they are in the highest Aux head in the sentence. 4.3.1 also showed that *ain't* cannot occur in a non-finite position; it only replaces *BE* and *HAVE* when either

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<sup>69</sup> That *ain't* is not separable (due to head movement) is shown through the fact that the auxiliary cannot be moved out of C separately from *n't* nor can any other item be put between the auxiliary and *n't* in the case of *ain't*.

one is the highest auxiliaries and moves to T. This raises the question of whether *ain't* is inserted directly into T or originates in a lower AuxP.

There is evidence that the auxiliary part of *ain't* originates in a lower AuxP like other auxiliaries. This evidence comes from the type and morphological form of the complements that *ain't* selects in its different semantic roles. In AAE as in other varieties of English, auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE* enforce morphological requirements on following verb forms. Table 16 takes the sequence *should have been being tested* as an example.

	Morphological Form	Example
<b>Modals</b>	Base	<i>Have</i>
<b>Present Perfect (PerfP)</b>	Past Participle (-ed/en)	<i>Been</i>
<b>Present Progressive (ProgP)</b>	Present Participle (-ing)	<i>Being</i>
<b>Passive (PassP)</b>	Past participle (-ed/en)	<i>Tested</i>

Table 16: Morphological selectional restrictions from Aux heads on following Aux/V in the example string *should have been being tested*.

The following sentences (50) illustrate these patterns. (50) contains modal *would*, (50) contains present perfect *HAVE*, (50) contains progressive *BE*, and (50) contains passive *BE*. Copular sentences are also included in (51). Copulas select non-verbal predicates (DPs, AdjPs, PPs).

- (50) a. I **wouldn't say** anything because I know it's not true. (Camille)  
 b. He **hasn't breathed** for five days. (Mr. Cairo)  
 c. I'**m** not really **worrying** about it. (Tito)  
 d. You **wasn't... allowed** to vote. (Nancy)
- (51) a. 'Least my friends up there **aren't snobs**. (Gavin)  
 b. That's **backwards** though, isn't it? (James)  
 c. I'**m** not **sure** about that. (Betty)  
 d. They'**re** not **in trouble** or whatever. (Nancy)

*Ain't* in *BE* contexts enforces the same morphological requirements for following verbs as the auxiliary *BE*. The sentence in (52) is a present progressive use of *ain't* with a V-ing complement. No instances of *ain't* in place of passive present tense *BE* were found in the



corpus. The sentences in (52) are copular uses with a PP and DP complement. The sentences in (53) show that other complements may not occur in these contexts and retain the same meaning. For example, *ain't* cannot be followed by a verb in a form other than *V-ing* and retain a present progressive meaning. Likewise, *ain't* cannot take a verbal complement and retain a copular meaning.

- (52) a. I ain't **going** nowhere. (Patricia)  
       "I'm not going anywhere."  
       b. I ain't **here** to talk about it. (Trey)  
       "I'm not here to talk about it."  
       c. But this ain't **your tape!** (Malika)  
       "But this isn't your tape!"
- (53) a. \*I ain't **go/went/gone** nowhere.  
       Intended: "I'm not going anywhere."  
       b. \*That ain't **talking/talked/talk**.  
       Intended: "I'm not here to talk about it."

*Ain't* in *HAVE* contexts is a bit more complicated for a few reasons. First, there is participle-to-preterit leveling in PhAAE, such that often the *-ed*/preterit form of a verb with a participle form will follow both *HAVE* and *ain't* (e.g., *haven't/ain't given* > *haven't/ain't gave*). Second, participle forms may still be used due to speakers' contact with other varieties of English, including MAE. Third, the high occurrence of final Consonant Cluster Deletion means that some *-ed* verbs following either *HAVE* or *ain't* appear in base form (e.g., *haven't/ain't walk*). All of these issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and it will be shown that any differences between the complements selected by *HAVE* and *ain't* in *HAVE* contexts are statistically negligible. For that reason,

we will treat the following complements of *HAVE* and *ain't* in perfect contexts as if they are the same.<sup>70</sup>

- (54)           a. I **haven't seen** him in a year now.                                 (Donette)  
                  b. I **ain't** never **seen** that shirt since.                                 (Donette)

Thus in (54) above, there is a present perfect use of *ain't* with a participle complement as found with *HAVE* in (54a).

The fact that *ain't* in progressive, copular, and perfect contexts enforces the same selectional restrictions on its following complements that *BE* and *HAVE* do indicates that when *ain't* is used in these contexts, it is acting as an underlying variant of *BE* and *HAVE*. This means that it is also initially merged in an AuxP. This would be contra Déchaine's (1993) proposal that *ain't* is merged directly in T. Déchaine contends that AAE contains neither a negative nor an affirmative functional head. Instead, negated auxiliaries like *ain't* and *haven't* are base generated in T or C with inflection for negation. Déchaine's proposal is based on the supposed lack of motivation for T-to-C movement in AAE, the only evidence of its existence coming from *yes-no* questions. Despite the fact that this analysis does explain many of the facts about AAE, there is corpus evidence of T-to-C movement in *wh*-questions and NAI constructions for speakers who would be considered vernacular speakers.<sup>71,72</sup> Moreover, all of the examples of T-to-C movement in (55) contain other vernacular grammatical features, like *was*-leveling or *ain't*.

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<sup>70</sup> It may also be possible that the forms *see* and *saw* can appear following both *HAVE* and *ain't* in present perfect contexts in PhAAE, but judgment data would be needed to draw that conclusion.

<sup>71</sup> These are speakers who would have low scores for contact with the White community according to the measures in Ash and Myhill (1986). Recall also that the setting for the recordings in the UMLC corpus is itself conducive to use of vernacular speech.

<sup>72</sup> Recall also that this dissertation assumes Green's (2014) hypothesis that NAI constructions involve movement of auxiliaries from T-to-C. It is, however, true that speakers of AAE do not always employ subject-auxiliary inversion in *wh*-questions. Often the subject and verb remain in-situ and/or the auxiliary is

- (55) a. Who **was my real parents**? (Greg)  
 b. What **ones in here ain't** three years? (Marcus)  
 c. **Ain't nobody** better than me. (Valentine)  
 d. **Ain't nothing** bad about you, though. (Donette)

Additionally, looking at the following predicate in each case supports the idea that part of *ain't* is merged in a semantically specified Aux and moves to T in these contexts, but what is this underlying auxiliary? One hypothesis is that something like \**ai* is merged in Aux. It then combines with *n't* in Neg and moves to T to be spelled-out as *ain't*. However, this hypothesis may seem odd considering that there is no affirmative form \**ai* that surfaces in varieties of English where *ain't* is used for *BE* and *HAVE*. Another hypothesis is that the item that moves from Aux to Neg in *ain't*-varieties of English is a form of auxiliary *BE* or *HAVE*. Recall that in emphatic contexts and tag questions, it is the full auxiliary that surfaces in opposition to *ain't* (Green 2002).

- (56) Well, I **ain't** saying, **am** I? (Ahmad)

If *ain't* is a possible spell-out of negated auxiliaries, it is similar to *won't* in varieties of English. There is no affirmative form \**wo* that surfaces in modal future sentences. Instead, *won't* is thought of as a combination of the modal *will* and *n't*. Thus, *will* is used as the affirmative counterpart to *won't* in emphatic contexts, tag questions, etc.

- (57) a. They **won't** appreciate that. (Camille)  
 b. They **won't** appreciate that, **will** they?

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not pronounced. The following sentences come from the UMLC corpus. A quantitative study of question formation in AAE would help determine how frequent each question formation strategy is in production.

- (7) a. When you found out? (Greg)  
 b. Where ya'll coming from? (Donette)  
 c. What you gon do about it, Bird? (Wayne)

- c. It'll change back for the better. (Nancy)  
 d. It'll change back for the better, **won't** it?

If this were the case, then *ain't* would begin, not as \**ai*, but as auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* in a lower AuxP specified for the same semantic features. Yet, when auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* join negation, the resulting complex functional head may be spelled out as *ain't*.<sup>73</sup> This story is consistent with the diachronic history of *ain't* up to a point: it is clear that the fact that *ain't* does not inflect for tense or aspect has led to its extension to grammatical contexts other than *BE* and *HAVE* in varieties of AAE. This leads us to *DO*. The dummy auxiliary *DO* works differently than auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE*. In varieties of English, including AAE, *DO* does not appear in affirmative sentences except for emphasis or other pragmatic usage. For example, (58) shows an affirmative declarative sentence in the past tense with the main verb *go*. The main verb appears in preterit form as *went*. There is no auxiliary in the sentence. However, in the presence of both *n't* and *not* negation, auxiliary *DO* is used (58). Auxiliary *DO* must be used in these contexts; negation cannot occur without recourse to *DO* (58).

- (58) a. I **went** to San Francisco, right? (Germaine)  
 b. We **didn't go** to school together. (Nancy)  
 c. We **did not like** the same people. (Navid)  
 d. \*We **not like** the same people.

The reason that *DO* does not appear in sentences like (58) that contain a main verb is because *DO* does not originate in a lower position and move to T like other auxiliaries in affirmative declarative sentences. Because *DO* does not originate as Aux, it does not select the form of its complement. Instead, *DO* interacts with Tense in varieties of

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<sup>73</sup> Hazen (1996) attributes preferences for *ain't* over *isn't/aren't* and *hasn't/have't* to its less complex syllable structure in comparison to other negated auxiliaries. Though this idea has interesting implications, it will not be fully explored within the scope of this dissertation.

English. In sentences like (58), T and V can be said to be in a local relationship, where TP is immediately above VP. In this situation, T may lower onto V. In (58) where the value of T is [+PAST], T lowers onto the Verb *go* and produces the morphological form *went*. However, in (58) when negation intervenes between T and V and the relationship is no longer local, *DO* is merged in T and expresses Tense. Consequently, it is the auxiliary *DO* that appears in past tense form rather than the Verb *go* in (58). *DO* is also merged directly in T in the case of questions and NAI constructions in AAE. In (59) below, all of the main verbs appear in their base form (e.g., *do*, *go*, *like*).

- |      |   |         |
|------|---|---------|
| (59) | a. <b>Did</b> she <b>do</b> that too?         | (Verna) |
|      | b. Where <b>did</b> you <b>go</b> after that? | (WH)    |
|      | c. <b>Didn't</b> nobody <b>like</b> him.      | (Sean)  |

Figure 26 below show *DO*-support for the phrase *didn't go* in PhAAE. This dissertation argues that *DO*-support in PhAAE works the same way as in other varieties of English: mainly, that the dummy auxiliary *DO* is merged directly in T when T and V are non-local. Green (1998) argues that *DO* in AAE originates in a lower AuxP position like auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE*. Earlier, the morphological form of auxiliary complements was used to argue that auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE* originate below. Auxiliary *BE* and *HAVE* each select a specific form of complement. *BE* selects non-verbal complements in its copular function and *V-ing* complements in its present progressive function. *HAVE* selects *-ed*/preterit and *-en*/participle forms in its present perfect function. Therefore, it could be the case that *DO* originates in a lower Aux and selects a base form of the main verb. However, the fact that *DO* categorically does not surface in affirmative declarative sentences except in emphatic contexts would need to be explained considering that other

auxiliaries do surface in this context, albeit variably in AAE.<sup>74</sup> In light of these facts and the absence of evidence to the contrary, this dissertation assumes that *DO*-support operates in PhAAE as it does in other varieties of English, being merged directly into T when the relationship between T and V is non-local (though see the acquisition facts for *DO*-support in AAE in Chapter 5).

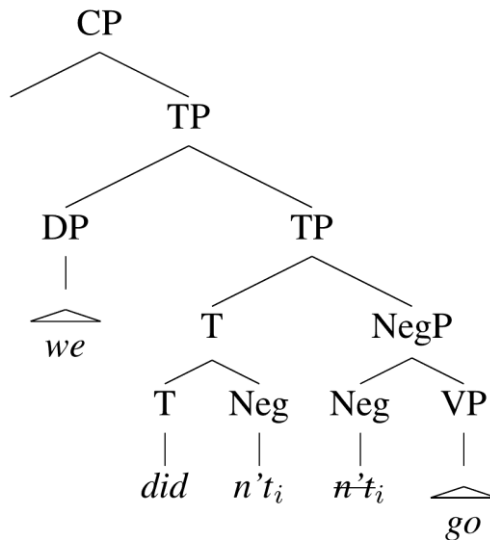


Figure 26: *Do*-support in African American English (e.g., *We didn't go*).

This dissertation has largely focused on variation between *ain't* and *didn't* in past tense contexts. In this context, *ain't* is often followed by a main verb in base form (60).

- (60) a. No, they **ain't say** it like that... (Dee)  
       “No, they didn't say it like that.”  
       b. I **ain't keep** arguing with her... (Dee)  
       “I didn't keep arguing with her.”

For the time being, the claim can be made that here *ain't* is also interacting with Tense in the same way that *DO* does. This corresponds to a hypothesis whereby *ain't* is underlyingly a form of auxiliary *DO*. In this case, the underlying auxiliary merges in T

<sup>74</sup> *DO* also does not have a place in the hierarchy of auxiliaries discussed in 4.2.6. It is always the highest auxiliary and does not co-occur with other auxiliaries.

and T-Aux is spelled out as *ain't* in the presence of negation. On the other hand, Chapters 2 and 3 showed that *ain't* may also be followed by preterit form verbs in past tense contexts, as in (61) below.

- (61) He called and says, “You’re a liar!” ... I **ain’t said** a word. (Valentine)  
“...I didn’t say a word.”

This appears to raise a problem for this analysis. If *ain't* interacts with Tense in the same way that *didn't* does, then *ain't said* sentences with past tense meaning should not be allowed because \**didn't said* sentences would not be allowed. This apparent problem will be resolved in Chapter 5, where it will be argued that sentences of the type *ain't said* may have the same structure as present perfect sentences.

The analysis of *ain't* as representing auxiliaries underlyingly is similar to the proposal made in Weldon 1994, whereby there are multiple semantically specified *ain'ts* in a given variety of English. Though this dissertation is partial to this analysis, it admittedly has some weaknesses. For one, it is apparent that *ain't* in isolation has no inherent semantic meaning other than “negated auxiliary.” Any meaning attributed to *ain't* comes from the context it is found in, whether that be conveyed by the discourse context, temporal expressions, or the type/form of following complement. However, fully underspecifying *ain't* would allow it to appear in contexts of past tense *BE* and habitual *be*, where it currently does not occur. Harris (2010) resolves this issue by appealing to the theory of morphological blocking (Aronoff 1976). Because *wasn't* and *don't* are suppletive forms and therefore already stored in the minds of speakers, they block the use of default forms like *ain't*. However, the low frequency use of *ain't* for *don't* may be due to the diachronic trajectory of *ain't* in AAE. There is little corpus evidence of the use of

*ain't* in *don't* contexts, though it is reported for contemporary AAE. If *ain't* in contexts of *don't* is an incoming change in varieties of AAE, this would also explain its lower than average frequency of use. The same explanation could be given for *wasn't*. *Ain't* in contexts of *didn't* came from the semantically plausible reanalysis of *ain't* in contexts of *haven't*, but there is not a clear semantically plausible avenue for the use of *ain't* in contexts of *wasn't* to come about. However, with the increased use of *ain't* in past tense contexts, perhaps *ain't* will eventually be used in contexts of *wasn't* as well.

Harris posits that *ain't* might only be specified for [+finite]. This dissertation argues that if this is not already the case, then it may be where *ain't* is headed. If *ain't* is semantically specified in most varieties of English where it is in variation with *BE* and *HAVE*, then in varieties of AAE that use *ain't* for *didn't* or *ain't* for *don't*, *ain't* moves into these additional auxiliary contexts through increasing semantic under-specification. Accordingly, Table 17 presents a possible *ain't* inventory for three types of variety of English containing *ain't*. In varieties of British English and Appalachian English, which only allow *ain't* in contexts of *BE* and *HAVE*, the auxiliary part of *ain't* is specified as in the first row (Vernacular English).

	<i>BE</i> contexts	<i>HAVE</i> contexts	<i>DO</i> contexts
<b>Vernacular English</b>	[+PRES, +BE]	[+PRES, +HAVE]	---
<b>AAE</b>	[+PRES, +BE]	[+PRES, +HAVE]	[+PRES]/ __ <i>got</i> [+PAST]
<b><i>Ain't</i>-Expanded AAE</b>	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Table 17: Specification for the spell-out of *ain't* in contexts of negation in varieties of English. Empty brackets represent full under-specification.

Additional specification is needed for a language like PhAAE (second row), where *ain't* is also used in contexts of *DO*. Chapter 2 outlined the progression of the use of *ain't* from a variant of *haven't* to one of *don't* before main verb *got*. This happened as the participle



*got*, which would have been negated by *haven't*, was reanalyzed as a main verb, which would have been negated by *don't*. This means that specification for the auxiliary +HAVE was relaxed while specification for present tense was maintained. The third row in the table illustrates the specifications for a so-called “*Ain't-Expanded*” variety of AAE. This represents a variety of AAE where *ain't* has extended further into other contexts, losing specification for specific auxiliaries and for tense/aspect. Chapter 2 also discussed that the use of *ain't* in present tense contexts of *don't* before verbs other than *got* may be increasing. This can be seen in corpus examples with stative main verbs, like (62) below, that are ambiguous between a simple past (*didn't*) and simple present (*don't*) reading.

- (62) Oh, I was about to put ‘clothes.’ You **ain't** want it as clothes?  
(Donette)

Recall that unambiguous uses of *ain't* for *don't* preceding stative verbs are reported to be used in AAE currently (Howe 2005). Thus, it is possible that current varieties of AAE may have only a +PRES specification for *ain't*, allowing it to stand in for *don't* as well, showing a greater relaxation on the constraints of use of *ain't*. It is possible that, since habitual *be* is negated by *don't*, a future development in underspecification would allow *ain't* to also negate habitual *be* sentences. This is something that would need to be tested with native speaker judgments. Given the expansion of *ain't* into contexts of *DO*, the *ain't-expanded* variety of AAE may represent a potential development in some varieties of AAE.

Chapter 5 will go into detail about how the use of *ain't* in +PAST tense contexts would have developed from the present perfect use of *ain't* and specification for auxiliary +HAVE would have eventually been dropped. For the time being, it is important that this

use of *ain't* remain specified for just past tense in order to block the use of *ain't* in contexts of *wasn't* and *weren't* in this approach. In order for *ain't* to replace *wasn't* or *weren't*, *ain't* would either need to be completely underspecified (and able to occur in all auxiliary contexts) or it would need to be specified for +BE in addition to +PAST. There are no corpus sentences that are ambiguous between a present and past tense *BE* interpretation. Therefore, judgment data would be useful in eliminating the use of *ain't* for *wasn't/weren't* in PhAAE.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter confirmed the dual nature of *ain't* as part negation and part auxiliary. Through tests of auxiliary-hood and other co-occurrence arguments, this chapter has shown that *ain't* patterns syntactically with other negative auxiliaries like *isn't* and *hasn't*. Most notably, *ain't* was shown to occur in T and be able to move to C in questions and NAI constructions in PhAAE. It was also shown that when T is not available, *ain't* cannot occur. Additionally, the category and form of the following complement selected in *ain't*-sentences was used to demonstrate that the auxiliary part of *ain't* originates in a lower AuxP when *ain't* varies with *BE* and *HAVE*. On the other hand, when *ain't* varies with *DO*, it appears to be merged in T in most cases. This, however, does not solve the problem of *ain't*-sentences where *ain't* is followed by an *-ed* or preterit form verb (to be taken up in Chapter 5). This chapter thus proposed that *ain't* is semantically specified for the auxiliary contexts it occurs in and is a surface representation of those auxiliaries, recognizing the weaknesses of this argument. This

proposal does, however, allow for the expansion of *ain't* through progressive underspecification of these semantic features.

## CHAPTER 5: Morphological Analysis of Main Verbs

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts has increased during the twentieth century. Chapter 4 showed that this increase has not changed the syntactic nature of *ain't* in AAE: it remains a negated auxiliary, or a complex head combining an auxiliary and negation, though these individual morphemes may not be separable. This chapter examines variation in verbal morphology following the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts, providing the first study of such variation in a speech community using the UMLC corpus.

Several works have reported variation in the form of verbs following *ain't* in past tense sentences (Fasold and Wolfram 1970; DeBose 1994; Green 2002). Using the UMLC corpus, this dissertation confirms the existence of morphological variation in this environment, showing that either base or *-ed*/preterit form verbs may be used following *ain't* in past tense contexts. However, base form verbs are strongly preferred in this environment and are used near categorically following *didn't*. Additionally, older speakers are more likely to use verbs in *-ed*/preterit form following *ain't*. Because this mirrors the form of present perfect sentences containing *ain't* (*ain't* + *-ed*/preterit /participle), this finding aligns with a hypothesis whereby present perfect sentences containing *ain't* were reanalyzed as conveying past tense meaning. This chapter further

illustrates that a variety of circumstances in PhAAE would have provided the grammatical conditions conducive to producing sentences of the type *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit that expressed past tense. These conditions include minimal use of *have* to express perfect meaning (especially in negative contexts), the leveling of participles to preterits in perfect contexts, and semantic overlap between the simple present and present perfect as described in Chapter 2. On the other hand, sentences of the type *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit that convey past tense also present a problem for how tense is thought to be expressed in varieties of English. Ultimately, this chapter proposes that *-ed*/preterit verbs following *ain't* in sentences that convey past tense meaning are contained within a functional projection other than Tense, similar to participles in MAE (Embick 2003, 2004). Though this chapter will not provide an in-depth syntactico-semantic analysis of *-ed*/preterit forms in past tense sentences of the form *ain't played*, it will outline the implications that these forms have for the clause structure of PhAAE based on previous accounts (primarily Green 1998, 2002).

This chapter unfolds as follows: Section 5.2 presents the background and results of the corpus study investigating variation in verbal morphology in main verbs following *ain't*. Then, Section 5.3 describes the environment and possible mechanisms by which *ain't* would have spread from perfect to past contexts in PhAAE. Next, Section 5.4 discusses potential morphological analyses of the preterit forms following *ain't* in PhAAE. Finally, Section 5.5 offers a conclusion to the chapter and further avenues of research on verbal morphology in AAE.

## 5.2 Variation in Verbal Morphology Following *ain't* and *didn't*

Morphological variation in the main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts has been reported in several works (Fasold and Wolfram 1970; DeBose 1994; Green 2002). This section presents the results of a study of variation in verbal morphology in the UMLC corpus. The study ultimately confirms the existence of morphological variation in *ain't* sentences that convey past tense meaning, showing that either base or *-ed*/preterit form verbs may be used following *ain't* in past tense contexts. However, base form verbs are strongly preferred in this environment and are used near categorically following *didn't*. Interestingly, the corpus study shows that older speakers are more likely to use verbs in *-ed*/preterit form following *ain't*. Because this mirrors the form of present perfect sentences containing *ain't* (*ain't* + *-ed*/preterit/participle), this finding aligns with a hypothesis whereby present perfect sentences containing *ain't* were reanalyzed as conveying past tense meaning. On the other hand, sentences of the type *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit that convey past tense present a problem for how tense is thought to be expressed in varieties of English. As a result, this chapter briefly outlines that problem, previously discussed in Chapter 4.

Before moving on to the results, recall that in Chapter 1, a distinction in terminology was introduced between the syntax and semantics of past and perfect constructions and the verbal forms used in those constructions. This distinction was made in order to account for the fact that the same verbal form may be used in both past and perfect contexts, though it may typically be associated with only one of the two in MAE. For example, in MAE, there is a strong association between the perfect (as a syntactico-

semantic category) and verbal participles (as a morphological category) and an equally strong association between the past and verbal preterit forms. In fact, the simple past tense is often referred to simply as “the preterit,” a practice that this dissertation will avoid. The MAE association between the past tense and preterit form can be seen in (1a), while the association between the perfect and participle is shown in (1b). The distinction in form is most noticeable with irregular verbs, as regular *-ed* verbs have the same form whether in past or perfect contexts.

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| (1) a. We <b>ate</b> lunch outside yesterday    | [PAST]    |
| b. We’ve <b>eaten</b> lunch at the park before. | [PERFECT] |

Additionally, in many vernacular varieties of English, including PhAAE, there can be participle-to-preterit leveling following *have* in perfect contexts such that the preterit form can be used in either the past tense or perfect contexts.

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| (2) a. I never <b>did</b> tell her that. | (Donette)[PAST]   |
| b. She must’ve <b>did</b> really get it. | (Janet) [PERFECT] |

Furthermore, due to the phonological process of final consonant cluster deletion, base form verbs (verbal forms without inflection) can appear in past contexts as well as preterits.

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| (3) a. Don’t even come and <b>act</b> like...                         | (Arnie)[PRESENT] |
| b. Janet ain’t say nothing... I <b>act</b> like I in’t hear anything. | (Janet) [PAST]   |
| c. You should’ve <b>act</b> like you knew.                            | (Trey) [PERFECT] |

For these reasons, the terms *past* and *perfect* will be used to describe syntactico-semantic constructions, while *preterit* and *participle* will be used to refer only to morphological form. Regular verbs will be said to have *-ed* form for both preterit and participles since

these are indistinguishable on the surface.<sup>75</sup> When discussing both *-ed* forms and irregular preterits (e.g., *gave*), the notation *-ed/preterits* will be used. When discussing both *-ed* forms and irregular participles (e.g., *given*), the notation *-ed/participles* will be used.

### 5.2.1 The Problem

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research describes variation in the morphological form of verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts in AAE. Following *didn't* in varieties of English, verbs typically appear in base form (*didn't give*). Green (2002) notes that verbs following past tense *ain't* in AAE may appear in either base (*ain't give*) or preterit form (*ain't gave*) in past tense contexts. Fasold and Wolfram (1970) present cases where main verbs following *ain't* may also appear in participle form (*ain't given*). Both Fasold and Wolfram (1970) and DeBose (1994) argue that these differences in morphological form do not correspond to any difference in meaning.

In the UMLC corpus, there are both base and *-ed/preterit* form verbs following *ain't* in simple past sentences, confirming Green's (2002) description of variation in this context. In the sentences in (4) and (5), both speakers are describing past events that have ended. However, the speakers use different verbal forms following *ain't* to convey information in their narratives. The speaker in (4) uses the base form (*say*) while the speaker in (5) uses the *-ed/preterit* form (*said*).

- (4)           **WAH:** Did they come down on you for hitting them, like [siblings]  
                  Brenda and Roy?

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<sup>75</sup> Note that a main argument of this dissertation is that they are distinct syntactically. *-ed* may be either the tense head T or a different functional head associated with verbal participles (Embick 2003, 2004).

**Dee:** No, they **ain't say** nothing to me.

**WAH:** She must'a told them.

**Dee:** She told them, but they **ain't say** nothing to me.

- (5) **Mr. Valentine:** I'm still strong. Don't you think I ain't! But I hadn't ha- He come in one morning—late with the car, and I'm sh- talking back and forth or something and he called and says, "You're a liar!" ... I **ain't said** a word.

The sentences above thus confirm that morphological variation in past tense contexts does not necessarily correspond to semantic differences: both sentences convey past events that have ended. If this is true, then it may be the case that the tense/aspect meaning of such sentences comes from somewhere other than the verb. For example, DeBose (1994) argues that the tense/aspect interpretation of sentences in AAE comes from the stativity of the main verb, following DeBose and Faraclas (1993) and Mufwene (1983). Under his proposal, dynamic verbs (like *say* above) convey past perfective meaning, while stative verbs (e.g., *have*) convey present perfect meaning, regardless of the morphology. This would explain the fact that a verb like *say*, which is dynamic, would convey simple past meaning regardless of its morphological form (*say* or *said*). It would then be expected that a stative verb like *have* would convey present perfect meaning whether it appeared as *have* or as *had*. However, this is not the case in either previous research (Weldon 1994) or in the UMLC corpus. In the UMLC corpus, there are examples of stative verbs used in past tense contexts following *ain't*.<sup>76</sup> These stative verbs may also vary in their morphological form, as shown in (6) and (7).

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<sup>76</sup> Note, however, that there is a statistically significant preference for dynamic main verbs in this context. This is expected given the cross-linguistic tendency for stative verbs to be interpreted as perfect (continuing), discussed in Chapter 2.



- (6) **Malika:** I remember finding this particular dollar, and I went and bought bologna, and mayonnaise, and bread, right? With this one dollar, I'll never forget. But you know what? I wondered why **I ain't have** enough change, cause, you know, I always buy bologna, mayonnaise, and bread for mom, and I knew about how much change I got. And I got very upset, kept wondering why the change was shorter than it yor- normally be, cause I was dependent on that change, after I bought y'all lunch, I was dependent on that change to buy my junk.
- (7) **Malika:** They would actually make fun of me—one time they had a—this is in the sixth grade at, um, William B. Carver. I went—uh, they had a sweetheart dance, right? And er- all the boys and girls was dressed up and **I ain't had** nothing to wear.

Again, the same verb (*have*) is used in two different forms following *ain't* in sentences that describe past situations that no longer exist (i.e., past perfective). In this case, the verb is stative, which is the opposite of what is expected if DeBose's claim that stative verbs always convey present perfect meaning is correct. So far there is no explanation for this difference in morphology for the same verbs in the same semantic contexts. Could it be that morphological forms are truly in free variation following *ain't* in past tense contexts? Most likely not.

The fact that both the base and *-ed*/preterit form of verbs can appear following *ain't* in past tense sentences is potentially problematic considering that, in these cases, *ain't* is in variation with *didn't*, or *DO*-support (Embick and Noyer 2001). Recall that in this environment, variation in morphological form has implications for the expression of tense in AAE. Chapter 4 demonstrated that *ain't* is a possible spell-out of the complex head Aux-Neg when T is PRES, Neg is *n't*, and Aux is either *HAVE* or *BE*. Variation between *ain't* and *didn't* complicates this picture because the dummy auxiliary *DO* does not originate in a lower Aux position like other auxiliaries. Instead, an Aux containing *DO* is merged directly in T when T is non-local to V, and *DO* is thus tasked with

expressing tense instead of V. Therefore, in these cases, *ain't* is a possible spell-out of T-Aux-Neg when T expresses PAST, Neg is *n't*, and there is no auxiliary *BE* or *HAVE* present in the sentence.

This is all the more interesting when we think about sentences like (5) and (7) above that contain *-ed/preterit* main verbs following *ain't* (e.g., *ain't said*, *ain't had*). In their counterpart sentences containing *didn't say* and *didn't have*, main verbs are in base form because T is non-local to V. When T and V are in a local relationship, V expresses tense as in affirmative past tense sentences (e.g., *They said*, *We had*, etc.). When T and V are non-local, *DO* is inserted in T and expresses tense morphology. Consequently, in sentences like *didn't say*, tense morphology appears on *DO* rather than on the main verb. If *ain't* is a possible spell-out of T-Aux-Neg where Aux is inserted in T (like *didn't*), then there is a reasonable explanation for why verbs appear in base form in this context: the relationship between T and V is non-local, as it would be in *didn't*-sentences. However, in sentences with *-ed/preterit* main verbs like *ain't said/had*, it appears as if tense morphology is still being expressed on the main verb. This data, therefore, begs the following question: Are *-ed/preterit* verbs following *ain't* expressing tense morphology in past tense contexts, or are they expressing something else?

In the next sub-section, the results of the corpus study on variation in verbal morphology following *ain't* will be presented. These results confirm Green's (2002) observations that both base and *-ed/preterit* main verbs occur following *ain't* in past tense contexts. Given the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* in the past tense originated from the use of *ain't* in the present perfect, it is unsurprising that some past tense sentences would have the same structure as present perfect sentences (e.g., *ain't said/had*). This

issue will be taken up in 5.3 and will lead into a discussion on the structure of such sentences in 5.4.

### 5.2.2 Results

Chapter 3 analyzed 888 observations of past tense negated auxiliaries (*ain't~didn't*) from the 42 speakers in the UMLC corpus. Of those 888 observations, 198 were tokens of *ain't* followed by a main verb while 690 were tokens of *didn't* followed by a main verb. These verbs were coded for morphological form as shown in Table 18.

	Morphological Form		
	Base	Preterit	Participle
<b>Regular <i>-ed</i> Verbs</b>	<i>walk</i>	<i>walked</i>	
<b>Irregular Verbs</b>	<i>see</i>	<i>saw</i>	<i>seen</i>

Table 18: Coding of morphological form for regular and irregular main verbs.

Regular *-ed* verbs that did not have separate preterit and participle forms (*walked*) were coded separately from those verbs with three separate forms, like *saw*, that appeared in preterit form in the corpus. Several verbs were excluded from this study, but may warrant future consideration. For example, some verb forms were phonetically ambiguous between their base and preterit or participle forms. This was the case for some tokens of *have/had* and *say/said* (N=9). Additionally, verbs like *hit*, *let*, *put*, and *beat* were excluded because they are invariant regardless of context (N=6). Other verbs, like *come* and *run*, are sometimes used interchangeably with the forms *came* and *ran* in the participle form in AAE (Green 2002). For this reason, these verbs should be looked at

separately in their contexts of use (N=5).<sup>77</sup> The verb *want* was also excluded when it appeared as *wanna* (N=7).

Finally, the prevalence of final Consonant Cluster Deletion (CCD) in AAE (Wolfram 1969; Wolfram and Fasold 1974; Guy and Cutler 2011) led to the exclusion of verbs that appeared in base form but could have been subject to final CCD (N=22).<sup>78</sup> For example, for a regular *-ed* verb like *walk* where the preterit and participle form is *walked* [wɔkt], the final consonant cluster [kt] is subject to deletion in a number of phonological environments.<sup>79</sup> For this reason, the form [wɔk] could signify either a base form or an *-ed* form where the final [t] has been deleted. These exclusions left a total of 149 main verbs following *ain't* and 540 main verbs following *didn't*.

The results for analysis of the 149 main verb tokens following *ain't* are shown in Table 19.

Verb Form	Counts	%
Base	111	75%
Preterit	32	22%
<i>-ed</i> verbs	5	3%
Participle	1	<1%
Total	149	

Table 19: Morphological variation of main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts (with potential T/D-deleted tokens excluded).

Table 19 shows that roughly 75% of main verbs following *ain't* appear in base form, while only 25% appear in *-ed*/preterit form. There is one main verb that appears in

<sup>77</sup> The four tokens of *come* were all in the form *come* and the one token of *run* was in the form *run* following *ain't*.

<sup>78</sup> Though these tokens were excluded, the overall results are largely the same regardless of whether base forms that could have been subject to CCD are included or excluded.

<sup>79</sup> According to Guy (1991), the preceding phonological environment from most to least favoring of CCD are (in order) preceding /l/, obstruent, glide, /r/, pause, and vowel. Speakers of AAE have been shown to have higher overall rates of deletion than White speakers in these contexts. For example, Wolfram 1969 shows that AAE speakers have higher rates of CCD for monomorphemic words like *mist* in pre-vocalic environments (65-72%).

participle form as *seen*. However, the form *seen* is used as a preterit in many varieties of English, including AAE, as in the following example from the UMLC corpus.

- (8)       **Camille:** I never give them my f- phone number.  
          **WAH:** Why?  
          **Camille:** Because I don't want no unknown person calling me! I don't even know him. I just met him, just **seen** him last night.

Therefore, the form *seen* may in fact be considered a preterit form by speakers of PhAAE. The status of *seen* will be further discussed in 5.3.

Compared to *ain't*, there is almost no variation following *didn't*. Nearly 100% of tokens of *didn't* followed by a main verb are in base form. Only two main verb tokens are in *-ed*/preterit form. These two sentences are shown below in (9) and (10).

- (9)       **Paula:** I **didn't** never **went** to bed with Sean.  
  
(10)      **Marcus:** But then, she was-- I asked her to go out with me, she **didn't wanted** to go out with me.

Interestingly, Marcus (22 years old and from the South) has only one token of *ain't* in the past tense, which is also followed by *wanted* (11).

- (11)      **Marcus:** Then she **ain't wanted** me to go out.

On the other hand, 17-year-old Paula, who grew up in Philadelphia, only produces verbs in base form in contexts following *ain't* in the corpus.<sup>80</sup> This illustrates the importance of obtaining judgment data from speakers who may not produce all forms available in their repertoires. In other words, the fact that Paula never produced a token of *ain't* followed by a preterit form verb does not necessarily mean that such a form does not exist in her

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<sup>80</sup> Paula produces a total of 16 past tense sentences containing *ain't*. Of those 16, 11 are included in the study. Those 11 are all in base form. The 5 excluded tokens could potentially also be in base form: 1 is *knock* (final T could have been deleted), 1 is *let* (invariant form), 1 is indecipherable (*say* or *said*), and 2 are *come* (probably base).

grammar, though that is also a possibility. Asking Paula about the acceptability of saying *ain't went* would be the only way to determine whether it does.

Because tokens of *didn't* followed by a preterit verb are rare in adult speech in PhAAE, the examples we see in (9) and (10) above could simply be mistakes.<sup>81</sup> However, such sentences are common in the acquisition of English in general and occur at higher rates among children acquiring AAE (Stokes 1976). Stokes (1976) finds that AAE speaking children ages 3-5 negate past tense sentences containing irregular preterit verbs (e.g., *He ate it*, *The dog bit me*, *Tom went home*) by inserting *didn't* (e.g., *He didn't ate it*, *The dog didn't bit me*, *Tom didn't went home*). Sentences of the type *didn't* + irregular preterit made up 67% of children's responses, compared to 6% responses of the type *ain't* + preterit and 27% responses that were off target (total N=101). While she concedes that the children may have been exhibiting a stimulus effect, she appeals to the literature on acquisition which finds such sentences to be common among children acquiring English for support. She also highlights that the incidence of these constructions decreased with age. Interestingly, these results are not reproduced for regular preterit verbs (e.g., *The cat scratched itself*), possibly due to T/D-deletion. Although one child negated the sentence as *The cat didn't scratched it*, most children used *didn't* + base in response. Still, *didn't* + preterit sentences are reported for adult AAE (Fasold 1972) and adult Puerto Rican English (Wolfram, Shiels, and Fasold 1971). The importance of this fact for analyses of tense morphology in AAE will be further discussed in 5.4.

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<sup>81</sup> There is also this sentence (You **ain't** turned the book yet, **did** you?) spoken by Trey where *did* surfaces as a variant of *ain't* and the main verb has an *-ed* ending. Eliciting judgments with tag questions like these may be an important source of information on the nature of the auxiliary underlying uses of *ain't*.

To summarize, these results confirm that there is variation in the morphology of main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts, but it is mainly between base and *-ed*/preterit forms as Green (2002) describes. Additionally, base form verbs (75%) are used more often than *-ed*/preterit form verbs (25%) in this context in PhAAE. Furthermore, the patterns of variation between *ain't* and *didn't* are asymmetrical: *didn't* is near categorically followed by a verb in base form in PhAAE. It is important to note that this variation in verbal form does not seem to be connected to a more or less vernacular form of the language. For example, Paula, who only employs verbs in base form following *ain't*, is one of the most vernacular speakers in the corpus, frequently using many of the features typically associated with vernacular AAE (e.g., copula deletion, 3<sup>rd</sup> singular and possessive *-s* deletion, habitual *be*, etc.). Moreover, the relationship between level of education (used as a proxy for social class in Chapter 3) and the use of *-ed*/preterit *vs.* base form verbs is not intuitive: Speakers who completed high school are more likely to use a preterit form than speakers who did not complete high school. This result is most certainly a product of co-linearity with another social factor. The most likely candidate is age, since many of the young speakers have not yet completed high school, and there is an age effect for the use of base *vs.* preterit forms following *ain't*, shown in Figure 27 below.

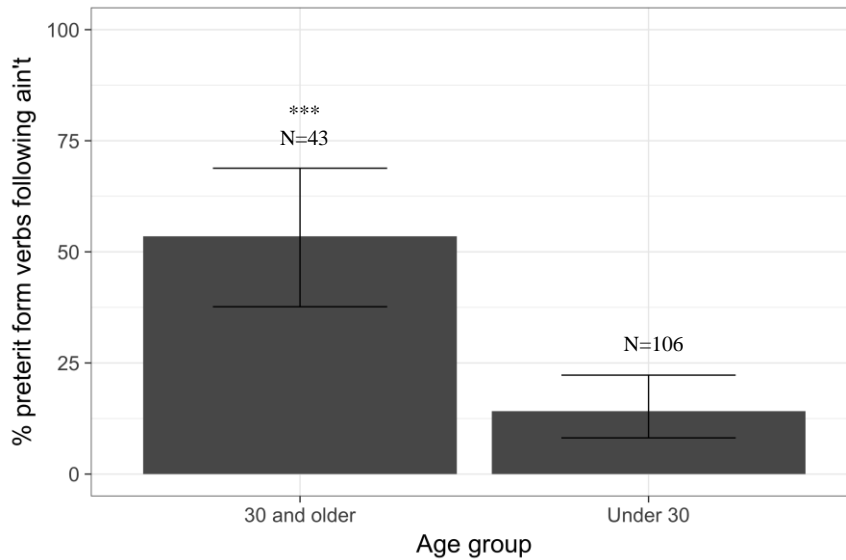


Figure 27: Percentage of preterit form main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts by age ( $X^2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Figure 27 shows that older speakers are significantly more likely to use an *-ed*/preterit form main verb following *ain't* compared to younger speakers, who use a base form main verb following *ain't* 86% of the time. These results for age coincide with the hypothesis that *ain't* in the past tense developed from the present perfect use of *ain't* because *ain't* is typically followed by a verb in *-ed*/preterit or participle form in present perfect contexts. It is therefore unsurprising that older speakers, who are less likely to use past *ain't* overall, prefer to use it with a verb in preterit form. Section 5.4 will look at this development more in depth.

One final note before moving on: it could be the case that the use of *-ed*/preterit forms following *ain't* in the simple past is driven by one or two lexical items or a particular class of lexical items that dis-prefer appearing in base form. Table 20 shows the rate at which the top 10 most frequent verbs that appear following *ain't* occur in *-ed*/preterit form.



Rank	Verb	Counts	% of time verb occurs in preterit form when it follows <i>ain't</i>
1	say	25	20% (said)
2	know	21	0% (knew)
3	have	18	89% (had)
4	do	16	50% (did)
5	get	12	0% (got)
6	want	9	33% (wanted)
7	go	8	0% (went)
8	tell	8	12% (told)
9	see	6	17% (saw)
10	take	4	75% (took)

Table 20: Rate at which lexical verbs appear in *-ed/preterit* form (vs. base) when following *ain't* in past tense contexts.

It is clear that some verbs (like *know* and *go*) never appear in preterit form in this corpus. There are no verbs that only occur in *-ed/preterit* form. However, *have* appears as an *-ed/preterit* 89% of the time, *do* 50% of the time, *want* 33% of the time, and *say* 20% of the time. There does not appear to be any apparent reason why these particular verbs would prefer appearing in *-ed/preterit* over base form.<sup>82</sup> Although, there is a plausible reason for why the base form of *get* might be preferred following *ain't* in simple past contexts: to distinguish it from both the use of *ain't got* to convey the simple present (in variation with *don't got*) and *ain't got* to convey the present perfect with leveled participle (in variation with *haven't got*).

In closing, this section has shown that there is variation in the morphology of main verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts where base form verbs are used 75% of

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<sup>82</sup> One interesting point is that many of these forms contain a final *-d* in their *-ed/preterit* form sometimes in addition to a stem change (*say~said*, *do~did*, *have~had*). Recall that some of these main verb tokens were excluded because they were ambiguous between their base and *-ed/preterit* form. It would be interesting to find out if the form used is at all conditioned by the following phonological environment (similar to consonant cluster deletion). Although, this would assume that there is not necessarily any underlying distinction between base and *-ed/preterit* forms in PhAAE. For now, such an investigation is outside the scope of this dissertation.

the time, and *-ed*/preterit form verbs are used 25% of the time. On the other hand, *didn't* is near categorically followed by a verb in base form in PhAAE. Essentially, this means that there are two decision points for speakers of PhAAE when they negate a sentence in the past tense (Figure 28). First, there is the choice of auxiliary (a), between *didn't* and *ain't*. Second, there is the choice of verbal form (b). When speakers choose *didn't*, this choice is clear cut: *didn't* will be followed by a verb in base form. However, speakers (theoretically) have an additional choice to make if they choose *ain't*: 75% of the time a verb in base form will be chosen, while the other 25% of the time, they will choose a preterit form.

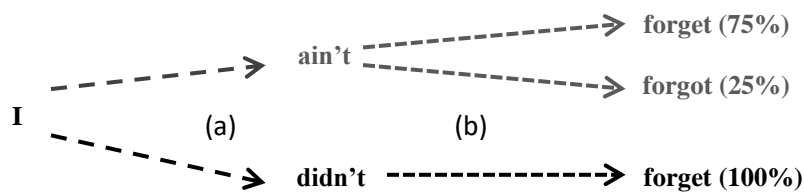


Figure 28: PhAAE negative past tense paradigm (auxiliary + main verb)

Bear in mind that this may not be the case for all speakers. Production results reflect 4 speaker profiles: (1) speakers who always choose *didn't*, (2) speakers who also choose *ain't*, but always choose a verb in base form, (3) speakers who also choose *ain't*, but always choose a verb in preterit form, and (4) speakers who also choose *ain't*, and choose a verb in either base or preterit form. There are no speakers who always choose *ain't* in the UMLC corpus. Of course, as mentioned earlier, production results may not reflect speakers' actual linguistic competence. This is likely the case considering that there are speakers who use *ain't* for *didn't* at very low frequencies, but use it nonetheless. For example, Nancy is 54 years old and moved to Philadelphia from the South in 1959. Nancy is a prominent community member and her family was one of the first Black

families to move to the Germantown area of Philadelphia. Nancy uses *didn't* in past tense negative contexts 98.1% of the time (N=56). She has one token of *ain't*, shown below in (12):

(12) I met him and I **ain't care** for him really.

Because Nancy only produced one token over the course of her recording, it is possible that some speakers who produce 0 tokens during the 45 minutes of their recording, might still have the construction in their grammar. Eliciting judgment data from individual speakers, in addition to production data from the corpus, is the only way to determine the limits of each speaker's grammatical competence.

This section also finds an age effect for the use of base *vs.* *-ed*/preterit forms following *ain't* in past tense contexts: older speakers are more likely to use a *-ed*/preterit form verb. This finding coincides with the hypothesis that *ain't* in the past tense developed from the present perfect use of *ain't* because *ain't* is typically followed by a verb in preterit or participle form in present perfect contexts. Recall also from 5.2.1, that such sentences present a problem for an analysis of the expression of tense in *ain't* sentences. These two ideas form the basis of the next two sections. In 5.3, the development of a past tense function from a present perfect construction (*ain't* + *-ed*/preterit) will be outlined. Then, in 5.4, a possible analysis of the *-ed*/preterit forms in such constructions will be put forth.

### 5.3 How *ain't* Spread to Past Tense Contexts

This section lays out the grammatical conditions present in PhAAE that would have set the stage for *ain't* to spread from present perfect contexts into simple past contexts. As will be shown, these conditions include identity between the preterit and participle form of *-ed* verbs coupled with participle-to-preterit leveling of verbal forms. This also includes the use of *ain't* as the preferred negative variant in perfect contexts and an overall decline in the use of *have* perfects in favor of other constructions that convey perfect meaning. These conditions facilitate the use of *-ed*/preterit verbal forms in perfect contexts where participles would otherwise be used and the reanalysis of *ain't* as a negator of *-ed*/preterit form verbs. The section concludes with an analysis of PhAAE morphology whereby *-ed* and preterit morphology in *ain't played* sentences that convey past tense no longer indicates the grammatical category of tense, but instead indicates another functional head.

#### 5.3.1 Overview

In Chapter 4 we saw that *ain't* is a negated auxiliary that can replace negated *BE*, *HAVE* and *DO* in PhAAE. Above, we saw that PhAAE allows three types of sentence to convey simple past tense meaning.

- (13)
- a. The children **didn't play** outside yesterday.
  - b. The children **ain't play** outside yesterday.
  - c. The children **ain't played** outside yesterday.

As previously discussed, in sentences (13) and (13), a verb in base form without tense morphology (*play*) follows either *didn't* or *ain't*. In sentence (13), the verb following

*didn't* appears in base form because tense lowering is blocked by negation. Instead, *DO* appears with tense morphology (*didn't*) in T. In other words,  $T_{[+PAST]} + \text{Aux} + n't$  is spelled-out as *didn't*. These sentences are the same as those found in mainstream varieties of English. This dissertation argues that in sentence (13), *ain't* is also a possible spell-out for  $T_{[+PAST]}$  in the context of negation in the PhAAE grammar. As a result, sentences like (13) have the same underlying structure as sentences like (13). Sentence (13), however, is puzzling. The meaning is past tense, and yet tense morphology appears to be marked on the main verb as well, unlike sentence (13). Why, then, does the verb appear to be morphologically marked as past tense (*-ed*) if negation has blocked T-to-V lowering as in (13)?

The hypothesis under consideration in this dissertation is that the use of *ain't* in simple past contexts is the result of a reanalysis of present perfect sentences containing *ain't* as having past tense meaning. As noted above, older speakers are more likely to use sentences like (13) to express simple past tense meaning in negative contexts. These sentences are hypothesized to have the same structure as those represented in (14), which convey present perfect meaning.

- (14)        a. The children **haven't played** outside since Saturday.  
               b. The children **ain't played** outside since Saturday.

The semantic difference between (13) and (14) is made evident by the use of different time denoting adverbs: a definite past adverb for the simple past sentences in (13) and an indefinite present one for the present perfect sentence in (14) (Sankoff and Thibault 1977; Klein 1992). The fact that the *-ed* form is used in both semantic contexts may have contributed to the expansion of *ain't* from contexts of *haven't* to contexts of *didn't*. This

line of reasoning picks up on work by Harris (2010), who contends that *ain't* “became a [preterit] negator when [preterit] forms began to appear in contexts dominated by the present perfect” (2010:8). In the following sub-sections, this proposal will be evaluated through corpus investigations of the grammatical conditions that may have facilitated the reanalysis of present perfect sentences containing *ain't* as conveying simple past meaning. The results of these investigations ultimately corroborate Harris’ assertions. There are three main conditions that would have facilitated the development of a past function for *ain't* from its present perfect uses in PhAAE. They are:

- Participle-to-preterit leveling in perfect contexts (boosted by preterit/participle identity for *-ed* verbs)
- The predominate use of *ain't* for negation in perfect contexts
- The minimal use of perfect *have* constructions in general

The fact that there is participle-to-preterit leveling in perfect contexts means that the same morphological forms found in the past tense (*They played/gave*) will also be found in perfect contexts (*They've played/gave*). This is true of both regular and irregular verbs. The fact that *ain't* is the predominate form of negation in perfect contexts means that *ain't* would be the primary negator of preterit form verbs (*They've played/gave* > *They ain't played/gave*). Because *ain't* is leveled, there is no tense/aspect cue from the auxiliary. This would allow *ain't* to move into contexts of negating simple past sentences containing preterits (*They played* > *They ain't played*) based on identity with negation in perfect sentences (*They've played* > *They ain't played*). Additionally, the overall minimal use of *have* perfects would facilitate this shift. *Have* is not only used infrequently in

general, it is also often reduced in declaratives and not used at all in questions (*They've played* > *They -- played*). We have seen that there is semantic overlap between the past tense and present perfect in American English, with American English using the simple past and associated forms more often. Additionally, varieties of AAE have other strategies for conveying perfect meaning so *have* can be used less (e.g., pre-verbal *done*). Furthermore, Through processes like final consonant cluster deletion (*played* > *play*) and analogy with *didn't*, which is categorically followed by verbs in base form (*didn't play*), speakers may have started using base forms in this context where *ain't* negates the simple past as well (*ain't play*). Younger speakers especially would have used base forms, while older speakers may have hung on to the original preterit forms. This situation would have put both *ain't played* and *ain't play* in variation with *didn't play* in past tense contexts in a single speech community. Each of the next few subsections goes into further detail about the conditions that may have facilitated this development.

### 5.3.2 Participle-to-Preterit Leveling in Perfect Contexts

As shown in 5.2, the simple past tense in MAE uses a preterit form of the verb (15a), while the present perfect with *have* is followed by a participle form of the verb (15).

Recall that for regular *-ed* verbs, the preterit and participle forms are the same (16).

- |      |   |           |
|------|---|-----------|
| (15) | a. We <b>ate</b> lunch outside yesterday        | [PAST]    |
|      | b. We've <b>eaten</b> lunch at the park before. | [PERFECT] |
| (16) | a. We <b>played</b> outside yesterday.          | [PAST]    |
|      | b. We've <b>played</b> outside all day.         | [PERFECT] |

Recall also that in PhAAE, there is participle-to-preterit leveling following *have* in perfect contexts. In these cases, the preterit form can be used in either the past tense or perfect contexts.<sup>83</sup> The following examples show that irregular preterit verbs are used following *HAVE* in perfect contexts in the UMLC.

- (17) a. I **have went** over the house several times on appointment. (WH)  
b. You **should'a went** there. (David)  
c. We still **haven't got** into that relationship. (Malika)  
d. She just **haven't gave** no answer. (WH)

Thus one condition that would have facilitated the reanalysis of *ain't* in present perfect contexts as conveying past tense is participle-to-preterit leveling. The prevalence of morphological leveling in PhAAE creates a situation where the morphological forms typically associated with the past are also used in perfect environments. Bear in mind that this is always the case for *-ed* verbs who have the same preterit and participle form. Further evidence of participle-to-preterit leveling in PhAAE will be presented in the following sub-section.

### 5.3.3 Use of *Ain't* in Perfect Contexts

*Ain't* is the preferred variant in negative contexts of the present perfect. Of 97 tokens of either *ain't* or *hasn't/haven't* extracted from the corpus, *ain't* is used 73% of the time while *hasn't/haven't* is used the other 27%. Though this rate of use does not appear to have changed over time, it does demonstrate that in negative present perfect contexts, most speakers will encounter *ain't* as input in acquisition rather than *haven't*. Since the

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<sup>83</sup> According to Green, “there is usually no distinction with respect to form between simple past and past participles in AAE. For the most part, the same form or identical morphology is used in simple past and participle environments” (2002:95).



auxiliary *HAVE* indicates that a sentence is present perfect, the use of leveled negation through *ain't* means that tense/aspect cues are no longer conveyed by the auxiliary form in the sentence. Stokes (1976) finds that 3-5 year old AAE-acquiring children negate the stimulus sentence with a regular verb *The girl has finished* with a negated form of auxiliary *have* about a third of the time and with *ain't* about a third of the time (total N=33). However, the percentage with which *haven't* is used decreases when the verb is an irregular participle, as in the sentence *The dog has eaten his dinner*. In this case, children use *haven't* only 9% of the time and *ain't* still around 29% (total N=34). Overall, *haven't* is the least employed strategy for negating either type of sentence, even trailing behind off target responses.<sup>84</sup>

A study of the UMLC corpus also reveals leveling of the morphology typically associated with main verbs in present perfect contexts from participle-to-preterit as exemplified earlier. As shown above, this means that irregular verbs that typically have three forms (e.g., *give, gave, given*) are reduced to only a base and preterit form (*give, gave*), making them parallel to regular *-ed* verbs that only have two forms (e.g., *play, played*).<sup>85</sup> The results of examining negative present perfect contexts and main verb

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<sup>84</sup> In the combined data for regular and irregular verbs (N=67), *haven't* is used 19%, an omitted auxiliary + *not* is used 30%, *ain't* is used 27%, and off target responses occurred 24% (Stokes 1976:87).

<sup>85</sup> However, in Stoke's study of the acquisition of negation by AAE speaking children, she finds that children do not level irregular participles when given them in stimulus sentences. In other words, no child responded to the stimulus sentence *The dog has eaten* by using the verb *ate*. She appeals to the fact that the verb *eat* and the form *eaten* may be more ubiquitous in child directed speech than other irregular verbs/participles (1976: 109). Her results for the present perfect sentences containing irregular verbs may indicate a breakdown in understanding of these participles.

morphology are shown below in Table 21. The same exclusions discussed in 5.22 were applied here.<sup>86</sup>

Verb form	<i>hasn't/haven't</i>	<i>ain't</i>
<b>base</b>	0% (N=0)	8% (N=5)
<b>preterit</b>	10% (N=2)	5% (N=3)
<b>-ed</b>	43% (N=9)	39% (N=25)
<b>participle</b>	47% (N=10)	48% (N=31)
Total	N = 21	N = 64

Table 21: Verbal forms following *ain't* and *hasn't/haven't* in the perfect.

Verbs following *haven't* occur most frequently as participles. However, the only participles that appeared were *been* and *seen*. Regular verbs in *-ed* form occurred second most frequently. There are two preterit form irregular verbs that would otherwise have a different participle form: *got* and *gave*. For verbs following *ain't*, there is a similar pattern. The majority of main verbs appear in participle form. This again includes mostly tokens of *been* and *seen* in addition to two tokens of *gotten* and one token of *known*. Regular verbs in *-ed* form occurred second most frequently yet again. There are also three preterits that would otherwise have a different participle form (*got*, *took*, and *knew*). Overall, then, most speakers use the *-ed* or participle form of main verbs following both *haven't* and *ain't* in negative present perfect contexts. An irregular verb in preterit form is used very infrequently. However, *-ed* verbs are used second most frequently in perfect contexts, which means that very often the form following *haven't* is identical to the preterit form used in simple past contexts.

Furthermore, the two irregular participles found (*been* and *seen*) should be examined further. As shown earlier, *seen* is used in past tense contexts as well and may

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<sup>86</sup> Following *ain't* there were 7 exclusions (3 invariant verbs and 4 verbs that appeared in base form but could have been subject to final CCD). Following *hasn't/haven't* there were 5 exclusions (2 for a token each of *come* and *run* and 3 for base forms that could have been subject to final CCD).

be analyzed as a preterit form by some speakers.<sup>87</sup> In fact, there are no tokens of *saw* in this context in the corpus. As for *been*, this form also commonly appears with no auxiliary form as in (18). Note that this use of *been* is unstressed and does not express remote past aspect like the aspect marker *BIN*.

- (18)       **WH:** You **been** stopped though?  
              **Tito:** I **been** stopped, man, a couple time.

The sentence in (18) is an example of an experiential perfect, alluding to one or more events that occurred in the past and are completed. Though it is unlikely that speakers analyze *been* as a preterit in this context, it may be the case that *been* occurs frequently enough without auxiliary *HAVE* that it is analyzed as a lone form, in the same way that *-ed* and preterit verbs in past tense contexts stand alone (e.g., *They played*, *She gave* → *I been*, etc.). The influence of MAE on speaker's use of other participles cannot be discounted though these may also be lone participles. However, a more in-depth study of each speaker's use of different morphological forms over the course of their recording might shed more light on rare instances of participle use.

Interestingly, there are also verbs in base form following *ain't* in the present perfect context. Crucially, the base form verbs in (19) are not the result of CCD since they are all irregular verbs or regular verbs with a stressed *-ed*.<sup>88</sup>

- |      |  |         |
|------|--|---------|
| (19) | a. No, you <b>ain't catch</b> a bid <u>yet</u> .     | (Trey)  |
|      | b. No, I <b>ain't never fight</b> no girl.           | (Ahmad) |
|      | c. I <b>ain't have</b> none <u>in a good while</u> . | (Janet) |

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<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, Stokes (1976) also finds that children negate sentences with lone participles using *didn't*. When 3-5 year old AAE-acquiring children are given the affirmative sentences *He done it* and *He seen it*, they negate them with *didn't* 73% of the time and with *ain't* 11%, while remaining responses are off target (total N=66). Children are essentially treating these participles in the same way they would treat preterits at that stage: by negating them with *didn't*.

<sup>88</sup> Stressed *-ed* is generally less susceptible to final consonant cluster deletion than other morphemes, so this form was initially counted here, but see also Example (3) in 5.2 with the verb *act*.

d. I **ain't** hear th- another person since.

(Paula)

e. I **ain't** taste shit yet, man.

(David)

(19) contains an adverb expressing frequency or length over a period of time extending to time of utterance (*never*), while (19) and (19) contain adverbs associated with a single past event (*yet*). Elsness (1997) finds that American English prefers the use of the simple past rather than the present perfect with such adverbs. As a result, the hypothesis that these sentences represent past tense sentences cannot be ruled out, especially since adverbs like *yet* and *never* are used with both perfect and past auxiliaries in PhAAE. On the other hand, (19) and (19) contain adverbs that are typically associated with present perfect meaning, and seem to convey inclusion of the time of the speech event in the point of reference, as expected with the present perfect. In other words, in (19), the speaker has not had any of a particular food in a long time, up to and including that moment. The same goes for (19). Sentences like those in (19), then, highlight the laxness of the distinction between perfect and past contexts and associated morphology in PhAAE and warrant further analysis.<sup>89</sup>

To summarize these results, *ain't* is used overwhelmingly in negative perfect contexts and the verbal morphology associated with past perfect contexts is either the participles *been* and *seen* or regular *-ed* participles that are identical to *-ed* preterits. Furthermore, there are some irregular preterit forms found, and even base form verbs. With the use of *ain't* in negative contexts, the tense/aspect cues present when auxiliary

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<sup>89</sup> A question this begs, though, is why irregular base forms are found following *ain't* and *done* but not *have/haven't*. Only base forms following *have/haven't* are from consonant cluster deletion. Furthermore, (19c,d) recall a previous footnote (82) on possible phonological conditioning affecting variation between base and preterit forms where the preterit ends in /d/ and the stem change is slight (e.g., *have-had*, *hear-heard*).

*HAVE* is used are absent. Furthermore, the verbal forms used in perfect contexts overlap with forms typically associated with the past tense.

Harris' (2010) proposal, which is followed here, states that the use of *ain't* to negate sentences with perfect meaning that contain *-ed* or leveled preterit form verbs created a situation in which speakers analyzed *ain't* as able to negate *-ed* or preterit form verbs in simple past contexts as well. This progression is shown in Figure 29 below. In other words, the use of *ain't* to negate *-ed* and preterit verbs in the present perfect (a), led to *-ed* and preterit verbs in the affirmative simple past being negated by *ain't* as well (b). When they were negated by *ain't*, the *-ed* or preterit form stayed intact.

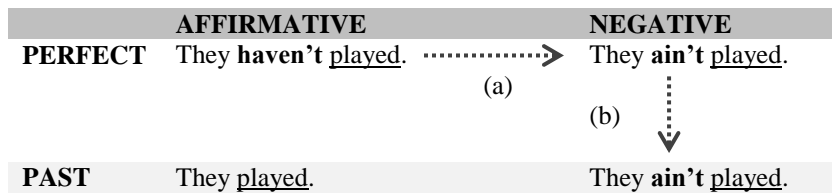


Figure 29: Development of use of *ain't* to negate *-ed* and preterit form verbs in simple past sentences.

Leveling of irregular verbs to preterits in perfect contexts would have facilitated this development. If *been* is frequently used without auxiliary *HAVE*, it could also have facilitated this development as it would have provided an analogy whereby a verbal form without an auxiliary was negated by *ain't* (e.g., *They been* > *They ain't been*). Likewise, if *seen* is analyzed as a preterit form for some people, its negation by *ain't* would have also facilitated such a development in PhAAE.

There is one additional overarching condition that would have facilitated the movement of *ain't* from present perfect to past tense contexts. In the next sub-section, the minimal use of perfects with *HAVE* in PhAAE will be discussed.

### 5.3.4 Use of Perfect *HAVE*

Several authors have argued that the perfect with *have* is not part of the AAE grammar (Loflin 1967; Fickett 1970; Dillard 1972) or that it is not “entirely secure” as part of the grammar (Labov 1968:223).<sup>90</sup> However, decreased usage of the present perfect might be a tendency found more generally in modern American English (Elsness 1997). Elsness reports that the simple past is used more frequently in modern American English than in modern British English to cover the same semantic ground, specifically when a situation is located entirely in the past but there is no clear definite time denoting expression in the discourse context.<sup>91</sup> He proposes that increased use of the simple past and associated preterit forms may be due to two things: First, the phonetic reduction (or omission) of *have*, which is generally contracted to ‘s or ‘ve in speech. Then, the fact that regular –ed verbs have the same preterit and participle form. Thus, the same form used in the simple past sentence *They played outside* is used following *haven’t* in the present perfect sentence *They’ve played outside*. If the contracted auxiliary ‘ve is further reduced, the sentences become identical (e.g., *They’ve played* > *They played*).

The increased use of the simple past and preterit forms to cover the same semantic ground as the present perfect provides an explanation for current semantic overlap between the two in many contexts in varieties of American English (Elsness 1997). For

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<sup>90</sup> Rickford and Théberge-Rafal (1996) propose that perhaps it is acquired later by speakers of AAE.

<sup>91</sup> Elsness (1997) reports that this can be seen with specific adverbial expressions. For example, with adverbs like *just* and *recently*, which express “vague, indeterminate recent past time”, as well as with adverbs “expressing frequency or length over a period extending up to the deictic zero” like *always*, *never*, and *ever*, American English prefers to use the simple past while British English prefers the present perfect (353-354). The same is true with the adverbs *already* and *yet* and when reference is to a single time within the past.

example, for many speakers today, there is no semantic difference between the sentences in (20) without temporal anchoring (21).

- (20) a. Did you play outside?  
b. Have you played outside?
- (21) a. Did you play outside yesterday?  
b. Have you played outside since yesterday?

Thus the infrequent use of the present perfect that has been reported for AAE may be part of a general tendency in varieties of American English to replace the present perfect with the simple past.

Moreover, there are several other means of conveying present perfect meaning in AAE.<sup>92</sup> Thus a decline in use of the present perfect with *HAVE* may be due to an increase in use of other strategies to express the present perfect. For example, many researchers have commented on the fact that *-ed* and preterit form irregular verbs in simple affirmative declarative sentences are able to convey both perfect and past tense meaning (Labov et al. 1968; Dechaine 1993; Dayton 1996; Tagliamonte 1997; Green 2002; Terry 2010).<sup>93</sup> In example (22), *lived* can be interpreted as expressing either simple past or present perfect meaning for speakers of AAE in Wise, North Carolina (Terry 2010).

- (22) Mary **lived** in Chapel Hill.  
“Mary lived in Chapel Hill.”  
“Mary has lived in Chapel Hill.”

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<sup>92</sup> The development of preterit *had* from the pluperfect (past perfect) (Cukor-Avila and Bailey 1995, Rickford and Théberge-Rafal 1996) may be another area where the shift from emphasis on perfect meaning to past meaning can be viewed in AAE.

<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that the full range of present perfect meanings may not be available to preterit verbs in this context. For example, Terry (2010) argues that when a preterit verb is used to convey present perfect meaning, the perfect of persistence reading is **not** allowed. The following example defaults to a past reading.

- (8) Mary **lived** in Chapel Hill (\*for three years).  
Intended meaning: “Mary has lived in Chapel Hill for three years and still does.”

The explanation for the development of this meaning in preterit form verbs is much similar to that responsible for the use of *been* as a lone participle and the invasion of present perfect contexts by forms typically associated with the simple past (Bybee and Dahl 1989; Elmsness 1997). Labov et al. write: “[M]ost of the occurrences of *have*... are deleted by a phonological process similar to those [for the copula]. The full forms which are not contracted of course, survive, but contraction leaves a lone [v], which is subject to deletion” (1968: 223-225). An additional reason might come from the fact that questions in AAE do not always contain affirmative auxiliaries as in (23) below.

- |      |                                  |            |
|------|----------------------------------|------------|
| (23) | a. You ever heard me ask for it? | (Ron)      |
|      | b. What you gon do about it?     | (Wayne)    |
|      | c. How you figure that?          | (Germaine) |
|      | d. When you found out?           | (Greg)     |

The lack of auxiliaries in question leaves yet another opportunity for verbal morphology to convey tense/aspect distinctions. This is another place where *ain't* as a negator of the present perfect can invade. If *HAVE* is deleted leaving behind *-ed* verbs, preterits, and participles that convey the present perfect meaning of the sentence (like in (23)), and these sentences can be negated by *ain't*, then there is a template for negating a lone *-ed*, preterit, or participle with *ain't*. This can carry over to *ain't* negating *-ed* and preterit verbs when they are in simple past sentences. A systematic examination of the UMLC corpus to find present perfect uses of preterit form verbs is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, this offers another area where speaker judgments would be essential in defining the grammar of PhAAE.



Another strategy by which speakers of AAE can convey perfect meaning is pre-verbal *done*. Terry (2010) argues that *done* constructions express perfect aspect and can be used in all of Comrie's (1976) perfect contexts including the perfect of persistence.

- (24) Mary **done** lived in Chapel Hill for three years.  
"Mary has lived in Chapel Hill for three years."

Green (2002) also contends that pre-verbal *done* can be used to indicate the recent past or having had a particular experience (*I done lost my wallet, She done been to church*), similar to the experiential perfect.<sup>94</sup> There are also examples from the UMLC corpus in which *done* sentences convey present perfect meaning, (24) and (25).

- (25) I **done** lived all over North Philly. (West)  
"I've lived all over North Philly."

The example of *-ed* and preterit form verbs being used to convey perfect meaning and pre-verbal *done* demonstrates that auxiliary *HAVE* is not the only means by which speakers of AAE may express perfect meaning. The fact that speakers of AAE have more options than speakers of MAE for expressing perfect meaning may contribute to the fact that the perfect with *HAVE* is used only minimally. Indeed, an examination of the UMLC illustrates that perfects with *HAVE* are not often used by speakers of PhAAE. These results are shown in Figure 30.

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<sup>94</sup> Green (2002) says that *done* may not always express the same range of meaning as the present perfect. For example, with stative verbs the endpoint is not over, allowing present perfect meaning to step in. However, for some stative verbs such reading is available. It is also probable that *done* has some emphatic or intensifier function (Labov 1998), which Terry (2010) accounts for through pragmatics.

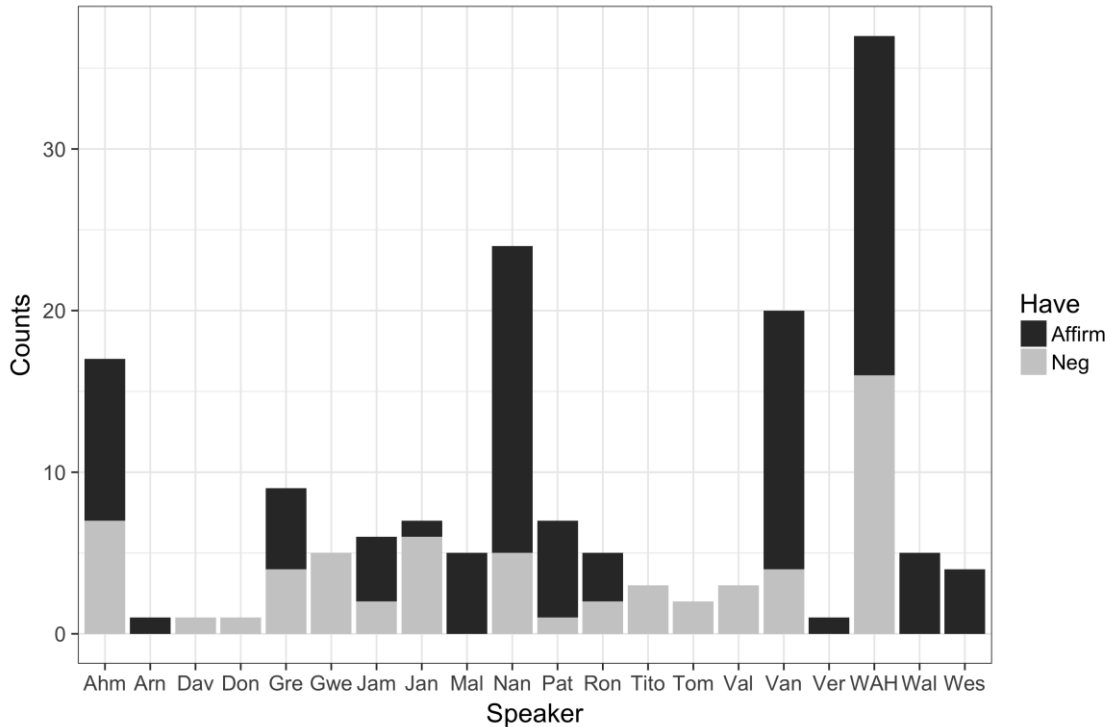


Figure 30: Counts for use of the present perfect with *have* in affirmative ('s/'ve) and negative (*hasn't/haven't*) contexts for 20 speakers, including the field researcher (labeled WAH).

Data from a subset of 20 speakers reveals that, while every speaker uses the present perfect with *have* at least once over the course of their recording in either an affirmative or negative context, the overall token counts for *HAVE* are relatively low compared to other auxiliaries. The highest token counts come from the field researcher. These high numbers represent his use over the course of the other 19 recordings. The second highest counts are from speakers with recordings that lasted an hour and 25 minutes, giving them additional time to use the present perfect construction. To properly investigate the use of the present perfect with *have*, however, a study of how frequently each speaker uses the construction compared to other constructions in PhAAE that convey present perfect meaning would be necessary.

Despite the fact that the present perfect with *HAVE* is still used, it is not used very often when compared to the simple past, for example. For the 42 speakers in the UMLC corpus studied in this dissertation, there are only 26 tokens of *haven't* compared to 690 tokens of *didn't*. Overall, this picture of the PhAAE grammar points to a decreased reliance on auxiliary *HAVE* to convey present perfect meaning, which would have set the stage for a shift in the use of *ain't* from conveying present perfect meaning to also conveying past tense meaning. Conditions like the use of lone participles (e.g., *been* and *seen*) and the deletion of *HAVE* and its contracted forms before *-ed* verbs and other preterits/participles, would have increased the chance that *ain't* would move from a negator of the present perfect to a negator of the simple past.

### **5.3.5 Summary and Further Expansion by *ain't***

Thus far, this sub-section has shown that the PhAAE grammar established conditions conducive to the development of the past tense function of *ain't*. For one, the present perfect with *HAVE* is used minimally in PhAAE, and there are several other items that express present perfect meaning in the language that *HAVE* must share territory with. Where the perfect overlaps in meaning with the past tense, American English has been shown to prefer use of the simple past (Elsness 1997). Additionally, auxiliary *HAVE* is often deleted from its already reduced contracted forms (*'ve* and *'s*) in declaratives and questions in PhAAE. Thus, the perfect with *HAVE* is increasingly not overtly marked in AAE.

Furthermore, the forms associated with the perfect are being supplanted by those associated with the past tense. For example, there is participle-to-preterit leveling in

perfect contexts, demonstrated by their use in negative perfect environments. Some verbal participles are leveled to their preterit form following *have* and *haven't*. The fact that *-ed* verbs have the same form as preterits and participles adds to this leveling effect. Moreover, in negative contexts, the increased use of *ain't* rather than *haven't* means that tense/aspect is no longer overtly marked by the auxiliary and *ain't* is able to negate *-ed* verbs, preterit form verbs, and lone participles (*been* and *seen*). This situation would have then facilitated the negation of *-ed* and preterit form verbs in affirmative simple past contexts (e.g., *They played yesterday* > *They ain't played yesterday*).

All of this evidence lends support to the hypothesis that the first use of *ain't* in the past tense was derived from and had the same form as present perfect sentences with *ain't*. This is precisely the type of sentence found to be most prevalent among older speakers in the UMLC corpus. On the other hand, there are also younger speakers who prefer base form main verbs following *ain't* in sentences with past tense meaning, parallel to what is found following *didn't*. In other words, younger speakers seem to prefer the form *ain't play* in the past tense, which is followed by a base form of verb like *didn't play*. It is possible that younger speakers use *ain't play* in past tense contexts on analogy with *didn't play* sentences. It is also possible that the pervasiveness of consonant cluster deletion in varieties of AAE facilitated the move from using forms like *ain't played* to convey past tense, to using forms like *ain't play*.

It would be interesting to investigate whether this variation between *ain't + -ed* or preterit and *ain't + base* in past tense negative contexts still exists within the Philadelphia speech community. A re-study of this community would be necessary to determine if generations born after 1969 have eliminated any variation in verb form following *ain't*

such that base forms are used categorically on analogy with *didn't*. It would also be interesting to see if the use of *ain't* for *didn't* has caused *ain't* to expand beyond contexts of *didn't*. For example, Harris (2010) believes that *ain't* began being used in present tense contexts in contemporary AAE (where it varies with *don't*) due to the alternation between *ain't* and *didn't*. In other words, *ain't* became a possible variant of *DO* in other tense contexts once it began being used in environments where it varied with *didn't*. Again, the morphological form of main verbs may have facilitated such an expansion as younger speakers began using *ain't* followed by base form verbs in past tense contexts. In the UMLC corpus, there are a few (N=2) clear cut examples of *ain't* being used in place of *don't* and a few examples (N=11) where use of *ain't* is ambiguous between a past (*didn't*) and present (*don't*) use. In the following examples, (26) is clearcut while (27) and (28) are ambiguous. In (26), Greg is putting his cards down after winning a hand of a card game. The absence of auxiliaries preceding base form verbs in questions like that shown in (28) (i.e., *Greg know about that?*) may also have facilitated such a move toward using *ain't* to replace *don't*.

- (26) **Greg:** [Puts cards down] That's blocked off. [Puts cards down] That's closed up tight as Dick's hatband. And this? [Puts cards down] You **ain't dare** mess around here. That's all one suit!
- (27) **WH:** A velour?  
**Donette:** Yeah, that's a shirt.  
**WH:** S-H-I-R-T.  
**Donette:** Oh, I was about to put "clothes." You **ain't want** it as "clothes"?
- (28) **WH:** That's bad. I mean, you go to sleep and your mu-  
**Gwen:** I'm telling you.  
**WH:** Wake up and you ain't got no—  
**Gwen:** I swear.  
**WH:** Greg know about that?  
**Gwen:** He **ain't know** certain parts of the story.

The use of *ain't* for *don't* is reported sometimes with stative main verbs as in the preceding examples (Howe 2005). This could be due to the fact that stative verbs often facilitate an interpretation that continues into the present (Comrie 1976). In any case, this is yet another example of *ain't* facilitating its own expansion into further contexts of *DO* through tense/aspect opacity and identity between its complement forms.

### 5.3.6 Cross-Linguistic Support

The development of constructions conveying past tense meaning from those conveying perfect aspectual meaning is cross-linguistically supported with Bybee and Dahl (1989) listing it a common evolutionary path. French provides an example of this development. In French, the *passé composé* is formed with a present tense form of the auxiliary *avoir* 'have' or *être* 'to be' and a verbal participle, similarly to the English present perfect (*have* + participle). Though the *passé composé* originally expressed present perfect meaning, it is now used to express both present perfect and simple past meaning, as the French *passé simple* has become obsolete in spoken French (Verkuyl et al. 2004; Hacquard 2009). Comrie (1976:61) writes that that this development "can be seen as a gradual reduction of the present-ness of the relevant forms, which finally become purely past." For example, in French grammars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the perfect could already be used to describe the recent past under the "24-hour rule" (i.e., an action/situation expressed by the *passé composé* could not have passed more than twenty-four hours before the present) (Comrie 1976:61).

Thus, French provides an example of a construction having the same form as the present perfect (auxiliary + participle) being used to express both present perfect aspect and past tense. The following examples are from Waugh 1987 (1987). (29a) shows the present perfect use of the *passé composé* with present relevance expressed through the adverb *maintenant* ‘now’. In contrast, (29b) uses a definite past time denoting adverb (*hier* ‘yesterday’) to illustrate the past tense use of the *passé composé*.

- (29) a. *Maintenant, j’ai assez mangé.* (p. 5, ex. 4)  
 Now I-HAVE enough eaten  
 “Now, I’ve eaten enough.”
- b. *J’ai assez mangé hier.* (p. 6, ex. 13)  
 I-HAVE enough eaten yesterday  
 “I ate enough yesterday.”

Because the French *passé composé* can have either a present perfect or past tense meaning, it can be used with adverbs associated with either tense/aspect meaning. Thus an example without temporal expressions may be ambiguous between either reading (Hacquard 2009).

- (30) *J’ai dansé.*  
 I-HAVE danced  
 “I danced.”  
 “I have danced.”

Recall that the present perfect in MAE cannot co-occur with past time denoting adverbs like *yesterday* or *at noon* (Klein 1992). However, this may be possible in PhAAE in the environment of *ain’t* negation given that *-ed* and preterit forms can be used in both simple past and present perfect contexts as in (31) (simple past) and (32) (present perfect).

- (31) **Marcus:** I asked her to go out with me; she didn’t wanted to go out with me. But then I said, well, I’ll go by myself then. Then she **ain’t wanted** me to go out! And I said, “Well, I’m going out...”

- (32) **Tariq:** Nah, he was never that way, and to see him now, man, you know. If you even mention the fact that he got a bad leg, uh, he takes that very, very personally. You know, he won't—he's very—he don't want no sympathy at all. He **ain't** never **wanted** that.

Thus the development of a past function for *ain't* in PhAAE by way of its function in present perfect sentences may be similar to the development of a past function for the *passé composé* in French. In French, however, due to the decline in use of the *passé simple* construction, the *passé composé* eventually became the predominate construction used to express past tense. In PhAAE, and more generally in varieties of English, the simple past and associated forms are taking over contexts of the present perfect (Elsness 1997). To confirm that a sentence of the form *ain't + played* is a type of *passé composé* available for use in both past and perfect contexts, it would be necessary to determine whether it can be used with both past time and present time denoting adverbs, and if so, whether this is true when verbs appear in either base or preterit form. For example, can both *ain't play* and *ain't played* be used with a temporal expression like *since Wednesday*, typically use in present perfect contexts. It would be essential to determine the extent of such alternations and whether they are limited to negative contexts of *ain't* or extend to other auxiliary contexts, for example, to *haven't* or *didn't*.

On that note, this analysis begs the question of what the auxiliary underlying *ain't* is in these cases where it is used in sentences conveying past tense meaning along with an *-ed* or preterit form main verb. Answering this question definitively for individual speakers and the community would require the collecting of grammaticality judgment data. One potential way of doing this would be to elicit auxiliaries in tag questions for sentences with *ain't* and a preterit form main verb in the matrix clause (e.g., *You ain't*



*went there yesterday, \_\_\_\_\_ you?*). One possibility is that *ain't* in these sentences is underlyingly *HAVE*. This hypothesis coincides with the theory that the use of *ain't* in past tense sentences originated from *ain't*'s use in present perfect sentences since it would suppose structural parallelism between the two. This would also account for the overlapping semantics between the present perfect and simple past in AAE. We might expect this to be the case for the older speakers in the corpus, who prefer the *ain't* + preterit verb construction when conveying past tense meaning. On the other hand, if this were the case, we might also expect speakers of PhAAE to be able to use auxiliary *HAVE* in both perfect and simple past contexts (and use it with both past and present time denoting adverbs), similar to the *passé composé* in French. Another possibility is that *ain't* is underlyingly *DO* in these situations. However, this use of *DO* would not interact with the expression of tense in the language. Instead, *DO* would originate in a lower AuxP and select the morphological form of its verbal complement much like *HAVE* does in the present perfect. This hypothesis coincides with work by Green (1998) claiming that *DO* does originate in a lower AuxP in AAE. However, this would have to be reconciled with the fact that *DO*-support is also used in a fairly regular way (and in a way that is similar to its use in MAE and other English varieties) in PhAAE as well. On the other hand, *DO* being first merged in a lower AuxP might explain the use of pleonastic tense constructions (e.g., *didn't played*) found in the data and reported for child AAE. This will be further discussed in the next Section.

## 5.4 Analysis of *-ed* Morphology in PhAAE

The previous sections have shown that *ain't* + an *-ed* or preterit form of the verb is used by speakers in sentences that express past tense meaning. Earlier in this chapter, it was shown that such sentences are problematic given the way that tense is expressed in varieties of English. This is because *ain't* varies with *didn't* in the past tense, and auxiliary *DO* has a strict relationship with regard to the expression of tense in English varieties. Specifically, *DO* is inserted when T and V are non-local, therefore, when *DO* is inserted there should be no morphological marking for tense on main verbs. Instead, morphological marking of tense should occur on *DO*. In the majority of cases, it is assumed that *ain't* is performing the same function as *didn't* in past tense sentences. As a consequence, main verbs would be expected to also appear in base form. The discussion up to this point has shown that not to be true: *ain't* is sometimes followed by a main verb in *-ed* or preterit form in past tense contexts. In these cases, it appears as if tense is still being morphologically marked on the verb. This section attempts to understand how that might happen. Ultimately, this dissertation proposes that inflection is generated in a functional head lower than T in these cases. For the time being, this inflection will be considered to be underspecified for any specific tense/aspect meaning, though 5.4.3 will discuss some possible meanings.

### 5.4.1 *-ed* as Tense

This chapter has shown the existence of the following types of sentences in PhAAE. Note the alternations in both auxiliary and verbal morphology.

Label	Present Perfect
A.	They <b>haven't</b> <b>played</b> outside yesterday.
B.	They <b>ain't</b> <b>played</b> outside yesterday.
	Simple Past
C.	They <b>didn't</b> play outside yesterday.
D.	They <b>ain't</b> play outside yesterday.
E.	They <b>ain't</b> <b>played</b> outside yesterday

Table 22: Present perfect and simple past sentence types (by auxiliary and following verbal morphology for regular verbs) in negative contexts in PhAAE.

Table 22 summarizes as follows: In negative present perfect contexts, there are sentences containing either *haven't* or *ain't* followed by a verb in preterit form (A, B). In negative simple past contexts, there are sentences containing either *didn't* or *ain't* (C, D, E). When sentences contain *ain't*, they are followed by either a verb in base (D) or preterit form (E). Sentences of type E have the same form as those of type B and contain verbs in preterit form. However, they are in variation with sentences of type C, which contain *DO*-support and are followed by a verb in base form. This chapter therefore raises questions about the nature and meaning of the *-ed* in verbs that appear in preterit forms like *played* in sentences like E. Specifically, is this *-ed* the same as that found in affirmative simple past sentences (e.g., *They played yesterday?*) The *-ed* morpheme in affirmative simple past sentences expresses past tense. Therefore, the hypothesis that *-ed* in sentences like E is tense will momentarily be considered. This dissertation relies on T-to-V lowering in varieties of English to explain the morphological expression of  $T_{\text{PAST}}$  (*-ed*) on main verbs in affirmative declarative sentences (*They played yesterday*). It has also previously outlined the fact that, in the presence of negation, T does not lower to V. Instead, an auxiliary moves to (*HAVE/BE*) or merges (*DO*) in T. Consequently, if the *-ed* in E also were to express tense, an explanation of how it could do so in the presence of negation would be necessary. The *-ed* morpheme could express tense in sentences like E

if *ain't* were negation and negation were above T in PhAAE. Under these circumstances, T-to-V lowering would not be blocked by the presence of negation. This is shown in Figure 5.

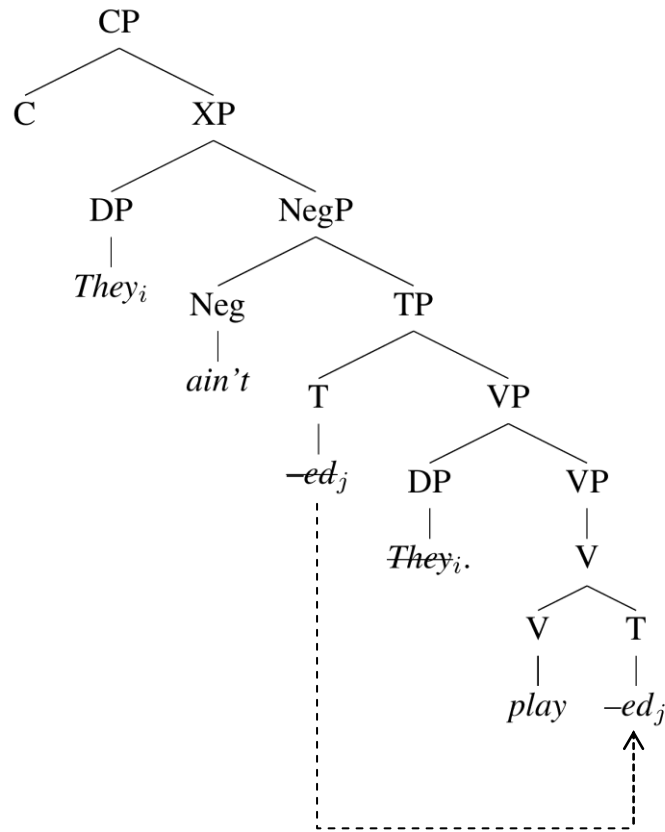


Figure 31: T-to-V lowering of past tense morphology with high negation in PhAAE.

However, Chapter 4 provided evidence that T is above Neg and that *ain't* encompasses features of both an auxiliary and negation and merges in/moves to T. Consequently, the *ed* in type E sentences cannot be negation.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> A full examination of whether E type sentences could result from tense concord is not within the scope of this dissertation, but may be examined in future work. Additionally, a tense concord explanation is non-ideal since sentences of type E represent only 25% of the data. If tense concord were the reason for the existence of type E sentences, an explanation for their infrequency in the data would be necessary. Additionally, the story where the past tense function of *ain't* is derived from its use in present perfect contexts aligns with the both PhAAE and cross-linguistic diachronic data.

#### 5.4.2 *-ed* as Asp

The hypothesis under consideration in this dissertation treats *-ed* and preterit form verbs that follow *ain't* in sentences that convey past tense, not as containing the tense morpheme *-ed*, but as containing a different morpheme that is homophonous with the past tense *-ed*. This morpheme is the head of a functional projection, here referred to as Asp. This analysis aligns with other analyses of participles in varieties of English (Embick 2003, 2004). For the time being, we will consider this morpheme to be underspecified for any specific tense/aspect meaning.

In MAE, *HAVE* typically selects verbs in participle form in perfect contexts. There are several allomorphs for English participles (e.g., *-en*, *-t*, *-èd*, *-ed*,  $-\emptyset$ ). Embick (2003) proposes that these allomorphs are heads of functional projections (labeled 'Asp'), much like adjectives. The structures of these Asp Phrases may be different depending on whether the participle is stative (*The door is open*), resultative (*The door is opened*), or eventive (*The door was opened by Jane*). For simplicity, we will adopt the simple structure in Figure 6, recognizing that resultative and eventive participles may contain verbalizing heads.

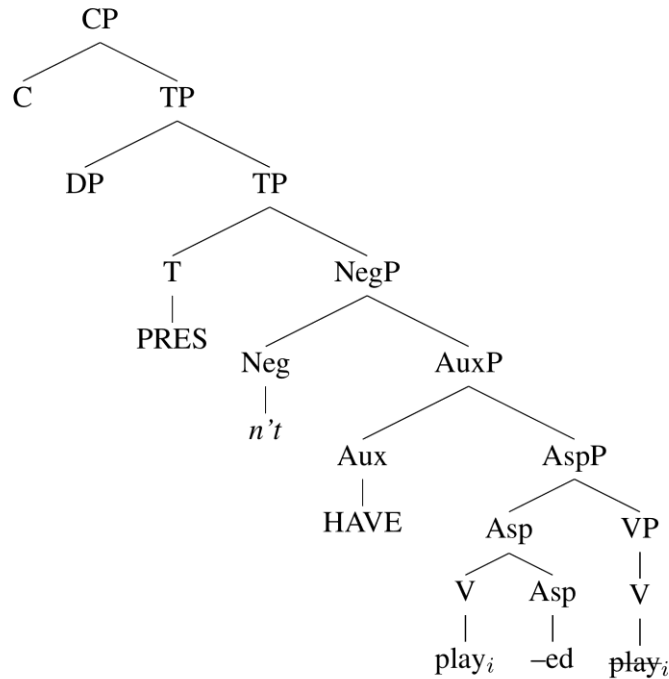


Figure 32: Asp Phrase for –ed/preterit veb following *haven't/ain't* within the phrase structure of PhAAE.

This chapter has demonstrated that participles are frequently leveled to preterit form in PhAAE, and that –ed verbs have the same preterit and participle form. In perfect contexts, *HAVE* typically selects –ed or preterit verbal forms or the participles *been* or *seen*, which often serve as lone participle. As a result, this dissertation considers the hypothesis that these forms contain a functional head (Asp) rather than T. The morphemes in Asp may be –ed or –ed for regular verbs, or –t or –∅ (with stem allomorphy) for irregular verbs. When participles are used, Asp can also be conveyed by the morpheme –en as in MAE (Table 23). Thus, whatever underlying auxiliary *ain't* is would select an AspP containing this Asp and associated inflection like *HAVE* does in Figure 23.

Morpheme	Example
<i>-ed</i>	<i>ain't played</i>
<i>-əd</i>	<i>ain't wanted</i>
<i>-t</i>	<i>ain't sent</i>
<i>-∅</i>	<i>ain't put</i>
<i>-en</i>	<i>ain't given</i>

Table 23: MAE/PhAAE Participial morphemes.

A crucial piece of evidence in favor of analyzing *-ed*/preterit forms as participles would be the use of preterit forms in passive contexts in PhAAE. Green reports that AAE uses both the preterit and participle form of verbs in passive constructions (2002:98-99). While a thorough and systematic study of passive constructions in the UMLC corpus is beyond the scope of this dissertation, some examples of *-ed* verbs and participles were nevertheless retrieved (33-35).

- (33) And Miss Betty got three color T.Vs. Alright, she had two. She bought two, right? And one **was given** to her. (Donette)
- (34) It ain't **been done** to me... it didn't happen to me. (Janet)
- (35) You didn't pay this poll tax, you **wasn't**, um, **allowed** to vote. (Nancy)

It remains to be seen whether PhAAE allows irregular preterit form verbs to be used in passive contexts. For example, would some speakers also accept (33) with leveling to the preterit form (e.g., *And one was gave to her*)? In any elicitation work addressing the issue of verbal forms used in passive constructions, it would be important to also take into account the prevalence of *get*-passives in PhAAE and associated verbal morphology (49–51).

- (36) I had **got handcuffed** that time, and **got put** in the wagon. (Janet)
- (37) We **got introduced** and everything, right? (Donette)
- (38) D'you ever **get blamed** for something you didn't do? (WH)

Additionally, *-ed* and preterit forms are used in other contexts, most notably following pre-verbal *done* and preterit *had*. Interestingly, participles like *been* are also used following *done*. A study of the rates of use of different verb forms in passive and other environments would allow comparison with rates in other contexts, like perfect environments. Ultimately, this would strengthen the assertion that preterit verbs in these instances contain a functional head similar to participles in MAE.

This dissertation then argues that perfect auxiliaries *have/haven't/ain't* in PhAAE select a main verb that contains Asp. The underlying auxiliary that expresses *ain't* in the past tense can also select a main verb containing Asp. It is as yet unclear whether the participles other than *been* and *seen* that occur in this environment are the result of speakers code-switching to MAE or whether these forms are possible allomorphs that developed due to *have*-deletion (as described earlier for forms like *seen*). Additionally, having an *-ed* allophone that represents Asp does not preclude *-ed* from maintaining its function as a reflex of the past tense in PhAAE. After all, speakers of PhAAE must eventually acquire *DO*-support and its structural relationship with tense morphology, shown by the categorical use of verbs in base form following *didn't*.

Positing that preterit verb forms contain Asp supports other facts about AAE. For one, it supports the fact that simple declarative sentences may contain *-ed* and preterit form verbs yet convey present perfect meaning. If these forms result from the phonetic reduction of *have* (i.e., *They've played since last week* > *They played since last week*), speakers are essentially using a lone participle that contains Asp to convey perfect meaning. Second, this explains why preterit forms appear most often following other auxiliaries and aspectual markers in PhAAE (e.g., following *have*, *done*, and preterit



*had*). Third, it explains the prevalence of pleonastic tense constructions (i.e., *didn't played*) in acquisition. If, during acquisition, *-ed* and preterit verbs in simple declaratives (*They played*) are interpreted as containing Asp rather than T, auxiliaries like *didn't* and *ain't* can negate them without there being a conflict with tense as in adult varieties of English that disallow this construction (*\*didn't played*).<sup>96</sup>

On that note, it is important to recall that *ain't played* sentences that convey past tense meaning and contain Asp are rare in the corpus, representing only 25% of verbs following *ain't* in past tense contexts, and are used predominantly by older speakers. Future studies of this speech community would therefore be essential for investigating the progress of this change and, in particular, finding out whether this variation is maintained or ironed out by younger generations such that verbs in base form follow *ain't* in past tense contexts categorically.

To summarize, the proposal presented in this chapter is that sentences of the type *ain't played* (exemplified by sentence E above) that convey past tense meaning contain an *-ed* or preterit form of the verb that indicates the presence of an Asp head rather than T, as with English participles. An appropriate question that might arise is whether this Asp head expresses some meaning. The next sub-section will briefly explore the possibility that this Asp expresses perfect aspectual meaning, a proposal put forth by Terry (2010) based on pre-verbal *done* sentences. The ramifications this would have on the phrase structure of PhAAE are also briefly explored.

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<sup>96</sup> Green (1998) proposes that *DO* originates in a lower AuxP like other auxiliaries in AAE. Such a proposal would account for sentences like the one above and possibly explain this phase in the acquisition of AAE prior to *DO*-support being acquired. However, it does appear that at some point *DO*-support is acquired by speakers (i.e., base verbs appear near categorically following *did/didn't* and *DO* never surfaces in declaratives except for emphasis).

### 5.4.3 Asp as Perfect Aspect

There is some work (Terry 2005, 2010) analyzing *-ed* as having the aspectual function of perfect aspect in AAE. Terry uses simple pre-verbal *done* sentences and simple *V-ed* sentences in a variety of AAE spoken in Wise, North Carolina to argue that “*-ed* morphology carries the perfect meaning [situation time precedes topic time]” (2010:22). This explains the fact that the sentences in (39) and (39) both may express perfect aspect in AAE.<sup>97</sup>

- (39) a. Mary **lived** in Chapel Hill  
b. Mary *done* **lived** in Chapel Hill.  
“Mary has lived in Chapel Hill.”

It may be possible that *-ed* expresses perfect aspect when it is Asp in preterit form verbs. In Chapter 2, perfect aspect was described as expressing the relationship between a prior event/situation and a reference point that may be either in the present or the (recent) past. According to Comrie, many languages account for the expression of these two points in time and their relationship by combining “the present tense of an auxiliary verb with a past participle” (Comrie 1976:106-7). In this case, the present tense auxiliary gives expression to the reference time (canonically the present) and the past participle gives

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<sup>97</sup> Previous analyses of sentences like that in (39a) in the main text, which that express perfect meaning, proposed that a covert *done* was present in the sentence (Dechaine 1993). However, Terry (2010) says that (39a) cannot have a perfect of persistence reading while (39b) can, and thus (39a) must not contain a covert *done*. For Terry, pre-verbal *done* introduces stativity into the sentence. This explains the fact that sentence (3a) below can function as a perfect, but not a perfect of persistence.

- (3) a. \*Mary lived in Chapel Hill for three years.  
b. Mary *done* lived in Chapel Hill for three years.  
“Mary has lived in Chapel Hill for three years.”

expression to the time of the past event/situation, positioning it anterior to present time reference. The Asp would therefore express the anteriority of the past event expressed by the verb to the present tense expressed by the auxiliary.

This hypothesis could account for present perfect sentences using either *have/haven't* or *ain't* and past perfect sentences containing *had*. The auxiliary sets the point of reference through tense and the preterit describes the event/situation, placing it or its beginning firmly in the past, anterior to the reference point. However, in negative contexts where *ain't* is used as an auxiliary, there is no clear indication of tense or the point of reference other than that expressed by main verb morphology. The conveyance of tense meaning now shifts to the verb, in *-ed* or preterit form, which expresses that the event/situation has occurred or began in the past. As previously discussed, the identity of verbal forms in both perfect and past contexts aids in this shift. Thus, the preterit form verbs following *ain't* in sentences that convey past tense meaning could represent perfect aspect. A similar analysis is proposed by Waugh (1987) for the French passé composé, where a past tense function also developed from a present perfect construction.

On the other hand, this analysis raises an issue for the general phrase structure of AAE. Green (1998) proposes that AAE has a double Asp Phrase to accommodate sentences that contain two successive aspectual markers, shown in (40) and (40).

- (40) a. They **be done** left when I get there. (Green 2002:26, ex. d.3)  
“They usually have already left by the time I get there.”  
b. The instructors **BIN done** left. (Green 2002:26, ex. e.1)  
“The instructors left a long time ago.”

Constraints in the ordering of aspectual phrases would be enforced through selection. Each AspP selects the phrase that follows it, whether it be another AspP or a VP. In the

examples above, both habitual *be* and remote past *BIN* select *done*, and *done* selects an *-ed* or preterit form verb. If there is another, lower AspP for perfect aspect on main verbs, AAE would need to allow a triple Asp phrase to accommodate such sentences.

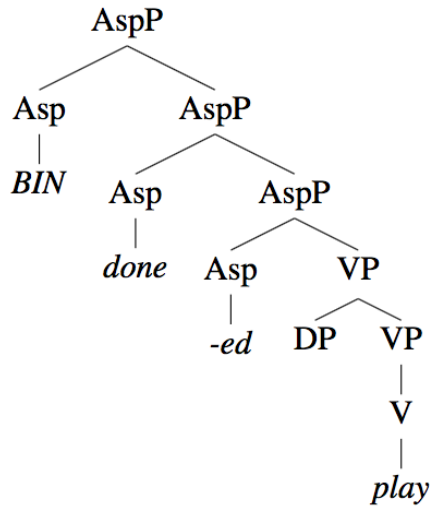


Figure 33: Triple Aspectual Phrases in AAE (hypothetical)

This analysis raises additional issues when considering the compositional meaning of pre-verbal *done* or preterit *had* constructions. For pre-verbal *done*, Terry proposes that its primary role is “to introduce stativity into the sentence” (2010:22). However, the analysis of *-ed* as having perfect aspect runs into problems in accounting for the compositional meaning of preterit *had* constructions. Namely, this analysis falsely predicts that past perfect and preterit *had* constructions will have the same compositional meaning, where *had* conveys past tense meaning and the *-ed*, preterit, or participle conveys anteriority to the past.<sup>98</sup>

To account for the fact that preterit *had* has an auxiliary in the past tense and selects an *-ed* or preterit verb yet conveys simple past tense, we might propose that this

<sup>98</sup> The same is true of other constructions that combine a past auxiliary with inflected main verb like pleonastic tense constructions (e.g., *didn't played*).

Asp represents perfective aspect instead. Perfective aspect views the event or situation as singular and complete, having a beginning, middle, and end (Comrie 1979). As such, two possible meanings of perfective aspect are “completive” and “resultative,” both emphasizing the end stages or aftermath of a situation (Comrie 1979). In varieties of English, perfective is the default aspectual value for the past tense, where emphasis falls on the completion of a situation. Perfective aspect is typically unmarked in English, but may become associated with *-ed*/preterits given its default status in the past tense. This analysis would also work for *ain't played* sentences that convey past tense meaning and have a main verb in *-ed* or preterit form. In this case, *-ed* /Asp would signify that the *playing* event had ended. Thus speakers may analyze *play-ed* in a sentence like *They played yesterday* as containing overt perfective aspect (*-ed*) when these sentences begin to be negated by *ain't*.

On the other hand, this proposal also raises some issues. First, it seems unlikely that present perfect sentences containing *have/haven't* and *ain't* would have main verbs expressing perfective aspect, given the importance of present relevance in many perfect sentences. Second, there would be a problem for *done* constructions, which express perfect aspect as well. Finally, the use of *-ed* and preterit form verbs to convey present perfect meaning in simple affirmative declaratives becomes much less intuitive under this analysis. One solution would be to propose that PhAAE has both a perfect and perfective Asp head that can appear in preterit form verbs depending on the context. Settling on a particular meaning for the functional head present in *-ed* and preterit verbs following *ain't* would require a more detailed study of the corpus coupled with native speaker judgments. For the time being, this dissertation will consider the possibility that this

functional head is underspecified for any specific semantic meaning in PhAAE. In this case, *-ed* in preterit form verbs would be a morpheme with several homophones, all expressing a meaning akin to either ‘past’, ‘completed’, or ‘anterior.’ However, the specific meaning would depend on the grammatical context, whether tense or aspect.

## 5.5 Conclusions

This chapter examined variation in verbal morphology following the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts, providing the first study of such variation in a speech community using the UMLC corpus. The existence of morphological variation in past tense contexts was confirmed, showing that either base or *-ed*/preterit form verbs may be used following *ain't*. However, base form verbs are strongly preferred in this environment and are used near categorically following *didn't*. Additionally, older speakers are more likely to use verbs in *-ed*/preterit form following *ain't*. Because this mirrors the form of present perfect sentences containing *ain't* (*ain't* + *-ed*/preterit /participle), this finding aligns with a hypothesis whereby present perfect sentences containing *ain't* were reanalyzed as conveying past tense meaning. This chapter further illustrated that a variety of circumstances in PhAAE would have provided the grammatical conditions conducive to producing sentences of the type *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit that expressed past tense. These conditions included minimal use of *have* to express perfect meaning, the leveling of participles to preterits in perfect contexts, and semantic overlap between the simple present and present perfect. Considering that other varieties of English, most notably Appalachian English, also use *ain't* in present perfect contexts, we might wonder why

such a change only happened in AAE. Thus, one further avenue of study would be to compare these grammatical conditions present in AAE with other varieties of English. It may be the case that differences in these conditions explain why this change happened in AAE and not in other varieties. Finally, sentences of the type *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit that convey past tense were shown to have the same structure as present perfect constructions. Thus, this chapter proposed that *-ed*/preterits contained a functional projection other than Tense, similar to participles in MAE (Embick 2003, 2004).

## CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

### 6.1 Major Findings

This dissertation took a quantitative approach to the study of language variation and change in the Philadelphia variety of African American English. Using a corpus of recordings of naturalistic casual speech to study speakers' variable use of *ain't* for negation in past tense contexts touched on other areas of AAE grammar, such as negation, auxiliaries, verbal morphology, and the tense/aspect system. Consequently, investigation of this phenomenon led to an intricate look at the interplay of negation and the expression of tense/aspect in PhAAE as well as how it has changed over time. This dissertation thus provides a case study on grammatical innovation and expansion and its connection to the overall organization of a grammatical system, underscoring the fact that linguistic change in one area of the grammar does not occur in isolation.

As a result of this line of inquiry into the variable behavior of *ain't* in past tense contexts, this dissertation advances several major arguments concerning the historical development of PhAAE and the structure of its grammar. First, this dissertation provides an example of change over time in the use of *ain't* in past tense contexts in PhAAE. Previous research had claimed that the use of *ain't* in the past tense was an innovation that had increased in use in the twentieth century (Wolfram 2004; Howe 2005). This dissertation provides evidence of this change, notably through comparison with the use of *ain't* in other grammatical contexts, which shows stable variation over time. This dissertation also pinpointed high frequency users of past *ain't* to be those young speakers who grew up in Philadelphia and primarily interact with other African Americans. Many



of these speakers are considered “core” members of the speech community and linguistic innovators within it (Labov and Harris 1986). By showing that Southern speakers of all ages do not use *ain't* in past tense contexts as frequently, this dissertation lends support to the hypothesis that the use of *ain't* for *didn't* originated in the urban North, potentially due to residential and linguistic segregation during the period of the Great Migration. Connections to style shift and co-variation with negative concord offer further avenues of study of the socio-stylistic profile of *ain't*.

Additionally, building on work from Weldon (1994), this dissertation used distributional data to show that, syntactically, *ain't* does not pattern with negative items in PhAAE. It does not occur in SpecNegP nor in Neg. Instead, it patterns like other negated auxiliaries used in varieties of English, originating in a lower AuxP and moving to T or merging directly in T. Furthermore, this dissertation provides the first ever quantitative study of the morphological variation reported to follow *ain't* in past tense contexts (Fasold and Wolfram 1970, DeBose 1994, Green 2002). It then connected this morphological variation to the underlying structure of *ain't* sentences, positing that there are two structures for past tense *ain't*: one where the underlying auxiliary is merged in T (like *DO*) and the main verb remains in base form and one where the auxiliary is merged in a lower AuxP (like auxiliaries *BE* and *HAVE*) and the form of the main verb is selected by the auxiliary. In the latter case, this main verb contains a functional head, similar to participles in MAE, which gives it inflection. Chapter 5 showed that this second construction (e.g., *ain't* + *-ed*/preterit) is used only 25% of the time to convey past tense meaning, but is the construction preferred by older speakers, reinforcing that the past tense use of *ain't* most likely developed from its use in the present perfect. This is also

supported by cross-linguistic data (Comrie 1976, Waugh 1987, Bybee and Dahl 1989) as well as various properties of the tense/aspect and morphological systems of PhAAE. This pathway of evolution was further supported through a quantitative analysis of the linguistic conditioning on the use of *ain't* for *didn't*. An analysis of the phonological segment preceding *ain't* and *didn't* allowed us to reject the hypothesis that *ain't* developed through the phonetic reduction of the initial /d/ in *didn't* due to consonant cluster deletion. Instead, a study of verbal stativity found that dynamic verbs occurred most frequently following *ain't*. Since stative verbs sometimes clash with perfective meaning (Comrie 1976), we would expect to find dynamic verbs preferred in perfective contexts, especially in the absence of *didn't*.

## **6.2 Open Theoretical Questions**

In addition to the notable advances this dissertation makes, it also leaves a number of questions open. This section and the next will address four questions that provide avenues for further study that might complete or complement this line of research. In this section, open questions of a more theoretical nature will be dealt with.

A question this dissertation has not attempted to answer is the relationship between MAE and AAE as it relates to speakers' grammatical representations. In other words, whether speakers in the corpus are using one linguistic system or toggling between two separate linguistic systems when they switch between variants also found in MAE to those associated with AAE. Labov (Labov 1998) argues for "co-existent systems" whereby each speaker's grammar contains both an MAE and AAE component.

Weldon (1994) argues that the fact that *ain't* is found to share a distribution with negated auxiliaries in AAE shows that it is a surface variant of the same underlying auxiliary category. She thus posits that *ain't* and negated auxiliaries are part of the same AAE grammar. DeBose (1994) on the other hand, attempts to show that the AAE verbal system is more similar to African and Creole languages (with its reliance on verbal stativity to convey tense/aspect meaning). Thus the use of *ain't* necessarily implicates the use of a grammatical system different from that of MAE. Throughout the dissertation, I have questioned whether a particular alternation is code-switching between MAE and AAE or the use of a particular form associated with MAE is due to interference or linguistic insecurity. However, this dissertation has largely considered all speech produced by the individuals in the corpus to be part of the repertoire in a community that includes speakers with varying experiences with and relationships to MAE. The asymmetries in morphological forms following certain auxiliaries provides an object of study for this issue. For example, in past tense contexts, *didn't* is near categorically followed by base form verbs, whereas, *ain't* may be followed by either base or preterit form verbs. On the other hand, *didn't* is used by most speakers much more than *ain't* as a past tense variant. Furthermore, there are examples (e.g., *Do it happen?*) of speakers using *DO*-support with non-standard agreement. One area that may shed further light on this discrepancy is the use of temporal expressions with negated auxiliaries. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in MAE, definite temporal expressions or temporal expressions that denote past tense meaning cannot be used with the present perfect. Therefore, we would not expect *haven't* to be used with an adverb like *yesterday* (e.g., *\*They haven't played outside yesterday*). Likewise, we would not expect *didn't* to be used with an indefinite adverb, or one that

expresses present time reference (*\*They didn't play outside since this morning*). However, given our analysis for *ain't*, we might expect it to be able to co-occur with both types of temporal expression (*They ain't played outside yesterday*, *They ain't played outside since this morning*). The differential behavior of *ain't* and other negated auxiliaries, may therefore be an indication that speakers have access to two sets of grammatical rules when it comes to *ain't* and its variation with auxiliaries. Additionally, this study could further be enhanced by looking at acquisition data, where we know that there are differences in the way AAE speaking children acquire *DO*-support as compared to children of other varieties of English (Stokes 1976).

Second, in order to advance some of the arguments made in this dissertation with regard to linguistic structure, it would be essential to collect grammaticality or acceptability judgment data from native speakers of PhAAE. This is important on two fronts. First, in the case of morphosyntactic variables, judgment data can aid in analysis by providing more data for constructions that may be infrequent in spontaneous speech like *ain't*. Second, the corpus data speaks to community patterns of variation and therefore to what can best be described as a community grammar. Studies of community grammar are essential to our understanding of language change. However, individuals within a community may be doing different things that interact with both the socio-stylistic and linguistic constraints on language use to produce individual patterns of variation (Tamminga, MacKenzie, and Embick 2016). Judgment data would be most helpful in understanding individual speakers' use of verbal morphology in simple past sentences following *ain't*. Chapter 3 introduced four different profiles with regard to a speaker's use of inflected verbs following *ain't*: there are some speakers who only use

base forms in this environment, others who use only preterit forms, and still others who use both. These profiles were based on production, and therefore on linguistic performance rather than competence. Though production data is an important tool for understanding language use, especially with regard to the type of input learners have access to during acquisition, descriptions based on production provide only half of the story. It is impossible to know with just production data whether each speaker's pattern of verbal morphology is reflective of their actual competence and beliefs about the grammar of the language that they speak. In other words, production data cannot tell us what a speaker *can* say (but don't) vs. what a speaker absolutely *cannot* say. Using judgment data might give us a better description of both the speech community and the individual grammars that make it up. Knowing the socio-stylistic and linguistic constraints already in operation on these variables will aid in constructing a full picture of variation. Thus, collecting judgment data that tests the tense/aspect plasticity of *ain't* as compared to other negated auxiliaries would greatly complement this corpus study.

Testing grammaticality judgments with a stigmatized language like AAE might be difficult for a variety of reasons, including linguistic insecurity (Labov 2006) and interference from standard varieties (Cornips and Poletto 2005). However, obtaining accurate grammaticality judgments may always be a difficult task. Labov writes in the aptly titled *When Intuitions Fail*, "Some of the most striking results of grammatical inquiries occurs when many judges agree that a certain form is completely unacceptable, yet use it themselves freely in every-day speech" (Labov 1996). He outlines several reasons for such discrepancies, and highlights the difficulty of obtaining accurate grammaticality judgments of AAE constructions like remote past *BIN* and past tense *ain't*

from speakers with a wide range of linguistic experiences. On the other hand, judgment data has been successfully collected in the semantic and syntactic study of AAE (See work by Lisa Green and Michael Terry). There are some diverging accounts for whether speakers who are bi-dialectal in a standard and non-standard language are equipped to provide accurate judgment data, with some arguing that they may be performing according to prescriptive norms or interference (Cornips & Poletto 2005), and others arguing that they may be more linguistically aware (Henry 2005; Cheshire and Stein 1997). Though interference from the standard language and prescriptive beliefs will always be a concern, recent studies in sociolinguistics and syntactic variation have successfully combined corpus and judgment data to answer questions about structural variation (Robinson and Duncan 2018). Therefore, the possibility of combining this corpus study with native speaker judgments will remain open as a future avenue of research on the use of *ain't* and its interaction with verbal morphology.

### **6.3 Philadelphia and Beyond**

This section deals with two more potential expansions of the work presented in this dissertation that involve variation and change within African American English.

First, this study offers the opportunity to update the analysis through a panel or trend study of PhAAE. The UMLC corpus recordings were made in the early 1980s. As nearly forty years have passed since the collection of this data, questions may be raised about the status of *ain't* in past tense contexts in the Philadelphia speech community today. Has this change gone to completion? Is *ain't* used categorically by speakers who

are isolated from MAE? Does it now show a stable pattern of variation as *ain't* in other grammatical contexts does? Another possible question is whether the use of *ain't* has further expanded to other auxiliary contexts in the language. Chapter 4 presented a number of contexts where *ain't* is not currently used in AAE, most notably for past tense *BE* (*wasn't*, *weren't*) and for habitual *be* (*don't*). Although it has been reported for contemporary varieties, the UMLC corpus contains very few tokens of *ain't* varying with *don't* with predicates other than *got*. An update on the UMLC data might thus answer questions on whether *ain't* has moved further into these contexts, and whether or not this has affected its syntactic status.

A second question left open by this dissertation is whether the linguistic situation in Philadelphia is comparable to other Northern cities in the U.S. Would the same patterns of variation and change with regard to the past tense use of *ain't* be found in other locations? AAE has by and large been considered to have more nationally oriented patterns of morphosyntax and more localized patterns of phonology (Labov 2014). However, recent work is also uncovering regional grammatical patterns of variation among different varieties of AAE (Wolfram 2007). Several large corpora, including longitudinal corpora, offer the opportunity to study these differences and begin to measure the extent of grammatical differences between varieties of AAE. This dissertation represents one small step in that direction.

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