Appalachian English and African American English: Considerations for Evaluation
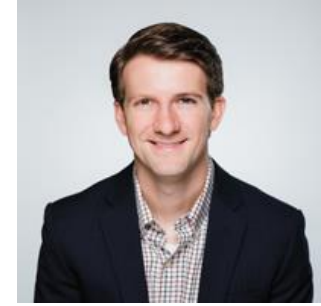
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& Taydi Owens, M.S., CCC-SLP

sidekick

About the Presenters

- Paul Rice is a CCC-SLP living in Bristol, VA. He has been a speech language pathologist since 2020 and has experience in schools, teletherapy, and private practice settings.

- Paul was a student at East Tennessee State University from 2018-2020, where he received an M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology. Paul completed a thesis at ETSU with Dr. Kerry Proctor-Williams titled "Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and the Relationship Between Respiration and Feeding," which he later presented at ASHA 2021.

- Paul is currently a district coordinator for Sidekick Therapy Partners in Kingsport, TN. He also coordinates The SPOTlight, Sidekick Therapy Partners' blog for parents and clinicians.

About the Presenters
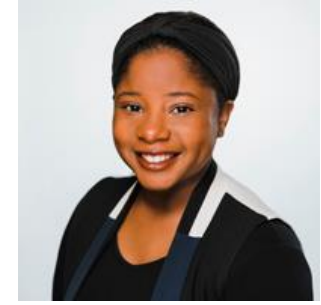
- Taydi Owens is a bilingual CCC-SLP living in Nashville, TN. She has been a speech-language pathologist since 2020 and has experience in schools, teletherapy, and early intervention settings.

- Taydi graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2020 with an M.S. in Communication Disorders. There, she cultivated her Spanish-speaking skills and gained experience in bilingual speech-language pathology.

- Taydi is currently a bilingual speech-language pathologist for Sidekick Therapy Partners and Vanderbilt KidTalk.

Dialect

- " … a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language which is shared by a group of speakers." (Wolfram, 1991)

- American English (AE) includes social and regional dialects that are 1.) systematic, 2.) highly regular, and 3.) cross all linguistic parameters.

- Major dialects include African-American English, Appalachian English, and Standard American English (SAE), among many others.

ASHA Required Competencies

- 1. Recognizing all American English dialects as rule-governed linguistic systems.

- 2. Understanding the rules and linguistic features of American English dialect(s) represented by their clientele.

- 3. Being familiar with nondiscriminatory testing and dynamic assessment procedures, such as the following:
  - identifying potential sources of test bias,
  - administering and scoring standardized tests in alternative manners,
  - using observation and nontraditional interview and language sampling techniques, and
  - analyzing test results in light of existing information regarding dialect use.

"No dialectal variety of English is a disorder or a pathological form of English."

Introduction to Appalachia

- How many speak Appalachian English? Millions of residents of the mountainous regions of Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

- What stereotypes do we have about this region?
  - Housing
  - Schooling
  - Employment
  - Medicine
  - Money

Appalachia Quick Facts

- Population of the region: 25,717,174 (2019)

- Average age: 41.3 years old.

- 88.9% of Appalachian adults ages 25-64 have earned a high school diploma, while 26.2% hold a bachelor's degree (U.S. average is 32.1%)

- 95.6% of Appalachia's labor force is employed. This is equal to the U.S. rate.

- Appalachia's median household income is $51,916, which is 82.6% of the U.S. figure.

- 86.1% of Appalachian households have access to a computer, smartphone, or other device, while only 77.8% of Appalachian households have a broadband subscription. (ARC, 2022)

Introduction to AE | Sample

Appalachian English - YouTube

*Excerpt from documentary film "Mountain Talk" from The Language and Life Project. (2:47 – 4:53)

- "si-gogglin" (3:14)
- "right yonder" (3:52)
- "stout" and "gaint" (4:04)
- "poke" (4:43)

Vocabulary Differences

- Like all dialects, Appalachian English features definitional differences:
  - "Britches" for "trousers"
  - "Poke" for "bag"
  - "Afeared" for "afraid"
  - "Fixin to" for "getting ready"
  - "Allow" for "suppose," among many others

Phonetic Differences

OH to -ER: ("Hollow" to "holler")

-AH to EE: ("China" to "chaney")

Prevocalic H insertion: ("It" to "Hit")

Rhoticization: ("Wash" to "Warsh")

Grammatical Differences

"To be" conjugational differences: Past tense singular "Are"

Usage of "Was" with plural subjects

Present progressive: Addition of pre-semantic "a-"

Pronoun changes: "Them" for "those," and "-uns"

Irregular past tense changes: "I knowed" for "I knew"

Possessives: "Yourn" for "yours"

More Language Differences

- Ain't

- A-verb-ing

- Comparatives (beautifulest)

- Double Modals (Useta couldn't)

- *Have* deletions (I been bitten)

- Intensifying adverbs (It was right cool)

- Adverbs:
  - -ly absence (It was terrible hard).
  - But (She ain't but a child)
  - Druther (I'd druther not)

More Language Differences cont.

- Multiple negation (They don't have no sense)

- Reflective *Done* (I done give it to you)

- Personal datives (We built us a house)

- Plural omissions in measurement (It's 34 inch tall)

- Y'all
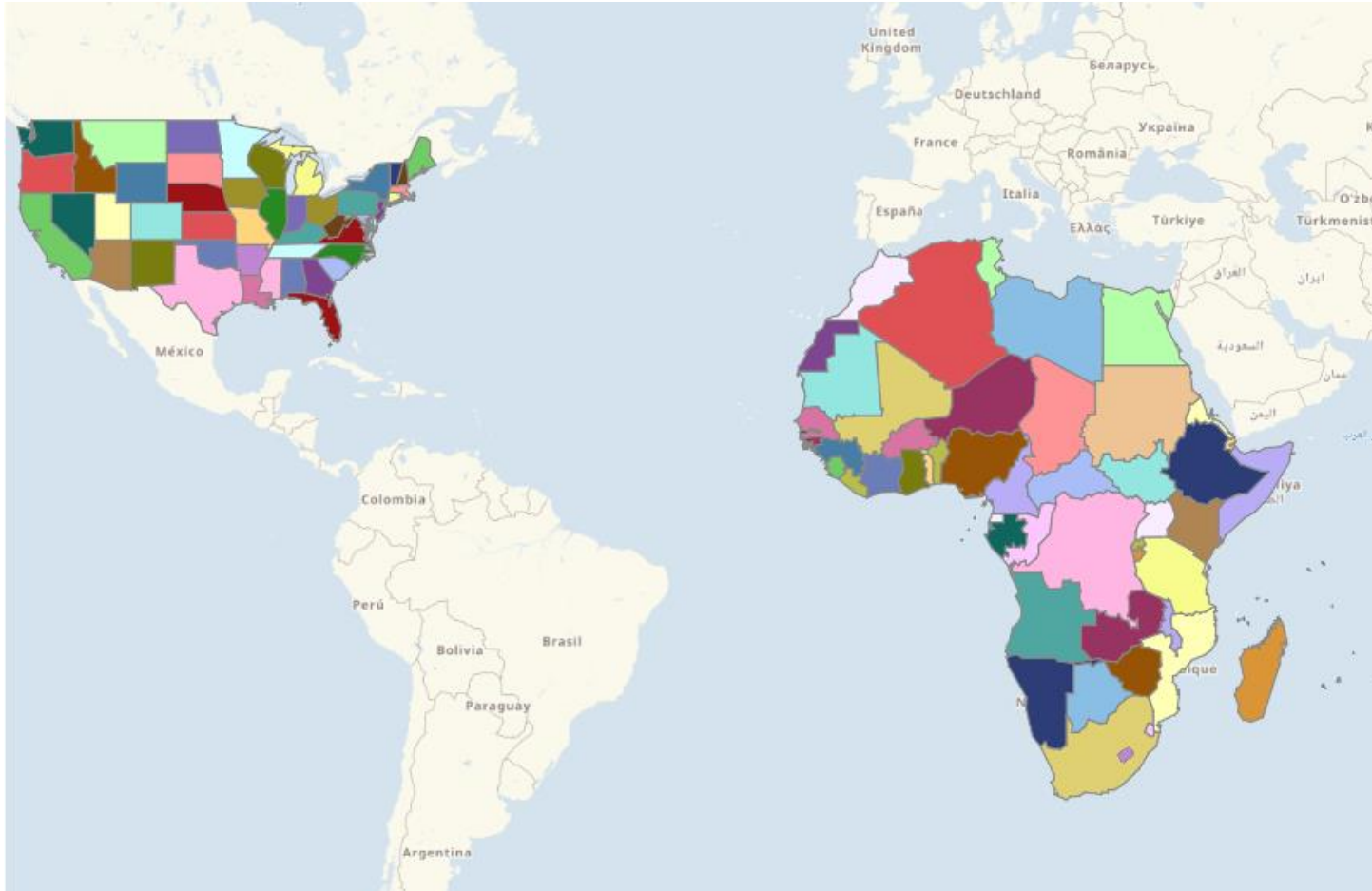
Introduction to African American English (AAE)

- Also referred to as African American Vernacular English, Black English, Black English Vernacular, Ebonics, etc.

- Controversial origin
  - Creole?
  - Second language acquisition?
  - Variation of old English?

- Difficult to estimate how many AAE-speakers exist today

- Spoken worldwide

Introduction to AAE | Sample

African American English – Youtube

- Features of AAE in the video:
    - "if you **was never**" (0:34)
    - "that's what **dey** did" (0:40)
    - "people don't **be tryin**" (0:48)
    - "we **gotta** get out" (0:55)

Semantic Features of AAE

- Older
  - Dig – to understand or appreciate
  - Cat – a friend or fellow
  - Cool – calm, controlled
  - Crib – house
  - Whip – car

- Newer
  - Tea – gossip or drama
  - Sis – female friend
  - Cap – lying or faking
  - Snatched – looking good
  - Extra – over the top or excessive

Phonological Features of AAE

Unstressed syllables

Consonant clusters

Final consonants

Interdentals

Lateral liquids

Vocalic "r"

Prosody

And more!

Phonological Features | Examples

Type	Description	Example
1. Unstressed syllable	Initial syllable deletion	"bout" for about
2. Consonant cluster	Backing in "str" clusters	"skreet" for street
3. Final consonant	Final consonant deletion	"goo" for good
4. Interdental	Labialization of "th"	"baf" for bath
5. Lateral liquid	Vocalization of /l/	"baw" for ball
6. Vocalic "r"	Deletion of "r"	"do" for door
7. Prosody	Stress on first syllable	"**po**lice" for police

Morphology

Possessive -'s
- That's my brother car.

Plural -s
- He has ten dollar.

Regular 3rd-person singular (present tense)
- He eat too much.

Irregular 3rd-person singular (present tense)
- He do my job.

Regular past tense -ed
- Yesterday, I walk home.

Present progressive –ing
- They are runnin' fast.

Grammatical Features of AAE

Syntax

Future tense: *gonna, finna*

- I'm gonna / finna dance tonight.

Multiple negatives

- Nobody never likes me.

Use of *ain't*

- I ain't going tomorrow.

Conditional *if*

- I asked did she go.

Habitual *be*

- She be working.

Omission of copula verb

- He sick.

Grammatical Features of AAE

Evaluation Considerations

- For speech, considerations include rhoticization and consonant insertion.

- For language, differences include pronouns, plurals, verb tense, and possessives.

- Standardized assessment is limited, and scores do not necessarily need to be included (i.e., GFTA-3, etc.)

Evaluation Considerations: Determination

- Who is a speaker of AE/AAE and how can we determine this?

- Regional residence and race isn't enough; consider parent interviews, language samples, and use of multiple AE/AAE forms.

- If errors in casual conversation and testing are not age-appropriate and don't match consensus lists of dialectal difference, errors may indicate disorder.

- Consider that standards of determination differ based on:
  - School district
  - State/Medicaid guidelines
  - Insurance

Evaluation Considerations:
AE Research

Results of research (Garn-Nunns & Perkins, 1999, Wolfram, 1972) suggest that AE can be subject to cultural bias in [language] testing.

Garn-Nunns & Perkins' (1999) specific AE forms of note:

- Irregular plurals

- Plural formation using –vz

- Verb irregular past tense

- Comparatives and superlatives

Review: ASHA Standards

- Identifying potential sources of test bias,
  - Solution: Education on AE/AAE/SAE differences and test specifics

- administering and scoring standardized tests in alternative manners,
  - Solution: Supplement tests with dynamic assessment as well as language samples (below)

- using observation and nontraditional interview and language sampling techniques, and

- analyzing test results in light of existing information regarding dialect use
  - Solution: Include narratives and data from supplemental testing to inform your diagnostic decision-making.

Administration: Standardization Modified

Adapt	Adapt assessment tools to fit client language, dialect, and culture
Administer	Administer several formal/informal measures
Assess	Assess in all languages/dialects
Choose	Choose the test with the most valid items and least bias for group
Analyze	Analyze sample data for tests to check for minority groups
Have	Have parents complete a case history
Modify	Modify items before testing; report all modifications and results
Report	Report norms only if they are valid for this population

Administration: Modification cont.

- Give child credit if he/she changes their mind, especially if they demonstrate knowledge

- Low stress, high motivation

- Repeat/reword instructions and provide additional time

- Test beyond the ceiling and record all responses

- Do not score dialectal differences as errors; accept culturally appropriate responses as correct

- Provide additional practice items

- Evaluate over several sessions

Model for Limiting Bias
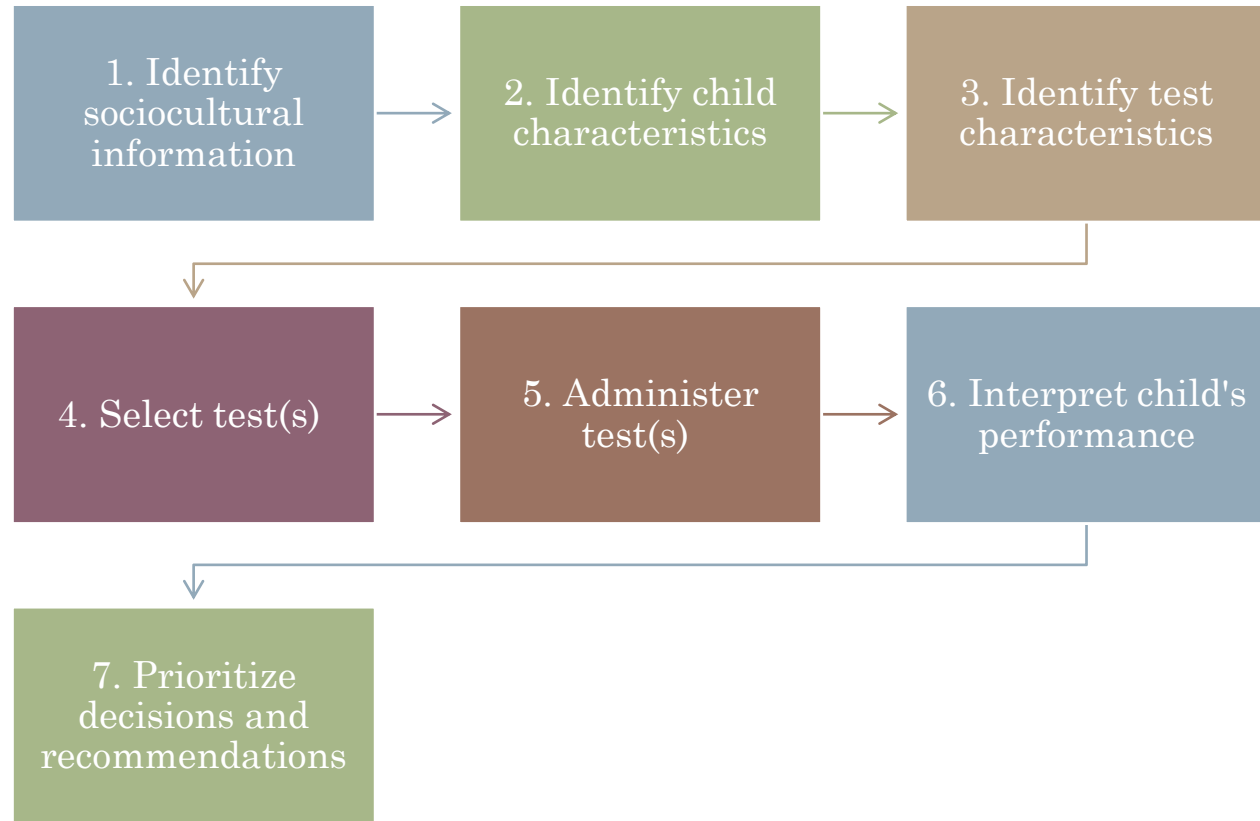
Dynamic Assessment

- Dynamic Assessment (DA) is an evaluation method used to identify an individual's skills as well as their learning potential. DA emphasizes the learning process and accounts for the amount and nature of examiner investment. It is highly interactive and process oriented. DA also helps to better differentiate speech-language differences and disorders. (ASHA, 2022)

- Based on developmental work of Vygotsky (1976) and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

- " … the difference between the level of performance a child can reach unaided and the level of participation that can be accomplished if the child is guided by a more knowledgeable participant." (Camplone & Brown, 1967, p. 611)

Dynamic Assessment cont.

- Test. Teach. Retest.

- Non-word repetition tasks

- Fast-word mapping

- Narrative evaluation reports describing evaluative activities and skills displayed by child.

Difference or disorder?

- Type 1 Impairment: Judged to be atypical regardless of dialect. (Ex. Initial consonant deletion is not considered typical in any dialect.)

- Type 2 Impairment: Cross-dialectal difference in the typical (or underlying) form. (Ex. Standard pronunciation for "Bathing" includes /ð/, but AAE can include /v/, while both dialects may produce /z/ for /ð/.)

- Type 3 Impairment: Affects forms that are shared across dialects but are applied with different frequency. (Ex. Final cluster-reduction is exhibited in many dialectal groups, but it is observed significantly more frequently in AAE than in other groups.)

- Implications: Type 1 impairments may be treated as disorders regardless of dialect, while Types 2 and 3 require gathering more quantitative and qualitative information.

AE Case Study

- Josh is five years old, and he is taking the GFTA-3 for the first time. He has an older brother and sister also in elementary school. His teacher has difficulty understanding his speech, but she does know the family and they all speak similarly. On the GFTA-3, Josh has errors for the following with a standard score in the severe range:

- K and G (Fronting)

- S and Z (Stopping)

- R and L (Vowelization, other distortion)

- What comes next?

AE Case Study cont.

- Josh is also taking the OWLS-II and received a moderate standard score of 84. In general, his errors included verb tense, possessives, and pronouns. Many of his errors included dialectally appropriate answers, but not all.
  - Error: He druther look in the pot (A13)* (Correct: Eat dinner.)
  - Error: Littlest (A14)
  - Error: A-runnin' (A21)
  - Error: Yourn (A22)* (Correct: Mine)
  - Error: A-sittin' (A35)
  - Error: Who done it? (A38)

- What comes next?

- What else can we do?

AAE | CELF-5 Examples

- Word Structure subtest
  - 3rd-person singular: The boy likes to read. Every day he _____ [read**s**].
  - Auxiliary + -ing: This girl _____ [**is** drawin**g**].
  - Regular past tense: The girls are playing a game. This is the game that the girls _____ [play**ed**].
  - Future tense: She is sliding now. Soon, he _____ [**will** slide].

- Formulated Sentences subtest
  - She **be washin'** her hands.
  - The **cat paw** is in the fishbowl.
  - I wonder **did** they get hurt.
  - He **do** his best every day.

- **Tip:** Refer to Language Differences and Cultural Sensitivity (Appendix I) in the CELF-5 manual.

AAE | GFTA-3 Examples

- cup → "cu"

- spider → "spiduh"

- teeth → "teef"

- that → "dat"

- pajamas → "jamas"

- **TAKEAWAY:** Maintain standardization. Modify interpretation.

Thoughts on Treatment

- Evaluation guides treatment; if differences are not disorders in testing, they can't be treated as such in sessions if child qualifies for services.

- Use culturally appropriate activities and techniques in treating these populations.

- Include family and teachers (if applicable) in discussing plans of care.

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Questions?