

A short comparative linguistic study of Ebonics, Gullah, Bamanankan, Wolof, and Esan

Abstract

This paper analyzes some core linguistic aspects featured in the following languages: Ebonics, Gullah, Bamanankan, Wolof, and Esan. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate the irrefutable fact that the language spoken by African Americans is, in its essence, an African language which uses an African Linguistic System. This fact will be proven by examining the verb, the absence of the copula be, the habitual be, the role and significance of repetitions of single terms as well as narrativizing, the presence of calques, the subdivision of sentences into topic and comment, the formation of possession and questions, multiple negatives, antiphrasing, epenthesis and the plural. Deductions have been made after consulting multimedia source materials such as films, TV shows, and interviews. Much of the research is based on personal observation and knowledge of continental African languages coupled with the expertise of scholars across the continent and the diaspora.

Keywords: Ebonics, Gullah, Bamanankan, Wolof, Esan, African Language System, West Africa, Diaspora

1. Introduction

This paper will demonstrate that Ebonics is an African language via the continental African retentions it presents in its language system.

1.1 Ebonics

The word Ebonics was coined during a conference titled *Cognitive and Language Development of the Black Child* held in 1973 by Dr. Robert L. Williams. The term is a fusion of two words: Ebony and phonics. Ebonics thus stands for Black sounds (Smith 1998: 54). Other synonyms are African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English and Black Vernacular English. The psychologist described Ebonics as the “linguistic and para-linguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of the West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendants of African origin” (Williams 1975). In this article the term Ebonics will be used to specifically define African American speech.

The origin and definition of this idiom are often contested or not properly researched with concluding remarks defining Ebonics as an accent, slang, or a testament to African people’s inability to master European tongues. Ebonics, however, was borne out of continental African languages mixing with one other and European idioms. This synthesis created a new creole which morphed into a complex language.

Though English words are what we superficially and mainly hear when we listen to conversations in Ebonics, the root of the language resides on the continent and more specifically in the Sahel, West and Central Africa.

1.2 Bamanankan

Bamanankan or the language of the Bamana is one of the most spoken idioms in Mali and its lingua franca. Bamanankan is a compound term formed by two words. It is made of Bamana, the name of a Mande and West African ethnic group, and **kan** which literally means throat and more figuratively language.

Linguistically, some of the features that characterize Bamanankan include the following: nasal sounds (like in the words **Bamanan** and **kan**), sentence structure of subject-object-verb in its simplified form and subject-predicative-object-verb in its more complex structure, non-conjugation of verbs, onomatopoeias, and repetitions.

1.3 Wolof

Prominent scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop and oral tradition point to the Nile River and Ancient Egypt as the origin of the Wolof people. According to Abdoulaye-Bara Diop, the Wolof inhabited the Senegambian region well before the foundation of the Jolof empire in the 13th century. They migrated there from the east because of political instabilities and Jolof Mbing founded their first sedentary settlement. The name of the founder and town subsequently became that of the larger region and empire (Diop 2012: 16).

Wolof, unlike many other African languages, is a non-tonal language and it does not employ the verb “to be” as understood in European languages. Wolof needs to conjugate the pronouns to provide temporal reference while the verb remains unchanged. Verb rigidity is a recurrent feature among Wolof, Bamanankan and Ebonics. The use of the infinitive is a feature of Bamanankan where verbs are not conjugated but always used in one form. Verb fixity has been kept in Ebonics in certain tenses and it exists in Wolof where the verb stays the same while the pronoun mutates.

1.4 Esan

Nigeria is home to the Esan people who are the speakers of the homonym language. The Esan language is an Edoid tongue closely related to and at times interchangeable with Edo-Bini. Esan per se, however, is unique in its own way and precedes what we now call Benin which came into being in 500 A.D. The term Esan has been applied to its people for thousands of years. Many historians believe that the name (originally, **Esan fia**) owes its origin to Bini meaning “they have fled” or “they jumped away” from a tyrannical system of leadership.

From a linguistic viewpoint, the Esan language uses three structures to form its sentences: subject-verb-object, object-subject-verb, and object-verb-subject. SVO, however, is the most commonly used. In the Esan tongue, all nouns end with a vowel or with a nasalized sound like **ogun** (blacksmith or god of iron). Just like Bamanankan and Ebonics, it is a tonal language.

2. The verb

The verb in many African languages has a fixed and rigid form which requires the use of particles or the change in pronoun to understand the tense they refer to. Starting with the lingua franca of Mali, let's look at how the verb is used and expressed in the language of the Bamana people.

2.1 Verb rigidity

In Bamanankan the verb stays in its infinitive form regardless of the pronoun it accompanies, tense and whether an action is completed or in progress. In order to differentiate the aforementioned, Bamanankan resorts to predicatives. These precede the action they introduce but they are not verbs themselves. If “my dad eats rice” is translated into Bamanankan the result will be **n’fa be kini dun** or **n’fa be kini dumu**. In a literal translation the sentence would read *my dad (n’fa) + predicative (be) + rice (kini) + eat (dumu/dun)*.

<i>Ne</i>	<i>fa</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>kini</i>	<i>dumu/dun</i>
<i>My</i>	<i>dad</i>	<i>PPRED</i>	<i>rice</i>	<i>eat</i>

The predicative **be** indicates that the action takes place in the present time. If it is turned into **ye**, the sentence will refer to the past since **ye** is the predicative that marks the past tense. The phrase would change to **n’fa ye kini dun** to mean “my dad ate rice”. In order to provide a reference to the future we would use the predicative **ben**: **n’fa ben kini dun** is “my dad will eat rice” in English. The list of predicatives for transitive verbs in the Bamana language is: **be, te, ka, kana, ben, tena, ye, ma**. As per Ismael Maiga, they can be divided in this manner:

1. **be/te** (present affirmative and negative)
2. **ka/kana** (subjunctive or imperative affirmative and negative)
3. **ben/tena** (future affirmative and negative)

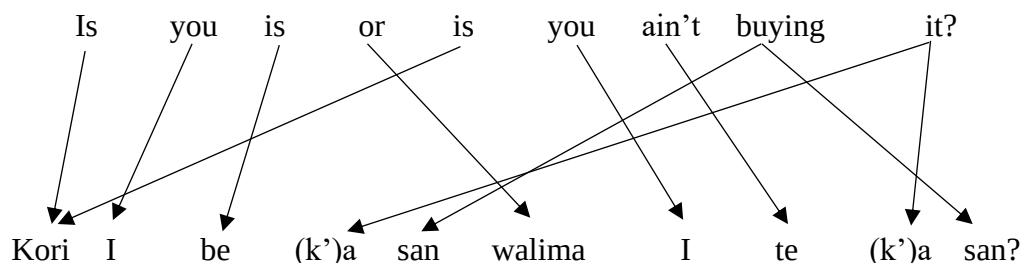
They denote incomplete verbal aspects with the temporal reference being the exact moment when the speaker utters the phrase. On the other hand, **ye/ma** are complete. By using them at the moment we speak, we signal that the action is complete (Maiga 2001: 45).

The Bamana language and Ebonics share the aspectual characteristic of verbs. In both idioms, the verb system transcends time. The verb in Bamanankan does not change regardless of the subject being in the singular or in the plural form. In European English, although its verb structure is relatively simple, the third singular pronoun (she, he, it) is differentiated from the other pronouns by the -(e)s added at the end of the verb (you sleep, she sleeps). In compound tenses such as present continuous (I am sleeping) or present perfect (we have chosen a film) verbs are marked by the auxiliaries “to be”, “to have” and “to do” which change from the third singular personal pronoun (he, she, it has arrived) to the first singular and the three plural personal pronouns (I, we, you, they have arrived). If in Euro-English we say “he was here”, “you were here” and “we were arriving”, Ebonics speakers maintain the verb in the seemingly 3rd person which produces “he was here”, “you was here” or “we was arrivin”. The verb “was” stays invariable whether it accompanies singular or plural pronouns as well as in simple and compound tenses. This is the fixed form which is present in the Mande tongue and crossed over to Ebonics.

2.1.1 Predicative in Ebonics

In the above paragraph, the predicative in Bamanankan was highlighted in conjunction with verb fixity to explore the topic of how Bamana verbs don’t mutate. In Ebonics there is a special verb and sentence construction where what seems to be a verb is actually a predicative: is you is or is you ain’t? By looking at the sentence “is you is or is you ain’t buying it?” we can see in which ways it has retained Bamanankan and its verb construction.

The Ebonics sentence is translated in Bamanankan to **i b’a san walima i t’a san?** or **i be k’a san walima i te k’a san** which better illustrates the present continuous (-ing form). To help us visualize the parallels, let’s look at the graph below:



First of all, this structure is used only in questions. Secondly, in the Malian language we are forced to repeat the verb **san** (buy) and the pronoun **a** (it), but Ebonics permits a one-time mention. Thirdly, the “is” which introduces the questions in the Ebonics phrases plays the part of auxiliary which is linked to **kori**. The second “is” and the “ain’t” which both follow the pronoun “you” are predicatives and find their counterpart in the Bamana predicatives **be** and **te**. Both the Ebonics and Bamana expressions coincide although they each maintain their own specific sentence order. The first “is” in “is you is” and “is you ain’t” may look like the verb “to be” conjugated to the third singular person. It, however, occupies the same place the auxiliary do/does in questions in Euro-English. The second “is” functions as a predicative showing that it retained the same characteristic present in Bamanankan. The only actual real verbs are buy(ing) in Ebonics and **san** in Bamanankan.

<i>Is</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>ain't?</i>
AUX		PRED		AUX		PRED

The “auxiliary is” is dropped in the affirmative phrase where only the “predicative is” remains in place. The result are these sentences: “You is buying it” and “you ain't buying it”. In Bamanankan the above is transposed to **i be k'a san** and **i te k'a san**.

<i>I</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>(k')a</i>	<i>san</i>
<i>You</i>	<i>PRED</i>	<i>(PRC)it</i>	<i>buy</i>

You is buying it

<i>I</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>(k')a</i>	<i>san</i>
<i>You</i>	<i>NPRED</i>	<i>(PRC)it</i>	<i>buy</i>

You ain't buying it

In the question, the sentence *is you is or is you ain't* blends aspect of European languages (auxiliary) and African languages (predicatives), whereas in the reply it solely features an African model of sentence construction. Ebonics looks like it is using Euro-English verbs, but they are actual predicatives that mirror and function as **be**, **te**, **ye**, **ben**a in Bamanankan.

Gullah, too, features tense markers like the Bamana predicatives. As Gullah Geechee binyah and teacha Sunn m'Cheaux said: “In showing verb tense or modifying verbs in a sentence the term “a” is either going to be present tense where it replaces the suffix -ing for “doing”. Instead of doing, it would be “a-do”. Also, it is for near future tense because “ge” — “I ge-say” or “I ge do” would be something that you’re doing in the future. “Imma do” or “Imma say” is something that is immediate future”. “What we *da* do” is the present continuous in Gullah, “what we *ad* do” refers to the past, “what we *a* do” is the present tense and “what we *ga* do” is used for the future (Subtitle 2022). If we translate these phrases in Bamanankan we have respectively: **an be ka mune kɛ** or **an be mun kɛ la** (present continuous), **an ye mune kɛ** (past), **an be mune kɛ** (present), **an bena mune kɛ** (future). Just like the West African tongue, the verb in Gullah doesn't undergo change because of the predicatives which freeze the verb in its fixed form.

2.1.2 Habitual be

The invariability of the verb is a feature of Ebonics when it comes to the habitual be. As the name suggests, it is used to describe an everyday action that happens often. In “the Cookie Monster study”, a 2005 study by the University of Massachusetts, a group of Black children were shown pictures from *Sesame Street*. The images portrayed the Cookie Monster in bed without cookies while Elmo was eating one. When asked “who be eating cookies?” the children replied “the Cookie Monster”. They provided that answer because, as Ebonics speakers, they understood that action of “be eating” refers to something done habitually. It is the Cookie Monster who usually always eats cookies, hence his name, although in that particular instance he was not eating any. It is a subtle yet important difference from “who is (currently) eating cookies?” that African American children are able to pick up at a very young age (Smitherman 1998: 31).

In *'Black English': How AAVE Developed From Slave Resistance & African Dialects* participants break down the usage of the habitual be with these examples:

“Err’time he be goin to deh sto he be gettin deh same thang” and “err’time he be goin to deh sto he be forgettin what I aks him fo’ so he be callin me aksing me what I be wantin’”. “Sowande be trippin’”, says Professor and word artist Robin Alva Marcus, “Sowande be trippin right now, he was trippin’ the last time I saw him, it is a perennial situation” (BETNetworks 2021).

2.1.3 Copula be

The verb “to be” does not always replicate its European counterpart in sense and form and at times doesn’t exist in African Language Systems whose absence is mostly noticed in present tenses. A great example from the continent is Wolof. A sentence like she hungry in the language of African Americans, and **dafa xiif** in Wolof mirror each other and neither expression uses a verb let alone the verb to be. What may look like an omission in Ebonics (she ~~is~~ hungry) follows and reproduces the pattern which is present in different African languages.

<i>Dafa</i>	<i>xiif</i>
3SGPRS	hungry
She/he hungry	

This linguistic phenomenon is referred to as the absence of the copula be. In European languages the verb “to be” means to exist, to become but is also employed to support another verb in compound and complex verb forms (I am gone, she is crying) or to accompany an adjective that encapsulates a quality that refers to the subject (you are tall, he is fine). The verb in general and the verb “to be” in particular are absolutely indispensable in European idioms. Without, the whole sentence crumbles and does not make sense. It is so crucial that in Latin the term **verbum** means word and neo-Latin languages like Italian can employ the word **verbo** as a synonym for it. African languages, on the other hand, don’t always need or use the verb like European idioms. This is why Ebonics, even when using English words, can do without the copula be. It reproduces the rules of and adheres to the African linguistic system. Ebonics and Wolof sentences can stand and make complete sense without be-ing. The absence of the copula be signals that the sentence refers to the present time.

3. Possession

Another similarity shared by Malians and African Americans is how possession is expressed in their respective idioms. Proximity between two words is enough to indicate that one thing belongs to the other. In phrases such as “Musa fa” (Musa’s father in Bamanankan) or “sista nose” there is no need to add a marker like the Saxon genitive (’s) to highlight that “father” and “nose” respectively belong to “Musa” and “sista”. The two words being next to one another is enough to signify possession (Smitherman 1998: 31, Maiga 2001: 53, Konaré 2004: 26).

Bamanankan presents the following subject pronouns:

- **Ne** (I)
- **E / I** (You)
- **A / Ale** (She, he, it)
- **An / Anw** (We)
- **Aw** (You)
- **U / Olu** (They)

Bamana possessive adjectives are formed by the subject pronouns listed above plus **ka** except for cases where possession is about personal relationships (being someone's relative or friend) and for body parts, unless we want to emphasize the relation. Subject pronouns in Bamanankan have two roles: that of replacement of a noun and that of possessive marker. The subject pronoun is used as a marker for possession also, even if only, in the third person plural (they or dey) in Ebonics. "Dey feet", "dey husbands", "dey fren" can be translated word by word in Bamanankan to **u sen**, **u cew** and **u teri**. Geneva Smitherman in *Talkin And Testifyin: The Language of Black America* mentions how in early Black English, the language presented possession in the 3rd singular form with constructions such as he book (for his book) and she house (for her house). Though these phrasal formations were common in the past, they have progressively disappeared with small traces surviving in young children or toddlers (Smitherman 1977: 29).

Subject pronouns occupying the role of possessive adjectives is a feature we find in the Caribbeans as well. *Small Axe* is a British series created and directed by Steven McQueen which chronicles different stories of West Indian immigrants in London spanning the period between the 1960s and 1980s. In its first episode titled *Mangrove* Frank Crichlow, played by Shaun Parkes, says in Trinidadian Creole: "We pay we taxes, we pay we bills and we pay we staff". A few minutes after, him and two other people go pick up Kendrick Manning, a young Black man that was unjustly detained. Frank introduces Mrs. Manning and says that the young man who has been arrested is "she's son". Trinidadian Creole is another diasporan African language that has retained the same structure as Bamanankan. In these African languages subject pronouns (we, they, she) can be used as possessive adjectives (our, their, her), too.

4. Topic and comment

Ebonics, Bamanankan and Wolof present a unique attribute in the way they construct sentences. In all three idioms a phrase is divided into two elements with the subject being repeated twice first as introduction and then as recap. This subdivision is called topic and comment.

The division of Ebonics phrases into topic and comment is proof that the language uses an African structure to form and construct its sentences. The topic is the part of the phrase that introduces the subject of the conversation, while the comment provides information about it.

A sentence like "my sister she smart" follows this structure since "my sister" is part of the topic section and "she smart", in which the pronoun "she" serves as summary, is the comment. The pronoun in the second part of the sentence may seem like an unnecessary repetition, but it is actually "a recapitulative pronoun that belongs in the comment segment" (Smith 1998: 57). In Bamanankan, we can see the same construction in **Mesitan ale ye n'muso ye**. The phrase is translated in Ebonics to "Mesitan she my wife" (Sidibé 2005). The pronoun **ale** reprises the "she" function of the Ebonics sentence and summarizes the first section of the phrase. A second example from West Africa can be found in the Wolof language. The sentence **sama xaarit dafa rafet** is another case in point where the topic and comment subdivision of a sentence is applied. It translates to the Ebonics "my friend she/he good-looking". In the Gullah language spoken on the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, we find again the same characteristic. Gullah-speakers open their sentences with the subject or the object and then repeat it using a pronoun in the second part of the phrase: tu basket, wat it kam tu?

(Two baskets, what do they come to?). The same is true for various continental African languages such as Yoruba, Ewe, Kimbundu and Kongo (Turner 1949: 218).

5. Multiple negatives

“Don’t nobody don’t know God can’t tell me nothin!” exclaimed a churchgoer. Geneva Smitherman quoted them to demonstrate that in Ebonics the construction of complex negative sentences is possible and correct (Smitherman 1998: 32).

Double or multiple negatives are employed in languages like Italian. **Non vedo niente** is “I don’t see nothing” and is grammatically correct in the Romance language but incorrect in English where a double negative turns the sentence into an affirmative assertion. In neo-Latin and African tongues, however, two negatives still equal a negative phrase.

In the Bamanankan sentence **ne ma mogosi ye**, or I ain’t seen nobody in Ebonics, both **ma** and the **si** in **mogosi** mark the negative forming a double negative sentence. In Wolof a sentence like **amuma dara** employs the double negative, too. The suffix **-uma** is used for the negative in the first singular person (I) in the present tense. **Dara** and its synonym **tus** mean “nothing”. I don’t have nothing or I ain’t got nothin is the translation in Ebonics. In the Esan language we have these two examples: **i bha lèn ôria so-so** and **i bha sê miémin**. The first sentence means “I don’t know nobody” and the second “I haven’t seen nothing”. They both employ double negatives.

6. Repetitions

In their studies of Ebonics and Twi, one of the languages spoken in Ghana, Adétáyò Èfúnbùkòlá and Kwaku Bekoe highlighted how both these African languages use repetitions to add emphasis (Èfúnbùkòlá, Bekoe 2020). Repetitions equally appear in Bamanankan, Wolof and Esan with the same or similar functions.

Let’s look at the role of repetition in Bamanankan with these examples:

1. **Belebele jamjan** is said to describe someone who is very big and very tall.
2. **Jɛman pas pas** denotes something that is very, very white.
3. **Bɛnbɛn** means plot, conspiracy, or agreement of more people against one and it is derived from **bɛn** meaning agreement.
4. **Boliboli** can mean active or, as a verb, running everywhere. It comes from **boli**, to run (Maiga 2001: 156 – 157).
5. **Korosa korosa** is a Bamana expression used to describe scratching or itching. It implies that the action of scratching is repeated (seldom, if ever, do you scratch yourself with only one motion). The expression also imitates the rubbing sound on the scalp and hair which turns it into a phonetic and onomatopoeic phrase.
6. **Mugete mugete** is what a baby’s toothless mouth does when eating or when we really enjoy some food. It is related to **choki choki** which means to smack when eating.

In Wolof, doubling words can expand the term’s concept. It works with verbs, nouns, and adverbs:

1. **Xam** means to know and **xam xam** is science or knowledge.
2. **Dagg** is the verb to cut whereas **dagg dagg** is a cut or an incision.
3. **Xew** is party and doubling the word to **xew xew** means event.

Esan also features repetitions in its linguistic system. Depending on regional variations, a person can say **obu**, **obulu** or **obilu** to express gratitude. **Obulu obulu** (or **obilu obilu**) means thank you very much. Repetitions in Esan are also featured in

adjectives such as **tetete** (exactly), **yoyo** (senseless), **yoyo** (very reddish) and **zighizighi** (crookedly, roughly).

Although repetitions may seem irrelevant, doubling words give sentences a subtle yet entirely new meaning. There is a difference between seeing Philly and seeing Philly Philly. The former simply denotes the city of Philadelphia and, in opposition to Philly Philly, the places that tourist and outsiders usually visit and sightsee. Philly Philly is the essence of the city which only natives and locals know about.

Gullah exhibits repetitions as a unique and important feature, as well. As Lorenzo Dow Turner said in his seminal book *Africanisms in the Gullah dialect* Gullah people, just like West Africans, employ repetition, in particular for words and phrases and especially in narration (Turner 1949: 220).

In European languages like Italian, filling a narration with repetitions makes the speech heavy, boring, pedantic and even irritating because the speaker is just saying the same thing over and over again. On the contrary, in Maninka, Bamanankan, Ebonics or Gullah these repetitions are an essential part of the conversation. They create excitement, suspense and lock the audience in a spell. Narrativizing is, in fact, one of the speech acts used in Ebonics (Smitherman 1998: 33) and a core element of linguistic exchange. In the words of Amadou Hampaté Ba as recorded in *The Living Tradition*: “[The traditionalist] is not afraid of repeating himself. No one gets tired of hearing the same story told over in the same words” (Ba 1985: 200).

7. Sematic inversion

Antiphrasing is the linguistic feat of using a word to mean its opposite. It is also known as semantic inversion (Smitherman 1998: 32), and, as the name suggests, it describes using antithetic and normally contradictory terms to communicate a message in reverse. One of the best-known examples of antiphrasing is “bad”. “She bad”, “that’s a bad brother”, “I like you bad” stress the quality that refers to the subject or object. It is a direct retention from **kojugu** in Bamanankan.

Here the parallels:

A	kadi	kojugu
It	tastes good	bad
A	cekani	kojugu
She/he/it	beautiful	bad

Kojugu means bad in English, and it is to Mande languages what it represents to Ebonics.

8. Plural

There are two concomitant phenomena that appear in Ebonics when it comes to the formation of plural words. The first is overcorrection. In most English words, it is sufficient to add a final -s to the singular word to express plurality. As such, from a singular “term” we have multiple “terms”, and one “car” becomes two “cars”. During the earliest formation of Ebonics, Africans in North America applied that rule to all plural words even those who don’t end with -s, for instance men and women. They have been turned to mens and womens in an effort to make them agree to the general pluralization practice. A current common example is childrens. Children already being

an overcorrection from the Middle English plural *childre* or *childer*, Ebonics speakers have pushed the boundary further by adding an extra plural marker, -s.

Conversely, Ebonics can maintain the same noun form in both singular and plural when said noun is accompanied by a numeral. In West African languages like Wolof there is no difference between the singular and plural form in nouns. Bamanankan does mark the plural with a final -w. However, when followed by a number, the singular form is kept. In these African languages, the number is enough to show plurality and any other plural indicator would be redundant.

Wolof: **benn xale bu goor** – **juroomi xale yu goor**.

Bamanankan: **dence kelen** – **dence duuru**.

Ebonics: one boy – five boy.

9. Epenthesis

When it comes to speech habits, another thing continental and diasporic West Africans have in common is ending words with vowels. European English words tend to finish with a consonant, whereas continental African terms end with a vowel. Just like all the linguistic characteristics mentioned until now, vowel ending has been kept and grafted onto Ebonics. This feature is unnatural and even wrong in Euro-English and in order to reproduce this phenomenon while using European English words, Ebonics speakers either do not pronounce the last consonant, blend or add an extra vowel at the end of the term.

Examples include *coulda*, *shoulda*, *woulda*, *sorta*, *kinda*, *fulla*, *killa*, *sista*. These words end in “er” or are terms that are followed by prepositions or verbs. The “of” and “have” which are part of “full of” and “could have” in Euro-English are merged and shrunk into the term they accompany and become a vowel. This practice is present on the continent, as well. Countries like Mali and Ivory Coast have been colonized by the French, consequently some elements of the colonizer’s language have been integrated into local realities. The expression **est-ce que** used in questions may end in a vowel but the final “ue” is pronounced like a schwa and not a fully sounded vowel. Since **que** is sounded out as **kə**, West Africans add a final vowel so that the term can be pronounced and make more sense in the African language system. **Est-ce que** becomes **eski**, **eske** or **ese**. Another case in point is the word **parce que** (because). Pronounced as **paʁs kə**, the term has a succession of consonants with unpronounced vowels. Vocalized vowels are, thus, added transforming the term to **parseke** or **paraseke**. The same is done with the term **donc** (so). It ends with a consonant, and we add a **u** to form **doncu**. **Finetri**, **frousheti**, **tabali** (**fenêtre**, **fourchette**, **table** in French or window, fork and table in English) are other prime examples of applying epenthesis.

In Esan too, most nouns end with a vowel or with a nasalized vowel which is transcribed with a final “n” like in **agbon** (people, world), **nɔn** (to ask), **nan** (to publicly castigate), **iton** (dirt). The word “gon”, “gwine” or “g’wan” is often wrongly pronounced by non-native Ebonics speakers as “gone.” It is at times spelled like that, but it actually uses a nasalised vowel (Smitherman 1998: 32). Nasalized sounds typical of Bamanankan and Esan are present in the Ebonics expression like “Ion”, “maee-yun” (man) (Smitherman 1977: 174), and in how Black Texans say “it is going down.” The “down” is pronounced with a nasal “a”.

Epenthesis is the phenomenon by which a vowel is added at the beginning, between or at the end of syllables. Diasporan and continental Africans using European words often employ it to form words. Like Malians that sporadically use French while

speaking Bamanankan use epenthesis in words like burusi (brousse or bush in English) and estation (station), African Americans also turn the English please into the Ebonics puh-lease, while the Gullahs turn great into guh-reat. Epenthesis is the reason why Kevin Hart pronounces The Rock's name as Duh-Wayne and why Amadou Ba, who plays the flute in the score for the villain of *Black Panther*, shouts Kilimonga instead of Killmonger.

10. Question formation

In the context of the U.S. the languages that were in contact with one another during one of the most massive forceful displacements in history were those spoken by the various Native nations, British English, Spanish, French, Dutch and African languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Mende and Vai. Using an affirmative sentence and changing the intonation to mark a question is not unique to West African idioms. They exist in French and Spanish too, but is technically incorrect in standard English.

European English generally forms questions using “do” or “does” as auxiliary. Bamanankan and Wolof also have auxiliaries. They are **kori** for the former and **ndax** for the latter but are rarely employed. Bamanankan and Wolof-speakers prefer to change intonation to signify questions. “Do you want to go home?” becomes (you) wanna go home? in Ebonics, **bëgg nga ñibbi kër gi?** and **i be fε ka taa so?** in Wolof and Bamanankan, respectively. Without the intonation, or question mark, they are all affirmative sentences. The same holds true in Gullah where the declarative or affirmative sentence order is maintained, i.e. subject-verb, and the auxiliaries do or does are disregarded (Turner 1949: 218).

Ebonics and Wolof share the placement of prepositions in questions like “where she at?”, too. In the Senegalese language the phrase is translated to **fan mu nekk?** In line with their African tradition, neither idiom uses the verb “to be” and they both put the preposition that indicates a place or location, at and **nekk**, at the end of the sentence. “Where she at?” perfectly coincides with its Wolof counterpart (Kambon 2015: 192).

<i>Fan</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>nekk?</i>
Where	3SGMINP	LOCPREP
Where she/he at?		

11. Calques

A final linguistic occurrence which will be discussed are calques from Bamanankan to Ebonics. As told by Donald Winford they are fundamentally African expressions which were translated word by word into English words. In other terms, they are African words clothed in English (Winford 2003: 25). Many of these word by word translations have crossed over and are used in mainstream White American English, while others are solely featured in Black speech.

Some examples of calques include the below:

Bad mouth (and its verbalized form bad mouthing) derives from the Bamanankan **da jugu**. **Da** is mouth and **jugu** mean bad. Closely related to bad mouth is big or fat mouth. This phrase also derives from the lingua franca of Mali, **da ba**.

Homegoing is another calque for which we can find one of the possible origins in Maninkakan. As taught us by Wâ Kamissoko in *Soundjata la gloire du Mali: La*

grande geste du Mali – Tome 2 the phrase is used to talk about an illustrious person's death, in this case Soundjata Keita's (Cissé, Kamissoko 2007: 129). The Maninka expression is **sosegin** which derives from **so** (house, home) and **segin** (return, go back). Like homegoing, it means to return to your original home.

Cut-eye has multiple sources including Akan, Ga and Ewe. It is also rooted in the expression **pamunu tige**, with **pa** being eye; and **tige**, to cut. Referring to father or patriarch as old man also finds its origin in the Mande language of Bamanankan. The literal translation and meaning are identical on both sides of the Atlantic. **Cɛ** (man) **kɔrɔba** (old) is the Bamanankan equivalent.

Lastly, in the Gullah language we find the phrase day clean. Found in Sierra Leone in the Krio **doklin**, it can be traced to **dugu jɛ**. **Dugu** is land and in its idiomatic sense it means day. **Jɛ** means to clean, to clear or white. The resulting meaning is dawn since the sun clears the day when dawn breaks.

12. Conclusion

Throughout the paper, multiple linguistic elements have been described, listed and explained to show how Ebonics was and is still related to continental African languages. By focusing on select West African idioms, it was possible to give precise and detailed, although succinct, information about the presence of Africanisms in the speech of African Americans.

It was firmly established that Ebonics is an African language which subscribes to the African language system despite the outer appearance of the idiom, namely its utilization of English words. Language not simply being a collection of words, a plethora of characteristics were researched and analyzed to draw the conclusion.

List of abbreviations

3SGMINP	3 rd person singular minimal pronoun
3SGPRS	3 rd person singular present tense
AUX	Auxiliary
LOCPREP	Locative preposition
NPRED	Negative predicative
PPRED	Present predicative
PRC	Present continuous

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