

Charlie Farrington, University of Oregon

Public Corpora and Investigating Sound Change in African American Language

Abstract

No variety of American English has received more attention by researchers, the media, or the public than that spoken by African Americans. African American Language (AAL) has long been a central object of study by sociolinguists, yet questions still remain about the origin of these varieties, their current and future development, and their relationship(s) to other varieties (regional and socio-ethnic). While AAL has been extensively studied, almost all AAL data collected to-date are in private collections and collected in a way that doesn't allow for wider, public sharing. Thus, it remains underrepresented in terms of publicly available datasets, creating a situation in which the most studied variety of American English has been inaccessible to larger-scale, corpus-based study.

This talk announces the release of the Corpus of Regional African American Language (CORAAL), the first public corpus of spoken AAL that the Language Variation and Computation lab has been compiling over the past two years. I will discuss a series of examples using data from CORAAL, focusing primarily on changes to the vowel system in Washington, D.C. that occurred over the course of the twentieth century.