



**THE STUDY OF SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH IN  
THE MOVIE “FENCES” BY AUGUST WILSON**

**BY**

**MS. SUPASUDA PONGKAEW**

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN CAREER ENGLISH FOR  
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION  
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE  
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2017  
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Career English for International Communication

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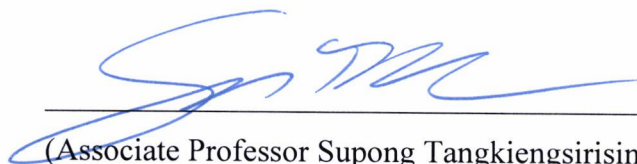
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| Independent Study Paper Title   | THE STUDY OF SYNTACTIC<br>CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN<br>VERNACULAR ENGLISH IN THE MOVIE<br>“FENCES” BY AUGUST WILSON |
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### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to examine the syntactic characteristics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) employed in the utterances of Troy Maxson, the leading protagonist in the movie *Fences*, as well as to differentiate the syntactic variation of AAVE with Standard English (SE). The movie adaptation of August Wilson’s play entitled *Fences* was utilized, and a summative approach to qualitative content analysis was adapted as the research instrument. The sample data was collected from the speeches of Troy Maxson in four selected scenes, and it was examined using the theoretical frameworks proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002). The findings indicated that the formation of negation was the AAVE syntactic variants that Troy Maxson engaged in the most frequently in the collected data (N = 23), followed by the complete absence of copula and auxiliary (N = 15). Five items of completive done were observed, and this AAVE indicator was mostly used when Troy Maxson reminisced about his past actions and events. The fourth AAVE indicator found in the data was subject-verb agreement (N = 5), while habitual *be* (or invariant *be*) and question formation were found the least frequently in Troy’s speeches (N = 1/1 respectively).

**Keywords:** Syntactic characteristics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Language variation, Vernacular language, English in movie.

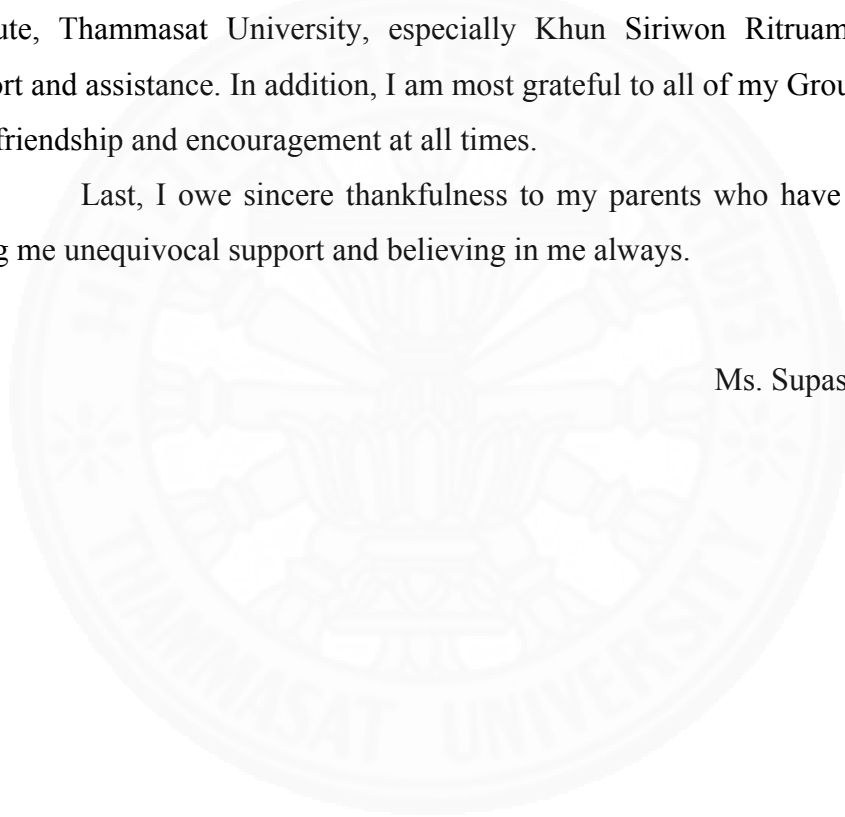
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Ms. Supasuda Pongkaew



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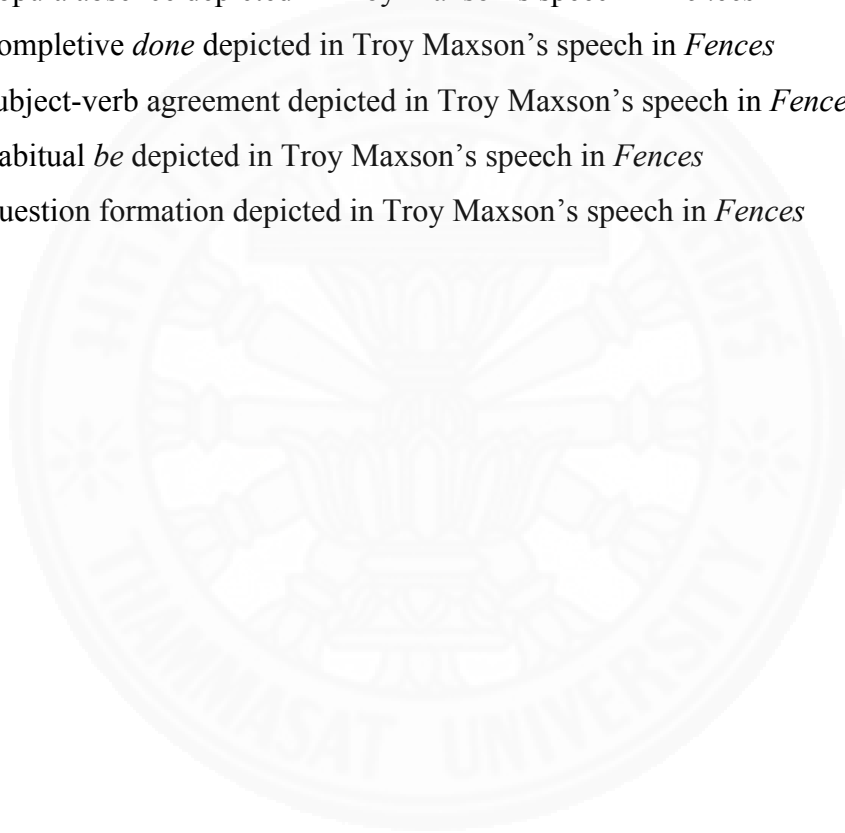
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

One of the prominent functions of language is to indicate membership of certain groups and to create distinctive characteristics of their social identity (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). The dimensions of identity in various communities present social position, gender, age, ethnic origin and the social networks' types (Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). Holmes and Wilson (2017) further indicate that the challenge of defining language varieties of English without associating them with Standard English (SE) is quite difficult since SE acquires parallel, standardized, and codified forms, which are accepted by the dominant groups in the society. Dialects are considered to be non-SE and can be distinguished from SE in term of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

One of the most widely recognized non-SE is African American Vernacular English (AAVE). AAVE can be heard particularly in the metropolitan areas of the United States such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. It can be referred to as Negro Dialect, Black English, and Nonstandard Negro English. Some other popular terms used to describe AAVE include Vernacular Black English, Afro-American English, and African American Language (Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). Although it is often called Ebonics, the majority of linguists prefer not to use the term since it raises strong emotional responses associated with racism, and thus, African American Vernacular English or African American English is more desirable among most linguists because of its unbiased remark. Wolfram and Schilling (2016) pointed out that AAVE has numerous characteristics which do not typically occur in SE, such as the lack of the copula verb *be*, the usage of invariant *be* and the multiple negation. These linguistic varieties are served as a representation of ethnicity.

The purpose of this study was to examine syntactic features that define AAVE in the Hollywood movie entitled *Fences*. *Fences* is not merely the movie which displays the story of the African American in the 1950s, but it also portrays the reality of a lower class African American who suffered from prejudices and unjust

treatments. Consequently, it can be expected that there is the richness of linguistic features depicted by the utterances of the main character. In addition, the connection of the character's social status and ethnicity can be used as a relevant source in conducting a research to explore possible explanations for linguistic differences of AAVE and mainstream SE. The notion of syntactic characteristics of AAVE is crucial to prepare English learners to recognize and gain greater understanding of many cultural backgrounds and language varieties. Moreover, for language learners, the knowledge of syntactic characteristics of AAVE in the movie may construct the awareness of the variety of SE and other language variations.

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1.2.1 How do dialogues of the main character, Troy Maxson in the movie *Fences* portray the syntactic characteristics of AAVE?
- 1.2.2 To what extent is the difference of syntactic characteristics of AAVE produced by the speeches of the main character in *Fences* from SE?

## **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- 1.3.1 To find out syntactic characteristics of AAVE depicted by the utterances of the African American leading protagonist, Troy Maxson in *Fences* movie.
- 1.3.2 To compare the dissimilarity of syntactic characteristics of AAVE in dialogues of the leading protagonist from SE.

## **1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

- 1.4.1 Standard English (SE) refers to a systemized written or spoken form of English that has been accepted by dominant groups in the society.
- 1.4.2 African American Vernacular English (AAVE) refers to a nonstandard variant of English utilized by the majority of African Americans living in the inner city regions of the United States.
- 1.4.3 Syntactic characteristics refer to all kinds of grammatical patterns associated with morphological and syntactic language patterns.

- 1.4.4 *Fences* refers to the 2016 movie adaptation of August Wilson's play under the production of Denzel Washington who also played a role as the leading protagonist.
- 1.4.5 August Wilson refers to the American playwright who received the Pulitzer Prize and successfully produced many masterpieces, namely *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Jitney*, and *Radio Golf*.

## 1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The language variety of AAVE has been identified in terms of lexicons, phonology, and syntax. However, the main purpose of this research is to investigate only the grammatical aspects produced by Troy Maxson, who is the main protagonist in the movie *Fences*. To create data richness, certain syntactic characteristics of AAVE from the frameworks proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002) have been selected as the main instrument. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) describe the negative forms: the use of *ain't*, double negatives and negative inversion, while Green (2002) explains copula absence, habitual *be*, subject-verb agreement, competitive done, and the question formation. In combining these two frameworks, eight syntactic features of AAVE can be described as follows:

### 1.5.1 The negative forms

#### 1.5.1.1 The usage of *ain't* as a general preverbal negative marker

Example: She ain't been there lately. (She hasn't been there lately)

#### 1.5.1.2 Double negatives

Example: I ain't never learned nothing from nobody. (I haven't learned anything)

#### 1.5.1.3 Negative inversion

Example: Don't nobody like him. (Nobody likes him)

### 1.5.2 Copula and auxiliary absence

Example: He a teacher. (He's a teacher.)

### 1.5.3 Habitual *be*

Example: Sometimes they be playing games. (Sometimes they're always playing games)

#### 1.5.4 Subject-verb agreement

Example: She have money. (She has money)

#### 1.5.5 Completive *done*

Example: I done forgot what you wanted. (I've already forgotten what you wanted.)

#### 1.5.6 Question formation

Example: Why they ain't growing. (Why aren't they growing)

### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of the present study are expected to provide several benefits for language learners and users of English. In regards to theoretical advantage, the findings can enhance and increase additional knowledge of the syntactic variants of AAVE. Moreover, the results of this study can be contributed as an idea or a reference for researchers who desire to conduct similar research, particularly for those who are engrossed in syntactic features of vernacular language variation as their research concentration. The results of this study can also be used as examples of ways to examine features of linguistic variations in a certain ethnic community. Pedagogically, the findings and discussion provided in this study are considered useful learning material in educating AAVE as one of the varieties of English. Additionally, it can be beneficial for teachers to increase their understanding about the syntactic differences that might be discovered in their multicultural community.

### **1.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

1.7.1 This study concentrated only on exploring the syntactic features of AAVE that influence the main character's speeches. Other linguistic characteristics including phonological, morphological, semantic, and lexical features were not of interest in the present study.

1.7.2 It should be noted that this study examined the syntactic characteristics of AAVE that were produced solely by a single character in four selected scenes of a single movie. The results of this research, therefore, should not be taken as evidence or confirmation that the majority of African Americans follow the rules of the linguistic structures of AAVE.

## **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This independent study consists of five main chapters as follows:

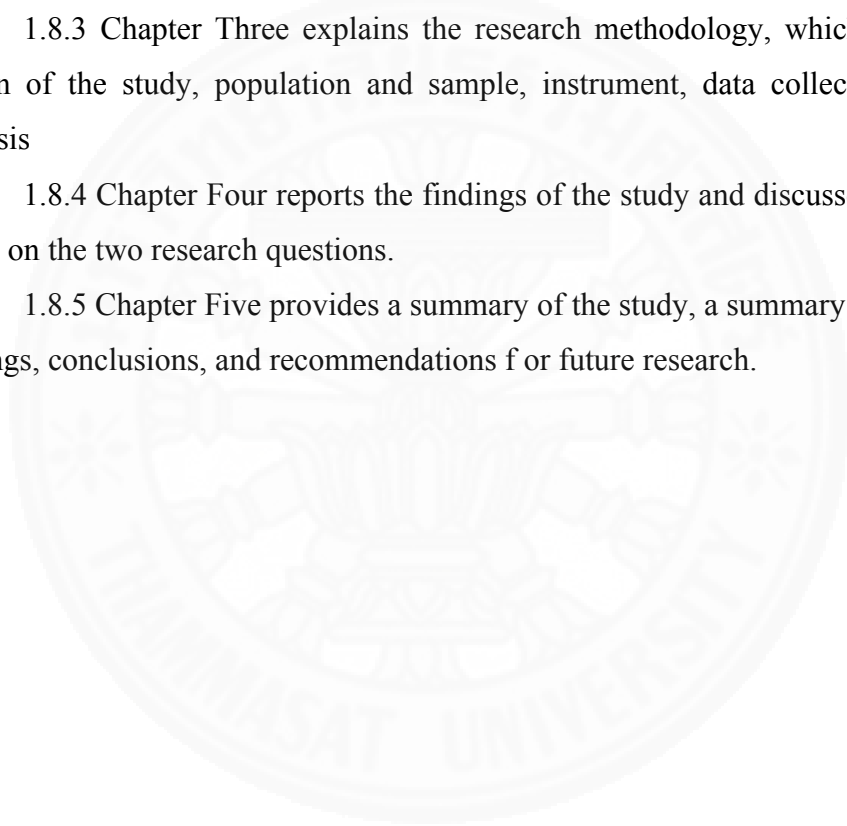
1.8.1 Chapter One presents the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, definition of terms, scope of the study, limitations of the study, and organization of the study.

1.8.2 Chapter Two reviews the literature which concerns SE, AAVE, syntactic characteristics of AAVE in the framework proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002), and related studies.

1.8.3 Chapter Three explains the research methodology, which includes the design of the study, population and sample, instrument, data collection, and data analysis

1.8.4 Chapter Four reports the findings of the study and discusses the findings based on the two research questions.

1.8.5 Chapter Five provides a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter reviews the literature and can be divided into four main parts: (1) Standard English, (2) African American Vernacular English, (3) Syntactic characteristics of AAVE in two relevant frameworks, and (4) Related studies.

#### **2.1 STANDARD ENGLISH AND DIALECTS**

##### **2.1.1 Standard English**

Standard English functions as a useful language of broader communication in a multilingual environment (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). The standard form of English is a particular language variety, which has received an exceptional position in society because of its social, economic and political prestige (Trudgill & Hannah, 2017). For instance, Standard American English (SAE) is the standard variety of English that most Americans communicate with in the United States. Trudgill and Hannah (2017) further noted that although SE is preferred by the majority group, it does not hold any linguistic superiority over other language variances, whether in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar. Nonetheless, SE is usually perceived as the grammatically correct form since it is often found in grammar books, dictionaries, and formal institutions including schools, universities and language academies (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). SE can be graced with many different accents such as British English, American English, and Australian English.

##### **2.2.2 Dialects**

According to Holmes and Wilson (2017), “dialects are linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation; the speech of people from different social, as well as regional, group may differ in these ways” (p.148). In other words, dialect represents a language variation that varies in term of phonology, lexis, and syntax from the other linguistic variants of the identical language and is correlated with geographic origins or social aspects. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) mentioned that language variation is often perceived as

deviance and insufficiency; however, dialects contain distinctive systems, with different divisions of language forms.

The terms language variety, language variation, or language difference tend to be preferred by most linguists as they contain more neutral tones (Melchers & Shaw, 2013). Some sociolinguists prefer the term *vernacular* as an alternative to dialect since it suggests a more neutral tone without the indication of biased remarks (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). The definition of vernacular normally refers to a language which has not been standardized and which does not have official status (Jenkins, 2015). For example, in the countries, especially the United States, where English is the dominant language, a language such as Spanish is signified as a Chicano vernacular; however, this term would not be viewed in Spain as a vernacular. Additionally, vernacular is a term which expresses the sense of the first language variety learned at home and used in informal contexts (Melchers & Shaw, 2013). In other words, vernacular may be restricted to typical domain. This domain can be found in the school, the family, and marginally the local group.

## **2.2 AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE)**

### **2.2.1 Definition of AAVE**

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is considered to be a nonstandard form of English. Among many labels attached to this variety, AAVE is often identified as Negro dialect, Nonstandard Negro English, or Black English (Green, 2002). Vernacular Black English, Ebonics, and African American Language are also classified in this category (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). However, Green argues that the references, namely African American English, African American Vernacular English, and African American Language, can be more preferable than the term Ebonics since the latter tends to create strong emotional responses and stimulate racial remarks.

### **2.2.2 The Origin and the Development of AAVE**

Several theories about the development of AAVE have been presented. For the Creolist hypothesis, it is believed that AAVE was originated from a creole (Amberg & Vause, 2009). Davies (2013) further reveals that AAVE may be derived from English-based pidgin during the early interaction between the slaves' native tongues and American English. It is claimed that AAVE share several words and grammatical features with English-based creoles in Caribbean nations including Jamaica and Barbados (Amberg & Vause, 2009). On the other hand, rather than being obliged to acquire pidgin for the purpose of communication, the Anglicist hypothesis suggests that AAVE can be perceived as an English variation based on the varieties the slaves studied from their white masters (Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). This explained why many Southern vernacular features share some similarity with AAVE. Lastly, Davies (2013) suggests that AAVE may be derived from West African languages.

Green (2002) asserts that "African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a variety that has set phonological (system of sounds), morphological (system of structure of words and relationship among words), syntactic (system of sentence structure), semantic (system of meaning) and lexical (structural organization of vocabulary items and other information) patterns" (p.1). Holmes and Wilson (2017) mention that the practice of AAVE often occurred particularly in the northern cities of the United States. Examples of these cities are New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In addition, it can be observed that a large population of American citizens of African ancestry practices AAVE. However, Amberg and Vause (2009) remark that not all AAVE speakers are African Americans. The reason is due to the fact that vernacular can be obtained from the community where the speakers grow up. Consequently, skin color cannot be used as a means to determine speakers' dialect. Amberg and Vause also indicate that the practice of AAVE in the north or urban AAVE may sound dissimilar from the exercise of AAVE in the rural south; however, certain linguistic features of AAVE are related.

## 2.3 SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AAVE

### 2.3.1 The Framework proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006)

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) outline some distinguish syntactic characteristics of contemporary AAVE as follows:

| No | Syntactic category    | Syntactic features  | Sentence (in comparison to SE)  |
|----|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1  | <b>Verb phrase</b>    | Copula and auxiliary absence for present tense situations and activities  | <i>She nice</i> (SE = <i>She is nice</i> )  |
|    |                       | Habitual <i>be</i> for ongoing and habitual activity  | <i>My ears be itching</i> (SE = <i>My ears are usually itching</i> )                          |
|    |                       | Present tense, third-person –s absence  | <i>She walk</i> (SE = <i>She walks</i> or <i>She have money</i> for SE <i>She has money</i> ) |
|    |                       | Completive <i>done</i> for the completed actions  | <i>They done used all the good</i> (SE = <i>They have already used all the good</i> )         |
| 2  | <b>Negative forms</b> | The usage of <i>ain't</i> as a common preverbal negative forms, which are parallel to SE “am not”, “isn’t”, “aren’t”, “hasn’t”, “haven’t”, and “didn’t” | He ain’t go there yesterday (SE = He didn’t go there yesterday)                               |
|    |                       | Double negation, multiple negation, or negative concord   | <i>They didn’t do nothing</i> (SE = <i>They didn’t do anything</i> )                          |

|   |                  |   |  |
|---|------------------|---|--|
|   |                  | Negative inversion                              | <i>Don't nobody like him</i> (SE = <i>Nobody likes him</i> ) |
| 3 | <b>Questions</b> | Forming question without subject-verb inversion | <i>Why I can't go?</i> (SE = <i>Why can't I go?</i> )        |

### 2.3.2 The framework proposed by Green (2002)

Green (2002) presents her framework of syntactic characteristics of AAVE, which supported the theory of Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) mentioned above. The examples of syntactic characteristics are illustrated as follows:

| No | Syntactic category    | Syntactic features   | Sentence (in comparison to SE)   |
|----|-----------------------|--|--|
| 1  | <b>Verbal markers</b> | The lack of copula and auxiliary in the form of <i>be</i>  | <i>They acting all strange</i> (SE = <i>They're acting all strange</i> )   |
|    |                       | Invariant <i>be</i> or habitual <i>be</i>  | <i>She be telling people she's eight</i> (SE = <i>She is always telling people she's eight</i> or <i>She always tells she's eight.</i> ) |
|    |                       | The form of <i>done</i> with the past tense representing a completed activities in the recent past | <i>I done told you not to mess up</i> (SE = <i>I've already told you not to mess up.</i> )   |
|    |                       | Remote past <i>bin</i> or <i>been</i> for SE " <i>has/have been</i> " in present perfect form      | <i>She been sick</i> (SE = <i>she has been sick</i> )  |

|   |                       |                         |  |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 2 | <b>Negative forms</b> | The use of <i>ain't</i> | <i>I ain't do it (SE = I didn't do it. )</i>   |
|   |                       | Multiple negation       | <i>I don't never have no problems (SE = I don't ever have any problems.)</i>                             |
|   |                       | Negative inversion      | <i>Can't nobody tell you it wasn't meant for you (SE = Nobody can tell you it wasn't meant for you.)</i> |

## 2.4 RELATED STUDIES

There are numerous studies that investigated the language variations of AAVE in popular films and television series. Ruzich and Blake (2015), for example, examined Stockett's novel *The Help*, which was written by Kathryn Stockett who was a white author representing the ideology of African American identity and speech. The objective of this study was to investigate the linguistic features of the characters' dialogue patterns of ethnic and socio-economic identities in the novel. Although the novel was widely praised with positive attitudes, there were a number of criticisms stating that the portrayal of AAVE was inaccurate and full of stereotypes. To examine dialect indicators, an excerpt of approximately five hundred words was analyzed and linguistic analysis was used to distinguish language variation from Standard American English (SAE). It was found that Stockett's depictions of Southern American dialect and AAVE was utterly distorted. In other words, the representations of AAVE and Southern American dialect did not mirror the actual linguistic reality. For instance, in the first chapter, Aibileen a black maid character, says *She skinny* instead of using the habitual *be* for *She be skinny* to indicate a habitual action. Additionally, the oversimplified AAVE features prolong the stereotype of black identities as being ignorant and illiterate. The researchers also found that the linguistic features of Stockett's white characters did not promote the language distinction of Southern

American and social class differences. That is, the representations of linguistic features in Stockett's *The Help* seems to fail in exposing the ideas of race, class, and identity, which is the central theme in the novel.

Dominguez (2016) conducted the analysis of AAVE in a popular TV series *The Wire*, which was aired by HBO in the United States from June 2, 2002, to March 9, 2008. The analysis was based solely on the scripts. The findings revealed that AAVE displayed a systematized and a logical variety with language rules. The researcher also found that although all the selected characters of the series speak AAVE, they did not do it in the same style. For example, drug traffickers as a representation of lower classes were the ones who showed more linguistic varieties than those who were from the middle classes. The results of this study, therefore, suggested that social class was a controlling aspect regarding the use of AAVE.

Prastitasari (2013) investigated the syntactic characteristics of AAVE engaged by the leading character in *Hustle & Flow*. The purpose of the study was to examine the syntactic variants that were portrayed by the main protagonist and categorize its functions used in the movie. A descriptive qualitative method was adopted and the collected data was examined by utilizing Chaika's classification of indicators of syntactic characteristics of AAVE and the theory of Homes to explain the functions of language phenomena in society. The result showed that in *Hustle & Flow*, the leading character displayed five indicators of syntactic variants. These markers included verb inflation, irregular verb forms, double negatives, the use of *ain't*, and the misuse of the prepositions *with*, *at* and *in*. Another finding discovered that in DJay's utterances, there were five functions of syntactic features of AAVE uncovered, which were expressive, directive, phatic, referential and poetic functions. The results of the findings prove that the users of AAVE produced distinctive characteristics in the way that they expressed the sense of ethnicity through their messages.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes: (1) design of the study, (2) instrument, (3) population and sample, (4) data collection and data analysis.

#### **3.1 DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

In this present study, the qualitative approach was adopted. The purpose of the qualitative data collection was not to directly calculate or measure in objective habits (Dörnyei, 2007), but rather, the study aimed at presenting rich details with thick description and relevant information in order to capture a sufficient level of detail about the phenomena of syntactic characteristics of AAVE depicted by Troy Maxson, the main protagonist in *Fences*.

#### **3.2 INSTRUMENT**

A summative approach to qualitative content analysis was employed in this research. The main purpose of this approach was not to infer meaning, but it was used to explore the phenomenon of AAVE syntactic characteristics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The interpretation of collected data was focused on exploring possible explanations for linguistic differences in syntactic variation of AAVE.

#### **3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The context of this study was *Fences*, which was the movie adaptation of August Wilson's play. The movie runs 139 minutes. It was released in the United States on December 16, 2016 under the production of Paramount Pictures. Denzel Washington, who was also the main character, directed the film. *Fences* focused on Troy Maxson, a former Negro Leagues baseball player who provided for his family by working as a garbage collector in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As many African American men of his period, Troy fled north to get away with the dreadful sharecropping situations in the South. He used to be a skilled baseball player who acquired his ability while he was in prison. He was sentenced for fifteen years for murdering a man with a knife during a robbery. After he was released from prison, he

was told that he was disqualified to play in the major leagues due to his age. Nevertheless, he refused to admit this fact and blamed the system that discriminates against African American players. This bitterness mars his ability to comprehend any positive alterations that have happened in the last 15 years. Therefore, when he heard that his son, Cory, got an athletic scholarship from a college football team, he instantly banned him from participating. Troy's wife, Rose, tried to convince him by stating that he should recognize the fact that the world has changed. Troy tried hard to assume the duties of being a good father and a decent husband. Moreover, he had to take care of his disabled brother, Gabriel. He could only reveal these frustrations to his close friend, Jim Bono. Inundated with these demands, he got away by committing adultery with Alberta, his mistress and even fathered a child with her named Raynell. Troy's family broke apart and Rose refused to accept him back in her life. The story ended with the scene where the family gathered for Troy's funeral seven years later.

This present study is centered solely on the speeches of Troy Maxson, who was a main protagonist in the movie. There was richness to Troy's utterances, which added the flavor of the linguistic variety of AAVE. Moreover, the speech practiced by Troy revealed a relationship between social classes and language patterns, as his occupation was a garbage collector. Certain scenes namely scenes 1, 3, 6 and 11 were selected as these scenes portrayed significant insights of the main character who was scarred deeply by the injustice of being African American.

- Scene 1 was the opening scene, which introduced the nature of the main character. In this scene, Troy Maxson kept complaining with Jim Bono, his colleague, about the injustice he received in which only the Whites were permitted to drive a garbage truck, while the African Americans did unhygienic work. On the way to his house, Bruno warned Troy not to take any unnecessary actions that would destroy his entire family in the future. In addition, the speeches displayed in this scene foreshadowed the actions and the climax of the movie.
- Scene 3 was used to give an insight of the relationship between the leading character and his family members. Troy was quite unsatisfied with his eldest son, Lyon, since his son was unemployed and always

came home to ask for money. Troy wanted his son to find a proper job. He opposed his son being a musician due to his bitter past. Consequently, this scene portrayed his philosophy, and how he viewed life as being African American.

- Scene 6 was selected because it was the climax of the story, which depicted the severe fight between the main protagonist and his son. When Troy was informed that his youngest son, Cory, was recruited for an athletic scholarship, he strongly opposed the idea. The reason was that he felt bitter over his misfortune in the past, and he blamed it on the discrimination. Then, his son left home and never returned until his funeral. This particular scene symbolized that the “fences” that he created to protect his family were eventually broken by his own hand.
- Scene 11 showed the fragile relationship between Troy Maxson and his wife, Rose, when she found out that he committed adultery and even had a child with his mistress. Overwhelmed by his frustration and responsibilities as a head of the family, Troy sought escape with a younger woman. He tried to convince his wife that his wrongdoings were not hers to blame; however, his wife refused to accept his apology. In this scene, Troy’s entire speech was full of emotion, and certain features of syntactic characteristics were produced repeatedly as he begged his wife forgiveness. This is quite in contrast to Scene 6 where his speeches were full of authority.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was collected and analyzed qualitatively by the researcher through the process of watching the film and making general observations. The film was watched for numerous times in order to detect the uses of dialect or non-linguistic features which was diverse from SE. The printed script from the official site (<http://www.paramountguilds.com/pdf/fences.pdf>) was used to synchronize while observing the film. All the speech produced by Troy Maxson found in the printed script was highlighted with the presumption that they might display the existence of syntactic characteristics of AAVE. To achieve a systematic observation and note

taking, the researcher utilized a data sheet to record the data of syntactic differences of AAVE. The format of the data sheet is shown in Table 1 below.

#### Syntactic characteristics of AAVE

- CB : Copula absence
- HB : Habitual be
- SA : Subject-verb agreement
- NF : Negative Forms
- CD : Completive done
- QF : Question formation

Once the data sheet was completed, the collected data were analyzed using the theoretical frameworks proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002). Wolfram Schilling-Estes (2006) clarified the use of negation such as the formation of the negator *ain't*, double negation or negative concord and negative inversion, while Green (2002) explained some AAVE linguistic elements such as the use of copula absence, habitual *be*, completive done, subject-verb agreement, and question formation. After consulting the previous studies, the researcher tabulated the data of syntactic characteristics of AAVE and compared it with the formation of SE. Lastly, the researcher drew some conclusions regarding the syntactic variations of AAVE portrayed by Troy Maxson and discussed the ways in which they differed from the SE

| No. | Code | Data | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English |
|-----|------|------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|------------------|
|     |      |      | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |                  |
|     |      |      |                 |    |    |    |    |    |                  |

Table 1 Syntactic characteristics of AAVE depicted in Troy Maxson's speech in Fences

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter described the methodology employed in the research including the population, sample, instruments, data collection, and data analysis. In this chapter, the overall results of the collected data were revealed according to the two research questions mentioned in Chapter One. The present study focused on responding to the research questions in finding the phenomenon of syntactic characteristic of AAVE spoken by the leading protagonist. The results are displayed as follows:

### 4.1. SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AAVE FOUND IN THE SPEECH OF TROY MAXSON

In the data description, the writer tabulates the selected data, which were taken from the script of *Fences*.

| No.          | Syntactic characteristics of AAVE | Description  | Utterances |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------|
| 1            | Negative Forms                    | The use of <i>ain't</i>  | 7          |
|              |                                   | Double negation  | 12         |
|              |                                   | Negative inversion   | 4          |
| 2            | Copula absence                    | Copula <i>is</i> and <i>are</i> is often dropped. It is omitted only in the states and actions in present tense. | 15         |
| 3            | Completive done                   | The form of have (already)+ past participle  | 5          |
| 4            | Subject-verb agreement            | Incorrect usage verb form in subject-auxiliary agreement   | 4          |
| 5            | Habitual <i>be</i>                | Ongoing or general states are marked by uninflected "be"   | 1          |
| 6            | Question formation                | Wh-questions + subject-auxiliary inversion   | 1          |
| <b>Total</b> |                                   |  | 49         |

Table 2 Markers of Syntactic characteristics of AAVE in *Fences*

After analyzing the data, the findings showed that the first indicator of syntactic characteristics of AAVE, which was depicted frequently in the speeches of Troy Maxson was the negative forms. From Table 2 above, there were 23 utterances found in the dialogues of Troy Maxson, which included the combination of, *ain't*, double negation, and negative inversion. These types of negative indicators were effortlessly spotted and identified.

The second indicator of syntactic variations of AAVE portrayed by Troy Maxson was the complete absence of copula. Troy Maxson tended to omit the form *be* when producing the speeches which indicated his present states and actions. There were 15 utterances found in the collected data.

The third indicator of syntactic variants of AAVE was completive done. From the data, 5 utterances of completive done were found. In addition, it was mostly produced when Troy Maxson was remembering past activities and circumstances. He suffered physically and psychologically from discrimination and unjust treatments because he was an African American growing up in the rural South and was in a lower socioeconomic class.

The fourth indicator of syntactic features of AAVE was the subject-verb agreement. The utterances of Troy Maxson displayed the subject which did not parallel with the verb. There were 4 subject-verb disagreement utterances that were discovered in his speeches.

Another indicator of syntactic characteristics of AAVE employed by Troy Maxson, the main character in *Fences*, was habitual *be* or invariant *be*. There was only one utterance found in his speeches.

The last indicator of syntactic characteristics of AAVE depicted by Troy Maxson was question formation. The researcher found only one item produced in this type of AAVE marker. When the main character produced this utterance, it was difficult to identify at first because the speakers from other vernacular varieties of English also shared these characteristics.

To conclude, the findings found that Troy Maxson's utterances in *Fences* reflected syntactic characteristics of AAVE in six classifications including the formation of negation, the lack of copula, the completive done, the invariant *be*, the subject-auxiliary agreement, and the question formation.

## 4.2 THE DISSIMILARITY OF SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AAVE IN *FENCES* MOVIE FROM STANDARD ENGLISH

From the tabulated data in Table 2, the six syntactic characteristics of AAVE found in the speeches portrayed by Troy Maxson were analyzed and compared with SE, and the results are shown as follows:

### 4.2.1 Negative Forms

| No  | Features                | AAVE   | SE  | Scene |
|---|-------------------------|--|---|-------|
| 1   | Negative Forms          |  |   |       |
|   | The use of <i>ain't</i> | 1.1 I <b>ain't</b> lying!  | I'm <b>not</b> lying!   | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.2 He <b>ain't</b> got that much sense.                             | He <b>hasn't</b> got that much sense.                             | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.3 I <b>ain't</b> seen him around here last week.                   | I <b>haven't</b> seen him around here last week.                  | 3     |
|   |                         | 1.4 You <b>ain't</b> supposed to be working down there after school? | You <b>aren't</b> supposed to be working down there after school? | 6     |
|   |                         | 1.5 <b>Ain't</b> been around here all day on a Saturday.             | I <b>haven't</b> been around here all day on Saturday.            | 6     |
|   |                         | 1.6 Rose, you <b>ain't</b> to blame.                                 | Rose, you <b>aren't</b> to blame.                                 | 11    |
|   |                         | 1.7 She <b>ain't</b> .   | She <b>isn't</b> .  | 11    |
|   | Double negation         | 1.8 <b>Ain't</b> said <b>nothing</b> .                               | I <b>didn't</b> say <b>anything</b> .                             | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.9 That <b>ain't no</b> paper job                                   | That <b>isn't</b> a paper job.                                    | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.10 Brownie <b>ain't</b> understand <b>nothing</b> .                | Brownie <b>doesn't</b> understand <b>anything</b> .               | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.11 I <b>don't</b> miss <b>nothing</b> .                            | I <b>don't</b> miss <b>anything</b> .                             | 1     |
|   |                         | 1.12 I <b>ain't</b> got <b>nothing</b>                               | I <b>haven't</b> got <b>anything</b> .                            | 3     |
| 1.13 You <b>ain't</b> getting <b>no</b> ten dollars here. |                         | You <b>aren't</b> getting ten dollars here.                          | 3   |       |

|  |                    |   |   |    |
|--|--------------------|---|---|----|
|  |                    | 1.14 Life <b>don't</b> owe you <b>nothing</b> .   | Life <b>doesn't</b> owe you <b>anything</b> .                                       | 3  |
|  |                    | 1.15 The white man <b>ain't</b> gonna let you get <b>nowhere</b> with that football <b>no</b> way.  | The white man <b>isn't</b> going to let you get <b>anywhere</b> with that football. | 6  |
|  |                    | 1.16 I <b>ain't</b> <b>never</b> been.  | I <b>haven't</b> been.  | 11 |
|  |                    | 1.17 It <b>ain't</b> about <b>nobody</b> being a better woman or <b>nothing</b> .                   | It <b>isn't</b> about being a better woman or not.                                  | 11 |
|  |                    | 1.18 She <b>don't</b> know <b>nothing</b> about grownups' business.                                 | She <b>doesn't</b> know <b>anything</b> about grownups' business.                   | 11 |
|  |                    | 1.19 She <b>ain't</b> got <b>no</b> mama  | She <b>has no</b> mother./ She doesn't have a mother.                               | 11 |
|  | Negative inversion | 1.20 <b>Don't</b> <b>never</b> let <b>nobody</b> tell you Troy Maxson don't eye the women.          | <b>Never</b> let <b>anybody</b> tell you Troy Maxson doesn't eye the women.         | 1  |
|  |                    | 1.21 <b>Ain't</b> <b>none</b> of your chores done   | <b>None</b> of your chores are done.  | 6  |
|  |                    | 1.22 <b>Ain't</b> <b>no</b> need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing nothing. | There is <b>no</b> need coming here to talk to me about signing.                    | 6  |
|  |                    | 1.23 That way you have something <b>can't</b> <b>nobody</b> take away from you.                     | That way you have something that <b>nobody</b> <b>can</b> take away from you.       | 6  |

Table 3 Negative forms of AAVE depicted in Troy Maxson's speech in *Fences*

Although the negative forms in AAVE is not specifically dissimilar from other vernacular variations of English, it was found that for overall results, the syntactic variation of AAVE discovered the most frequently in the speeches of Troy Maxson were in the form of negation. The frequent occurrence of negation can be due to

several factors. First, apart from Troy's African American status, negative forms play a significant role in projecting images of his characteristics. The richness of the negation represents the character's negative thoughts. In *Fences*, Troy was assigned a set of pessimistic elements such as being poor, being uneducated, and having an unpleasant character, and his negativity foreshadows the destructive results, which occurred at the end. This corresponds with Green (2002) who confirmed that the depiction of AAVE in TV shows and movies tend to be strengthened by undesirable attitudes to evoke certain perception of the character in the mind of audiences. Furthermore, the expressiveness of the negative forms in Troy's speeches was a reliable marker of his social position and ethnic classification. It is believed that AAVE variants, particularly the negative forms, are unlikely to occur in African American speakers from privileged social positions. This salient features tends to be used more frequently among AAVE speakers than most white Americans (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Consequently, in the utterances of Troy, the recurrence of negation may provide the indication that Troy fits in the lower socioeconomic group.

In *Fences*, there were 3 markers of negation engaged by Troy's speeches, which included the combination of, *ain't*, double negation, and negative inversion. These negative indicators can be explained in detail in the following section.

#### 4.2.1.1 Ain't

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) stated that the form *ain't* is used for the purpose of indicating a general preverbal negative for present tense in the form of *be* (i.e., *am not*, *isn't*, *aren't*). It can also occur in the form of the perfect auxiliary *haven't* and *hasn't*. Moreover, the use of *ain't* can perform in the structure of the generalized past tense *weren't* and *wasn't* (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). The example of *ain't* is described as follows. It should be noted that AAVE stands for African American Vernacular English and SE refers to Standard English.

AAVE : Rose, you **ain't** to blame.

SE : Rose, you **weren't** to blame.

(Scene 11/Utterance 1.7)

As seen from the above dialogue, the utterance 'you ain't to blame' should be in the past tense form since the sentence marks the action, which occurred in the past.

In this situation, Troy Maxson was trying to explain to Rose, his wife, that the reason he committed adultery was not indeed Rose's responsibility. This utterance has the subject 'you', which is plural. Therefore, the 'ain't' should be changed into 'weren't' in SE.

Another example of the formation of *ain't* is shown as follows:

AAVE : He **ain't got** that much sense.

SE : He **hasn't got** that much sense.

(Scene 1/Utterance 1.2)

In the above sentence, the utterance 'He ain't got that much sense' should be in the form of the perfect auxiliary *hasn't* as "he" is the subject which is singular. In this scene, Troy Maxson produced the dialogue to emphasize his opinion about his colleague, Brownie. The form of *ain't* was constructed to indicate informality and to represent the authenticity of the character as Troy produced this utterance when gossiping with Bono, who was his close friend. Although Brownie was White, he was classified in the lower social class. Consequently, Troy saw Brownie as equal to him. In addition, Troy produced this utterance in the form of present tense, and it supported the framework of Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) which stated that the form of *ain't* indicates a preverbal negation for present tense in the form of *be*. Therefore, the '*ain't*' can be translated to "He hasn't got that much sense" in the SE.

#### 4.2.1.2 Double negation

Multiple negation was classified as one of negative forms and as Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) mentioned, most AAVE speakers utilize these characteristics more regularly than most white Americans. It is noted that double negations or negative concord is used in nonstandard varieties of English. These negations can be shown in auxiliaries (don't) and indefinite nouns such as anybody (nobody) and anything (nothing) in multiple negation structures (Green, 2002). In *Fences*, Troy Maxson often articulated his speech in casual or informal patterns as his character was portrayed as an uneducated and ignorant garbage collector. To be precise, Troy Maxson practiced the speech used by lower socioeconomic classes, as his profession

was a garbage collector. This portrayal of Troy Maxson supported the framework of Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), which indicated that this type of negative concord was likely to convey the message of social factors such as class, education, and identity. Non-linguists may claim that double negatives are not grammatically correct due to the fact that they may contain an affirmative implication. However, Green (2002) argued that the rule of multiple negation, which produces a positive, does not employ for AAVE. Particularly, this structure of negative marker differentiates SE by allowing more than one negative element in clauses that can still be taken as negative. That is, there is no limit on the number of negations that can be used. The example of double negation in the data is illustrated as follows:

AAVE : Brownie **ain't** understand **nothing**.

SE : Brownie **doesn't** understand **anything**.

(Scene 1/Utterance 1.11)

The above sentence, 'Brownie ain't understand nothing.' shows the identification of double negation by using the combinations of the use of *ain't* in present tense and other negative form *nothing*. This utterance occurred in scene 1 where Troy Maxson complained about the partial treatment that gave privilege to the White Americans to drive a garbage truck. Troy used double negative forms in order to emphasize to his friend, Bruno, that Brownie, his White colleague, was an idiot. In SE, the use of *ain't* is equivalent to 'does' as Brownie is considered a singular noun. Therefore, the utterance 'Brownie ain't understand nothing.' can be translated into 'Brownie doesn't understand anything.' in SE structure.

#### 4.2.1.3 Negative inversion

Related to the occurrence of multiple negation is negative inversion. The significance of this structure is for the purpose of emphasis, specifically if the indefinite is stressed (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). Furthermore, to produce negative inversion sentences, the initial auxiliary and indefinite noun should be negative (Pullum, 1999). The example of negative inversion found in the data is shown as follows.

AAVE : That way you have something that **can't nobody take away from you.**

SE : That way you have something that **nobody can take away from you.**  
(Scene 6/Utterance 1.24)

In this sentence, the first negated auxiliary 'can't' must be accompanied by a negative indefinite noun phrase 'nobody' in order to construct AAVE. However, to translate this utterance to SE, auxiliary verb *can't* should be negated. Therefore, this sentence will be translated into '.... nobody can take away from you'.

The example of negative inversion is also found in the following utterance:

AAVE : **Don't never let nobody** tell you Troy Maxson don't eye the women.

SE : **Never let anybody** tell you Troy Maxson doesn't eye the women.  
(Scene 1/Utterance 1.21)

In this utterance, auxiliary verb '*don't*' should be negated. Also, 'nobody' should be transformed to 'anybody'. Therefore, this sentence should be changed into 'Never let anybody...' in the SE.

#### 4.2.2 Copula Absence

| No | Features       | AAVE  | SE  | Scene |
|----|----------------|---|---|-------|
| 2  | Copula absence | 2.1 What watermelon, Mr. Rand?                            | What <b>is</b> watermelon, Mr. Rand?                                      | 1     |
|    |                | 2.2 It sitting there big as life.                         | It <b>is</b> sitting there big as life.                                   | 1     |
|    |                | 2.3 The nigger too dumb to know he carrying a watermelon. | The nigger <b>is</b> too dumb to know he <b>is</b> carrying a watermelon. | 1     |
|    |                | 2.4 He getting...   | He <b>is</b> getting...   | 1     |
|    |                | 2.5 You telling the truth there.                          | You <b>are</b> telling the truth there.                                   | 3     |
|    |                | 2.6 It my payday.   | It <b>is</b> my payday.   | 3     |

|  |      |   |  |    |
|--|------|---|--|----|
|  | 2.7  | You too good to carry people's rubbish?       | You <b>are</b> too good to carry people's rubbish? | 3  |
|  | 2.8  | You too lazy to work.                         | You <b>are</b> too lazy to work.                   | 3  |
|  | 2.9  | You still trying to get something for nothing | You're still trying to get something for nothing.  | 3  |
|  | 2.10 | Now you telling me ...                        | Now, you <b>are</b> telling me...                  | 6  |
|  | 2.11 | You a bigger fool than I thought.             | You <b>are</b> a bigger fool than I thought.       | 6  |
|  | 2.12 | ...he coming from.                            | ...he <b>is</b> coming from...                     | 6  |
|  | 2.13 | ...you going down...                          | ...you <b>are</b> going down...                    | 11 |
|  | 2.14 | Rose, you not listening to me.                | Rose, you <b>are</b> not listening to me           | 11 |
|  | 2.15 | She innocent.                                 | She <b>is</b> innocent                             | 11 |

Table 4 Copula Absence depicted in Troy Maxson's speech in *Fences*

Copula absence or the deletion of *be* was commonly found in the daily conversations displayed by Troy Maxson. The technical term for the auxiliary verb is copula, which presents in the form of *be*, *been*, *being*, *am*, *are*, *is*, and *were* (Green, 2002). Principally, the omission of copula signifies sentences in AAVE that do not have the structure of 'to be'. Many copula examples found in the data are illustrated as follows:

AAVE : Figure if the **nigger too dumb** to know **he carrying** a watermelon, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him.

SE : Figure if the **nigger is too dumb** to know **he is carrying** a watermelon, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him.

(Scene 1/Utterance 2.3)

In *Fences*, it was shown that Troy Maxson consistently omitted the use of copula, which indicates present conditions and actions. Green (2002) mentioned that

in most communication situations, utterers of standard variant practice reduced or lessen usages of the verb *be*. Therefore, the utterance ‘...nigger too dumb...’ can be translated into ‘...nigger is too dumb...’ In the above utterance, the occurrence of the copula absence can be used as a means to label the character as representative of AAVE speakers. Although this feature is not necessarily related to the implication of socioeconomic status as the negation is, it is marked as one of the apparent characteristics of AAVE that the audience can notice even when it occurred only once (Holmes and Wilson, 2017).

#### 4.2.3 Compleitive done

| No | Features                   | AAVE   | SE   | Scene |
|----|----------------------------|--|--|-------|
| 3  | Compleitive<br><i>done</i> | 3.1 I <b>done learned</b> my mistake and learned to do what’s right by it. | I’ve <b>(already) learned</b> my mistake and learned to do what’s right by it. | 3     |
|    |                            | 3.2 You <b>done quit</b> your job.   | You’ve <b>(already) quitted</b> your job.                                      | 6     |
|    |                            | 3.3 I <b>done locked</b> myself  | I’ve <b>locked</b> myself into...  | 11    |
|    |                            | 3.4 Rose, I <b>done tried</b> all my life to live decent                   | Rose, I’ve <b>(already) tried</b> all my life to live decent.                  | 11    |
|    |                            | 3.5 I <b>done gave</b> you everything I got.                               | I’ve <b>(already) given</b> you everything I got.                              | 11    |

Table 5 Compleitive *done* depicted in Troy Maxson’s speech in *Fences*

Apart from the lack of copula, the usage of *done* with the past tense was shown in the speeches of Troy Maxson. It can indicate that the verbal particle *done* can appear in Caribbean creoles; however, the syntactic and semantic structures of AAVE are not equivalent with the creole (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). That is, the occurrence of *done* in AAVE appeared solely in preverbal auxiliary position with past tense state, while in Caribbean creoles, it should occur with a bare verb (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). The example of compleitive *done* in the data is shown as follows:

AAVE : I **done learned** my mistake and learned to do what's right by it.

SE : I've (**already**) **learned** my mistake and learned to do what's right by it.

(Scene 3/Utterance 3.1)

In this utterance, Troy Maxson recalled a bitter memory of his past. He still yearned for his missed opportunity to become a professional baseball player. In addition, he suffered greatly trying to keep his family content so he tried to find the way to relieve his frustration. It can be inferred that the character's life is full of sorrow and depression. Green (2002) remarked that the function of the completive *done* could be referred in a form of perfect to indicate an activity finished in the recent past, to emphasize the change of activity or to intensify an action. The use of the past participle structure *done* is equivalent to the present perfect form in SE. Consequently, Troy's utterance can be changed into 'I've (already) learned...' my mistake...'. It is also necessary to add '*already*' into the structure to stress that the action has changed and to avoid the ambiguity.

#### 4.2.4 Subject-verb agreement

| No | Features               | AAVE  | SE   | Scene |
|----|------------------------|---|--|-------|
| 4  | Subject-verb agreement | 4.1 We <b>is</b> .  | We <b>are</b> .  | 1     |
|    |                        | 4.2 You <b>was</b> in the neighborhood all right, nigger. | You <b>were</b> in the neighborhood all right, nigger. | 3     |
|    |                        | 4.3 It <b>don't</b> matter how you gonna eat .            | It <b>doesn't</b> matter how you're going to eat.      | 3     |
|    |                        | 4.4 She <b>give</b> me a different idea                   | She <b>gives</b> me a different idea.                  | 11    |

Table 6 Subject-verb agreement depicted in Troy Maxson's speech in *Fences*

Based on the theory of SE, it is necessary to acknowledge that verb must correspond with the subject. Nevertheless, in AAVE and most nonstandard English varieties, the form for singular and plural remain invariable such as I was, she was, we

was, you was, and they was (Trudgill & Hannah, 2017). The example of subject-verb agreement in the data is presented as follows:

AAVE : It's just . . . **She give me** a different idea . . . a different understanding about myself.

SE : It's just . . . **She gives me** a different idea... a different understanding about myself.

(Scene 11/Utterance 4.4)

It can be noticed that Troy Maxon's utterance, '... She give me a different idea...', lacked the signaling of the third-person singular in the present tense. She is identified as singular, and thus, the suffix –s must be added to draw a distinction between singular and plural. Therefore, this sentence can be transformed to '... She gives me a different idea...' in SE.

#### 4.2.5 Habitual *be*

| No | Features           | AAVE                                 | SE  | Scene |
|----|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-------|
| 5  | Habitual <i>be</i> | 5.1 You be looking to tell somebody. | You are (usually/always) looking to tell somebody. / You usually look to tell somebody. | 1     |

Table 7 Habitual *be* depicted in Troy Maxon's speech in *Fences*

In *Fences*, the form of habitual *be* or invariant *be* was rarely found in the speeches of Troy Maxson. The form *be* indicates a habitual or ongoing event (Green, 2002). According to Green (2002), the misperception among speakers of other language varieties may occur due to the assumption that form *be* is the representation of SE *am*, *is*, or *are*. For instance, the sentence, *She always be going to school* can be used because it shows repetitive actions; however, it was incorrect to say, *She be going to school right now* since the latter suggests a one-time action. It is essential to note that the aspectual marker *be* cannot be omitted as it may obtain ambiguous interpretations (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). The example of habitual *be* is shown as follows:

AAVE : Aw, nigger, look here . . . I know you. If you had got anywhere near that gal, twenty minutes later **you be looking to tell somebody.**

SE : Aw, nigger, look here . . . I know you. If you had got anywhere near that gal, twenty minutes later **you are (usually/always) looking to tell somebody. or you usually look to tell somebody.**

(Scene 1/Utterance 5.1)

In this utterance, the habitual marker *be* occurred in front of ‘ing’ forms as ‘... you be looking to tell somebody.’ To translate this sentence into SE, the marker *be* should be changed to *are* since *you* indicates the subject. Furthermore, the adverb *usually* or *always* should be added to deliver the meanings that denote repeated actions. That is, the sentence can be translated into ‘you are usually/always looking to tell somebody or you usually look to tell somebody.’ in SE. In Scene 1, the habitual *be* in Troy’s utterance defined Bono’s characteristics through the perception of Troy. His utterance depicted the usual behavior of Bono who always suspected Troy’s affair with Alberta. Bono warned Troy and tried to prevent him from committing adultery; however, Troy denied his accusation. Although the habitual *be* was found only once, it can be recognized as an essential indicator that promptly informed the audiences that the structure of AAVE was being exercised.

#### 4.2.6 Question formation

| No | Features           | AAVE                       | SE                      | Scene |
|----|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| 6  | Question formation | 6.1 Why you ain’t working? | Why aren’t you working? | 3     |

Table 8 Question formation depicted in Troy Maxson’s speech in *Fences*

To form a question in AAVE, it is essential to know that questions can be formed without subject-auxiliary inversion. Furthermore, it tends to appear mainly with *wh*-questions including *who*, *what*, *which*, *why*, *when* and *where* and simple sentences. For example, ‘*Why those people don’t want to take that car?*’ in AAVE is equivalent to ‘*Why don’t those people want to take that car?*’ in SE. *Wh*- questions in AAVE resemble *wh*-questions in SE and other variations of English (Green, 2002).

The emergence of question formation in AAVE may appear less than that of other AAVE variations depicted in Troy's speeches; however, it is still considered a meaningful indicator associated with black identity. The example of question formation used by Troy Maxson is illustrated as follows:

AAVE : Why **you ain't** working?

SE : Why **aren't you** working?

(Scene 3/Utterance 6.1)

In this utterance, two syntactic characteristics of AAVE were found. As mentioned previously, the form *ain't* is used in order to present the form of negation that occurred in the sentence. The use of *ain't* can be changed to present tense *be* which is in the form of *aren't* since "you" was presented as a subject of the sentence. Then, to translate this sentence into SE, it is necessary that the auxiliary verb must follow the wh-question and come before the subject. Therefore, this sentence can be changed to 'Why aren't you working?' in SE.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) conclusions, and (4) recommendations for further research.

#### 5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This section summarizes the objectives of the study and research procedures.

##### 5.1.1 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the research consist of two main purposes. The first was to investigate the syntactic characteristics of AAVE engaged in the dialogues of Troy Maxson, the leading protagonist in *Fences* movie. The second purpose aimed at comparing the syntactic characteristic of AAVE with SE.

##### 5.1.2 Population, Sample, and Procedures

The context of this current study was the movie version of August Wilson's play entitled *Fences*. Particularly, the sample data came from the speeches of Troy Maxson, the main character in the movie, which were chosen from four scenes: one, three, six and eleven. The utterances of Troy Maxson contained richness in terms of AAVE syntactic variation, as there was a strong connection between his language patterns and his social identities.

The research instrument used in this research adapted the summative approach to the qualitative content analysis of Hsieh and Shannon (2005). It aimed to explore the phenomenon of syntactic features of AAVE and find out the possible explanations for the differences of AAVE and SE in the *Fences* movie.

The data was gathered and examined by the researcher through the process of watching the movie several times to distinguish the grammatical variants of AAVE and SE. The printed script was underlined to search for occurrences of the existence of syntactic features of AAVE, and the information was then recorded in the data sheet. The collected data was examined using the theoretical frameworks proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes proposed the theory of negation form including the form of *ain't*, double negation,

negative inversion, while Green clarified the complete absence of copula and auxiliary, habitual *be*, completive done, subject-verb agreement, and question formation. The conclusion was drawn from the tabulated data, and the previous studies were discussed.

## 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The main findings of the present study revealed six categories AAVE syntactic variation depicted in the leading protagonist, Troy Maxson's speeches. These significant features included the formation of negation, the lack of copula, the completive done, the invariant *be*, the subject-auxiliary agreement, and the question formation. The negative forms was the AAVE syntactic feature that Troy Maxson engaged in the most frequently in the collected data sheet (N = 23), followed by the lack of copula *be* (N = 14). 5 items of completive done were observed, and this AAVE feature was mostly used when Troy Maxson recollected his past actions. The fourth indicator was subject-verb agreement (N = 4), while habitual *be* (or invariant *be*) and question formation were found only once in the entire data sheet.

## 5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to find out the phenomenon of syntactic characteristics of AAVE engaged in the utterances of Troy Maxson, the protagonist in *Fences* movie as well as to compare the syntactic difference of AAVE with SE. In order to conduct the research, the movie adaptation of August Wilson's play entitled *Fences* was utilized, and a summative approach to qualitative content analysis was employed as the research instrument. The sample data was gathered from the dialogues of Troy Maxson in four designated scenes, and it was investigated using the theoretical frameworks proposed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and Green (2002).

The results showed that the occurrence of negative forms, namely the combination of *ain't*, multiple negation, and negative inversion, was found as a primary indicator of syntactic characteristics of AAVE. Due to the frequent recurrence of the negation, it can be interpreted that this attribute is used with the intention of projecting images of Troy's characteristics, which are often perceived as

the characteristics of a pessimistic character. Furthermore, the findings implied that Troy's use of negation convey the message of low socioeconomic class and African American ethnic identity. Apart from the negation, other occurrences of AAVE, namely the omission of copula and auxiliary, completive *done*, subject-verb agreement, habitual *be*, and question formation engaged in Troy's utterances, may not be concerned with the implication of socioeconomic status. However, these syntactic structures are useful markers that notify the audiences regarding the language variation of AAVE being practiced.

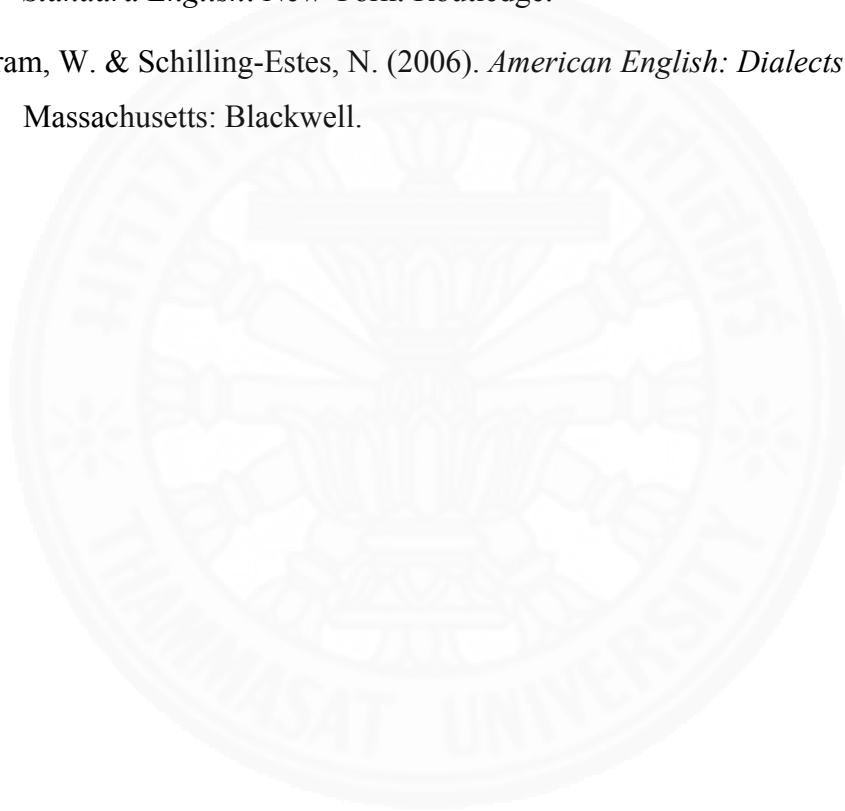
#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research. First, the population and sample of this present study were concentrated solely on the syntactic characteristics represented in Troy Maxson's speeches in *Fences*. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, future research should investigate a wider range of linguistic variations of AAVE including phonological, morphological, semantic, and lexical aspects. Second, the findings of this research indicated a necessity for further research for other variants of English that are vital for English learners such as Chicano English, Indian English, and Chinese English.

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**APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX A

### SYNTACTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AAVE DEPICTED IN TROY MAXSON/S SPEECH *FENCES*

Syntactic characteristics of AAVE

- CB : Copula absence
- HB : Habitual be
- SA : Subject-verb agreement
- NF : Negative Forms
- CD : Completive done
- QF : Question formation

| No. | Code | Data   | Characteristics |    |    |    |    | Standard English |   |
|-----|------|--|-----------------|----|----|----|----|------------------|---|
|     |      |  | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD |                  | QF  |
| 1   | S1   | <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>1</sup> I <u>ain't</u> lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big. Talking about . . .</p> <p><sup>2</sup> <u>What watermelon, Mr. Rand?</u> I like to fell out! "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" . . . <u>And</u> <sup>3</sup> it <u>sitting</u> there big as life.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>4</sup> <u>Ain't</u> said nothing. Figure if the <sup>5</sup> <u>nigger too dumb to know he carrying a watermelon</u>, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him. Trying to hide that great big old watermelon under his coat.</p> | /               |    |    | /  |    |                  | <p>1. I'm <u>not</u> lying!</p> <p>2. What <u>is</u> watermelon, Mr. Rand?"</p> <p>3. And <u>it is sitting</u> there big as life.</p> <p>4. <u>I didn't</u> say anything.</p> <p>5. ...<u>nigger is too dumb to know he is carrying</u> a watermelon, ...</p> |

| No. | Code | Data  | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English  |
|-----|------|---|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|
|     |      |   | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |   |
|     |      | <p><b>TROY:</b> You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck? <sup>6</sup><u>That ain't no paper job.</u> Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all the whites driving and the coloreds lifting?</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>7</sup> <u>Brownie ain't understand nothing.</u> All I want them to do is change the job description. Give everybody a chance to drive the truck. Brownie can't see that. <sup>8</sup> <u>He ain't got that much sense.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Same as you and me. <sup>9</sup><u>He getting as much as</u> <sup>10</sup><u>we is.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Aw, nigger, look here . . . I know you. If you had got anywhere near that gal, twenty minutes later <sup>11</sup><u>you be looking to tell somebody.</u> And the first one you gonna tell . . . that you gonna want to brag to . . . is gonna be me. I eye all the women. <sup>12</sup><u>I don't miss nothing.</u> <sup>13</sup> <u>Don't never let nobody tell you Troy Maxson don't eye the women.</u></p> |                 |    |    | /  |    |    | <p>6. That <u>isn't</u> a paper job.</p> <p>7. Brownie doesn't understand anything.</p> <p>8. He hasn't got that much sense.</p> <p>9. He is getting...</p> <p>10. ...we are</p> <p>11. ...<u>you are (usually/always) looking to tell somebody./ ...you usually look to tell somebody.</u></p> <p>12. I <u>don't</u> miss <u>anything.</u></p> <p>13. <u>Never let anybody tell you Troy Maxson doesn't eye the women.</u></p> |

| No. | Code | Data  | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English   |
|-----|------|---|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|--|
|     |      |   | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |  |
| 2   | S3   | <p><b>TROY:</b> He must have been doing all right. <sup>1</sup> <u>I ain't seen him</u> around here last week.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>2</sup> <u>You was</u> in the neighborhood all right, nigger. <sup>3</sup> <u>You telling the truth there</u>. You was in the neighborhood 'cause <sup>4</sup> <u>it my payday</u>.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> The only time I see this nigger is when he wants something. That's the only time I see him. <sup>5</sup> <u>Why you ain't working?</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> I told you I know some people down there. I can get you on the rubbish if you want to work. What's the matter, <sup>6</sup> <u>you too good</u> to carry people's rubbish? I'm just supposed to haul people's rubbish and give my money to you 'cause <sup>7</sup> <u>you too lazy</u> to work.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>8</sup> <u>I ain't got nothing</u>. I give you that ten dollars and I got to eat beans the rest of the week. Naw . . . <sup>9</sup> <u>you ain't getting no ten dollars here</u>.</p> |                 |    |    | /  |    |    | <p>1. <u>I haven't seen him</u> around here last week.</p> <p>2. <u>You were</u> in the neighborhood all right, nigger.</p> <p>3. You <u>are telling</u> the truth there.</p> <p>4. . . . <u>it is</u> my payday.</p> <p>5. Why <u>aren't you</u> working?</p> <p>6. . . . <u>you are</u> too good to carry people's rubbish?</p> <p>7. . . . <u>you are</u> too lazy to work.</p> <p>8. I haven't got anything.</p> <p>9. . . . <u>you aren't</u> getting ten dollars here.</p> |

| No. | Code | Data   | Characteristics |    |    |    |    | Standard English |  |
|-----|------|--|-----------------|----|----|----|----|------------------|--|
|     |      |  | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD |                  | QF   |
|     |      | <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>10</sup>I done learned my mistake and learned to do what's right by it.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>11</sup> You still <u>trying</u> to get something for nothing. <sup>12</sup> <u>Life don't owe you nothing</u>. You owe it to yourself.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Yeah, I can see that! <sup>13</sup><u>It don't matter how you gonna eat . . . where your next dollar is coming from.</u></p>   |                 |    |    |    | /  |                  | <p>10. I've (already) learned my mistake and learned to do what's right by it.</p> <p>11. <u>You're still trying</u> to get something for nothing.</p> <p>12. Life <u>doesn't</u> own you (anything).</p> <p>13. It <u>doesn't</u> matter how you're going to eat.</p>           |
| 3   | S6   | <p><b>TROY:</b> I thought you supposed to be working down there at the A&amp;P. <sup>1</sup><u>You ain't</u> supposed to be working down there after school?</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> I thought we had an understanding about this football stuff? You suppose to keep up with your chores and hold that job down at the A&amp;P. <sup>2</sup><u>Ain't been</u> around here all day on a Saturday. <sup>3</sup><u>Ain't none</u> of your chores done . . . and now <sup>4</sup><u>you telling me</u> <sup>5</sup><u>you done quit</u> your job.</p> |                 |    |    | /  | /  | /                | <p>1. You <u>aren't</u> supposed to be working down there after school?</p> <p>2. I <u>haven't been</u> around here all day on a Saturday.</p> <p>3. None of your chores are done</p> <p>4. . . <u>you are</u> telling me. . .</p> <p>5. . . <u>you've</u> quitted your job.</p> |

| No. | Code | Data   | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English   |
|-----|------|--|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|--|
|     |      |  | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |  |
| 3   | 6    | <p><b>TROY:</b> You damn right you are! <sup>6</sup>And <u>ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing nothing.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> I don't care where <sup>7</sup><u>he coming from.</u> The white man <sup>8</sup><u>ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football no way.</u> You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&amp;P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have <sup>9</sup><u>something can't nobody take away from you.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>10</sup><u>You a bigger fool than I thought . . . to let somebody take away your job so you can play some football. What kind of foolishness is that to let somebody take away your job?</u></p> |                 |    |    | /  |    |    | <p>6. ...there is no need coming here to talk to me about signing.</p> <p>7. ...<u>he is coming from.</u></p> <p>8. <u>The white man isn't going to let you get anywhere with that football.</u></p> <p>9. That way you have something that nobody can take away from you.</p> <p>10. <u>You are</u> a bigger fool than I thought.</p> |

| No. | Code | Data   | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English |   |
|-----|------|--|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|------------------|---|
|     |      |  | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |                  |   |
| 4   | S11  | <p><b>TROY:</b> Rose . . . now listen to me . . . we can get a handle on this thing. We can talk this out . . . come to an understanding. It's just . . . <sup>1</sup> <u>She give me</u> a different idea . . . a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems . . . be a different man that <sup>2</sup> <u>I ain't never been.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>3</sup> <u>It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing.</u> <sup>4</sup> Rose, you <u>ain't to blame.</u> I'm responsible for it. <sup>5</sup> <u>I done locked myself</u> into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Rose, <sup>6</sup> <u>I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life.</u> I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know.</p> <p><b>TROY:</b> <sup>7</sup> <u>If you going down . . . you going down swinging.</u> Everything lined up against you. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory anda halfway decent job . . . I was safe.</p> |                 |    | /  |    |    |    |                  | <p>1. <u>She gives</u> me a different idea.</p> <p>2. . . <u>I've never been.</u></p> <p>3. <u>It isn't</u> about being a better woman or not.</p> <p>4. Rose, you <u>aren't</u> to blame.</p> <p>5. I've locked myself into...</p> <p>6. Rose, <u>I've tried</u> all my life to live decent . . .</p> <p>7... <u>you are going</u> down...</p> |

| No. | Code | Data  | Characteristics |    |    |    |    |    | Standard English   |
|-----|------|---|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|--|
|     |      |   | CB              | HB | SA | NF | CD | QF |  |
| 4   | 11   | <p>: <sup>8</sup> <u>Rose, you not listening to me.</u> I'm trying the best I can to explain it to you. It's not easy for me to admit <sup>9</sup> <u>I done gave you everything I got.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Rose . . . I'm standing here with my daughter in my arms. <sup>11</sup> <u>She ain't</u> but a wee bitty little old thing. <sup>12</sup> <u>She don't know nothing about grownups' business.</u> <sup>13</sup> <u>She innocent . . .</u> <sup>14</sup> <u>and she ain't got no mama.</u></p> <p><b>TROY:</b> Well . . . I guess we'll just sit out here on the porch.</p> | /               |    |    |    | /  |    | <p>8. Rose, <u>you are not</u> listening to me.</p> <p>9. <u>I've already given you everything</u> I got.</p> <p>11. She isn't...</p> <p>12. She <u>doesn't know anything</u> about grownups' business.</p> <p>13. She is innocent</p> <p>14. She has no mother./ She doesn't have a mother.</p> |

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|                        |  |
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