

“Make it Sound like We back on a Plantation!”

Received Pronunciation and African American

Vernacular English in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*

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When people are asked to name differences between British English and American English, they tend to refer the difference in vocabulary for the same objects, e.g. *cookie* and *biscuit*. Others might point to the varieties in orthographic realisations of a word as in *color* and *colour*. However, the differences between the two varieties can be broken down into even more aspects.

During the 1990s the popular American sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (aired on NBC from 1990 until 1996) did not only find a wide audience in the United States but was broadcasted all around the world. Today, people can take a trip down memory lane and watch the series on streaming platforms like Netflix. Especially foreign viewers, but also Americans, notice that the language some characters use differ from each other: most prominently protagonist Will speaks with an American accent while the butler of the American Banks family, Geoffrey, talks British. Having a closer look at the way these two characters talk, one can see that various features of the two varieties occur. Therefore, in this paper I decided to focus on the fields of phonology and grammar by analysing the language of Will and Geoffrey in the opening scene of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* in order to investigate how English varieties are represented in the series and how they therefore underline the differences between the characters. Because the sitcom is an American show the main focus will be on the American variety, in particular African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

The approach of answering this question is going to be divided into the following steps: first, this paper will give an introduction to *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* before providing a short overview about the English varieties Received Pronunciation and African American Vernacular English. Afterwards, my paper

¹ This essay was initially submitted as a term paper and supervised by Carolin Schneider.

will analyse the data collected from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* with particular attention to the different features of both varieties.²

Overall, this paper will not solely present the differences between two varieties but it will also show that the series' producers did not only make use of things like clothing and characters' behaviour to show their differences but that linguistic features underline those differences as well.

INTRODUCING *THE FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR*

The US-American TV show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* deals with the African American teenage protagonist Will Smith (played by Will Smith) who originally lived in West-Philadelphia. After getting into trouble his mother sent him to Bel-Air to live with his aunt Vivienne and her family as the opening songs explains (see Appendix A). Her husband Philip is a highly acknowledged lawyer which is why the Banks family can afford living in a big mansion and has a butler, Geoffrey.

The show often contrasts Will who grew up in a working-class neighbourhood and his exuberant behaviour with the social norms and expectations of the upper-class Banks family in a humorous way. He rarely knows when to behave or talk appropriately in most situations. As a consequence, Will gets into trouble with his family or involves the family members in embarrassing situations. Therefore, particularly the family's butler, Geoffrey, struggles to cope with Will's behaviour as he – in contrast – is a person who mostly acts according to traditions and rules.

Since Geoffrey uses RP and Will speaks AAVE, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* features both a British and American variety of the English language. The U.S. sitcom can thus serve as a foundation for this paper in order to examine features of these two varieties and to explore their representation in the series.

1 The transcribed conversation between the two example speakers (both orthographic and in IPA) can be found in the appendix as well as the lyrics of the opening song.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DIFFERENT VARIETIES AND THEIR FEATURES

The English language has numerous different varieties which are spoken in different parts of the world. Received Pronunciation (RP), which is spoken “by only 3-5 per cent of the population of England” (Trudgill and Hannah 15) is considered standard in England. However, the accent cannot be assigned to a certain region of the country as it is a non-regional accent, “i.e. if speakers have an RP accent, you cannot tell which area of England they come from, which is not the case for any other type of the British accent” (15). Hence, it is considered a social variety. American English, on the other hand, does not have a standard way of pronunciation (see Dretzke 165). Except for the East and the South, the pronunciation in the rest of the United States – at least to some extent – “is particularly uniform” (165). In the following this kind of American English is referred to as General American English (GenAmE) (see 165).

PHONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES AND GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCES: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

Different varieties of any language can be formed within social environments or are located in either different parts of a country, a continent or even the globe. Oftentimes the features of these varieties are expressed through pronunciation. Phonological differences can vary from slight changes to the loss or the addition of sounds. Featuring two different varieties of English, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* serves as a good example to show those differences with Geoffrey as an RP speaker and Will as an AAVE speaker. In this case, the phonological differences are the most striking which is why they are focussed on.

British English has numerous different varieties and Received Pronunciation possesses three striking features. One of them is rhoticity: Most British varieties, RP being among them, are *non-rhotic* which means that the pronunciation of the /r/ sound is left out in given cases (see Aslam and Kak 94), while GenAmE is considered a *rhotic* variety. A GenAmE speaker would therefore pronounce the words *chart* and *joker* as /tʃɑ:t/ and /ˈdʒoʊkər/ in contrast to an RP speaker who would say /tʃɑ:t/ and /ˈdʒoʊkə/. Here, the /r/ sound is only pronounced when it is followed by a vowel

as in *frog* /frɒg/ (94). However, RP makes use of *linking-r*. The phrase *car owner*, for example, would be realised as /kɑːr 'əʊnə/ because the following word starts with a vowel (while *car* on its own is only /kɑː/) (see 94-95). Moreover, sometimes an alveolar tap /ɾ/ is used for a /r/ sound between vowels such as in *American* (/ə'mɛrɪkən/) (see 20).

Another important feature of RP is the /ɒ/ sound which does not surface in American varieties of English at all (see Dretzke 39). An RP speaker pronounces *hot*, *object* and *shop* as /hɒt/, /'ɒbdʒɪkt/ and /ʃɒp/ while a GenAmE speaker would simply use an /ɑː/ sound saying /hɑːt/, /ɑːbdʒɪkt/ and /ʃɑːp/ (39).

Lastly, RP speakers realise the /ɑː/ sound when an orthographic <a> stands before the sounds /f/, /θ/, /s/ or the nasal clusters /nt/, /ns/, /ŋ/, /nd/ and /mp/ (see Trudgil and Hannah 18). Examples for this can be found in *laugh*, *path*, *grass*, *plant*, *dance*, *branch*, *demand* and *sample* being realised as /lɑːf/, /pɑːθ/, /grɑːs/, /plɑːnt/, /dɑːns/, /brɑːŋ/, /dɪ'mɑːnd/ and /'sɑːmpl/ (39). By contrast, a GenAmE speaker would pronounce the /æ/ sound (/læf/, /pæθ/, /græs/, /plænt/, /dæns/, /brænʃ/, /dɪ'mænd/ and /'sæmpl/) (see Aslam and Kak 97).

African American Vernacular English exhibits seven phonological features. One of them is the abbreviation of certain consonant sound combination endings such as *-pt* (as in *script*), *-st* (as in *trust*), *-ld* (as in *fold*), *-ct* (as in *expect*), *-ft* (as in *craft*) or *-nd* (as in *friend*) (see Green 85). This means that *friend* (/frɛnd/) would be pronounced /frɛn/ or *fold* (/fould/) would become /foul/. However, they also delete single consonants at the end of words: if a word ends with a single consonant (especially a nasal) that follows a vowel the consonant is oftentimes dropped which results in words such as *man* (/mən/) or *cat* (/kæt/) being pronounced as /mæ/ or /kæ/ (see Rickford 4).

Another commonly known feature of AAVE is that the gerund *-ing* is not realised as /ɪŋ/ but as /ɪn/ (see 4). An example for this phenomenon is the following: whereas an RP speaker for example would refer to *swimming* as /'swɪmɪŋ/ an AAVE speaker would say /'swɪmɪn/. Nevertheless, this feature only occurs if the *-ing* is really the suffix of a word (see Green 122). That means that words like *sing* (/sɪŋ/) and *ring* (/rɪŋ/) do not become */sɪn/ and */rɪn/ (see 4).

When it comes to the interdental fricatives, AAVE speakers usually use neither the voiceless /θ/ nor the voiced /ð/ which are both realised as <th> in writing. Instead, they use a /d/ sound when a word starts with a voiced interdental fricative (/ð/) as in *that* (/ðæt/) so it becomes /dæt/. A word like *with* (/wɪð/) is

pronounced /wɪt/ so the /ð/ at the end of a word is replaced by a /t/ sound. In the case of /ð/ between two vowels it becomes a /v/ sound such as in /brʌvə/ in *brother* (/ˈbrʌðə/) (see Finegan and Rockford 86). If a voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ occurs at the end of a word such as in *bath* (/bæθ/) it is pronounced with a /f/ sound and becomes /bæf/. Also, if /θ/ occurs in the middle of a word such as in *birthday* (/ˈbɜrθ,deɪ/) it becomes /f/ resulting in /ˈbɜrf,deɪ/. The pronunciation of either “t, d, f or v thus depends on the special properties of the corresponding *th* sound and its position in the word” (86).

Unlike other American varieties of English there is significantly less rhoticity found in AAVE. The final /r/ sound is dropped when it is supposed to follow a vowel as in *sister* (/ˈsɪstər/) which becomes /ˈsɪstə/ (see Rickford 5). This also occurs when the /r/ sound is at the end of a word that is followed by a word that begins with a consonant (see 5). An example for this is *cover girl* (/ˈkʌvər ɡɜrl/) which becomes /ˈkʌvə ɡɜ:l/. However, due to the *linking-r* phenomenon the /r/ sound is in fact realised in case the following word starts with a vowel such as in *father is* which becomes /ˈfɑðər ɪz/ (see 5).

Also, AAVE speakers oftentimes nasalise the /nt/ sound in an auxiliary like *don’t* and pronounce it /dɔ̃/ (see Green 85) and have a different realisation of given diphthongs. When an AAVE speaker refers to themselves they would pronounce their *I* (/aɪ/) more like /ɑ:/ (see Rickford 5) and thereby drop the /ɪ/ sound. A different example is the word *time* (/taɪm/) that is pronounced /tɑ:m/ in AAVE.

Given the fact that Received Pronunciation is considered a standard variety, it functions as the reference for grammatical features and their common realisations while other forms of English are seen as variations thereof. The omission of the auxiliary *is* or *are* and the elimination of the third person singular *-s* suffix constitute the two grammatical most common features in African American Vernacular English. An AAVE speaker describes a present tense action or state, they would not say “He is coming” or “They are great” but drop the auxiliaries *is* and *are* (see Rickford 6) by saying only “He coming” and “They great.” Another common feature in AAVE is to leave out the third person singular *-s* suffix (see 7). Hereby, the sentence *He plays the guitar* becomes *He play the guitar*.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

The data for this paper consists of the very first scene of the first episode in season 1 of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (see transcript of the scene in appendix B), which aired in 1990. In the opening scene an American but also a British variety occur. The ninety-second scene has been transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) using John C. Wells' *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (2009) in order to find phonological differences between the varieties. Furthermore, the varieties' different specific features had to be investigated, as well as counted. Overall there are eleven different features that viewers of the show come across. Each feature that occurs in the analysed scene is listed below and highlighted within the sentence it occurred in.

The following sections deal with the first dialogue of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* in which the example speakers Will and Geoffrey meet for the first time. Will arrives at his aunt Vivienne's house which is now his home and is being welcomed by butler Geoffrey who he mistakes for his uncle Phil. The features of Received Pronunciation and African American Vernacular English, which can be found in this scene, are being listed together with the environment they occur in. In order to highlight in which words exactly the feature is used, they are written in bold letters in the following. The underlined words mark the uses of linking-r and alveolar taps. Furthermore, the IPA transcription is given as well.

PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION

In the opening scene, Geoffrey uses the following phonological features of RP (the full transcribed conversation can be found in appendix C).

- Example 1: "I am not your uncle Philip."
(aɪ æm nɒt jɔːr 'ʌŋkl 'fɪlɪp.)
- Example 2: "You have the right house. I am Geoffrey, **your** uncle's **butler**."
(juː hæv ðə raɪt haʊs. aɪ æm 'dʒɛfri jɔːr 'ʌŋklz 'bʌtlə.)
- Example 3: "If you will follow me I will show you to your room, **Master** William."
(ɪf juː wɪl 'fɒləʊ miː aɪ wɪl ʃəʊ juː tuː jɔː ruːm 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm.)
- Example 4: "**Master** William, tradition dictates that a clean, unbreakable line be drawn between a family and **their** **butler**. **Therefore**, it

is necessary **for** the operation of the household that you address me as *Geoffrey* and I in **turn** address you by **your** proper title. **Master William.**"

('mɑ:stə 'wɪljəm trə'dɪʃən 'dɪkteɪts ðæt ə kli:n ,ʌn 'breɪkəbl laɪn bi: drɔ:n bi'twi:n ə 'fæmɪli ænd ðeə 'bʌtlə. 'ðeəfɔ: ɪt ɪz 'nɛsɪsəri fɔ: ði ,ɒpə'reɪʃən ɒv ə 'haʊshəʊld ðæt ju: ə'dres mi: æz 'dʒɛfri ænd aɪ ɪn tʃ:n ə'dres ju: baɪ jɔ: 'prɒpə 'taɪtl. 'mɑ:stə 'wɪljəm.)

Geoffrey leaves out the /r/ sounds in examples 1, 2 and 4 resulting in the realisations /jɔ:/, /'bʌtlə/, /'mɑ:stə/, /ðeə/, /'ðeəfɔ:/, /fɔ:/ and /tʃ:n/ which marks non-rhoticity instead of saying /jɔ:r/, /'bʌtlər/, /'mɑ:stər/, /ðɛr/, /'ðɛr fɔr/, /fɔr/ and /tʃrɪn/ as it would typically be done by a GenAmE speaker. Also, he makes use of the linking-r when he says *your uncle* (/jɔ:r 'ʌŋkl/) in example 2. Apart from that, Geoffrey makes an alveolar tap as the /r/ sound is between two vowels in the words (*your*) *room* (/ru:m/) and *operation* (/ ,ɒpə'reɪʃən/) (examples 3 and 4).

Example 5: "I am **not** your uncle Philip."

(aɪ æm nɒt jɔ:r 'ʌŋkl 'fɪlɪp.)

Example 6: "If you will **follow** me I will show you to your room, Master William."

(ɪf ju: wɪl 'fɒləʊ mi: aɪ wɪlʃəʊ ju: tu: jɔ: ru:m 'mɑ:stə 'wɪljəm.)

Example 7: "Therefore, it is necessary for the **operation of** a household that you address me as Geoffrey and I in turn address you by your **proper** title."

('ðeəfɔ: ɪt ɪz 'nɛsɪsəri fɔ: ði ,ɒpə'reɪʃən ɒv ə 'haʊshəʊld ðæt ju: ə'dres mi: æz 'dʒɛfri ænd aɪ ɪn tʃ:n ə'dres ju: baɪ jɔ: 'prɒpə 'taɪtl.)

Geoffrey also pronounces the words "not," "follow," "operation," "of" and "proper" as /nɒt/, /'fɒləʊ/, / ,ɒpə'reɪʃən/, /ɒv/ and /'prɒpə/ thereby vocalizing the /v/ sound differently than a GenAmE speaker who would say /nɑt/, /'fɑləʊ/, / ,ɑpə'reɪʃən/, /ʌv/ and /'prəpər/.

Example 8: "Come with me, **Master** William."

(kʌm wɪð mi: 'mɑ:stə 'wɪljəm)

With regard to the /ɑ:/ sound, a GenAmE speaker would say /'mæstər/. Geoffrey, on the other hand, makes use of the /ɑ:/ sound and says /'mɑ:stə/. He does not use any other words that would feature the /ɑ:/ sound in the rest of the given dialogue.

PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

The opening scene of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* also contains the seven AAVE features previously discussed. To minimize repetition, I refrain from listing every single word or case of the given dialogue between Will and Geoffrey that matched the phonological and grammatical features of RP and AAVE (the whole dialogue can be found in appendix B).

Example 9: “Hey man, it’s cool if you **just** call me Will, man.”
(heɪ mə ɪts kul ɪf ju dʒɪs kəl mi wɪl mə.)

Example 10: “[...] Lemme rap to you for a **second**, man. [...] Make it **sound** like we back on a plantation. [...]”
([...] ləmi ræp tə ju fɔː ə 'sekən mə. [...] meɪk ɪt saʊn laɪk wi bæʔk ən ə ,plæn'teɪʃən. [...])

The given dialogue shows the reduction of consonant clusters at the end of words. Here, Will drops the last sounds in the words that end with <st> and <nd> and hereby says /dʒɪs/, /sekən/ and /saʊn/ in example 9 and 10 while it should actually be /dʒʌst/, /sekənd/ and /saʊnd/. He also deletes single consonants at the end of words in example 11. As the nasal /n/ sound follows a vowel Will pronounces *man* as /mə/ which is the result of omitting the final /n/ sound.

Example 11: “Hey **man**, it’s cool if you just call me *Will*, **man**.”
(heɪ mə ɪts kul ɪf ju dʒɪs kəl mi wɪl mə.)

Furthermore, like typical for AAVE speakers Will does not say /ŋ/ in words that end with the gerund suffix *-ing* but reduces the final sound only to /n/. In the following utterances Will pronounces the words in bold differently:

Example 12: “Hey, Uncle Phil. Oh man. How you **doin’?**”
(heɪ 'ʌŋkl fɪl, ʊs **mæ**, haʊ jə 'duːɪn.)

Example 13: “[...] I didn’t know there were so many brothers **livin’** in this neighbourhood.”
([...] aː 'dɪdənt nəʊ ðeə wə sʌʊ 'meni 'brʌðəz 'lɪvɪn ɪn dɪs 'neɪbə,hʊd.)

Will only pronounces the words “doin” and “livin” as /'duɪn/ (example 12) and /'lɪvɪn/ (example 13). Here, a GenAmE speaker would say /'duɪŋ/ and /'lɪvɪŋ/ in contrast.

- Example 14: “[...] so many brothers living in **this** neighborhood.”
 ([...] sou 'mɛni 'brʌðəz 'lɪvɪn ɪn dɪs 'neɪbə,hʊd.)
- Example 15: “[...] All **this** Master William stuff, man, I’m not down with **that**, man. [...]”
 ([...] ɔl dɪs 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm stʌf mæ aːm nat daʊn wɪð dæt mæ.
 [...])
- Example 16: “Check **this**. [...]. **That’s** dope!”
 (ʧɛk dɪs. [...] . dæts doʊp.)

In examples 14 to 16 Will modifies the realisation of his interdental fricatives very obviously. Here he replaces all his /ð/ sounds in /ðɪs/ and /ðæt/ with /d/ sounds resulting in him saying /dɪs/ and /dæt/.

Another important feature, which shows that Will speaks AAVE, is that he does not pronounce /r/ sounds that follow vowels which is actually untypical for most of the American English varieties.

- Example 17: “[...] so many brothers living in this **neighborhood**. [...]”
 ([...] sou 'mɛni 'brʌðəz 'lɪvɪn ɪn dɪs 'neɪbə,hʊd. [...])
- Example 18: “Are you, robo **butler**, man?”
 (ɑr ju 'roʊboʊ 'bʌtlə mæ?)
- Example 19: “[...] All this **Master** William stuff, I’m not down with that, man. [...]”
 ([...] ɔl dɪs 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm stʌf mæ aːm nat daʊn wɪð dæt mæ.
 [...])

Will says /'neɪbə,hʊd/ and /'bʌtlə/ instead of /'neɪbə,hʊd/ and /'bʌtlər/. Also, he does not say /'mɑːstər/ but /'mɑːstə/.

As already mentioned, AAVE speakers oftentimes nasalise the /nt/ sound in an auxiliary like *don’t* and pronounce it /dɔ̃/ (see Green 85). However, according to Rickford, rather the initial /d/ sound in *don’t* is omitted resulting in something like ‘on (see 5). Due to this theoretical contradiction, I refrained from analysing Will’s pronunciation of the given auxiliaries.

Furthermore, a modification of the diphthong /aɪ/ by Will can be found in the analysed dialogue marked by examples 20 and 21.

- Example 20: “My fault, man. I musta got the wrong crib. But ayo, I didn’t know[...]
 ([...] ma: fɔlt mə. a: mʌst gət ðə rɔŋ kɹɪb. bʌ ‘eɪoʊ a: ‘dɪdənt noʊ [...])
- Example 21: “All this Master William stuff, I’m not down with that, man.”
 (ɔl dɪs ‘mɑ:stə ‘wɪljəm stʌf mə a:m nat daʊn wɪð dæt mə.)

The diphthong /aɪ/ becomes an /ɑ:/ sound which can be seen in example 20 in the words *my* and *I*. Example 21 shows that Will pronounces /aɪ/ in *I’m* as /ɑ:m/.

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

The feature of omitting the copula/auxiliary is also present in the first scene of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

- Example 22: “[...] We Ø doin’ alright, huh?”
 ([...] wiˈduɪn ɔlˈraɪt hʌ?)
- Example 23: “Make it sound like we Ø back on a plantation.”
 (meɪk ɪt saʊn laɪk wi bæʃk ʌn ə ˌplænˈteɪʃən.)

While in example 22 it would be “We are doin’ alright, huh?” and “Make it sound like we are on a plantation” (example 23) for GenAmE speakers, Will actually drops the “are” in both sentences. However, he does not use this feature when abbreviating “is” as in “it’s” (see example 11 “Hey man, *it’s* cool if you just call me Will, man.”) and “that’s” (see example 16 “*That’s* dope!”).

Similarly, the dropping of the third person singular *-s* is something that the viewers of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* encounter regularly for example, when Will says “All this Master William stuff, I’m not down with that, man. Make Ø it sound like we back on a plantation” (ɔl dɪs ‘mɑ:stə ‘wɪljəm stʌf mə a:m nat daʊn wɪð dæt mə. meɪk ɪt saʊn laɪk wi bæʃk ʌn ə ˌplænˈteɪʃən). Here, Will leaves out the third person singular suffix *-s* in the word “make” in contrast to the standard variety of GenAmE.

Also, a direct comparison is possible due to the fact that both Will and Geoffrey say the words *that*, *this*, *butler*, *Master*, *I* and *not* in the given

conversation. As already elaborated above, Will pronounces *that* and *this* as /dæt/ and /dɪs/ replacing the interdental fricative /ð/ with a /d/ (see examples 14, 15 and 16) sound, while Geoffrey's pronunciation of these words does not come with any exceptional features. As both speakers, however, pronounce the word *butler* as /'bʌtlə/ (compare examples 4 and 18), they delete the /r/ sound which shows that both varieties are *non-rhotic*. This can also be observed with the word *Master* (/ˈmɑːstə/) (examples 3 and 19). Moreover, it is striking that Will uses the /ɑː/ sound in *Master* as well instead of saying /ˈmæstə/ as GenAmE speakers use /æ/. Additionally, in example 1 Geoffrey's realisation of the word *I* is the diphthong /aɪ/. Meanwhile, Will (in example 20) only says /ɑː/. When hearing Geoffrey's realisation of *not* (/nɒt/) (example 1) one can clearly tell that he is not a GenAmE speaker. The /ɒ/ sound only exists in the British varieties of English. Therefore, Will's /nɑt/ (example 21) contrasts immediately with Geoffrey's /ɑ/ sound.

RESULTS

The opening scene of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* shows that African American Vernacular English and Received Pronunciation have many different features and that the varieties do not only differ in minor things like different orthographic realisations or only rhoticity. Needless to say, AAVE is closer to General American English than to RP because it is an American variety of English. However, AAVE and RP do share the non-rhoticity. But other than that, these two varieties are very different from each other. The Britishness of Geoffrey is being emphasized by making use of various striking RP features such as the *non-rhoticity*, the /ɒ/ sound that is only used in British varieties of English and the /ɑː/ sound in given circumstances. While RP is a standard variety, AAVE has many features that deviate from the common use of English in America such as in the field of phonology which includes the reduction of consonant clusters at the end of words, deletion of single consonants at the end of words, replacing /ŋ/ by /n/ in the *-ing* gerund, different realisations of the interdental fricatives, nasalisation of the /nt/ sound in given auxiliaries or a different realisation of given diphthongs like /aɪ/. All of these features are presented in the segment of the series that was analysed in this paper.

In terms of grammatical features of AAVE, the study found only the omission of the copular/auxiliary *is* and *are*, and the elimination of the third person singular *-s* suffix. This has different reasons: first of all, it is only a ninety-second dialogue which was analysed. Will may use more features throughout the rest of the series. Second, according to John R. Rickford “no one uses all of the features [...] 100 percent of the time” (9) and we cannot examine which and how many other features of AAVE Will uses by only looking at these given ninety seconds. However, this leaves room for further studies which can include more episodes or seasons of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the scenario of asking people to name differences between British English and American English it is now clear that they would not necessarily only name differences in vocabulary or different orthographic realisations of certain words. In fact, there are numerous other linguistic aspects that show differences between these two varieties. The paper has shown that the opening scene of the ‘90s sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* uses several additional features of both varieties. The British representation is shown by butler Geoffrey who realises the /b/ and /ɑ:/ sound differently. The seven features of African American Vernacular English that occur in the analysed scene are the reduction of consonant clusters at the end of words, deletion of single consonants at the end of words, replacing /ŋ/ by /n/ in *-ing*, realisation of the interdental fricatives as /t/, /d/, /f/ or /v/, nasalisation of the /nt/ sound in given auxiliaries and the different realisation of given diphthongs. The only feature found in the opening scene that both varieties share is rhoticity.

In sum, the opening scene of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* represents a broad range of AAVE features and contrasts them with those of RP. Therefore, it shows that producers do not only make use of things such as characters’ clothing or behaviour in order to stress differences between them but that language plays an important role in doing so, too. Further studies could expand the dataset to more dialogues between Will and Geoffrey within the series and analyse matching phonological and grammatical features of RP and AAVE. This also applies to the field of sociocultural and sociolinguistic features that had to be left out for this

paper, such as why those two varieties were chosen for the portrayal of both characters and the implications such representation entail.

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Appendix

Appendix A

“The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince

Now this is a story all about how
 My life got flipped-turned upside down
 And I'd like to take a minute
 Just sit right there
 I'll tell you how I became the prince of a town called Bel-Air

In west Philadelphia born and raised

On the playground was where I spent most of my days
Chillin' out maxin' relaxin' all cool
And all shooting some b-ball outside of the school
When a couple of guys who were up to no good
Started making trouble in my neighborhood
I got in one little fight and my mom got scared
She said, "You're movin' with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air."

I begged and pleaded with her day after day
But she packed my suitcase and sent me on my way
She gave me a kiss and then she gave me my ticket.
I put my Walkman on and said, "I might as well kick it."

First class, yo, this is bad
Drinking orange juice out of a champagne glass.
Is this what the people of Bel-Air living like?
Hmm, this might be alright.

But wait I hear they're prissy, bourgeois, all that
Is this the type of place that they just send this cool cat?
I don't think so
I'll see when I get there
I hope they're prepared for the prince of Bel-Air

Well, the plane landed and when I came out
There was a dude who looked like a cop standing there with my name out
I ain't trying to get arrested yet
I just got here
I sprang with the quickness like lightning, disappeared

I whistled for a cab and when it came near
The license plate said "Fresh" and it had dice in the mirror
If anything I could say that this cab was rare
But I thought, "Nah, forget it."
– "Yo, home to Bel-Air."

I pulled up to the house about 7 or 8
 And I yelled to the cabbie, “Yo home smell ya later.”
 I looked at my kingdom
 I was finally there
 To sit on my throne as the Prince of Bel-Air

Appendix B

Conversation between Will (W) and Geoffrey (G) in the first scene of Episode 1, Season 1, of *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.

W: “Hey, Uncle Phil! Oh man! How ya doin’?”

G: “I am not your uncle Philip.”

W: “Oh uh my fault, man. I musta got the wrong crib. But ayo, I didn’t know there were so many brothers livin’ in this neighbourhood. We doin’ alright, huh?”

G: “You have the right house. I am Geoffrey, your uncle’s butler.”

W: “Oh okay, well, uh cheerio an’ all that rot. [...] Bring the horses ‘round, would you?”

G: “If you will follow me, I will show you to your room, Master William.”

W: “Hey man, it’s cool if you just call me *Will*, man.”

G: “Master William, tradition dictates that a clean, unbreakable line be drawn between a family and their butler. Therefore, it is necessary for the operation of the household that you address me as *Geoffrey* and I in turn address you by your proper title. *Master William*.”

W: “Who are you? Robo butler, man?”

G: “Come with me, Master William.”

W: “Yo, yo, G, G, G, lemme rap to you for a second, man. All this Master William stuff, man, I’m not down with that, man. Make it sound like we back on a plantation. Somethin’ like *Massah William, Massah William!* Let’s come up with somethin’ better that you could call me!”

G: “What would you prefer?!”

W: “Check this. *His royal Freshness*. That’s dope!”

G: “Master William, walk this way.”

Appendix C

Conversation between Will (W) and Geoffrey (G) in the first scene of Episode 1, Season 1, of *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (IPA).

W: heɪ 'ʌŋkl fɪl. ʊʊ mæ. haʊ jə 'duːɪn

G: aɪ æm nɒt jɔːr 'ʌŋkl 'fɪlɪp

W: ʊʊ ʌ mɑː fɔlt mæ. aː mʌst gət ðə rɒŋ kɪɪb. bʌ 'eɪʊʊ aː 'dɪdənt noʊ ðeə wə sʊʊ
'meni 'brʌðəz 'lɪvɪn ɪn dɪs 'neɪbəˌhʊd. wɪ'duːn ˌɔl'reɪt hʌ

G: juː hæv ðə reɪt haʊs. aɪ æm 'dʒefrɪ jɔːr 'ʌŋklz 'bʌtlə.

W: ʊʊ ˌʊʊ'keɪ wɛl ʌ 'ʃɪrɪʊʊ ænd ɔl ðæt rət [...] brɪŋ ðə 'haʊəzɪz raʊnd wʊd ju

G: ɪf juː wɪl 'fɒləʊ miː aɪ wɪl ʃəʊ juː tuː jɔː ruːm 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm

W: heɪ mæ ɪts kul ɪf ju dʒɪs kɔl mi wɪl mæ

G: 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm trə'dɪʃən 'dɪkteɪts ðæt ə kliːn ˌʌn'breɪkəbl laɪn biː drɔːn bɪ'twiːn
ə 'fæmɪli ænd ðeə 'bʌtlə. 'ðeəfɔː ɪt ɪz 'nesɪsəri fɔː ði ˌɒpə'reɪʃən ɒv ə 'haʊshəʊld ðæt
juː ə'dres miː æz 'dʒefrɪ ænd aɪ ɪn tɜːn ə'dres juː baɪ jɔː 'prɒpə 'taɪtl. 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm

W: ɑr ju 'rəʊboʊ 'bʌtlə mæ

G: kʌm wɪð miː 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm

W: jʊʊ jʊʊ dʒɪ dʒɪ dʒɪ lɛmi ræp tə ju fɔː ə 'sekən mæ. ɔl dɪs 'mɑːstə 'wɪljəm stʌf mæ
aːm nʌt daʊn wɪð ðæt mæ. meɪk ɪt saʊn laɪk wɪ bæk ʌn ə ˌplæn'teɪʃən. 'mɑːsə
'wɪljəm mɑːsə 'wɪljəm. lɛts kʌm ʌp wɪð 'sʌmθɪn 'betə ðæt ju kʊd kɔl mi

G: wɒt wʊd juː pri'fɜː

W: ʃɛk dɪs. hɪz 'rɔɪəl 'frɛʃnəs. dæts doʊp

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Published in:

Student Journal of the Department of Anglophone Studies / 2 (2020), pp. 67-82

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DOI: 10.17185/duepublico/71247

URN: urn:nbn:de:hbz:464-20200121-161945-3

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