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AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY’S A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the intricate relationship between language, identity, and social dynamics, with a specific focus on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as portrayed in Lorraine Hansberry’s play A Raisin in the Sun. The paper highlights how language serves as a powerful tool for characterizing individuals and reflects their aspirations, affiliations, and generational conflicts. The characters in the play are analyzed in terms of their language use, revealing distinct patterns. Ultimately, the paper discusses the significance of language in shaping identity and emphasizes how African American characters in the play navigate linguistic challenges while striving for social mobility and self-acceptance in a racially biased society.

Key Words: *African American Vernacular English, AAVE, identity, performative, social mobility, language variety*

Introduction

The way a person speaks is an obvious indicator of their background, which includes their profession, social status, level of education, gender, and race. Dialects carry social meaning and the language variety that we use is a mark of our identity, revealing who we are and where we come from. Peterson (2020) explains that there is a direct connection between relative social power and the use of language. In particular, people are judged based on the level of standardization of the dialect they use. There is no single definition of standard language since there are different varieties of Standard English worldwide. The standard variety that is relevant for the development of this paper is standard American English, also termed General American. According to Trudgill (1995), Standard American English is a dialect “usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native

speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations" (p. 5).

While standard forms are associated with correct usage, dialects designated nonstandard become stigmatized. Standard English is the voice of authority, promoted through the education system and the media. However, no dialect is intrinsically better than any other. Linguists such as Lippi-Green (1997) maintain that Standard English is a hypothetical construct but still, there is a bias towards this abstracted, idealized dialect. Moreover, Thomas (2003) emphasizes that "the selection of one dialect and its forms over others for promotion as the standard is only a result of historical accident, not linguistic superiority" (p. 178). This means that there is no objective or linguistic reason to mark Standard English as superior. Widespread promotion of the ideology of a standard continues despite this fact because many people still believe that this dialect is "proper English." In other words, Standard English holds a high level of "overt prestige" because speaking it is considered crucial in formal settings.

Linguistic standards are set by speakers with high levels of economic and political power, while social groups who speak nonstandard English have less social power. They are disenfranchised and their language is described as 'bad' or 'broken English'. It becomes evident that such descriptions of dialects have more to do with a society's social systems than with the language itself. Nonstandard dialects are deemed corrupted because their speakers lack mainstream social power and prestige. Linguistic discrimination can thus serve as a proxy for racism and classism. Classifying someone's language as 'bad English' becomes an effective means of 'othering' (Peterson, 2020). Because this variety is linked to social prestige, it is considered a key to success because it offers its speakers certain social advantages and it improves their life prospects. Not only that, but it is also supposed to represent people who are more logical, productive, globally oriented, and less likely to be perceived as having committed a crime. The academic and popular belief that Standard English has such importance is termed the 'myth of Standard English' (Lanehart, 2001). This dialect is mainly associated with white, upper-middle-class speakers who promote linguistic assimilation for members of other social communities, including African Americans.

Speakers of nonstandard dialects might understand that their speech is stigmatized in mainstream society but still refuse to assimilate linguistically. This is because dialectal forms are important for identity formation, in-group solidarity, and local pride. Though nonstandard speech does not have prestige in the wider society, it can hold a high level of "covert prestige." Labov (1966) used this term to refer to the prestige of a language variety or form

that stems from its value for group solidarity. African Americans, for example, will commonly use features of AAVE while interacting with their community to evoke familiarity and build a sense of belonging.

Speakers of a nonstandard dialect might rightly refuse to abandon their culture but still acquire full control of the standard language. Most people alter their speech according to their interlocutor and the social situation they are in. This is termed 'code-switching', referring to the practice of shifting a language variety according to the appropriate social context or topic (Morgan, 2002). Speakers will use their vernacular in an informal or intimate setting but will shift to the standard dialect in an academic or professional environment. Though acquiring the standard is the goal for many speakers, code-switching has been subject to objections. This is because speakers of a nonstandard dialect bear the responsibility of learning a second dialect if they wish to succeed in mainstream society. They speak a language that is not held in esteem so they must alter it. Such biased attitudes can cause nonstandard speakers to feel insecure about their vernacular dialect.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

According to Wolfram & Schilling (2015), studies of AAVE surpass those on other social and regional dialects of American English due to persistent sociopolitical controversies related to the speech of African Americans. It is difficult to provide a single definition of this dialect because its speakers come from all socioeconomic backgrounds and not all black Americans use it. Morgan (2002) defines AAVE as "the language, discourse and interactional styles and usage of those socialized in the speech community" (p. 65). It was previously thought that being African American and not belonging to the middle class were equivalent to speaking AAVE. However, this racial and economic classification is incorrect. Though there are shared features that constitute AAVE, these forms vary across regional, age, and social groups. It is certain that AAVE is a valid, systematic dialect with unique semantic, grammatical and rhetorical patterns and pronunciation. During the 1960s in the U.S., linguists such as William Labov and Walt Wolfram challenged the assertion that AAVE is illogical, claiming instead that it is indeed rule-governed. The dialect is an inextricable part of a community, culture, and history.

Despite linguists' efforts to convince the public that AAVE is a legitimate English dialect, there is still a widespread belief that it is merely street slang, broken English, and the language of an ignorant urban underclass (Pullum, 1999). There is significant linguistic prejudice towards its speakers. Stereotypically, AAVE usage is related to ignorance,

criminality, and immorality so speakers should abandon it in order to obtain education and employment (Morgan, 2002). This explains why numerous African Americans code-switch. Working-class African Americans might not have the opportunity to acquire General American because the standard dialect is useful in certain environments that are unattainable for them. Interestingly, many middle-class African Americans use only Standard English, believing that encouraging AAVE among its speakers means keeping their race down. According to this view, the inability to use the standard means a lack of education or employment.

On the other hand, using Standard English exclusively in intragroup interaction might symbolize self-hate and promotion of white values. Ideology in the African-American community racializes employing the standard dialect as 'talking white' (Rahman, 2004). Those who abandon AAVE might risk losing community membership. Such opposing attitudes are the reason why many African Americans experience what Smitherman (2006) termed a "linguistic push-pull" (p. 77). AAVE speakers might refuse to abandon their vernacular because it serves as a symbol of ethnic identity but, simultaneously, they understand that it is the target of discrimination in mainstream society.

Hansberry effectively employed AAVE in her play to realistically disclose the social and regional features of her characters. She includes the language spoken by African Americans in Southside Chicago to paint an authentic picture of a working-class family in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, AAVE in the play reflects the characters' aspirations, feelings, and stance towards the black community in a particular scene. Dialectal features also demonstrate generational conflicts among the characters, particularly Mama and her children. Mama Lena uses a wide range of AAVE constructions and incorporates aspects of southern rural AAVE in her speech. Walter and Beneatha's language is less concentrated with dialectal features since they represent the ambitious, urban younger generation. They also occasionally code-switch, unlike their mother.

Speaking One's Identity: African American Identity Formation

Raisin in the Sun (*Raisin* further in the text) is in many ways a play about identity formation – most especially, as Borrego (2015) argues, in the binary relation of individuality vs. the collective good. Personal dreams that numerous characters espouse must inevitably be sacrificed for a greater (potential) good. This is what Walter Younger – a staunch believer in American individualism and the American Dream – realizes by the end of the play when he 'defers' his personal dream for the collective good of the entire Younger family.

In the fifth chapter of her recent book entitled *Judith Butler, Race and Education* (2018), Charlotte Chaderton argues, relying on Butler's contribution to the theory of the performative, that race also operates as a performative. Chaderton (2018) follows Butler's notion of 'the performative' which is "the process by which, for Butler, identities are produced," adding that "performativity is also the process by which norms are (re)produced" (p. 109). Chaderton's own contribution to the theory of performativity then introduces race as a potential performative when viewed through the Butlerian notion of such a phenomenon. As she states, "Like gender, through a Butlerian lens race [...] function[s] as a performative: race is produced and reproduced through actions, practices and *utterances* which create a reality or perceived reality" (2018, p. 110, emphasis added). This is ultimately the main preoccupation of this paper. However, whereas Chaderton focuses exclusively on issues of race in educational settings, this paper focuses on the premise that 'race as a performative' can be found in Lorraine Hansberry's play *Raisin* as a mainly verbal undertaking. Specifically, this paper focuses on the play's (socio-)linguistic characteristics ("utterances" in Chaderton's quote above).

Raisin has enjoyed continuous success ever since its first performance on Broadway, and numerous books and articles have already tackled its political/ideological themes, especially in the context of the American Dream, as well as identity formation on various characters' parts. In that sense, numerous authors have tackled how the play's characters 'express their identity' through myriad different representational modes. This paper is interested in precisely that aspect of *Raisin*; namely, how various identities are 'expressed' literally, that is, verbally throughout the play. This paper argues that 'race as a performative' (including the white race) is predicated upon the process of 'stylization' of acts that are repeated through time. This process must include the privileging of one set of norms (historically the norms of the white race) and discrediting all others. In that way, African American collective identity which comes with its own substrata of cultural, metaphysical, and linguistic aspects has been viewed as "non-normative," and therefore, undesirable by white power structures (Rose, 2014, p. 32).

If we are to understand race as a performative, that is, that race is 'expressed' through subconscious repetition of acts (including linguistic acts), then we have to recognize the crucial role of language and dialects in that process of identity formation. It is through language that race gets expressed and exposed. But precisely because "identities are not actually fixed to bodies" (p. 114) as Chadderton (2018) argues, and are "supposed to be nomadic and mobile, open to a constant play in which subjects performatively enact

temporary selves," as Veen (2020) has recently argued in "Narrative Identity, Subject Formation, and the Transfiguration of Subjects" (p. 43), linguistic characteristics which are ascribed to AAVE can be abandoned for other dialectal variations. This is visible in *Raisin*. Almost all characters in the play are speakers of AAVE, but depending on exterior circumstances, they can (depending on their level of education or acculturation) switch to or use exclusively either Standard English (Joseph Asagai, George Murchison) or other linguistic forms, such as English as spoken by Black slaves which Walter Younger speaks briefly to reflect the historic oppressive quality of African Americans' lives in the U.S. These linguistic 'episodes' in the play reveal that race is indeed a performative since the act of speaking in a particular linguistic formation can be abandoned partially or completely; played with; and used to further advance financially in the racist U.S. of the 1950s.

Moreover, what Hansberry tackled in *Raisin* in the context of identity formation is precisely the 'hybrid' quality of African American identity. Numerous critics have made the connection between *Raisin*'s characters and W. E. B. Du Bois's 'double consciousness' which, according to him, all African Americans possess (Borrego, 2015; Nowrouzi and Faghfori, 2015; Neto, 2011). As he stated, "one ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 1903, as cited in Borrego, 2015, p. 125). This paper aims to explore what characters in *Raisin* best capture this notion of 'double identity' in African-American communities and Younger family in particular, especially how such a phenomenon is linguistically 'visible'. It is the contention of this paper that such characteristics find their way into the dialect and lexicon of those subjects that feel those binary pulls of their identities (being African *and* American simultaneously).

African American Identity Formation through AAVE in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Through the characters in the play, Hansberry highlighted the variety and diversity of AAVE, using language as a powerful tool for characterization. Most characters employ this nonstandard dialect but their speech strikingly varies from one another. The variation of AAVE present in the play shows both trans-generational and geographical shifts that become present in AAVE depending on different geo-temporal *topos*. In the following discussion, this paper analyzes the most prominent characters from *Raisin* which are grouped as such to reveal common traits that individual characters carry through linguistic means. In that sense, the discussion shall focus on the following issues: a) male-female binary relations expressed through AAVE; b) trans-generational shifts of AAVE; c) how a higher level of education

affects the usage of AAVE; d) if AAVE is a hindrance for African Americans who wish to participate in the American Dream and upward social mobility.

Lena Younger (Mama), and Ruth Younger

Mama is the character who uses AAVE the most in the play and her dialect is fairly consistent. This is in line with her values – she is presented as a typical black mother, an upholder of traditional principles who understands the plight of black people in America and does not try to challenge societal structures. As Washington (1988) explains, "Hers is the thinking of a Black woman born near the turn of the century in a racist American society, and she does not understand the modern ways and thinking of her children" (p. 113). Her manner of speaking is well presented in the following quote:

> MAMA: Ain't nobody trying to stop you. I just wonders sometimes why you has to flit so from one thing to another all the time. You ain't never done nothing with all that camera equipment you brought home— (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 45; emphasis added).

There are three prominent features of AAVE in Mama's quote: negative inversion (*ain't nobody*), multiple negation[1] (*ain't never done nothing*), subject-verb disagreement (*you has*; *I wonders*). The verbal suffix –s is commonly omitted in AAVE but the construction *I just wonders* is interesting because it includes a redundant suffix. Wolfram (2004) explains that in Southern rural versions of AAVE, the verbal suffix –s is frequently attached to subjects other than 3rd person singular. This indicates that Mama stands for Southern rural AAVE, while the younger characters use the urban, Southside Chicago variety. This is also supported by a didascaly that describes Beneatha (Mama's daughter): "perhaps the Midwest rather than the South has finally – at last – won out in her inflection" (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 34). This quote suggests that the rest of the Younger family still (partially) uses Southern inflection which only Beneatha – given the generational gap and the level of education – has lost.

Moreover, growing up as a black woman in the South has not only influenced her language, but her thinking, too. Racism and hardships impacted her view of the American Dream, "narrowing her perspective and restricting her beliefs about what a Black person could reasonably expect to achieve in American society" (Washington, 1988, p. 113).

[1] For a detailed discussion on *negative inversion* and *multiple negation* see Bureković (2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) and Bureković & Rizvić (2018).

Additionally, as Julie M. Burrell (2014) argued, "the core crisis in *Raisin* comes from Mama's and Walter's competing versions of masculinity: Mama's, a masculinity that stems from a life-affirming Black tradition; Walter's, a capitalist masculinity that depends upon being the family's sole provider and a wealthy power player" (p. 5). Mama's role as the head of the family means her firm verbal command which she often uses throughout the play – when Beneatha states there is no God, Mama slaps her and commands her: "Now – you say after me, in my mother's house there is still God" (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 48). As Borrego (2015) states about Mama's role in the play in the context of the late 1950s audiences, "The strength of Lena within her family is problematic for whites who saw a black female character's assertion of strength or independence as a threat" (p. 129). Mama's "strength" lies precisely in her verbal command. Her power lies in her ability to yield authority through namely verbal means.

The same, however, cannot be said for her daughter-in-law, Ruth Younger. Because of the historically prevailing sexism within African American communities,[2] Ruth's role of being Walter's wife means Walter constantly puts the blame of his 'un-success story' on Ruth specifically and African American women *grosso modo*. This is reflected in the following quote:

> WALTER: That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world … Don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something.
>
> RUTH: (Drily, but to hurt) There are colored men who do things.
>
> WALTER: No thanks to the colored woman.
>
> RUTH: Well, being a colored woman, I guess I can't help myself none. (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 35)

Ruth is not a confrontational character. She is the tired wife with a boring, repetitive lifestyle who does not strive for greatness but only has simple dreams. Her subservient role in the marriage and in the family is reflected in her way of speaking:

> WALTER: Something the matter with you this morning?
>
> RUTH: No—I'm just sleepy as the devil. What kind of eggs you want? (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 26)

[2] For a detailed discussion about "double oppression" that was/is present for African American women see hooks (1981/2015). For a detailed discussion about intersectional racism and "womanism" as Alice Walker's form of Feminism see Walker (1983/2011).

The previous quote demonstrates another feature of AAVE, the formation of a question without using the auxiliary *do*. Hansberry combined AAVE and Standard English on other occasions too, showing how her characters code-switch. Ruth shifts to Standard English when speaking on the phone with Mrs. Arnold:

> RUTH: (At the phone) Hello—Just a minute. (Goes to door) Walter, it's Mrs. Arnold. (Waits. Goes back to the phone. Tense) Hello. Yes, this is his wife speaking … He's lying down now. Yes … well, he'll be in tomorrow. He's been very sick. (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 95)

Since she is speaking with the wife of Walter's employer, Ruth switches from AAVE to Standard English precisely because the receiver of information on the other side of the telephone is white. This form of 'performativity' (and a form of performance) on Ruth's part reveals a crucial fact – she is very much linguistically capable of using Standard English when circumstances require that of her. The implication, therefore, is that Ruth refuses to construct her identity through such linguistic input most probably because of the stigmatization within the African American community regarding Standard English. She is a cleaning lady who works for white people, and her usage of the English language reflects that.

Beneatha, Joseph Asagai, and George Murchison

Hansberry also featured the speech of educated characters, whose language has been influenced by their level of education. This group includes Beneatha, Joseph Asagai, and George Murchison, whose academic world encourages them to use Standard English ('acting white'). In the following quote, it is evident that Beneatha's speech is more sophisticated than that of her family:

> BENEATHA: (Hissingly) Yes – just look at what the New World hath wrought! … Just look! (She gestures with bitter disgust) There he is! *Monsieur le petit bourgeois noir* – himself! There he is – Symbol of a Rising Class! Entrepreneur! Titan of the system! (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 123-124)

What is visible in this quote is also Beneatha 'playing' with language. She uses antiquated linguistic units (*hath wrought*) and also combines English with French. Standard English is preferred in schools and it is clear that education has an effect on forming speech habits and, in this case, eradicating AAVE. However, Beneatha does opt for AAVE in one instance:

BENEATHA: What they think we going to do—eat 'em? (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 109)

Here, she omits the auxiliary verb *do* and the copula *be*, both prominent characteristics of AAVE. This is an instance of code-switching and Beneatha's way of using her vernacular due to covert prestige. She utters this question as a reaction to white people not wanting her family to move into their neighborhood. Therefore, the usage of AAVE in this situation can be understood as a signal of togetherness in the face of racism. Regardless of this scene, however, Beneatha, like her brother Walter, wishes to participate in social mobility, which means adapting one's linguistic characteristics. Precisely because Beneatha wants to be a doctor (an almost impossible task not just for an African American but for a woman of any race in the 1950s U.S.), she realizes she must adhere to "standard language ideology" which is present in the educational system (Carter and Callesano, 2018, p. 69). Her coeval who belongs to the same educational system, Asagai, reflects the same sentiments. Asagai is an exchange student from Nigeria, but his mastery of the English language (that is, Standard English) is hard to ignore. Because he is an exchange student from an African country who was included in the hegemonic educational system in the U.S., Asagai accepts norms of Standard English even though he harbors anti-colonialist sentiments regarding his own country.

George is another African-American character who does not use AAVE in his everyday communication. For him, Standard English is representative of both his educational background and his family's social status. As a member of a highly affluent (and assimilated) family, George's dialect must sound more 'sophisticated'. And when Beneatha openly states she hates assimilationist African Americans, George replies:

> Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilizations; [...] Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts! (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 75)

Whereas Beneatha sees connections between her identity and her ancestral homeland, George only links his heritage (and African American heritage) to the U.S. His discussion in the quote above shows the animosity he has for his own heritage. Spirituals – one form of opposition of African American slaves against the hegemonic powers expressed through verbal means – for George represent one example of his communal and cultural history which he is ashamed of.

Walter Younger

Walter is another character who shifts dialects. For him, young white men of his age embody the American Dream. Unlike his mother, he wishes to climb the social ladder and achieve success like white people. Walter Lee is a desperate man, bound by poverty and prejudice, and fascinated with a business idea that he believes would solve all of his socio-economic issues. In certain instances, while he is talking about his dream as a businessman, he forsakes AAVE and uses Standard English:

> WALTER: And I'll pull the car up on the driveway … just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white walls – no – black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy … though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth – maybe a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in. (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 99)

He also uses Standard English when he first meets Mr. Lindner, perhaps to impress him and show that his family is good enough for the white neighborhood. This might suggest that his AAVE would have completely diminished if he had succeeded in achieving his white dream. However, by the end of the play, as he chooses to decline Lindner's offer and move into Clybournne Park, he shifts back to AAVE:

> WALTER: We <u>don't</u> want to make <u>no</u> trouble for <u>nobody</u> or fight <u>no</u> causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. And that's all we got to say about that. (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 133, emphasis added)

A trademark feature of AAVE, multiple negation, is evident in his speech. It might indicate his ultimate preference for black values and family over his white ambitions, which he ultimately comes to relish by the end of the play. Throughout the play, however, Walter's discongruity between his American Dream and his African-American identity constantly clash. As Neto (2011) notes, "Walter's struggles represent the black male effort to cope with white Americans [*sic.*] standards of manhood" (p. 8). 'Double consciousness' comes here to the foreground when Walter's binary sense of his identity (being African and American) clash. The scene where he imagines himself as an African chieftain foregrounds his version of "alternative masculinity" (Burrell, 2014, p. 8). This form of alternative reality is certainly reflected in his language:

> WALTER: (On the table, very far gone, his eyes pure glass sheets. He sees what we cannot, that he is a leader of his people, a great chief, a descendant of Chaka, and that the hour to march has come)

[...]

WALTER: Do you hear the singing of the women, singing the war songs of our fathers to the babies in the great houses? Singing the sweet war songs! (The doorbell rings) OH, DO YOU HEAR, MY BLACK BROTHERS!

[...]

WALTER: Telling us to prepare for the GREATNESS OF THE TIME! [...]. (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 75, 76, emphasis in the original)

In these two quotes, Walter only employs Standard English, without switching to AAVE. This can be noticed in the question formation. In AAVE, the auxiliary verb in *yes-no* question can be omitted. Walter, however, uses the auxiliary *do*. There is also no inclusion of *g-dropping*, where the words *singing* and *telling* would be rendered as *singin'* and *tellin'*. The connection here is between the perception of 'success' and the verbal expression. Ordinarily, Walter uses AAVE in his community and around his family, but as soon as he imagines himself as "a great chief" (where he combines his African heritage and American individualism and the myth of the self-made man), his dialect changes to that of Standard English. He understands that if he is to be successful in the U.S., he must also employ the linguistic characteristics of his 'oppressors'. Walter quickly returns to the myth of the American Dream as propagated through ideological narratives of white hegemonic power structures. What he does not realize, however, is that if one wants to participate in social mobility of that kind, one must adhere to the normative set of rules governing one's use of language continuously. Whereas Beneatha understood this simple fact, Walter does not abandon AAVE outside his familial and communal surroundings except in brief moments when he is daydreaming about his potential successful future. He also opts for Standard English at the end of the play when he finally 'deferrers' his dream and confronts Mr. Lindner: "I mean – I have worked as a chauffeur most of my life – and my wife here, she does domestic work in people's kitchens. So does my mother. I mean – we are plain people…" (Hansberry, 1958/1994, p. 132). This shift in dialects on Walther's part occurs perhaps because the family has decided to move to a white neighborhood even though they do not want the family there because of their race. Walter's usage of Standard English therefore signifies not only their willingness but also their ability (against popular belief at the time) to use Standard English, thus showing that using a dialect is a matter of choice and a part of one's identity.

Conclusion

Through the nuanced analyses of characters such as Mama, Ruth, Beneatha, Joseph Asagai, George Murchison, and Walter, from Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, this paper illustrated how their education, aspirations, and struggles get expressed through language. Furthermore, the paper addressed the concept of code-switching, where speakers adapt their language depending on the social context, as well as more recent contributions in the theory of performativity. The paper underscored the multifaceted nature of African American identity formation, where language plays a pivotal role. It focused on the tension between preserving cultural heritage (AAVE) and the desire for social mobility. The characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* exemplify the complexities of this struggle, highlighting the role of language as a performative expression of identity within a broader socio-cultural context. Finally, this paper provided a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between language, identity, and power, using Hansberry's play as a lens through which to examine these themes.

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AFROAMERIČKI ENGLESKI I FORMACIJA IDENTITETA U PREDSTAVI *GROŽĐICA NA SUNCU* LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada jeste pokazati zamršeni odnos između jezika, identiteta i društvene dinamike, s posebnim fokusom na afroamerički engleski (eng. AAVE) kako je prikazan u drami Grožđica na suncu Lorraine Hansberry. Rad naglašava kako jezik služi kao moćan instrument za karakterizaciju pojedinaca i odražava njihove težnje, pripadnosti i generacijske sukobe. Likovi u drami analizirani su u smislu njihove jezične upotrebe, otkrivajući različite obrasce. U konačnici, rad se bavi značajem jezika u oblikovanju identiteta i naglašava kako se afroamerički likovi u predstavi snalaze u izazovima povezanim sa jezikom dok teže ka društvenoj pokretljivosti i samoprihvaćanju u rasno pristranom društvu.

Ključne riječi: *afroamerički engleski, AAVE, identitet, performativnost, društvena mobilnost, jezični varijete*