

# Phonological Features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

(Pollock, Bailey, Berni, Fletcher, Hinton, Johnson, Roberts, & Weaver, 1998)

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This page will be updated as information becomes available.

## Features Involving Unstressed Syllables

### Initial and Medial Unstressed Syllable Deletion (IM-USD)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Deletion of unstressed syllables; initial and medial word position only	unstressed syll = V only > unstressed syll = CV closed grammatical class > open grammatical class	about → [baʊt] government → [gʌvnrnt]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Occurs in most varieties of English, most frequent in AAVE, possibly more common in older speakers	Rural: + Urban: +	General: Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Cukor-Avila, 1989; Rickford, 1999; Vaughn-Cooke, 1987 Children: Vaughn-Cooke, 1976, 1986

### Haplology (HAP)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Deletion of reduplicated syllable.		Mississippi → [mɪsɪpi] probably → [prɒbli]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Occurs in most varieties of English, more frequent in AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Wolfram, 1994

### Prevoallic Voicing of /p/ Initial Unstressed Syllables (PV-IUP)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Voicing of initial singleton /p/ in initial unstressed syllables.		pajamas → [bedʒæməz] potato → [bɒtɛɪrɒ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurs in SWVE	Reported in Memphis data	Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b



# Features Involving Clusters

## Final Cluster Reduction (F-CR)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Deletion of second consonant in final consonant cluster; both consonants must share voicing	single morpheme > double morpheme unstressed > stressed following consonant > following vowel alveolar plosive > other consonant	cold → [kɔɹl] hand → [hænd] desk → [des] left → [lɛf]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Occurs in all varieties of English, more frequent in AAVE	Rural: + Urban: +	Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999

## Metathesis (FsC-MET)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Metathesis of final /s/ + stop clusters	may be lexically determined - primarily "ask"	ask → [æks] grasp → [græps]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurred in earlier forms of SWVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999

## Backing in /str/ Clusters (BK-str)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Substitution of /k/ for /t/ in initial /str/ clusters		street → [skrit] straw → [skrɔ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Apparently unique to AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999

## Initial /r/ Cluster Reduction (ICR-r)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Most often with /θr/ clusters or in unstressed syllables	most often with unstressed "thr" or in unstressed syllables	throw → [θɔy] professor → [pɒfəsə]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Occurs in other non-standard varieties of English, esp. in the South		Hinton & Pollock, 2000; Wolfram, 1994

## Initial /j/ cluster Reduction (ICR-j)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Deletion of /j/ in /Cj/ sequences	usually followed by /u/ vowel	

		computer → [kəmputə-] beautiful → [bju:ɾɪfl]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Apparently unique to AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998

### Initial /j/ Cluster Rhotacization (Irhhot-J)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Rhotacization of /j/ in /Cj/ sequences	usually followed by /u/ vowel possibly a regional variant of ICR-J	beautiful → [brɪɾɪfl] cute → [kɹut] music → [mɹuzɪk]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Apparently unique to AAVE (may be limited to Southern AAVE)	Reported in Memphis data	

## Features Involving Final Consonants

### Final Consonant Deletion (FCD)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Deletion of singleton consonants in syllable-final position <i>Note: When final nasals deleted, nasality maintained on preceding vowel. When voiced obstruents deleted, length of preceding vowel maintained. Consonants remaining from reduced final clusters may be eligible for deletion.</i>	Nasal>non-nasal coronal>non-coronal voiced>voiceless may be lexically determined	man → [mæ̃] good → [gʊ̃] five → [faɪ̃] football → [fʊbɔɪ̃]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Apparently unique to AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram, 1994

### Final Obstruent Devoicing (FDV-Ob)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Syllable-final obstruents are devoiced; length of preceding vowel maintained		bad → [bæ:t̥] nose → [noʊ:s̥] orange → [ɔʒənt̥]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>

Apparently unique to AAVE <i>Note: Fasold (1981) points out that although devoicing of final /d/ also occurs in Southern white vernaculars, the devoiced /d/ in AAVE is different because it is also glottalized (see F-Glot-d).</i>		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Fasold, 1981; Fasold & William, 1970; Wolfram, 1994
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### Final /d/ Glottalization (F-Glot-d)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Final devoiced /d/ becomes a glottal stop or a glottalized /t/. ( <i>an extension of FDV-Ob</i> )		bad → [bæ:tʔ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Apparently unique to AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Fasold, 1981



## Features Involving Interdentals

### Labialization of Interdental Fricatives (LAB-th)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Interdental fricatives replaced with labiodental fricatives	Syllable-final and intervocalic>syllable initial voiceless>voiced	bath → [bæf] mother → [mʌvə] thumb → [fʌm]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurred in earlier forms of SWVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999

### Stopping of Interdental Fricatives (ST-th)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Interdental fricatives replaced with stops	voiced>voiceless; initial > final	this → [dɪs] father → [fədə] with → [wɪt]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurs in Northern non-standard varieties		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999

### Stopping of Interdental Voiceless Fricatives Near Nasals (ST-th-N)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
/θ/ replaced with /t/ contiguous to a nasal consonant		tenth → [tɛnt] nothing → [nʌtɪŋ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References

## Alveolarization of Voiceless Interdental Fricatives (ALV-th)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
/θ/s replaced with /s/ when syllable final and within word before another consonant		bathroom → [bæsrum] birthday → [bæ-sdeɪ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
	Reported in Memphis data	

## Features Involving Other Fricatives

### Stopping of Voiced Fricatives Before Syllabic Nasals (ST-Vd-N)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Voiced fricatives preceding syllabic nasals may be stopped. <i>Note: /d/ may actually go to a glottal stop through FDV-Ob and American English allophonic rule of /t/ realized as a glottal stop before syllabic nasals</i>		seven → [sɛbm̩] wasn't → [wʌdn̩t] or [wʌʔn̩]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurs in SWVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Wolfram, 1994

## Features Involving Lateral Liquids

### Vocalization of /l/ (VOC-l)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Postvocalic (but not intervocalic) and syllabic /l/ produced as a back vowel – usually either high back rounded [ɯ], high back unrounded [u], mid back unrounded [ʏ], or sometimes [ə] <i>Note: After mid back vowels, vocalized /l/ may coalesce with vowel, as in "ball" becomes "ba" or "bowl" becomes "bo"</i>		bell → [bɛɯ] ball → [bɑɯ] belt → [bɛɯt] bottle → [bɑɯ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Occurs in many varieties of English, frequent in AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Fasold & Wolfram, 1970

## Deletion of /l/ Before Labials(DEL-l)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
When /l/ comes after a vowel and before a labial consonant in the same syllable, /l/ may be deleted		help → [hɛp] Rudolph → [rʊdɔf]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
		Fasold & Wolfram, 1970; Rickford, 1999



## Features Involving Vocalic & Postvocalic /r/

### Derhotacization or Deletion of Vocalic and Postvocalic /r/ (DeRhot)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Vocalic /r/ (also known as syllabic /r/ or a rhotic vowel) produced as a non-rhotic vowel. Postvocalic /r/ (also known as a rhotic diphthong) produced as non-rhotic vowel or deleted. Following front vowels, most often replaced by non-rhotic vowel. Following back vowels, most often deleted. Intervocalic /r/ may also be affected, esp. when following mid back vowel.	ɔə > ə > ɪə > eə > iə > ə > -r-	bird → [bɪd] zipper → [zɪpɪ] deer → [dɪɪ] bear → [bɛɪ] car → [kɑ] door → [dɔɪ] story → [stɔɪ] hurry → [hʌɪ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Historically well-recognized feature of SWVE, but now rapidly disappearing from this dialect; now may occur primarily in older speakers in rural areas		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Rickford, 1999

### Schwa Offglide (Schwa-off)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
A schwa offglide may follow vocalic or postvocalic /r/.	eə, iə, > ɪə, ɔə	chair → [tʃɪəə] ears → [ɪəəz]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Unique to AAVE	Reported in Memphis data	Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b

### Vowel Centralization Before /r/ (VC-r)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples

Front vowels preceding /r/ may be centralized, deleted, or rhotacized	VC-r and Schwa-off frequently co-occur	bear → [bɛ̃r] here → [hɛ̃r]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Unique to AAVE	Reported in Memphis data	Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b

### Raised Onglide to Stressed Syllabic /r/ (RO-3<sup>^</sup>)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Addition of [ɛ̃]-like quality as onglide to stressed syllabic /r/		hurry → [hɛ̃rɪ] stir → [stɛ̃r]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Unique to AAVE	Reported in Memphis data	Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b

## Features Involving Diphthongs (non-rhotic)

### Monophthongization of /aɪ/ (Mono-aɪ)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Second element of diphthong / aɪ/ deleted; first element typically lengthened	Only in open syllables or before nasals or voiced obstruents	pie → [pa:] ride → [ra:d] time → [ta:m]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
Found in SWVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram, 1994

### Monophthongization of /aʊ/ (Mono-aʊ)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Second element of diphthong /aʊ/ deleted	typically in multisyllabic words before voiced obstruents	cowboy → [kəbɔɪ]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
	Reported in Memphis data	

### Monophthongization or Central Offglide of ɔɪ (Mono-ɔɪ)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Internal Constraints</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Second element of diphthong /ɔɪ/ deleted or centralized	Mostly in open syllables or multisyllabic words before voiced obstruents	toybox → [tɔbaks] boy → [bɔɪ]
<b>Scope and Direction</b>	<b>Geographical or Rural/Urban</b>	<b>References</b>
		Rickford, 1999; Wolfram, 1994

## Monophthongization & Syllable Reduction Before Liquid (MSR-L)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Diphthongs / aʊ, aɪ, ɔɪ/ followed by unstressed syllabic liquids [ɫ, ʒ] are monophthongized and collapsed into one syllable		fire → [fɪʒ] flour → [flʌʒ] oil → [ɔɪ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Found in SWVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998



## Features Involving Vowels (non-rhotic)

### Tensing of Lax Vowels (Tns)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Lax vowels are produced as tense vowels	esp. before liquids & velars	still → [stiːl] pig → [piːg]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Found in SWVE	Reported in Memphis data	

### /ɪ/ɛ/ Merger Before Nasals (MRG-ɪ/ɛ)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Before syllabic-final nasals, /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ merge to [ɪ].	Coronal > Non-Coronal (pin/pen > him/hem)	The words "pin" and "pen" become homonymous. pen → [pɪn] again → [əɪn]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Widespread in AAVE and SWVE after 1875		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Brown, 1991; Labov, 1968; Wolfram, 1994

### Tense/Lax Merger Before /l/ (MRG-T/L)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Before tautosyllabic /l/, tense front vowels are laxened (e.g., the words "wheel" and "will" are homonymous)		wheel → [wiɫ] tail → [tɛɫ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Widespread in SWVE and AAVE after 1875		Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Wolfram, 1994



### Raised /æ/ (Rs-ae)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
/æ/ is raised to [ɛ] or [e]		ham → [hɛm] wagon → [wɛɡŋ]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also occurs in many Northern cities dialects, but probably unrelated to AAVE; does not occur in SWVE; widespread in AAVE after 1875		Bailey & Thomas, 1998

### Rhotacization of /l/ (Rhot-l)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Rhotacization of /l/ in words with following postvocalic or syllabic /l/		milk → [mɛɹk] pickle → [pɛɹkl]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Unique to AAVE	Reported in Memphis data	Pollock & Berni, 1996, 1997a, 1997b



## Features that Existed in Earlier Forms of AAVE

### Long Offglides of /æ/ (Off-ae)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
/æ/ produced with long offglide towards [i]	Most common before voiceless fricatives	glass → [glæ <sup>ɪ</sup> s]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Only used by older persons in rural areas	Southern: + Rural: + Urban: -	Schremp, 1996

### Monophthongal /e/ and /o/ (Mono-e,o)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
/e/ and /o/ produced as monophthongs		cake → [kek] coat → [kot]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Reported in Gullah and Caribbean Creoles. In English dialects, does not occur in speakers born after 1900; in 1800s, occurred only in AAVE		Bailey & Thomas, 1998



## Prosodic Features

### Front Stressing (FrStress)

Description	Internal Constraints	Examples
Stress moved to first syllable of words	Lexically determined	police → [pəʊlɪs] Detroit → [diˈtrɔɪt]
Scope and Direction	Geographical or Rural/Urban	References
Also in SWVE		Rickford, 1999; Wolfram, 1994



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