# «**AAVE In Pop-Music**: Cultural Appropriation or Appreciation?”

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Master's Thesis In English Linguistics

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University Of Bergen

May 2023

2023

AAVE In Pop-Music: Cultural Appropriation or Appreciation?

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https://bora.uib.no/

## Abstract in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven tar for seg bruk av *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE) i pop-musikksjangeren. Det legges spesielt vekt på diskusjonen om en kan snakke om kulturelle approprieing, når ikke-svarte musiker bruker AAVE både i sangene og sitt private språk. Dette gjøres ved a sammenligne musikernes ordbruk i sangtekst og personlig språkbruk i intervjuopptak. Oppgaven analyserer språkbruken til musikerne Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish og Olivia Rodrigo, der fire grammatiske trekk, og ordbruk som er typisk for AAVE analyseres. Datagrunnlaget til oppgaven er to korpuser, som ble samlet av meg selv. Den første korpusen, songcorpus (SONC), inneholder 14 sangtekster fra hver musiker, der totalt ordantall ligger på 12955 ord. Den andre korpusen inneholder tjue minutt intervjuopptak av hver musiker og inneholder 6000 ord. Metodikken som blir anvendt i oppgaven er en blanding av kritisk diskurs analyse og korpuslingvistikk.

Resultatene fra oppgaven sammenlignes med funn fra tidligere studier som tar for seg bruk av AAVE i for det meste hip-hopmusikk fra ikke-svarte musikere.
Oppgaven forventet å finne bruk av AAVE i både sangtekster og intervjuopptak, med hyppigere bruk i sangtekstene, siden det forventes at musikerne bruker sin egen dialekt fremfor AAVE.

Resultatene viser at det blir brukt AAVE i både sangtekstene og intervjuopptakene. Det ble også funnet forskjeller i ordbruk mellom sangtekster og mer personlig språk i form av intervjuopptak. Ariana Grande bruker mer AAVE i sangtekstene enn de to andre musikerne, mens bruk av AAVE i intervjukontekster er lav for alle tre artister. Kulturell approprieing blir derfor diskutert i sammenheng med språkbruket av Ariana Grande.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Leah Bauke for taking on this project and especially for believing in me and this thesis when it was difficult for me to do so. Your guidance, advice, and encouragement were motivating throughout this whole process. I would also like to thank my fellow students at Lesesalen, especially Anja – thank you for making this process more fun, thank you for listening to my complaints and of course thank you for always being there to procrastinate with me. Furthermore, a huge thank you to my family and my friends for supporting me in everything I do and rooting for me, even from far away. Thank you to Steffi for proof reading this thesis. Last, but not least, I want to thank my partner Alex for supporting me, always believing in me, and making me laugh even during the most stressful of times. This thesis would not have happened without any of you.

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Saskia Pircer,

May 2023

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**List of Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| AAVE | African American Vernacular English |
| AG | Ariana Grande |
| BiE | Billie Eilish |
| CADA | Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis |
| CDA | Critical Discourse Analysis |
| DA | Discourse Analysis |
| GAE | General American English |
| GE | General English |
| INTC | Interview Corpus |
| SONC | Song Corpus |
| OR | Olivia Rodrigo |

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# 1 Introduction

The first chapter outlines the aim and scope of the thesis, before moving on to the research questions and hypotheses. Finally, an overview of the structure of the thesis is given.

## 1.1 Aim and Scope

This thesis project aims to analyze and investigate the lyrics of pop singers Ariana Grande, Olivia Rodrigo, and Billie Eilish. All three singers have at one point in their career been accused of using a "blaccent" and/or appropriating African American culture for their own personal gain. Examples would be dressing a certain way or using African American Vernacular English, short AAVE, in their lyrics and private communication. The focus of this paper is on the linguistic style used within these singer's lyrics and to compare it to their everyday speech style by comparing the lyrics to interviews. There are many ways to analyze discourse. I will make use of Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, and Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis, CADA, and analyze four grammatical features of AAVE and how many occurrences of them can be found within the chosen lyrics. This will act as my main analysis. However, as mentioned before, I will then use the same strategy and analyze the three singer's speech in interviews and compare the outcomes. Grammatical features that will be analyzed are the following:

- Absence of copula / auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions, as in *he tall;*
- Use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect, as in *he be walking*
- Absence of third person singular present tense *-s*; as in *he walk*
- Multiple negation or negative concord, *he don't do nothin'*

In addition to the four grammatical features chosen, lexical features will also be discussed. The phonological features will be disregarded due to the length of this thesis.

This study was inspired by previous research within this field. The main research I am building my own thesis on is by Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) and Jamie Shinhee Lee (2011). In addition to these articles, a summary of Simpson (1999), Intan Tia Ajeng Aryani (2020), and Bucholtz (1999) will be given. My thesis differentiates itself from all the ones mentioned in that I am analyzing AAVE within the pop genre. The main papers this thesis is based on analyze

the use of AAVE by non-black singers within the hip-hop and rap genres. Only Simpson (1999) discusses the pop genre, however, his focus is on the general use of American English by British singers.

## 1.2    Research Question and Hypotheses

The research question and hypotheses of this thesis were developed out of the question and discussion of whether these singers can be accused of cultural appropriation. Therefore, my research questions are the following:

1. Do Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish, and Olivia Rodrigo use AAVE within their song lyrics? If yes, how many occurrences of AAVE can be counted, and how relevant is it in the wider context of their work?
2. Is there a big difference in the linguistic choice of the singers within their lyrics vs. their interviews? If so, how does this express itself and what could this mean?
3. Can one talk about cultural appropriation within these examples or not?

The hypotheses for the study of AAVE within the lyrics and interviews are the following:

1. I expect the use of AAVE to increase in songs in more recent years.
2. I do not expect the general use of AAVE to be particularly high compared to General American English, GAE
3. Grammatical features of AAVE will be less present in informal speech, i.e. the interviews. This is due to the fact, that I expect the singers to use their own dialect rather than using more intricate features of AAVE such as grammatical features, as it is less natural for them.
4. Lexical features of AAVE will be more present in informal speech, i.e. the interviews. This expectation stems from the fact that many say that AAVE lexical items are now part of the speech repertoire of the younger generation.

The thesis finds that all three singers make use of AAVE features in their lyrics, as well as their interview speech. Ariana Grande uses the highest amount of features overall, while Billie Eilish's and Olivia Rodrigo's general use of AAVE features is low. The study also finds a difference in the speech style of Ariana Grande in her lyrics vs. her interviews. Ariana Grande

uses more AAVE features in the former. I find that General American English (GAE) is overall more used than AAVE, in both lyrics as well as interviews.

## 1.3    The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided up into six chapters. Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the thesis, including the aim and the scope and the research questions and hypotheses of this thesis. In Chapter 2, the theoretical background will be outlined. First, a definition of cultural appropriation will be given and discussed. Furthermore, a definition of AAVE and a historical background will be given. This is followed by an overview of the AAVE elements that I will be analyzing, including the four grammatical features as well as the lexical features. Thereafter, previous relevant studies for my thesis will be discussed. Finally, the theoretical chapter ends with background information on the three singers at the center of this study. In the next chapter, the relevant methodology for my thesis will be explained and discussed, before my own method will be explained further. In Chapter 4 the results will be presented and in Chapter 5 the results will be discussed. Finally, in Chapter 6 a summary of the thesis will be given, including a discussion on further possible research on this topic.

## 2    Theoretical Background

In this chapter, the relevant theoretical background for the thesis will be given. The first section introduces the term cultural appropriation and is followed by an introduction to AAVE. Within this, a definition of the term, as well as a historical background, will be outlined, before moving on to the main features. The five features will be introduced, explained, and illustrated with examples. Furthermore, relevant previous research will be outlined. Finally, a short background on the singers will be given before moving on to the methodology part of the thesis.

### 2.1    Cultural Appropriation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines cultural appropriation as

*"the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the practices, customs, or aesthetics of one social or ethnic group by members of another, typically dominant, community or society (...)" (*OED 2022*)*

Following this definition, I will give a short overview of the discussion of cultural appropriation, why it is important, and how I will approach it within this thesis. While the term cultural appropriation has been studied for years, it has gotten more attention within the past decade. Generally speaking, we can say we are talking about cultural appropriation when a member of one culture that is usually considered a dominant one, takes something that originally stems from another cultural context and appropriates it for personal gain. This can be financial gain or within other domains such as power (Young & Brunk 2009: 6). An example would be a singer appropriating black culture to reach a broader and new target group, which would also lead to a bigger financial gain. With this explanation in mind, we can see why this concept is important for the main research question of this thesis, namely: do the non-black singers Ariana Grande, Olivia Rodrigo, and Billie Eilish appropriate African American culture by taking African American language and aesthetics and incorporating them into their own work? However, one has to remember that not all appropriation from other cultures can be seen as inherently negative. Therefore, some sort of criteria are needed to differentiate between appropriation that can be seen as harmful and appropriation that has no further effect on someone.

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Young & Brunk (2009) talk about two harmful ways of cultural appropriation. One is the violation of property rights or property theft. Here, it is important to note that it is the act of appropriating or stealing something that belongs to another culture. The second harmful way of appropriation is the attack on the identity of a culture or its members. This includes also the possibility of living out its culture. An example of this would be the banning of African American hairstyles such as cornrows, afros, braids, and more (Birchall 2022). With this in mind, one can say that an act of appropriation can be seen as harmful to a culture when it lacks respect for the "culture, its beliefs, its values or its members" (Young & Brunk 2009: 6). In addition to these explained criteria on what can be seen as harmful, respect is often used as another criterion. To use this criterion to discuss cultural appropriation has been done in earlier research, which I will be elaborating on in 2.3 and therefore it will also be the main criterion that I will use to discuss cultural appropriation within my thesis. One has to keep in mind that respect as a criterion can be difficult to justify, the idea of what counts as respectful can be very subjective. While there are general criteria, such as respect, used to discuss cultural appropriation, there is still valid criticism of the concept within academics. It can be seen as dubious because it is generally difficult to work with defined terms and conditions in this field. For my thesis, I will focus on the definition of cultural appropriation and the criterion of respect to discuss the cultural appropriation of AAVE within Ariana Grande's, Olivia Rodrigo's, and Billie Eilish's songs and interviews. However, I will keep in mind that the research question of cultural appropriation is not answered with a simple yes or no and includes many nuances, which will be reflected in my discussion.

Furthermore, when discussing cultural appropriation, one also has to consider the term culture in itself and question if we can speak of cultural appropriation when there is no exact correspondence with any nation itself. This can for example be linked to African American as well as Yiddish culture (Young & Brunk 2009: 4 - 6). The concept of culture is in itself difficult to explain and define, as a culture usually has no set lines and conditions. It is difficult to answer what for example Norwegian culture is, even though people have a few characteristics and examples in mind. Young & Brunk (2009: 3) explain that the concept of culture can be explained by a number of associated characteristics. Someone who fulfills or shows enough of said characteristics or traits of a culture participates in said culture. The opposing option of discussing cultural appropriation would be the appropriation of a nation. However, the concept of a nation, or even a clan, is often even more difficult and blurred than cultures. This is why Young & Brunk deem it appropriate, to talk about cultural appropriation when dealing with for example African American and Yiddish culture, as they technically do not correspond to any

set nation (Young & Brunk 2009: 3 – 4). I will follow this explanation and justification of Young & Brunk of culture and its relevance for AAVE and will treat African American culture as its own culture within the US.

## 2.2    African American Vernacular English

In this chapter, I will first present the history and background information on AAVE, before I present the features that will be discussed and analyzed in this thesis.

### 2.2.1    History / Background on AAVE

AAVE refers to African American Vernacular English, which is a variety of English that comes with a set of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical features (Green 2002: 1). Not all African Americans use AAVE however, among those who do, there can be differences between regions. The term AAVE is a recent one, and the variety has gone through many name changes throughout the years. While there are different terms in use, such as *African American Language*, *African American English*, or *African American Vernacular English*, they all refer to the same linguistic system (Green 2002: 6 - 7). Due to a heightened interest in AAVE in the early 1960s, the first labels have been established. Earlier definitions for AAVE referred to it as an "ethnic and social dialect spoken by African Americans who are members of the working class" (Green 2002: 5 – 6). In addition to that, the labels served to describe the linguistic features that occur in AAVE. As mentioned, there are many different labels for this variety. Some of them include English, such as AAVE, and some of them omit it on purpose, such as *Black dialect* or *Black folk speech*. To include *English* in the label suggests that AAVE shares characteristics with other varieties of English. Some scholars omit it on purpose to highlight the variety's relations to African creole (Green 2002: 6). While there are many labels for the variety, the ones that are commonly used among scholars today are the following: *Afro American English*, *African American English*, *African American Language*, and finally *African American Vernacular English*, or AAVE. Even though the labels are different, they all refer to the same variety. Green (2002) argues for the term AAE, as she explains that it includes all age groups, rather than focusing on a certain age group. Her reason for this is that Labov first introduced the term *Black English Vernacular* in one of his studies, where he used the label to refer to the mostly uniform speech of younger people in the inner city (Green 2002: 7). However, I choose to use AAVE, as it has been used for several years now without focusing on certain age groups. In addition to this, it is the term I familiarized in my own education. AAVE

in this thesis, therefore, refers to the variety as a whole and not to a specific age group or to a variety spoken in inner cities only.

The origins of AAVE are debated and usually one talks about three different positions regarding the origins. In this chapter, I want to give an overview of these three positions to underline the still ongoing discussion within the field. At the same time, the three positions will give a good overview of the history of the language.

The first position I will discuss is that AAVE's structure is related to West African languages and shares only superficial similarities to General English (GE). This position is also often called the substratist hypothesis. The reason for this is that West African or substrate languages influenced both sentence and sound structures of AAVE (Green 2002: 9). Substratum is explained as the relationship of speakers of a subordinate social or cultural status to the reference language which, in this instance, would be English. The second position is the creolist hypothesis. It states that AAVE possibly started off as a creole, such as Jamaican Creole and Gullah. These are spoken for example in the Sea Islands, a chain of islands on the Atlantic Ocean coast of the southern US. A creole is generally defined as a language that develops from pidgin. In turn, pidgin is a simplified means of communication, that enables communication between people who speak different native languages. A pidgin is restricted to limited communications only, to enable for example trade or migration. Furthermore, pidgin usually merges elements of the native languages of the users and is, in general, simpler, as it contains fewer words, less morphology, and other elements (Rickford 1992a: 223). A creole is a pidgin that has acquired native speakers and it generally has a broader range of vocabulary and grammar, too. Compared to pidgin, creole then has a larger vocabulary and inhabits more complex grammatical structures than pidgin. There are, however, pidgins that already come with quite a complex system, such as Tok Pisin in New Guinea (Rickford 1992a: 224). The debate in the creolist hypothesis is then, whether a large amount of enslaved Africans who were brought into the United States went through the process of pidginization and creolization, or if they learned the English language of British and other immigrants rather quickly and through direct contact, without the pidgin or creole stages. The latter explanation is the center of the dialectologist's position (Rickford 1998: 157). The creolist hypothesis developed as an answer to AAVE sharing patterns with creole varieties of English, such as Jamaican Creole, and even other dialects of English (Green 2002: 8 – 10). It is suggested that Jamaican Creole might have established itself without a pidgin in place and resulted from the contact between black and white people (Rickford 1998: 156). Green (2002: 9) explains, however, that there is little data on the speech and language of African slaves and servants that were brought to the US and the

language of their offspring. Therefore, linguists who support the creolist hypothesis had to make use of other strategies, such as sociohistorical conditions and linguistic patterns of creoles, to discuss the possibility of AAVE being once a creole.

Finally, there is the dialectologist position, arguing that AAVE mainly stems from dialects spoken by British and other white immigrants and settlers (Mufwene et al. 1998: 155). The argument here is that the characteristic patterns of AAVE are found in other varieties of English, such as Southern varieties. Linguists in support of this view have considered data from speech communities in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Samaná, Dominican Republic. African Americans settled in these areas during the 18th and 19th centuries (Green 2002: 9). While these three are the most commonly discussed positions, Winford (1997) argues for a compromise between them. He states, that the changes in AAVE happened gradually during the 17th to the 19th century. Furthermore, Winford argues, AAVE was never a creole, but a product of African slaves, that developed from Africans wanting to adapt to the settlers language and local norms, as opposed to establishing their own variety. This means the variety continued to develop in contact situations with creole varieties and settler languages (Winford 1997). Winford concludes this by giving three explanations for this compromise. The first one is that AAVE has several features, that stem from earlier varieties of English and that were adopted into AAVE. Secondly, many of the features seem to stem from imperfect second language learning, which then led to simplification or loss of segments, such as word endings. Lastly, several features of AAVE can be said to be a result of keeping some creole structures and meanings (Winford 1997).

While the ongoing discussions on the origin of AAVE are both important and interesting, I will refrain from positioning myself on one of these three possibilities and will follow Winford's compromise of combining all three positions. For my thesis, the main importance is that AAVE developed within the African American community and is a variety spoken by them. While the history and development of AAVE is important to have as background information, it is not of big importance for my analysis to position myself in one of the three areas, as my thesis is not discussing the origins and history of AAVE. In the next section, I will give an overview of the features discussed in this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Features

To be able to analyze which features of AAVE can be found in the song lyrics of non-black pop singers, I will first give an overview and explain the different features I am analyzing. While AAVE is marked by many characteristics, my thesis will focus on four grammatical features. The reason for this is the length of the paper, but also its relevance to the overall topic. The chosen features are very frequent within AAVE and are often known to outsiders of the variety. The hypothesis is that if there are AAVE features used in the singers' lyrics, they will be features that are generally known to outsiders and are therefore easier to use for them. The features that will be discussed are the following:

- Absence of copula / auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states
- Use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect
- Absence of third person singular present tense -s
- Multiple negation or negative concord

In addition to these four grammatical features, I will include a discussion of the lexicon of AAVE and, more importantly, slang. While this is not the main focus of this paper, it will be relevant for both the analysis of the lyrics, as well as the interviews. I will now discuss the features one by one.

### 2.2.2.1   Absence of copula / auxiliary is and are for present tense states and actions

The absence of copula / auxiliary *is* and *are* is definitely one of the most studied features of AAVE. However, despite this, there are still some uncertainties and difficulties behind it (Wolfram 2002: 77). Wolfram (2002: 77) lists the difficulties as the following: a descriptive issue involving the structural status of 'null copula', the relationship between copula contraction and deletion, and finally the difficulty of explaining the structural linguistic constraints on the variability of deletion. Another issue is the comparison of the copula absence in AAVE to the copula absence of Southern American vernacular varieties. Many say they are very similar, but there are both qualitative and quantitative differences.

This feature has often been the most popular example of linguists supporting the creolists' hypothesis. This is due to the prominence of null copula in English-based creoles within the African diaspora. Others, on the other hand, say that copula and auxiliary absence is linked to the independent development of the variety, developing from phonological contraction

(Wolfram 2002: 77). Labov found that the absence of copula and auxiliary feeds off contractions, which usually does not happen in creole and pidgin (Wolfram 2002: 78). In addition to that, copula absence in AAVE is not applied to the 1st singular copula form *am*. However, this can be found in creoles. This means, in AAVE you will not find copula deletion in sentences such as *I am pretty* It can be used in the third person singular form, where *she is pretty* will then be *she pretty* These examples are my own.

More examples of absence of copula / auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions are the following:

(1)      …therapy my new addiction (Ariana Grande, AG)

(2)      …that you different from the rest (AG)

(3)      We havin' better discussions (AG)

(4)      This the kinda thanks I get? (Olivia Rodrigo, OR)

### 2.2.2.2 Use of invariant be for habitual aspect

The semantic analysis of the marker *be* shows that AAVE has a way of marking habituality not available in GAE. Aspectual *be* signals the recurrence of a process or state of affairs (Green 2002: 1993) in AAVE. In GAE, on the other hand, simple present tense constructions and a combination of adverbials are used in such ways as to express this meaning. AAVE can make a distinction between a general property (*He smokes*) and a usual occurrence of an eventuality (*He be smoking*). While there is this distinction in AAVE, it can be difficult to differentiate between these two meanings without presenting a semantic discussion. As mentioned, aspectual *be* denotes the recurrence of a process or state and can occur with NPs, AdjPs, PPs, AdvPs, AspPs (Mufwene et al. 1998: 45 - 46). Examples from Mufwene et al. (1998: 43):

(5)      She always be a clown on Halloween

(6)      I think those buses be blue

(7)      The children be at school when I get home

(8)      He can't find his mail because it be here

(9)      They be done left when I get there;

Eberhardt and Freeman (2015: 311) mention that the habitual *be* is often used incorrectly by non-AAVE speakers, namely it is used as an alternative for the conjugated copula instead of

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referring to an action that is recurring over time. In the analysis and discussion part of this thesis I will discuss if this feature is used correctly. Examples of the use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect in the lyrics I analyzed are:

(10)    I be on some bullshit (AG)

(11)    My receipts be lookin' like phone numbers (AG)

(12)    The way it be settin' the tone for me (AG)

**2.2.2.3 Absence of third person singular present tense -s**

Another common and well-known phenomenon in AAVE is the neutralization of number distinction between singular and plural verbs. One can say that present-day AAVE's attachment of -*s* to verbs with 3rd person singular subject forms is optional. This means one form is used for both singular and plural contexts. Most often, the plural form is used as the standard, meaning the plural form can occur in the 3rd person. This results in not marking the 3rd singular subject with the -*s*, as in *he come* vs. *he comes* (Green 2002: 99 – 100). While this trait is very typical of AAVE, it can also be found in some vernacular varieties of English in the British Isles, such as East Anglia, which would work as a pro-argument for the dialectologist position saying AAVE has its origins in British dialects (Wolfram 2002: 83). Wolfram (2002: 84) says that origins for the absence of the 3rd person singular -*s* can be dated back to Middle English, as it is found in several Southern-English varieties, as mentioned above. However, the transmission of this phenomenon to American English is less noticeable. There is some evidence found for -*s* absence constructions from coastal Virginia to Georgia, but the numbers are very small (Wolfram 2002: 84).

Another phenomenon is the genitive -*s* marker not being necessary for many instances within AAVE. This, however, is not as frequently used in AAVE as the absence of 3rd singular present tense -*s*. Even so, both phenomena describe inflectional morphology, which is why they are mentioned. The word order in a sentence of AAVE is enough to mark the possessive relationship, therefore the possessive -s is not necessary (Green 2002: 102). While the 3rd person singular -*s* and genitive -*s* are two different morphological processes, they both share the fact that the morpheme at the end of the word gets eradicated, which is why I also mention the omission of the genitive -*s* in this instance. However, as the 3rd person singular present tense -*s* is described as the more frequently used phenomenon, this will be the main feature analyzed in my analysis part. An example of the absence of 3rd person singular present tense -*s* from the song lyrics is the following:

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(13)    The way it shine (AG)

## 2.2.2.4 Multiple Negation or Negative Concord

Negative concord, also referred to as multiple negation or pleonastic negation (Mufwene et al. 1998: 17), usually refers to using two or more negative morphemes to convey one single negation. This characteristic is among the better known characteristic of AAVE. GAE sentences must only contain one negative morpheme, while sentences in AAVE often contain several that can negate an entire clause or even a smaller constituent such as a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase (Mufwene et al. 1998: 17 – 18). Generally speaking, AAVE has no limit on the number of negators that can be used within one sentence. The additional negative elements in AAVE sentences are also referred to as pleonastic, meaning they do not add any additional negative meaning to the sentence (Green 2002: 78). This is another difference to GAE and should not be confused with what Mufwene et al. refer to as "logical double negation", which refers to using two negatives to actually refer to a positive (Mufwene et al. 1998: 18, Green 2002:  77).  An example of this would be "*It's not not bad*", which would mean that something is bad. One way of differentiating between logical double negation in GAE and multiple negation in AAVE is intonation and stress. In logical double negative sentences, one of the negative words will receive normal stress, while the other negative will be heavier stressed and often comes with a rising intonation (Mufwene et al. 1998: 18). Another way of differentiating is that while AAVE can have multiple negative morphemes to convey one negative meaning, the logical double negation almost never uses more than two negatives to undo one another. A reason for this could be that it is difficult to process the meaning (Mufwene et al. 1998: 19). While AAVE speakers generally tend to use more pleonastic negatives than other speakers of various dialects of GAE, there is no requirement to use these negatives in every possible location within the grammar of AAVE (Mufwene 1998: 19). Examples for multiple negation can be the following:

(14)    Don't need no hold up (AG)
(15)    I don't wanna waste no time (AG)
(16)    Can't even get yourself none (AG)
(17)    …but don't find no one better (Olivia Rodrigo, OR)

    In addition to multiple negatives, I shortly want to discuss the negator *ain't* in AAVE. Generally, it can be said that *ain't* is used as a general negator in AAVE, whereas in GAE we

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would use *am not*, *isn't* and so on (Rickford 1999: 8). *Ain't* was not only found to alternate with the negative forms of *be* and *have*, but also with *did* and *do*, which is a pattern generally not found in other varieties of English (Wolfram 2002: 293). Examples of this would be *He ain't coming* in AAVE vs. *He isn't coming* in GAE. More examples of the negator *ain't* are:

(18)    Ain't gon' be no "Mrs." (AG)

(19)    Ain't no budget when I'm on the set (AG)

(20)    I ain't worried 'bout nothin' (AG)

(21)    This ain't nothin like it once was (Billie Eilish, BiE)


**2.2.2.5 Lexical Expressions / Slang**

While lexical features and slang of AAVE are not among the main features I am analyzing in my thesis, I do think it is important to give a short overview of the topic. It will be relevant for the interview analysis, as I expect to find more instances of lexical features used there than for example grammatical features such as the absence of 3rd person singular *-s*. In addition to this, slang is often attributed to the language of young people or youth culture. An argument against cultural appropriation is often that people are not appropriating AAVE, but using Gen Z Slang, so slang that is attributed to the current young generation. This interaction between AAVE and youth culture has been studied by several linguists such as Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Green (2002). Rickford & Rickford (2000: 142) explain that what often marks AAVE to outsiders is exactly that: the slang and the informal language, which is primarily spoken by teenagers and young adults. Taking all of this into account, one can see where the misconception of AAVE and youth culture stems from. While slang is important and part of AAVE, one has to keep in mind that it is not representative of the whole variety. In this subchapter, I will give a short overview of slang in AAVE and touch on some current slang. However, giving an accurate account of slang in AAVE is difficult, as it changes rapidly, which makes it impossible to list and describe all current slang words (Green 2002: 26). By the time this paper is submitted, some of the words listed might be deemed very outdated or no longer be in use. They are, however, relevant, as there is an ongoing debate if they really 'belong' to AAVE or can fall under youth culture slang, as mentioned above. As slang changes so rapidly and frequently, it is difficult to find and refer to academic sources, which is why I will use the help of Urban Dictionary to explain current terms. Urban Dictionary is a crowd-sourced online dictionary, that specializes in slang words, youth language, names, and more. Some of the slang

terms are even marked as AAVE at the beginning of the entry, linking the reader to an explanation of what AAVE is.

While current slang is difficult to study, there are academic texts on lexical items of AAVE. It is also important to note that slang is usually associated with youth language and that what usually is called black talk surpasses the lexical items young people use. There are lexical items and aspects that are shared across members of social groups and networks within the African American community, such as *ashy*, *kitchen* and *saditty* (Green 2002: 15). These lexical items are found to be used by all African American age groups. In addition to this, the meaning of these words has not changed throughout the years. These terms are then different from the slang I was discussing above, as slang is very short lived and changes quickly, while these three terms seem to have resisted change and were able to stay within black communities (Green 2002: 14 – 15). Green (2002: 26) divides the lexical items she analyzes into three different sections: labeling people, labeling money, and labeling actions. While many of the lexical items Green discusses are still known and heard today, such as *dime* and *honey* for labeling women and *player* and *dawg* for labeling men, I would say they do not fall under contemporary slang. However, the three different sections can still be used for categorizing more recent lexical items, as they usually fall in one of the mentioned categories. Taking a look at current known slang terms to label people are *boo*, *bae*, *simp*, *sis, miss girl*, and more. Most of these, except for the latter two can be used for both genders. The first two usually refer to a significant other, while Urban Dictionary defines *simp* as a person who does too much for a person they like. *Boo* and *bae* are not necessarily negatively connotated, while *simp* usually is. *Sis* is a slang word that has been used for a longer time and can also act as an answer to more or less any question, not only referring to a person. An example of this would be

*Person 1: How was your weekend?*
 *Person 2: Sis…*

According to Urban Dictionary, *miss girl* is generally used sarcastically in a conversation when you are talking about someone. Nothing of current slang terms labels money, however many of them label actions and ways of people. *Extra*, for example, means to be over the top, excessive or dramatic. Within my analysis and discussion, I will analyze whether slang is used either within the song lyrics or the interviews.

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## 2.3 Previous Studies

For my thesis, I will be following a multidisciplinary approach of Discourse Analysis (DA) and Corpus Analysis (CA). Similar studies within the field of AAVE that used a multidisciplinary approach have been conducted in the past. However, most research has been conducted within the field of hip hop and rap culture, as these music genres directly stem from black culture and are therefore well known for AAVE use. In this subchapter, I will shortly summarize previous studies that have given me inspiration and input for my own study. The main papers that will be used to strengthen the point of my discussion will be Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) and the paper of Jamie Shinhee Lee (2011). In addition to these articles, a summary of Simpson (1999), Intan Tia Ajeng Aryani (2020) and Bucholtz (1999) will be given.

### 2.3.1 AAVE in Hip-Hop Culture and Rap

The first study I want to outline is the one of Eberhardt and Freeman (2015), titled "'*First things first, I'm the realest*' Linguistic appropriation, white privilege, and the hip-hop persona of Iggy Azalea". In this study, Eberhardt and Freeman are analyzing the use of AAVE within the music of the white female hip-hop singer Iggy Azalea. A strong focus is on how she uses AAVE to gain influence and profit. Furthermore, the performative nature of language plays a big role in this study. Eberhardt and Freeman's study is relevant to my thesis because of several reasons. Even though their focus is on the hip-hop genre, we share the focus on the question of appropriation of AAVE language by non-black female singers. In addition to this, they also have a multidisciplinary approach. While not stated explicitly in their study, there are clear indications for a Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis approach (CADA). This term will be explained in depth in section 3.2.4. Their corpus consists of the Iggy Azalea's discography, namely her five albums and five singles, and five radio interviews, each about 10 to 30 minutes long. Eberhardt and Freeman find a wide range of AAVE features within Iggy Azalea's works, particularly copula absence to construct her persona within the hip-hop nation. In addition, they find the singer uses AAVE features such as multiple negation, the absence of third person singular *s,* and copular *ain't* extensively. When it comes to the lexical use of AAVE, the study finds that Iggy Azalea not only uses current AAVE slang but also words that are more closely connected to the African American community as a whole, as opposed to lexical items that are more linked to youth culture (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 311). As examples, they give words such as *boojee*, *finna*, *grown*, and *thick*.

Another notable finding is that Iggy Azalea uses copula deletion within her music as often as her fellow black peers, but only rarely uses it in her day-to-day speech, i.e. within the interviews that were used in this study. The findings also show that her use differs from other white rappers such as Eminem (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 313 – 315). It is for this reason that many may find the use of Iggy Azalea's AAVE inauthentic and even see it as mockery (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 317). Their studies show that when comparing Iggy Azalea's copula absence to four other artists - Eve, Juvenile, Trina, and Eminem - Iggy Azalea's rates are in the same range as the first three artists, all of whom are black. In comparison, Eminem represents almost no tokens of copula absence within the lyrics of his songs, even though he was exposed to AAVE during his formative years as an artist. In all categories studied, Iggy Azalea's rate of copula absence is much closer to the African American artists, showing the second highest rate in every category (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 315). When comparing the findings from the lyric analysis to the radio interviews, Iggy Azalea's and Eminem's language clearly differentiates from the other three singers. Azalea produced a total of 180 countable tokens of the copula. The copula was only absent in one instance, when she was imitating another rapper. This means that copula absence in Azalea's off-stage speech was virtually 0%. Similarly, Eminem does not show any tokens of copula absence in his interview speech. All other mentioned rappers do use it in the interviews, although less frequently than they do in their lyrics (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 315). Despite that, one has to keep in mind that only a small selection of Iggy Azalea's interviews has been taken into account. In addition, the 2015 comparison study that included lyrics of Eminem only analyzed his three latest albums. With this in mind, there is the possibility, that the results in everyday speech could differ if more interviews would be included. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to compare Iggy Azalea's speech to some of Eminem's earlier albums, as well as more current work at the time. Nonetheless, the findings are valuable and interesting for my own study, as we share a similar approach to the methodology, using both lyrics and personal speech. In addition, Eberhardt and Freeman's findings show a clear distinction between the language used in Iggy Azalea's lyrics and her everyday speech used in interviews.

Another study I am discussing is Jamie Shinhee Lee's work (2011) titled *Globalization of African American Vernacular English in popular culture, Blinglish in Korean Hip Hop*. The study's focus is on *crossing* and how Black English, also known as Blinglish, is used as a form to express subcultural identity and style within the genre of hip-hop. In addition to this, Lee explores the term *crossing* and how it differs from code-switching. *Crossing* generally refers to someone outside of a language switching into a language, or a variety, that is not theirs, meaning

that they do not usually speak it (Lee 2011: 3). The term *crossing* is also discussed in Bucholtz' (1999) paper, which will be discussed in this chapter as well. *Code switching* then refers to the use of more than one linguistic variety by one single speaker within one conversation (Britannica). Within code switching, the person switches between varieties that they are both part of, for example switching from AAVE to GAE. The *crossing* that is happening in Bucholtz's study is attributed to white, hip-hop-oriented youth crossing into AAVE, due to its alignment with black youth culture. Lee discovers in her study that the heaviest influence of AAVE on Korean hip-hop is lexical, followed by phonological influence. Lexical items that are often found in Korean hip-hop texts are for example *whut, flow, ill*, and more (Lee 2011: 8). In addition to the lexicon, AAVE influence on a phonological level is also found. Lee finds that there are mainly four AAVE phonological phenomena found in Korean hip-hop lyrics. The realization of dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ pronounced as [t] or [f] and as [d] or [v] respectively is the most frequently used phonological feature. Furthermore, Lee finds the realization of final /ŋ/ as [n], monophthongization as well as deletion or vocalization of liquids (Lee 2011: 12). She discovers grammatical features within the lyrics she analyzed, however, compared to the other features mentioned, it is very restricted. Notable features that were observed are habitual *be*, absence of copula, subject-verb disagreement, and negative concord. A grammatical feature that seems to appear frequently is the use of habitual *be*. The restricted use of other grammatical features such as verbal markers can mean that they are simply not as easy for non-AAVE speakers to learn and use in a proficient way, unlike lexical items (Lee 2011: 19). In summary, Lee observes most AAVE influence on Korean hip-hop stems from the lexicon and is then followed by phonology. Lee argues that the lack of more complicated grammatical features, such as the tense markers *BIN*, *done* or *finna*, show that verbal markers in AAVE are intricate and varied and therefore not easy to reproduce or master for non-AAVE speakers. This means that crossing into AAVE by non-AAVE speakers is easiest in the area of lexis. Lee's paper is relevant to my thesis in a couple of ways. First and foremost, she analyzes the use of AAVE by a non-black person, even though the music genre is different, as explained in the previous paper. Furthermore, while she focuses a lot on phonology, we share the emphasis on lexicon grammatical features. It is striking to me that Lee finds very few grammatical features used within the lyrics, compared to the use of lexical items or phonology. While I do not analyze phonological features, our studies differ in that I find more grammatical features than lexical items.

Finally, I want to discuss *African American Vernacular English (AAVE) used by Rich Brian: A Sociolinguistic Investigation (2020)*, by Intan Tia Ajeng Aryani. This paper investigates the

use of AAVE within the songs of the Indonesian rapper Rich Brian. The author's main investigation is on grammatical features of AAVE within the song lyrics. The reason this study is mentioned is that it is similar in topic and approach. The use of AAVE features by a non-black singer is studied and his song lyrics are used as data. The approach is similar to mine, although overall more descriptive, as Aryani does not state any specific numbers for the features they find in their paper. Fourteen songs by Rich Brian are analyzed. The data is collected by listening to the music and reading the transcribed lyrics (Aryani 2020: 70). Aryani (2020) refers in her analysis to Wolfram's 13 grammatical features of AAVE and finds that the singer Rich Brian makes use of seven of those features within his works (Aryani 2020: 70). Among those are features such as multiple negation, copula absence, use of *ain't* and more. The author finds native-like usage of AAVE in Rich Brian's work and links it to his upbringing and the neighborhoods he lived in in the US. While there is no doubt, that Rich Brian was influenced by all this, one has to note that the rapper was born and raised in Jakarta, and then moved to the United States at the age of 17. The author also argues that the internet, as well as Rich Brian's friends, helped him achieve native-like control of AAVE. The discussion lacks depth in many parts, which could be due to the length of the paper and that it has to be concise. Our studies do overlap, however, as we are analyzing the same grammatical features, although Aryani (2020) concentrates on 13 grammatical features of AAVE, while I chose four of them for my thesis. In addition to this, we both analyze the use of AAVE in lyrics by non-native speakers of AAVE and non-black singers.

### 2.3.2   AAVE and dialects in pop and rock

While little research has been conducted on AAVE in pop music, there are papers on dialects and variations within pop songs. Paul Simpson (1999) discusses the different variations and dialects used within pop songs and takes a closer look at British pop singers using different accents within their music than the accent they usually speak in. It is a diachronic study with Trudgill's USA-5 model in mind. The USA-5 model describes five US variables that are perceived as typical American speech by British people. The set of variables includes, for example, the tapped voiceless alveolar consonant /t/ in words like *bottle* (Simpson 1999: 345). In addition to these variables, multiple negation as in *ain't had no* has been found to be common as well. Simpson notes that while this feature is common in AAVE, it is also very strongly associated with the Southern United States (1999: 351). Simpson starts by analyzing early British pop music from the 1960s and finds that, in general, there is a strong orientation towards the USA-5 model (Simpson 1999: 347). Later on, in the punk era, the USA-5 model was often

retained, but it was mixed with features of the working-class vernacular. The post-punk rock and pop bands of the 80s, however, blend the known USA-5 model with higher-status features of British English, which reflects the political climate of that time (Simpson 1999: 356). With the example of Van Morrison, Simpson also discusses topic-influenced style shift. Van Morrison seems to include AAVE features such as nonstandard subject-verb concord and gospel-oriented references in his song *Crazy Love*, which seems to be influenced by the topic of the song (Simpson 1999: 358). This topic-influenced style shift has been touched upon in the other papers as well, where many in the hip-hop community produce AAVE features as they are common for the language within the hip-hop community. Simpson (1999: 359) finds that the type of style shifting rock and pop singers undergo is often reflecting a type of social role or persona of the singer. Continuing with the example of Van Morrison, in his later works his linguistic style shifts to reflect his Irish background. While he first produced many of the USA-5 model variables, this changes when he reconnects to his Irish roots. Simpson (1999: 363 – 364) concludes that in modern pop music, the status of the USA-5 model might be questionable. Although many of its features are still widespread within the music, the expansion within the pop and rock genres across the years leads to less resonation with the model. Simpson concludes in his paper that Trudgill's model is applicable to the study of development in linguistic style in music, but that it also needs to take into account sociopolitical and cultural contexts. The importance of this paper for my own work is mainly the analysis of varieties within pop music, with the focus being on American English,  as well as style shifting to fit a genre or context of a song.

### 2.3.3   AAVE and youth culture and gender identity

Finally, I want to give a brief summary of Bucholtz (1999: 443 – 460) paper *You da man: Narrating the racial other in the production of white masculinity*. Bucholtz aims to investigate narratives of interracial conflict as told by a middle-class European American male student at a Californian high school. The focus of this paper is a white boy, who identifies with black youth culture and uses elements of AAVE in his speech. The term *crossing* is expanded on here, and the discussion and analysis of the boy's constructed narrative are supposed to show the position of black masculinity vs. white masculinity. The data Bucholtz uses is a set of narratives of racialized conflicts told by European American boys from a multiracial urban high school in California. She refers to this school at Bay City High. The data was collected during ethnographic fieldwork between 1995 and 1996. While a diverse school, Bucholtz argues that the school still is racially organized when it comes to ideologically defined structures, e.g. social

words. An example of this would be the basketball team in this school being almost all black (Bucholtz 1999: 445). Bucholtz focus is the use of AAVE in narratives told by white male students. This is done to link gender and race, specifically masculinity and race. However, Bucholtz states that the white girls in this school also make use of elements of AAVE, but are not analyzed in this article as she is not analyzing girls' language (Bucholtz 1999: 445). Bucholtz summarizes that the gender ideology links masculinity to physical power and violence. Furthermore, she finds that this ideal of masculinity is linked to blackness, rather than whiteness. Finally, AAVE is linked to both blackness as well as masculinity (Bucholtz 1999: 455). What is most important in this paper for my own study is Bucholtz discussion of AAVE in youth culture. Bucholtz states that elements of AAVE that are used in the boy's ordinary speech style come from his identification with urban youth identity, which is majorly influenced by African American youth culture. AAVE being a marker of this African American youth culture is, according to Bucholtz, something European American youth can easily appropriate, to fit into this urban youth culture. However, it is usually just partially, and also imperfectly, appropriated (Bucholtz 1999: 445). This discussion is relevant to my own, as many people argue that many aspects of AAVE are now seen as Gen Z language, or rather part of the current youth culture.

## 2.4   Summary

All of the papers discussed helped me in some way to structure my own discussion, underline my theories and gather information. While Eberhardt and Freeman's paper is the one most similar to my undertaking, all of them have relevant parts for my analysis and discussion of AAVE in pop music by non-black singers. I will be referring back to some of these papers, if similar findings show up or if my findings differ greatly to what others found. However, one has to keep in mind that while many of the papers share similarities with my undertaking, I will not be able to fully compare my findings with those of others, as the background and the music genre of the singers I study are different. In the next section, I will shortly give an overview of the three singers' background and why they have been chosen for this paper.

## 2.5   The Singers' Background

Since the focus of the paper is on the appropriation and usage of AAVE by non-black pop singers, it is important to discuss the background of the three singers I will be analyzing. Not only is it relevant what heritage they are from, but also where they grew up. I deem the latter to

be important, as it would make a difference if one of the singers grew up in an AAVE community as opposed to an all-white neighborhood. One has to keep in mind that this will be a short summary and it is impossible to fully outline the upbringing of these individuals, so one can never include all the influences on these singers. In addition to the background information, instances where the singers were accused of cultural appropriation, are mentioned.

### 2.5.1 Ariana Grande (AG)

Ariana Grande, full name Ariana Grande-Butera, is an American singer, songwriter, and actress. Born in 1993 in Florida, US., the singer rose to fame starring in the Nickelodeon tv-shows *Victorious* and *Sam & Cat*. Grande is of Italian descent and described her heritage as Italian American with Sicilian and Abruzzese roots. She released her debut album in 2013 at the age of 20 and has since then released another five albums, the last one – *Positions* - in 2020. In her music, she features pop and R&B and Grande's voice has often been compared to Mariah Carey. Grande has received several awards, including two Grammy Awards (Wikipedia 2023). Ariana Grande has been accused of cultural appropriation several times throughout her career, most noticeably however with the release of her single *7 Rings* in 2019. Fans started to notice not only a change in appearance but also mannerisms and articulation, leading many to believe the singer did so to appeal to a new audience and advance her music career (Carmody 2019).

### 2.5.2 Olivia Rodrigo (OR)

Olivia Rodrigo was born in 2003 in California, U.S. under the full name Olivia Isabel Rodrigo. Rodrigo is Filipino American, her father is Filipino, while her mother is said to have German and Irish ancestry. Rodrigo became famous through her role in the Disney TV series *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series*. She then released her debut single *Drivers License* in 2020, following with her first studio album *Sour* in 2021. At this point, Olivia Rodrigo was 18. Rodrigo received three Grammys for her first studio album and Billboard named her "Woman of the Year" in 2022 (Wikipedia 2023). She was accused of cultural appropriation in 2021 when Instagram live videos, which usually are not saved on the platform, resurfaced where she interacts with her fans and is using a lot of AAVE features. This started a discussion on Twitter, where many were accusing her of appropriating black speech and comparing her speech in front of U.S. President Joe Biden versus the way she spoke in these Instagram lives (Mohammed 2021).

### 2.5.3   Billie Eilish (BiE)

Billie Eilish, full name Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connell, was born in 2001 in Los Angeles, U.S. Eilish is the daughter to two actors of Irish and Scottish descent. Eilish was raised in a neighborhood inhabited by a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic groups called "Highland Park". At the age of 14, Billie Eilish uploaded her first song *Ocean Eyes* in 2016 on soundcloud. She woke up the next day to her song going viral on the internet. In August 2017 she released her EP *Don't smile at me*. In 2019 she released her first album *When We Fall Asleep*, *Where Do We go?*. Her second album released in 2021, called *Happier Than Ever*. The singer received several awards, including seven Grammy awards (Wikipedia 2023). Many of the signature styles associated with Billie Eilish, as well as her mannerism and slang, are said to be appropriated from black culture, which led to many people accusing her of appropriating AAVE (Taylor 2020).

### 2.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave an overview of the relevant theoretical framework for this thesis, as well as an introduction to the term cultural appropriation and to AAVE and its history. Furthermore, I described the features I will analyze and discuss in detail. This is followed by a summary of relevant studies that my thesis builds upon. I also explain, why they are relevant to this thesis and in which ways the studies differ from the thesis. Finally, this chapter concludes by giving an introduction to the three singers that I study. The next chapter will outline the methodology for this thesis. My methods and why I chose them will be discussed in greater detail. Furthermore, the data and data collection will be summarized. Finally, I consider the limitations of this thesis before moving on to the results chapter.

## 3    Data and Methodology

### 3.1    Introduction

After introducing the theoretical framework for this thesis, as well as the background of the three chosen singers, I will present the methodological approach used and the data that will be presented in Chapter 4. In the first part, I will discuss DA and CDA. Next, I will give an overview of CADA, and explain, why those methods were chosen for this thesis. Then, I will elaborate on my approach to the methods, before I move on to present my data, its selection, and its volume. Finally, a discussion on the limitations of the methods and the data selection and its volume will be given.

### 3.2    Approach and Method

Since my thesis is discussing race, culture, and appropriation, the main method for analyzing the different texts will be CDA, which will serve as the qualitative method for this thesis. In addition to this, I touch upon the topic of language and power, as I see it as relevant to my analysis. However, due to the inherent flaws of CDA as a method, I will follow a combined approach by including Corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics will then serve as the quantitative analysis. The exact reasons will be explained in the respective chapters. However, important to note is that a similar approach was also followed in one of the earlier research I mentioned, namely in Eberhardt and Freeman (2015).

### 3.3    Discourse Analysis (DA)

When talking about discourse, one generally can say one is referring to "any piece of connected language, written or spoken, which contains more than one sentence" (Thornborrow & Wareing 1998: 240). Furthermore, one can describe discourse as vital in social relations, therefore one can study discourse within activities that are executed using a language. This is referred to as Discourse Analysis. DA, in general, is a broad term and a method usually used by linguists. However, scientists from other fields also undertake DA. As DA is such a broad field, it is impossible to give one clear definition of it. Nevertheless, one can say that researchers within DA are not focused on the system that is a language, but more on people's source of the system, namely generalizations established by participating in discourse and the result of the discourse. The result of discourse can be seen as people applying what they already know of discourse to create and interpret new discourse (Johnstone 2018: 1). DA "examines how the use of language

presents different views of the world and different understandings" (Paltridge 2012: 2). As mentioned, DA is used by different researchers, such as social sciences as well as language sciences, and is often described as different methods by them (Paltridge 2012: 6). Fairclough (2003) however, argues for an analysis of discourse that is both linguistic and social in its orientation (Paltridge 2012: 6). This means that DA is both analyzing language at the level of text, as well as language in use (Paltridge 2012: 7). DA studies how discourse is shaped "by relationships between participants, and the effects discourse has upon social identities and relations" (Paltridge 2012: 12). In the next section I will go into detail about CDA, which can be described as a subfield of DA. As mentioned, CDA will serve as the qualitative method used in my study, which is the reason for going into further detail about that method.

### 3.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis is a subfield of DA. One can generally say that CDA is a political enterprise that concerns itself with highlighting power relations, mostly inequality (Ehrlich and Romaniuk 2013: 462). CDA

> "examines the use of discourse in relation to social and cultural issues such as race, politics, gender and identity and asks why the discourse is used in a particular way and what the implications are of this kind of use" (Paltridge 2012: 186).

This means that CDA concerns itself with and analyzes the way social power abuse and or dominance and inequality are performed, reproduced, and worked against within text and speech in social and political contexts (van Dijk 2001: 352). CDA usually distances itself from descriptivism, as it is focusing first and foremost on social constructions and the constructions of ideologies. CDA tries to understand changes in society through the ideological use of language. In doing so, critical discourse analysts have to take an explicit position, which leads them to try to understand, uncover and work against social inequality (Van Dijk 2001: 353). The main difference between CDA and DA is that CDA tries to not only understand a text and its structure but also discusses possible explanations as to why the text studied is what it is and what the text's aim might be. Furthermore, CDA looks at the relationship between discourse and society and aims to describe, explain and interpret this relationship (Paltridge 2012: 196).

CDA can be done in the whole context of a text, at the sentence level, or even at the word and phrase level. How this analysis is done then depends on the research situation and the research question, as well as what kind of texts are studied (Paltridge 2012: 194). While these are the strengths of CDA, there are of course weaknesses and moral dilemmas in executing it.

First of all, CDA is not a specific direction of research, meaning that it uses no set theoretical framework. This means that there are many different types of CDA, that can differ in both theory and practical approach (van Dijk 2001: 353). Examples of approaches are analyzing vocabulary, such as looking for metaphors, as well as looking at grammar and how certain grammatical structures might reveal some intended meaning, such as the use of passive versus active voice in newspapers. Furthermore, CDA usually distances itself from prescriptivism, so it can be seen as a qualitative-only orientation to linguistics. Consequently, doing CDA comes with the strengths and weaknesses all qualitative research contains. One of the main weaknesses here is justifying the selection of the material used for the research data. CDA is generally more suited for certain types of research questions and less for others. CDA generally focuses primarily on social and political issues, rather than for example current paradigms and fashions in language. Therefore, the selection of data will never be fully objective and will always have the political aim in the foreground. Often, the works in CDA discuss a very limited number of texts, which leads to the criticism of very selective and objective text selection. A solution to this problem, however, can be using discourse from the internet (Paltridge 2012: 197). Of course, using texts found on the world wide web come with its own strengths and weaknesses. However, one can say that most research comes with its strengths and weaknesses. One can argue that CDA needs support from other fields in research to reduce the impact of its inherent weaknesses (Jaworski & Coupland 1999: 32 – 37). Many therefore say that, in order to aim for empirically adequate critical analysis, one's work must be multidisciplinary. This can be done in many ways, but I will be focusing on how one can use Corpus Analysis, referred to as CA, to work across disciplines. An introduction to CA and how we can work with it in CDA will be given in 3.2.4.

To sum up, I will be using CDA as a qualitative tool to analyze the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the song lyrics and the interviews of the three singers. Furthermore, CDA is used as a qualitative method as it is inherently political, and therefore the question of cultural appropriation and racism falls under this umbrella. To further strengthen my argumentation and my analysis, I will briefly touch upon Van Dijk's (200) definition of social power and the connection between language and power.

### 3.3.2 Language and Power

Van Dijk (2015) defines social power in terms of control. This means that certain groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of other groups. The ability to do so comes with privileged access to certain social resources. Van Dijk introduces the following social resources that can create power dynamics: force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, culture, or even forms of public discourse and communication (van Dijk 2015: 469). The type of power, therefore, differs between these resources. An example would be that people within the military will enact their power through force, while rich people will have power over other people because of their money. Other people will have power because of their knowledge status or access to certain information, such as journalists or professors (van Dijk 2015: 469 – 470). In addition to these differences, one has to keep in mind that power itself is rarely absolute. This means that power might be dependent on specific situations or social domains. Some power might be integrated into laws, norms, habits, and even a general consensus in society. This means that power is not necessarily always displayed by abusive acts by a dominant group but might be enacted through actions on a day-to-day basis that one takes for granted. These kinds of power dynamics are often the case in the forms of everyday sexism or racism (van Dijk 2015: 469 – 470). The latter is important within my research, as cultural appropriation often comes with the claim of racism. Racism is a complex system that includes social and political inequality and it is often reproduced by a general discourse, as well as by elite discourses (van Dijk 2015: 470). This reproduction of racism through the use of general discourse will be the main focus when analyzing slang words within the lyrics and the interviews and will serve as a basis for the discussion on cultural appropriation. The next subchapter will be about the quantitative method, Corpus Linguistics, and Corpus Analysis, before summarizing my combined approach and goal for this thesis in 3.5.

### 3.4 Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Corpus Analysis (CA)

Within the last couple of years, CL has established itself as one of the most widely used and versatile tools used to study various areas of language (Gries and Newman 2013: 257). CL has developed through new technological and methodological processes, as well as linguists desiring an alternative or an addition to intuitive judgments that are objective, quantifiable, and replicable (Gries and Newman 2013: 257). Generally speaking, CA can be defined as a set of studies that uses computerized corpora in the analysis of forms and/or functions of language. Therefore, CL can be said to be evidence driven, meaning it aims to describe and rationalize

the interactions in spoken or written discourse. Furthermore, CL wants to describe and explain a language system, or at least parts of it. This means the aim is to look at the organization of a language and why it functions the way it does. One has to keep in mind that this enterprise does not come without some challenges. The difficulties are that the behavior of a language system is bigger than the behavior one can observe in discourse. The definition of a corpus can be said to be a body of text that stems from naturally occurring language. Furthermore, a typical corpus nowadays is a machine-readable collection of text, which aims to be representative of a language/variety/register (Gries and Newman 2013: 258). Corpora have been used to study various things. Among these are lexical items, phraseologies of a discourse, cohesion, style, ideologies, and more. Since there is a huge variety of topics that can be studied, many argue, CL should be seen as a methodology, as opposed to a discipline or field of study. This means a corpus study should be seen as a set of tools and practices and how to use these tools to analyze language. Taking this explanation into account, however, CL will be treated as a methodology in this paper and will therefore be one of the tools used to analyze song lyrics.

A corpus in itself however is not providing any specific information about a language system. To describe noteworthy insights, one can for example conduct word-frequency counts and try to spot a pattern of usage within these texts. Word-frequency counts become even more informative when comparing them to similar lists from other discourses. Patterns can be said to be of interest because whenever something is happening frequently within a language, it can be deemed significant. This frequency can be used to predict how other parts of language might behave and how discourse might be constructed as a whole. One can say that traditional CL focuses most on the quantitative approach, meaning producing authentic collections of a language by compiling large amounts of discourse types. This is done to collect and give an overview of the quantity and variety of discourse types possible in a language.

Traditional CA does not interact too much with the single discourse types, but is more interested in the picture as a whole. CADA is very different from that. In CADA, the aim is to get to know the discourse types as much as possible. CADA researchers will therefore engage with their corpus in a variety of ways. While wordlists and patterns are important for CADA, researchers will usually engage with the discourse by watching, reading, and/or listening to parts of the data set. The term CADA was coined to describe studies, that combine both DA and quantitative methods in one. However, in CADA, the corpus was just one of many other techniques used to obtain results, which is why it is called corpus assisted as opposed to corpus-driven. Furthermore, CADA differentiates from usual corpus studies, in that other information than the one from the corpus is used (Partington, Duguid & Taylor 2013: 10). In addition to

this, one has to keep in mind that DA is comparative. This means CADA is comparative as well. One can only discover and describe features of discourse by comparing it with other discourse and looking at how the phenomenon we found behaves elsewhere. The importance of CADA in my thesis lies in the word corpus *assisted*, as I will be doing a joint approach for the analysis. In the next chapter, I will go into further detail on what this will look like, why this approach was ultimately chosen, and where the limitations for it lie.

## 3.5 My Method

After giving an introduction to CL, CDA, and CADA, the aim of this chapter is to summarize the methods used in my thesis and the reason for approaching it this way. When conducting research, one has to determine early on if a quantitative or qualitative approach, or a mix of both, is appropriate. My main approach for the thesis is of qualitative nature, using CDA, a subfield of DA, to analyze the song lyrics and interviews of the singers and discuss the accusations of cultural appropriation in an objective manner. As CDA is a method that is inherently political and the notion of cultural appropriation is closely linked to racism, the use of this qualitative method made the most sense to me. However, one has to remember the main limitation of CDA is the attribution of subjectivity and the lack of quantitative evidence. For this reason, I decided to use CADA as well as CDA, to subdue the limitations of my method. This combined or joint approach has been used to conduct research before, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The main research I'm basing my own on is by Eberhardt and Freeman (2015). This strengthens my decision to follow a similar path. Two corpora were collected, the main one consisting of the song lyrics of the three singers, called SONC, short for Song Corpus. The second corpus is of a smaller extent and serves to compare the use of language across different genres. This one will be from now on referred to as INTC, short for Interview Corpus. The contents of the second corpus stem from interviews. The SONC amounts to 12955 words, while the INTC includes 6000 words. Within the next chapters, I will go into depth about the selection of the data, the time frame, and the volume. Furthermore, an account of the limitations of these mentioned parts will be given, before moving on to the results and discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

## 3.6 Data

This section will discuss and explain how the data for this thesis was selected. In addition to this, questions about the time frame, collection method, where the data was collected from, and

why will be explained and answered. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of the methods used and how I overcame them, if possible.

### 3.6.1 Data Selection, Time Frame, and Volume

As mentioned earlier, the data used for my analysis consists of two corpora. The main corpus is the SONC, while the smaller one is the INTC, a corpus of interviews with the three different singers. AG, OR, and BiE were chosen for this thesis because they are all of non-black backgrounds and are singers within the same music genre, pop. In addition, they are within the same age range, with OR being the youngest of the three. Furthermore, they were chosen because of past accusations of appropriating black culture, language, and/or looks. These accusations were summarized in section 2.3.5. Appearance of the singers will not be taken into consideration or discussed in this thesis, but the accusations based on them helped me in the decision to write this research. The selection of the singers is therefore biased, as they were not randomly chosen but with a CDA perspective in mind. I will go into more detail about the limitations behind this decision in the next subchapter.

Before starting to collect song lyrics from the three different singers, I had to set a number of songs per artist. Initially, I chose 11 songs per singer. One of the difficulties and limitations in the data research were the different time frames in which the singers have been publishing. AG published her first studio album in 2013, whereas OR published her first, and only, studio album in 2021. BiE published her first EP in 2017, but her first full studio album in 2019. AG has a total of six studio albums, BiE has two, and OR has one. Thus, the selection of the data for the latter two was more limited, than for AG. OR album *Sour* contains 11 songs, so I decided to include all of her songs and thereafter picked 11 random songs, from different time periods, for the remaining two singers. While the internet lists more songs by OR, they are not officially published. However, during the analysis process, I decided on including three more songs for each singer. This was done, to make sure there would be enough data to analyze. Three unreleased songs were therefore included for OR. While unreleased, the recordings are published by herself on Instagram and YouTube and therefore it was possible to listen to the songs and make sure the lyrics were correct. This resulted in analyzing 14 songs per singer in total.

After deciding on a number of songs, I needed to find a source for the lyrics. There are many different providers on the internet that collect song lyrics, but ultimately I decided on *AZlyrics*, as they included the biggest collection and clearest representation of lyrics. In addition to this, Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) also used the website *AZlyrics* when analyzing the songs of Iggy

Azalea. Besides *AZlyrics*, I listened to all the songs and cross-checked if the lyrics posted on the website were correct. This was done to ensure that no errors which could potentially influence the analysis occurred. OR's unreleased songs are all uploaded on YouTube, either by herself or by fans who recorded or saved the videos from Instagram or TikTok. This made it possible for me to cross-check those songs as well. The song lyrics corpus consists of 12955 words in total. As mentioned, phonetical phenomena were disregarded. An additional limitation in analyzing song lyrics is the fact that most of the singers have co-writers. While all of them claim to write their songs mainly themselves, there usually are several co-writers listed. This has to be kept in mind when discussing the claim of appropriation, as it is difficult to trace who decided on wording and more.

The second corpus consists of three interviews with the singers. In total, the corpus consists of 8000 words, however, only 6000 words were analyzed. When selecting the interviews, I chose interviews that were all done by the same interviewer, namely Zach Sang. The interviews are all public on YouTube. In addition to this, I chose to transcribe 20 minutes of each interview. This was done because the only interview with OR was 20 minutes in total, while the ones with AG and BiE were between 35 and 120 minutes. This was done to ensure comparison. To also account for talking speed, I decided to analyze the first 2000 words of each interview. However, if the 2000 words were reached and cut a sentence off, I decided to include the whole sentence. This was mainly done because I am analyzing grammatical features. The interviews were transcribed by myself. I chose interviews as data for the comparison corpus because in general, interviews depict more informal language than for example song lyrics do. The Zach Sang Show on YouTube, where all three interviews are from, is recorded in an informal setting. Usually, the host and the interviewee chat about life, and of course, the interviewee's recent works. Due to the length of the paper, only 20 minutes, or 2000 words, could be analyzed. In addition, the second corpus is much shorter than the song lyrics. This is because it serves mainly as a comparison to the language used in the lyrics.

As mentioned earlier in my thesis, I also aimed to investigate whether AG changed her linguistic choices throughout the years. Therefore, I chose to transcribe two interviews with AG to take this into account. 1000 words were chosen from an interview from 2015 and the other 1000 words from an interview conducted in 2019. However, this was only possible for AG as there were no other interviews from the Zach Sang Show with BiE and OR. In the next section, I will talk more about the limitations of my methods, and how they might have an effect on the results.

## 3.7    Limitations

As discussed, there were a few limitations I came across during the data selection. The main limitation is the subjectively chosen singers. This limitation is justified by the use of CDA as a method, as it is inherently political and can therefore never be completely objective. Thus, the accusations of cultural appropriation were deemed important when making the decision on whom to choose. However, they were also chosen because the subjects are non-black pop singers who are in roughly the same age group and have similar target audiences. Another limitation was the number of song texts I was able to include. The first limitation I already mentioned above is that one singer, OR, has published considerably fewer songs than the other two singers. This is of course due to her being a lot younger and having done a TV show before she started her career as a singer. In addition to these limitations, 14 songs per singer can never show the full picture of the language used in their music. Due to time restrictions that come with this thesis, it was not possible for me to include each and every song. However, by choosing songs from different time periods for AG and BiE and including every published song off OR's album, as well as three unreleased ones, it is still possible to get an insight into the language use and change over time and to discuss cultural appropriation within these. I did include three unpublished songs for OR, which can have advantages as well as disadvantages. As they are unpublished, they have not undergone any forms of editing by producers or co-writers. This means, that the lyrics stem from the singer herself. However, if OR publishes these songs at a later stage of her career and the lyrics are changed, my analysis of these songs will not be up to date. This can then affect the discussion and results of the thesis. As mentioned earlier, the limitation of co-writers has to be taken into account as well. While the singers all claim to mainly write their own songs, co-writers are employed and it is difficult to find out which part was written by whom or in what way the co-writers influence the outcome. This can then affect the discussion of cultural appropriation because the question can arise if the lyrics really were written by the singers themselves. It is however assumed, because of the singers' statements, that they are mainly responsible for their lyrics and are actively part of the final product. For the interviews, a few limitations have already been mentioned.

The biggest limitation is the scope of this thesis. For a full comparison, one would ideally include several instances of informal speech. In addition to this, one might want to look at interviews from different years. Furthermore, one can argue, that interviews are still scripted speeches, as the interviewees often get sent the questions asked beforehand, so they can prepare accordingly. This limitation however is almost impossible to overcome. One other possibility

would be to include live streams from the singers, however, they usually get deleted after a short amount of time.

In summary, I am aware of the limitations of the methods and data used. I did account for all of them and tried to minimize them where possible. Ideally, further research would include more singers from that genre and compare them to black singers from the same genre. Moreover, for the comparison corpus, more interviews could be included, as well as interviews from different sources.

## 3.8    Conclusion

In this chapter, I gave an overview of the relevant methodology for this thesis. As this thesis is mainly of qualitative nature, I discussed DA and CDA as my main methodology for analyzing and discussing the data. Included in this discussion of DA and CDA is the theory of Language and Power by Labov. However, I acknowledge the limitations behind the decision of a quantitative-only approach and therefore use a joint approach of DA / CDA and CADA. This is then followed by an in-depth explanation of my approach, the data selection process, as well as the time frame and volume of the data. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the methodology and how I overcame them, if that was possible. In the next chapter, the results of my analysis will be presented and then discussed.

# 4    Results

## 4.1    Introduction

This chapter is divided into eight subchapters, following the structure of the four grammatical features as well lexical items and finally the comparison of the two corpora. The Results will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The subchapters will first present the quantitative and qualitative findings of the main corpus, the song lyrics corpus, SONC. Following this, I will compare the results from the SONC to the results from the INTC. In the discussion chapter that follows, I will discuss both qualitative and quantitative findings and compare them to earlier research. Within the use of the four different grammatical structures I am analyzing, the use of multiple negation and negator *ain't* is by far the most commonly used among all singers. The second very frequent feature found is the absence of copula, followed by lexical items and the use of invariant *be* for the habitual aspect. The least common feature is the absence of third-person singular present tense -*s*, which occurred only once. As shown in Figure 1 below, the features of AAVE are most found in the song lyrics of AG, with 83%. Figure 1 takes into account the total number of AAVE features found in the SONC, which amounts to 52 instances. Out of these 52 instances, 43 are found in the songs of AG, which is 83%. OR uses 4 and BiE 5 features of AAVE, which then amounts to 8% and 9% respectively. This figure serves as a first look at the use of AAVE features in the SONC. In the subchapters, I go into further detail and list all examples of AAVE features for each singer respectively.
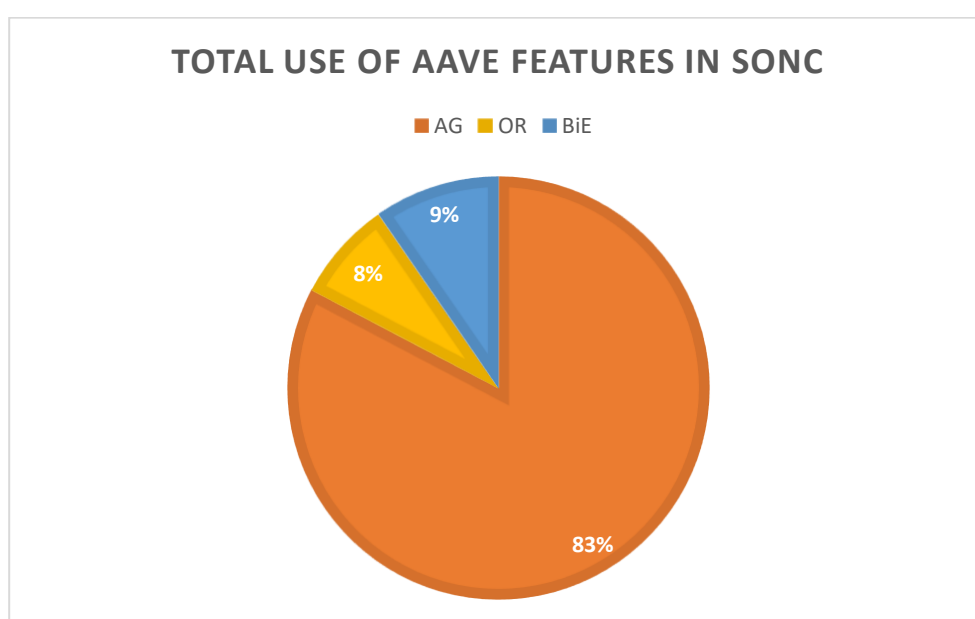


*Figure 1 Total Use of AAVE Features within SONC*

In subsection 4.6. there will be a more detailed analysis comparing the features used in the SONC vs. the features used in the INTC.

## 4.2 Absence of copula / auxiliary is and are for present tense states and actions

As mentioned in the theory chapter, the absence of copula auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions is one of the most studied features of AAVE. This grammatical feature can be found in the lyrics of two out of three singers, but with great differences in numbers. With seven instances, AG has most occurrences of this feature. Compared to other grammatical features, however, this number is very low. Within these seven instances, the copula deletion usually occurs in sentences including personal pronouns, such as *you*, *we,* and also the possessive determiner *my*.

(22)    Think retail therapy _ my new addiction (introduced as example (1))

(23)    That you _  different from the rest (introduced as example (2) )

(24)    We _  havin' better discussions (introduced as example (3) )

(25)    My presence _ sweet and my aura bright

(26)    My love _ infinite nothing I wouldn't do

For the remaining two instances, the structures look like the following

(27)    I know this shit _ kinda heavy

(28)    This _ some shit that I usually don't do

For OR, only two instances of copula absence were found. One of them includes the pronoun *you*. In this instance, the verb *are* is missing. The other construction is similar to (7) of AG, with the determiner *this*. In this example, the verb *is* is missing. It is to note that (8) is repeated in the song, as it is part of the main chorus. However, I still count it as only one original occurrence.

(29)    So when _ you gonna tell her that we did that, too?

(30)    This _ the kinda thanks I get? (introduced as example (4) )

In the songs of BiE, no instances of copula deletion were found.

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### 4.3 Use of invariant be for habitual aspect

Through the analysis, I was able to find instances for the use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect exclusively in the lyrics of AG, occurring a total of eight times across 14 songs. It seems, that most of them refer to the habitual aspect - however, in a few cases this is difficult to assess.

(31)    I know I be on some bullshit (introduced as example (10) )

(32)    I know I be driving you crazy

(33)    You know you be on some bullshit

(34)    Yeah, my receipts be lookin' like phone numbers (introduced as example (11) )

(35)    The way it be settin' the tone for me (introduced as example (12) )

(36)    How you been spending your time?

(37)    How you be using your tongue?

(38)    You be so worried 'bout mine

All eight examples listed above stem from only three different songs. The first three examples are all from one song, called *six thirty*, which explains the repeated structure of (31) and (32). Furthermore, (34) and (35) are examples from the song *7 Rings*. Finally, the last three examples are from the same song as well, namely *shut up*.

### 4.4 Absence of third person singular present tense *-s*

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, absence of third person singular present tense -s is the least-used feature in the SONC. I only found one example in the SONC, which was in the song *7 Rings* by AG.

(39)    The way it shine (introduced as example (13) )

This is a very clear and good example of this feature. However, it is the only occurrence found. For context, the full verse is as follows:

My smile is beamin'
My skin is gleamin'
*The way it shine*
I know you've seen it

You've seen it

I did not find any examples of this feature in the songs of OR or BiE.

## 4.5 Multiple negation or negative concord

The final grammatical feature analyzed is multiple negation and negative concord, as well as the negator *ain't*. As previously stated at the beginning of this chapter, multiple negation, and the negator *ain't* are the features that are most frequently used by all three singers. AG is also leading in the percentage of use here. While all three singers make use of this feature, for BiE I only found instances of the negator *ain't*. OR uses one instance of *ain't* and one instance of multiple negation. AG shows eleven instances of using the negator *ain't* and eight instances of multiple negation across fourteen songs.

(40)    And you *ain't scared* to show me your ugly

(41)    Wearin' a ring but *ain't* gon' be no "Mrs." (introduced as example (18) )

(42)    If it *ain't* money, then wrong number

(43)    *Ain't* got enough money to pay me respect

(44)    *Ain't* no budget when I'm on the set (introduced as example (19) )

(45)    You *ain't* got a one-track mind, yeah

(46)    *Ain't* nobody else can relate

(47)    Boy, I like that you *ain't* afraid

(48)    I *ain't* worried 'bout nothin' (introduced as example (20) )

(49)    *Ain't* no need for searching, and for that, I say

(50)    We *ain't* really with drugs and shit

As the examples show, in most instances the negator *ain't* is used at the beginning of a line, such as in (43), (44), (46) and (49). Example (44) directly follows example (43) in the song, so the argument of rhyme can be made here as AG makes here use of a literary device called anaphora, where successive phrases or lines start with the same word. In this case the word is *ain't*. Anaphora is often used to emphasize things. It also makes *respect* and *set* at the end of the lines rhyme. In most of the other instances of *ain't*, personal pronouns precede it, such as in (40) and (45), (47), (48) and (50).

In the lyrics of BiE, we can find four instances of the negator *ain't*. Many of these instances are repeated several times within the songs, as they are usually part of the chorus or

the bridge, such as (51) and (52). (53) and (54) are similar here and they also follow each other directly. For (51) and (52), the argument of rhyme can be made again.

(51)    You *ain't* nothin but a lost cause (x3)

(52)    This *ain't* nothin like it once was (x3) (introduced as example (21) )

(53)    He *ain't* a man (x2)

(54)    And sure as hell *ain't* honest (x2)

In the lyrics of OR, there is only one instance of *ain't* accounted for, although it is repeated four times within the same song, *traitor*.

(55)    Ain't it funny? (4x)

The full verses here are

And *ain't* it funny

How you ran to her

The second that we called it quits?

And *ain't* it funny

How you said you were friends?

Not it sure as hell don't look like it

*Ain't* it funny

All the twisted games

All the questions you used to avoid?

*Ain't* it funny?

These are all the instances of *ain't* within the SONC. For multiple negation, I found a total of eight occurrences. Seven of these are in the lyrics of AG and one instance is in the lyrics of OR. In the lyrics of BiE, the analysis shows no instances of multiple negation.

AG uses multiple negation in several songs and across the timeline. AG also uses several different structures of multiple negation, where examples (56) and (57) show the most negation. Generally, two to three negations can be found within the structures of the lyrics. While AG

uses multiple negation fairly often compared to the other two singers, she still does not use it as much as the negator *ain't* and regular negative sentence structures, that we can find in GAE.

(56)    *Don't* need *no* hold up (introduced as example (14) )

(57)    I d*on't* wanna waste *no* time (Introduced as example (15) )

(58)    *Can't* even get yourself *none* (Introduced as example (16) )

(59)    *Never* need no *no one* else, babe

(60)    *Don't* have *no* time to waste around

(61)    I *can't* resist it *no* more

(62)    Worried 'bout *not* a thing

In the songs of OR, the analysis finds one instance of multiple negation, which she repeats several times in her song. For OR, one can say she uses as much multiple negation as she uses the negator *ain't*. However, both instances occur only once within the SONC.

(63)    So find someone great but *don't find no one better* (x2) (Introduced as example (17))

Following the pattern, there are no instances of multiple negation found in the lyrics of BiE.

## 4.6    Lexical Expressions / Slang

The last characteristic discussed here is lexical expressions and slang. I will then compare the use of the features in the SONC vs. the use in the INTC. Generally, I find the use of lexical expressions and slang most within the lyrics of AG. Some of the instances are hard to pinpoint as slang or specifically AAVE slang, but I discuss all the examples in detail, using the urban dictionary to explain what each lexical expression means. There are nine instances of lexical expressions in the lyrics of AG and one instance in BiE lyrics. I did not find any AAVE lexical features in the lyrics of OR. Most of the lexical expressions AG uses are found within one single song, namely *7 Rings*. Examples (64) to (69), which I discuss one by one in the following, are all from the same song. Examples (70) to (72) are not from the same song, but I will be discussing them in detail as well.

(64)    Savage

The term *savage* refers to a person that is fierce and strong minded (Urban Dictionary). In addition, it is used for people that do not care about the consequences of their actions. The full excerpt of the usage within the song is *Who woulda thought it'd turn* me *to a **savage**?* In this instance, the term is used with the same connotation, referring to the subject of the song as someone fierce and strong. While *savage* is frequently listed as an AAVE term, it is not 100% clear where the usage came from.

(65)    Flossin'

The same can be said for the term *flossing*. While it is most certainly a slang word, it is not possible to determine with absolute certainty if it is part of AAVE slang. *Flossing* stems from *flossy* and it refers to something or someone showy or extremely flashy. The full verse in the song is

> My wrist, stop watchin'
>
> *my neck is flossin'*

and it refers to all the jewelry the lyrical self is wearing on her neck. The word final *g* was dropped for the words *watching* and *flossing*, which is represented in the written lyrics.

(66)    Poppin

The term *popping* usually refers to something beautiful and stylish. The full line in the lyrics is *My gloss is poppin* and many believe this is a direct reference to the song *Lip Gloss* by Lil' Mama, a black female US rapper. The song *Lip Gloss* released in 2008. As with (65), the word final *g* has been omitted.

(67)    You like my hair? Gee thanks, just bought it

While this is not a lexical item, the reference to bought hair received some attention from black women especially. Black female singers often refer to hairpieces of black and brown women when talking about the hair they bought (Kornhaber, Spencer 2019). However, AG is referring to her signature ponytail in this part of the lyrics. AG creates this signature hairstyle by using extensions, as her hair has been damaged severely over the course of her career.

(68)    Crib

The term *crib* refers to someone's home or place where they live and was usually used for describing their home in the hood (Urban Dictionary). The full line in the song is *I bought a* **crib**, *just for the closet* and it clearly refers to a house.

(69)    Them racks

Here, both *them* and *racks* can be analyzed separately. The full line in the song is *When you see them racks, They stacked up like my ass*. *Them* is here used instead of *those*. Usually, it is used in slang to put attention to something. The same can be found also in (70) *Them demons*. In addition to this, *racks* has a double meaning here. It refers to both clothing racks, as well as to female breasts (Urban Dictionary). This lines up with the next sentence referring to her ass.

(70)    Them demons

As mentioned above, the use of *them* instead of *those* can be often found in slang and AAVE. It is, however, difficult to pinpoint it as a sole AAVE item. Nonetheless, it is not part of the GAE repertoire. It is, however, a grammatical feature, as the demonstrative pronoun *them* in accusative is here paired with a plural noun. In GAE and GE, *them* is used to refer to the object of a clause. In the cases of (69) and (70) one would use the determiners *these* or *those* paired with a plural noun instead. I chose to include these grammatical items as slang / lexical items, as they are very specific to this song and are not used in the rest of AG's repertoire.

(71)    Pray

*Pray* in itself is, of course, not a lexical item of AAVE descent. However, it has been studied by, for example, Simpson (1999) before, that the topic of praying and religion is a huge part of the gospel genre, a music genre that was created by slaves. Simpson (1999: 358) discusses the topic-influenced style shift in his paper and mentioning gospel-oriented references to highlight an AAVE or Southern theme.
The lexical item can be found in the song "God is a Woman" and in the following line:
Baby, lay me down and let's *pray*

(72)    My circle lit

*Lit* is a term often used to refer to something cool, awesome, or great. It can also be used to say someone was drunk. However, the first use is more common and it is often associated with youth slang and AAVE. This term is found in the song "shut up" and part of the following verse:

> I vibrate high and my circle *lit*
> We ain't really with drugs and shit

These are all instances of lexical items and slang within the SONC. As mentioned before, many of them are part of one song that has received particular attention from the public due to the use of AAVE. This is further discussed in 4.6. Discussion.

There are no extraordinary lexical items or slang in the lyrics of OR. I only found one such item in the lyrics of BiE.

(73)    Sus

*Sus* is a shortened version of the words *suspect* or *suspicious*. It is often referred to as something or someone questionable or dishonest. It has been especially popular among Generation Z and gained even more popularity through the game *Among Us*. This lexical term can be found twice in the song *My boy*. The first line in the first verse is the following:

> My boy's being *sus*, He was shady enough

And the second time follows in the third verse of the same song,

> My boy's being *sus* and he don't know how to cuss

These are all the lexical items found in the SONC.

## 4.7    Analysis of INTC

One part of my thesis is the comparison of the language used by the singers AG, OR and BiE within their song lyrics versus the language they use in more everyday speech. For this purpose, I listened to and transcribed interviews from one source. I searched for the same features studied in the SONC and compiled a corpus that I will use for comparison, called the INTC. This comparison of song lyrics versus interview speech is also used in other studies, such as the one by Eberhardt and Freeman (2015). As I wanted to see if there was any change over time, I

included two interview segments for AG, as she is the singer that has been releasing music for longer, compared to OR and BiE. Figure 2 shows us the overall use of AAVE within the SONC vs. the INTC. I counted all the instances of AAVE features for each singer in both the SONC as well as the INTC. The numbers for the SONC have been summarized in Figure 1. The whole INTC shows only three examples of AAVE features. One of them I found in the lyrics of BiE and two in the lyrics of AG. I was not able to find any AAVE features in the interview part of OR. Figure 2 compares the AAVE features I found for each singer in each of the corpora.
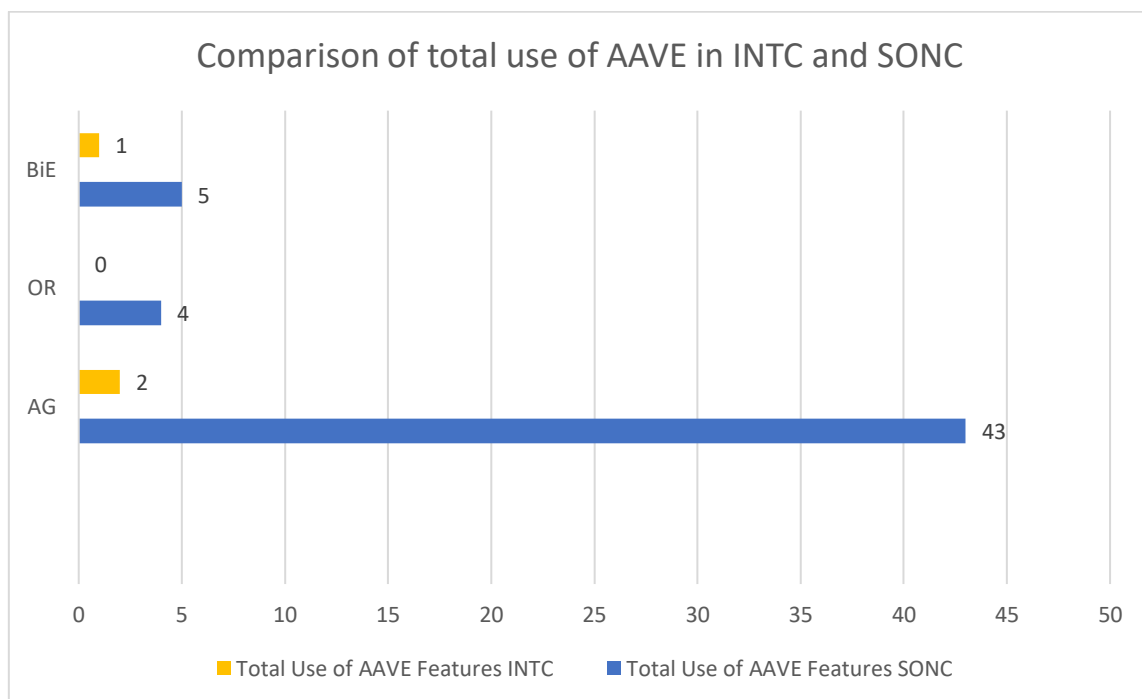


*Figure 2 Comparison of total use of AAVE in INTC vs. SONC*

The figure shows a clear difference in the use of the two different speech styles. As discussed above, AG employs the highest number of AAVE features within her song lyrics. However, when comparing the numbers of the SONC to the ones of the INTC, the differences are evident. While there are 43 features of AAVE across 14 songs in the SONC, I only found two features within the INTC. Both of these features are lexical items or slang.

(74)     …okay this is lit

(75)     He was like oh my god…he was like..bro

The term *lit* is discussed in 4.5. Lexical expressions / Slang and refers to cool or great. In the context of the interview, AG tells the listeners that she found therapy "lit". The term *bro* is used as a short form for a brother or a good friend. While it originally comes from AAVE, this term has been used by white people for a long time.

No AAVE features were found within the interview of OR. For BiE I found one feature in the INTC, namely the use of the invariant *be* for the habitual aspect.

(76)    …, I don't even know…I don't be knowing

This is the only AAVE feature observed in BiE's interview speech and is one feature she does not make use of in her song lyrics.

## 4.8    Conclusion

In the next chapter, I discuss the data presented above. The discussion aims at answering the research questions of this thesis, as well as considering the implications of my findings. While the result chapter answered the research question whether AAVE features can be found in the singer's lyrics, the discussion chapter aims on answering the question of cultural appropriation and the relevance of the use of the features in the grand scheme. Furthermore, I will link back to previous research and compare my results to earlier findings to see where my findings differ or agree with existing research.

# 5    Discussion

Before going into the detailed analysis of my data, I shortly summarize the most important findings. The analysis of the SONC and the INTC shows that AG uses a higher amount of overall AAVE features than the other two singers. The feature that is used the most among all three singers is the negator *ain't*, while the least frequent feature in the data is the absence of the third-person singular present tense *-s*. A comparison of the SONC and the INTC reveals a clear difference in the use of AAVE features in the song lyrics vs. the informal speech of AG. However, for OR and BiE the results indicate an overall low use of AAVE features in both the SONC and the INTC.

The aim of my thesis is to investigate if AG, OR, and BiE use AAVE in their song lyrics. If the answer is yes, the question of how relevant the use is in the grand scheme of my data remains. My general hypotheses for these research questions are that they use AAVE features and that the use increased in more recent years. In addition to this, I hypothesized that the overall use of AAVE is not particularly high compared to GAE. The data I presented in section 4.1. to 4.6. show, that all three singers make use of AAVE features in their songs. However, looking at the numbers of the data, the results are not significantly high for two out of three singers. I found evidence for the use of the four grammatical features I studied, but I only found four such instances for OR and five for BiE in the SONC. One of the instances from BiE, however, is a lexical item. In the INTC, this number amounts to zero for OR and one for BiE. The one instance of BiE in the INTC is a lexical item. The SONC amounts to 12955 words in total, while the INTC amounts to 6000. It is fair to say that the instances of AAVE features used by OR and BiE can be deemed insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, I will still take a look at the few features used by the two singers and discuss and compare them. While the numbers for OR and BiE are low, the analysis found more instances of AAVE features by AG. The total number of AAVE features analyzed for AG amounts to 43 instances in the SONC and two instances in the INTC. Out of the 43 instances in the SONC, 34 of them are grammatical features, while nine of them are lexical items.

## 5.1    Grammatical Features

The grammatical feature all three singers use the most is, as mentioned before, the negator *ain't*. As Rickford (1998) mentioned, the negator *ain't* is the standard used in AAVE, while in GAE one would use *is not* and *am not*. AG uses this negator eleven times in the SONC, BiE four

times, and OR once. The use of *ain't* in all three singers' works seems to be a stylistic choice, rather than following their natural speech pattern. This argument is supported by the lack of use of this negator in the INTC. None of the singers used it in the interviews transcribed and would rather use the common negation forms for GAE. One can argue that the negator *ain't* is not a unique feature of AAVE and that it can also be found in varieties spoken in the southern part of the US. What is, however, unique to AAVE is the alternating pattern of use. Not only can you use it with negative forms of *be* and *have*, but also with *did* and *do* and even *get* (Wolfram 2002: 293). Examples for this can be found in these lines:

(77)     *Ain't got* enough money to pay me respect (AG)
(78)     You *ain't got* a one-track mind (AG)

In addition to this, the negator *ain't* is often associated with low class in southern states. Another argument that points to *ain't* being an AAVE feature rather than a southern states one is the combination of *ain't* and *multiple negation*, which brings me to the next grammatical feature I want to discuss. Following the pattern of earlier results, AG uses multiple negation the most. In fact, AG uses multiple negation seven times and OR once. BiE does not make use of multiple negation at all. Those instances of multiple negation are however all without the use of the negator *ain't*. If we were to add the instances that include the negator *ain't*, AG would end up with around ten instances. For the remaining lexical features I analyzed, AG shows similar numbers as in the use of multiple negation. The absence of copula auxiliary *is* can be found seven times in the SONC, and the use of invariant *be* for habitual aspect was found eight times. What is interesting about the latter is that this lexical feature is often used inaccurately by non-native users of AAVE. Namely, the focus is on the habitual aspect and when analyzed by researchers, they often find that the feature is used in a non-habitual setting (Eberhardt & Freeman 2015: 311). However, looking at the instances by AG, one can argue that all instances describe a habitual aspect. This use of AAVE features by AG can be compared to the results of Eberhardt and Freeman's (2015) study on hip-hop singer Iggy Azalea. They find, that she shows significant use of AAVE features such as multiple negation, the absence of third person singular -*s* and the negator *ain't*. However, one large difference in the findings is that Eberhardt and Freeman highlight that Iggy Azalea particularly uses copula absence to construct her persona within the hip-hop nation (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 317). While AG occasionally makes use of copula absence, she does not use it extensively. An explanation for this can however be the different genres of music. While AAVE is extensively used in the rap-genre, the same

cannot be said about the pop-genre or even the whole of RnB genre. The latter two are the ones we attribute to AG.

Comparing my results and findings of grammatical features to the ones of Lee, we can find some differences. First and foremost, Lee (2011) focuses on phonological features as opposed to grammatical features. Lee finds a few grammatical features used in the song texts she analyzed, such as habitual *be*, absence of copula, subject-verb disagreement, and negative concord. However, Lee discusses that she finds very few grammatical features compared to phonological features. One reason for this could be, that the hip-hop singer she analyzes is a non-native speaker of English. It might be more difficult to reproduce grammatical structures that are not GAE or GE as a non-native speaker, such as AAVE, than reproducing GAE features. This, however, is just a hypothesis. Finally, I want to compare my findings to those of Aryani (2020). The author focused on 13 grammatical features of AAVE in total within one singer. They also analyzed 14 songs and found, that the singer uses seven out of the 13 features. Those seven features they find in the lyrics of Rich Brian are the following: Copula absence, remote been, use of *ain't*, concord negation, negative inversion, subject-verb disagreement, future form, question form, nominal, irregular verb, and finally non-standard pronoun (Aryani 2020: 70). They go into detail and show examples from Rich Brian's lyrics for each feature. However, they do not state any numbers or present any quantitative representation of the examples. Therefore, the reader does not know which feature was most used or how many instances of AAVE grammatical features were found overall. This makes it difficult to compare our overall results.

## 5.2   Lexical Items / Slang

Moving on from the grammatical features to the lexical items and slang, I stated one specific hypothesis: I expected to find more lexical features of AAVE in the INTC compared to the SONC. This hypothesis was established from the argument that many lexical items of AAVE can be linked to youth culture or Gen Z language, which is commonly associated with informal speech. I found 10 lexical items in total in the SONC. Nine of these were produced by AG and one of them by BiE. In the INTC however, I was only able to find two lexical items, and both of them were produced by AG. These numbers show clearly that my hypothesis that lexical items will be more present in informal speech could not be confirmed. In addition to the expectation of higher numbers in the INTC as opposed to the SONC, one would assume a higher usage of these lexical items by the younger singers BiE and OR. However, as mentioned, BiE only uses one lexical item and OR none. This further supports the idea that the argument of Gen

Z and youth culture is not of importance for this thesis and not necessarily a reason for the findings of the 10 lexical items. In addition, if the hypothesis of youth culture or language of Gen Z was the reason for the lexical items, the results would show all of the instances of lexical items in the songs of AG in her latest albums only, which is not the case.

While youth culture is not a reason for the use of lexical items, I still want to discuss the types of lexical items I found in the SONC and INTC. Six out of the nine lexical items AG uses in the SONC are found in one song, namely *7 Rings*. This is the song that started many of the cultural appropriation allegations against the singer, as summarized in Chapter 2. The lexical items used were not the main reason for these allegations, but they do contribute to the criticism she received for this song. One can, however, argue that AG is using *style shifting* in *7 Rings* to cater to the overall theme and look of the song and music video. It is interesting that many of the lexical items used in *7 Rings* stem without a doubt from AAVE and are not found in any of the other songs analyzed, nor the INTC. These lexical items are (64) to (68) which were discussed in chapter 4.5. Here the examples are numbered chronologically.

(79)    Savage (introduced as (64) )

(80)    Flossin' (introduced as (65) )

(81)    Poppin (introduced as (66) )

(82)    You like my hair? Gee thanks, just bought it (introduced as (67) )

(83)    Crib (Introduced as (68) )

The same argument of style shifting can be made for the lexical item *pray* in example (71). I explained that this particular item as such is originally part of the repertoire of GAE. However, it has been argued before that pop singers shift into a general AAVE style by also referencing religion, a nod to the gospel genre. Apart from gospel, however, this is also very common in country music. Comparing my results within the lexical items to the previous research mentioned in this thesis is somewhat difficult. The main problem that arises is the difference in genre, where hip-hop is more prone to the use of AAVE items. Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) found that Iggy Azalea is not only using current AAVE slang in her music but also lexical items that are much more connected to the African American community in general. Such lexical items that are strongly connected to the AAVE community have been discussed in chapter 2.2.2.5, like *saditty*, *kitchen,* and *ash*. Lexical items are not a focus in the study of Lee (2011) or Aryani (2020). Before discussing cultural appropriation I want to discuss and compare the findings of the two different corpora.

### 5.3 Comparison of SONC and INTC

One of my research questions is to determine if there is a difference in the linguistic choice of the singers within their lyrics versus their interviews. I decided to analyze this, to see if there is a different choice for the song texts vs. a more formal speech style. Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) use this approach in their study as well, where they find a significant difference in the linguistic choices made by Iggy Azalea. These findings help to discuss and understand why the singer was accused of cultural appropriation, which is why I take a similar approach in my thesis. As discussed in Chapter 4, one can clearly see a difference in numbers when comparing the SONC to the INTC. The most significant differences can be seen in the linguistic choices made by AG. As the general number of occurrences of both grammatical features and lexical features in the songs and interviews of BiE and OR are so low, it is unreasonable to discuss them in great detail. However, there is a big discrepancy in the numbers for AG, which will serve as the main discussion in this section.

AG produces two instances of AAVE features in the interviews I transcribed. Out of those 20 minutes, I analyzed the first 2000 words. Both AAVE features that exist in the INTC are lexical items. This is interesting because I expected that lexical items of AAVE would be more present in the interviews than in the songs. I also expected to find a greater number of lexical items. For the two lexical items used in the INTC, *lit* and *bro*, one of them has been used in the SONC as well, namely *lit*. Furthermore, I analyzed two interviews for AG, as she has been in the business for a long time. I did this to answer the question if she might use more AAVE features in more recent interviews. Both lexical items AG produced were found in the second interview, which is from 2018, while the first interview is from 2015. So there is a difference in lexical choice between those years. However, it is debatable how significant this is, as AG only uses two lexical items. The numbers that show significance are the overall difference of AAVE features used in the SONC vs. the INTC. AG uses 43 instances of AAVE in fourteen songs and only two instances in the INTC. One reason for the low number of AAVE features in the INTC is naturally the difference in the size of the two corpora. However, it is enough to show that there is a contrast in the linguistic choices between the SONC and the INTC. Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) find a similar contrast in their study, with similar deviations in the numbers. Their results show that Iggy Azalea produces as many AAVE features in her songs as her black peers, while in the interviews, she uses few to none instances. An example they give is the use of the absence of copula, which is a feature Azalea very frequently uses in her songs. But in the interviews that were transcribed, she produces this feature only once. This one

feature was produced when quoting a black rapper. Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) argue, that this discrepancy in her language use on and off stage is one of the main reasons, why she is deemed as inauthentic and why her use of AAVE can even be seen as a mockery (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 317). While AG generally uses less AAVE in her songs than Iggy Azalea, my results are still comparable to those of Eberhardt and Freeman. As the numbers for BiE and OR are so low, it is natural to compare to Eberhardt and Freeman's study instead. They find extensive use for multiple negation and copular *ain't* in the lyrics of Iggy Azalea, as well as extensive use of the third person singular -*s* absence (Eberhardt and Freeman 2015: 311). In addition to these features, the singer frequently uses habitual *be* as well (ibd.). Furthermore, Eberhardt and Freeman (2015: 311) find several examples of current slang in Azalea's lyrics. Additionally, one has to remember that the use of AAVE in hip-hop is more natural, even for white singers, than in the pop genre. I follow up on this discussion on differences in speech in the next subchapter, where I discuss the accusations of cultural appropriation.

## 5.4   Cultural Appropriation

The final discussion will be on cultural appropriation and aim at answering my research question if one can speak of cultural appropriation in the examples and data I found. As mentioned in the theory chapter, it is difficult and nearly impossible to answer this question with a clear yes or no. I will discuss the notion of respect which was mentioned in section 2.1 and combine it with the discussion of language and power by van Dijk (2015) to answer my research question in a suitable way. In addition to this, the main data that will be used for this discussion is the comparison of SONC vs. INTC, taking a more detailed look into the differences for AG.

As discussed in 5.1.3., AG shows a large discrepancy in the use of AAVE features in the SONC vs. the INTC. This can be interpreted as a conscious choice she makes when writing her lyrics. While AG sings in the pop genre, her music shows influences of R&B, and her voice and register are often compared to the one of Mariah Carey. Songs like *7 Rings* show signs of hip-hop and rap influence and AG has been open in the past about drawing a lot of inspiration from these music genres and the black artists that shaped them. Many people, including black people, appreciate her support of the black community and her acknowledging and supporting black artists whom she draws her inspiration from (Kennerly 2019). What the data of the SONC shows, is that the use of AAVE features in AG songs has been more or less consistent over the years of her career. Only the lexical items are more prevalent in the later years of her career. This however is due to a large amount of the lexical items analyzed coming from one song only,

namely *7 Rings*. One can argue, that the AAVE use in AG songs can be both a sign of style shifting, as well as arguing that it can be seen as cultural appropriation. I make the argument of style shifting, as the features of AAVE, as mentioned earlier, can be found in her lyrics throughout her career. Not only this but one can say AG style shifts to fit into the R&B style she is known for. This style shifting would then not happen in her interviews, as it is only a stylistic choice for her music.

However, this can also lead one to argue that AG is making use of AAVE features for financial gain and fame. The discussion has become louder after her release of the song *7 Rings* and the accompanying music video. AG was accused of copying black artists and using black women as props in her music video, for the sole purpose of selling a new image (Blackmon 2019). Examples like these can lead to what van Dijk (2015) discusses and explains in power dynamics and privilege. AG, a white singer, copying black artists and putting black women in the background of the music video shows that she can do so for fame, acknowledgment, and money. The argument is, that AG can appropriate the looks and language of African American people, while African Americans are shunned and sometimes even banned from doing so, such as with hairstyles and the like in schools (Birchall 2022). This shows an example of the privilege that AG has which comes with her skin color but also her status and fame. Of course, the power she possesses is domain-specific, but it can lead to the reproduction of this behavior on a more day-to-day basis. The fact that most of the lexical items found in the lyrics from AG stem from this song can be interpreted as a conscious choice for this song, rather than something that comes naturally to her. Besides the aesthetics of the music video, many also reacted to the line "You like my hair? Gee thanks, just bought it" (AG – 7 Rings).  Princess Nokia, an African American hip-hop and R&B singer argued that *7 Rings* was very similar to her song *Mine*, released in 2016. In that song, Princess Nokia celebrates "the cultural significance of hair for women of color" (Ahlgrim 2019) and discusses the shame of people telling them off for wearing fake hair. That AG, a white singer, takes up this conversation in her song *7 Rings* is the main critique by many. In the discussions of AG's song *7 Rings* one has to remember, however, that AG credited several co-writers for this song, two of them women of color and good friends of AG (Ahlgrim 2019). These co-writers could be a big reason for the AAVE features and lexical items in this song.

My results on the difference in language use in the SONC and the INTC align with what Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) found in their study on Iggy Azalea. We both found a significant difference in the use of AAVE features when comparing the song lyrics to the language the singers use in interviews. However, the study of Eberhardt and Freeman showed an even greater

discrepancy between these two discourse fields. While the results are comparable, it is important to note that AG does not use the same amount of AAVE features in her songs as Iggy Azalea does. Iggy Azalea shows a much more native-like understanding and use of the AAVE features, which makes the difference in the lyrics vs. the interviews even greater.  In addition, Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) looked at the complete discography of Iggy Azalea and several interviews. I, on the other hand, only looked at 14 songs and two interviews. The data suggests that AG has included AAVE features since the start of her career, but faced specific backlash on it only in the past couple of years. It seems, that people have become more aware of the issue of cultural appropriation, which would then explain the huge and more frequent discussions around it. For BiE and OR the numbers in both the INTC and SONC are so low that it is unjustifiable to discuss cultural appropriation behind it. The reliability of these data points is impacted by the fact, that for BiE and AG, only parts of their discography were included, which could have given a clearer picture. However, for OR it is justified to say that there is no evidence for cultural appropriation by song lyrics or the interview. In addition, the data I found is a reasonable indication of what one would find if they were to include all lyrics of BiE and AG.

This chapter discussed the data that was presented in Chapter 4. The grammatical features that are found in the SONC were compared to earlier research such as Eberhardt and Freeman (2015), Lee (2011) and Aryani (2020) and discussed.

## 6    Conclusion

This thesis used a joined approach of CDA and CL to analyze the song lyrics of Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo for features of AAVE. The singers were accused of cultural appropriation and using a blaccent, which was the main reason these singers were chosen for this study. As all these singers are non-black, I decided to analyze five rather common AAVE features in their lyrics. Four of these features are grammatical, namely the absence of copula/auxiliary *is* and *are* for present tense states and actions, the use of invariant be for habitual aspect, the absence of third person singular present tense -*s*, and multiple negation or negative concord. The final feature I studied was lexical items of AAVE. My thesis aimed to answer the following research question:

1. Do Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish, and Olivia Rodrigo use AAVE in their song lyrics? If yes, how many occurrences of AAVE can be counted, and how relevant is it in the grand scheme?
2. Is there a big difference in the linguistic choice of the singers within their lyrics vs. their interviews? If so, how and what could this mean?
3. Can one talk about cultural appropriation within these examples or not?

Through the analysis I found that all three singers use some or all of the features I studied in their lyrics. Within the lyrics corpus, the SONC, I found a total of 52 instances of the relevant AAVE features. One can find 43 of these examples in the lyrics of AG. BiE uses 5 AAVE features, and AG 4. Overall, GAE is the main variety used in the SONC and only AG uses a significant amount of AAVE features. In addition to this, the thesis found a discrepancy in the use of AAVE features in the SONC vs. the INTC in the lyrics of AG. As mentioned before, AG uses 42 instances of AAVE in the SONC, while she only produces two such features in the INTC. In the discussion chapter, I considered possible answers for this. These possible explanations which I will summarize shortly, can also serve to answer research question number three. However, one cannot answer the third research question with a simple yes or no. Generally, one can argue for the discrepancy between the SONC and the INTC in the discourse of AG in two ways: cultural appropriation or at least a lack of respect for African American culture or style shifting. Earlier research, such as Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) find a similar discrepancy in the discourse of the Australian hip-hop singer Iggy Azalea and conclude, that it can be argued for cultural appropriation. The difference between their numbers and my numbers

however is very stark. Not only are their numbers greater than mine, but Eberhardt and Freeman (2015) also find that Azalea uses more AAVE features in her lyrics than her black peers and then uses zero instances in her interview speech. Due to the size of this thesis I was not able to include a comparison of black singers from the same genre, however, the overall number of AAVE features is low, so my hypothesis is that AG would not use more features of AAVE than her black peers. Eberhardt & Freeman found in their paper numbers as high as 75 instances of copula absence alone for the black singers they studied, which suggests higher numbers for all features studied in this thesis as well. While AG's numbers are higher than the ones of BiE and OR, all features combined result to 43 instances for AG, which suggest that her black peers would use higher numbers than that. Therefore, I argue that AG style shifts consciously in her lyrics to fit the R&B style her music is well-known for. In addition to this, this style shifting is evident in her earlier works as well as current music. I do however argue that the song *7 Rings* can be seen as cultural appropriation, as AG makes use of very typical AAVE lexical items which she does not use in other parts of her lyrics. In addition to this, the music video contributes to this rather disrespectful image of African American culture and its language. For BiE and OR, there is no notable difference in the SONC vs. the INTC, as the numbers of AAVE features are overall very low. Therefore, it is difficult to argue for cultural appropriation in these examples.

Like in any other study, there are challenges that come with the data collection and analysis. Due to the length of this thesis, I could not include the whole discography of all singers, as well as several interview transcriptions. However, my thesis contributes numbers and analysis to the study of AAVE in pop music, a genre that has not been greatly studied for AAVE features before.

Further research could use the whole discography of all singers as well as including several interviews, preferably from several different sources. Furthermore, it would be of value to compare the use of AAVE in the singer's lyrics to those of African American pop singers. This can give a better comparison of the numbers I found in my own thesis, to see how they compare to numbers of native users. Finally, one can use a greater number of artists and include both male and female singers, to study if AAVE is for example preferable to male singers, both African American, as well as non-black. Such a study would then cover several sociolinguistic factors, such as gender and social background, as well as race.

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