

The Intersection of African American English and Black ASL



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Black ASL as a variety



- Extensive research on African American English (AAE), with unique features identified at all levels of the language – phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon – showing that AAE is a distinct variety of English (see Mufwene et al. 1998 and Green 2004 for reviews).
- Our basic research question: can linguistic features be identified that will show that Black ASL is a distinct variety, as has been done for AAE ?
 - Anecdotal reports about the existence of Black ASL, e.g. Hairston and Smith (1983) on “a Black way of signing”
 - Some confirmed differences in linguistic features in Black ASL in our study

Founding and Desegregation of Deaf Schools

State	1. White school	2. Black sch./ dept.	3. Desegregation	Years bet. 1 & 2	Years bet. 2 & 3
DC, KDES	1857	1857, dept.	1958	0	101
N. Carolina	1845	1868	1967	23	99
Maryland	1868	1872	1956	4	84
Tennessee	1845	1881, dept.	1965	36	84
Georgia	1846	1882	1965	36	83
Mississippi	1854	1882, dept.	1965	28	83
S. Carolina	1849	1883, dept.	1966	34	83
Kentucky	1823	1884, dept.	1954-60	61	70
Florida	1885	1885	1965	0	80

Founding and Desegregation of Deaf Schools

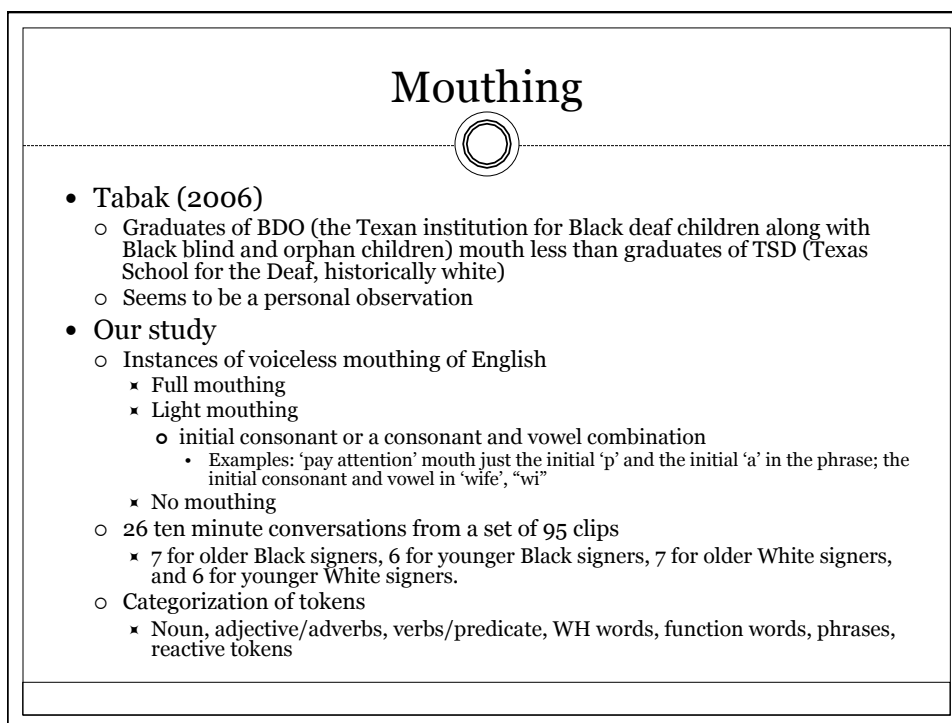
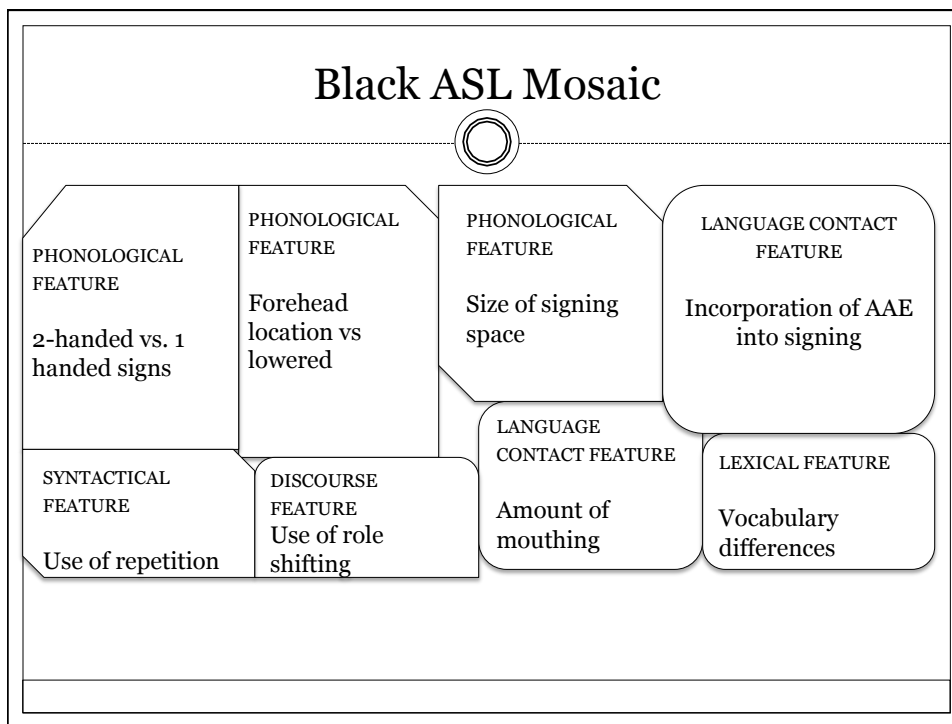
State	1. White school	2. Black sch./ dept	3. Desegregation	Years bet. 1 & 2	Years bet. 2 & 3
Texas	1857	1887	1965	30	78
Arkansas	1850	1887	1967	37	80
Alabama	1858	1892	1968	34	76
Missouri	1861	1888, dept	1954	37	66
Kansas	1861	1888, dept	1954	27	66
Virginia	1839	1909	1965 (2 schs)	70	56
Oklahoma	1898	1909, dept	1962	11	53
Louisiana	1852	1938	1978	86	40
W. Virginia	1870	1926	1956	56	30

Proximity of Deaf Schools and HBCUs

Schools for the Colored/Negro Deaf	Historical Black Colleges/Universities
Kendall School for the Deaf	Howard University
North Carolina State School for the Deaf & Blind	Shaw University
Alabama School for the Negro Deaf & Blind	Talladega College
Virginia School for the Colored Deaf	Hampton University
West Virginia School for the Colored Deaf	West Virginia State College
Florida State School for the Deaf	Florida A& M University
Southern State School for the Deaf	Southern State University
Mississippi School for the Negro Deaf	Jackson State University

The History and Structure of Black ASL: The Project at a Glance

- Sites visited in order of the year in which the schools for Black Deaf children were founded:
 - North Carolina (1869)
 - Texas (1887)
 - Arkansas (1887)
 - Alabama (1892)
 - Virginia (1909)
 - Louisiana (1938)
- At each site, groups of signers "over 55" (i.e. who attended school during segregation, n= 58) and groups of signers "under 35" (i.e. who attended integrated schools, n=32), have been filmed in free conversation and structured interviews.



Mouthing: results



- Nouns were the most frequently mouthed, followed by plain verbs and predicates, phrases, and finally adjective and adverbs.
- Some function words were mouthed, as well as a small number of WH words.
- Some evidence that older Black signers mouth less than other signers, however, further research is necessary with a larger sample size.
- Evidence that younger signers mouth more, evidence of more contact with hearing people, due to integration and mainstreaming.
 - It is with integration and mainstreaming that we see the most intersection of Black ASL with AAE.

Contact with AAE



- Borrowing of expressions from AAE, e.g. “Girl”, “My bad”
- Examples spontaneously produced in interviews and free conversations in our videotaped
- Black signers incorporate AAE lexical items into their signing.
 - STOP TRIPPING
 - STUPID #FOOL
 - WHASSUP
 - GIRL, PLEASE
 - #DANG
- Younger Black signers incorporate more AAE lexical items than their elders, possibly due to media exposure and education with hearing students.

DVD showing



- **Book with a DVD**
 - Carolyn McCaskill, Ceil Lucas, Robert Bayley, & Joseph Hill. In press, 2011. *The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL: Its History and Structure*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

- **Chapter 7 of the DVD, “The Effects of Language Contact”**
 - Features: Mouthing and AAE
 - ✦ [Video link](#)

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The History and Structure of Black ASL: Research Team

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Black ASL Project Website



<http://blackaslproject.gallaudet.edu/>