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Abstract

While there is well documented evidence of certain supra-regional features in African American English (AAE) phonology and morphosyntax (for example, see Labov 1972; Rickford 1999; Baugh 2000; Green 2002), recent trends in the study of linguistic variation suggest that the homogeneity of the variety has been largely overstated (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002; Friedland 2003; Wolfram 2003). For the most part, contemporary AAE influences on mainstream language have originated from varieties spoken in the northeast and on the west coast which have evolved independently of one another over the past forty years, and which vary in significant ways from southern AAE; however, the most popular linguistic styles of rap music and hip hop culture have shifted over the years as artists from various regions (the West Coast, the Midwest, and the South) have put their particular speech communities on the map in the Black Public Sphere. We argue here that as southern American rappers have become more dominant in the popular music scene, like East and West coast rappers before them, they have had a significant impact on the AAE spoken by hip hop's insiders, and they have also influenced the language of mainstream speakers as well.

This paper builds on Smitherman's insights on Hip Hop Linguistics (2006) even as it explores a more recent sociolinguistic phenomenon: the imminent emergence of southern AAE forms in the music and lyrics of the most popular rap artists of this decade and the attendant influence that these forms might have on AAE in general. Preliminary findings suggest that the linguistic effects of southern rap on AAE (and to a lesser extent, mainstream varieties) are not only evident in the lexicon (which could be dismissed simply as fleeting slang), but also in the phonology of the variety, providing us with a more complete understanding of contemporary AAE and the ways in which the variety continues to develop.

Keywords

Music, Hip Hop, African American, Dialect, Linguistics

Disciplines

African American Studies | Linguistics | Music | Typological Linguistics and Linguistic Diversity

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only evident in the lexicon (which could be dismissed simply as fleeting slang), but also in the phonology of the variety, providing us with a more complete understanding of contemporary AAE and the ways in which the variety continues to develop.

1. Background

In the fall of 2003, I () taught a course on the linguistic analysis of African American English (AAE), “Language in Black and White” for the first time at a small private liberal arts institution in south central Pennsylvania. Because the course was the first of its type at the college, the ethnic makeup of the class was unusual for the wealthy, predominantly white campus: 22 African American and 3 European American students enrolled. The African American students were all from major urban centers in the northeast (mainly Philadelphia, New York, and Washington D.C.) and all were speakers of AAE. I used Lisa Green’s *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* as the primary text and encountered very little resistance until we reached the phonology section of the course. When we covered Green’s examples of the phonological features of AAE, beginning with the rules that govern the articulation of final consonant clusters and ending with a summary of the prosodic features that (in part) characterize the variety, my northeastern city speakers revolted in protestations that some of the examples were “country” and that no urbane, self-respecting AAE speaker living outside of the rural south would ever use “herr” (hair) or “thang” (thing)...seriously. And, indeed, Green identifies the lowering of [er] to [ar] as a regional feature, noting that “this pattern is produced by speakers of AAE in all age groups in cities in central and northern Texas (and)...in Memphis, Tennessee.” (123). I last taught the same course in the fall of 2010 to a new generation of students from the same demographic as those who were in my 2003 class, but this time, remarkably, there were no objections to the lowered [er] examples at all. I was astounded

at what I understood to be an exceptionally rapid linguistic and social shift, and believe that anecdotal evidence of this type suggests that there is an erosion of the stigma surrounding some of what has heretofore been considered Southern (or “country”) AAE in the northern AAE speaker’s mind.

Examinations of hip hop¹ have shown that it is essential to consider the genre when analyzing contemporary language change, particularly among young speakers (see Smitherman 2000; Alim 2006). Morgan (1996) stresses the importance of speech communities and the role of place in hip hop; this is especially relevant in this analysis as the south has recently been established as a distinct and unique region in hip hop. Outside of linguistic research, with the growing popularity of southern rap, hip hop historians are shifting their attention to the south (see Miller 2008), and within language studies, new work in sociolinguistics suggests that we consider the ways in which popular culture helps to spread and reintroduce southern AAE variants to AAE speakers in other regions (Blake & Shousterman, 2010).

To adequately address what the variety of hip hop’s linguistic contributions are potentially, it is necessary to begin with a set of questions about the development, history, and social aspects of southern rap and hip hop. Most important, what defines Southern hip hop, from where does it originate and thrive, and how did it develop? Secondly, how does southern rap differ from Midwestern and East coast/ West coast rap musically, linguistically, and ideologically?

2. History of southern rap and hip hop

“The Music”, as Amiri Baraka writes in his introduction to *Blues People*, “is our history.” It is impossible to distance African-American music from the history of subversion, fortitude, and strength of will that encapsulates the Black experience in the Slave States of America. One

can not begin to understand a people's music without digging into the history that produced it. Although hip hop may seem a great divide from the field hollers and ring shouts of African slaves, it is still a music born out of frustration and oppression.

The search for escape by Black and Brown youth in the Bronx ignited a blaze that reached to the top of U.S. popular culture. Unfortunately, to be properly commodified, hip hop had to be downsized (loss of graffiti and b-boying), purified (politically flaccid), and exoticized (gangsta, lascivious aesthetic). As beautiful as it is to seep in nostalgic wonder at the "golden" age of hip hop, what remains now is just as important. Mainstream rap does not sound, look, or feel very much like Run-DMC, Public Enemy, Grandmaster Flash, Eric B. and Rakim, KRS-ONE, and the multitude of righteous artists that any true hip hop head can rattle off the top of his or her head. But, as with all popular culture, we study the current trends to better understand history, culture, and influence. We find that regardless of how little it may resemble hip hop of the late 80s and early 90s, rap today retains elements of the critique and turmoil of Black history in the United States, especially in the South.

A brief history of the Dirty Third's growth as a rap superpower is difficult because several regions within the South made different, equally important contributions. It is best addressed by piecing together the general attitudes, styles, sounds, and sociohistorical settings behind each major contributor. Cities such as Houston, Miami, New Orleans, Memphis, and especially the ATL brought something new to the studio. Although the differences are often compartmentalized into "Southern" hip hop, each region distinguishes itself from the next. However, they do share several similarities that create what we recognize nationally as simply Southern rap.

The heavy 808 bass throbbing over the 18s in the trunk² is largely credited to artists in Miami (Sarig), where the popular clubs supplied African-American and Latino/a youth social outlets. Artists were quick to put out beats that could get crowds moving. Producers recognized the attraction to the bounce of bass not only in the club, but also in the car. Because of the city's sprawl (unlike the urban centers of the northeast), carrying a track down the street in a boom box or sitting on the stoop as a social activity was unheard of. Cars were a personal marker of taste and style and the bigger the woofers, the heavier the bass, the more looks and attention cruising down the ave. Beats were made to be bumped either in the car or in the club, the latter added the all-important crowd response as dancing (especially that of the women), giving Miami Bass the monikers of Miami Bounce or Booty music. This familiar sound was quickly adopted throughout the South.

Most regions adopted the gangsta aesthetic coming out of the West. Houston's Geto Boys blew up gangsta rap in the South with their album *We Can't Be Stopped* in '91. A diverse album, it had elements of social and political critique, but is remembered most for the violent, sexually explicit lyrics that represented the shift to gangsta-ism thanks in large part to N.W.A. and its individual members. Lyrically, the Geto Boys were on the forefront of bringing gangsta to the Third coast. Musically, though, it drew many parallels with the East coast sound.

Also from the Houston area (Port Arthur, TX), UGK was largely responsible for popularizing the Southern slang that is now heard across the nation. Although the duo was not the first to use "ridin' dirty," UGK was the first to put the term in a national spotlight with their '96 album *Ridin' Dirty*, which reached the second spot on *Billboard's* Top Hip Hop/Rap Albums. Linguistically, this is an extremely important album in that it created the opportunity for Southern AAE to experience mainstream success. Consequently, more Southern artists became

comfortable using and marketing aspects of it after noting UGK's sensationalist appeal. Despite the growing importance of language use by Dirty Third rappers, employing Southern slang is not the only means by which artists champion their roots.

Southern rap's connection to the blues is emphatically embraced by the urban nihilism and desperation seen in Memphis rap. West coast gangsta rap was easily adopted and appropriated into a "Gangsta blues," made popular by Eightball & MJG and Three 6 Mafia, Memphis rappers who harkened back to the blues era. The Geto Boys, UGK, and Eightball & MJG did not simply celebrate the gang banging lifestyle, rather admitted it is, at times, necessary for survival in the 'hood. Memphis personalized gangstaism by conveying the real world necessity for pimping and hustling in the all-too-common abandoned Black, urban setting. The blues influence, the uncensored reality, and Southern ideology present in the lyrics, backed by the Miami-born sound, created a new wave in hip hop that was pure South. However, most rap coming out of Houston, Memphis, Miami, Mississippi, and Florida still attracted minimal attention from mainstream record labels; one city is credited as being the catalyst for Southern hip hop's break into the national spotlight: Atlanta.

Artists coming out of the ATL fought vociferously for their place in the rap game. With a distinct Southernness being defined by Dirty Third rappers during the early 90s, Atlanta quickly became the crossroad for musical development. As a historically important hub of industrial and cultural capital, Atlanta was a natural leader in the rise of rap's prominence. Rappers sought to identify and popularize a specific embodiment of what it means to be Black on the Third Coast, and progressively define a unique trope that could take hip hop to another level. Artists coming out of the ATL fought vociferously for their place in the rap game. With a distinct Southernness being defined by Dirty Third rappers during the early 90s, Atlanta quickly became the crossroad

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The Dungeon Family consisted of primarily two groups, Goodie Mob and OutKast, and Goodie Mob's *Soul Food* (1995) was one of the first albums out of Atlanta to fully capture the South. Resting somewhere between N.W.A. and Public Enemy, *Soul Food* was a politically potent album, yet spoke unabashedly about the entrapment of real street life. Soon after, with the duo's release of *Aquemini* (1998), OutKast broke into the mainstream with a new and unique blend of musical qualities (field hollers, harmonicas, double-time high hats, heavy bass), cultural markers (food, slang), and regional lyrics, to create an unmistakably Southern hip hop album. Going double platinum, *Aquemini* was the first album out of the South to be nationally accepted and promoted to such a considerable scale.

Bounce music was a product of Southern car culture, but the club had as much influence as the cars for producers. In particular, strip clubs were considered the hot spot for new DJs to showcase their talents, because there was always dancing in the strip club (*Dirty States*). As was the case with the beginning of party hip hop in New York, Southern hip hop grew out of a need for non-violent gathering and for a celebration of individual and cultural survival. Additionally,

crunk music exemplifies the energy and aggression of 400 years of slavery, sharecropping, and continuing inequality in the South (*Dirty States*). The club was also the birthplace of dances and terms that have been adopted by mainstream artists across the nation. The method of chanting over the beat (Lil' John made this nationally popular) was born in the club, as was the gangsta walk out of Memphis. Terms such as “get buck” or “buck wild” and the cash-rewarded “booty bouncing” that is a must for every artist to include in music videos all came out of Southern club culture (Sarig, 66). Any Southern artist will be quick to say that most, if not all, of the rap we hear today is completely or partially rooted in the South.

The Southern hip hop ideology is proud and defensive. When OutKast won the best group category at the 1995 Source Awards, Southern artists finally found recognition as legitimate performers. Sadly, the duo was met with disdain. In response to boos from the crowd in attendance, Andre simply stated, “the South got something to say,” but the Third coast was still shouldered aside by East and West coast hip hop heads (Hess, xxii). The prevalence of small, independent labels in Southern hip hop lends light to the individualistic, anti-establishment (i.e. commercial dominance of New York and Los Angeles) sentiment shared amongst Third Coast artists. And due to continuing rejection from the rap sphere, artists began to champion a specific, purposefully crafted southern black ideology.

Critics suggest that hip hop is experiencing a ruralization through the music of influential southern artists like Outkast, David Banner, Field Mob, and Bubba Sparxx (Sarig 2003; 219-247). Notably, these are performers who have particularly crafted their sound and, in part, their musical ideologies, in a way that emphasizes southern Black heritage. The “ruralization of hip hop” might be slightly overstated, since in the south, as is customary in the music industry in general, production centers are still in the region’s major metropolitan areas, and many artists

look to market themselves as appealing to a national fan base. In addition to what can be characterized as urban influences and themes, these artists also reintroduce southern African American folk forms into mainstream hip hop culture. Evidence suggests that a similar phenomenon is occurring linguistically.

3. Musical Features

Musically, southern rap and hip hop is distinguished from that of major music centers in the northeast, the Midwest, and the west coast. The southern sound is characterized by faster rhythms, heavy bass (with greater influences from funk), and there is a focus on beats rather than lyricism; the variety is known for “sound and slang,” not lyrical content (Miller, 2008). Because in its most popular form, it is considered to be “feel good” dance music, most southern artists are less concerned with reporting on social ills, and critics point out a shift away from “gritty” to “mainstream.” These musical features in particular have been emphasized in southern rap and hip hop because it is a sub-genre that is intended to be played chiefly in clubs and is oriented towards dancing; this environment also leads to the prioritization of audience participation, so performances are interactive events which heavily employ call and response. In addition, unlike raps composed on the street corners of northeastern cities, southern rap is constructed chiefly to accommodate the car and club culture more typical of the south.

Once thought unsophisticated and unruly, the Third Coast sound infiltrated mainstream rap after years of rejection. While the music most closely emulates the West Coast genre, Southern hip hop differs in its infamous use of double time high hats, giving the sound a frenetic, continuous flow. Less concerned with lyricism than the East Coast, and West Coast to some degree, the Dirty Third is dedicated to dance.

Although early artists such as Geto Boys, Goodie Mob, and early OutKast remain politically and socially critical at times, there was a shift away from utilizing lyrical mastery as pointed critique in the '90s, which was true across the nation. OutKast managed to blend lyricism with a distinct Southern sound much more seamlessly than earlier artists, but with the fall of social and political evaluation in hip hop, the music took over completely. The 808 bass accompanied with crowd controlling emcees resulted in a musical style true to a club environment. A low-BPM rhythm (rhythm with fewer beats per minute) and repetitive synthesizers allows for more freedom over the mic to chant and shout, creating a more aggressive, communal feel unique to Southern rap. Artists and producers have taken this club energy into the studio and popularized the sound on a national scale.

In keeping with Black Southern history and culture, a highlight of Dirty Third rap is also heard in the field hollers, harmonica, and banjo samples and cuts included in many tracks. The significance of such musical breadth lies in its exclusivity. Slavery and its music are still highly relevant and central to authentically Southern music. These quintessentially black elements, such as call and response, field hollers, and energetic release are rooted in the slave culture of antebellum South as well as the emancipated Black South. Southern rap appropriates this heavy history to its own era, blending elements of the blues, jazz, soul, and gospel in a wholly Southern musicality. While new southern artists continue to enter the industry every year, Table 1 lists a sampling of the most notable current artists.

| Houston | Atlanta | New Orleans | Memphis | Other Regions |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Geto Boyz | Outkast | Lil Wayne | Three 6 Mafia | Field Mob (GA) |
| Scarface | Young Jeezy | BG | 8Ball & MJG | David Banner (MS) |
| UGK | Goodie Mob | Hot Boys | | T-Pain (FL) |
| Paul Wall | TI | Juvenile | | Flo Rida (FL) |
| Chamillionaire | Lil Jon | Mystikal | | Nappy Roots (KY) |
| | Ying YangTwins | | | |
| | Ludacris | | | |

Table 1: Contemporary representative southern artists

4. Current Undertaking

In an effort to determine the extent to which southern rappers may influence AAE (and GAE, but perhaps less so) nationally, we selected work from the following 9 artists from different regions in the south:

Three 6 Mafia (Memphis) *Da Unbreakables* 2003

Geto Boys (Houston) *We Can't be Stopped* 1991

Goodie Mob (Atlanta) *Soul Food* 1995

UGK (Port Arthur, TX) *Ridin' Dirty* 1996

Outkast (Atlanta) *Aquemeni* 1998

Juvenile (New Orleans) *Solja Rags* 1997

Hot Boys (New Orleans)³ *Guerilla Warfare* 1999

Lil' Wayne (New Orleans) *500 Degreez* 2002

Ludacris (Atlanta) *Word of Mouf* 2001

These choices suit our purposes for several reasons. First, these are the artists and songs that have demonstrated their longevity in the genre and therefore have had considerable mainstream influence and conventional impact. Second, because of their relative popularity with a broad range of audiences, they are most likely to introduce (or in some cases, reintroduce) southern African American English variants. Third, they present a range of “southern-ness” in terms of location, dialect, and regional identity and philosophy. A number of other artists (e.g., Missy Elliott, TI, and the Nappy Roots) have achieved mainstream success in many ways, but in being mainstream they may be considered less southern, to some extent. However, the argument can still be made that they have included enough regional material that they could be *more* influential than the top sellers because they have been able to reach a larger audience.

Selection of Linguistic Features

Our starting point of inquiry into the language used in southern rap was first to quantify black “southernisms” in the lyrics in terms of:

- A) Lexicon: southern rap is the vehicle for the spread of regional words and expressions that would never have made it to non-southern AAE, or to mainstream varieties.
- B) Ideology: a source for a new understanding of the black south through references to black southern culture
- C) Phonology: described by Bailey (2001) to be particularly characteristic of southern black speech which are especially present in the lyrics of southern rap

The specific phonological features we considered are as follows:

/ɪŋ/~/æŋ/ alternation as in *thing~thang*, *drink~drank*

/ɛr/~/ɛr/ merger as in *hair~hɛrr*

loss of /r/ post consonantly: *throw~thØow*

While these features alone are insufficient to evaluate the southern linguistic identity of the artists, we find it necessary to begin here so that we have evidence for the rates of usage and the spread of certain forms identified as black and southern.

5. Results

Lexical findings

A. Regional slang/ musical regionalisms

The majority of our lexical findings fall into the category of regional slang with 354 mentions of southern references including, but not limited to the following:

Crunk (Lil' Jon, Three 6 Mafia): (crazy) drunk; type of music that began in Memphis, popularized in Atlanta

Trill (Paul Wall has a song entitled): blend of true + real= well respected

Skeet (Lil Jon): ejaculate

Purple/drunk/syrup/ lean (various artists, Three 6 Mafia song, "Sippin on Some Syrup"): cough medicine with codeine and liquor

Ridin' dirty (UGK): driving with illegal substances

Get low (popularized by Lil' Jon and the Ying Yang Twins): a signature dance

ain't trickin' if you got it (TI, T Pain, Lil' Wayne): spending large sums of money (that you have) on a woman (that you also "have," not on one you are trying "get")

Bling (bling) (B.G.): flashy jewelry

Ice cream (Master P): crack

Whoot (whoomp) there it is (Tag Team): exclamation, “look at that!”

Woadie (Juvenile): good friend

Buck (Three 6 Mafia): getting wild

Bounce music: music that originated in the New Orleans area

Chopped and screwed (musically): a musical production style where a song is slowed down on one turntable, and delayed and repeated on a second turntable

The dirty third/ the south coast/ the third coast: the south

B. References to locales and local events

In an effort to establish themselves as insiders with their fan base, like their contemporaries on the east and west coasts, southern rappers name particular local wards, streets, neighborhoods, parishes, and regional events such as:

Orange mound (Memphis)

Liberty City (Miami)

Calliope, Melpome, Magnolia (housing projects in New Orleans)

St. Bernard Parish (parish in New Orleans)

College Park (neighborhood in Southwest Atlanta)

Chopper City (New Orleans)

Piedmont Park (a 189-acre park in Atlanta)

Perry Homes (housing project in Atlanta)

Herndon Homes (housing project in Atlanta)

A-T-L (Atlanta)

New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) drug sweep on Tuesdays and Thursdays

There are 218 such references in the data, establishing local place mentions as the second most robust lexical finding.

C. References to the south/southern culture

Finally, we found a number of references outside of the local sphere to what we determined to be typically “southern” food, activities (esp. the emphasis on car culture), or that celebrate southern black culture (e.g. Goodie Mob’s album *Soul Food*)

Some of these references include:

Mardi Gras parades, the Second line

Rosa Parks

Mentions of lynching, the Ku Klux Klan, burning crosses

The behavior, trustworthiness, predictability, authenticity (etc.) of southern whites

Corporal punishment

Mark Twain

Southern belles

The Deep South as “the final frontier”

The south having a “rhythm that’s as complex as life itself” and having a soul

Specific examples of references to the south and southern culture from the artists we’ve considered are:

Outkast, “Rosa Parks”: “Ah ha, hush that fuss/ Everybody move to the back of the bus

(reference to de facto segregation in the south)/Do you wanna bump and slump with us/

We the type of people make the club get crunk (reference to southern music)

“West Savannah”: “See, niggaz in the South wear gold teeth and gold chains/ Been doin it for years, so these niggaz ain't gone change/They comin around the ghetto so you might call em soul.../ You listen to that booty shake music in your trunk (808's are typically installed in car trunks)/as long as there's that "tic tic" followed by that bump (reference to southern hip hop musical style)/ You might call us country, but we's only Southern/And I don't give a fuck, P-Funk spot to spark another”

Three 6 Mafia, “Southmemphis”: “Infamous comes from the south territory/ Listen to some of my demonic poetry/ Circles of Triple 6 men smokin' ganja/ Ri-tuals wid dead bodies on the furniture /One mo' trick in the mud/ Quick, I want all my niggas in the south to say this shit”

Goodie Mob, “Dirty South”: “Do you think that Clampett (reference to Jed Clampett to mean all southern whites) will sick his goons on me?/See Martail Homes, that's my claim to fame.../Wanted to live the life of Cadillacs, Impalas and Regals (focus on car culture in the south).../Kickin' that same southern slang.../ What you niggas know about the Dirty South/ What you niggas know about the Dirty South/ See life's a bitch then you figure out/ Why you really got dropped in the Dirty South/ See in the 3rd grade this is what you told/ You was bought, you was sold...(southern slavery)/I betcha Jedd Clampett want his money back/ See East Point Atlanta threw this road block”

“Soul Food” is an homage to soul food, a significant component of southern balck life:

“A heaping helping of fried chicken, Macaroni and cheese and collard greens Churches dipping chicken in yesterday's grease (reference to church fried chicken dinners),

Spaghetti plus her monthly flow” (reference to voodoo practice of adding menstrual fluid to food as a love spell)

Ludacris, “Area codes”: Mentions several southern area codes (including Atlantis, Memphis, South Carolina, New Orleans), “Know that Southern ho-spitality”

Table 2 summarizes the rates of mention by each group for each lexical type.

| Artist | Album | Locales | Regional slang | South/Southern culture |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|----------------|---|
| Outkast (Atlanta) | <i>Aquemini</i> 1998 | 21 | 9 | “Rosa Parks” “West Savannah” |
| Goodie Mob (Atlanta) | <i>Soul Food</i> 1995 | 54 | 43 | “Guess Who” “Soul Food” “Dirty South” |
| Lil’ Wayne (New Orleans) | <i>500 Degreez</i> 2002 | 8 | 27 | 0 |
| Juvenile (New Orleans) | <i>Solja Rags</i> 1997 | 85 | 94 | 0 |
| Hot Boys (New Orleans) | <i>Guerrilla Warfare</i> 1999 | 16 | 85 | 0 |
| Geto Boys (Houston) | <i>We can’t be Stopped</i> 1991 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| UGK | <i>Ridin’ Dirty</i> | 13 | 61 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|----|----|----------------|
| (Port Arthur) | 1996 | | | |
| Three 6 Mafia | <i>Da Unbreakables</i> | 17 | 32 | “Southmemphis” |
| (Memphis) | 2003 | | | |
| Ludacris | <i>Word of Mouf</i> | 56 | 13 | “Area codes” |
| (Atlanta) | 2001 | | | |

Table 2: Summary of lexical findings

From the data in Table 2 we can suggest that, given the high rates of neighborhood references, Juvenile and Goodie Mob appear to be most concerned about situating themselves locally. In order to determine the extent to which some of the terms used in southern rap and hip hop might be spreading to non-southern speakers, we surveyed 75 undergraduate students from the northeast US regarding their familiarity with a set of words and phrases attributed to southern rappers as well as the southern locations that figure most prominently in the albums we chose. The participants ranged from 18-23 years old, and were predominately European American (63 identified as “White,” 8 identified as “Black” and 4 as “Latino”); there was relatively equal gender representation with 35 women and 40 men in the pool. A summary of these results is presented in Table 3.

| | % use | % Have heard | % Never heard | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------|---------------|------|
| Regional slang/ musical regionalisms | Crunk | 49.3 | 46.7 | 4.0 |
| | Trill | 2.7 | 45.3 | 52.0 |
| | Skeet | 32.0 | 58.7 | 9.3 |
| | Purple/drank/syrup | 37.3 | 56.0 | 6.6 |
| | Ridin' dirty | 44.0 | 53.3 | 2.7 |
| | Get low | 49.3 | 49.3 | 1.3 |
| | Ain't trickin' if you got it | 12.0 | 45.3 | 42.7 |
| | Bling | 56.0 | 41.3 | 2.7 |
| | Ice cream (drug) | 1.3 | 28.0 | 70.7 |
| | Whoot there it is | 34.7 | 58.7 | 6.6 |
| | Woadie | 1.3 | 14.7 | 84.0 |
| | Buck/get buck | 21.3 | 46.7 | 32.0 |
| | Bounce (music) | 21.3 | 48.0 | 30.7 |
| | Chopped and screwed | 10.7 | 37.3 | 52.0 |
| The Dirty third | 4.0 | 25.3 | 70.7 | |
| Locales | Orange Mound | 0.0 | 4.0 | 96.0 |
| | Liberty City | 4.0 | 33.3 | 62.7 |
| | Calliope, Melpome, Magnolia | 1.3 | 18.7 | 80.0 |
| | St. Bernard | 1.3 | 20.0 | 78.7 |

| | | | |
|---------------|------|------|------|
| College Park | 36.0 | 49.3 | 14.7 |
| Chopper city | 0.0 | 20.0 | 80.0 |
| Piedmont Park | 2.7 | 20.0 | 77.3 |
| Perry Homes | 0.0 | 8.0 | 92.0 |
| Herndon Homes | 0.0 | 1.3 | 98.7 |
| A-T-L | 49.3 | 20.0 | 32.0 |

Table 3: Summary of survey on familiarity with regional slang and locales

All of the participants reported familiarity with at least some of the artists selected for this study (100% of respondents were familiar with Outkast and Lil' Wayne, but only 10% were familiar with lesser known Goodie Mob). Most of the participants had either used or heard many of the terms commonly accredited to southern rappers, but they were only familiar with a few of the most frequently mentioned place names. Not surprisingly, the terms with which the participants reported the greatest degree of familiarity were words or phrases that have entered the popular context either because of their frequency (e.g., *crunk*, *purple/syrup/drunk*, and *bounce* are commonly mentioned in various songs by almost all of the southern artists on our list), because of the fact that the word or phrase is part of a popular 'hook' (as is the case with *ridin' dirty*, *get low*, and *whoot! There it is*), or because of the word's adoption by figures in popular culture outside of southern rap, as is likely the case with *bling* (*Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian* all have published articles with *bling* in the titles; in 2008 even presidential hopeful Mitt Romney was quoted as using the term, saying that a baby had "some bling-bling here"), and *skeet* (for example, Chris Rock uses *skeet* a number of times during his popular HBO comedy special *Bigger and Blacker*). In terms of place names, in this survey,

College Park (it is uncertain if there is some interference here from participants' more likely familiarity with College Park, Maryland) and A-T-L were the most generally known. It is the case that *ATL* (the Atlanta airport code) is highly popularized outside of southern hip hop and is used widely in the entertainment industry (e.g., in television shows such as Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, and Tyler Perry's *House of Payne*).

Phonology

Turning to the phonological features we considered, we see similar patterning of the features we've identified as characteristic of southern AAE. The first and most common southern AAE sound feature we found was the /ɪŋ/~/æŋ/ alternation. This occurs in words where /ɪŋ/ forms the nucleus (e.g., drink, think, thing, etc.). Specific examples from the artists whose songs featured the /ɪŋ/~/æŋ/ alternation most frequently include the following:

Outkast "Hold on Be Strong": A lust that love the **drank**/ Drunk driving a tank/ Rolling over a bank

"Return of the G": Return of the gangsta thanks ta'/them niggas that **thank** you soft

"Slump": Plus that crooked cop Brock think we blow **slangin** (fuck him)/ That why he ride through the hole with the do' **swangin**

"West Savannah" I'm down to stick a hoe if she got a **G-strang**/ Cause the niggaz in the Pointe ain't changed, main

Lil' Wayne "Where you at" I come and do my **thang** and hold down my SIDE/ Single

Street man throw my set up HIGH

"Young 'n Blues" Mami was a nice piece, young Cali sweet **thang**/ Made her into wifey and then reality changed

Hot Boyz: “Shoot First” when my guns bang it be singing like a sanger

“Get Out of the Way” You know them niggas that I roll wit bout the same **thang** (same **thangs**)

“Tuesdays and Thursdays” 2 days out the week I lay low cuz them people gon' **swang**/ I ain't bout gettin hack/ Juvey, that ain't my **thang**/ Police ridin' my back

Scoping out my **rang**

Goodie Mob “Fighting” Outbreaks on my skin don't blend with the way I want this

thang to flow

“Goodie Bag” Without your shank you can't **thank**

“I didn't Ask to Come” Almost dropped ma end of the casket/ Woodgrain and the only **thang** on my brain

“Live at the O.M.N.I” Worried about the wrong **thang** this paper aint' gon' set you far

Ludacris “Coming 2 America” what I'm 'sposed to do? It's such a sweet **thang**

“Move Bitch” I've been **drankin'** and bustin' two/and I been **thankin'** of bustin' you

“Keep it on the Hush” Keep it on the hush, dont say nothing/Aint gone be no talking, while I'm doing my **thang**/... Disturbin' the peace, we runnin' the streets and steady **slangin'** them **thangs**

Table 4 includes a summary of the /□ŋ/~ /æŋ/ alternation findings for all of the artists we considered.

| Artist | Album | /ŋ/~ /æŋ/ | % /æŋ/ |
|--------|-------|-----------|--------|
| | | N/T | |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Outkast (Atlanta) | <i>Aquemini</i> 1998 | 16/21 | 76.2% |
| Goodie Mob (Atlanta) | <i>Soul Food</i> 1995 | 26/44 | 59.1% |
| Lil' Wayne (New Orleans) | <i>500 Degreez</i> 2002 | 21/32 | 65.6% |
| Juvenile (New Orleans) | <i>Solja Rags</i> 1997 | 16/39 | 41.0% |
| Hot Boys (New Orleans) | <i>Guerrilla Warfare</i> 1999 | 12/23 | 52.2% |
| Geto Boys (Houston) | <i>We Can't be Stopped</i> 1991 | 4/21 | 19.0% |
| UGK (Port Arthur) | <i>Ridin' Dirty</i> 1996 | 15/28 | 54.5% |
| Three 6 Mafia (Memphis) | <i>Da Unbreakables</i> 2003 | 20/49 | 40.8% |
| Ludacris (Atlanta) | <i>Word of Mouf</i> 2001 | 63/66 | 95.5% |

Table 4: summary of /□ŋ~/æŋ/. alternation

While Outkast included notably fewer regional lexical cues, they have made much use of the southern sounding /ɔ̄ŋ~/æŋ/. This feature also figures prominently (occurring more than 50% of the possible instances) in the work of Goodie Mob, Lil' Wayne, The Hot Boys, UGK, and Ludacris. While Lil' Wayne might be responsible for the higher percentages in the Hot Boys' songs, the feature appears to be more of a southern identity marker, rather than a New Orleans identifier, particularly since Juvenile, one of the other members of the group has relatively low rates of usage, and the other artists who use the feature are from outside of New Orleans. Table 5 includes a summary of the /er~/ɛr/ merger.

| Artist | Album | /er~/ɛr/ | % /ɛr/ |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|--------|
| | | N/T | |
| Outkast (Atlanta) | <i>Aquemini</i> 1998 | 4/27 | 14.8% |
| Goodie Mob (Atlanta) | <i>Soul Food</i> 1995 | 0/34 | 0 |
| Lil' Wayne (New Orleans) | <i>500 Degreez</i> 2002 | 5/28 | 17.9% |
| Juvenile (New Orleans) | <i>Solja Rags</i> 1997 | 2/18 | 11.1% |
| Hot Boys (New Orleans) | <i>Guerrilla Warfare</i> 1999 | 0/13 | 0 |
| Geto Boys | <i>We Can't be Stopped</i> | 0/25 | 0 |

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|------|---|
| (Houston) | <i>1991</i> | | |
| UGK | <i>Ridin' Dirty</i> | 0/24 | 0 |
| (Port Arthur) | <i>1996</i> | | |
| Three 6 Mafia | <i>Tha Unbreakables</i> | 0/8 | 0 |
| (Memphis) | <i>2003</i> | | |
| Ludacris | <i>Word of Mouf</i> | 0/31 | |
| (Atlanta) | <i>2001</i> | | |

Table 5: summary of the /er/~/*ɛ*r/ merger

Of particular interest here is the relative absence of the /er/~/*ɛ*r/ merger in the work of most of our artists. One possible explanation for this is that /er/~/*ɛ*r/ is not a salient southern AAE phonological feature. This is unlikely, given the frequency of the feature in more recent southern rap from the same performers (and given its spread to the work of mid-coast rappers like Kanye West and Lupe Fiasco). What seems to be a more probable explanation is that the /er/~/*ɛ*r/ merger is first popularized by Nelly in his 2002 “Hot in Here,” the overwhelming success of which fixed /er/~/*ɛ*r/ in the national consciousness as a “country grammar” variant. Post 2002, the merger becomes exploited by rappers who want to distinguish themselves solidly as southern (e.g., Lil’ Wayne). We include it here to suggest that there is at least one sound feature that is on the rise in southern AAE, and it emerges significantly through regional music. While we mention the /er/~/*ɛ*r/ merger here, this investigation is only a survey of southern AAE features in early southern rap and hip hop. Further inquiries into the merger’s frequency in recent rap are necessary to completely understand the way in which it functions as a southern identifier.

The final southern AAE feature we considered was the absence of /r/ in word-initial /thr/ clusters. This feature occurs in our data most often in word initial /thr/ clusters, before a rounded vowel. That is, /r/ is often absent in words like *through/threw* and *throw*, but is preserved in *three*. Specific examples in our data include the following:

Goodie Mob: “Thought Process” **Through** one of our episodes, only god knows, what I go through/... Done sent me **through** a lot of ups and down like it ain't nothin’
“The Coming” KKK **throwin’** up rallies but not no more in these parts/... Ain't no space, cut **through** the Fina, so I park, I hit my usual/... Suppress me, break Cam, run thinkin' of a son trying to see **through** tha fog

Juvenile: “Solja Rag” Then you a SOLJA nigga, put up a solja rag!/ **Throw** up a solja rag/ Put up a solja rag/ **Throw** up a solja rag/ Put up a solja rag/ **Throw** up a soljah rag/ Put up a soljah rag/ **Throw** up a soljah rag
“I Did That” Phase, a blast of foolishness went **through** his head/... This life you strugglin' **through** you gone lose it, / I come **through** actin' foolish, with semi-automatics
“Pimpinabitch” The Calliope cut-**throaters**,

Hot Boys: “Respect My Mind” Seen him slit a nigga **throat** and shoot one up in the face/... Move when I'm comin' **through**, or you get stepped on/...I'm shootin' **through** that, thought you knew that/... Come **through** your cut

Table 6 is a summary of the absence of /r/ in word initial /thr/ clusters before round vowels in the work of the artists we considered.

| <i>Artist</i> | <i>Album</i> | <i>/thr/~/th#/ N/T</i> | <i>% /#/</i> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Outkast (Atlanta) | <i>Aquemeni</i> 1998 | 0/14 | 0% |
| Goodie Mob (Atlanta) | <i>Soul Food</i> 1995 | 12/17 | 70.5% |
| Lil' Wayne (New Orleans) | <i>500 Degreez</i> 2002 | 4/14 | 28.6% |
| Juvenile (New Orleans) | <i>Solja Rags</i> 1997 | 28/32 | 87.5% |
| Hot Boys (New Orleans) | <i>Guerrilla Warfare</i> 1999 | 14/18 | 77.7% |
| Geto Boys (Houston) | <i>We Can't be Stopped</i> 1991 | 0/15 | 0% |
| UGK (Port Arthur) | <i>Ridin' Dirty</i> 1996 | 4/22 | 18.2% |
| Three 6 Mafia (Memphis) | <i>Da Unbreakables</i> 2003 | 0/6 | 0% |
| Ludacris (Atlanta) | <i>Word of Mouf</i> 2001 | 3/11 | 27.3% |

Table 6: summary of /thr/~/th#/

Once more, there is a considerable range of usage with the /thr/~th#/ alternation; it is not a feature employed at all by two of the other southern groups, but it is heavily used by Goodie Mob, The Hot Boys, and Juvenile. Where we might have seen Lil' Wayne's influence with The Hot Boys' employment of /θr/~θr/, perhaps here we see Juvenile's effect on the group's sound. Again, we cannot conclude that this feature is confined to more specific regions in the south since both Goodie Mob and Outkast are out of Atlanta and show dramatic differences in usage. This again may be a case of attempting to project a particular kind of southern black identity, as Goodie Mob and Outkast seem to have marketed themselves as very different types of artists; Outkast as urban and Goodie Mob, less so. The absence of /r/ in word initial /thr/ clusters may be an in-group signifier of "country-ness."

6. Discussion

Hip Hop Culture and the regional dominance of southern styles in the lyrics of rap music seem to have had an impact on the longstanding social stigma of southern speech and southern AAE. Southern artists introduce specific lexical items into AAE 'proper' and a small percentage of these terms (e.g. bling, get low, crunk) may indeed enter colloquial GAE. If Mitt Romney's use of "bling" is not convincing enough support of this argument, consider a t-shirt available from the University of Indiana Bloomington department of Linguistics that states, in shiny lettering across the chest: "Blinguistics!" While some of these forms are innovations of contemporary speakers (much of the regional slang, for example), the lyrics of southern rap also revives southern iconography for northern AAE speakers. Not only do they remind listeners of what is still largely considered "southern African American" cultural practices (particularly with those lyrics that nostalgically idealize southern

black life), these rappers also expand the conventional purview of certain southern AAE phonological elements to the broader AAE (and in some ‘performative’ cases, GAE speech communities). Visual and Sociolinguistic southern AAE identity markers have become centralized categories through southern styled elements popularized in the lyrics and imagery of southern Hip Hop, although some of this imagery tends toward performance and/or minstrelsy.

The celebration of southern culture is more than lexical—it is almost philosophical or ideological and political because entire singles, entire albums are devoted to both southern pride and prejudice. This consideration of the music is especially important in evaluating what southern rap is introducing to the rest of the country—there are some parallels in other “regional” genres. For example, country and western music conjures up images of a particular kind of life (albeit idealized) that almost every American accepts, even if one doesn’t listen to the music regularly.

Miller points out that the concept of the Dirty South is complex, contradictory, and multidimensional; characterized as:

1. Shaped in the remnants of a racist, oppressive, white South historically synonymous with slavery
2. A “down-home” black South marked by distinctive speech and cultural practices which is rural and bucolic
3. sexually libidinous
4. lawless and criminal
5. sophisticated and urban
6. Excessive and absurd

In both lyricism and its accompanying ideology and imagery, “the Dirty South was forged in opposition to older or alternate modes of imagining the South, spanning a continuum from Confederate apologetics at one end to the idea of the South as a unique African-American homeland on the other.” (Miller 2008).

In claiming hip hop as first a Southern thing that was simply adopted by Northern Blacks who ran away from the social and political turmoil of the South, artists vociferously challenge their marginalization in mainstream rap. David Banner confronts mainstream hip hop purists in “South’s On My Mind,” (1999), saying “So why y’all frontin on the South, come and get some/Ask your scared-ass parents where you came from.” Statements of this type from Southern artists throughout the 90s and 2000s suggest an aggressive claim to authenticity, the goal of every artist. The difference between the Southern artist and East/West coast artist is the former argues that simply being a product of the Dirty Third lends him or her more credibility than the other. Regional pride is clear in the dispute between East and West coast rappers, but it did not rely nearly as heavily on history and social standing. Where the West and East coasts generally claim legitimacy through conveying uncensored reality or staying true to the original intent of hip hop as rebel music, Southern artists claim authenticity because of the simple fact that they are *still* Southern.

In the southern rap documentary, *Dirty States of America*, rapper Big Floatie exemplifies the blend of musical and sociological history that crafts a unique Southern ideology, “this kind of music originated from the South...like the hymns and the spirituals and stuff...the niggas in the north, they in the north cause they came from the South runnin’ from the bullshit that we were going through down here...” The sense of black authenticity produced by the interconnections of music, oppression, religion, country living is aggressively championed by Southern artists.

Generally, living in the South has been the worst situation American Blacks have had to face. Southern artists carry the historical burden of oppression, poverty, and White hatred in a way that they believe is unique to their region. This is the reality that feeds the musical and cultural aspect of Southern hip hop. The music produced by a “twice marginalized” people, being Black and Southern, is a function of historical segregation and violence (Sarig, p. 219). Southern artists are entirely knowledgeable of their past and their obligation to their fan base to either simply provide a method of escape or speak directly to power in highlighting ongoing racial inequity, or both. The music carries the weight of several Black generations captured in racism, unable to flee the hardships of the South as so many others did.

7. Conclusions

While this paper introduces a number of new insights into the role that southern rap has played in the continuing development of AAE nationwide, there is still considerable work to be done. Specifically, we only looked at the early rise of southern rap; since 2003, these artists have increased tenfold in both production and popularity. If there is a continuing shift in the popularity of southern rap, will this new wave of acceptance be significant enough to support sound arguments about the music’s influence on non-southern varieties of AAE and on GAE? It is possible that southern rap will have an even greater linguistic influence than we have suggested here. Future inquiries should consider the most recent contributions by superstars of the genre like TI, TPain, and Lil’ Wayne, all of whom have undoubtedly capitalized on the appeal of their “southern sound” by sounding, well, even more southern. It would also be useful to conduct an additional survey of listeners both in the north and the south to determine the extent to which national audiences think these artists sound southern, rather than just “different.”

Moreover, to consider the impact of southern rap on east/ west/ and central coast rappers, it is necessary to investigate the southern influence in the work of artists like Kanye West, Nas, and Dr. Dre or Snoop, most of whom have certainly incorporated reclaimed southern features (especially the /er/~/er/ merger) in their music. While we considered the most mainstream and commercially successful artists for this project, future work on southern regional variation in AAE and rap needs to investigate southern hip hop where it thrives, in underground artistry and mixtapes, especially “The Southern Slang” series. Finally, while the methods of inquiry we have conducted here are useful, considering lyrics and listener surveys is only a starting point; interviews with the southern artists who make this music should also be conducted in order to understand speaker intentions, dialect perceptions, and the role of language in constructing this particular version of black southern identity.

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¹ While hip hop scholars have clearly established the difference between “rap” and “hip hop,” the genres have frequently merged historically, culturally, and musically. Because of the linguistic influence of each on the other, we will use both terms in this discussion, but do not assume their interchangeability.

² The Roland TR-808 Sequencer synthesizer (introduced in 1981) is heavily used in southern hip hop to provide the genre’s characteristic heavy, thumping base. 18’s are 18 inch subwoofers (loudspeakers) used specifically for the reproduction of low frequency sounds, such as bass, and are commonly installed in car trunks.

³ Although Lil’ Wayne and Juvenile were both originally members of The Hot Boys before launching lucrative solo careers, all three albums are included here because of their impact on the southern rap industry.