Chapter 5

Ethnicity and Varieties of English

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we turn to the relationship between ethnic affiliation and English. *Ethnicity* refers to a person's origins in terms of their race, culture and family background. The word *ethnic* is found in a very wide range of contexts today, sometimes having a blatantly racist meaning (as in the chilling *ethnic cleansing*) and sometimes being used in a general cultural sense, as when we refer to *ethnic* restaurants, jewellery, music, hairstyles and fashion. Where *ethnic* refers to people directly, the emphasis tends to be on their cultural background and the characteristics that make them distinctive. Where it refers to cuisine or fashion and so on, *ethnic* has, fundamentally, a more commercial meaning, referring to items that represent or derive from the traditions of a particular group of people and that anyone else can, if they wish, 'sample'. It is often naively assumed that *ethnic* implies *minority*, because those who belong to the *ethnic majority* or the dominant cultural group in a particular place consider their own ethnicity to be the norm and therefore it is the ethnicity of those outside the dominant group that tends to be 'marked'. The ethnicity of minority groups is marked, for example, in situations where an individual's skin colour is mentioned where this has absolutely no bearing on the context, while that of other individuals is treated as normative and not commented on.

Ethnicity can be broken down from large to smaller groups, depending on where our loyalty lies. For instance, a British person might feel a stronger allegiance to, say, Welsh ethnicity than to English, feeling that Welsh and English cultures retain a certain distinctiveness despite centuries of political union. Even Welsh people who do not speak or understand the Welsh language often identify with their cultural and geographical roots in this way, though it might be argued that those who do speak Welsh generally have a deeper sense of Welsh identity. This is because language has a central role in our sense of ethnicity and can survive beyond national borders and where the sense of national identity has been undermined or lost.

In this chapter we will look at some of the most important ways in which ethnicity has played a part in developing varieties of English, first of all

considering pidgin and creole Englishes and then exploring the phenomena of African American Vernacular English and Chicano English in the light of attitudes to English in education and the impact of various powerful language lobbies.

5.2 Pidgins and creoles

One of the reasons why English has become the global language that it is today is that it has in many parts of the world been used as a *lingua franca* or common means of communication for a considerable time. In some parts of the world, especially coastal regions where contact between different groups of people began for trading purposes, English has taken on very distinctive forms, undergoing a process of simplification and hybridisation as it has been combined with features from other languages. The process whereby a dominant language (usually that of a one-time colonial power) is used alongside other local languages for practical purposes of basic trade and negotiation gives rise to a hybrid form of language called a ***pidgin***. Pidgin languages are characterised by their simplification of the syntax and lexis of the contributing languages and by the fact that they are not spoken as a vernacular or native language, but used only when required for limited communicative needs between people who do not have a common language.

When a community is multilingual, however, and more and more people begin to increase their use of a pidgin as a contact language, the range of situations in which this contact language is used widens and its grammar and lexis expand and become more complex. A new generation is then likely to learn this variety as their mother tongue. When this occurs, the pidgin has become a fully functioning language and is called a ***creole***. When a pidgin becomes a creole, its phonology, syntax and vocabulary all become more complex, so that it can be used effectively in all the situations in which it is the medium of communication. Examples of English-based pidgins that are now creoles include *Bislama*, used in Fiji and the Solomon Islands and an official language in Vanuatu, and *Tok Pisin* in Papua New Guinea, spoken by over two million people and widely used in commercial and administrative contexts.

5.2.1 English-based creoles

The English-based creoles of the world have many formal similarities, especially in grammatical structure. For example, the creole first used by black slaves in the Caribbean and America had a West African linguistic background, but came increasingly under the influence of English as a result of contact with a powerful, white English-speaking population. Where the pressure to move more towards a dominant parent language exists in

this way, a ***post-creole continuum*** comes into being. At the most socially prestigious end of the continuum an ***acrolect***, or variety closest to the standard dialect, is spoken by the most educated groups, while at the least prestigious end a ***basilect*** is used. Varieties that are placed between these two extremes are called ***mesolects***. Where the acrolect develops into a powerful and institutionalised variety of English, a phase known as ***decreolisation*** can occur. When this happens, stigma towards the other forms of the creole will increase and they may be proscribed in official or educational contexts. This can sometimes lead to the eventual disappearance of the creole altogether, though its ultimate fate often depends on whether and in what way its speakers choose to value and defend it.

Let us look in more detail at an English-based creole, namely Jamaican Creole or Jamaican Patwa.[1] This exists as a basilect alongside the acrolectal variety of Jamaican English. Some of the most noticeable features of Jamaican Patwa are as follows:

Phonological:

- The use of the vowel /aː/ in *paw* and *card*
- The use of the vowel /a/ in *hat*, *hot*, *one*
- The use of the vowel /ɒ/ in *gun* and *but*
- The tendency not to distinguish between /t–θ/ and /d–ð/, so that *oath* is pronounced like *oat* and *though* is pronounced like *dough*.
- The use of the diphthong /ai/ for both *buy* and *boy*
- Non-rhoticity, so that the /r/ is not pronounced after a vowel, as in words like *card* and *water*. Note, however, that some Caribbean Englishes, such as those of Barbados and Guyana, are rhotic.
- The devoicing, reduction or loss of final consonant clusters: *England* becomes *Englan'*
- The rhythm of Patwa stresses every syllable more or less equally

Lexico-grammatical:

- Plurals are not generally marked with -s: *two cat*, *all di book*
- Possession is expressed without an apostrophe 's: *dis man coat* (this man's coat), or through the use of the particle *fi*, as in *de bok a fi me* (the book is mine).
- Subject versus object case is not necessarily distinguished in pronoun use: *She come, take she book an' read*
- Non-standard *s-* concord between subject and verb: *She sing every day*
- Lack of *be* as copula or auxiliary verb: *di man sad*, *dem coming*
- The negation of verbs through use of a *no* particle and use of multiple negation for emphasis: *he no want dat*, *Ain' nobody go nowhere las' week*

[1] Patwa, from 'patois', is a term that is sometimes used to stigmatise basilectal forms of a creole. However, in some contexts, it has been reclaimed as a badge of pride in ethnic identity, as in the case of Jamaican Patwa in Britain.

- Past tenses are expressed with the base form of the verb: *Linton go last week*. With stative verbs 'did' is often used: *She did know dem*. Completed actions in the past are expressed by 'done': *She just done tell dem*
- Continuous actions are marked with particles such as 'da', 'di' or 'a': *Linton da work now*
- Reduplication: *picky-picky* (choosy), *one one* (all alone)

Jamaican Patwa has become well known internationally through immigration of West Indians to English-speaking countries, particularly Britain, and through the significant impact of Caribbean popular culture, particularly reggae music. Many Jamaican immigrants to the UK have actively maintained the use of Patwa in informal social networks, song lyrics and poetry. Often their use of it is a badge of protest against the pressure to assimilate into the mainstream culture, or against perceived victimisation by the dominant group in areas such as education and employment.

Some of the features listed above can be seen in the following poem by Jean 'Binta' Breeze, a poet and performer who divides her time between England and Jamaica:

seasons

(for Linton)

sometime,
when im coming
is like a cole front
cross de Atlantic
or a chilling eas wind
den yuh have to meet him
ratianal,
lagical,
wid a clarity
dat is more
intellectual
but occasianally
spirit tek
an a smile
wid a twinkle
in de I
does warm de heart
like summer come in May
or tulips out in Feb
an yuh haffi sey
it did wut it
after all
fi endure im winta

(Jean 'Binta' Breeze, 2000 *The Arrival of Brighteye and Other Poems* Tarset: Bloodaxe)

This poem is a useful example of how Jamaican English creole is represented in creative writing. In it we can find much evidence of pronunciation-guided spelling, such as 'cole' for 'cold', 'de' for 'the', 'ratianal', 'lagical', 'occasianally', for 'rational', 'logical' and 'occasionally', and 'yuh' for 'you'. The use of 'I' for 'eye' in 'in de I' is less easy to explain, as 'I' and 'eye' are pronounced the same. However, the play on words here might be a means of suggesting that the 'eye' of the speaker is the centre, in some way, of her 'I-ness' or identity.[2] Creole grammar is represented in the poem by, for instance, 'wen im coming' for 'when he's coming' (or 'when he comes'), where the object pronoun 'im' ('him') performs the role of clause subject and the auxiliary verb is omitted. Immediately after this we find 'is like' for 'it's like', in which the subject is omitted. In 'spirit tek/an a smile', the definite article is dropped before 'spirit', and in 'does warm de heart' (for 'warms the heart'), we find the auxiliary 'do' being used in a declarative proposition, a non-standard feature in English in modern times. The final lines 'it did wut it/after all/fi endure im winta' might be rendered as 'it (the spirit) did what it had to do, after all, to endure his (its?) winter'. The phrase 'im winta' might at first be read as a variant of 'in winter', but this would be unlikely, as the phrases 'in May' or 'in Feb' retain the standard prepositional form 'in'. Also, case distinction between pronouns in Jamaican creole is not necessarily observed, so 'his' often occurs as 'him'. Breeze is also personifying the spirit here, so the spirit could be thought of as having endured its own metaphorical winter and come through it to a new optimism. Another grammatical feature worth noting is the use of the particle 'fi' in the last line and as part of the word 'haffi' in 'haffi sey' ('have to say'). This particle can also sometimes occur in possessive constructions, as in *De book a fi me* ('the book is mine'), but in the last line of our poem it seems to express purpose.

What will strike a careful reader of this poem is that there is some inconsistency in the extent to which creole variants are used. For example, 'have to' occurs in its standard form in 'yuh have to meet him' but in its creole form in 'yuh haffi sey'. There could be several reasons for this. It is possible that Jean 'Binta' Breeze made her choice in connection with the overall flow and rhythm of the poem, simply choosing the most appropriate variant for the line in question. It could also be the case that 'haffi' may be habitually juxtaposed (or may ***collocate***) with certain verbs more frequently than with others. Or it could be argued that a writer who divides her time between England and Jamaica is inevitably going to draw on both creole and standard forms of English in her work. Breeze is also a poet who, like many other poets with Caribbean roots, often 'performs' her poetry for audiences with varying levels

[2] Crystal (1995:347) notes: 'In Rastafarian speech, *I* is considered a syllable of special, mystical significance, and often appears in unusual contexts, as in West Indian poet Dennis Scott's line 'Seals every I away from light' (*More Poem*, 1982), where there is a play on words between *I* and *eye*.'

of familiarity with Jamaican Creole English, a factor which might also indirectly influence the mix of standard and creole features in her writing.

5.2.2 Attitudes to creole

Attitudes to the use of creole can be complex within the society in which it first develops, depending on the social contexts and networks in which it is spoken, the language policies of governments and so on. DeCamp (1977) drew attention to the educational consequences of the continuum of Jamaican English (going from the basilectal creole to the Standard Jamaican English taught in schools) being linked to social class, with the Creole stigmatised as the variety used by the poor, delinquent or ignorant. More recently, a study by Wassink (1999) of speakers from a semi-rural community outside Kingston, Jamaica, showed that such negative feelings towards the Creole may be losing some of their force and that younger speakers have more positive attitudes towards it and to its function in the community. However, Wassink's respondents in general retained ambivalent attitudes towards the creole variety or, to use the term adopted for it locally, the 'patois'.

A further level of complexity is added, with regard to attitudes, when a creole is 'exported' from its place of origin to another area of the world through emigration. When this takes place, the Creole speakers have to take new linguistic bearings and decide how they wish to relate to a new standard variety (e.g. the attitude to British English of Jamaican Creole speakers who have emigrated to London) and the other regional and social varieties they encounter in their adopted country. As Sebba (1993) has shown, some young British African Caribbeans have 're-creolised' their English as 'London Jamaican' with forms that differ from those of Jamaican English in Jamaica (e.g. with a Cockney pronunciation of 'through' as /fru/ rather than the Jamaican pronunciation /tru/).[3] Their aim in doing so is to assert their ethnic identity within the British context – the use of London Jamaican or British Black English thus has covert prestige as, despite its divergence from Standard British English, it represents the distinctiveness of its speakers as an ethnic group and reinforces their solidarity.

As Kramsch (1998:70) has noted, 'One way of surviving culturally in immigration settings is to exploit, rather than stifle, the endless variety of meanings afforded by participation in several discourse communities at once.' This means code-switching as an act of identification, through which speakers can reinforce cultural group membership or distance in subtle and creative ways. In fact it can involve not just code-switching, but also the stylisation of a single variety or creation of a hybrid variety of the same code. It can also reveal multiple cultural memberships by speakers who

[3] This process of re-creolisation by youths of West Indian origin was also noticed in earlier studies by Edwards (1986) and Hewitt (1986).

parody or stereotype different codes or styles depending on the communicative context and their interlocutors. The following shows a stylisation of both Asian and Creole English by Pakistani school pupils as an act of resistance to their teacher (BR below) in a British school:

BR: attention gents
Asif: yeh alright
Alan: alright
Asif: yeh
Kazim: (in Stylized Asian English) I AM VERY SORRY BEN JAAD
/aɪ æm veri sɒri ben ʤaːd/
Asif: (in Stylized Asian English) ATTENTION BENJAMIN
/əthenʃaːn bendʒəmɪn/
. . .
BR: concentrate a little bit
. . .
Kazim: (in Creole English) stop moving **dat ting aroun**
/dæt tɪŋ əɻɑʊn/

(from Rampton 1995:115–6)

There is evidence that Patwa is being strategically borrowed by some young white and Asian people in Britain, a claim first made by Hewitt (1986) with reference to east London youth clubs.[4] Rampton (1995) found that the occasional use of creole in a multi-ethnic context by an 'outgroup' of white and Asian adolescents was associated with their positive perception of creole in terms of youth and class identity. It was the creole-speaking group who were considered by Rampton's informants to have the greatest influence on the vernacular used in this multi-racial setting, introducing new words, for instance, that the other groups would adopt in order to move towards this leading group.

5.3 African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Spoken by many people of African ancestry in the United States, African American Vernacular English, or AAVE (pronounced /ɑːveɪ/ or /ɑːvi/), has many characteristics that can be found across different regions, so that most linguists agree that this is a distinct ethnic variety, even though it is not spoken by *all* black people in the United States.[5] Well-educated black speakers from more privileged socio-economic classes do not necessarily use AAVE features in their own speech and may also have more ambivalent

[4] In particular, this phenomenon may be noticeable among some young Asian and white people in multi-ethnic areas of Britain, such as the Midlands (see Stockwell, 2002:45–46).
[5] About 80–90 per cent of the black population of the US are thought to use AAVE, the majority coming from inner-city and working-class backgrounds. However, those black speakers who do not generally use the variety are still familiar with it and capable of using it if they wish to.

attitudes towards this variety. Younger speakers, however, are more likely than older speakers to use AAVE as a badge of peer-group solidarity.

Tottie (2002:227) outlines as follows the current theories about the origins of AAVE and why it differs from Standard and other varieties of English:

1 AAVE is descended from a *creole*, itself derived from an English-based *pidgin*, i.e. a contact language.
2 AAVE is a dialect of English based on the varieties that the slaves picked up from white speakers.
3 AAVE is derived from West African languages. Those who advocate this theory are often the same people who use the term *Ebonics*.

Tottie notes that the third theory is not 'accepted by professional linguists but it has had some important political consequences', as we shall see below when we discuss AAVE in the context of educational policy. As for the first and second theories, Tottie explains that there is evidence in favour of both positions. For example, the aspect system of AAVE and its African loanwords tend to support the 'creolist' theory, while evidence that black slaves might have picked up the dialects of Southern white farm employees tends to favour the position of the 'dialectologists'. The fact that AAVE is treated as a variety in its own right, whether dialectal in origin or creole-based, could be said to show that it has followed its own course, at least, and that more research will be needed to establish exactly how it has developed.

5.3.1 Linguistic features of AAVE

In its phonology AAVE shares some features with Southern US English, such as the use of the monophthong /a/ rather than the diphthong /aɪ/ in words like *hide*, *I* and *time*, especially before voiced consonants. Like Southern White English, AAVE also often merges the short vowels /e/ and /ɪ/ before nasals, losing the phonemic distinction between words like *ten* and *tin*. AAVE differs from Standard English more noticeably in its consonant system, however. It is *r*-less or non-rhotic, losing post-vocalic *r* both word-finally and before a consonant, as in *door* and *short*. Tottie (2002) also notes that intervocalic *r* can be absent, so that *Carol* sounds like *Cal*. Another distinctive feature is the reduction of word-final clusters (through the loss of the final consonant) in words like *rest*, *child*, *cold* (pronounced as if spelled *res'*, *chil'* and *col'*), although this does not apply where there is a cluster of voiced followed by voiceless consonants, as in *felt* or *pump*. Where cluster reductions occur, they can also influence morphology, as when the plural of *test* (pronounced in AAVE as /tes/) follows the rule for nouns like *kiss* and is pronounced /tesɪz/.

The pronunciation of dental fricatives depends on whether they occur initially, medially or finally in a word. The initial /ð/ in words like *the*, *this* and *them* becomes /d/, so that these words sound like *de*, *dis* and *dem*. In

medial position, however, the voiced fricative is often replaced by /v/, so that *brother* may be pronounced as if written *bruvver*. The voiceless fricative may be pronounced as a /t/ initially, but sometimes occurs as /f/ in medial position, so that *thing* is pronounced like *ting*, while *nothing* often occurs as *nuf'n* (though *nut'n* is also possible).

Other phonological features include some vocalisation of /l/, so that *I'll go* and *I go* are likely to sound the same, the pronunciation of final *-ing* in words like *dancing* as /n/ rather than /ŋ/, usually shown in spelling as *dancin'*, and the reversal of some consonant sequences (metathesis), so that, for example, *ask* is pronounced like the word *axe*.

Aspects of the rhythm and intonation of AAVE are also distinctive. One rhythmical feature that is often reflected in written representations of the variety is the deletion of the first syllable in words like *about* or *remember*, shown as *'bout* and *'member*.

Among the grammatical characteristics of AAVE the aspect system of the verb phrase is the most interesting area of difference from Standard English or other vernacular US dialects. The verb *be* is frequently deleted both as a copula (except in the first person) and auxiliary form, so *she's a teacher* is expressed in the form *she a teacher* and *she's going to stay* as *she gonna stay*. When indicating that something is a habit or happens frequently, AAVE makes use of an invariant form of *be*, so that *the place is often cold* is expressed in the form *the place be cold*. In AAVE there is a contrast in aspect between the forms *subject + be + verb-ing* and *subject + verb-ing* without *be*: for example, *she be singin'* means 'she often sings', whereas *she singin'* means 'she's singing now'. Aspectual meanings of the past tense forms are also distinctive in AAVE. Some examples, with Standard English versions in brackets, include the following:

He done gone ('He went recently')
He been gone ('He went a long time ago')

The future is expressed by *will* but this is usually absent in contracted forms because of the common vocalisation of *l* mentioned above. The future perfect tense formed in Standard English by *will have + past participle* (e.g. 'he will have finished his work') is rendered in AAVE as *he be done finished his work*. Finally, other common features include the following:

- Non-standard subject-verb agreement (e.g. *they is here*; *he don't sing*).
- Frequent use of *ain't* in forming negative clauses, along with the use of two or more negatives in the same clause (*you ain't got time*; *ain't got no money*). Sometimes the subject pronoun is omitted in negative clauses, as in *ain't got no money*.
- Inversion of subject and auxiliary in a declarative clause when the subject is a negative word like 'nothing' or 'nobody' (*Didn't nobody see him*: 'Nobody saw him'; *Wasn't nobody there*: 'Nobody was there').

- In existential sentences, *there* is often missing and replaced by *it* (*it's a car outside*: 'There's a car outside').

The vocabulary of AAVE is characterised by a number of words of African origin (e.g. *juke*, *okra*, *tote*, *banjo*) and by words from English used with new meanings by black speakers (e.g. *bad* for 'good', *uptight* for 'anxious', *jive* for 'insincere talk'). Such terms are also widely adopted by white speakers, especially younger people, as they have become widely known through rap music and international popular culture.

It is important to remember that AAVE is recognised not simply by the kinds of linguistic features noted above, but also by certain identifiable discourse strategies and speaking styles. Called in Smitherman (1995) the African American Verbal Tradition (AVT), these strategies can be found, for instance, in the speech of influential political and social figures who are bidialectal as a result of their upbringing in AAVE-speaking communities (e.g. Reverend Jesse Jackson). AAVE discourse style is marked by intonation, address systems, the use of tag questions and so on, and is closely associated with the signalling of solidarity within the African American community. As Lippi-Green (1997:177–178) has pointed out:

> . . . even when no grammatical, phonological, or lexical features of AAVE are used, a person can, *in effect*, still be speaking AAVE by means of AVT rhetorical devices. Thus, while the core grammatical features of AAVE may be heard most consistently in poorer black communities where there are strong social and communication networks, AAVE phonology (particularly intonation) and black rhetorical style are heard, on occasion, from prominent and successful African Americans in public forums.

Before we consider attitudes to AAVE within education, where it has been a source of considerable controversy, I think it is worth discussing for a moment the representation of this variety in written form. As in the case of all non-standard dialects of English, when AAVE is represented in literary writing, authors try to echo its formal and rhetorical features by exploiting the resources of spelling and punctuation in unconventional ways. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, many African Americans wrote nostalgic dialect verses that mythologised the Southern past. While the following example, an extract from a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906), avoids an overtly racial theme, its use of an AAVE-speaking persona has the immediate effect of appealing to African American solidarity. The servant speaker's nostalgia for the 'gospel' singing of 'Malindy' is not a direct comment on AAVE itself, but since African American singing and speech, especially in church communities, are closely interrelated (AAVE speech is highly 'musical' in its intonation patterns), so the singing referred to in the poem seems to acquire a symbolic dimension. To the narrator, its quality can never be replicated by the singing of a white singer, in this case her young Southern charge, Miss Lucy:

G'way an' quit dat noise, Miss Lucy –
  Put dat music book away;
What's de use to keep on tryin'?
  Ef you practice twell you're gray,
You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'
  Like de ones dat rants and rings
F'om de kitchen to de big woods
  When Malindy sings.

You ain't got de nachel o'gans
  Fu' to make de soun' come right,
You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's
  Fu' to make it sweet an' light.
Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,
  An' I'm tellin' you fu' true,
When hit comes to raal right singin',
  'Tain't no easy thing to do.

Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,
  Lookin' at de lines an' dots,
When dey ain't no one kin sence it,
  An' de chune comes in in spots;
But fu' real melojous music,
  Dat jes' strikes yo' hawt and clings,
Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me,
  When Malindy sings.

Ain't you nevah heerd Malindy?
  Blessed soul, take up de cross!
Look heah, ain't you jokin', honey?
  Well, you don't know what you los'.
Y'ought to heah dat gal a-wa'blin',
  Robins, la'ks an' all dem things,
Heish dey moufs an' hides dey faces
  When Malindy sings.[6]

(From 'When Malindy Sings', by Paul Laurence Dunbar, in Joan R. Sherman, ed. 1997 *African-American Poetry: An Anthology, 1773–1927* New York: Dover Publications)

[6] 'Go away and quit that noise, Miss Lucy –/Put that music book away;/What's the use of keeping on trying?/ If you practise till you're grey, /You can't [won't] start any notes flying/ Like the ones that rant and ring/ From the kitchen to the big woods/When Malindy sings. You haven't got the natural organs/To make the sound come [out] right,/You haven't got the tunes and twistings/To make it sweet and light./ [I'll] tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,/ And I'm telling you for true,/When it comes to real, right singing,/ it isn't an easy thing to do. [It's] easy enough for folks to hollah [shout],/Looking at the lines and dots,/When there isn't anyone who can make sense of it,/ And the tune [only] comes in in spots;/But for real melodious music,/That just strikes your heart and clings,/Just you stand and listen with me,/ When Malindy sings. Haven't you ever heard Malindy?/ Blessed soul, take up the cross!/ Look hear, aren't you joking, honey?/Well, you don't know what you've lost./ You ought to hear that girl warbling,/Robins, larks and all those things,/Hush their mouths and hide their faces/When Malindy sings.'

In this poem we can find a number of the features of AAVE already mentioned. In the first two verses, for example, we find the spelling 'dat' for 'that' and 'de' for 'the', reflecting the pronunciation of the voiced dental fricative. The spelling of 'sta't' (for 'start') represents a non-rhotic pronunciation of the word. Another feature is the loss of 'g' in, for example, 'tryin'', where the second syllable would be pronounced /ɪn/ rather than /ɪŋ/. Syllables are deleted in 'twell' for 'until' and 'nachel' for 'natural', and there is consonant cluster reduction in 'F'om' ('From') and 'soun''. Typical AAVE negative constructions are seen in 'You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin'' and ''Tain't no easy thing to do'. (The last two verses of this poem will not be commented on here, as they are the focus of one of the Activities at the end of the chapter.)

5.3.2 Attitudes to AAVE

Before looking at attitudes to AAVE specifically, we need to consider the broader picture of language attitudes in the United States, particularly with regard to education and notions of American citizenship. The latter half of the 20th century saw considerable debate among educators, linguists and the public on the relationship between English and other languages spoken in the US, as well as between Standard English and non-standard varieties of the language. In 1981 Senator Hayakawa of California proposed an *English Language Amendment* to the Constitution to make it the official language of the United States. Though the proposal was not approved by the Senate, Hayakawa co-founded an organisation called *US English* in 1983 which still lobbies for the Amendment and for 'Official English' at state level in almost all government and public meetings, documents and legislation. Another organisation, *English First*, which was established in 1986, shares the same aims, but in addition campaigns against bilingual schooling and voting. These organisations justify their conservative stance with the argument that US citizens of all backgrounds should be assimilated into one shared sense of national identity, and that speaking English is essential if this is to happen.

Not surprisingly, several other organisations have been set up to counter the influence of these groups. The most well known is *English Plus*, founded in 1987, which opposes the English Language Amendment and supports the development of bilingual education in schools, as well as wider provision of social services in languages other than English. *English Plus* and other groups that oppose 'Official English' policies believe that, far from ensuring national cohesion, they would fuel intolerance towards ethnic and linguistic minority groups.

AAVE has been caught up in this debate because in December 1996 the Oakland school board in California issued a resolution which was understood to imply that African Americans spoke a separate language, not a dialect of English, and could therefore qualify for bilingual education grants. This

was the position supported by campaigners for *Ebonics* (a term for AAVE blending 'ebony' and 'phonics' favoured by those who link it with African languages), so it became known as the 'Ebonics controversy'. However, during much heated public debate, linguists clarified that AAVE is not a language in its own right, but a variety of English, and so could not be treated in the same way as other minority languages in the US, such as Chinese and Russian. The Oakland board decided to omit the word *Ebonics* from a revised proposal in April 1997.

Attitudes to AAVE among African Americans are often ambivalent. Lippi-Green (1997:185) writes that 'it is hard to find any African American, regardless of profession, politics, or personal belief, who would deny the practical necessity of bidialectalism and selective assimilation to MUSE [Mainstream US English] norms'. However, while the majority of African Americans seem to accept that assimilation to MUSE norms is hard to resist in some contexts, they can also be suspicious of those who adopt Standard English too readily. As Lippi-Green points out, the debate often centres itself too narrowly on attitudes towards discrete formal issues of Standard English proficiency (especially subject-verb agreement), whereas AAVE discourse strategies and intonation (often detectable in the speech of successful African Americans who have assimilated to MUSE norms) receive insufficient attention. Lippi-Green highlights this, because there is evidence that these too are sometimes stigmatised, especially by non-black MUSE speakers, who 'have a much lower tolerance for non-grammatical features of AAVE than some seem to realize' (Lippi-Green 1997:200).

5.4 Chicano English

People of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Spanish-speaking backgrounds in the US are ethnically grouped together as 'Hispanics'.[7] In the 1990 US Census 60 per cent of Hispanics reported their national origin as Mexican, and it has been estimated that Mexican-American English, or Chicano English, is now spoken by around 25 to 30 million people in the US (Baugh and Cable, 2002:385).

5.4.1 Linguistic features of Chicano English

Chicano English differs from Standard American English mainly in pronunciation. Here is a selection (adapted from Tottie 2002:228–229) of some of the main segmental differences:

[7] Note that this term has been criticised for its lack of applicability to a large proportion of the population of Mexico and Central America who have other ethnic backgrounds, such as *mestizo* (mixed European and Native American ancestry) and groups who speak no Spanish at all. See Lippi-Green (1997:229–230).

- Loss of distinction between /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, so *choose* and *shoes* may sound the same.
- Devoicing of /z/ to /s/, so *spies* sounds like *spice*.
- In word-final position /v/ is pronounced like /f/, e.g. *live* (adjective) is pronounced like *life*.
- In other positions /v/ is pronounced like /b/ in words like *never* and *fever*.
- Initial /dʒ/ becomes /j/, so *just* is pronounced /jas/.
- /h/ becomes /χ/ in *hit*, *whole*.
- consonant clusters are reduced, so *it's* is pronounced /ɪs/.
- /e/ is lengthened in words like *intention*, *send*.
- /i/ is shortened to /ɪ/ in words like *feel* and *weak*.

Other characteristics include the tendency to stress the final element in compounds (e.g. *police de'partment* rather than *po'lice department*) and to use a rising, rather than falling, intonation for statements.

Although these features are typical, they are not necessarily used to the same degree by every speaker of Chicano English. Baugh and Cable point out that '[w]hile features of pronunciation and intonation may remain stable, the selection of those features depends on numerous variables, including the context of speech and the attitude of the speaker' (2002:385). This is because the community of speakers of this variety is a rather complex one, spanning those who are bilingual in Spanish and English, those who are more proficient in one language than the other and those who may simply have acquired Chicano English as their first language. Bilingual speakers frequently code-switch between English and Spanish, a characteristic extensively illustrated in the work of writers such as Rolando Hinojosa.

5.4.2 Attitudes to Chicano English

While Chicano American and Latino American English have established their own literatures, attitudes to Hispanic speakers of English in the US have often been discriminatory. Despite its diversity, the Latino population has tended to be constructed in popular culture as a homogenous community that refuses to learn English or speaks inferior or inadequate English. The label *Spanglish* (for code-switching between Spanish and English) has often been used to undermine the linguistic identities of Hispanics by not taking the natural linguistic behaviour of bilinguals seriously. As Lippi-Green writes (1997:234):

> There is a shorthand at work here, and that is, there is only one acceptable choice: it is not enough for Spanish speakers to become bilingual; they must learn the *right* English – and following from that, the right US culture, into which they must assimilate completely.

This kind of discrimination has also been reinforced by negative stereotyping of Mexican Americans in popular culture: they have all too frequently

been portrayed as dealers in violence, drugs and corruption. Though in more recent years Spanish-speaking Americans have had increasing influence on US society and politics, this does not mean that negative attitudes towards Latino use of English, particularly in terms of accent, have been overcome.

Nonetheless, Hispanic English is having an increasingly noticeable influence on mainstream US English and other Inner Circle Englishes in terms of the lexicon. Borrowed words noted in Baugh and Cable (2002:386) include *nachos*, *sangria*, *margarita* in the food and drink category, and *Sandinista*, *Contra* and *Fidelist* from politics. We can expect the growing contact between Spanish and English in the US to be a source of many more such borrowings in the future, some of which are likely to become known and used across the English-speaking world.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter we have seen that the relationship between ethnicity and variation in English is a highly sensitive one. While English pidgin languages may evolve into rich and highly effective creoles, not all creole languages based on English have survived the pressure to standardise towards international norms. The attitudes, not only of educationalists and policy-makers, but of ordinary speakers, determine how far a variety of English associated with a minority or generally less powerful ethnic group will be supported in schools, workplaces and communities. In multi-ethnic contexts, more tolerant attitudes can often be found. Evidence of strategic code switching by school pupils in multi-cultural educational settings shows that Standard English norms are not necessarily preferred or advantageous, especially within youth culture, though not all teachers are prepared or sufficiently trained to deal with code-switching in the classroom. Finally, the way a variety of English such as AAVE or Chicano English is represented in literature and popular culture is an indication of prevailing attitudes towards it, attitudes both of those who represent it and of their intended and implied audiences.

Activities

1. Look again at the last two verses of 'When Malindy Sings' by Paul Laurence Dunbar. With the help of the list of selected features of AAVE provided in this chapter and also the 'translation' in footnote 6, see how many different characteristics of AAVE you can identify.
2. Find a short poem written in Creole English (e.g. a poem by Linton Kwesi Johnson or Benjamin Zephaniah) and write a 'translation' of it in

Standard English. Read the two versions through, one after the other. What effect do you think this 're-coding' has on the impact and effectiveness of the poem?

3. If you have access to people who use AAVE or Chicano English, or any other variety of English associated with a particular ethnic group, devise a questionnaire to ask them about their attitudes towards their own language use and towards Standard English.

Further Reading

Lippi-Green (1997) includes an excellent chapter on 'Black English', as well as a very helpful section on attitudes towards Hispanic cultures and language use. See also Smitherman (1999) on African American language and culture. Tottie (2002) contains accessible and well-illustrated chapters on varieties of American English and on US language politics. Sebba (1993) is a detailed study of 'London Jamaican'. There are many book-length studies of pidgins and creoles available, but for informative shorter introductions see Holmes (2001) or Wardhaugh (2002).