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“Not Perfect Grammar, Always Perfect Timing“
African American Vernacular English in Black and White Rap Lyrics

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Abstract

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Abstract: African American Vernacular English, AAVE, is a variant of English spoken mostly by lower-class black citizens in the US. Since the most popular music genre among African Americans today is rap, this paper will describe what characterizes AAVE and rap music, and explore the use of AAVE in rap lyrics of both black and white rappers.

AAVE is different from Standard English in several respects; grammatically, phonologically and lexically. Examples of grammatical features in AAVE are invariant be, double negations and the differing use of possessive pronouns.

The hip hop industry has been, and still is, largely dominated by black performers, and white artists make up only a minority of rappers in the line of business today. Rappers being part of a larger culture, the hip hop nation, they have a language in common, and that language is AAVE. In this paper, a number of lyrics performed both by black and white rap artists have been compared and analyzed, in search of linguistic features of AAVE. This study provides evidence that AAVE is indeed used in rap lyrics, although the use of its features is often inconsistent. It is also shown that AAVE-presence in white rappers’ lyrics exists, but is sparser than in the works of their black equivalents.

Nyckelord: AAVE, rap music, rap lyrics, hip hop music, Ebonics
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1. Introduction

Language reflects the society in which the speaker lives. This is a common notion amongst linguists all over the world. Language is a social phenomenon and different varieties of a language have more or less prestige than others, according to Trudgill (2000:8). Music has been a way for people to express themselves for centuries, and language and lyrics are essential in the process of expressing feelings, emotions and opinions through music. When it comes to rap, the style of delivering lyrics in hip hop music, it has been dominated by black performers ever since it was introduced as a new music genre in the 1970s, and the language of hip hop music is marked by African Americans and the language many black citizens in America use (Keeley 2001:9; Trudgill 2000:52).

Several different names are used to refer to the language spoken by black people in America; Black English, Black English Vernacular, Vernacular Black English, Black Vernacular English, African American English, Ebonics, and African American Vernacular English. The latter expression, abbreviated AAVE is commonly used among linguists (Tottie 2002:218), and is thus also the expression that will be used in this essay. The additional term vernacular refers to everyday language and distinguishes the black AAVE speakers from the black speakers of Standard English (Trudgill 2000:52). AAVE is by some people considered to be inferior to Standard English, but this is only a prevailing myth among non-linguists.

African American Vernacular English is the dialect used by many black people, and among them, many rappers. However, there are also white rappers today, and even though they are still a minority among the rappers, they are gaining recognition. I am interested in discovering whether the language white rappers use is the same as that of black rappers. This is what my essay will investigate. My hypothesis is that the language of black and white hip hop performers is different from one another. This essay will also provide some general information about African American Vernacular English. Characteristic features will be presented and compared to the language used in the lyrics of the rap artists investigated. In order to find out whether my hypothesis is true, I have selected sixteen different rap lyrics, by four rap acts; two black and two white.
2. Background

2.1 The origin of African American Vernacular English

The history of AAVE begins with the first African slaves arriving in America in the 17th century. Exactly what happened, and what led to the birth of AAVE is not agreed upon among linguists. Some linguists believe that AAVE is the same language that was formerly spoken in the south, and that black forms of the language are remnants from the plantations in the southern coastal states, where West Africans worked as slaves (Andersson 2003:2).

According to this theory, AAVE is a dialect of English that the slaves picked up from the white speakers and that historically derives from the British Isles (Tottie 2002:227; Trudgill 2000:52). The English of the British Isles and AAVE have since then developed in different directions, due to segregation and natural language change (Trudgill 2000:52-53). There is also a theory that is related to the above mentioned one which suggests that the language of the black influenced the white and not vice versa (Trudgill 2000:54).

Another theory suggests that since the ancestors of the African Americans who speak AAVE today came from Africa, they spoke different African languages, mostly from the West of the continent. The slaves had very limited access to English, and in order to be able to communicate with their captors and slaves from other countries and tribes, they combined English expressions with grammar and vocabulary typical of various African languages, and thus created a pidgin, a reduced, mixed, and simplified language that functioned as a contact language (Trudgill 2000:53, 2002:68; Dillard 1973:117). The pidgin was later developed into a creole, as it became the native language of a speech community (Dillard 1973:74).

Advocates of this theory are often the same people that claim that AAVE is a separate language, should be referred to as Ebonics and be taught at schools as a native language (Tottie 2002:239). It is also suggested that AAVE is derived from an English Creole, like the one spoken in for example Jamaica. Contemporary varieties of Pidgin English that are now spoken in the coastal areas of West Africa, and English creoles used by “people of African descent” in the West Indies have, just like AAVE, vocabularies similar to that of English and seem to be influenced partly by African languages. These are arguments that support the creole theories (Trudgill 2000:53-54).

It is thus not clear whether AAVE is a dialect, like cockney or Manx English, or if it is a language of its own (Andersson 2003:2). AAVE shares quite a few features with Southern White, and their similarity supports the dialect view (Tottie 2002:218). However, AAVE is
quite different from other dialects of American English; it has a unique and specific grammar, which suggests that it should be considered a separate language (Tottie 2002:221).

Documentation of Black English goes back almost 300 years in time, and traces are to be found, for example, in some of Daniel Defoe’s literary works. During the centuries that have passed AAVE has changed and become more like standard American English, but today there are signs indicating that they are once again slowly growing apart (Dillard 1973:78, 102; Trudgill 2000:52, 60).

2.2 Features of African American Vernacular English

2.2.1 Phonological features

There are more differences between AAVE and Standard English in the consonant systems than in the vowel systems. Like in Southern White English, monophthongization takes place with words like side (sad) and time (tam), whereas words with short /e/ before nasals are pronounced similarly to /ɪ/, so that Ben and bin sound identical, as in Southern White dialects (Tottie 2002:220). Further, I have observed that various expressions like you all (y’all) and I’m going to (I’m a) are pronounced with simplification in AAVE and some other dialects of English as well.

One regular feature of AAVE is that final consonant clusters are reduced, except when a voiced consonant is followed by a voiceless one. This means that cold and coal are pronounced the same way in AAVE (Tottie 2002:220). The reduction and assimilation of consonants also lead to morphological changes, when nouns are turned into plurals: desk (dess) becomes (desses), since adding an extra –s to a noun with two final –s would aggravate pronunciation (Andersson 2003:5; Tottie 2002:220). Reduction is common also with first syllables, when unstressed, as in (re)’member and (a)’bout (Tottie 2002:221).

The sound that is pronounced /ð/ in Standard English is pronounced differently in AAVE, depending on the position of the phoneme. Hence, /ð/ in initial position is replaced by a [d] sound, so that this and that sound like (dis) and (dat). In medial position, /ð/ is often pronounced like /v/, as in [bɔvə] (brother). The change of /θ/ to /f/ is another feature that is typical of both AAVE and several other varieties of English (Andersson 2003:6; Tottie 2002:220-221). Before and after nasals, AAVE sometimes has /l/, so that arithmetic and tenth are pronounced (arithmetic) and (tenth), respectively (Tottie 2002: 221).

It is not uncommon in AAVE that /l/ disappears in words like told and toll, which are consequently pronounced like toe, and in contracted forms, which leads to sentences like I’ll do it sounding like (a du it). Contracted forms like you’ll and I’ll are pronounced (ju) and (a)
because of this l-reduction (Andersson 2003:6; Fromkin & Rodman 1988:265). Deletion of final nasals is not rare in AAVE either; man is thence pronounced (mae) (Tottie 2002:221).

Another consonant difference involves the treatment of /t/: AAVE is non-rhotic. Like in other non-rhotic vernaculars, /t/ is not pronounced at the end of words or before consonants. Moreover, in AAVE, /t/ is also silent between vowels. Hence sure is pronounced (sho); dark is pronounced (dak), and Darryl becomes (Dal) (Tottie 2002:220).

As in some white people’s speech, final –ing forms are replaced by a single n, as is often seen and heard in colloquial speech in words like dancin’, chillin’ and rumblin’ (Tottie 2002:221). Also, Standard English –ing and –ink are often replaced by –ang and –ank, so that thing is pronounced (thang), and drink yields (drank) (Alim 2006:15).

Sometimes in AAVE speech, consonants switch places, turning ask into (aks), and grasp into (graps); whereas words with final ks lose the s so that box becomes (bok) (Tottie 2002:221). The history of pronouncing ask with the consonants in reversed order goes back to Old English, which means that the form has been in use for 16 centuries. For several hundred years, aks was even the correct literary form (Lippi-Green 1997:179).

The intonation of AAVE is also different from Standard English. It has a characteristic rhythm, and sometimes the stress is shifted. The shift of stress is audible in words like police, July and hotel, in which the stress is sometimes on the first syllable in AAVE (Andersson 2003:6; Tottie 2002:221).

2.2.2 Grammatical features of African American Vernacular English

One of the most striking grammatical features of AAVE is the invariant be, which fills an important function, since it enables speakers to choose to indicate that an action took place in the past or leave it in “noncommittal form” (Dillard 1973:42). By using be as a finite verb form, AAVE speakers refer exclusively to repeated, habitual action, in contrast to Standard English, in which that sort of verbal contrast is not possible. Standard English communicates the same message as AAVE in the sentences below, but in AAVE there is a verbal contrast between ‘be’ and the absence of the copula, and this distinction is not possible in SE, unless an extra word is added, for example an adverb like always.
As the examples show, the Standard English verb form is he’s in both examples, whereas the AAVE sentences have different forms; the first one (with copula deletion) indicating present tense, and the second one representing repeated action. Likewise, in a sentence like John is happy, it is unclear whether John is happy right now, or if he is always happy. In order to make this distinction something more needs to be added, like always, or right now. In AAVE there would be no confusion, since John happy (right now) has a different meaning than John be happy (always) (Fromkin & Rodman 1988:267). The copula, the verb be, is not always absent, though. When be is in sentence position where it is not contractible in Standard English, there is a need to have the copula in AAVE. An example of a sentence in which the copula appears in so called ‘exposed position’ where the copula is needed in AAVE is he is not as nice as he says he is, since the verb form here is not contractible in Standard English: *He is not as nice as he says he’s (Fromkin 1988:267). As noted in example (a), it is acceptable to leave out the copula, but only in present tense, in the positions where it is contractible in Standard English, and not when referring to the first person singular. The same rules apply when be serves as an auxiliary. A sentence like we tryin’ to get outta here is thus acceptable in AAVE, even though a verb follows the pronoun, and not an adjective, as in example (a) (Tottie 2002:222).

In addition to the present perfect verb form: I have talked, and the past perfect form: I had talked, which both Standard English and AAVE have, the latter has two additional forms: I done talked which refers to a completed event, and I been talked, which is to say an event took place in a distant past. Furthermore, there are forms that exist in similar forms in both varieties of English, but are used differently in AAVE: I did talk, which means that I just finished talking, and I BÍN talked, in which been is stressed, which means that I have been talking for a long time, and still am (Trudgill 2000:56; Tottie 2002:222). BÍN can also be used in sentences to mean ‘for a long time’ or ‘a long time ago’ (Rickford 1999:23).

To indicate future tense, the verb gon is sometimes used in AAVE, which is illustrated by the example You better watch him cause he gon take credit for the work that you did (Alim 2006:115).
Another typical feature of AAVE is the use of double negations, as in the following example: “[a]in’t no cat can’t get in no coop”, in which negation is indicated no less than four times. The sentence in Standard English would be [t]here is no cat that can get into any cage, demonstrating only a “logical” double negation: no and any (Andersson 2003:7; Tottie 2002:224). Ain’t is used in AAVE and a few other non-standard varieties of English, where be not, do not, and sometimes also have not would be used in Standard English (Tottie 2002:223). Examples of the use of ain’t include: he ain’t worth nothing, he ain’t speaking, and he ain’t got no money.¹

Another AAVE characteristic that is featured in the sentence above is the lack of the relative pronoun that (Tottie 2002:224). There is replaced by it, called the existential it, yielding sentences like [i]t’s a boy in my class (Trudgill 2000:57).

The possessive s that is used to indicate ownership in Standard English is often absent in AAVE: Anna book, David car². The possessive is expressed differently regarding plural pronouns as well. Instead of third person plural possessive, their, AAVE-speakers often use they, as in they cars are cheap (Alim 2006:15).

It is common to use nouns with verbs in a way that violates what in Standard English is called subject-verb agreement. Hence, the present tense -s that is usually added to third person singular is deleted, as in [h]e walk. Instead the -s is sometimes seen with the plural forms you, we and they, as in [y]ou looks hard tuh beat. Other verbs are affected by this non-agreement as well, such as the form be, which is, when present, also used differently from Standard English: I, you, and they (is). (Tottie 2002:223).

The term steady is often used in AAVE to emphasize and to accentuate continuation, as in the sentence “She steady prayin her son come home”, which means ‘She is intensely, consistently and continuously hoping her son comes home’ (Alim 2006:55).

Negative inversion is another feature of AAVE, yielding sentences like [c]an nobody touch E-40!, instead of Nobody can touch E-40! (Alim 2006:55). Inversion is also common in indirect questions, which in AAVE are formed in exactly the same way as direct questions:

¹ My own examples
² My own examples
(c) Direct question: Where did you go?
Indirect question:
AAVE: I asked Sarah where did she go.
SE: I asked Sarah where she went.

(d) Direct question: Did he leave town last night?
Indirect question:
AAVE: I wanna know did he leave town last night.
SE: I want to know whether/if he left town last night.\(^3\)

In AAVE it is common to use the standard indefinite article even before words that begin with vowels, as in *a egg* and *a attitude* (Tottie 2002:225).

### 2.2.3 Lexical features of African American Vernacular English

Vocabulary in AAVE is also different from other varieties of English. Some words with African origin have made their way into the English language, like *totem* and *juke*, whereas some English words have taken on new meanings among AAVE speakers, such as *brother*, which means ‘a black man’ (Tottie 2002:220, 225).

Furthermore, there are expressions that have special meanings, such as *come*, which indicates indignation, as in *he come walkin’ in here like he owned the place*; and *to call oneself*, as in *he calls himself a plumber\(^4\)*, which indicates that he is not good at his job, or *he calls himself a singer*, which is to say he thinks that he sings well, but he really doesn’t. However, the use of *to call oneself* is nowadays also common in Standard English (Tottie 2002:226).

Several linguists have claimed that the language of the people within the hip hop culture and AAVE are essentially the same (Alim 2006:114). This means that many expressions that are used in hip hop lyrics, even though they may be slang, are to be considered part of AAVE vocabulary. A few examples of such expressions are: 9, *thug*, and *ends*, which mean nine millimetre gun, someone who has gone through hardships in life and makes money by any means available, and *money*, respectively (www.rapdict.org). The language in rap lyrics is constantly developing, and rappers come up with new words with great frequency. Some artists even publish glossaries on the inside flaps of their album covers, in order to help their listeners keep up with their slang usage (Alim 2006:75).

\(^3\) (Labov, 2008)

\(^4\) My own example
2.3 Who speaks African American Vernacular English?

It is difficult to determine how many people speak AAVE, since not all of its features are present in all African Americans’ speech. Some linguists also hold that AAVE speakers are skilled executors of code switching and possessors of a “chameleon quality”, which allows black speakers to go through “a range of speech styles” (Alim 2006:110). However, the estimated percentage of the African Americans in the US who speak AAVE ranges from 80-90% (Lippi-Green 1997:176). Many African Americans are able to speak AAVE, but choose not to, whereas some people use the variety only on certain occasions. Gunnel Tottie observes in her book *An Introduction to American English* that young speakers of AAVE often have more characteristics of AAVE in their speech than older speakers do. Tottie points out that the reason for this is probably “influence from rap lyrics and identification with black culture”, and that it works as means of peer-group bounding (Tottie 2002:228). Further, adult, black speakers are more aware that their speech is considered inferior to other varieties of English, and this may be a reason why they seem to possess a “refined, communicative competence”, that children do not (Alim 2006:124).

2.4 African American Vernacular English and hip hop

The US is often said to be a world leader in many respects; politically, economically, industrially, military and culturally. Many countries all over the world are influenced by the American culture and language, partly through music, movies and television. Through the media we have learned to recognize the different features of American English, and to discern the differences that are in the language of many Black speakers of American English. AAVE is different from Standard English in several respects; there are differing grammatical, lexical and phonological features in AAVE that do not appear in other varieties of English (Tottie 2002:219).

The term hip hop refers to an urban American youth culture that evolved in the mid 1970s in New York City (Keeley 2001:6). Important cornerstones of the hip hop culture were graffitti, breakdance and music. The culture spread among young African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in poor parts of New York, such as the Bronx (Keeley 2001:9). What was interesting about this new group of adolescents was that their music was something completely innovative and groundbreaking. The music was produced by DJs, discjockeys, who used two different turntables to switch back and forth between discs (Keeley 2001:10). It was probably DJ Kool Herc, an immigrant from Jamaica, who first distinguished hip hop music from other genres, and who led the way for others to follow. DJ Kool Herc is somewhat
of a legend within hip hop for introducing massive stereo systems and creating extended instrumental breaks in the music (Thornberg 2003:4). During the 1970s, DJs grew in popularity and the focus was moved from the break dancers on the dance floor to the DJs. At this point, so called MCs, masters of ceremonies, were hired for the DJ shows. The MCs delivered lyrics in a way that resembled speech more than singing; this type of music is called rap and is a form of hip hop music in which the vocals are in focus rather than the electronic instruments that make up the background music (Keeley 2001:11). Rap music was not widely accepted in America until 1979, when the hip hop group Sugar Hill Gang had a breakthrough with their song “Rapper’s Delight”, which reached fourth place on the Billboard R&B chart. The song was so “closely related” to this new music style that MCs from this time on were known as “rappers” (Keeley 2001:14). The term rap has been used in different parts of the world, to refer to chiefly two things: lovemaking and talking. In Africa, the term has been used since the 1970s, meaning flirt, fool, and tease (Campbell 2005:35). African Americans have been using the word since the 1940s to refer to “[holding] a conversation; a long, impressive, lyrical social or political monologue; rapid, clever talk; rhyming monologue; conversation as a highly self-conscious art-form” (Campbell 2005:35).

Rap music is the preferred music style for 67% of black and 55% of all non-white youths in America (Morgan 2001:189-190). The lyrics of rap often contain personal observations and experiences, and express pain, anger, sorrow, desire, and pleasure (Thornberg 2003:2). Further, they are often delivered in a storytelling and boasting way, making the performers seem like heroes (Andersson 2003:10). According to some sources, the storytelling way of rap lyrics might be related to the traditions of griots in West Africa, who are people that tell stories about people or villages in order to preserve the stories for the future (Campbell 2005:35; Alim 2006:21). The traditional black church, with its sermons and preachers, is the “most powerful and influential black institution” in America, and has hence influenced rap music and the way it is delivered today (Thornberg 2003:4). The style of the lyrics developed during the seventies and the eighties and it came to affect people, since it contained political messages, threats and slurs against the police, ethnic groups, homosexuals, and women (Keeley 2001:30-31, 36). Due to the prevalence of violent rap lyrics, there are people outside the hip hop community opposing rap National Political music. In the mid-1990s, Dr C. DeLores Tucker, head of the Congress of Black Women, pushed for, and achieved a trial in court against rap (Thornberg 2003:3).

What is also characteristic about the language in rap music is the use of African American Vernacular English, and rap is therefore sometimes referred to as a “black form of
music” (Keeley 2001:31). Rap music is still today a musical genre in which most performers are black, and as Tottie (2002:219) puts it, “Most people have probably heard specimens of AAVE even if they have never been to the United States, either in movies or in rap lyrics”.

2.5 Previous research on AAVE in rap lyrics

Research on white rappers’ language is sparse to non-existent, and not many studies have been made investigating the use of African American Vernacular English in rap lyrics either. However, it is a known fact that most black rappers do use AAVE when communicating with one another (Alim 2006:74). A Belgian student of African history and linguistics was one of the first researchers to provide a minor account of the history of rap, in 1986-87. His results showed that there were indeed “Black English” linguistic features in rap lyrics (Alim 2006:5). Since then, a number of academic papers on hip hop Culture and its language have been presented at conferences for scholars of language around the globe (Alim 2006:5). Before rap and hip hop were born and gained recognition, research was made on the language in the neighbourhoods in which rap later erupted. This means that “[b]y describing the linguistic patterns and practices of Black Americans in the inner cities, these scholars were studying the linguistic forebears of the H[ip]H[op]N[ation]” (Alim 2006:5-6).

Andersson (2003) found in her study on the use of African American Vernacular English in rap lyrics, that word final clusters were deleted, th-sounds were pronounced as d or t, and that the -ing and -er suffixes were used in ways that are characteristic of AAVE (Andersson 2003:11-13). Typical AAVE features such as double negation, various AAVE forms of the verb be, as well as absence of the third person singular present tense marker –s also prevailed in the lyrics investigated by Andersson (2003:14-16). Another study showed that habitual be, copula absence, stressed been, the future tense marker gon, and the use of they for possessive were common grammatical features, and that postvocalic –r, and pronunciation of -ink and -ing as (–ank) and (–ang) were prevalent phonological characteristics (Alim 2006:115).

Another study, on the use of AAVE in legendary black rapper Tupak Shakur’s lyrics (Thornberg 2003) showed that that AAVE was used in Shakur’s lyrics to a large extent. It was demonstrated that the use of AAVE was not consistent and that standard forms were sometimes used as well. The inconsistency in the use of AAVE was, according to Thornberg (2003:24) due to the fact that the rhythm determined which forms were most suitable.

Kanye West, whose lyrics are investigated in this research, has declared against white artists using black language: “I hate music where white people are trying to sound black. The
white music I like is white”⁵. The white rap group Beastie Boys, on the other hand, have stated in their lyrics that they focus on producing qualitative music rather than on writing lyrics with Standard English sentences: “Not perfect grammar, always perfect timing” (Beastie Boys: 3-minute rule); “We need body rockin’, not perfection” (Body movin’). These two quotes clearly assert what Thornberg found: flow and style is more important than using Standard English expressions. The relationship between beats and rhymes in time is called flow, and a nice flow is something all rappers want to achieve (Alim 2006:95). However, a flow does not necessarily require rhymes, as long as the words “go good together” (Alim 2006:63).

Alim, (2006) also found in his research that black rappers’ use of AAVE is inconsistent, and that the use of AAVE features were more present in their lyrics than in their ordinary speech (2006:110, 121). In addition, the results showed inconsistency in the use of AAVE in rap lyrics as well. The texts investigated lacked features such as completive done, future completive be done, invariant be, and aspectual steady. In contrast to what Thornberg concluded, Alim believes that the lack of some AAVE features might be due to the fact that they are not exceedingly common in vernacular speech either, and that rap artists use Standard English grammar as a way to “appeal to” white people (Alim 2006:115). Rickford agrees with the latter statement and finds that “[the] hypothesis that speakers vary their languages use primarily to suit their audience or addressee” is “basically confirmed” (Rickford 1999:xvi).

3. Methods and material
3.1 Material

The rappers investigated in the present study are all male. This is a justified and conscious decision. The reason I will not put gender into this investigation is that it would make the project unwieldy. Instead I will limit myself to the differences between black and white, male artists. The criteria I had when I selected artists to investigate were 1) race (two of each), and 2) fame. I thus ended up with the following four rather randomly picked, successful, contemporary rappers: Snoop Dogg, Kanye West, The Beastie Boys, and Eminem. Four lyrics from each artist/group were analyzed, totalling 16 lyrics.

Snoop Dogg, whose real name is Cordozar Calvin Broadus, Jr. was born in 1972 in California. He released his first album in 1993, and is, in addition to being a famous rapper,
also a well-known producer and actor. Snoop Dogg was formerly known as Snoop Doggy Dogg, but changed his stage name in 1998.\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snoop_dogg, 2008}

Kanye west is a black rapper from Chicago, Illinois, who started producing rap music in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Despite being a newcomer in the music industry, he has already won nine Grammys and possesses his own record company.\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanye_west, 2008.}

Marshall Bruce Mathers III, more known as Eminem or Slim Shady, is a white rapper from Detroit, Michigan, which is the most racially segregated cosmopolitan area in the United States (Smitherman 2000:339). Eminem has sold millions of albums, won several Grammys and owns his own record company.\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eminem, 2008.}

The Beastie Boys is a hip hop group from New York City, which consists of white members Michael "Mike D" Diamond, Adam "MCA" Yauch, and Adam "Ad-Rock" Horovitz, and since the 1990s, the DJ for the group has been Michael "Mix Master Mike" Schwartz. The Beastie Boys have been making hip hop music for several decades and “came out rapping when [they were] born” as they say in their \textit{Body Movin’} lyrics. Their first rap album was the best selling record in its genre of the 1980s.\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beastie_boys, 2008.}

The songs included in my investigation are listed as primary sources in my list of references, whereas all lyrics are found in the appendix.

\textbf{3.2 Methods}

When analyzing the material, I scrutinized paper copies of the lyrics, while listening to the songs and taking notes simultaneously. Grammatical features were mostly detectable in the printed versions of the lyrics, but listening repeatedly was the most important and useful method for catching phonological features, and grammatical characteristics that did not appear in the paper copies.
3.3 Criteria for features to be referred to as AAVE features

The features I have chosen to refer to as AAVE features in this essay are the most prominent ones that I found in my secondary sources. When investigating lyrics I tried to find lyrics with at least three verses in order to increase the chances of finding AAVE features. Many lyrics are written in a way that makes no or little room for typical features of AAVE, for example lyrics with much repetition and very short clauses. In the modern music industry it is extremely common that artists collaborate and perform as guest artists on each other’s tracks; therefore I have had to take such co-operation into consideration as well when choosing songs for this investigation. Some of the lyrics include guest performers, but in those cases the co-rapper is the same race as the main rapper.

4. Analysis and results

Throughout this section, all data referred to will be presented in a different font.

4.1 AAVE features in black rappers’ lyrics

The following features appear in the lyrics by Kanye West and Snoop Dogg that were investigated in this paper.

4.1.1 Phonological features

There are innumerable examples in the lyrics of the songs in this study that show simplification in the pronunciation of words ending in -ing. There are also a few cases of pronunciations that lean toward -ang and -ank for words like thing and drink, as in Snoop Dogg’s lyrics: Bring your friend and some drank (“Those gurlz”). What can also be heard in some of the lyrics is simplification of /ð/, which either makes the sound into a stop, as in:

(1) Jumpin’ in da crowd (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)
    …guess when I heard that [daf] (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)
    Momma told me there’d be days like this [dis] (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
    My spirit is a part of this [dis] (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
    …I got like four of them [dem] (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

or omits it, as in: Spark your lighters wave ‘em round (Kanye West: “Homecoming”). There were also a few lines in which the /θ/ sound was turned into a /t/ sound, which is common
when appearing in association with nasals: Nothing [na’tin] sadder than... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”), I ain't got nutt’n jack (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”). Another tendency that was found in several of the lyrics was deletion of unstressed initial syllables:

(2) I know you ‘memb’ me (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
I rate you ‘bout an eight (...) then I’m ‘bout to beat... (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
She’s thinkin’ ‘bout me (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual Seduction”)
...like she talkin’ ‘bout me (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)

One feature that was difficult to find was the dropping of post-vocalic /r/, which was nevertheless found in some of the songs:

(3) Well it’s the supa dupa Snoopa (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
I’m a be that nigga for [fo] life (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

Other characteristics of AAVE that were rare were reduction of word-final clusters, and omission of /l/ in contracted forms, which was quite difficult to discern, yet found in a few of the lyrics:

(4) ...she got so cold [col] (...) platinum and gold [gol]... (Kanye West: “Homecoming”),
Wait [wei]...baby girl I’m the great [grei] (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
I’ll [a] bake a nigga... (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
...want a ride [ra] (...) grippin’ on my nine [na]... (Snoop Doog: “Those gurlz”)

Monopthongization appeared in the following excerpts from Snoop Dogg and Kanye West:

5) When I [a] peeped this lil’ freak out... (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)
I love how you stay fly [fla] (...) and I’ll reply [repla] (...) I’m the guy [ga] (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
When I [a] look you in the eyes [aːs] (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
...I’m on the fly [fla] (...) want a ride [ra] (...) grippin’ on my nine [na] (...) C’s up in the sky [ska] (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
I [a] know I [a] got angels... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

14
Just as diphthongs were turned into monophthongs, word clusters were assimilated in several cases, mostly with expressions like y’all and I’ma. Some examples are:

(6) So y’all copped the LPs and y’all fiends got dealt (Kanye West: “We major”)  
    I’ma be that nigga for life (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)  
    I’ma handle it (Snoop Dogg: “Why did you leave me”)  
    Y’all eat pieces of shit? (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)

Pronunciation of /e/ as /i/ is used once in the West lyrics: …take away from my ends [inds]… (Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”). In this case the non-Standard pronunciation might have been used because West is a speaker of AAVE, but this particular case might just as well be a realization of a phoneme pronounced in order to make the line rhyme with the preceding word spins and the following sins.

4.1.2 Grammatical features

4.1.2.1 Zero copula

Both Kanye West and Snoop Dogg use structures that lack the copula. In all of the eight songs investigated, many examples of copula deletion were found, as in the examples below:

(7) We major (Kanye West: “We major”)  
    We at war (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)  
    They just like you, they wanna’ rap (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)  
    When you hot, I’m hot (…) and when your feet cold, mines\textsuperscript{10} is sizzelin’ (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)  
    You the wheels to my car… (Snoop Dogg: “Why did you leave me”)  
    You a freak… (Snoop Dogg: Sensual seduction”)  
    That’s why they on my d*** (…) and they at my crib… (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)  
    And we your number one biggest fans (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)

As mentioned before, copula deletion indicates present tense, in contrast to invariant be, which represents repeated action. This means that the actions in (7) are not recurring or repeated, but could be fixed in time.

\textsuperscript{10} Mines is a possessive pronoun I have not come across when doing my research on AAVE. However, it is possible that it is a feature that has only recently begun to exist or prevail.
The auxiliary *be* is also quite often absent in the lines formed in the progressive, as is shown by the following examples:

(8) She lookin’ at my stones like ‘damn is he rich?’ (Snoop Dogg “Those gurlz”)
They hating on you… (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
…it always seems like she talkin’ about me (Homecoming)
Next time I’m in the club, everybody screaming out… (Jesus walks)
God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down (Jesus walks)
…what niggas tryin’ to do… (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)
…for we living in hell here… (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)
…if you ever comin’ home (Snoop Dogg: “Why did you leave me”)

The deletion of auxiliary *be* is a very consistent feature in the lyrics, whereas the zero copula is not used quite as consistently. Some examples of where *be* is present and not deleted are:

(9) Doggy dogg is a freak (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)
My spirit is a part of this (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
My name is Windy¹¹ (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)

4.1.2.2 Invariant *be*

It is quite common that rappers use the invariant *be* in their lyrics, although this feature does not appear as often as the zero copula. This form, which is used to indicate repeated, habitual action, is used in the following lines:

(10) We be crip’n (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
They be asking us questions (Kanye West “Jesus Walks”)
…rappers be deprived…; …companies be stealing (Kanye West: “We major”)
I just don’t be feelin’ it (…) they just be concealin’ it… (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

¹¹ This looks like an example of pronunciation of the phoneme /e/ as /i/, which is a phonological feature of AAVE (see chapter 2.2.1 and 4.1.1). However, this song is about Chicago which is often referred to as The Windy City, and the name is thus probably Windy and not Wendy. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windy_City,_Origin_of_Name_(Chicago))
Smitherman (1998:331-332) states that *be* is not only used to indicate habitual events, but sometimes also to refer to future events, which might be the intention with the lines in (10).

### 4.1.2.3 Aspectual steady, completive *done*, remote *been*, and stressed *BÍN*

Aspectual *steady*, completive *done*, remote *been*, and stressed *BÍN* are features of AAVE that are not particularly common neither in hip hop lyrics, nor in AAVE in general (Alim 2006:114; Trudgill 2000:56). My findings support these claims; out of the eight lyrics I investigated, only two examples of completive *done* were found:

(11)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I done} & \text{ came and crept up... (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”) } \\
\text{We done} & \text{ got her sensual seduction (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)}
\end{align*}
\]

The use of completive *done* in these sentences indicates in both cases that Snoop Dogg will no longer keep doing what he has been doing.

The use of remote *been* and stressed *BÍN* was even more rare. I found one example with stressed *BÍN*, which indicates that something has been going on for a long time, and still is: *Who else you know been [bi:n] hot this long* (Kanye West: “Never let me down”). The term *steady* was not used in the lyrics.

### 4.1.2.4 Subject-verb non-agreement

There are several cases of what is in Standard English would be called *Subject-verb agreement errors*. These features of AAVE are not to be considered errors, but solely deviances from the Standard variety of English. Most of the lyrics, performed by the black artists I have investigated contained a few verbs that did not have third person singular *s*, where Standard English would require its presence. Some examples are:

(12)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{...she know they soft... (Kanye West: “Homecoming”) } \\
\text{...she like to toe ‘em off... (Kanye West: “Homecoming”) } \\
\text{...the way school need teachers... (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”) } \\
\text{...so here go my single dog... (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”) } \\
\text{He hear me when my feet get weary (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)}
\end{align*}
\]
...she never mess... (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)
...better than a chick that say yes to soon... (Kanye West: “We major”)
...it take a lot more than... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
...and a player know if I... (Snoop Dogg:” Sensual seduction”)

However, it is noteworthy that the Standard forms are used as well a few times, as the examples in (13) demonstrate:

(13) Radio needs this (...) that means...(Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”)
...that means... (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)

There was also a case of do-construction that was different from the standard: ...she don't grow breasts too soon... (Kanye West: “We major”)

In addition, examples of phrases in which the singular form of the verb be, i.e. is, is used instead of are when referring to plural nouns. However, the use of this feature is not as prominent in the lyrics I investigated as is the absence of third person singular s. The following cases were identified:

(14) ...mines is sizzelin’... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
...niggas is...(Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
...we rappers is role models... (Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”)
...vibrations is what I’m into... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

4.1.2.5 Ain’t
That the use of ain’t is a common feature of AAVE becomes apparent when analyzing black rap artists’ lyrics. The expression was used three times as much as the Standard forms in the lyrics. Some examples are:

(15) We ain't going nowhere (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)
...we ain't spoke in so long... (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”)
Ain't no different when I'm rippin’... (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
I ain't talkin' bout a gun...(Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
I ain't givin' up (...) you ain't this nigga' (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)
However, there were, as mentioned, also several cases of standard forms of *BE + not* as well. The following inconsistencies were found:

(16) So it's *not* me (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
I'm *not* just another individual (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
I'm *not* a miracle (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
They just *not* you... what niggahs tryin to do just *not* new (Kanye West: Homecoming”)
I'm *not* gonna rush to stroll (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)

4.1.2.6 Gon’
The use of future marker *gon* is present in half of the songs investigated:

(17) And them other bitches they *gon*’ wait in line (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)
She *gon*’ get hers before I... (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)
She’s so right I’m *gon*’ beat (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)
*Gon*’ be a whole family on that funeral line (Kanye West: “We Major”)
It *gon*’ take a lot more than coupons to get us saved (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)

*Gon*’ was not the only future marker found in the lyrics. Common standard forms such as *gonna, will,* and contracted forms of *will* were also used several times, as in Which will probably... (Kanye West: “Never let me down”) and I'm not gonna rush... (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”).

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12 Here, the copula is missing, which is also a typical feature of AAVE. Nevertheless, *ain’t* could be used in this case as well, but is not, which is why the example is listed in this chapter.
4.1.2.7 AAVE forms of the possessive

The possessive is not demonstrated in AAVE in the same way as in Standard English. Possessive –s is sometimes absent in AAVE, and the possessive pronoun their is sometimes replaced by the personal pronoun they. I found two cases of complete absence of possessive marker: The black man plight (Kanye West: “We major”); That day my girl father past away (Kanye West: “Never let me down”). They for possessive pronouns is used in three of the lyrics:

(18) First I had they ear, now I have they heart (Kanye West: “Never let me down”)
...how you take away they shine (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”) 
...they good whisky… (Kanye West: “We major”) 
Get they first car… (Kanye West: “We major”) 

However, third person singular possessive ‘s is used as well, which implies that there is inconsistency in black rappers’ use of AAVE forms of the possessive:

(19) ...to get into k’s club (Kanye West: “Never let me down”) 
Let it be known that God’s penmanship has… (Kanye West: “Never let me down”) 

4.1.2.8 Multiple negations

It is to be noted that multiple negation is used in white non-standard English, and was used in Old and Middle English as well. The feature is thus not something peculiar in AAVE, yet widely used among AAVE speakers, and therefore included in this investigation. There are a few cases of multiple negation in Kanye West’s and Snoop Dogg’s lyrics. In fact, all sentences in which there is negation are formed according to AAVE standards:

(20) ...I don’t think there is nothing I can do now (Kanye West: “Jesus walks”) 
But it wasn’t no use (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”) 

4.1.2.9 Regular indefinite article before word initial vowels

The indefinite article a, which in Standard English is used before words that are pronounced with an initial consonant, appears before words beginning with a pronounced vowel as well. This feature was found in two of the lyrics:
However, there were also two cases in which *an* was used:

(22) I wanted her to have an eruption (Snoop Dogg: “Sensual seduction”)

I rate you ‘bout an eight (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”)

Since both indefinite articles *a*, and *an* are used before vowel-initial nouns, it can be stated that the black rappers’ use of this feature is inconsistent.

### 4.1.3 Lexical features

Classical hip hop terms such as *gangsta*, *nigga*, and miscellaneous swear- and taboo-words are present in all eight lyrics. Furthermore, there are a few expressions that are quite unique, that even though they might be considered slang, are indeed true black, rap terms. In Snoop Dogg’s song “Let it out”, he refers several times to *his nine*, and the term, which, as mentioned earlier, is a clipping of a ‘nine millimetre gun’, is also used in one of West’s songs.

(23) I'm still grippin’ on my nine (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)

I'm workin’ with a nine (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)

He ain't never had shit, but he had that nine (Kanye West: “We major”)

Interestingly, another hip hop-term presented in the background section was used in one of the lyrics:

(24) Which will probably take away from my ends, then I hope this take away from my sins (Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”)

*Ends* is another word for money and derives from the expression “making ends meet”.  

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13 (http://rapdict.org/Ends, 2005)
There is also another expression; *po-po*, which like many other rap terms, refers to the police.\(^\text{14}\)

(25) And the *po-po* know... (Snoop Dogg: “Let it out”)

West uses typical hip hop terms to refer to his home town, America’s third largest, the city of Chicago, Illinois. Chi-city, Chi-Town and The Chi are all clippings for Chicago that are commonly heard in rap lyrics.\(^\text{15}\)

(26) And you say *Chi city*, *Chi city*, *Chi city* (Kanye West: “Homecoming”)
I walk through the valley of the *Chi* (Kanye West: “Jesus Walks”)

In order to refer to an attractive woman, a “‘ten’ on a scale of one-to-ten”, Snoop Dogg uses the expression *dime*: ...okay, fine, you a *dime* (Snoop Dogg: “Those gurlz”).\(^\text{16}\) The expression and its meaning are explained by the US currency system, in which a dime is 10 cents.

### 4.2 AAVE features in white rapper’s lyrics

In this section the results of the investigation of the white rappers’ lyrics will be presented. The following features appear in the lyrics by the hip hop acts Beastie Boys and Eminem

#### 4.2.1 Phonological features

Like Kanye West and Snoop Dogg, white rappers Eminem and the Beastie Boys pronounce the phoneme /ŋ/ with simplification in words ending in –*ing*. There are a large number of lines with such features. Some examples are: sayin’, comin’, rappin’, shakin’ (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”) Y’all writnin’, chasin’ (Beastie Boys: “Looking down the barrel of a gun”) movin’, lookin’, rockin’ (Beastie Boys: “Body movin’”); breathin’, kickin’, mornin’, takin’ cleanin’ (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”). Pronunciation of verbs ending in –*ing* was completely consistent in all of the lyrics. Words like *ring* and *thing* were pronounced with /ŋ/, but no cases of pronunciation of words ending in –*ing* and –*ink* as –*ang* and –*ank*, on the other hand, were found. Besides with words ending in –*ing*, there were a few cases of word-final cluster reductions in the lyrics:

\(^\text{14}\) (www.rapdict.org/Po-po, 2005)
\(^\text{15}\) (http://www.rapdict.org/ChiTown, 2007)
...kickin' ass in the mornin' an' takin' names in the evenin'… (Eminem: Cleaning out my closet)"

It always brings me back when I hear, "ooh child" [chile] (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”).
...shot Kim and him [Kim'h'im] both (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet)"

No cases of pronunciations of /ð/ as /d/ were found in the lyrics, but the / ð / sound was sometimes omitted and assimilated with surrounding sounds as is sometimes the case in spoken Standard English as well. Some examples are:

And stuck ’em under the tree and said some of ’em were from me (Eminem “Mockingbird”)
Cuz daddy couldn't buy ’em (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
...blow ’em; give ’em: leave ’em (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)
...man enough to face’em… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)

Single word monophthongization cases were not found in the lyrics, except for some cases of I pronounced as /a/, but the typical assimilated word clusters y’all and I’ma were used quite frequently in the lyrics. Some examples are:

I’ma give you the world (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
I’ma buy a diamond ring for you, I’ma sing for you (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
I’ma break that birdies neck (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
I’ma make you… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)
I’ma expose it… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)
I’ma die harder like my kid Bruce Willis (Beastie Boys: “Looking down the barrel of a gun”)
Cold medina y’all (Beastie Boys: “Looking down the barrel of a gun”)
All of y’all get off the wall (Beastie Boys: “Body movin’”)
…welcome y’all… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)

The word ask appeared in Eminem’s “Superman” lyrics, but it was not pronounced aks as is sometimes the case in AAVE.

AAVE is non-rhotic, which means that /r/ is sometimes silent. This feature was noted quite a few times with words like father (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”), sugar (Beastie
Boys: “Intergalactic”), bigger, chamber, hammer, trigger (Beastie Boys: “Looking down the barrel of a gun”).

4.2.2 Grammatical features

4.2.2.1 Zero copula

In the lyrics of the white rappers in this study, the use of zero copula is not as frequent as in the lyrics of the black rappers. In fact, copula deletion is not used at all in any of the eight lyrics. There are many places where copula deletion could occur, but does not. Some examples are:

(30) Your rhymes are spread (...) the music is loud (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)
     His palms are sweaty (...) arms are heavy (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)
     This world is mine... (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)

Auxiliary deletion, on the other hand, appears in several of the lyrics, as is shown below:

(31) What you crying about? (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
     What you tryin’ to be my new wife? What you Mariah? (Eminem: “Superman”)
     People always sayin' my style is wild (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)
     Beastie Boys known to let the beat... (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)

However, there are also examples where deletion of the auxiliary could occur, but does not:

(32) The ship is docking (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)
     Words are flowing out... (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies”)

There are, in other words no examples of zero copula in the lyrics, only auxiliary deletion, but even this feature is used without consistency.
4.2.2.2 Invariant be

It has been stated that the use of invariant be is not the most frequent feature of AAVE. Therefore it is quite remarkable that it indeed appears in three of the lyrics of white, supposedly non-AAVE speakers:

(33) We be getting’ down (Beastie Boys: “Body movin’’’)
    You be listening to my records… (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies’’’)
    Ultra violence be running through my head (Beastie Boys: “Looking down the barrel of a gun”)

Since Beastie Boys use be as a finite verb form in three of the four lyrics in this study, it can be assumed that they are aware of its usage among AAVE speakers. Invariant be is used when referring to repeated, habitual action, which is possibly what the group tries to express in (33). It is also probable that Beastie Boys do not use these constructions when they speak, both because they are white and because, as Alim stated, AAVE features tend to prevail more in lyrics than in speech (see chapter 2.5).

4.2.2.3 Aspectual steady, completive done, remote been, and stressed BÍN

All four above mentioned features “appear relatively infrequently in the corpus of Black American speech” (Alim 2006:115). The term steady, as a marker of intense activity that occurs continuously, is not used in any of the lyrics, neither is completive done, or stressed BÍN. What is possibly present, however, is the remote been, in one of the lyrics:

(34) I been chewed up… (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)

It is also possible that (34) is an example of auxiliary deletion in present perfect, which means that this example is not completely reliable.

4.2.2.4 Subject-verb non-agreement

Third person singular –s, like Mario C likes… (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”’) and he opens… (Eminem: “Lose yourself”) was not absent in any of the white lyrics, except in the line: AD-rock light up the place (Beastie Boys’’), which could be considered non-standard; however, the message in this specific example is presumably posed as an exhortation, and is thus a
perfectly standard case of the imperative. The most frequent subject-verb non-agreement feature was the plural form of *do* used with singulars, in the following lines:

(35)  
It's got a ring to it, don't it? (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)  
*It don’t* matter (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)  
*It don’t* collapse (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)  
And if that *mockingbird don’t* sing and that *ring don’t* shine... (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)  
*Daddy don’t* want you to see

The last example is not crystal clear, though, since in this case, Eminem refers to himself in third person (*daddy*), which makes the form *don’t* (as in *I don’t*) logic even in Standard English. However, the use of *don’t* with singulars is quite consistent and only one sentence was found in which *does* was used instead: *Doesn’t it?* (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”).

The singular form *is* together with plural nouns appears a few times in the white rappers’ lyrics:

(36)  
*Y’all is* green (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)  
*My beats is* stock (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)  
*These hoes is* all on him (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)

Further, there were a few other cases of subject-verb non-agreement that would not be accepted in Standard English. In three of the lyrics, the plural personal pronouns *we* and *you* were used with the singular form of past tense *be*,

(37)  
*We was* cutting up the rug (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies”)  
...*we was* teenagers... (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)  
...admit *you was* wrong, bitch, do your song, keep tellin’ yourself that *you was* a mom...  
(Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)
4.2.2.5 Ain’t
As mentioned earlier, ain’t is used in AAVE where be not, do not, and have not would be used in Standard English. From what this study shows, white rappers tend to use Standard forms quite a lot, and the only time ain’t is used is where be + not would be used in Standard English, although not consistently since the standard negated form of be was used as well:

(38) I’m not James at 15 (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies”)
I’m not too keen (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”)
I know mommy’s not here right now (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
I’m not fazed (Eminem: “Superman”)

Ain’t was found in the following lines:

(39) …that girl ain’t nothing but a crab… (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies””)
Superman ain’t savin’ shit (Eminem: “Superman”)
…I ain’t there? (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
…ain’t you mama… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)

4.2.2.6 Gon’
Future tense marker gon’ was far more common in the lyrics of black rappers, than in those of the white ones. Standard forms are used as well, as in I’m going to rap, and If you try to knock me you’ll get mopped (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”). Contracted forms of will were the most common future tense markers in the lyrics. However, three examples of gon’ were found:

(40) We gon’ pull together (…) we gon’ do it (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)
Momma’s gon’ be alright (Eminem: “Mockingbird”)

4.2.2.7 Possessive
The possessive is not used very frequently in lyrics, especially not with third person singular nouns to which possessive –s can be added. Four cases of third person singular –s were found, but none in which this feature was absent. The most prominent use of possessive forms is, in these eight lyrics, with possessive pronouns such as his, her, and your. The plural personal pronoun they appeared in one case where their would be used in Standard English:
…as sour as vinegar in they mouth… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)

4.2.2.8 Multiple negations
Double negations were used instead of the terms anyone/anybody and anymore, as in the following examples:

(42) I don’t know if no one knows it… (Eminem: “Cleaning out my closet”)
…don’t wan’t him no mo’ (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)

4.2.2.9 Regular indefinite article before word initial vowels
No examples of regular indefinite articles before words beginning with vowels were found. There were two cases in which this feature could have occurred, but it did not: an electric shock (Beastie Boys: “Intergalactic”) and I’ve got an open mind (Beastie Boys: “Hey ladies”). In AAVE, using the regular indefinite article, the expressions would be a electric shock, and a open mind, respectively.

4.2.3 Lexical features
Eminem provides an example of a term that is part of hip hop nation language, since it refers to an activity that is exclusive and unique for the hip hop culture. Cipher means “highly competitive lyrical circles of rhymers” (Alim 2006:6).

(43) …writin’ the next cipher… (Eminem: “Lose yourself”)

5. Conclusion
The results of the close analysis of some rap lyrics, accounted for in the previous sections, indicate some major differences between the language of black and white rappers. My hypothesis that the language of black and white hip hop performers is different from one another is thus partly true. It has been shown that there are more features of AAVE in the lyrics of the black rappers, but many of the features presented in this essay were present in the lyrics of the white rappers as well, although not to the same extent.

The greatest difference between the uses of various grammatical features was that of third person singular –s, which was present in all possible positions in the white rappers’ lyrics, whereas there were a large number of examples demonstrating the opposite in the lyrics of the black artists. However, the white artists’ lyrics showed a few more examples of
plural nouns together with singular forms of be than the black rappers’ lyrics did. Typical AAVE features such as gon’, possessive they and indefinite article without n before vowel initial words, as well as the more widespread expression ain’t, were used twice as much in the black lyrics. The most common features of AAVE: zero copula, use of ain’t, and subject-verb non-agreement are found several times in the black artists’ lyrics, as well as in those of their white equivalents, disregarding the zero copula. The phonological features were quite difficult to distinguish, but what was apparent was the overt use of monophthongization and substitution of /d/ for the phoneme /ð/ in the lyrics of the black artists, and the reduction of initial unstressed syllables and simplification of final /ŋ/ in both the black and the white lyrics. Some of the features described in the background section that were not found in any of the lyrics are pronunciation of /l/ as /l/, /θ/ as /θ/, and ask as aks, or the use of negative inversion and existential it. What is also striking is how inconsistently the features of AAVE are used in the lyrics; standard forms are used quite often as well. The only feature that was used consistently in all of the lyrics was multiple negation.

This study has shown, like previous research, that there are several features of AAVE in the lyrics of black hip hop artists. The results strongly support Alim’s (2006) suggestion that the language of most rappers is AAVE. Remarkably, it has also been shown that white rappers use several features of the black vernacular in their lyrics. Being part of the same culture, the hip hop community, white rappers have been exposed to, and are affiliated with the black linguistic culture in America. However, Kanye West and Snoop Dogg sound more like AAVE speakers when rapping, than their white equivalents do. This divergence might be explained partly by the fact that Eminem grew up in the white parts of the highly segregated city of Detroit. Consequently, there are still, to a large extent, standard features of English present in his linguistic repertoire. Likewise, Beastie Boys are from the provenance town of hip hop, New York City, and having been rap icons for a long time, they have unmistakably found their own sound, although obviously influenced by black linguistic patterns. What is very likely, however, is that rhythm and rhyme are important factors that influence the way rappers, regardless of race, pronounce words and construct sentences.
References

Primary sources


Secondary sources


APPENDIX

KANYE WEST

"Jesus Walks"

Yo, We at war
We at war with terrorism, racism, and most of all we at war with ourselves (Jesus Walks)
God show me the way because the Devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks with me) with me, with me, with me [fares]

You know what the Midwest is?
Young & Restless
Where restless (Niggaz) might snatch your necklace
And next these (Niggaz) might jack your Lexus
Somebody tell these (Niggaz) who

Kanye West is
I walk through the valley of the Chi where death is
Top floor the view alone will leave you breathless Uhhhh!
Try to catch it Uhhhh! It's kinda hard hard

Getting choked by the detectives yeah yeah now check the method
They be asking us questions, hassle and arrest us
Saying "we eat pieces of shit like you for breakfast"

Huh? Y'all eat pieces of shit? What’s the basis?
We ain’t going nowhere but got suits and cases
A trunk full of coke rental car from Avis
My momma used to say only Jesus can save us

Well momma I know I act a fool
But I'll be gone 'til November I got packs to move I Hope

KANYE WEST

"Never Let Me Down"

(feat. Jay-Z, J-Ivy)

[Intro:] Yeah Grandmama
Told you I won’t let you down
Told you I won’t let this rap game change me, right?

[Chorus:] When it comes to being true, at least true to me
One thing I found, one thing I found
Oh no you’ll neva let me down, Get up I get(down)
Get up I get(down)
Get up I get(down)
Get up I get(down)
Get up I get(down)

[Jay-Z:] Yo, yo first I snatched the streets then I snatched the charts,
First I had they ear now I have they heart,
Rappers came and went, I’ve been here from the start, I

[Chorus x2] Jesus Walks
God show me the way because the Devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks with me)
The only thing that that I pray is that my feet don’t fail me now (Jesus Walks)
And I don’t thing there’s nothing I can do now to right my wrongs (Jesus walks with me... fades)

I wanna talk to God but I’m afraid ‘cause we ain’t spoke in so long

[Hook x2] (Jesus Walks)
God show me the way because the Devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks with me)
The only thing that that I pray is that my feet don’t fail me now (Jesus Walks)
And I don’t think there is nothing I can do now to right my wrongs (Jesus Walks with me)

I want to talk to God but I’m afraid because we ain’t spoke in so long

To the hustlas, killers, murderers, drug dealers even the strippers
To the victims of Welfare for we living in hell here hell yeah
Now hear ye hear ye want to see Thee more clearly
I know he hear me when my feet get weary

Cuz we’re the almost nearly extinct We rappers is role models we rap we don’t think
I ain’t here to argue about his facial features Or here to convert atheists into believers
I'm just trying to say the way school need teachers
The way Kathie Lee needed Regis that's the way y'all need Jesus
So here go my single dog radio needs this
They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus
That means guns, sex, lies, video tapes
But if I talk about God my record won’t get played Huh?
Well let this take away from my spins Which will probably take away from my ends
Then I hope this take away from my sins
And bring the day that I’m dreaming about
Next time I'm in the club everybody screaming out

(Jesus Walks)
God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks)
The only thing that that I pray is that my feet don’t fail me now (Jesus Walks)
And I don't thing there's nothing I can do now to right my wrongs (Jesus walks with me... fades)
I wanna talk to God but I'm afraid ‘cause we ain't spoke in so long

Devil trying to break me down
God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks)

[Chorus:]

This is God given
This is not a image
Nigga's can't f**k wit me
It's plain to see

APPENDIX

[Chorus:]

This is hard livin'
This is God given
This is not a image
Nigga’s can’t f**k wit me
It’s plain to see

And I don’t think there’s nothing I can do now to right my wrongs
And I don’t think there’s nothing I can do now to right my wrongs
And I don’t think there’s nothing I can do now to right my wrongs

We are at war with terrorism, racism, and most of all we at war with ourselves (Jesus Walks)
God show me the way because the Devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks with me) with me, with me, with me [fares]

You know what the Midwest is?
Young & Restless
Where restless (Niggaz) might snatch your necklace
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Get up I get(down)
Get up I get(down)
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I wanna talk to God but I’m afraid ‘cause we ain’t spoke in so long

Devil trying to break me down
God show me the way because the devil trying to break me down (Jesus Walks)

[Chorus:]
spirit is a part of this
That's why I get spiritual, but I get my
hymns from Him
So it's not me, it's He that's lyrical
I'm not a miracle, I'm a heaven-sent
instrument
My rhythmic regimen navigates
melodic notes for your soul and your
mental
That's why I'm instrumental
Vibrations is what I'm into
Yeah, I need my loot by rent day
But that is not what gives me the heart
of Kunte Kinte
I'm tryna give us "us free" like Cinque
I can't stop, that's why I'm hot
Determination, dedication, motivation
I'm talking to you, my many
inspirations
When I say that I can't, let you or self
down
If I were of the highest cliff, on the
highest riff
And you slipped off the side and
climched on to your life in my grip
I would never, ever let you down
And when these words are found
Let it be known that God's penmanship
has been signed with a language called
love
That's why my breath is felt by the deaf
And why my words are heard and
confined to the ears of the blind
I, too, dream in color and in rhyme
So I guess I'm one of a kind in a full
house
Cuz whenever I open my heart, my
soul, or my mouth
A touch of God reigns out
[Chorus]

[Jay-Z (Kanye West)]
Who else you know been hot this long,
(Oh Ya, you know we ain't finished)
Started from nothing but he got this
strong,
(The ROC is in the building)
Built the ROC from a pebble, pedalled
rock before I met you,
Pedalled bikes, got my nephews pedal
bikes because they special,
Let you tell that man I'm falling,
Well somebody must've caught him,
Cause every fourth quarter, I like to
Mike Jordan 'em,
Number one albums, what I got like
four of dem,
More of dem on the way,
The Eight Wonder on the way,
Clear the way, I'm here to stay,
Y'all can save the chatter chat, this and
that, this and Jay,
Dissin' Jay 'ill get you mased,
When I start spitting them lyrics,
niggas get very religious,
Six Hail Marys, please Father forgive
us,
Young, the Archbishop, the Pope John
Paul of y'all niggas,
The way y'all all follow Jigga,
Hov's a living legend and I tell you
why,
Everybody wanna be Hov and Hov still
alive.

KANYE WEST
"We Major"
(Feat. Nas, Really Doe)
[Chorus]
You motherfuckers better do your job
and roll up and watch how we roll up
and
I can't control it, can't hold it, it's so
nuts
I take a sip of that yak, I wanna fuck
I take a hit of that chronic, it got me
stuck
But really what's amazing is how I
keep blazing
Towel under the door smoke until the
days end
Puff, puff then pass, don't fuck up
rotation
Hypnotic for Henny, now nigga that's
your chaser
Turn nothin to something now pimplin'
that's a savior
Best things are green now pimp and get
your paper
High off the ground instead of
skyscraper
Cool off thinkin' we local, come on
home, we major
We major (come on, homie, we major)
[repeat]
Feeling better than some head on a
Sunday afternoon
Better than a chick that say yes to soon
Until you have a daughter, that's what I
call karma
And you pray to god she don't grow
breasts too soon.
Projects to' up, gang signs is thrown up
Niggas hats broke off that's how we
grow up
Why else you think shorty's write
rhymes just to blow up?
Get they first car and then IRS show up
He ain't never had shit but he had that
nine
Nigga come through flickin' and he had
that shine
Put two and two together in a little bad
weather
Gon' be a whole family on that funeral
line
Ask the reverand was the strip club
cool if my tips help send a pretty girl
through school
That's all I want like wino's want they
good whisky
I ain't in the Klan, but I brought my
hood with me

KANYE WEST
"Homecoming"
Yeah
And you say chi city chi city chi city
I'm coming home again
Do you think about me now and then
Do you think about me now and then
Cause I'm coming home again
Coming home again
I met this girl when I was three years
old
And what I love most she had so much
soul
She said Excuse me little homie I know
you don't know me
But my name is Windy and I like to
blow trees and
From that point I never blow her off
Niggas come from out of town I like
to show her off
They like to act tough she like to toe
em off
And make em straighten up their hat
cuz she know they soft
And when I grew up she showed me
how to go downtown
And in the nighttime her face lit up so
astounding
I told her in my heart is where she'll
always be
She never mess with entertainers cuz
they always leave
She said it felt like they walked and
drove on me
Knew I was gang affiliated got on tv
and told on me

He said, Nas, what the fans want is
Illmatic, Stillmatic
Picked up the pad and pencil and jotted
what I feel
Been like 12 years since a nigga first
signed
Now I'm a free agent
And I'm thinking it's time
To build my very own Motown
Cuz rappers be deprived of executive 9
to 5
And it hurts to see these companies be
stealing the life
And I love to give my blood sweat and
tears to the mic
So y'all copped the LPs and y'all fiends
got dealt
I'm Jesse Jackson on the balcony where
King got killed
I survived the livest niggas around
Lasting longer than more than half of
your clown
Look, I used to cook before I had the
game took
Either way my change came like Sam
Cooke.
Feeling better than I ever felt before
today
Like better late than never is
orientation
Still we can make it better throwing all
your cares away

[chorus]
I guess that's why last winter she got so cold on me
She said yay keep makin keep makin that platinum and gold for me

I'm coming home again
Do you think about me now and then
Do you think about me now and then
Cause I'm coming home again
Coming home again
Do you think about me now and then
Do you think about me now and then
Oh
Now I'm coming home again
Maybe we can start again

But if you really cared for her
Then you wouldn't of never
Hit the airport to follow your dreams
Sometimes I still talk to her
But when I talk to her, it always seems like she talkin about me
She said you left your kids, and they just like you
They wanna rap and make soul beats just like you
But they just not you and I just got through
Talkin bout what niggas tryin to do just not new
Now everybody got the game figured out all wrong
I guess you never know what you got till it's gone
I guess that's why I'm here and I can't come back home
And guess when I heard that when I was back home
Every interview I'm representing you making you proud
Reach for the stars so if you fall you land on a cloud
Jumpin in da crowd spark your lighters wave em around
If you don't know by now I'm talkin bout Chi-town

I'm coming home again
Do you think about me now and then
Do you think about me now and then
Cause I'm coming home again
Coming home again
Baby do you remember when Fireworks at Lake Michigan
Oh
Now I'm coming home again
Coming home again
Baby do you remember when Fireworks at Lake Michigan
Oh
Now I'm coming home again
Maybe we can start again

Loy oy oy oh
Loy oy oy oh
Comin home again
Loy oy oy oh
Loy oy oy oh
Comin home again
Maybe we can start again

SNOOP DOGG
"Let It Out"
[Snoop Dogg]
Well it's the super duper Snoopa once again I'm on the fly
Swoopin through I'm in my coupe and all the bitches want a ride
If it's trippin like I'm clippin I'm still grippin on my nine
We be Cripp'n while I'm dippin with my C's up in the sky
And the East is still my side, I'm a reaper when I ride
Fuck a feature, I don't need a motherfucker, I'm the guy
I delete 'em, stampede 'em, straight eat 'em like some fries
Get a ketchup, get 'em messed up, turn the heat up let 'em fry
Ain't no different when I'm rrippin, pimpin's still up in his prime
TV shows, movie hoes, pimpin's still up on his grind
Man these hoes don't know, I'm workin with a nine
I ain't talkin 'bout a gun, I'm talkin feel it in your spine
when I hit it from behind, if I go up in your mouth
I might hit you in the mind, you know what I'm talkin bout
It'll thrill ya, I'm the heater that'll kill ya with the rhythm of a trigger
Motherfucker better duck before I hit her, bang!

[Chorus]
Dogg-y Dogg, is all, you need
So love, the Dogg, like we, love weed
(Breathe in) Breathe in (breathe out) let it out
(Breathe in) Breathe in (breathe out) let it out
(Breathe in) Breathe in (breathe out) let it out
(Breathe in) Breathe in (breathe out) let it out

[Snoop Dogg]
You niggaz mad cause I done came and crept up back up on the scene
This is bye, retire, I'm still spittin' gasoline
I'm a gangsta motherfucker what the fuck you think that means?
Little nigga I'm the king, I ain't givin up a thing
If you want it come and take it nigga, I'll be sittin waitin
Make a patient nigga got the other ear and I'll bake a nigga
Fuck it put the gun down, and straight bank a nigga
Take it nigga, take it nigga fuck, you ain't this nigga
... Slow down my turbo flow
... Inhale my doe-doe smoke
... Okay I let the fo'-fo' blow
And the po-po know, that's why they on my dick
And they at my crib, tryin to find my shit
Tryin to search my house, what the fuck that's bout!
I ain't givin up shit, you can search that bitch
I ain't got nuttin Jack; get the fuck on back

[Chorus - 2X]
SNOOP DOGG
“Why did you leave me?”

[Verse 1: Snoop Dogg]
Ba-da-bang, ba-da-boom
What a dog gotta do?
Let me holla at ya boo
Damn I miss you
I just wanna kiss you
And all that good stuff
Was I really all that bad?
Or was I good enough?
I'm under pressure
I can't run plays like this
My momma always said
That there'd be days like this
I'm all alone
By the phone
In the zone
Face the storm
Wonderin, if you ever comin home
I try to run the streets and play
But that feelin just won't go away
My whole life I'll throw away
To get you back on my team
Damn, why'd you have to go away?

[Chorus:]
I miss ya breakfast in the morning
Miss ya in the evening
Tryin to manage, and I'm a handle it
And yes, I'm still the king of the west
I'm so stressed
Tryin to do my best
I'm at the pad
I'm doing bad.
Why'd you have to leave me this way?
It's cold without you
And I can't roll without you
You the wheels to my car
To follow u wherever u are
Listen, I'm a star but I'm wishin
In the kitchen
Breakfast in the morning
I also miss that smell of that good breakfast
I'm missin my baby
Please, I'm going crazy
(Why did you leave me?)
You can't leave me by myself like this
(oh, oh)
You can't leave me by myself like this
(Why did you leave me?)
You can't leave me by myself like this
(oh, oh)
Mama told me there'd be days like this

[Verse 2: Snoop Dogg]
I get up early in the mornin
Miss ya rudeness and kissin
I also miss that smell of that good breakfast
In the kitchen
Listen, I'm a star but I'm wishin
To follow u wherever u are
You the wheels to my car
And I can't roll without you
My heart is a icobox
It's cold without you
Why'd you have to leave me this way?
I'm doing bad.
You don't wanna see me this way
I'm at the pad
Tryin to do my best
I'm so stressed
And yes, I'm still the king of the west
Tryin to manage, and I'm a handle it
I need you back in my life
Cause I'm tired of livin scandalously

[Chorus]
[Verse 3: Snoop Dogg]
Hold my lord (?)
I'm sittin' at the board with my head down
I can't write my next line I need to lay it down (hmm)
I'm stuck like a dumptruck
Lookin stupid, cupid, down on my luck
I touch, a four leaf clover
Hopin for somethin' good, like I should
If not, I guess it's over
Baby be real with it
Do you love me?
Do you miss me?
Shit I can't deal with it

[Chorus x2]
SNOOP DOGG
“Those girlz”
- Those girls, those girls -
Those girls, they don't mean a thing to me
I was just playin' the game
It was all a fantasy (Those girls)

[Snoop Dogg]
I got a call from this hoe the other day
She say she just moved down from The Bay
to L.A. - well that's great
We should sit down and talk face to face
You bring the barbeque, I got the paper plates
I can't lie girl, I like the way you shake
And when you dance the way you make your bootie shake
Give or take, I rate you 'bout an eight
Or a nine - okay, fine, you a dime
And them other bitches they gon' wait in line
They hatin' on you how you take away they shine
Rewind, pay attention to the signs
I see money when I look you in the eyes
No lie, I love how you stay fly
So fly, send a text and I'll reply
And when you need that good sex, I'm the guy

[Chorus]
- Those girls, those girls, those girls, those girls -
Those girls, they don't mean a thing to me
I was just playin' the game
It was all a fantasy (Those girls)

[Snoop Dogg]
I was just playin' the game
And exchanged some love faces
But it wasn't no use for me to rush to bost one
cuz I wanted her to have an eruption
Sensual seduction (A sensual seduction)
Sensual seduction (woah)
Sensual seduction

[Snoop Dogg]
It was Kim, Dalesa, Vanessa, Rene
I don't love hoes or respect what they say
Hey... yeah that's life
The Pound comin' through, get the F out the way
I know it's been a minute but your boy been away
It feels so good, take me back in the day
I hit the studio, then back to the stage
The lights come on and the people start to wave
Then I seen this girl, she looked me right in the face
Like "I know you remember me and my homegirl Tanay"
We stay downtown in a loft on Santa Fe
And we your number one biggest fans to this day
Wait... baby girl I'm the great Bigg Snoop Dogg, you got to bring me up to date
I know a lot of girls rock shows in many states
Room 220, bring your friend and some drank

[Chorus]
- Those girls, those girls, those girls, those girls -
Those girls, they don't mean a thing to me
I was just playin' the game
It was all a fantasy (Those girls)

[Snoop Dogg]
Now where you gonna find a nigga fresh like me bitch?
Somebody pass the lighter so I can get this weed lit
She lookin' at my stones like "Damn, is he rich?"
I'm lookin' at her pose like damn is she thick
Fuck them other dudes, I'm the man to be with
Fifty million sold, who's bigger than me bitch?
Nobody, let me put you on to some G shit
Hop in the Benz, I'll get you higher than ski lifts
And then I'm bout to beat the cat up like Heathcliff
Yeah, 'cause all bitches need dick
And if they say they don't they just lyin', they wanna sit shotgun in the 500 like she the shit
Uh-uh, hold on baby, we the shit
Clear blue skies, dip 'til you're seasick
You're with the one and only
S, yes, N, double, O, P

[Chorus]
- Those girls, those girls, those girls -
Those girls, they don't mean a thing to me
I was just playin' the game
It was all a fantasy (Those girls)

BEASTIE BOYS
"Intergalactic"
Chorus:
Intergalactic, planetery, planetery, intergalactic (x4)
Another dimension... (x8)
Well, now, don't you tell me to smile
You stick around I'll make it worth your while
Like numbers beyond what you can dial
Maybe its because we're so versatile
Style, profile I said
It always brings me back when I hear, "tho child"
From The Hudson River out to the Nile
I run the marathon to the very last mile
Well if you battle me I feel reviled
People always sayin' my style is wild
Mike D, MCA, Ad Rock

Rolling down the hill, snowballing getting bigger
Explosion in the chamber, the hammer from the trigger
I seen him get stabbed, I watched the blood spill out
He had more cuts than my man Chuck Chillout
24 is my age and 22 is my guage
I'm writing rhymes on a page, and going up in a rage
'Cause I'm out on a mission, a stolen car mission
Had a small problem with the transmission
3 on the tree in the middle of the night
I have this steak on my head 'cause I got into a fist fight
Life comes in phases take the good with the bad
You bought the coins on the street and you know you got had
Because it's all high spirit, you know you got to hear it
Don't touch the mic baby don't come near it
It's gonna getcha, it's gonna getcha
It's gonna getcha girl, it's gonna getcha
Looking down the barrel of a gun, son of gun
Son of a bitch getting paid getting rich
Ultra violence be running through my head
Cold medina y'all, making me see red
Rapid fire Louie like Rambo got bullets
I'ma die harder like my kid Bruce Willis
I love girlies, waxing and milking
Coordinating shit is my man Dave Scilken
Predetermined destiny is who I am
You got your finger on the trigger like the Son of Sam
I am like Clockwork Orange, going off on the town
I've got homeboys bonanza to beat your ass down
Well I'm mad at my desk and I'll be writing all curse words
Expressing my aggressions through my schizophrenic verse words
You're a headless chicken chasing, a suckin free basin
Looking for a fist to put your face in
Well get hip get hip, don't slip ya knuckle heads
Exhaustion is my enemy, I strip down and I'm free
I wanna do the freak until the break of dawn

Hey ladies in the place I'm callin' out to ya
There never was a city kid truer and bluer
There's more to me than you'll ever know
And I've got more hits than Sadaharu Oh
Toum Thumb Tom Cushman or Tom Foolery
Date women on T.V. with the help of Chuck Woolery
Words are flowing just like the Grand Canyon
And I'm always out looking for a female companion
I threw the lasso around the tallest one and dragged her to the crib
I took off her moccasins and put on my bib
I'm wheelin' and dealin' I make a little bit of stealing I'll bring you back to the place and your dress I'm peeling Your body's on time and your mind is appealing Staring at the cracks up there upon the ceiling Some such nonsense is the bass that I'm throwing Talking to a girl telling her I'm all knowing She's talking to the kid to the who I'm telling here every lie that you know that I never did

Hey Ladies, Get Funky

Me in the corner with a good looking daughted I dropped my drawers and it was welcome back Kotter We were cutting up the rug she started cutting up the carpet In my apartment I begged her please stop at The gift of gab is the gift that I have And that girl ain't nothing but a crab Educated no stupid yes And when I say stupid I mean stupid fresh I'm not James at 15 or Chachi in charge I'm Adam and I'm adamant about living large With the white saxoons and the looks that kill Makin' love in the back of my Coupe De Ville I met a little cutie she was all hopped up on zootie I liked the little cutie but I kicked her in the buttie Cause I don't kinda go for that messin' around You be listening to my records a number one sound Step to the rhythm step step to the ride I've got an open mind so why don't you all get inside Tune in turn on to my tune that's live Ladies flock like fish to my line

Hey Ladies, Get Funky

She's got a gold tooth you know she's Hardcore She'll show you a good time then she'll show you the door Break up with your girl it ended in tears Vincent Van Gogh and mail that ear I call her in the middle of the night when I'm drinking The phone booth on the corner is damp and it's stinking She said come on over it was me that she messed I threw that trash can through her window cause you know I got dissed Your old lady left you and you went girls(c3) insane You blew yourself up in the back of the 6 train Take my advice at any price a gorilla like your mother is mighty weak Sucking down pints till I didn't know
Mom and dad were arguin' a lot so momma moved back
On the Chalmers in the flat one bedroom apartment
And dad moved back to the other side of 8 Mile on Novara
And that's when daddy went to California with his CD and met Dr. Dre
And flew you and momma out to see me
But daddy had to work, you and momma had to leave me
Then you started seeing daddy on the T.V. and momma didn't like it
And you and Laney were too young to understand it
Papa was a rollin' stone, momma developed a habit
And it all happened too fast for either one of us to grab it
I'm just sorry you were there and had to witness it first hand
Cuz all I ever wanted to do was just make you proud
Now I'm sittin' in this empty house, just reminiscing
Lookin' at your baby pictures, it just trips me out
To see how much you both have grown, it's almost like you're sisters now
Wow, guess you pretty much are and daddy's still here
Laney I'm talkin' to you too, daddy's still here
I like the sound of that, yeah
It's got a ring to it don't it?
Shh, momma's only gone for the moment

[Chorus]

Now you've got that ring don't shine
And if that mockingbird don't sing and smile
I'll do anything for you to see you
I'mma buy a diamond ring for you
Daddy's gonna buy you a mockingbird
And if you ask me too
Laney I'm talkin' to you too, daddy's still here
I never forget that Christmas I sat up the whole night crying
Cuz daddy felt like a bum, see daddy had no money
Mommy wrapped the Christmas presents up
And stuck 'em under the tree and said some 'em were from me
Cuz daddy couldn't buy 'em
I'll never forget that Christmas I sat up the whole night crying
Cuz daddy felt like a bum, see daddy had a job
But his job was to keep the food on the table for you and mom
And at the time every house that we lived in
Either kept getting broke into and robbed
Or shot up on the block and your mom was saving money for you in a jar
Tryna start a piggy bank for you so you could go to college
Almost had a thousand dollars til someone broke in and stole it
And I know it hurt so bad it broke your momma's heart
And it seemed like everything was just startin' to fall apart
Verse 3)

First thing you say, "I'm not fazed, I hang around big stars all day
I don't see what the big deal is anyways, you've just plain old Marshall to me"
Oooh yah girl run that game, "Hailie Jade, I love that name, love that tattoo,
what's that say? Rot in pieces? Uh, that's great"
First off you don't know Marshall, at all so don't grow partial, that's ammo for my arsenal, I'll slap you off that barstool
there goes another lawsuit, leave handprints all across you, good Lordy
you want what you can't have, ooh girl that's too damn bad, don't touch what you can't grab, end up with two backhands
put anthrax on a tampax, and slap you till you can't stand
girl you just blew your chance, don't mean to ruin your plans

A Chorus/B Chorus

B Chorus (X2)

EMINEM

"Cleaning Out My Closet"

Where's my snare? I have no snare in my headphones, there ya' go, yeah, yo', yo'...

Have you ever been hated or discriminated against, I have, I've been protested and demonstrated
against, picket signs for my wicked rhymes, look at the times, sick is the mind of the motherf**kin' kid that's behind, all this commotion, emotions run deep as ocean's explodin',
temper's flaring from parents, just blow 'em off and keep goin', not takin' nothin' from no one, give 'em hell long as I'm breathin', keep

kickin' ass in the mornin', an' takin' names in the evenin', leave 'em with a taste as sour as vinegar in they mouth, see they can trigger me but
they'll never figure me out, look at me now, I bet ya' probably sick of me now, ain't you mama, I'ma make you look so ridiculous now...

[CHORUS]

I'm sorry mama, I never meant to hurt you, I never meant to make you cry, but tonight I'm cleanin' out my closet, [one more time], I said I'm sorry mama, I never meant to hurt you, I never meant to make you cry, but tonight I'm cleanin' out my closet...

I got some skeletons in my closet and I don't know if no one knows it, so before they throw me inside my coffin and close it, I'ma expose it, I'll take you back to '73, before I ever had a multi-platinum sellin' CD, I was a baby, maybe I was just a couple of months, my faggot father must have had his pantie's up in a bunch, cause he split, I wonder if he even kissed me goodbye, no I don't on second thought, I just fuckin' wished he would die, I look at Hailie and I couldn't picture leavin' her side, even if I hated Kim, I grit my teeth and I'd try, to make it work with her at least for Hailie's sake, I maybe made some mistakes but I'm only human, but I'm man enough to face'em today, what I did was stupid, no doubt it was dumb, but the smartest shit I did was take them bullets out of that gun, cause Id'a killed 'em, shit I would have shot

Kim and him both, It's my life, I'd like to welcome y'all to the Eminem show...

[CHORUS]

Now I would never diss my own mama just to get recognition, take a second to listen who you think this record is dissin', but put yourself in my position, just try to envision witnessin' your Mama poppin' prescription pills in the kitchen, bitchin' that someone's always goin' through her purse and shits missin', going through public housing systems, victim of Munchausen's syndrome, my whole life I was made to believe I was sick when I wasn't 'til I grew up, now I blew up, makes you sick to ya' stomach, doesn't it, wasn't it the reason you made that CD for me, ma, so you could try to justify the way you treated me, ma, but guess what, you're gettin' older now and it's cold when you're lonely, and Nathan's growing up so quick, he's gonna know that you're phoney, and Hailie's getting so big now, you should see her, she's beautiful, but you'll never see her, she won't even be at your funeral, see what hurts me the most is you won't admit you was wrong, bitch, do your song, keep tellin' yourself that you was a mom, but how dare you try to take what you didn't help me to get, you selfish bitch, I hope you fuckin' burn in hell for this shit, remember when Ronnie died and you said you wished it was me, well guess what, I am dead, dead to you as can be...