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Junior Year Writing

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Final Consonant Cluster Reduction in African American English

00:00:00-00:00:07

[A red soda can. The words “Soda?,” “Pop?,” and “Coke?” appear. Green check marks.]

Sophia He: What do you call this: soda? Pop? Coke? Actually, all of these answers are right.

00:00:07-00:00:17

[A map of the United States. Stick figures appear.]

He: If you live in the United States, you’ve probably heard how some people speak English differently from one another. In fact, there are over 30 different variants of American English in the United States.

00:00:17-00:00:28

[Stick figures saying “Pahk the cah in hahvahd yahd!!” and “I love that drass on you!!”]

He: Maybe you’ve heard “Pahk the cah in hahvahd yahd!!” in the streets of Boston. Or maybe you’ve heard someone from California say “I love that drass on you!!” These are both language variations.

00:00:28-00:00:37

[African American English (aka AAE)]

He: But in this video, we’re going to be talking about another language variation that you may have possibly heard of called African American English, also known as AAE.

00:00:37-00:00:45

[Stick figures on US map. Some of them now have labels saying “speaks AAE.”]

He: Alright, let’s get back to that map we saw earlier. African American English is an English variation spoken by millions of speakers across the country.

00:00:45-00:00:55

[Stick figure reading a book titled “AAE.” The stick figure is labeled “Linguistics Researcher”; a question mark is near their head. The figure looks confused then continues reading. Then, the figure looks surprised.]

He: Although linguists don’t have concrete evidence on the origin of African American English, today’s research suggests that African American English has been spoken as early as the 17th century.

00:00:55-00:01:03

[Stick figures with labels “speaks AAE.” The words “unprofessional,” “deficit language,” “Gen-Z slang,” and “slang” appear in big red letters, then are crossed out.]

He: A common misconception is that African American English is unprofessional or it’s just slang. However, research determines that this is not the case at all.

00:01:03-00:01:10

[Stick figure reading “AAE” book. The page of the book says AAE basics with many complicated symbols and equations.]

He: In fact, African American English is an extremely complex language variation with its own set of sound and grammar rules.

00:01:10-00:01:19

[Checklist of “AAE Features” including “cool AAE feature,” another cool AAE feature,” “Consonant Cluster Reduction,” “yet another cool AAE feature,” “a sick AAE feature,” and “another sick AAE feature.”]

He: In this video, we're going to look at one of the many features that are found in African American English called final consonant cluster reduction.

00:01:19-00:01:30

[The words “Consonant cluster” and “best” with “st” of “best” underlined.]

He: Now, before we get too technical, let's start with the basics. When linguists say consonant cluster, they refer to two consonant sounds put together like “st” in the word “best.”

00:01:30-00:01:35

[Stick figure looking confused.]

He: But if you're an English speaker, you're probably familiar with how weird the English spelling system is.

00:01:35-00:01:51

[The word “though” with the “gh” underlined and a speech bubble saying “I’m silent!” which changes to a frowny face when the speaker says “sorry, “gh.” Also, an angry stick figure shouting “thouguhhuh!”]

He: Why is it pronounced as “though” and not “thouguhhuh”? Even though it looks like “though” ends with a consonant cluster, English speakers know that the “gh” is silent. When linguists look at consonant clusters, they really only mean the ones that aren't silent. So, sorry, “gh.”

00:01:51-00:01:57

[The word “Voicing.”]

He: One more thing that we should cover before jumping into consonant cluster reduction is called voicing.

00:01:57-00:02:16

[The letter "g" with a profile outline of someone speaking. Red lines are coming from their throat. Text above reads: "vibration = voiced." Next to that, the letter "s" with a profile outline of someone speaking. No lines are coming from their throat. Text above reads: "No vibration = voiceless."]

He: Go ahead and touch your throat and say "go." Did you feel your throat vibrate? Now say "s." Did you notice how your throat didn't vibrate that time? This vibration is a good indicator that determines what consonant is voiced. In this case, "g" is voiced and "s" is voiceless.

00:02:16-00:02:32

[The letter "f" with a profile outline of someone speaking. Text above reads: "Voiceless." Next to that, the letter "v" with a profile outline of someone speaking. Red lines are coming from their throat. Text above reads: "Voiced."]

He: Let's try that vibration trick again for these consonants "f" and "v." "f." "v." Did you feel that? "V" vibrated your throat, didn't it? That means "v" is voiced and "f" is voiceless.

00:02:32-00:02:42

[The letter "p" with a profile outline of someone speaking. Text above reads: "Voiceless." Next to that, the letter "b" with a profile outline of someone speaking. Red lines are coming from their throat. Text above reads: "Voiced."]

He: Now try it again with "p" and "b." Which ones's voiced? You're right, "b" is voiced and "p" is voiceless.

00:02:42-00:03:02

[The word “Best.” The “t” drops away then reappears.]

He: Let's go back to the word “best.” If you take a look at this word, most American English speakers would say it like “best.” However, an African American English speaker might pronounce this as “bes.” This phenomenon is final consonant cluster reduction, where consonant clusters like “s” and “t” found at the end of words are reduced or simplified to just “s.”

00:03:02-00:03:18

[The words “best,” “desk,” “next,” “cold,” “child,” and “left.” Then, the last letter of each word is slashed through in red.]

He: This doesn't just happen to “best.” All of these words can have final consonant cluster reduction. “Desk,” “next,” “cold,” “child,” and “left” could be pronounced as “des,” “nex,” “col,” “chil,” and “lef” with final consonant cluster reduction.

00:03:18-00:03:24

[Stick figure looking confused, scratching their head.]

He: Now you may be wondering when does this happen? Does this happen in every word with consonant clusters?

00:03:24-00:03:30

[Critic with a tag reading “consonant cluster reduc.” saying “No.”]

He: The answer is no, and final consonant cluster reduction only occurs in some specific environments.

00:03:30-00:03:44

[The word “best” with the “st” underlined. Speech bubbles appear from it saying: “I'm voiceless!” and “So am I!” The “t” is then slashed through.]

He: Remember voicing? Consonant clusters are found to be reduced when both consonants share voicing mannerisms. In this case, “s” and “t” are both voiceless. When they share voicing, the final consonant “t” is likely to be dropped.

00:03:44-00:04:03

[The words “best singer.” The word “consonant” points to the “s” in “singer.”]

He: Another way to find out if it is dropped is if you take a look at the word that comes after it. The final consonant is often dropped by African American English speakers when the next word begins with a consonant. For example, if this is the word that comes after “best,” most African American English speakers would say “bes singer.”

00:04:03-00:04:11

[The words “best airplane.” The word “vowel” points to the “a” in “airplane.” A speech bubble from “st” says: “I’m staying!”]

He: But if you change this word to “airplane,” most African American English speakers would say “best airplane.” See how the “t” is still there?

00:04:11-00:04:19

[A spinning Earth with a question mark.]

He: Now, where does final consonant cluster reduction even come from? To answer this question, we need to know where African American English came from as well.

00:04:19-00:04:28

[Map of the Atlantic Ocean. Stick figures from West Africa are taken to the United States.]

He: Some researchers believe that African American English was influenced by West African languages when African slaves were taken to the United States in the 17th century.

00:04:28-00:04:40

[Map of United States. A smiling stick figure labeled “White Southern American” says “blablablablabla.” A group of stick figures are frowning.]

He: Other researchers believe that it was the isolation between African slaves and white Southern American English speakers and its effects on African slaves’ language acquisition that African American English would develop to what it is today.

00:04:40-00:04:44

[Map of the United States. A stick figure looks confused.]

He: Unfortunately, the origins of final consonant cluster reduction face a similar dilemma.

00:04:44-00:04:51

[Stick figures reading AAE books. The words: “West African Language Influence.”]

He: However, linguists found that final consonant cluster reduction may have most likely been influenced by West African languages.

00:04:51-00:04:55

[Map of West Africa with the words “Consonant Clusters.” A speech bubble saying: “I have no idea what you are.”]

He: West African languages generally didn't have any consonant clusters at the end of words at all.

00:04:55-00:05:04

[Checklist of “AAE Features” including “cool AAE feature,” another cool AAE feature,” “Consonant Cluster Reduction,” “yet another cool AAE feature,” “a sick AAE feature,” and “another sick AAE feature.” “Consonant Cluster Reduction” is highlighted and “Reduction” is crossed out.]

He: Linguists hypothesized that the final consonant cluster reductions may not have been produced by African American English at all, as they were never there in the first place.

00:05:04-00:05:13

[A search bar with “Final consonant cluster reduction in AAE” resulting in “Search not found.”

A West Africa map with a speech bubble saying “Rude.”]

He: However, linguistic researchers are still not completely sure due to the very limited research done on the origins of final consonant cluster reduction.

00:05:13-00:05:16

[Stressed stick figure saying “wait... hold on...”]

He: Okay, whoa, that was a lot of information at once.

00:05:16-00:05:44

[Checklist of “Today's Topics,” including “AAE is a complex variation!, AE isn't slang!, Final Consonant Clusters, ‘Best’ vs. ‘Bes’, and West African influence?” Each item is checked off.]

He: So, here's a quick summary of what we covered today. African American English is a language variation that has their own individual rules and systems. We must not regard it as slang or unprofessional English. Final consonant cluster reduction is where consonant clusters at the end of words are simplified in certain environments, like when they share voicing. And maybe final consonant cluster reduction came from West African language influences due to the lack of final consonant clusters. It seems most likely, but we must be open to

00:05:44-00:05:46

[SpongeBob making a rainbow with his hands.]

He: the possibilities.

00:05:46-00:05:50



[The words “What do you think?”]

He: What do you think? Be sure to leave a comment below and your own hypotheses.

00:05:50-00:05:57

[The words “Like and subscribe.”]

He: And don't forget to smash that like button and subscribe for more cool linguistics content.

See you in the next video.