

2 Syntax part 1: verbal markers in AAE

Focal point Part of knowing a word involves knowing how to use it in sentences. As explained in the preceding chapter, speakers of AAE use some of the same words that occur in other varieties of English, but they may use them with different meanings. In addition, these words must occur in specific environments in a sentence. For example, the verbal marker *be* can precede words from any grammatical class such as verb (*That computer be **crashing***), adjective (*Those computers be **light***) and preposition (*Her computer be **in** her carry on bag*). On the other hand, the verbal marker *dən* can only precede verbs (*They dən **bought** all the sale books*).

Jesus is mine;
Jesus is mine;
Everywhere I go,
Everywhere I be,
Jesus is mine.

[from a gospel song]

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter characterizes a part of the system of AAE, the lexical component. In continuing to put the pieces together to form a complete picture of the AAE system in this chapter, I present a description of verbal markers and try to make explicit how they fit into the syntactic component. Many of the well-known features of AAE are from the syntactic component of the language system, that part of the system that deals with the way words are put together to form sentences. In many cases, words in AAE that are identical or quite similar in pronunciation to words in other varieties of English are used differently and may combine with other words in sentences in different ways. Speakers of mainstream English identify the AAE uses as being different from general English, and they label them as ungrammatical uses of English that make African Americans sound unintelligent.

Some of the defining syntactic features of AAE are argued to coincide with syntactic features of other varieties of English such as Southern States English in the United States and Hiberno English in Ireland, for example. In general, there is validity to this claim, especially if we are simply comparing a list of features from each dialect of English, such as the following: the marker *dən* is used in AAE and in Southern States English, and the verbal marker *be* is used in AAE and in Hiberno English. But in making these comparisons, it is important to move beyond listing superficial similarities between AAE and other varieties to testing whether elements such as the verbal markers *dən* and *be* exhibit the same patterns in AAE and these other varieties.

One well established syntactic feature of AAE is the use of the verbal marker *be* to signal the habitual occurrence of an event.¹ The feature is very common and has been used to show how AAE differs from other varieties of English, and it has also been used as the topic of jokes and derogatory remarks about AAE and its speakers. Ironically, this *be* is often used incorrectly by the same people who try to show that what is taken as AAE is illogical speech. Also, misleading characterizations of the verbal marker were given in newspaper and magazine articles written during discussions about the Oakland Ebonics case in 1997. In an article in *The New Yorker*, Louis Menand explains that *be* is used “to indicate a habitual condition, as in ‘Johnny be good,’ meaning ‘Johnny is a good person’” (p. 5). The definition that Menand gives is correct, but the characterization, in particular the explanation of the example, provides little insight into the meaning indicated by *be*. In simple terms, it is unlikely that the meaning of *Johnny be good* is ‘Johnny is a good person.’ In spite of the inaccurate representations, this *be* is used quite systematically in AAE in sentences such as those in the focal point and in the gospel song by Donnie McClerkin referenced at the beginning of this chapter. In the song, “everywhere I be” refers to different places I go or usually am, such as home, work, the mall, gas station, school, grocery store, vacation, dentist’s office, basketball games, conferences, church, etc. So the verbal marker *be* is quite effective in this song in that it helps to convey the contrast between humans and Jesus. Humans never stay in the same place and they are always changing, but Jesus is constant.

Although sentences with the verbal marker *be* adhere to rules of AAE, they are not acceptable as school or professional language. This is one of the reasons why it is important to get the meaning, use and syntactic environment of the verbal marker right. For instance, if a teacher is concerned with providing accurate mainstream English correspondences for sentences in which AAE speakers use *be*, then it is useful to know the correct properties of the verbal marker. Specific rules govern the systematic occurrence of words and phrases in AAE as they do in other languages and dialects.

This chapter discusses the properties of auxiliaries and verbal markers such as *be*, *dən* and *steady*. It explains that auxiliaries in AAE are used in the ways in which they are used in mainstream (and other varieties of) English. In addition, it gives a description of the use of verbal markers, which separates AAE and mainstream (as well as other varieties of) English.

2.2 Auxiliaries

Auxiliary verbs *have*, *do*, *be* and modals such as *will/would*, *shall/should*, *can/could* and *may/might* will be the focus of this section. Auxiliary *be* refers to the forms *is*, *am*, *are*, *was* and *were* and is distinguished from the verbal marker *be* highlighted in the introduction to this chapter. Specific properties that will be explained and illustrated in the next three subsections differentiate auxiliary verbs from main verbs such as *eat*, *run* and *rub*.

2.2.1 General description of auxiliaries

Paradigms are used to set up chart-like structures that will be helpful in exhibiting the patterns that occur with verb forms. These paradigms are especially useful in that they list the auxiliaries that occur in AAE, reflect the type of verb forms that occur in the sequences and show the ‘agreement’ patterns that are used. In addition the paradigms include data that represent a range of auxiliaries, and this makes it possible to show how auxiliaries listed at the beginning of section 2.2 pattern similarly.

Verbal paradigms²

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| (1) | Present tense | | | |
| | Person,
number | Present | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | 1st, 2nd, 3rd
sg, pl | eat, run, rub | DO eat, run, rub | don't eat, run, rub |
| (2) | a. Past tense | | | |
| | Past | | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | ate, ran, rubbed | | DID eat, run, rub | din (didn't) eat, run, rub |
| (2) | a'. Past tense | | | Negative |
| | | | | ain('t) eat/ate, run/ran,
rub/rubbed |
| (2) | b. Preterite <i>had</i> | | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | Preterite <i>had</i> (Past) | | – | – |
| | had ate, ran, rubbed | | | |
| (3) | a. Future tense | | | |
| | Future | | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | 'a eat, run, rub
(reduced <i>will</i> ('a) attaches to the preceding pronoun, as in <i>I'a</i> , <i>she'a</i>) | | WILL eat, run, rub | won't eat, run, rub |
| (3) | b. Future tense | | | |
| | Person,
number | Future | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | 1st sg.
2nd, 3rd sg, pl. | I'ma eat
gon eat | – | I ain't gon/ I'm not gon
ain't gon/not gon |
| | | | | (Note: There are also variations such as <i>I'm gonnal</i> / <i>I'monna</i> and <i>you gonna</i> .) |

(4) a. **Present progressive (prog) (auxiliary *be*)**

Person, number	Pres prog	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st sg.	I'm eating	I AM eating	I'm not/ I ain('t) eating
1st pl, 2nd sg, pl,	we, you		
3rd sg, pl	she, they eating	IS eating	ain('t)/not eating
3rd sg neuter	it's growing	It IS eating	it's not growing it ain('t) eating

(4) b. **Present copula *be***

Person, number	Present	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st sg.	I'm tall	I AM tall	I'm not tall/ I ain't tall
1st pl, 2nd sg, pl	we, you,		
3rd sg, pl	she, they	IS	ain('t)/not tall
3rd sg neuter	it's tall	It IS	it's not tall/ it ain('t) tall

(5) **Past progressive**

Person, number	Past prog	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	was eating	WAS eating	wadn't (wasn't) eating

(6) **Future progressive**

Future prog	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
'a be eating	WILL be eating	won('t) be eating

(7) **Present perfect (perf)**

Person, number	Present perf	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	ate, ran, rubbed	HAVE ate, ran, rubbed	ain('t)/haven't ate, ran, rubbed

(8) **Past perfect**

Past perf	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
had ate, ran, rubbed	HAD ate, ran, rubbed	hadn't ate, ran, rubbed

(9) **Present perfect progressive**

Person, Number	Present perf prog	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
1st, 2nd, 3rd sg, pl	been eating	HAVE been eating	ain('t)/haven't been eating

- | | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| (10) | Past perfect progressive | | |
| | Past perf prog | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | had been eating | HAD been eating | hadn't been eating |
| (11) | Modal perfect | | |
| | Modal perfect | Emphatic affirmation | Negative |
| | should'a been eating | – | shouldn'a been eating |
| | ('a in Paradigm (11) may correspond to a reduced form of <i>have</i> .) | | |

The paradigms in (1–11) are similar to conjugations in general American English; however, there are some differences, which will be described here. These paradigms are representative examples of the elements that constitute the AAE auxiliary system. The first, second and third person singular and plural are given, and the emphatic affirmation and negative verb forms are indicated in that particular paradigm if they occur in the language system.

A characteristic of AAE is that a single verb form may be used with both singular and plural subjects, so in (1) the verb forms *eat*, *run* and *rub* are used with first person singular and plural (*I*, *we*), second person singular and plural (*you*, *y'all*) and third person singular and plural (*she*, *they*) in the present tense. The auxiliaries are like main verbs in this respect; a single auxiliary form is used with both singular and plural subjects. The emphatic forms *DO*, *WAS* and *HAVE* in (1), (5) and (7, 9), respectively, are used when the subject is singular (e.g., *he DO*) as well as when it is plural (e.g., *they DO*). In this way, the present tense verb forms in AAE pattern similarly with the past tense verb forms; no distinction is made between first, second and third singular and plural. So just as the main verb form *run* is used with singular and plural subjects, the past tense verb *ran* is used with singular and plural subjects.

These paradigms are intended to capture uniformity in the auxiliary system, so they do not represent the possible variation in the form and use of different verbs. That is to say that the paradigms do not reflect the extent to which social factors influence language use; so, for example, there is no indication that a single speaker may use the singular verb form (e.g., *they was*) in some linguistic and social environments and the plural verb form (e.g., *they were*) in others. Such variation is very important and has been the topic of a large amount of research on AAE.³

Another difference between AAE and mainstream English that is familiar even to those who have limited knowledge about AAE is the behavior of the auxiliary/copula *be*. The auxiliary *be* occurs in the environment preceding V-ing, as in (4a), and the copula *be* occurs in the environments preceding an adjective, adverb, noun and preposition (e.g., *She is tall a doctor*), as in (4b). They have the same form, so I will collapse them in discussions throughout this book. The auxiliary/copula element does not obligatorily occur on the surface in all environments, as shown in the examples in (4). For the most part, it is overtly represented when it occurs with the first person singular pronoun (*I'm*) and with the third person singular neuter pronoun (*it's*). It obligatorily occurs in the past tense (*was*, in (5)) although without a singular/plural distinction. The overt auxiliary/copula form also occurs in emphatic contexts in which it is stressed (*IS*). It

occurs optionally, as indicated in the paradigms for first person plural, second and third person singular and plural, in which no auxiliary/copula *be* form is given.

Another difference between the AAE and general English auxiliary systems is revealed in (2) and (7), the past and present perfect tenses, respectively. These forms show that there is no observable distinction between the simple past (2) and the present perfect (7) verb forms. In other words, the simple past and present perfect are often identical in shape (i.e., the simple past verb form is used in both); there is often no separate participle verb form such as *eaten*. In general American English, although in most cases the simple past and present perfect verb forms are identical, some verbs do take *-en* in the present perfect. (This issue will be discussed in chapter 3.) It is often the case that in AAE, the simple past and present perfect can be distinguished only in emphatic affirmation environments, cases in which the auxiliary *HAVE* is stressed and occurs on the surface in the present perfect. This observation leads to two questions:

- Do speakers actually make a distinction between the past tense and present perfect? That is, do they actually only use *DID eat* in emphatic past contexts and *HAVE ate* in emphatic present perfect contexts?
- Is there a *have* in the sense of the present perfect in AAE?

The negative categories in the paradigms in (2) and (7) suggest that the answer to the first question is yes in that the negative past tense is formed with one auxiliary and the negative present perfect is formed with another auxiliary. If there were no distinction, then we might expect the same auxiliary to occur with both forms. The second question is more difficult to answer, especially because *have* does not usually occur in regular non-emphatic present perfect sequences, and for this reason, there is no direct evidence that *have* is obligatorily used to mark the present perfect in AAE. So far the data suggest that *have* is only used in emphatic affirmation and negative contexts in present perfect sequences.

The negative forms in the present perfect are *ain't/haven't ate*. *Ain't* is the negator in other contexts, so whereas it may be used in present perfect paradigms, it is not used solely in that context. *Ain't* also occurs in past contexts such as *He ain't ate* ('He didn't eat'), in which it serves as a negative marker and is not overtly marked for tense. That is, the form *ain't* does not have distinct past and non-past forms. In the sequence *ain't ate*, the main verb is in the past form. This contrasts with *didn't eat*, in which past is marked on the auxiliary *didn't*. *Ain't* is also argued to occur in past contexts such as *He ain't eat* ('He didn't eat'), in which the main verb is in the non-past form. I have included such an example in the paradigm in (2a'); however, it is not clear that the auxiliary form preceding the verbs *eat*, *run* and *rub* is actually a full form of *ain't*. These cases raise interesting questions about tense marking and the nature of *ain't* in different environments.⁴

A final difference between the AAE and general American English systems is the use of *had* in simple past contexts. In the paradigm in (2b), the auxiliary *had* occurs in construction with a verb overtly marked for the past. As shown in the paradigm, no emphatic and negative forms occur with this use of *had*. This preterite *had* sequence is

discussed in the literature in Rickford and Th  berge-Rafal (1996). It will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Finally, the future marked by *will* and the modal forms in the AAE and mainstream English auxiliary systems are quite similar. As indicated in (3b), future is also marked with *gonna* or *gon*, which does not occur with first person singular (I'ma).⁵ In the paradigms in (3), (6) and (11), the reduced forms of the auxiliaries have been given. It should also be noted that there is no emphatic affirmation form for the modal perfect (11). One important generalization that can be made in light of the data in (1–11) is that the auxiliaries pattern similarly by occurring in the same environments (i.e., emphatic and negative contexts).

2.2.2 Properties and processes of auxiliaries

The inflected auxiliaries or conjugated forms of *be*, *do*, *have* and modals can be characterized by a set of properties that will be discussed below. Referring once again to the paradigms in (1–11), we find that in the auxiliary + main verb sequence, tense is marked on the auxiliary (but *ain't* does not have separate past and non-past forms). In paradigms such as the past perfect (8), the main verb (*ate*, *ran*) is in the simple past form, but it is not marked for tense; it is in a form required in that paradigm. Past tense is marked on the auxiliary *had*. Take an example from mainstream English. The main verb (*run*, *eaten*) in the past perfect sequence *had run/eaten* is in the form (participle) that is required for that paradigm. Past tense is marked on the auxiliary *had*.

The second property of auxiliaries is that they can appear in a contracted, reduced or zero form such as *'s*, *'m*, *'ll ('a)*, *'d* and \emptyset . (The symbol ' \emptyset ' is used to show that a particular auxiliary does not occur on the surface in that position). Examples of auxiliaries in these forms are given below:

- (12) a. It's the one I like.
 b. I'm driving to Amherst.
 c. They \emptyset walking too fast.
- (13) You should'a made your mind up before I called you.
- (14) a. The teacher \emptyset got all the papers.
 b. They \emptyset got everything they need.
- (15) a. Bruce'a study when he get home.
 b. We'a put the cakes in the oven.
 c. He \emptyset be there in a minute.
- (16) a. Sometimes he'd be already sleeping.
 b. Sometimes he \emptyset be already sleeping.
 c. We'd be mad if they left us.

The sentences in (12) provide examples of contracted (12a, b) and zero (12c) auxiliary *be* forms. The difference between the forms *it's* and *she's* in AAE is that the former is invariable for the most part, but the latter is clearly variable. Speakers rarely ever

produce sentences such as **It the one I like*, while both variants *she's* and *she* occur without question (*She's/She here.*).⁶ Labov (1972) makes a slightly weaker statement on the issue of plain *it* forms. He says, "While we occasionally do get plain *it*, as in *It always somebody tougher than you are*," *it's* is "found in the great majority of cases" (p. 71).

A reduced form of the auxiliary, which corresponds to mainstream English *have*, is given in (13). In (14), no auxiliary form precedes the main verb *got*, while reduced auxiliary forms that correspond to *will* (*'a*) are in construction with the present form of the main verbs in (15a, b). The sentence in (15c) shows that the future form of the auxiliary (*will*, *'ll*) does not have to be represented overtly by a reduced form (*'a*); it can be marked by \emptyset . The same pattern occurs in (16) with the reduced and zero forms of *would*. If we take just a moment to look at the sentence in (16b), we find that the use of *be* there is much like the use of *be* in sentences in the focal point at the beginning of this chapter. The sentence in (16b) can have two interpretations: one like the 'usually' interpretation of the focal point sentences ('Sometimes he is already sleeping') and the one that means exactly what the sentence in (16a) means. It is the (16a) interpretation that we are interested in at the moment.

A third property of auxiliaries is that they can host the contracted negator *not* (*n't*). In other words, *n't* can 'attach' to auxiliaries. This is shown in the sentences below:

- (17) a. Bruce ain't taking calculus this semester.
 b. Bruce is not taking calculus this semester.
 c. Bruce won't take calculus next semester.
 d. Bruce will not take calculus next semester.
 e. Bruce didn't (din) finish his homework last night.
 f. Bruce did not finish his homework last night.
 g. Bruce hadn't been doing his homework.
 h. Bruce had not been doing his homework.

The sentence pairs (c–d/e–f/g–h) consist of an auxiliary + contracted *not* (*n't*) sequence (c, d, e) and a full auxiliary + *not* sequence (d, f, h). In the discussion of the paradigms (1–11), I have classified *ain't* as a negator. It is different from other negated auxiliaries in that it is not formed from any particular auxiliary + contracted *not* (*n't*), although it may occur in environments in which *isn't*, *didn't* and *haven't* occur.

Auxiliaries can also be identified by their property of inverting in yes-no questions, which require a yes or no answer. Question formation in AAE, as well as in general American English, is a process by which the auxiliary assumes the position preceding the subject of the sentence. In the declarative sentence in (18a), the auxiliary *was* is in the position following the subject *Dee*, and in the yes-no question (interrogative), it is in the position preceding the subject:

- (18) a. Dee **was** here.
 b. **Was** Dee here?

The property of inverting in question formation is a special property of auxiliary verbs, so auxiliaries, but not main verbs, can be placed in the position preceding subjects in

yes-no questions. The sentence in (19c) is ungrammatical because the main verb *cook* has inverted preceding the subject *Bruce*:

- (19) a. Bruce can cook.
 b. Can Bruce cook?
 c. *Cook Bruce can?

An analysis of questions in AAE helps to reveal another property of auxiliaries in that variety. The fifth property of auxiliaries in AAE is that they do not occur obligatorily in questions. In cases in which auxiliaries do not occur on the surface (e.g., (20b, d)), questions are signaled by using a special question intonation, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

- (20) a. Is Bob here?
 b. Bob here?
 c. Is Bob gon' leave? ('Is Bob going to leave?')
 d. Bob gon' leave?
- (21) a. Have Bob left?
 b. Bob left?
- (22) a. Did Bob leave?
 b. Bob left?

These sentences show that, on the one hand, auxiliaries can occur at the beginning of sentences, but on the other, they can be left completely out of questions. In the (b) and (d) questions, there is no auxiliary that indicates that a question has been formed; the intonation of the sentences signals that a question is being asked. In the question in (22b), past tense is marked on the main verb (*left*). If the identical questions in (21b) and (22b) have different interpretations, they will be distinguished by the context in which they occur. The modals (e.g., *will* and *should*) cannot be left out of questions in all environments, but they can remain in the position following the subject and preceding the main verb, as in (23a, b):

- (23) a. You'a teach me how to swim? ('You'll teach me how to swim?') 'Will you teach me how to swim?'
 b. Bruce can swim?
 c. Bruce was running?

Modals and the past tense auxiliary/copula *be* (*was*) (23c) pattern similarly, in that they cannot be left out of questions, but they are not required to occur in the position preceding the subject. So note that **Bruce running* cannot be used for 'Bruce was running,' nor can it be used for 'Was Bruce running?' Question intonation is also used in these sentences to signal that the construction is a question. The claim is not that AAE is the only English variety that uses intonation to signal questions; it is that intonation can be used in this way, also. The point that will be explored in chapter 4 is that in AAE, questions can be marked by different intonational patterns that may not be commonly used in other varieties of English.

The inversion of the auxiliary in yes-no questions is the same type of inversion that results in tags, constructions in which yes-no questions are tagged onto the end of a declarative. Tag questions are formed by copying the auxiliary in a declarative sentence in the position at the end of the sentence, making it negative if its original occurrence is positive and positive if its original occurrence is negative. The pronoun corresponding to the subject of the declarative sentence is copied in the position following the copied auxiliary. This is demonstrated in (24):

- (24) Bruce WILL finish his homework, **won't he?**

Given that the auxiliary *will* is positive, its negative form (*won't*) is copied at the end of the sentence, and the pronoun (*he*), which corresponds to the subject (*Bruce*), is copied immediately following the negative auxiliary. The description of tag questions given above specifically mentions auxiliary, but as has been noted, declaratives in AAE are not necessarily formed with auxiliaries (see (12c)). In forming tag questions from declarative sentences in which there is no overt inflected *be* form, we operate as if an auxiliary is actually present:

- (25) a. Bruce \emptyset eating, ain't he?
 b. *Bruce \emptyset eating, \emptyset not he?
 c. Bruce not eating, is he?
 d. *Bruce \emptyset not eating, \emptyset he?

In forming the grammatical tag in (25a), the negative element (*ain't*) corresponding to the positive form of the auxiliary that would occur in the declarative if there were one is copied at the end of the sentence, and then the pronoun corresponding to *Bruce* is copied. The tag in (25c) is formed by copying the positive auxiliary (*is*) corresponding to \emptyset *not* in the declarative. The ungrammatical sentences in (25b) and (25d) show that the tag questions cannot be formed without placing an auxiliary in the tagged part of the sentence even if there is no overt auxiliary in the declarative. Tag question formation is an important process in the study of AAE because it can be used as a diagnostic to determine what auxiliary would occur if one were present. In short, auxiliaries that do not occur superficially in declarative sentences can be *forced* to surface by using tag questions, as in (25a, c). A final note here is that the rule for tag questions that has been presented will have to be formulated more carefully to account for the positive auxiliaries that correspond to *ain't* and *ain*, *have* and *did*, respectively, in sentences such as the following:

He ain't eating, is he?

He **ain't** ate, **have** he?

He **ain** eat, **did** he? (As noted in the previous discussion, it is not clear that the auxiliary here is actually *ain't*.)

The following will suffice for our purposes: in forming tags, if *ain't* precedes a verb in the past form in the declarative, use the auxiliary *have* (or *did* for some speakers) in the tag. In all other cases, use the auxiliary *is*.

The sixth property of auxiliaries discussed here is that they can substitute for deleted material in verb phrase-ellipsis and verb phrase-fronting. These two processes have

been discussed at length in studies on auxiliaries in general American English, for the most part, to illustrate some similarities and/or differences between auxiliaries and main verbs and to show that auxiliaries do not form constituents or units with main verbs. (See Pullum and Wilson 1977, Akmajian, Steele, and Wasow 1979 and Warner 1993 for a discussion of these topics and a review of the literature.) The term VP-ellipsis is used to refer to structures in which an auxiliary is substituted for deleted material, as shown below. Recall that 'Ø' is used to indicate that an auxiliary does not occur in that position:

- (26) Bruce Ø dancing, and Dee Ø dancing, too.
VP-ellipsis: Bruce dancing, and Dee **is**, too.

In this sentence, the auxiliary *is* substitutes for Ø *dancing*, which is omitted in the second clause of the sentence. As a result, we get . . . *and Dee is, too*, not *and Dee dancing, too*. VP-fronting can occur, in which the auxiliary is left behind while the verb and other material (VP) is moved forward:

- (27) Bruce said he would win the election, and win the election he **did**.

In the second clause in the sentence in (27), the whole verb phrase *win the election* moves forward to the position preceding the subject *he*, that is, fronts (as in VP-fronting); and the auxiliary (*did*) is left behind. As a result, we get *win the election* preceding, not following, the subject *he*. Again, the auxiliaries here occur in both AAE and general American English, and, furthermore, most of the processes used to demonstrate the properties of auxiliaries are common to both systems.

Generally speaking, auxiliaries in AAE bear some features that are quite similar if not identical to patterns of auxiliaries in general American English. We have seen some subtle differences between the two systems in the present perfect and in some processes in which the auxiliary does not occur on the surface in AAE. Two interesting questions that are in line with the type of research gathered in the volume *Language Variety in the South Revisited* are the following: What is the relationship between black and white speech in the South? Are the data that I have presented here on the auxiliary patterns in AAE identical to Southern white usage? I do not have corresponding paradigms for Southern American English, but I will address this question, in part, in the next section by referring to data that are available for Southern and other varieties of English. (See Labov 1969a, Baugh 1980, Holm 1984, Bailey and Schnebly 1988, Rickford, Ball, Blake, Jackson and Martin 1991, Mufwene 1992 and Green 1993, 1998a, for a discussion of auxiliaries in AAE.)

2.3 Aspectual markers (verbal markers): *be*, BIN, *dən*

The aspectual markers (or verbal markers) in AAE are similar in form to auxiliary verbs in general American English, and this shared identity may cause some confusion between speakers of the two language systems.⁷ Because of this similarity, non-AAE speakers may expect these markers to have the same role and meaning as some auxiliary

verb forms in general American English. As noted in the lexical entries in chapter 1, the verbal markers *be*, *BIN* and *dən* occur in specific environments in sentences and indicate a certain type of meaning. Due to the type of meaning these verbal markers indicate, we will refer to them as aspectual markers (more specifically tense-aspect markers).

Aspect is a complicated subject and is the topic of numerous journal articles and books (e.g., Comrie 1976, Brinton 1988, Binnick 1991, Smith 1997), but it will be helpful to give a simplified definition here. Aspect is often contrasted with tense to make useful distinctions. Tense situates an event in time, as in *Bruce ran*, in which the running took place at some past time before the sentence was uttered. Aspect, on the other hand, refers to duration, completion or habitual occurrence. The progressive or durative aspect is expressed on the verb *running* (as in *Bruce is running*), in which the running activity is durative, indicating continuing action, or that the activity is in progress. (For a more advanced analysis of aspectual markers in AAE see Déchaine 1993 and Green 1993, 2000).

2.3.1 General description of aspectual markers

The paradigms in (28–39) reflect the possible aspectual combinations. In the following paradigms, the aspectual marker is followed by a verb in the *-ing* or *-ed* forms. The following patterns are given:

- (1) Column 1 – aspectual element with corresponding verb form
- (2) Column 2 – aspectual element in stressed or emphatic affirmation constructions, if the form exists for that paradigm
- (3) Column 3 – aspectual element in negated construction, if the form exists for that paradigm

The categories first, second, third person singular and plural are not indicated here because these distinctions are not made in the aspectual marker paradigms. The same form is used regardless of whether the subject is first, second, third person singular or plural.

(28) Habitual

Habitual	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
be eating	DO be eating	don('t) be eating
'am usually/always eating'	'AM usually/always eating'	'am not usually eating'
or 'usually eats'	or 'DO usually eat'	or 'don't usually eat'

(Note: Some speakers allow *bes* in some contexts (e.g., *bes eating*)).

(29) Remote past (state, habit)

Remote past	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
BIN eating	HAVE BIN eating	ain('t)/haven't BIN eating
'have been eating for a long time'	'HAVE been eating for a long time'	'hasn't/haven't been eating for a long time'

(38) **Future resultant state/conditional**

Future resultant state/ conditional	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
'a be dɔn ate	WILL be dɔn ate	won't be dɔn ate
'will have already eaten'	'WILL have already eaten'	'won't have already eaten'

(39) **Modal resultant state**

Modal resultant state	Emphatic affirmation	Negative
might/may be dɔn ate	MIGHT/MAY be dɔn ate	might/may not be dɔn ate
'might have already eaten'	'MIGHT have already eaten'	'might not have already eaten'

Aspectual *be*

Aspectual markers denote meaning in the constructions in which they occur.⁸ Generally speaking, the type of meaning (e.g., habitual, resultant state) they denote is indicated by the headings in the paradigms. Also, the meaning expressed by these aspectual markers is captured in the general American English glosses by a sequence of verbs and an adverb or adverbial phrase. Aspectual *be* (which may also be in the form of *bes* in some instances) denotes habitual or iterative meaning; therefore, the activity expressed by the verb 'eating' in (28) is characterized as recurring.⁹ The adverb *usually* or *always* is used in the gloss to convey the meaning in the corresponding general English sequence. Because it denotes meaning, the aspectual marker *be* must occur in sentences in which such aspectual interpretation is intended. For example, whereas the auxiliary/copula *be* and other auxiliaries can be absent or do not have to occur obligatorily, the aspectual marker *be* cannot be left out of the sentence. If it is omitted, some sentences may receive ambiguous interpretations, or they may not receive the intended interpretation. This point is illustrated by the sentences in (40):

- (40) a. Bruce run.
'Bruce runs on occasions' or 'Bruce doesn't have a problem with running'
- b. Bruce Ø running.
'Bruce is running now' or 'Bruce is running these days'
- c. Bruce be running.
'Bruce is usually running' or 'Bruce usually runs'

All of the sentences in (40) can have habitual readings, in which the running activity occurs on different occasions. The difference is that the sentence in (40c) can only have that meaning, so if a speaker leaves aspectual *be* out of the sentence, the one in (40b), in which the present progressive ('is running now' or 'is running these days') is expressed, will be produced. While the sentences in (40b) and (40c) share some superficial similarities, there is an important difference between the two. First of all, they are similar in that the verb *running* in both is in the *-ing* form, and secondly, they can both be produced with some form of *be*. In (40b), the inflected *be* form will appear on the surface in emphatic contexts (e.g., *Bruce IS running*) and in some questions

(*Is Bruce running?*). If we add an adverbial clause ('when I leave for work') that specifies a time period, we will see how the sentences differ.

- (40) b'. Bruce running when I leave for work.
 'Bruce's running is in progress when I leave for work'
 c'. Bruce be running when I leave for work.
 (1) 'It is usually the case that Bruce's running is in progress when I leave for work'
 (2) 'It is usually the case that Bruce begins to run when I leave for work'

The sentence in (40b') has one interpretation, in which the running is already in progress when I leave for work, but the sentence in (40c') has two interpretations, one in which the running is usually already in progress when I leave for work (1) and the other in which the running usually begins when I leave for work (2). This is one of the major differences between sentences such as the present progressive in (40b') and the aspectual *be* construction in (40c').

Aspectual *be* always occurs in its uninflected or bare form, so it never appears as *is*, *am* or *are*.¹⁰ In the paradigm (28), aspectual *be* occurs in the environment preceding a verb in the *-ing* form; however, as noted in the lexical entries in the preceding chapter, it can precede elements from other grammatical classes, as illustrated in the sentences in (41):

- (41) a. She **be telling** people she eight. (Bf, 6)
 'She is always telling people she's eight' or 'she always tells people she's eight'
 b. I **be looking** for somewhere to waste time. (Bm, 30s)
 'I am usually looking for somewhere to waste time' or 'I usually look for somewhere to waste time'
 c. During the summer, they go off for two weeks, so her checks **be big**. (Bf, 50s)
 'During the summer, they go away for two weeks, so her checks are usually big then'
 d. Your phone bill **be high**, don't it. (Bf, 80s)
 'Your phone bill is usually high, isn't it?'
 e. I always **be scary** stuff. (Bm, 7)
 'I am always scary stuff'
 (Literally: I always pretend to be scary characters.)
 f. It **be knives** in here. It **be ice picks** in here. (Bf teenager, national news)
 'There are usually knives in here. There are usually ice picks in here'
 g. I **be in my office** by 7:30. (Bf, 30s)
 'I am usually in my office by 7:30'
 h. He doesn't even allow women to wear pants at women's retreats and he doesn't even **be there**. (Bf, 40s)
 'He doesn't allow women to wear pants at women's retreats and he isn't usually there'
 i. She gotta be there for 9, so they **be dɔn** gone to school. (Bf, 60s)
 'She has to be there at 9, so they have usually already gone to school'
 (Literally: She has to be at work at 9 AM, so the children have usually already gone to school by the time she leaves.)

j. It don't **be drove** hardly. It don't **be dogged**. I grease it and oil it. (Bm, 60s)

'It is usually the case that it is hardly driven. It isn't usually dogged. I grease it and oil it'

In all of these cases, *be* denotes habitual or iterative meaning, so the *be* + verb/adjective/preposition/adverb/aspectual/passive verb sequence has a 'happens on different occasions' or 'is in a certain state or place on different occasions' interpretation. In (41a) and (41b) the telling and looking events, respectively, occur on particular occasions, and in (41c) and (41d) *be* occurs with adjectives to indicate that the checks are usually big and the phone bill is usually high, and in the sentence in (41e) the speaker expresses that he pretends to be scary characters on different occasions. In (41e), the speaker is commenting on his roles during Halloween, during which he dresses as scary characters. The speaker in (41f) uses the sentence to comment on the occasional, perhaps usual presence of weapons in her school.

Aspectual *be* also precedes prepositional phrases (e.g., *in my office*, where *in* is a preposition) (41g) and adverb phrases (e.g., *there*) (41h) to indicate being in a place on particular occasions. (41g) says that it is usually the case that I am in my office by 7:30, and (41h) says that it is usually the case that he isn't there (i.e., at retreats). The aspectual marker *be* also precedes the verbal marker *ɔn*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In (41i), what recurs is the event of the children having already gone to school by some particular time. Note that *be* can precede a passive verb, ending in *-ed* (41j).

In most of the cases in (41), aspectual *be* precedes a verb or other predicate phrase (such as adjective phrases, noun phrases and prepositional phrases). Here we refer to predicate phrase as a cover term for verb phrase, adjective phrase, noun phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase which may name an action performed by the subject or modify the subject. The predicate phrase indicates a temporary property of an entity. For example in (41e), the scary state is temporary; the subject, the seven-year-old boy, can change his appearance from being scary back to normal.

However, in some sentences aspectual *be* precedes adjectives and prepositions that indicate permanent properties of a subject. These types of sentences are referred to as bicycle sentences in Green (2000) because the first sentence of this type that I saw in print was about bicycles.¹¹ The sentence in (42a) is in the 1972 book *Tense Marking in Black English* by Ralph Fasold:

- (42) a. Some of them be big and some of them be small. (Fasold 1972, p. 151)
'It is usually/always the case that some of them are big and some of them are small'
(my gloss)
(Literally: It is usually the case that some of those bicycles are big and some of those bicycles are small.)
- b. Sam's wholesale stores be on the outskirts of town. (Green 2000, p. 21)
'It is usually/always the case that Sam's wholesale stores are on the outskirts of town'
- c. Some iMacs be tangerine.
'It is usually the case that some iMacs are tangerine'

Now when we think about the sentences in (42), we realize that their subjects can be described as having permanent properties. In particular, some bicycles are permanently big, while others are permanently small. Once built in a certain place, Sam's wholesale stores are permanently located there. Finally, some iMacs, once designed, are permanently tangerine. These states will not be changed unless some force of nature or human acts upon them. Because a bicycle is in the permanent state of being big or being small, the sentence in (42a) cannot have the interpretation in which the bicycles habitually change sizes. Likewise, because a store is permanently located in a particular place, the sentence in (42b) cannot have the interpretation in which one store habitually occurs in different places. That is to say the sentence cannot mean that Sam's stores which have been built in a certain place change locations from time to time. This explains the situations in the sentences in (42), but the cases in the sentences in (41a, b, c, e, g, h, i) are different, as the subjects are human; the subjects can volitionally participate in events that occur on different occasions, and they can participate in changing states.

The inanimate subjects of the sentences in (42) cannot volitionally participate in events, nor do they have mobility or other requirements necessary to participate in such changes. However, given the nature of aspectual *be* as a marker whose function is to give the predicate following it the interpretation that the activity happens over and over, the sentences in (42) must have some type of habitual reading even if the subjects are inanimate and cannot normally change size, color or location over and over. So the kind of interpretation we end up with in sentences such as (42) is "one in which different members of a particular group can be described by the state indicated by the predicate" (Green 2000, p. 23). As a result, the sentence *Some iMacs be tangerine* does not mean that one day the computers are tangerine and the next the same computers are grape and then finally they change their color to bondi blue. It means that out of the class of iMacs some will be tangerine, that is, some are usually tangerine. We can expect Apple to produce tangerine iMacs from time to time. Fasold (1972, p. 151) labels this use of *be* distributive, such that it is "the subject of the sentence, not the event in the predicate" that is "distributed in time," and he illustrates with the sentence in (42a). He explains that "although any given bicycle is always the same size, one encounters different bicycles at different points in time and these will be of varying sizes" (p. 151). Fasold concluded that sentences such as the ones in (42) were rare. They do, however, occur in conversation; I have collected a few of these sentences. In fact, an African American female in her 30s made the statement in (42b) as we were discussing the growing popularity of Wal-Mart stores. However, when I wrote about these sentences, I changed the name of the store to Sam's.

Aspectual *be* also occurs at the end of the sentence, as in (43a) or immediately preceding a prepositional phrase that adds additional description (43b).

- (43) a. That's how they be. (Bf, 60s)
 'That's how they usually/always are'
 (Literally: The boys' socks are always that dirty. The appearance of their socks today isn't unusual.)

- b. No, that's how it be at Wal-Mart. (Bf, 60s)
 'No, that's how it usually/always is at Wal-Mart'
 (Literally: The price of aspartame sweetener is always reasonable at Wal-Mart. The reasonable price today isn't unusual.)

In these cases, aspectual *be* indicates habitual meaning, but it also attributes a property to the subjects of the sentences. For example, the property of being dirty is attributed to the socks in (43a), so they are usually dirty.

Because aspectual *be* indicates habituality, adverbs are not needed to express this meaning, but certain types of adverbs (e.g., those expressing frequency) can occur with the marker. Some examples are given in (44):

- (44) a. **I always be** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 'I am always looking for somewhere to waste time'/'I always look ...'
 a'. ??**I be always** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 b. **I usually be** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 'I am usually looking for somewhere to waste time'/'I usually look ...'
 b'. ??**I be usually** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 c. **I often be** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 'I am often looking for somewhere to waste time'/'I often look ...'
 c'. ??**I be often** looking for somewhere to waste time.
 d. **I never be** looking for that.
 'I am never looking for that'/'I never look ...'
 d'. ***I be never** looking for that.

Given the meaning of aspectual *be*, we already know that the looking for somewhere to waste time activity occurs from time to time, so the adverbs in (44) specify precisely how often the looking activity occurs: always, usually, often, never. The preferred place in the sentence for these adverbs is in the position preceding aspectual *be* (44a, b, c, d), so the resulting sentences are less than perfect when the adverb follows *be* (44 a', b', c', d'). Other types of adverbs such as *probably* occur with aspectual *be*:

- (45) a. They **probably be** up there laughing. (attested)
 'They are probably usually up there laughing'
 b. *They be probably up there laughing.

The sentence is bad when the adverb *probably* follows aspectual *be*.

Before moving on, let's summarize the properties of aspectual *be* in AAE:

Summary of properties of aspectual *be*

Q: What is it?

A: Aspectual *be* is a verbal or aspectual marker that is different from the auxiliary/copula *be*.

Q: What is its function?

A: Aspectual *be* indicates habitual meaning (i.e., an event occurs over and over).

Q: Where does it occur?

A: Aspectual *be* occurs before verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, adverbs, *dən* and at the end of sentences.

Q: What happens when it takes a predicate that occurs with a subject that can change states?

A: The resulting interpretation is one in which the subject participates in the activity over and over.

Q: What happens when it takes a predicate that occurs with a subject that does not normally change states?

A: The resulting interpretation is not one in which a single subject undergoes change over and over. Instead it is one in which different members of the group can be described by the property indicated by the phrase following *be*.

Q: What do frequency adverbs such as *always* and *often* indicate when they occur with aspectual *be*, and where do they occur with respect to the aspectual marker?

A: Frequency adverbs specify how often the activity in the aspectual *be* construction occurs, and these adverbs usually precede aspectual *be*.

As shown in the discussion of aspectual *be*, the verbal marker has a very clear function. The types of details presented here are crucial for explaining the meaning and use of the marker; however, they are most important in that they address subtle meanings and properties that may be beneficial in developing lessons for teaching speakers of AAE to use general American English proficiently.

One challenging problem is that of explaining the difference in meaning between the type of aspectual *be* sentences in (42) and their zero *be* counterparts in (46), in which the copula *be* does not occur overtly (as indicated by ‘Ø’).

- (46) a. Some of them Ø big and some of them Ø small.
 ‘Some of them are big and some of them are small’
 (cf. Some of them be big and some of them be small.)
- b. Sam’s wholesale stores Ø on the outskirts of town.
 ‘Sam’s wholesale stores are on the outskirts of town’
 (cf. Sam’s wholesale stores be on the outskirts of town.)
- c. Some iMacs Ø tangerine.
 ‘Some iMacs are tangerine’
 (cf. Some iMacs be tangerine.)

AAE speakers have intuitions about sentences such as (42) and (46), but it is not sufficient to use only intuition to explain the subtle meaning difference between the two groups of sentences. While the sentences in (42) and (46) are very similar (including nouns, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions which rename or describe the subjects), they do not have identical meanings. There is no aspectual *be* in the sentences in (46), so unlike the sentences in (42) they do not necessarily have the habitual interpretation that is associated with the marker.

At least two other uses of *be* in AAE resemble occurrences of aspectual *be*, in that the *be* is in its uninflected form (that is, it is not in any forms of *be* such as *is*, *am*, *are*). Examples of these two uses are in (47) and (48):

- (47) a. I'm going fishin if it don't be raining. (Bm, 60s)
 'I'm going fishing if it isn't raining'
 b. I sure hope it don't be no leak after I finish. (Bm, 60s)
 'I surely hope there isn't a leak after I finish'

In (47a), a type of conditional in which *be* precedes a verb (*raining*), the meaning is that the speaker will go fishing at some point in the future under the condition that it is not raining at that time. This sentence also has a subjunctive meaning in which it is not a fact that it will be raining, but it is a possibility. In (47b), *be* precedes a noun phrase (*no leak*), and the speaker is expressing his hope that there will not be a leak in the future.

The future meaning is given in (48) although there is no future marker *will* (or its variants, *'ll* and *'a*):

- (48) You be surprised how the Lord can use you. (attested)
 'You'll be surprised how the Lord can use you'

The speaker who used the sentence in (48) was encouraging the listener to yield to the Lord, who can and will do wonderful things. Given the context, it is clear that this occurrence of *be* is not the aspectual *be* that has been discussed in this section. The meanings are different; (48) in its intended context expresses future meaning and possibly future habitual meaning. Also, if you reconsider the paradigm in (28), you will find that aspectual *be* occurs with *do*. On the other hand, *be* in (48) would have more than likely occurred with the auxiliary *will* had the speaker stressed the point. It is likely that she would have said: 'You WILL/WOULD be surprised how the Lord can use you.' In such cases, it is necessary to hear the context in order to determine the meaning that is intended, whether aspectual *be* or some other *be* as in (46) and (47) is intended.

Aspectual *be* is also found in Hiberno English spoken in Ireland (especially in Northern Ireland), and it also occurs in varieties of English spoken by whites in the United States in some parts of the Carolinas. Both Harris (1985) and Kallen (1985) report that *be* or *doldoes be* marks habituality in Hiberno English. (Note the spelling of *be*'s with an apostrophe in Hiberno English.) Two examples from Harris are as follow:

- (49) a. He never be's sick or anything.
 b. They be shooting and fishing out at the Forestry lakes. (p. 76)

Kallen also discusses the role of *do* as a habitual marker and the role of *do* in *do be* sequences:

- (50) a. I do put the excess up in here.
 b. Those pancakes do be gorgeous. (p. 135)

The uses reported here are quite similar to the uses of aspectual *be* in AAE. The only difference is in the use of *do* in Hiberno English. *Do* itself can be used as a habitual marker, and it can also occur with *be*. In the latter case, Kallen suggests that habituality is doubly marked, once by *do* and another time by *be*. In contrast, *do* in this environment in AAE is limited to marking emphasis, hosting the contracted *n't* (*not*) and occurring

in tag questions, ellipsis and VP-fronting. Review the AAE aspectual *be* paradigms. Neither Harris nor Kallen gives examples of *be* preceding a prepositional phrase, but, of course, it just may be the case that there are gaps in the data. The most obvious question is whether AAE aspectual *be* and Hiberno English aspectual *be* are historically related. This question is raised in Harris (1985) and discussed at length in Rickford (1986). The latter presents a number of arguments against the claim that habitual *be* represents a spread from Hiberno English to AAE.

Montgomery and Mishoe (1999) present data on the use of aspectual *be* by white speakers in the Carolinas. They give examples of *be* and *bes*, both of which can be habitual markers, as shown below:

- (51) a. Sometimes I have spells. Lately I be having more spells. (p. 247)
 b. That baby bes crying all afternoon. He's fine in the morning, but cranky in the afternoon. (p. 246)

There are clear parallels between aspectual *be* in AAE and *be* in Carolina English, but there are also some interesting differences. These *be* forms can also be used where no habitual meaning is intended:

- (52) a. I babysat your mama. Yep, I be that old. (p. 248)
 b. Lord, lord, child, you bes all grown up. (p. 247)

Be and *bes* are not limited to habitual and iterative contexts in the Carolina variety. This is one major difference between the data here and that in AAE. Another difference is that, according to Montgomery and Mishoe, *bes* is used when the subject is third person singular. Although *bes* occurs in AAE, I have not seen any hard and fast evidence suggesting that it is limited to third person singular. (Some attested examples of *bes* in AAE are in chapter 3, along with the discussion of verbal *-s*.) Based on the data and observations from Montgomery and Mishoe, it is possible to glean some interesting points about the *be* paradigms in the Carolina variety; however, time and space do not permit me to discuss them here.

Research shows that aspectual *be*, which indicates habitual meaning also occurs in other English varieties. The use and meaning of these corresponding *be* forms in AAE, Hiberno English and the English in the Carolinas overlap in significant ways. It is also the case that there are interesting differences. Historical research focusing on the origin of habitual *be* in these varieties would answer questions about the relationship among them, which goes beyond the scope of this book. Such research on origins of the marker cannot be conducted without including discussion about the influence of African languages and creoles on the language of African Americans in the United States. Issues related to historical origin are very complicated and require serious analysis and attention to detail. But see the sources in the Introduction to the book for additional references to historical research on AAE.

Remote past *BIN*¹²

BIN situates an activity or state (or some part thereof) in the remote past, and, as such, the 'eating' in the paradigm in (29) started at some point in the remote past and

continues up to the moment of utterance (i.e., the point at which the speaker produces the sentence using *BIN*), while the ‘eating’ event in the paradigm in (30) ended at some point in the remote past, thus ‘ate a long time ago.’ The remote past is relative, so it can refer to a time period of fifteen minutes ago or fifteen years ago. One way to put it is that *BIN* is used to indicate that the time period referred to is longer than normal for an activity, or it can be used to affirm that a state has indeed held for a long of time. The stress (or pitch accent) distinguishes *BIN* phonetically (i.e., pronunciation) and semantically (i.e., meaning) from *been* (the unstressed form), which also occurs in AAE (cf. the present perfect progressive paradigm above in 9). *BIN* in (53a) and *been*, *bin* in (53b, c) have different stress patterns and different meanings; therefore, the sentences have different meanings:

- (53) a. She *BIN* running.
 ‘She has been running for a long time’
 b. She *been* running.
 ‘She has been running’
 c. She *bin* had him all day. (Bm, 60s)
 ‘She has had him all day’

One important factor is that stress is associated with meaning, such that stress on *BIN* results in the remote past interpretation. Is this *BIN* unique to AAE, or is it also shared by other varieties of English? Some speakers will recall the toothpaste commercial in which the announcer says, with stress on *been*, “Forget about the way you’ve *been* brushing your teeth.” The first impression for some may be that the remote past *BIN* has ‘crossed over’ into mainstream English, but the example does not unequivocally support this claim, as the meaning that is intended is quite likely ‘Forget about the way you’ve *been* brushing your teeth in the past.’ Were this the remote past *BIN*, then the meaning would be ‘Forget about the way you’ve been brushing your teeth for a long time.’ It is not clear that the latter is the meaning that is intended in the toothpaste commercial.

In the early 1970s, linguists began to analyze the meaning that is associated with *BIN*. Rickford (1975), in presenting data from speakers in Philadelphia and the coastal Carolinas and reporting the differences in judgments about *BIN* from African American and white speakers, notes that “there is a rich arena for research in the use of *BÍN* . . .” (p. 117). Some years later, Green (1998b) expanded on research on *BIN* in Labov (1972) and Rickford (1973, 1975), raising sociolinguistic questions and giving a description and semantic account of the marker and constructions in which it occurs.¹³ The three types of *BIN* or environments for *BIN* are *BIN_{STAT}*, *BIN_{HAB}* and *BIN_{COMP}*. In what follows, I will use *BIN* labels (STAT, HAB, COMP) simply to explain the meaning of the sentences in which *BIN* occurs. The point is that there is only one *BIN*, but there are three types of meaning depending on the type of predicate with which *BIN* occurs.

In *BIN_{STAT}* constructions (where ‘STAT’ refers to state, that which holds constantly), the state started at some point in the remote past and continues to hold up to the moment of utterance or time of speech, as illustrated in the sentences below.

- (54) a. He **BIN running**.
 ‘He’s been running for a long time’
- b. They just sent me this one, but I **BIN having** that one. (Bf, 60s)
 ‘They just sent me this one, but I have had that one for a long time’
- c. I **BIN knowing** he died.
 ‘I have known for a long time that he died’
- d. A: The police going bad.
 B: They ain’t going bad. They **BIN bad**. (Bm, 40s)
 ‘They aren’t going bad. They have been bad for a long time’
- e. He **BIN a preacher/in the kitchen/there**.¹⁴
 ‘He has been a preacher/in the kitchen/there for a long time’

In the examples in (54), *BIN* precedes a verb that ends in *-ing* (54 a, b, c) or a predicate phrase such as an adjective phrase (54d), noun phrase, prepositional phrase and adverb phrase (54e). These constructions have the ‘for a long time’ meaning, so in (54a) the running state has held for a long time, and in (54b) the state of having (i.e., own) has also held for a long time. The knowing state (54c) has held for a long time. As you will see in (55a), *BIN had* (in addition to *BIN having*) can also be used. The use of *having* and *knowing* in (54b) and (54c), respectively, as opposed to *BIN had* (cf. 55a) and *BIN knew* (cf. 55b) may be due to regional patterns that are used in parts of the Southern United States (Green 1998b). Janna Oetting, Ph.D., in research on AAE and nonstandard varieties of English of white speakers in southeastern Louisiana, also reports the use of *BIN having* and *BIN knowing* by African American children.¹⁵

The predicates following *BIN* in the remaining sentences are not verbs, but the constructions still have a ‘for a long time’ reading. The term ‘state’ is used as a description in these constructions because the sentences refer to a situation that remains constant, unchanged. For example, according to the sentence in (54d), the police’s change to a state of being bad started to hold a long time ago, and it continued to hold until the sentence was uttered (and probably after that). As noted above, certain verbs (e.g., *have*, *know*) in the *BIN_{STAT}* construction can be marked for past, as shown in the examples in (55):

- (55) a. A: Where’d you get that shirt?
 B: I **BIN had** it.¹⁶ (Bf, 60s)
 ‘I’ve had it for a long time’ (i.e., I’ve had it so long I can’t remember where I bought/got it)
- A: Hunh?
- B: I **BIN got** it.
 ‘I bought/got it a long time ago’
- b. I **BIN knew** that.
 ‘I’ve know that for a long time’

Compare the sentences in (54b, c) to the sentences in (55a, b), respectively. They have the same meaning. One word of caution: It is not the case that each verb-*ing* can be used interchangeably with the corresponding past form of the verb in *BIN_{STAT}* constructions.

BIN running and *BIN ran* do not have the same meaning, so the sentences *She BIN running* and *She BIN ran* cannot be used interchangeably. The verbs in (54b, c) and (55a, b) are special cases because they indicate states, so they are inherently stative. They are different from a verb such as *run*, which indicates an activity. In summary, state verbs can occur in the *BIN_{STAT}* constructions in their *-ing* or *-ed* form without a change in meaning. We have ignored the *BIN got* sequence in B's second response in (55a), but we will return to it in the description of the *BIN_{COMP}* construction.

The second reading of the *BIN* construction is labeled *BIN_{HAB}* (where 'HAB' refers to habitual). I use habitual because the activity or state expressed by the verb begins at some point in the remote past and continues habitually, that is, on occasion or from time to time. Generally speaking, these constructions express a habit, and can be interpreted to mean 'started some time ago and continue from time to time.' The verbs in the *BIN_{HAB}* constructions are similar to those in the *BIN_{STAT}* construction in that they, too, occur in their *-ing* form, but they differ in that none of them can occur in the past form. Another difference is that only verbs can occur in *BIN_{HAB}* constructions (but cf. *BIN_{STAT}* in which other predicates such as nouns and adjectives can follow *BIN*). This is logical because these constructions are used to express habits, actions; and only verbs indicate actions, at least in this variety:

- (56) a. Bruce **BIN running**.
 'Bruce started running some time ago and he still runs from time to time'
 b. That's where I **BIN putting** my glasses.
 'That's where I started putting my glasses some time ago and I still put them there'
 c. Bruce **BIN being** a clown.
 'Bruce started acting as a clown/portraying a clown some time ago and he still acts as/portrays one from time to time'

In the sentences in (56), Bruce has had the habit of running for a long time; I have had the habit of putting my glasses in a particular place for a long time, and Bruce has had the habit of acting like a clown for a long time. The sentence in (56a) can have two readings, *BIN_{STAT}* and *BIN_{HAB}*, respectively. In principle, *BIN* verb-*ing* constructions can have the two readings. So even *BIN putting* can have a *BIN_{STAT}* reading if we change the sentence in (56b) slightly and think of the object (glasses) as drinking glasses.

- (57) Bruce *BIN putting* those glasses on the shelves.

In addition to the habitual reading, the sentence in (57) can have the *BIN_{STAT}* reading that means roughly that Bruce started putting those glasses on the shelves a long time ago (perhaps two hours ago) and he is still in the process of putting them there. This meaning occurs with *put* because its object (*those glasses*) is plural, so Bruce can place the glasses on the shelf one by one until he has finished the task. If glasses in (56b) refers to the object that is worn to improve sight, then the state reading is anomalous because to put a pair of glasses in a particular place requires one action, not the kind of continuous activity involved in putting drinking glasses away. (Of course this *BIN_{STAT}* reading also occurs when referring to plural eyeglasses.)

The third reading of the *BIN* construction is called *BIN_{COMP}*. This remote past marker should not be confused with the unstressed past marker that I will represent as *bin* (also see the sentence in (53c)) in a sentence such as *I bin had this necklace 'bout fifteen, sixteen years* (Bf, 80s) 'I have had this necklace for about fifteen or sixteen years.' There are two major differences between *bin* and *BIN_{COMP}*. The marker *bin* is unstressed and can occur with a time adverbial (e.g., 'bout fifteen, sixteen years), but *BIN* is stressed and can only occur with time adverbials in specific contexts.

In *BIN_{COMP}* constructions, the activity indicated by the verb ended at some point in the remote past; thus *BIN_{COMP}* constructions are interpreted as meaning finished or ended 'a long time ago.' For the most part, the verbs in these constructions are in their past tense forms, but given variation and phonological processes, the *-ed* may not be pronounced, so a speaker may say either *I BIN started the car* or *I BIN start the car*. This type of variation is well documented in the literature (Wolfram 1969, Labov 1972, Wolfram and Fasold 1974, Guy 1991, Santa Ana 1992). Also, some speakers may use the present form of the verb, as in (58c).

- (58) a. I could'a **BIN went** back to work. (Bf, 60s)
 'I could have gone back to work a long time ago'
- b. A: You called her, Kaye?
 B: Yeah, I **BIN called** her. (Bf, 30s)
 'Yes, I called her a long time ago'
- c. I **BIN give** Brenda and Mr. Al they books.¹⁷ (Bf, 60s)
 'I gave Brenda and Mr. Al their books a long time ago'
- d. I thought I would'a **BIN had** a copy of that tape. (Bf, 60s)
 'I thought that I would have gotten a copy of that tape a long time ago'

The meaning of the *BIN_{COMP}* construction can be explained by referring to the example sentences in (58). In (58a), the possibility of having gone back to work is expressed as if it is in the remote past, and in (58b) *BIN called* means that the calling event was in the remote past, a long time ago. The books were given to the recipients in the remote past although the verb *give* is not overtly marked for past (58c). In the final example (58d), it is the acquisition of the copy of the tape that is in the remote past. The meaning of *BIN had* here is identical to that of *BIN got* in the second part of the example in (55a). But given the preceding discussion, this *BIN had* construction may also be interpreted as a *BIN_{STAT}* sequence.

The three *BIN* readings (*BIN_{STAT}*, *BIN_{HAB}* and *BIN_{COMP}*) have one property in common: *BIN* in all of the readings "situates the initiation of a state in the remote past, and the state continues until the moment of utterance" (Green 1998b, p. 133). In short, the use of *BIN* indicates that the state began a long time ago. All the predicates indicate some type of state, generally speaking. We have already distinguished state from activity by noting that the former remains unchanged; states are constant. In the *BIN_{STAT}* and *BIN_{HAB}* constructions, the state that starts in the remote past and continues up until the moment of utterance is the in-progress state. In (54a), the running event started in the remote past, and it continues, that is, it is in progress until the speaker makes the statement. This same in-progress state is applied to the running event in (56a).

The difference is that it is the habit that starts in the remote past and continues up to the moment of utterance. So in (56a), the person started the habit of running a long time ago. The state that starts in the remote past in the *BIN_{COMP}* reading is the resultant state, the state of an event that has ended. The resultant state simply refers to the state of an event that has ended. In (58b), the calling event is over, so it is in its resultant state.¹⁸ (If you choose to read more about the in-progress and resultant states, see Parsons 1990). The major point is that speakers use *BIN* when they want to say that something started or happened a long time ago.

BIN does not specify the length of time that a state has been in progress or the length of time the state has been over; it just indicates that the time period a state has been in progress or over is a long one. For example, there is no indication about the number of minutes, hours, etc. that the running has been in progress in *He BIN running* or how long it has been over in *He BIN ran*. You might think that because *BIN* does not specifically note the length of time of an event, it would be possible to use an adverb that provides this information in *BIN* constructions. But *BIN* does not permit this type of additional modification, so temporal adverbial phrases (adverb phrases having to do with time) such as *for twenty minutes* and *for twenty years* are not allowed in *BIN* constructions to specify the time period. Consider the sentences below, in which the adverbial phrase is ungrammatical in the *BIN_{STAT}* reading but grammatical in the *BIN_{HAB}* reading:

- (59) John *BIN* running for ten minutes.
- a. *‘John has been running for ten minutes’ (*BIN_{STAT}* reading)
 - b. ‘John started to run for ten-minute stretches a long time ago and he still runs for ten-minute stretches’ (*BIN_{HAB}* reading)
 (‘It is the case that for a long time, John has been running for ten-minute stretches’, i.e., ‘for a long time John has had the habit of running for ten minutes’) (Green 1998b, p. 127)

The (a) reading of the sentence in (59) is a bad one because *BIN* already gives the information that the running activity has been in progress for a long time; the additional specification “for ten minutes” is not allowed. The sentence in (59) is acceptable on the *BIN_{HAB}* reading (59b). In the reading in (59b), the adverbial phrase *for ten minutes* does not tell how long John has had the habit of running; instead, it modifies the duration of each of the smaller running events that together make up the habit. A scenario for the reading in (59b) could be the following: Six years ago, John jogged for ten minutes. He liked the way he felt after jogging, so he decided to do it regularly. Ever since then, he has jogged for ten minutes twice a week. So John *BIN* running for ten minutes.

Let us review the properties of *BIN*.

Summary of properties of *BIN*

Q: What is it?

A: *BIN* is a verbal or a tense/aspect marker.

Q: What is its special pronunciation property?

A: *BIN* is stressed.

Q: What is its function?

A: *BIN* situates something (let's call it a state) in the remote past.

Q: Where does it occur?

A: *BIN* occurs before verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, adverbs and *dən*. (We will discuss *BIN* in the environment preceding *dən* shortly.)

Q: What happens when it occurs with an adverb phrase that marks a specific time period (e.g., *for ten minutes*)?

A: The time adverb has to modify the duration of each of the smaller events that combine to form the habit. The resulting interpretation is a *BIN_{HAB}* reading.

Q: Under what conditions do *BIN* verb *-ing* and *BIN* verb *-ed* have the same meaning?

A: This happens in the case of *BIN* occurring with verbs that indicate inherent states.

Before leaving this section, we can make an observation about the similarities between aspectual *be* and *BIN*. Both aspectual *be* and *BIN* can occur preceding verbs (ending in *-ing* and *-ed*), adjectives, nouns, adverbs, prepositions and *dən*. For linguists, this issue raises interesting questions about the relationship between *be* and *BIN*. I will not address those issues here.

Dən

The verbal marker *dən* denotes that an event has ended; it refers to events, such as having changed (60a), having finished that (60b), having done all you told me to do (60c) and having pushed it (60d), that have ended:

- (60) a. I told him you **dən changed**. (Bm, 30s)
 'I told him that you have changed'
- b. A: You through with Michael Jordan I bought you?
 (Literally: Have you finished reading the magazine that I bought you with Michael Jordan on the cover?)
 B: I dən already **finished** that. (Bm, 9)
 'I have already finished that'
- c. I **dən done** all you told me to do. I **dən visited** the sick. (Bm, 60s, 70s)
 'I have done all you told me to do. I have visited the sick'
- d. A: Push your seat.
 B: I **dən pushed** it.
 'I have (already) pushed it'
- A: Push it again.
 (elderly Bfs on Amtrak)

As shown in the paradigms in (32–39) and the sentences in (60), *dən* precedes a verb in the *-ed* form. (As you read the *dən* section of the paradigms, you will notice that there are some gaps. For example, there are no corresponding emphatic and negative forms for the modal resultant state.) The marker is pronounced with an unstressed syllable, and it is distinguished from *done*, the past participle form of the verb *do* in general American English (*She has done her homework*) and in nonstandard varieties of

English (*She done her homework.*). The two forms (*dən, done*) are clearly distinguished in (60c). *Dən* has the function of indicating that some eventuality has ended, but it may also indicate additional meanings such as that of recent past (61a, b) or having had some experience (61c).

- (61) a. People would say that medicine I'm taking *dən* made me sick. (Bm, 70s)
 'People would say that the medicine I'm taking has made me sick'
 b. I *dən* lost my wallet!
 'I have (just) lost my wallet!'
 c. She *dən* been to church. (Bf, 60s)
 'She has been to church before'

The sentence in (61a) indicates some notion of recent past in that the speaker is commenting that people would observe something strange about him, and, as a result, they would conclude that his state is due to the medicine he has been taking. The recency is in the sense that the people would have just observed the effect of the medicine. In (61b), another recent past example, the person has just lost his wallet or just realized that his wallet is lost. In (61c) *dən* indicates that the person has had the experience of attending church.

The *dən* sequence is quite similar to the present perfect in general American English, but it is not clear that it always shares the range of meanings of the present perfect:¹⁹

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| (62) | AAE <i>dən</i> | General American
English present perfect |
| | a. !I <i>dən</i> wanted to do that for five years.
(special context) | a'. I have wanted to do that for five years. |
| | b. ?/*She <i>dən</i> always wanted to go to Liberia. | b'. She has always wanted to go to Liberia. |
| | c. ?/*His sister <i>dən</i> knew that for five years. | c'. His sister has known that for five years. |

The sentence in (62a) is not completely ruled out, as it can occur in a special pragmatic context. The sentence can be used in a context in which the speaker expresses surprise: I can't believe that dance class is canceled after I *dən* wanted to take dance for five years. In this context, the focus, or more precisely, the emphasis is on having wanted to take dance for five years. I have flagged the sentence with a '!' to show that it is used in a special context. Another sentence that is similar to the one in (62a) is a sentence discussed in Green (1998b, p. 48): *His sister dən been an invalid all her life*. This sentence is acceptable with the reading "How dare you offer your help now (ten years too late). She's been an invalid all her life!" The interpretation is intended to show that some special pragmatic context is required in this case, also. The sentences in (62b, c) are anomalous if not completely ruled out (thus they are marked '?/*'), and it is not clear at all whether they can occur in special contexts. However, the general American English present perfect sentences in (62a', b', c') are grammatical and do not require a special context.

A number of issues may be related to the status of the sentences in (62a, b, c). One is the type of verb that occurs in the *dən* construction, and the other is the type of adverb phrase that occurs in the sentence. *Dən* indicates that an event is over, but *know* (62b) is a state, and we have explained that states continue; they do not have ending points. As such, there appears to be an incompatibility between *dən* and the state (indicated by the verb *know*). The adverb phrase (*for five years*) refers to a time period that includes the present time, and it is allowed in present perfect contexts, as shown in (62c').²⁰ As shown in (58a), an adverb such as *for five years* can occur with *dən* sequences in special pragmatic contexts. Also, note that the following sentence is fine, in which the person is still in California when the sentence is uttered: *I dən been in California too long* 'I have been in California too long.' One question is whether this sentence also requires a special context. (Dayton [1996] and Labov [1998] have conducted extensive research on *dən* in AAE. See those works for further discussion, especially on their readings of new uses of *dən*. Also see Terry 2000 and Edwards 2001 on *dən* and the present perfect.)

The resultant state marker *dən* occurs with time adverbs *already* and *before*, which are compatible with an event being over:

- (63) a. **I dən** already finished that/**I dən** finished that already.
 b. **I dən** drove that car before.

Already usually occurs in the position following *dən*, but it can occur at the end of the sentence (63a). *Before* occurs at the end of the sentence (63b). Adverb phrases such as *for five years* and *too long* also occur with *dən* constructions, often in special contexts.

The properties of the verbal marker *dən* can be summarized in the following way:

Summary of properties of *dən*

Q: What is it?

A: *Dən* is a verbal or tense/aspect marker.

Q: What is its special pronunciation property?

A: *Dən* is unstressed.

Q: What is its function?

A: *Dən* indicates that an event is in the resultant state; that is, it is over. But in some contexts, it occurs with states, which do not have endpoints. (But see the last Q/A pair.)

Q: Where does it occur?

A: *Dən* usually occurs preceding verbs ending in *-ed*; however, it may precede the present form *give*, for example.

Q: What happens when it occurs with some verbs that name states?

A: In some situations, *dən* seems to be incompatible with states, so in those cases, the resulting readings are strange. In other cases (in which there are adverbials such as *for five years*, *too long*), *dən* and states often occur in special pragmatic contexts.

A thorough analysis of *done* in Southern white American English is given in Feagin (1979). About the marker, Feagin says: "Of all the grammatical forms in Southern White

US English which are claimed to be derived from the mesolect creole spoken by Blacks during the era of American slavery, preverbal *done* (also called quasi-modal *done*) is the most likely candidate in the verb system” (p. 159). Feagin suggests that *done* made its way to Alabama through the speech of poor whites from Georgia and the Carolinas and also through the speech of slaves. The extensive data set that Feagin provides on *done* shows that it is used in a wider range of environments by her Alabama working-class speakers than by speakers of AAE. She does not discuss any unique pronunciation properties of *done*, so I have no basis on which to compare the pronunciation of *done* in Alabama white English and *dən* in AAE. In some of its uses *done* (in Alabama) is identical to *dən* in AAE. Two examples from Feagin’s data are *He done got out* (p. 128) and *Oh, I done used all my thread* (p. 129). On the other hand, at least two types of examples that Feagin presents have not been reported for current AAE, to my knowledge. In the first example, *done* occurs with an inflected form of *be* (i.e., *am* [’*m*]), and in the second example, it occurs in a sentence with an adverb that indicates past time (*yesterday*). It also precedes adjectives, as in (64c):²¹

- (64) a. Lord, I’m done died! (p. 127)
 b. They done had the tables fixed yesterday, already. (p. 129)
 c. Some of em’s done dead an’ gone. (p. 131)

Edwards (1991) discusses similarities and differences between preverbal *don* in Guyanese Creole and *dən* in AAE. He notes that sentences such as *Dem don gat di koolii-man rom* (‘They already have the Indian man’s rum’) in Guyanese Creole and AAE *dən* constructions are similar. One difference is that Guyanese Creole *don* is produced with significant stress, but AAE *dən* is produced as an unstressed form.

AAE *dən*, *done* in other varieties of American English and *don* in Guyanese Creole converge in their use to mark events that have ended; however, they diverge in a number of other environments in which they occur. Further research would help to determine whether the use of *done* in Alabama is representative of its use in other Southern states or whether the use of *done* in other varieties is more like that of *dən* in AAE. Also, it would be interesting to determine the extent to which the stress patterns associated with verbal markers *dən* (and *BIN*) were influenced by African languages and creoles.

Aspectual combinations with *dən*: *be dən* and *BIN dən*

The markers *be* and *BIN* can combine with *dən* to yield *be dən* and *BIN dən*, respectively. In some cases, the combination of *be* and *dən* to yield *be dən* results in the habitual resultant state compositional meaning; the newly formed unit has a meaning that is equal to the meaning of its parts, habitual *be* and resultant state *dən* that usually signals that an event is over. As we will see, there are other readings of the *be dən* sequence, in which *be* does not indicate habituality. However, *dən* has the same meaning in all *be/BIN dən* constructions. Also, *dən* is unstressed in all of the sequences in which it occurs. As such, the stress is on the first element in the sequence (on *be* and *BIN*).

***Be dən* (habitual resultant state)**

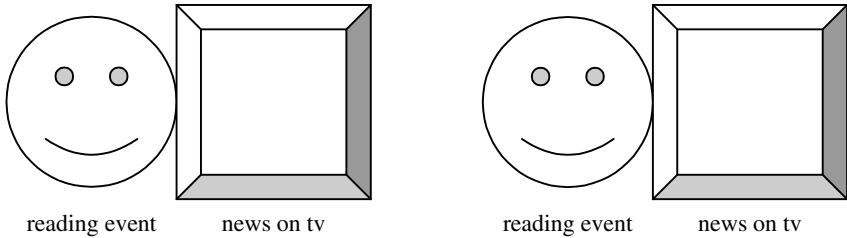
The first *be dən* construction that will be discussed is referred to as habitual resultant state (see the habitual resultant state paradigm in (37)), in which habitual is denoted by *be* and the notion of having ended is denoted by *dən*. The verb is in the past form just as it is in the *dən* constructions that have been discussed. The meaning of these constructions can be glossed as ‘have usually already.’ This *be dən* sequence indicates the habitual completion of some event such as having usually already read it in the newspaper (65a).

- (65) a. A: Y’all keep up with the news, hunh?
 B: Yeah, when it come on there, we **be dən read** it in the newspaper. (Bf, 60s)
 ‘Yeah, when it comes on there, we have usually already read it in the newspaper’
 (Literally: Yeah, by the time the news comes on the television news show, we have usually already read it in the newspaper.)
- b. She gotta be there for 9, so they **be dən gone** to school. (Bf, 60s)
 ‘She has to be there at 9, so they have usually already gone to school by then’
 (Literally: She has to be at work at 9 AM, so the children have usually already gone to school by the time she leaves.)
- c. When I change the oil, I like to see how much it **be dən burned**. (Bm, 60s)
 ‘When I change the oil, I like to see how much it has already burned’
 (Literally: It is usually the case that when I change the oil in my truck, I like to see how much oil it has burned.)
- d. **Be dən told** them something before you get there. (Bm, 50s)
 ‘(You should) have told them something before you get there.’
 (Literally: Before you start jumping up and down as you preach, you should have already given the congregation a solid message.)
- e. Anybody who don’ [don’t] have no money and jus’ **be dən got paid**, must be on drugs. (Bm, 30s)
 ‘It is usually the case that anybody who doesn’t have any money but has just gotten paid, must be on drugs’
 (Literally: It is usually the case that a person who doesn’t have money after s/he has just been paid must be spending money on drugs.)

This *be dən* sequence is the least discussed of all *be dən* sequences in AAE perhaps because it occurs in some geographical regions more than in others. The extent to which it occurs in inner city areas in the northeastern and western United States in which data have been collected from speakers of AAE is not clear; as such, research has not focused on descriptions of the use of habitual resultant state *be dən*, but see Dayton (1996) for examples that are compatible with this *be dən* interpretation. The sentences in (65a, b, c) are from speakers in southwestern Louisiana, but the sentence in (65d) is from an African American male in northern California, and the sentence in (65e) is from an African American male in southeastern Texas. In all of the sentences, the meaning that is conveyed is that an event has usually already occurred by the time a subsequent event takes place. In the case of (65a), speaker B notes that usually the

reading event is over by the time the news comes on television. We can represent this meaning pictorially:

(66)



The smiling face represents the reading event and the square frame represents the news on television. The face precedes the frame in order to show that the reading event occurs before the news comes on television. Also, there are two groups, each of which is composed of a reading event (represented by the smiling face) and a news event (represented by the square frame). The two groups are included to show that the event of having read preceding the time the news comes on television is a habitual occurrence; it occurs from time to time.

The adverbs *usually*, *always* and *already* occur with this *be dən*. As noted earlier in this chapter, *usually* and *always* occur with aspectual *be*, and *already* occurs with *dən*. Because this sequence is composed of both *be* and *dən*, it makes sense that these adverbs occur with it.

- (67) a. I **usually be dən** read that.
 b. I **be dən already** read that./I **be dən** read that **already**.

***Be dən* (future resultant state)**

The future resultant state *be dən* sequence is similar to the habitual resultant state in that it, too, indicates that an event is over, that the event is in the resultant state. However, the future resultant state is different in that it does not indicate habitual meaning. It is used in environments in which some activity will be completed by a future time.²²

- (68) a. They'a **be dən growed** out that by then.
 'They will have already grown out of that by then' (Bm, 60s, Green 1993, p. 161)
 b. Five years from now, they mama be out the service. They'a **be dən got** older.
 (Bf, 50s)
 'Five years from now, their mama will be out of the service. They will have gotten older by then'
 A: Honey, what's your name?
 B: Lisa.
 A: I **be dən forgot** next week. (attested)
 'I will have forgotten by next week'

In the sentence (68a), the event of having grown out of that will have taken place before some future time, and in (68b) the event of having gotten older will have taken place before some future time. Finally, the event of having forgotten will have taken place before some event in the future (68c). As noted in an earlier discussion, *be* can be used to indicate future readings, so *be dən* here can also be regarded as being compositional. The future meaning comes from *be* and the resultant state meaning from *dən*. As indicated in the examples in (68), adverbials referring to some future time (e.g., *by then*, *five years from now*, *next week*) can occur in this *be dən* construction.

In other varieties of English, the future resultant state reading is the future perfect (*will have*) as in *He will have grown out of that by then*. In mainstream English, the verb following *will have* occurs in the participle form (*grown*), not in the simple past (*grew*).

***Be dən* (modal resultant state)**

The *be dən* modal resultant state, as it is referred to here, is used in somewhat threatening situations, situations which are associated with veiled or mild threats or simply to express imminent actions. The constructions in which *be dən* occurs resemble conditionals in that they have an implicit and sometimes explicit *if*-clause and *then*-clause. “The *be dən* sequence, which is in the *then*-clause, is a part of the statement of the consequence. In these sentences, the speakers wish to express the fact that not only will the consequences happen if the condition is met, but they will happen immediately after it is met” (Green 1993, p. 162).

(69)

- a. Boy, I make any kind of move, this boy **be dən shot** me. (Bm, 40s)
 ‘If I move, this boy will shoot me’
 (Literally: If I move, then this boy will shoot me as a result of moving.)
- b. Once you put your hand on the plow, you can’t be looking back, cause you **be dən dug up** something else. (Bm, 50s)
 ‘Once you put your hand on the plow, you can’t look back, because you will dig up something else’
 (Literally: Once you put your hand on the plow, you can’t look back because if you do, then you will dig up something else, that is, something you don’t intend to dig up.)

In (69a, b) neither *if* nor *then* is explicitly stated, but both the statements are conditional. The sentence in (69a) would be rendered in the following way if *if* and *then* were explicitly stated: Boy, **if** I make any kind of move, **then** this boy *be dən* shot me. Both sentences, ([69a] and the one just stated [with the explicit *if* and *then*]) suggest that there will be some consequence as a result of some action. In (69a) the action of making any kind of move will result in the consequence of getting the speaker shot, and in (69b) the action of looking back will result in the consequence of digging up something else.

Adverbs such as *probably* and *certainly* occur with this *be dən* sequence: *Boy, I make any kind of move, this boy probably be dən shot me.*

***BIN dən* (remote past resultant state)**

One of the most interesting characteristics of this *BIN dən* sequence is that it appears to be identical in meaning to the reading of *BIN_{COMP}* constructions. They both mark the remoteness of an event that ended in the past. A number of examples occur in my database; however, it is not clear how or if the sentences with *BIN dən* are different from those with *BIN_{COMP}*:

- (70) a. You should'a **BIN dən** called me down there. (attested)
 'You should have called me down there a long time ago'
 (cf. You should'a BIN called me down there.)
- b. He **BIN dən** put that in there. (attested)
 'He put that in there a long time ago'
 (cf. He BIN put that in there.)

The obvious question is the following: If *BIN dən* and *BIN_{COMP}* constructions have the same meaning, why do both occur? One response is that *dən* simply adds emphasis to the notion of the event having ended, so the difference between *He BIN dən put that in there* and *He BIN put that in there* is that the former uses *dən* to place emphasis on the resultant state of the putting that in there event, while the latter does not. The second is that in sentences such as (70) *dən* redundantly indicates the resultant state.

It is slightly misleading to refer to *be dən* and *BIN dən* as separate markers. It is probably more accurate to say that the markers *be* and *BIN* can take sequences of *dən* + verb. However, I have treated them separately as a means of being able to refer to them conveniently. Time adverbs that indicate how long ago an event has ended do not occur in *BIN dən* constructions. This is also the case with *BIN_{COMP}*, as noted in the discussion of *BIN*.

We have seen that *be* and *BIN* can combine with *dən*, and at this point, you are probably wondering whether *be* and *BIN* can combine to yield a compositional reading of *be BIN* or *BIN be*. Neither combination is possible, which, no doubt, raises questions about the relation between the two markers. As a result, in AAE the sentences **Bruce be BIN running* and **Bruce BIN be running* are ungrammatical. One suggestion is that the two markers cannot occur together because there is only one available place in the sentence for a *be* or *BIN* marker, and it is taken by one or the other (*be* or *BIN*), not both together. Remember that *be* indicates habituality and *BIN* situates something in the remote past. If they could occur at the same time, then we would expect to get the remote past habitual meaning. But remember from the discussion of *BIN_{HAB}*, that we do get this meaning with just *BIN*, so we do not need **be BIN/*BIN be* occurring together to get the remote past habitual. Also, see Green (1998b) for further details and a possible explanation for why *be* and *BIN* do not combine to yield a marker with compositional meaning.

2.3.2 Additional characteristics of aspectual markers

Referring once again to the paradigms in (28–39), we find some other important characteristics of aspectual markers. One characteristic is that aspectual markers are not inflected for person and number, so, for example, aspectual *be* is used to indicate habitual meaning when the subject is first, second or third person singular/plural (e.g., *she be*, *they be*). This is a point of difference between aspectual *be* and the auxiliary/copula *be* in AAE. In the case of the auxiliary/copula *be* some forms are inflected, so for example, the forms *I'm* and *is* are used. Aspectual *be*, on the other hand, is invariant with respect to inflection for person and number; the form is always *be*.

The aspectual paradigms also show that certain auxiliaries occur with aspectual markers in the contexts of emphatic marking and negation. For example, the auxiliary *do* occurs with aspectual *be* and habitual resultant state *be dən* in emphatic affirmation and negative environments (37). Likewise the auxiliary *have* may occur with *BIN* (29) and *dən* (32) in emphatic affirmation environments, and *ain't* and *haven't* occur with these markers in negative environments. (As noted in the paradigms, the judgment about the occurrence of *have* with *dən* is somewhat questionable.) Auxiliaries also occur with aspectual markers in some questions, as shown below:

- (71) a. **Do** they be running? (They be running?)
 ***Be** they running?
 b. **Have** they BIN running? (They BIN running?)
 ***BIN** they running
 c. **Do** they be dən ran? (They be dən ran?) (habitual resultant state)
 ***Be dən** they ran?
 ***Be** they dən ran?
 d. **Will** they be dən finished that by then? (They'a be dən finished that by then?) (future resultant state)
 'Will they have finished that by then?'
 ***Be dən** they finished that by then?
 ***Be** they **dən** finished that by then?

The sentences in (71) show that auxiliaries but not aspectual markers can occur at the beginning of the sentence in questions. The sentences in which the aspectual marker appears in inverted order with respect to the subject are ungrammatical, thus they are flagged with '*'. As shown in parentheses following the questions formed with auxiliaries, the questions are acceptable without auxiliaries if the aspectual marker occurs in the position following the subject and intonation is used to signal the question.

This same pattern of auxiliary use occurs in tag questions with aspectual markers; an auxiliary must be copied at the end of the sentence in the tag. (You may want to review the discussion of tag formation in the section on auxiliaries.):

- (72) Your phone bill be high, **don't** it? (Bf, 80s).
 *Your phone bill be high, **ben't** it?

The auxiliary *don't* is used in the tag because *do* occurs with the aspectual marker *be* in the declarative. *Be* cannot host *n't* (or *n't* cannot attach to *be*), so the sentence with *ben't* is ungrammatical. The auxiliaries *ain't/haven't* occur with *BIN* in tag questions:

- (73) They **BIN** left, **ain't/haven't** they?
 *They **BIN** left, **BIN't** they?

Auxiliaries are also used to support aspectual markers in verb phrase-ellipsis. (It would be a good idea to review verb phrase-ellipsis in the section on auxiliaries):

- (74) a. Bruce **be** running, and Sue **do**, too.
 *Bruce be running, and Sue **be**, too.
 b. Bruce **BIN** running, and Sue **have**, too.
 *Bruce BIN running, and Sue BIN, too.

Consider an example from natural speech:

- (75) A: I tell 'em how pretty they look.
 B: Do they be pretty?
 A: Sometime they do, and sometime they don't. I just tell 'em ALL they pretty.
 (Bf, 60s)

As we see in (74) and (75), the auxiliary *do* can substitute for deleted material, but aspectual *be* cannot. *Do* is the auxiliary that supports aspectual *be* in questions, negative constructions and emphatic constructions. Auxiliaries are used along with aspectual markers when they are needed in some environment in which an aspectual marker cannot occur.

Further examples of auxiliary support are given in (76). The auxiliary *do* occurs in the environments of questions (76a, b), negation (76c, d) and emphatic affirmation (76e, f). The sentence in (76g) expresses emphasis and negation, and the auxiliary *do* occurs in those environments. The marker *dən* receives the same type of support from *ain't* and *have* (76h, i).

- (76) a. A: You at work?
 B: Where else **do** you **be** at eight in the morning? (Bm, 30s)
 'Usually, where else are you at eight in the morning?'
 b. One day I **be** up and the next day I **be** down. **Do** you **be** like that? (attested)
 'One day I am up and the next day I am down. Are you like that sometimes?'
 c. I really **don't be** feeling too good. (Bf, 50s)
 'Usually, I really don't feel too well'
 d. He doesn't even allow women to wear pants at women's retreats and he **doesn't** even **be** there. (Bf, 40s)
 'He doesn't allow women to wear pants at women's retreats, and he isn't usually there'
 e. I **DO be** all over the place. (Bm, 30s)
 'I AM usually all over the place'

- f. At six, it **DO be** dark. (attested)
 ‘At six, is it usually dark?’
- g. That’s all a mind game. That **DO NOT be** working. (Bf, 20s)
 ‘That’s all a mind game. That does not usually work.’
- h. She **dən** died, **ain’t** she? (attested)
 ‘She has died, hasn’t she?’
- i. When I **HAVE dən** come; when I **have dən** sung my last song, prayed my last prayer . . . meet me at the Jordan River. (Bm, 70s)
 ‘When I have come, when I have sung my last song, prayed my last prayer . . . meet me at the Jordan River’

Sentences such as the ones in (76) can provide valuable information about general syntactic processes in AAE, but they can also provide insight into what speakers think about language. The sentence in (76d) is especially insightful. The speaker uses a very salient property of AAE, aspectual *be*, to mark the habitual nature of being there on different occasions; however, she uses the general American English agreement pattern, *doesn’t* to agree with the singular subject *he*. I do not want to suggest that general American English agreement patterns are not used in AAE, but the use of *doesn’t* (as opposed to *don’t*) to support aspectual *be* is rare. I have not collected any other such examples, and I do not recall seeing such examples in the literature. Overall the speaker is very careful to use general American English and probably would not consider herself an AAE speaker.

2.4 Preverbal markers: *finna*, *steady*, *come*

Markers *finna*, *steady* and *come* have been identified in AAE, but they have not been analyzed to the extent that markers such as aspectual *be*, remote past *BIN* and *dən* have been analyzed. There are some descriptions of them in the literature, which will be cited in the summary of each preverbal marker. Also, note that lexical entries for *steady* and *come* are given in chapter 1.

Finna

Finna (including variants *fixina*, *fixna* and *fitna*) indicates that the event is imminent; it will happen in the immediate future. It precedes non-finite verbs, which are not marked for tense and agreement. Sentences in which this marker occurs are given below:

- (77) a. I don’t know about you, but I’m **finna leave**.
 ‘I don’t know about you, but I’m getting ready/about to leave’
- b. Y’all **finna eat**?
 ‘Are you getting ready/about to eat?’
- c. She was **finna move** the mattress herself when I got there.
 ‘She was getting ready/about to move the mattress when I got there’
- d. Oh-oh they pulling they coats off. That mean they **fixna kill** us or something.
 (attested)

‘Oh-oh they are pulling their coats off. That means that they are about to kill us or something’

e. They **finna do** something. (Bm, 40s)

‘They’re about to do something’

(Literally: The professional ice skaters are getting ready to make a complicated move.)

First note that the verbs following *finna* are all in their bare (non-finite) forms. For example, *move* (77c) has no tense or agreement marking. This means that the form would never be *moves* or *moved* as in **She was finna moves the mattress herself*. The word in the position preceding *finna* is glossed with some form of the auxiliary *be*. The auxiliary form of *be* occurs on the surface in the sentences in (77a) as the contracted form *'m* and in (77c) as the past form *was*, but it does not occur on the surface in the sentence in (77b). These environments (with first person singular [77a] and past [77b]) are obligatory for auxiliary *be* in AAE, so it has to appear on the surface. (See the discussion on auxiliaries presented earlier in this chapter.) Aspectual *be* can also occur in this position preceding *finna* (78):

(78) They **be finna go** to bed when I call there.

‘They are usually getting ready/about to go to bed when I call there’

In other varieties of English, the marker is realized as *fixing to* (see Bailey, Wikle, Tillery and Sand 1991), so it appears that a major difference between the two variants is pronunciation. Rickford and Rickford (2000) include this marker under the umbrella of innovative features of AAE. In addition, they list it as one of the preverbal markers used to encode tense-aspect distinctions. DeBose and Faraclas (1993) refer to *finna* (which they represent as *finna*) as a type of modal marker used to make a weak assertion. The term they use is irrealis marker.

Steady

The marker *steady* (which may also be pronounced as ‘study’) precedes a verb form in the progressive (verb+*-ing*, e.g., *steady talking*, where the verb *talk* takes *-ing*). *Steady* is used to convey the meaning that an activity is carried out in an intense or consistent manner. Baugh (1984) defines the marker as “a predicate adverb” that “indicates that the activity of the corresponding progressive verb is conducted in an intense, consistent, and continuous manner” (pp. 3, 5). Because it indicates that an activity is carried out in an intense and consistent manner, it must precede a verb that names an activity. As such, *steady* does not usually precede verbs that name states such as *have*, *own* and *know*. This means that a sentence such as **They steady having money* is ungrammatical because *have* names a state, which cannot be carried out in an intense and continuous manner. States are uninterrupted; they simply hold. The source of the ungrammaticality is the semantic or meaning clash between *steady*, which functions as a marker that indicates the manner in which an activity is carried out, and the state named by *have*, which does not provide the kind of event or activity that *steady* requires. The sentence is anomalous

because on the one hand, it refers to a constant state, but on the other it describes the state as occurring in a certain manner. This is a contradiction. But the sentence *They steady getting money* is good because *getting* refers to the type of activity required by *steady*.

Some sentences in which *steady* occurs are given below:

- (79) a. They want to do they own thing, and you **steady talking** to them. (attested)
 ‘They want to do their own thing, and you’re continuing to talk to them’
 b. People be on them jobs for thirty years just **steady working**. (attested)
 ‘People usually stay on those jobs for thirty years, working consistently’
 c. Now that you got the new life, Satan **steady bothering** you. (Bm, 40s)
 ‘Now that you have a new life, Satan is consistently bothering you’
 (Literally: Now that you are a Christian, Satan is consistently trying to make you sin.)

(Also, see additional examples in the lexical entry for *steady* in chapter 1.) As shown in the sentence in (79a), the *steady V-ing* sequence can occur in a predicate construction in which a form of auxiliary *be* does not occur on the surface (i.e., ‘and you \emptyset steady . . .’, where \emptyset indicates that there is no overt auxiliary). Overt forms of *be* (e.g., *is*, *was*) can precede *steady*, as illustrated in its lexical entry in chapter 1: *That politician is/was steady talking*. The now familiar aspectual *be* can also occur in the position preceding *steady V-ing*, as shown in the sentence in (80):

- (80) Them students **be steady trying** to make a buck.
 ‘Those students are always working diligently to make money’

In such environments, *steady* has the function that has just been described, while aspectual *be* indicates habitual meaning; in sentences such as (80), *be*, not *steady*, contributes the habitual meaning.

Aspectual *be* can even combine with *know* (or any verb that expresses a state), but *steady* cannot. For this reason, the sentence *Those brothers be knowing how to fix cars* is grammatical. The verb *know* indicates a state, but it can occur with aspectual *be*, which forces a habitual reading on the state verbs that otherwise do not express this type of event reading. It expresses a meaning in which on particular occasions, the brothers do something to show that they know how to fix cars. That is, their knowledge of fixing cars is manifested on different occasions by their acts of fixing cars. Because they fix cars on different occasions, we can say that they *be knowing how to fix cars*. The sentence does not mean that they know how to fix cars on one occasion and then they forget how to fix them on others. The state of their knowing how to fix cars does not change; they always know how to fix cars. The point is that they fix cars on different occasions, which shows that those brothers have skills in the mechanics of cars. The sentence **Those brothers steady knowing how to fix cars* is not acceptable in AAE because *steady* cannot occur with a verb that expresses a state. *Steady* modifies an activity, and when it occurs with a state, the state is characterized as occurring in an intense and consistent manner. The result is a semantic clash because states cannot occur in an intense and consistent manner; they simply hold or remain constant. As noted, *have*

expresses a state, so *steady having* as in **They steady having money* is ungrammatical; however, *be steady having* as in *They be steady having money* is grammatical. The latter sentence is grammatical because aspectual *be* forces *have* to take on an activity reading, and, as a result, *steady* is no longer occurring with a state. One way to put this is to say that aspectual *be* fixes *have*, gives it a reading that is compatible with the type of activity that *steady* can take.

The general properties of aspectual *be* and *steady* and compatibility with states are summarized in the chart below:

Properties of *be* and *steady*

Marker	Meaning	Compatibility with states
<i>be</i>	indicates activity/state recurs	compatible with states (in that it forces states to take on an activity reading)
<i>steady</i>	indicates activity carried out in intense/continuous manner	incompatible with states (in that it describes action associated with activities or events)

Come

Some lexical items in AAE are described as indicating or reflecting attitude, namely indignation, expressed on the part of the speaker. Whether such attitudes are always directly related to particular lexical items is an interesting issue, and research on this topic should be pursued.²³ However, it is clear that a major function of the marker *come* is to mark speaker indignation. Spears (1982, p. 850) refers to *come* as a semi-auxiliary that expresses speaker indignation. Some sentences in which this property of *come* is expressed are given below:

- (81) a. You the one come telling me it's hot. I can't believe you got your coat on. (Bm, 30s)
'You're the one who had the nerve to tell me that it's hot. I can't believe you've got your coat on'
- b. They come walking in here like they was gon' make us change our minds.
'They walked in here as if they were going to do or say something to make us change our minds'
- c. Don't come acting like you don't know what happened and you started the whole thing.
'Don't try to act as if you don't know what happened, because you started the whole thing'

(Also, see additional examples in the lexical entry for *come* in chapter 1.) The viewpoint in sentences such as those above is that of the speaker, who actually sees the addressee as entering the conversation (or scene) in a manner of which the speaker does not

approve. Note that in (81a), the speaker, in hindsight, disapproves of the addressee first saying it was hot and then acting differently. In all of the examples, *come* precedes verbs ending in *-ing*: *come telling*, *come walking* and *come acting*. In this way, the marker differs from the main verb *come*.²⁴ This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that Spears (1982) refers to it as a semi-auxiliary.

Summary

This chapter has presented basic verbal paradigms in AAE, pointing out general patterns in the verb forms. Throughout the discussion, the ways in which the verbal paradigms in AAE differ from those in general American English were highlighted. Some of the differences are related to person/number agreement and past and present perfect forms. Many of the major differences that were outlined are those in the aspectual paradigms. AAE uses markers *be*, *BIN* and *dən* to indicate specific meaning. These markers occur in well-defined environments, and they have unique stress patterns. Aspectual markers differ from auxiliaries, as shown in processes such as emphatic affirmation, negation, yes-no question formation and tag question formation. This chapter gives a description of subtle meaning and use of patterns which provide evidence that the syntactic system of these verbal markers is rule governed. The description of these markers may also be useful in developing lessons for speakers in standard English proficiency programs in that it provides numerous examples and explains how the AAE patterns differ systematically from those in general American English.

The marker *be* in AAE was compared to *be* in Hiberno English and *be* in the Carolinas, while AAE *dən* was compared to *done* in Alabama white English and *don* in Guyanese Creole. While there are similarities, there are also differences. For example, *done* in the Alabama variety is less restricted than *dən* in AAE, as the former occurs in a broader range of environments than *dən* in AAE.

The markers *finna*, *steady* and *come* were also addressed in this section. They occur with verbs in specific forms: *finna* occurs with verbs in the bare form, and *steady* and *come* occur with verbs ending in *-ing*. In addition, as has been shown, it is important to make the state/activity distinction because the marker *steady* must combine with a verb that can be understood as indicating some activity.

Exercises

1. Explain the similarities and differences between the following pairs of sentences:
 - (a) They eating./They be eating.
 - (b) They tall./They be tall.
 - (c) They dən ate./They BIN ate.
 - (d) They BIN ate./They BIN dən ate.
2. In the introduction to this chapter, I noted that in a magazine article *Johnny be good* was inaccurately glossed as 'Johnny is a good person.' What is the accurate gloss for the sentence?

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3. The example in (76) is used to illustrate *do* and *be* in ellipsis constructions. What other salient property of AAE is reflected in A's response to B's question?
4. Consider the following sentence:

We been here for a long time.

Based on the discussion of *been* and *BIN*, tell whether the *been* in the sentence can be stressed *BIN* or whether it is the same *been* that occurs in other varieties of English (e.g., *We've been here for a long time*). Explain your answer by addressing the types of requirements that must be met in *BIN* constructions.

5. In the discussion of *BIN*, it was noted that there are three types of *BIN* constructions. They are labeled *BIN_{STAT}*, *BIN_{HAB}* and *BIN_{COMP}*, due to the type of readings we get when *BIN* is used with different predicates (e.g., verbs, adjectives, nouns). The following sentence should have two meanings:

They BIN playing soccer.

What are they? (Hint: The difference in readings is related to the way we understand the length of time they have been playing soccer.)