

**Exploring the Use of Black English Vernacular in the American Narrative:
Case of Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe.
Towards a Sociolinguistic Perspective**

1 Yamina ILES*

yamina.iles@univ-tlemcen.dz, University of Tlemcen, Algeria FLPATP LAB N°72

2 Prof. Amine BELMEKKI

amibel213@gmail.com, University of Tlemcen, Algeria

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Abstract:

The main interest of this research paper attempts at basically investigating the use of Black English Vernacular (BEV) through Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1811-1896) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, henceforth (UTC), (1852) is selected as a corpus of study. This novel constitutes a productive, rich and interesting reference to deal with the necessary and targeted sociolinguistic elements displayed by the different chosen characters. Thus, the focus is purposefully directed towards the linguistic and sociolinguistic concern. In this sense, the data gathered from this novel has been analyzed and interpreted in order to provide and reflect a vivid image of the novels' fictional characters with a purpose to enhance dialect awareness among readers of literary dialect.

Keywords: Black English Vernacular, sociolinguistic, language, cultural aspects, anthropology

Introduction

The implementation of vernacular has always been thought to be as unfashionable, odd and an off-the-cuff way of speaking. It was also viewed as bizarre when dealing with the study of the vernacular or dialect as a science in relation to an artistic discipline, as that of literature.

Language is said to empower literary works and conceived as crucial to everything in the interpretation of literary texts; it facilitates the communication of ideas, express feelings, persuade, and present matters to different audiences. In this line of thought, sociolinguistics is therefore, considered as an ideal complement to literature, where an understanding of how they are joined together is worth revealing. Hence, in current times, scholars began to vary their minds by recognizing that folks can learn variety of distinctive sorts of language just by reading a piece of writing.

Methodologically, it is enough interesting to consider that there is a wide range of different varieties. These varieties are related to non-standard English, as Black English Vernacular (BEV), which is often employed in American literary works since it enables novelists to portray their own experiences and adventures by painting, a more or less, an authentic picture for readers to become much more involved through an interactive process. In addition, it appears to have greatly contributed to the outstanding success of American literary works.

* Corresponding Author

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Dialect use is may be one of the secrets which makes of American literary works richer, more complex and, therefore, more interesting and attractive. Also, it is very effective in depicting the American society, and remains almost quite faithful to its spirits. Besides, it can provide much pleasure to readers while exploring the vernacular language, and helps push them to better appreciate American literature.

As mentioned previously, this area of research spotlights on the importance of dialect use in literature by highlighting various characteristics of dialectal elements, providing social parameters and norms that condition the speakers' dialect. This research work also tends to reveal the artistic relationship that can be systematically established between two distinctive disciplines namely, Sociolinguistics and Literature where a set of scientific inquiries at more than one level of analysis.

Sociolinguistics and Literature: *An Emerging Discipline*

Sociolinguistics as an emerging discipline of the twentieth century is considered as linguistics regarded and examined at a micro-cosmic scale the language. It was so-labelled by Labov (1972), and others as dealing with societal matters that might affect the way people talk or produce utterances. By the same token, these are represented in texts as dialogues between distinct characters. The way these personas communicate in fictitious setting reflects their ethnic, geographical and social stratum within the same speech community or society. The speech is, in fact, represented in terms of typographic illustrations. In other words, the way they are typed, refracts utterances of a specific dialect. And therefore, the investigation should be narrowed down on morphology of words that are key-components of dialect recognition within the literary language, if so to consider. The latter is another talk to catch up later.

Roman Jakobson (1935) puts forward three main features in his morphological research; the first point might not be of significance in the present endeavour, however. It deals with the linguistic analysis of aphasia that has undermined and triggered the development of modern aphasiology. It underlined the profound analogy between natural language and the genetic code. The second feature consists in “the most general and abstract formulation of linguistic problems-and their solutions based on the most concrete and specific material” (180). This feature is primarily concerned with the very essence of language; the connection “between the semantico-logical nature of grammatical categories and the linguistic means used for their expression” (idem). In the same way, Jakobson (1935) highlights ‘**Zerosignata**’ as an enigma which examines the interdependence of different levels of language. Their independence from each other opens up the gap for the literary language to be defined as one language specific to that discipline in particular if it is deemed one among other disciplines. The style of author affects the texture of language and how the words are organised to fulfil an implied meaning.

Here, the semantics and its relation with logical comprehension are transgressed in literature. Some of the passages might seem to convey no meaning if the reader is a pragmatic one with no pre-requisite awareness of the specificities of literary figures and symbolic nature of language. The meaning in this case is spoiled because of the non contribution of this readership to a centripetal endeavour; the one that prevents the meaning to be spoiled. The manner they are linguistically expressed is, to a great extent, different from what is conventional. Units of the same pattern are not in the conventional order, and neither are they in terms of the frequency and occurrence in the same utterance.

The third features reads that Jakobson (1935) draws “the maximally tight link with the best linguistic traditions- and the maximally bold innovativeness of theoretical breakthroughs”

(108). It stresses the predecessors works on linguistic representations in the speech of a specific speech community and what has been theorized and advanced by newly researchers in the field such as those associating the discipline of sociolinguistics and literature. By the same token, Jakobson introduces two universal distinctions;

- Speech itself Vs the narrated matter
- The event itself Vs any of its participants

If the narrated matter is considered, an inner and outer narrative frames should be raised as components within and through the literary work, for their intertwining relationship with the speech itself. The perception of the speech by the readership in terms of cognitive semiotic determines the frame as well as the linguistic presentation of matters or different patterns offered in a peculiar utterance. The readership, in fact, is a key component in the understanding or more advanced a judgemental value interpretation which does not exclude the reader as active participant in the phenomenon.

The events as being components of the plot of the narrative depends also of some of its participants which leads to a close examination of what is told and the telling of it in Bakhtin's terms when considering the narrative and more precisely the novel as being a system of language on its own (05). This means that the latter can exist in relation to and within aco-existence with its readership. Therefore, no linguistic predetermination shall control the levels of language in any literary work.

Linguistics, literature and Anthropology

In order to cope with and analyze the different tackled matters in this so called new discipline or rather a combination of anthropology and Linguistics, many concepts and theories shall be taken into consideration and put under scrutiny. Scholars thought of deciphering the speech individuals with each others, discourse with all that is held within; lack of standard grammatical structures, false starts, hesitation and other psychological factors that have a crucial role in guiding a conversation and an effect upon the resulting impressions on each other.

For this, many theorists and language properties should be examined and described so as to wind up with concrete data base analysis and sustain what would be advanced as clues and evidences to the threshold as it presents, to a certain extent. If one looks backward to the 1960's or less, many trends came back and forth to provide a systematic definition and study of language, though many of them had started much earlier. However some scholars could attract the world view toward the modern linguistic paradigm.

For Chomsky (1965) defined language in terms of linguistic competence and linguistic performance; competence is about what a person knows about the rules of grammar of his language, performance is about the way he uses this infinite number of words and phrases, to be more clear and accurate, utterances. But not that far from the performance which was still a subject matter of arguing. He set aside the latter opening thereby further studies by Dell Hymes in 1974 and before him William Labov in 1968.

Hymes (1972) in this respect worked on performance to wind up with the fact of developing a communicative competence for a successful performance, whereas, Labov distinguished to levels of performance in a primary school of African Americans using both the Black English Vernacular (BEV) and the standard language taught at school; they used the BEV inside and outside school walls and used the RP in their written productions. Yet, the characteristics of language, as natural is, are common for all the languages of the world.

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Language is defined as being a set of speech sounds, a set of systems that culminates with discourse as spoken utterances that are considered as the gist of this research paper. It is said also that language is creative. However, the linguistic channel must be considered in this case; setting up the two main components of the conversation 'sender-receiver', wherein the sender encodes the message and send it via utterance to the receiver who decodes it as demonstrated by David Crystal in his **Encyclopedia of Language** updated in **2010**.

Getting back to Chomsky, he has offered a combination of structures(deep and surface) wherein, he asserts that each sentence has a deep structure and two surface structures, the fact, which stresses the point of diversity in speech and unpredictability of answers and comments to one another. In fact, Linguistics tries to explain all aspects of human communication from description of speech sounds to how thoughts are expressed. Nevertheless, the latter not had been given enough credit and concern in early studies.

Linguistic analysis, therefore, begins with the identification of speech sounds, shows how these are combined into contrasting groups and meaningful elements and examines the structures of words and their relationships in larger structures. Moreover, language is intertwined with culture, anthropology, and sociology. They have helped a lot in learning about the nature and development of culture, languages, as language is a social phenomenon that is central to the culture in particular.

Thus, the relevance of Anthropological linguistics as interdisciplinary ground for the understanding of discourse expands the premises in the study of the language. Once more, Structuralism is considered within the advent of Functionalism with Bloomfield's **Language** 1933, because they gave importance to the functions of language.

Use and Significance of B.E.V in Literary Works

During the early years of American settlement, a great number of different forms of English were emerging. That was an important income of the importation of African slaves to work in sugar plantations. In fact, the AAVE did not escape the different views about its origin as for any other variety that may emerge.

One view being called the Anglicist hypothesis of origin; this is to say "AAVE is no more than another dialect of American English" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 175). On the other hand, Wolfram and Thomas (2002) and Wolfram (2003) take a slightly different position, "favoring a neo-Anglicist hypothesis that early African Americans maintained certain features of the languages they brought with them while at the same time accommodating to the local dialects of English.(Wardhaugh 344)

This means that AAVE has some features of its own with some characteristics of the standard language.As a matter of fact, Black English Vernacular has different views of origins and among them are Creoles and Pidgins known as the Creole hypothesis.

Significant Statement on Black English

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is the variety formerly known as Black English Vernacular or Vernacular Black English among sociolinguists, and commonly called Ebonics outside the academic community.

Ebonics Concept

Ebonics is referred to as the dialect of Black English and was introduced by an African-American social psychologist called Dr. Robert Williams in 1973 and his major aim was to link the words 'ebony' with 'phonics' to refer to "black sounds". As William highlights: "We need to define what we speak. We need to give a clear definition to our

language ... we know that ebony means black and that phonics refers to speech sounds or the science of sounds. Thus, we are really talking about the science of black speech sounds or language.”(25)

According to Tolliver-Weddington: “Ebonics is the equivalent of Black English and is considered to be a dialect of English”(10). Ebonics then is considered as a synonym of Black English and it is regarded just as a variety of English. In the same context Nero adds: “Ebonics a synonym for AAVE is considered as the primary language of African American children”(7).

Other scholars have distinct definitions about Ebonics; Williams’ original international definition: “extending the linguistic consequences of the African slave trade from West Africa to all countries where African slaves descendents now reside”(William Smith) suggests: “Ebonics is the antonym of Black English and is considered to be a language other than English”(5). Blackshire-Belay claim that “Ebonics refers to language among all people of African descent throughout the African Diaspora”(15).

Finally, there is no single definition of Ebonics. So, it remains a subject of interest to many linguists, researchers and educators.

Black English Vernacular’s Description

Black English Vernacular is a variety of English used commonly by black people in the United States. However, this variety cannot be described only racially since not all black Americans speak this variety of English, there are also people who do not belong to the American society but may still use it. Therefore, a number of people employ only a few features of this variety like vocabulary, so it is not an easy task to describe who really speaks it.

A wide variety of terms have been employed to define English as spoken by African Americans in the United States as Wardhaugh (2006) states:

Linguists have referred to this variety of speech as Black English, Black Vernacular English, and Afro-American Vernacular English. Today, the most-used term is African American Vernacular English (AAVE) but Ebonics (a blend of Ebony and phonics) has also recently achieved a certain currency.(342)

Wardhaugh’s view means that, nowadays, the suitable term is African American Vernacular English which is mostly employed by different linguists. Furthermore, we can notice a number of names related to the word ‘black’ as illustrated by Jolinen

“There are also several names with the word ‘black’ contained in them that can be heard: Black communications, Black dialect, Black folk speech, Black street speech, Black English Vernacular, and Black Vernacular English” (20)

Examples of Literary Dialect Used in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

Henceforth, there are an immense number of forms of contractions employed in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* novel. Therefore, the subsequent table depicts some of these contractions used by different characters.

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Table 1. A few Forms of Contractions employed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* novel

Contractions' Form	Standard Form	Page number
Ha`nt	Have not	10
Don`t	Do not	10
`cause	Because	10
That`s going	That is going	11
You`ll let	You will let	11
I`ve got	I have got	11
There`s been	There has been	12
Mas`r	Master	12
`em	Them	14
Isn`t	Is not	14
That`s it	That is it	14
Can`t	Can not	16
Aunty`d keep	Aunty would keep	22
`ccount	Account	22
O`	Of	22
Won`t	Will not	22
Lor`	Lord	22
Cuttin`	Cutting	22
Cookin`	Cooking	22
Does n`t know	Does not know	23
Bringin`	Bringing	23
Declar`	Declare	24
Mus`n`t	Must not	24
T` other night	The other night	24
Al`ays	Always	24
`long	Along	24
Boun`	Bound	24
`pears	Appears	25
On `t	On it	25
`way off	Away off	31

Therefore, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* novel is portrayed in a vernacular variety which is recognized as Black English Vernacular. Moreover, it is very significant to state that the whole novel of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is full of contractions used by slave characters since it is written in a non-standard form of language.

A great deal of contractions' forms are used in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as the case with Uncle Tom, a slave character as shows the following table:

Table 2 Contracted Words by *Uncle Tom* in the novel

Character	Contracted words
Uncle Tom	'menber, o'yer, seein', Mas'r, an't going, natur, 'deem, thar's, 'em, nothin', nur, chil'en, ba'r, ye, ator, 'fraid, 'spectin', readin', jest, 'tan't, bein', on 't, o' me, swarin', crackin', better 'n you, willin', crittur, agin.

The other characters in the novel also employ contractions in their speech as shown in the table below:

Table 3. Contracted Words by Other Characters

Character	Contracted words
Ant Chloe	Al'us, interestin', Mas'r, cuttin', 'ccount, an't much, o', meetin', 'em, declar', boun' .
Sam	'magine, ridin', 'tall, gen'leman, getting', jist, 'varsal, o' day, minit, our 'n, Mas'r, 'pinion, I car', yer's, 'Hio, 'markably, 'bout, bein' .
Andy Andy	Extro'rinary, fa'r, gen'ally, tryin', t' other, al'ays, mus'n't, 'll, ris, 'em, ha'nt, 'Lizy, 'em, 't .
Topsy	Nothin', ma'am, tellin', you's, it's jist, 't, 'fess, workin', I's used, n't, Mas'r, know'd, you 's all, 'spects, o' har, 'bout, 'cause, han't, 'long, tan't, don't

Moreover, Uncle Tom's Cabin reveals the study of the data demonstrates that vowels and consonants have been sometimes deleted or added from words by characters as:

*Deleted vowels /a, e, o, i/ in:

'agin, 'bout, 'way, b'longs, car', 'Hio, 'pinion, 'ccount, off'n, natur, spos'n, 'magine.

*/i/ turns to /e/ in:

set, ef, tell.

*/e/ turns into /i/ in:

Git, yit, forgit.

*/o/ and /a/ turns to /e/ in:

yer, getherin'.

*Consonant

*Contracted /g/ from nouns and verbs in:

meetin', goin', cuttin', seein', interestin', mornin', crackin', swarin', willin', 'spectin', readin'.

*Contracted /t/ in:

Mas'r, nex', inves', didn', breas', los', las'.

*Contracted /th/ from:

T' other, 'em,

/Consonant transformation:

/s/ and /d/ turns to /n/ in:

'yourn', 'hearn'

/s/ turns to /x/ in: 'axe'

/k/ turns to /t/ in: 'ast'

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In addition, the novel obtains some other changes occur in pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, auxiliaries, verbs and articles in terms of pronunciation used by Uncle Tom as it is shown in the table below:

Table 4. Various Dialectal Utterances Used by Uncle Tom in the Novel

Dialectal features	The standard form
Dat	That
Dem	Them
We's	We are
De	The
Yer	You
Dunno	Don't know
Der	Their
Dese	These
Dey	They
Gwine	Going

Some of the words have been totally changed by Uncle Tom as shows table 5:

Table 5. Other Dialectal Terms Used by Uncle Tom in the novel

Character	Dialectal words	Words in the standard
Uncle Tom	Mas'r	Master
	Ator	After
	Nur	Nor
	Crittur	Creature
	Al'ays	Always
	Ye	You
	Cum	Come
	Wal	Well

There are other changes in the speech of other slave characters like Aunt Chloe and Topsy as shown in the following table:

Table 6. Dialectal Words Used by Aunt Chloe and Topsy in Stowe's Novel

Dialectal words	The words in the Standard
Gal	Girl
Nuther	Neither
Dun no	Don't know
Jist	Just
Spect	Expect
Ma'am	Madam
Minnit	Minute
La	Laws

Furthermore, the research work spots light on other dialectal utterances that disclose the double negation which is considered as a feature of a non-standard language; some of these utterances are depicted in the subsequent table:

Table 7 Various Utterances of Double Negation employed in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* Novel

Double negation	Standard form	Page number
I should n’t need no clothes	I should not need any clothes	172
’t would n’t do, no ways	It would not do, any ways	173
Don’t think nobody never made me	Do not think anybody ever made me	159
I never tells no lies	I never tells any lies	161
I couldn’t think of nothin’ else to ’fess	I could not think of anything to confess	163
I an’t a proposin’ nothin’	I am not proposing anything	170
I wan’t spectin’ nothin’	I was not expecting anything	173
But it did n’t do me no good!	But it did not do me any good	190
Dunno nothing ’bout love	Do not know anything about love	191
Never had nothing nor nobody	Ever had anything nor anybody	192
Could n’t never be nothin’ but a nigger	Could not ever be anything but a nigger	192
I never did care nothin’ about it before	I never did care anything about it before	192

Henceforth, we can observe a huge range of dialectal utterances which contain the feature of double negation portrayed in Stowe’s novel.

The following table will reveal some dialectal grammatical utterances used in the novel

Table 8 Deviant Grammatical Forms by Aunt Chloe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* Novel

Character	Dialectal Grammatical Utterances
Aunt Chloe	I likes, hev, I’s, I’s,I knows, gwyne, Dun no, I looks, I hearn.
	We doesn’t, you telled, stories isn’t,
	I grow’d, they was, I never tells.
	They’s burnt, dunno, I spect, I an’t used, I gets, does you know.
	You’s all, you is, white folks is, niggers is, I loves candy and sich, “there an’t nobody left now”
	I’s so awful, other folks hires out der niggers, I’s a thinkin’, de boys is big enough.
	He was gwine, I’s nothin’ but a nigger, “If they’s to pull every spear o’ har out o’ my head, it would n’t do no good, neither”

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Conclusion

To conclude, one may say that this research paper is simply a research work that would probably bring a further step in a scientific adventure to a very particular and fascinating field of investigation namely, *Literary Linguistics*. This scope of research is just an attempt to uncover the significance of dialect use in American literary works with an exploration at various dimensions and different levels of analysis.

It tries at the same time to shed light on language as it empowers literary works in the interpretation of literary texts, and how it facilitates the communication of ideas, express feelings, persuade, and present matters to different audiences. Sociolinguistics is therefore viewed as perhaps an ideal complement to literature, where an understanding of how they are joined together is of no doubt. This is mainly because, in current times, language scholars began to vary their minds by recognizing that folks can display varieties of distinctive sorts of language just by reading a piece of writing

Besides, it has been shown that in any speech community, language carries a lot of means of interaction and reveals our social behaviour. For this account, it is a fundamental element in any literary work which is used side by side with different forms of non-standard language.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe is very rich with the use of Black English Vernacular, for the sake of realism and to cope with the characters' educational and social background as well. Therefore, it is a more direct way to connect with the reader, without filter of censure, just a complete heart to heart connection through a book. Also, dialect use in literature may attract the reader's attention and provide him with a vivid image about the atmosphere of the literary work, then, it is also considered as flexible and intelligible.

There are a lot of data which have been gathered from the speech of some slave characters, and then analyzed in terms of the phonological and grammatical level. Non-dialect characters employ a non-standard variety which is used and spoken by slaves living in the South namely the so-called Black English Vernacular. Hence, Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* tends to expose from slaves' speech that they are black slaves who are illiterate, poor, religious and uneducated.

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