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AN ANALYSIS OF BLACK ENGLISH USED IN “THE COLOR PURPLE” NOVEL BY ALICE WALKER

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ABSTRACT

Black English is a variety of English spoken by many African Americans. Most of the people consider that Black English as a badly spoken version of Standard English. Therefore, this is the reason why the syntactic feature of Black English important to analyze. The knowledge about the syntactic feature of Black English may results that people will understand and recognize Black English. This research is aimed at describing the syntactic feature of Black English that Alice Walker used in her novel and to find the most dominant feature which occurs in the novel. This research used the syntactic analysis based on Lisa J. Green’s perspective. Then, the data were analyzed by using descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected by downloading, reading, classifying and coding the data then analyzed by presenting the collected data, describing the used of the syntactic feature, and making a conclusion. The results of this research is the researcher found 10 syntactic features of Black English used in The Color Purple novel, they are; multiple negations, negative inversion, zero auxiliary, lack of subject-verb agreement, ain’t as negated auxiliary, lack of auxiliary in wh-question and yes-no question, existential it, aspectual be and lack of genitive-‘s.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistic, Black English, Syntactic Feature, The Color Purple.*

INTRODUCTION

Black English is a variety of English as a dialect that is used by many African-Americans in the USA which shares a set of grammatical and other linguistic features that distinguish it from various other American dialects (Fought, 2006). However, speakers of Black English are sometimes looked down upon, lazy, ignorant or stupid and most of the people think that Black English is just a badly spoken version of standard English and marred by a lot of ignorant mistakes in grammar or syntax (Pullum: 1999). However, for some people, Black English is a symbol of black identity and even black resistance, and many black writers have made a point of writing in Black English. The most well-known example of an entire novel in Black English is Alice Walker’s novel “The Color Purple”. Hence, this is important to analyze the syntactic feature of Black English that occurs in the novel. The knowledge about the syntactic feature of Black English may results that people will understand the novel and recognize Black English. Therefore, this study analyzed about “What are the syntactic features of Black English used in “The Color Purple” novel by Alice Walker?” to get understanding of the sentences.

This research aimed to describe the syntactic features of Black English that are used in “The Color Purple”. However, this research practically is expected to give a valuable knowledge in the development of linguistics in sociolinguistics field in general and especially in the study of syntactical feature for Black English. Theoretically, this research can be a reference of sociolinguistics field for the further researcher and the readers. For the researcher, this research can enlarge her knowledge about sociolinguistics especially the syntactic feature of Black English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses the descriptive qualitative method to facilitate the data that was analyzed and to respond the research question about what is the syntactic features of Black English that are used in “The Color Purple” novel by Alice Walker. The source of data in this research is “The Color Purple” novel written by Alice Walker which published in 1982. Researcher collects the data by downloaded the novel “The Color Purple”, read the novel, classified the data, and the researcher code directly to the data which contains the syntactic feature of Black English that found in “The Color Purple” novel. The researcher then analyzed those data with this step below :

1. Presenting the data

The data was presented by making a data reduction of the data collection. The researcher sorted out based on the syntactic feature of Black English,

2. Describing the data

The researcher described the data by using novel *The Color Purple* to apprehend the used of the syntactic feature of Black English.

3. Concluding

4. In the last step, the researcher gave the conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research used Lisa J. Green's perspective to analyze the novel “The Color Purple”. However, this research focuses on the analysis of the syntactic features of Black English, such as the use of negation, auxiliary, existential it and dey, question, aspectual be and genitive-'s in Black English.

Multiple negation

Multiple negators such as *don't*, *no* and *nothing* can be used in a single negative sentence. Particularly, the main characteristic of this form is “the use of two or more negative morphemes to communicate a single negation” (Martin & Wolfram, 1998) and “there is no limit on the number of negators that can be used” (Green, 2002). In multiple negation constructions, negation can be marked on auxiliaries (e.g., *don't*, *didn't*, *ain't*, etc.) and indefinite nouns such as *anybody* (*nobody*) and *anything* (*nothing*). The researcher found this construction in the novel as follows:

You better not never tell nobody but God. (Page: 1)

The sentence above uses multiple negative which have three negators. In the sentence above, the negator *not* makes the whole sentence negative, while the second negator *never* doesn't contribute any additional negative meaning to the sentence, then the sentence is considered as negative sentence, meanwhile, the negative indefinite *nobody* should be *anybody* in Standard American English. Furthermore, in Standard English the sentence should be "*You better not to tell anybody but God*". The speakers of Black English prefer to use a stressing negativity of a sentence by putting multiple negators.

Double Negation

Another form of negation is double negation which have two negation in a single sentence. This construction can be found in the novel as follow:

She say long as she been a teacher she never know nobody want to learn bad as Nettie and me". (Page: 11)

The sentences above use double negative where Standard English using it considers as a positive sentence for using a double negative in one clause. However, Black English permit using double or even multiple negations, the meaning of the sentence is still negative. Double negative were used instead of the term *anyone/anybody*, *any more* and *anything*. The speakers of Black English often prefer to use the word *nothing* than *anything* to stress the negative meaning of a sentence. Then, the sentence above use the negator *never* to makes the whole sentence negative, then use the negation *nobody* instead of *anybody*. However, the negator *nobody* doesn't contribute any additional negative meaning to the sentence. Therefore, in Standard English the sentence should be "*She says since she has been a teacher she has never known anybody who wanted to learn as badly as Nettie and me*".

Negative Inversion

Negative inversion can be marked on an initial negated auxiliary is followed by a negative indefinite noun phrase such as *nobody*, *nothing* and *etc* (Green: 2002). The construction of indefinite noun phrase that can be inverted with the negative verb particle is used for emphasis. This construction is found in the novel, as follow :

Can't nothing make me happier than seeing you again, I think, but I don't say nothing". (Page: 222)

In the sentence above, the negated auxiliary *can't* in the initial sentence is followed by negative indefinite noun phrase *nothing* which does not name anyone or anything in particular. In standard English, the negated auxiliary and negative indefinite noun phrase should be occurs in inversion. Therefore, the sentence above should be "*Nothing can make me happier than seeing you again, I think, but I don't say anything*" in standard English. However, the construction of negative inversion which have double negators is used for emphasis the negation.

Zero Auxiliary

Zero auxiliary refers to sentences in Black English that do not have a form of the auxiliary *be*. However, As Labov (1969) has explained, the rule for its use is really quite simple. The auxiliary can be write zero in the situation where the *auxiliary be* in the sentence can be contract in SAE (Standard American English), then it can be delete in Black English The researcher found this construction in the novel, as follow:

She Ø happy, cause he good to her now. (Page: 2)

The construction of the sentence above is zero auxiliary that occurs in a nominal sentence which actually the auxiliary acts as the main verb. However, the *auxiliary be* in the sentence that can be contracted in Standard English will be deleted in the sentence of Black English. Then, the sentence directly combines the subject and the predicate noun without any verb. However, in Standard English, the auxiliary *be is* should be appear the sentence above between the subject and the predicate noun since the subject are the third singular subject. Therefore, the sentence above should be “*She is happy because he is good to her now*” in standard English.

Subject-Verb Agreement

In Standard American English, if the subject is occupied by a third person singular noun, the verb must be inflected with *s/es*. However, in Black English, the used of single verb and single auxiliary form may be used with both singular and plural subjects in the present tense (Green: 2002). The researcher found this construction in the novel, as follow:

She don't know but she say she gon fine out. (Page: 7)

In the Black English's sentences above, a single auxiliary form *do* is used with a third singular subject which in the Standard English the singular form for the third person subject should be followed by an *infinitive+s/es* if the sentence is formed in simple present sentence. So, in the sentence above, the third person subject *she* should be followed by an *infinitive (do) + s/es* in the Standard English. Then, the auxiliary *do* and negated auxiliary *don't* in the sentences on the table above should be *doesn't* in Standard English. Therefore, the sentence above should be “*She doesn't know, but she says she going to find out*” in standard English.

Negative form *ain't*

In Black English, *ain't* is used as a general preverbal negative for present tense *be* (*am not, isn't, aren't*) and for the perfect auxiliary *haven't/hasn't* (Green: 2002). However, unlike most European American vernacular varieties in generalizing, Black English is also used the negative form *ain't* for *didn't* (Wolfram: 2004). The construction of negative fom *ain't* was found in the following sentences in the novel:

Good behavior ain't good enough for them, say Sofia. (Page: 94)

In the Black English's sentence above *ain't* as a negator or negated auxiliary is located after the third person singular subject. So, the function of *ain't* in the sentence above is refers to

present tense be *is not* in Standard English. Therefore, the sentence above should be "*Good behavior is not good enough for them, say Sofia.*" in standard English.

Existential *it* and *dey*

In Black English, the construction *It* and *dey* are used to indicate that something exists. Green (2002) note that the construction can only be constructed with an existential element (*it* and *dey*) and following obligatory form of *be* (inflected or aspectual), *have* or *got*, which will be referred as a linker between an existential element and the following noun phrase. This construction found in the novel, as follow:

It got sort of a canopy over it now, made out of old blankets or something. (Page: 46)

The Black English's sentence above is an existential *it* construction that can be identified with the construction existential *it* and following obligatory form of *got* as a linker between an existential element and the following noun phrase *sort of a canopy*. Then, it can be concluded that *It* occurs in sentence to indicate that something exists. The sentence literally talk about wagon, Celie says "*Five days later I look way off up the road and see the wagon coming back. It got sort of a canopy over it now, made out of old blankets or something*". Then, the sentence means that there is canopy that made out of old blankets over the wagon now. However, the sentence above should be "*There is sort of a canopy over it now, made out of old blankets or something.*" in standard English.

Yes-no questions

According to Green (2002), yes-no questions construction in Black English are formed with no auxiliaries in the initial position of the sentences that indicating that they are questions, but question marks in these sentences indicate them as questions. This construction found in the novel, as follows:

He know anything bout it? ast Mr___. (Page: 96)

In the sentence of Black English above, there is no auxiliary in the initial position of the sentence indicating that it is question. However, in the Standard English, the auxiliary *does* should be occurs in front of the third singular subject to indicate that the sentence is a question forms. Therefore, the sentence above should be "*Does he know anything about it? Ask Mr___.*" in standard English.

Wh-questions

In Black English, the form of *wh*-questions are constructed without subject-auxiliary inversion and the auxiliary verb (Wolfram: 2004b). The patterns for this construction are depending on the placement of the auxiliary or whether there is an auxiliary in the question, in other word, the auxiliary for this construction are either follows the subject, or it does not occur in the sentence (Green: 2002). This construction is found in the following sentence:

Squeak say, What you mean? Dis her house? She walk out on you. (Page: 87)

The researcher discover that in the sentence above, there is no auxiliary after the subject. It means that the Black English's construction above is follow the (WH-WORD + SUBJECT) wh-question form of Black English. However, in the standard English there should be any auxiliary after wh-question form. Thus, in the sentences above, there should be auxiliary *do* after wh-question form to acquire the syntactical rules of Standard English. Therefore, the sentence above should be "*Squeak says, What do you mean? Is this her house? She walks out on you*" in standard English.

Another construction for wh-question in Black English are occurs in the following sentences:

Why you don't work no more? he ast his daddy. (Page: 28)

The Black English's construction above are follow the (WH-WORD + SUBJECT + AUXILIARY) wh-question form of Black English. However, the subject-auxiliary inversion should be occurs after wh-question in the Standard English's question form. Therefore, in the Standard English, the sentence above should be "Why don't you work anymore? He asked his dad".

Aspectual *be*

In Black English, the use of a form of *be* can indicate whether the performance of the verb is of a habitual nature. According to Green (2002), aspectual *be* can be expressed only using adverbs such as *always* and *usually* in Standard English. Green also note that the aspectual marker *be* can occur in front of *ing*-forms, adjectives, nouns and prepositional phrase. This construction found in the following sentence:

She be sitting there with me shelling peas or helping the children with they spelling. (Page: 17)

The sentences above are the constructions where aspectual *be* occurs in front of *-ing* forms, *be sitting* which is indicates habitual action in Black English. Habitual *be* used in the sentences of *The Color Purple* novel to indicate repeated, habitual action. It means that something is done usually, repeatedly or in a habitual manner, which is contradiction with Standard English that uses *be* as either auxiliary or copulative verb it functions either as a helper or a link between subject and complement. However, in the Standard English, the sentence above should be "*She usually sit there with me shelling peas or helping the children with their spelling.*"

Genitive –'s

According to Green (2002), in possessive or genitive contexts the marker genitive-s is not compulsory since word order enables speakers to perceive the meaning of the phrase. Genitive-'s means that speakers of Black English omit possessive –'s in the sentence. Possession may also be indicated by *-of*, however, Black English speakers also express it by placing the name of the possessor in front of the possessed. This kind of construction found in the novel, as follows:

Sofia eye go cool. She look him up and down. (Page: 86)

In the Black English's sentence above, there is no genitive –'s to show the possessive relationship between the possessor *sofia* and the possessed *eye*, the word order are enough to show the possessive relationship between possessor and possessed, that means that the possessed is belong to possessor. However, in Standard English genitive-'s should be place in the possessor to show the possessive relationship. Therefore, in the standard English, the sentences should be *Sofia's eye goes cool. She looks him up and down*

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that *Black English* is a variety of colloquial English which shares some distinctive syntactical features that different from the Standard English. Moreover, most people think that the syntactic feature of Black English is carelessness or language with mistake since it seems defying the strict rule of Standard English. Nevertheless, syntactic feature of Black English actually has its own strict and complicated rule. Because of its rule, Black English is included in varieties of American English dialect. Thus, learning Standard English is necessary, but knowing other varieties of English dialects, is good to open up our mind

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