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ATENÉIA ROCHA FRANÇA DE ARAÚJO

**BLACK MUSIC AS A PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE IN
ENGLISH TEACHING**

CAMPINA GRANDE – PB

2013

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INSCRIPTION

To my mother, for all her support.

To my advisor, for all her help.

EPIGRAPH

*“I’m the voice of the young people
Young people theres a voice up in you”
Lil’Mama
Look at my life*

ABSTRACT

The general objective of this work is to show how the cultural material produced by African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers might be used as a pedagogical resource to draw the students' attention to a non-standard variety of English. As the specific objectives it will be made a contrastive analysis between Standard English (SE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) by using two Hip Hop lyrics by Lil Mama (2008). It will be also analysed the social and poetical aspects involved in the production of these lyrics. This research will also give attention to the cultural Hip Hop movement and how to use hip hop songs in the classroom. The theoretical basis takes into account mainly the studies of Crystal (1995), Labov (2010), Rickford (1996), and Almeida (2012). It is concluded that the cultural material produced by AAVE speakers might be utilized in the classroom as an important pedagogical aid to make students aware of this English language variety and the social cultural values this material reflect.

Key-words: African American Vernacular English, Standard English, Hip Hop songs Pedagogical resource.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo geral mostrar como o professor pode utilizar a produção cultural dos falantes do Inglês Vernáculo Afro-Americano (IVAA) como um recurso pedagógico para chamar a atenção dos alunos para uma variante subpadrão do inglês. Como objetivos específicos será realizada uma análise contrastiva entre o IVAA e o Inglês Padrão (IP) através de duas letras de músicas de Hip Hop compostas por Lil Mmma (2008). Serão também verificados, através das letras das referidas músicas, os aspectos sociais e poéticos presentes nessas canções. Esta pesquisa também abordará temas como o movimento cultural Hip Hop e o uso das músicas Hip Hop na sala de aula. A fundamentação teórica é baseada, principalmente, nos estudos de Crystal (1995), Labov (2010), Rickford (1996) e Almeida (2012). Os resultados comprovam que o material cultural produzido por falantes do IVAA deve ser utilizado em sala de aula como um importante instrumento pedagógico para oferecer oportunidades aos alunos de conhecerem esta variante da língua inglesa e os valores sócio-culturais que este material reflete.

Palavras-chave: Inglês Vernáculo Afro-Americano. Inglês Padrão. Músicas hip hop. Recurso Pedagógico.

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AAVE - African American Vernacular English;

DC - Disc Jockey;

MC - Master of Ceremonies;

RAP - Rhythm and Poetry;

SE - Standard English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century English has conquered the status of an international language since it is spoken throughout the world by people from diverse nations, cultures, beliefs and linguistic backgrounds for the most varied purposes. Therefore, it must be accepted that English can no longer be connected only to the culture of its native speakers, but according to Mackay (2002, p.12), it is to be used by speakers to share their ideas and culture.

Being an international language, English is quite valued and taught, either in countries where it is the first, second or foreign language. The spread of English gave origin to a language that is spoken with varied accents, vocabulary and grammar rules. English is used in relevant domains such as economics, international organizations, scientific and technological environments, trade, tourism, business, movies, music and the Internet. Today, any person has some contact with English and globalization has contributed to this situation.

This phenomenon, in which a language has got this position is impressive and unique, as it is observed by Kachru and Nelson in *World Englishes*(1996, pp. 71-72):"It may seem strange, on some moments' reflection, that the native language of a relatively small island nation could have developed and spread to this status."

It can only be understood how English has conquered the status of international language by focusing briefly on its history, according to Crystal(1995).

English began to be established in England in the sixteenth century, while this nation was arising as a modern state. During this period, a new religious order, the Anglicanism, was implanted. The Anglican Church was independent from Rome and the Pope's control. At this time, the Bible was translated into English, which made philosophers and respected writers associate it with freedom of thought. Beyond England, other countries like Ireland, Scotland and Wales are said to be countries in which English is a native language.

Later, many people, for reasons of religious persecution or of searching a better life, began to migrate to other countries to make a living there. They were mainly from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. But there were also people from other parts of Europe. Most of these people brought with them African natives to work as slaves. They came to settle colonies in the lands where today are the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The people who came to the New World had linguistic, cultural and religious differences which they brought with them to their new lands. This situation was favorable to breed a varied and increasing number of English's varieties.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, English became an Imperial language. In this period England became the most powerful nation in the world and standard British English had acquired a position of social prestige. England also colonized some African and Eastern countries, but the British did not aim to live in these countries, as they did in the United States or Australia, but only to explore their natural resources.

By the nineteenth century, learning English was essential, due to the Industrial Revolution. England had the monopoly of scientific and technological innovations and new words arose to define these innovations. As they were in English, people who wanted to be connected with these innovations should learn English. Consequently, speaking English was the same as speaking the language of progress.

The United States, which had been a British colony, became an independent nation and started to gain economical power, developing its own industry as well. After World War II, the United States overcame England and reached a position of supremacy. Gradually, the American influence over the world solidified the dissemination of English. The United States, especially because of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, worked to diffuse its culture as the “American ideal way of life”, using resources such as rock music and movies showing the “American dream”, which were attractive to youth.

Thus people in the whole world were influenced by the American culture. Consequently, American English began to be more used, making people relate it to good opportunities such as social ascension, improvement of life, access to information and social prestige. Today, there are more nonnative than native speakers of English and, therefore, English is spoken by many different people with many different accents. This means that there is not a single English language (British, American or whatever) but “many different Englishes being used around the world” (HARMER, 2007, p.13). It must be admitted that no language is spoken at a static way, because a language is intrinsically affected by extralinguistic factors, which determine its use. A language cannot be studied as something abstract. It changes depending on its speakers’ necessities and social realities. A person’s speech reflects one’s social class, cultural characteristics, beliefs and how one uses the language to build social relationships.

Any language is flexible, varying according to circumstances which might be related to the geographical areas where it is spoken such as gender, ethnicity, age and socio-cultural aspects. Languages change as people and societies change. Therefore, languages cannot be perceived only as codes, because they contain many variations, which are rich and meaningful, as it is observed by Spolsky(2007, p.4): “ [...] the most important verity is that a language – any language – is full of systematic variation, variation that can only be accounted for by appealing, outside language, to socially relevant forces and facts.”

It was well observed that, in the countries of North America, Oceania, Asia or Africa where English is spoken, this language had different kinds of development and this influenced strongly the way how it is spoken in these countries today. Studying the English spoken by the people who live in those countries requires studying the history of its speakers, their social values, culture and customs, which is confirmed by the following affirmation of Spolsky(*op.cit*, p.5):

The existence of patterned variation in language makes it possible to identify ourselves and others as belonging to certain groups. The social prestige or stigma associated with these variations makes language a source of social and political power. (SPOLSKY, *op.cit*, p.5)

Because of its dissemination around the world, English has been adopted in programs of foreign language teaching in many countries and its use has increased especially in countries such as Brazil and China, where it is taught as a foreign language. The variety of English that is taught as a foreign language is often the standardized British or American variety, since these are used all over the world to establish interaction among people of different nations. Priorizing a standardized variety can give origin to some problems, such as neglecting the social and cultural factors which are inherent in a language and make students perceive language only as a code, not as the expression of the identity of its speakers.

This paper will then be developed in the following sections. First, we will focus on Standard English and language policy. Then we write about African American Vernacular English and its main characteristics. After that, we deal with African American culture, focusing specifically on hip hop music. Next we show some scholars' suggestions on how teachers should use hip hop lyrics in the classroom. Finally, we analyze two lyrics by an African American female rapper, Lil Mama¹ from her album "Voice of the Young People" (2008), with the purpose of contrasting AAVE and SE grammar, highlighting the social context the lyrics reflect, and focusing on the poetic resources used by the author.

¹ Lil Mama is the nickname of Niatia Jessica Kirland, who was born in Harlem in 1989 and raised in Brooklin, New York. Voice of Young People is her first album.

2. STANDARDIZATION, STANDARD ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE POLICY

In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, like China or Brazil, it is commonly observed that educational programs often select either British or American English to be taught. Therefore, English learners have the impression they are learning this language when they are, in fact, learning the standard variety of English spoken in these countries. This variety is denominated Standard English. But what does Standard English mean exactly? According to Perera (1994 *apud* TORKINGTON, 2000, p.81), “There is a central ambiguity in the word standard; it can refer to the notion of uniformity or to the notion of excellence.” Although there is not a peaceful agreement among scholars and academics about the definition of Standard English - because there is not an official regulation to classify it - it can be seen that it is the one written in print, literary works or spoken by people who are said to be educated.

The process of English’s standardization has happened especially in countries where it is spoken as a first language, as it is concluded by Kachru and Nelson (1996, p. 83):

This codification has taken place almost exclusively in the Inner² Circle countries; this has made it necessary for the Outer³ and Expanding⁴ Circles to look to these sources when in need of citable authority, and it has functioned as a deterrent to their setting up authorities of their own. (KACHRU & NELSON, 1996, p.83)

Therefore, countries in which English is taught as foreign language have to choose a kind of English to be adopted in school programs and it is obvious they will choose a standard variety which is spoken in native speaking English countries.

² Inner Circle represents those countries where English is spoken as a first or native language, such as USA, Australia, the United Kingdom, etc.(KACHRU & NELSON 1996, pp.77-8)

³ Outer Circle is composed by countries where English is a second language, such as India, Nigeria, etc. (KACHRU & NELSON, *op., cit.*, p.78.)

⁴ Expanding Circle is formed by countries in which English is taught as a foreign language, as China, Greece, Brazil, Mexico, etc. (KACHRU & NELSON, *op. cit.*, p. 78)

Standardizing a language causes a problem: programs of teaching English usually teach it in a monolithic way, prioritizing grammar lessons and consequently the structural aspects of English, not showing the use of English in real situations and the social factors which influence the language. As a result, anyone who studies English has the illusion they are learning the language when they are actually learning a standard variety. It is valuable to mention that, as the United Kingdom and the United States have their own standards, other countries such as Canada and New Zealand also have theirs. Thus, there are many kinds of standard “Englishes” in the world.

In the United Kingdom, Standard English is called “Queen’s English”, “BBC English” or “Oxford English”, being spoken by middle class people and often associated with Received Pronunciation, an accent of social prestige. In the United States, Standard English is generally related to the “General American” accent, being frequently contrasted with Southern American, some Northeastern accents, regional accents and social groups dialects like African American Vernacular English.

Crystal (1995), gives five characteristics which are said to be essential to recognize Standard English:

1. “ it is a variety of English; a dialect like any other dialect, although it has no longer geographical base;
2. its linguistic features include grammar, vocabulary and orthography, but not pronunciation;
3. it is the dialect which carries the most social prestige and it is used by the powerful;
4. the prestige attached to it means that it is generally recommended by adults as a desirable educational target.
5. it is widely understood, but not widely used.”

The characteristics of SE given by Crystal’s (*op.cit.*, p.110) definition lead us to conclude that Standard English is, basically, a dialect which was chosen among others, suffering a process of codification and being legitimated as the national language rather than others. Crystal’s arguments are unlike many scholars’ who argue that a dialect would be the subset of a language. They affirm that there is a pure language, which would be the correct one.

The term dialect is not well accepted by many linguists, as it is seen by Kachru and Nelson (1996, p.73):

The well-known national dialects are not referred to as such, for the term dialect has acquired various sorts of stigmatized

baggage over the years. In some speakers' minds, to say that people speak a dialect is tantamount to say they are provincial, perhaps, not well educated. (KACHRU & NELSON, 1996, p.73)

In fact, scholars and linguists have never been able to give an exact denomination either to language or dialect and there have always been divergences about what language and dialect would exactly mean. Trudgill(1975, p.14) gives an idea of this confusion by saying that most people think they know what a dialect is but in fact it is not an easy term to define.

If only the linguistic criteria is considered to define dialect, it can be accepted the following definition given by Trudgill (*op.cit.*,p. 17): "The term dialect refers, strictly speaking, to differences between kinds of language which are wholly adequate for the needs of their speakers."

Trudgill's definition puts language and dialect in a position of equality, but this is not accepted by some people who consider language as something superior to a dialect. Social groups who speak standard varieties say that they speak the 'real language', which is the one to be taught and learned.

It is also easily concluded that standardization has social and political interests involved. The variety which is standardized belongs to groups that detain economic and political power in society as they can determine the language policy and educational programs. Why are schools considered the ideal places to impose the highest social valued variety spoken in a country? This is explained by McGroarty (1996, p. 24):

Because one of the main objectives of formal schooling is to teach reading and writing, schools are one of the central arenas for the promotion of prescriptive norms of written language (see Wiley, this volume). Historically, school systems have played a central role in creating and standardizing a national written language. (MCGROARTY, 1996, p.24)

Therefore, students are obliged to learn it, because it is the "correct" variety, the one spoken by people who have high knowledge and culture, while other forms, called nonstandard dialects, are usually conceived as used by uneducated people. Another belief that has existed for a long time is that a standard variety is more complex and systematic whereas nonstandard ones are random and less complex.

As it can be seen, educational system is not neuter or apolitical. Teaching the standard as the “legitimate English” helps to maintain the power of its speakers. This demonstrates that language is more than an instrument of communication. It is an efficient tool to establish and guarantee social power as well. People who do not speak the standard form of English in countries where it is a native language belong to lower social classes, have more difficulties to find jobs and are stigmatized as inferior, because their speech is often associated with lack of intelligence.

Although linguists recognize that there is no evidence that a language would be more superior or inferior than its dialects and that they are all equally rule-based and systematically complex as the standard one, there is still a strong prejudice against the nonstandard varieties. While the standard would be the language, the nonstandard ones would be dialects, as it is seen by Wiley (1996, p.105): “The Language variety that has the higher social value is called a ‘Language’, and the language variety with the lower social value is called a ‘dialect’.”

At school, children who do not speak Standard English often fail in the learning process because teachers do not even have basic knowledge of the language variety their pupils use. This may produce many misunderstandings such as the attribution of cognitive deficiency to these children. As a result, they tend to be discriminated by their classmates and teachers, who may practically abandon them, because of the belief that they are not capable of learning as other children. The problem of children who speak nonstandard varieties to adapt to school confirms the words of Wiley (1996, p.106): “Language planning affects speakers of regional and social varieties within the language.”

Language policy, as it can be concluded, contradicts the myth that education gives everybody equal opportunities in life, which is also concluded by Hornberger (1996, p.449):

Education is the site where, on the one hand, broad social and political forces are reflected in the kinds of educational opportunities offered to speakers of different language varieties and, on the other, language use mediates their participation in those opportunities. (HORNBERGER, 1996, p.449)

All these evidences lead to observe that the reasons to codify a language are not merely pedagogical, as it is said by Wiley (*op.cit*, p.105): “The attribution of status to the language varieties can become a subtle means of social control.”

What would be the reasons to impose a variety upon others? This question is not easy to answer. Leibowitz (1971 *apud* WILEY, *op.cit.*, p.121) makes the following affirmation: “[...] the

motivation to impose English and requirements has been based upon the “degree of hostility” of the majority toward the language minority group “usually because of race, color or religion.”Wiley (*opus.cit.*, p.121) concludes that the phenomenon of language restriction does not occur isolatedly from other forms of discrimination.

Teachers must be aware about this language policy in order to make the classroom a place to develop critical thinking and reflexive literacy, which is not an easy task, for school programs impose the teaching of Standard English and teachers are obliged to fulfill these programs. Even so, teachers must reflect about ways of implementing the classes to become English learners aware of variations and the socio-cultural aspects which influence the way of using a language, as it is supported by Rickford (1996, p.152):

[...]an increased awareness of regional and social variation can significantly enhance teachers and students ‘mutual understanding and appreciation, and can offer teachers additional tools with which to enhance their students’ appreciation of literature, their ability to write and use a variety of styles and their sensitivity to the diversity and richness of the speech communities in which their languages are used. (RICKFORD, 1996, p.152)

Rickford’s words give an idea about how a teacher can improve English’s lessons – by using the use of cultural products made by these speech communities. This can help a teacher to fight linguistic prejudices in classroom, while students acquire knowledge about the history and culture of a specific speech community, perceiving a language as something which is more than a code as it reflects the customs, beliefs and the social contexts of the communities that speak it.

Among the nonstandard varieties, we can highlight African American Vernacular English, spoken by the African American community. This dialect has been discriminated by most of American society for a long time and its speakers have been segregated in the school setting. But in recent times, its particular features have called the attention of scholars worldwide to some cultural aspects of black culture, particularly to a type of music called hip hop, which has become a global cultural phenomenon. Hip hop has been the target of academic studies and has been applied in schools in order to develop a critical pedagogy.

The history and characteristics of African American Vernacular English and the ways hip hop can be used in educational context are treated in the next sections of this work.

3. AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH

3.1. History of African American Vernacular English

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is also called Black English (BE), African American English (AAE), Black English Vernacular (BEV), Nonstandard Negro English (NNE) and Ebonics, which is a term that means “Black Sounds”. This variety is strongly identified with Negro people in the United States, although it is valuable to mention that white people, who live in areas where African American Vernacular English is dominant speak this variety and negro people, who live in areas where the variety used is the one spoken by the white communities do not speak AAVE.

There are some controversies among scholars and academics about the definition and origin of AAVE. Some linguists say that it is simply a dialect of American English. Other studies diverge from this affirmation when they defend that AAVE is a creole⁵ which developed independently of Standard English, borrowing some terms from Africanisms.

Venla Joniken (2008) admits two theories which aim to explain the origin of AAVE: the dialect hypothesis and the creolist hypothesis. According to the dialects hypothesis, slaves would have learned “wrong” English and passed it on to their descendants, whereas the creole hypothesis affirms that AAVE was a mixture of English and West African languages.

Stewart (1970 *apud* RICKFORD, 1996, p.178) and Dillard (1971, 1990 *apud* RICKFORD, *opus. cit.*, p.178) defend the creolist view when they say that “[...] textual attestations of the language of African-Americans from the eighteenth and nineteenth century are even more similar to Caribbean creole English than in modern AAVE.”

Another evidence that can reinforce the Creolists’ beliefs is the case in which twelve linguists, for a period of about four years, analyzed some eleven tapes which reproduced the speech of African-American former slaves, intertwined as part of the U.S. Federal Writers ‘Project, initiated in the 1930s. Nichols (1996, p.203), observed that: “Linguists who had an extensive background working with

⁵ Creole is the result of a process in which a pidgin becomes more used, being adopted by a particular community to be used in more complex social situations and also acquired by the younger generations, as their mother tongue. (SPOLSKY, 2007, p. 62)

creole texts were more likely to recognize creole structures in passages that were doubtful or difficult to hear.”

But the creolist hypothesis is not totally accepted by some scholars, as it is said by Wolfram (2005 *apud* GRIM, 2010, p.2):

[...] the Creolist position does not concretely explain the origin of AAVE – from new linguistic evidence a third hypothesis stemming from the Dialectologist/Anglicist Hypothesis emerged, called the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis, Neo-Anglicists still believe that early AAVE was similar to the original British dialects in the United States; what makes their view different from Dialectologists is that they see modern AAV as having developed into a very “distinct” dialect that is different from the other British English influenced American dialects. (WOLFRAM, 2003 *apud* GRIM, 2010, p.2)

Linguists who are adepts of Labov’s (2010) ideas, on the contrary, affirm that AAVE is related to Standard English based on the fact that when comparing AAVE and Standard English system, they observed some similarities in their grammar structures, as it is written by Falkenstein(2007,p.5):

On the one hand many characteristics of AAVE demonstrate how close the dialect is to Standard English. In addition there are several “transitional dialects” that link AAVE and SE. Non-standard white dialects partly show characteristics of AAVE and in the south even the language of many whites shows many of the same features of AAVE. (FALKENSTEIN, 2007, p.5)

According to David Crystal (1995), AAVE was originally a pidgin⁶ which developed into a creole language. This pidgin possibly originated when the colonizers brought people from Africa to

⁶ Pidgin is a variety derived from the contact between the speakers of different languages. It is developed naturally from the necessity of communication in special circumstances, such as trade or master-slave relation on a plantation. (SPOLSKY, op. cit., p. 61)

work as slaves in the Southern part of the United States. They were from different tribes and had different languages backgrounds. This factor caused the growth of many pidgin forms of communication that were used especially between the slaves and the sailors. When the slaves arrived in the lands where they were forced to work, pidgin English continued to be used as a means of communication among the slaves and the landowners.

Later, this pidgin became a mother tongue when it started to pass on from one generation to the other, going through a process of creolization. This creole English was predominantly used in plantations, coastal towns and islands. At this time, Standard British English was acquiring a status of a prestigious variety because England was emerging as a country of political influence.

For a long time, black people remained in the South of the United States but, in a movement called Great Migration, they immigrated to the industrial cities in the Northern areas, where they were segregated because of the existent racism in the American society. This forced them to have contact almost exclusively with themselves, contributing to maintain their dialect practically unchangeable. And, as everything which is related to blackness is said to be inferior and rude, the same is said about their particular dialect, as it is observed by Pullum (1999,pp. 39-40):

Most speakers of Standard English think that AAVE is just a badly spoken version of their language, marred lot by a lot of ignorant mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, or worse than that, an unimportant and most abusive repertoire of street slang use by an ignorant urban underclass. (PULLUM, 1999, pp. 39-40)

It is worth mentioning that the migration of black people to the Northern areas of the United States contributed to the dissemination of their culture, especially through music, which has always been a strong factor in their culture. Hearing black music makes people have an awareness of black vocabulary that usually reflects their customs, feelings and habits.

The special characteristics of AAVE, which, according to Labov (2010,p.1): “[...] maintains a fairly uniform sound system, based on a modification of the Southern States vowel pattern and does not participate in sound changes characteristic of surrounding White vernaculars,” have been considered a signal of linguistic deficiency for a long time and, for this reason, educators adopted the following point of view: black children did not have enough cognitive abilities because their speech lacked some qualities inherent to Standard English.

In the 1960s, with the civil right movement, in which black people fought against racial segregation, schools were obliged to take particular AAVE into account. At the same time, William Labov (2010), helped by a black colleague, conducted some research into nonstandard varieties spoken by some ethnic groups in the United States. He applied fieldwork to observe how black groups in the ghettos of New York, used spontaneous language in a natural context.

One of the reasons to study AAVE was to discover why African American students often failed at school. The failures of these students called the attention of scholars, according to Wolfram (2005, p.1):

Scholars found out that “[...] there was... an apparent link between AAVE and significant social and educational problems in American society, including urban poverty and racial disparity in school performance. These problems were acute in metropolitan areas, where they affected large numbers of a rapidly growing African American population. (WOLFRAM, 2005, p.1)

The work of Labov and other researchers in the Black communities has found that African American Vernacular English is rule-governed, complex structured and systematically coherent as any other language, which contradicts the myth that any variety different from Standard English would be random and deficient. It was also discovered that AAVE and Standard English share the same grammatical and lexical systems and their differences are due to systematic reasons.

Labov’s work must have largely contributed to make scholars admit AAVE is not a deficient kind of English, as is said by W.Diorio (2011, p.10): “Linguistic Society of America and other distinguished scholars of education came forward to defend it- recognizing AAVE as a rule-governed variety of English worth of respect.”

Labov’s (2010) research helped to find that black children have great verbal skills and a rich oral tradition. In fact, they already dominate the linguistic system of their L1 when reach the age of attending school. Therefore, the real reason why they failed at school may be attributed to other factors such as teachers’ lack of knowledge of their speech. It has also been proved that AAVE is not inferior to Standard English, however, the problem of integrating black children to school still remains, as it is seen by Angela D. Holmer (2005, p.2), who asks the following important questions on this issue: “Can educators teach students the prestige language while still promoting the acceptance of AAVE as a dialect of the Standard English language? If this promotion does not occur, do speakers of the dialect suffer academically?” These questions are neither simple nor easy to answer because, as it has been

previously said, teaching a language always involves social power, as it is also observed by Holmer(2005,p.2):

It s extremely important to understand that language and power go hand in hand and the prestige language is what should be used in order to gain that power. AAVE should simply be looked at as a form of the language and should not be labeled as incorrect or wrong due to the implication that this may have on the speakers of the dialect. (HOLMER, 2005, p.2)

In the past, teachers tried to eradicate AAVE and force black children to adopt Standard English, as it is comproved by Alim(2007, p.2): “Most Blacks in the United States since integration can testify that they have experienced teachers’attempts to eradicate their language and linguistic practice.” But this idea was proved to be a failure.

In addition, teachers’ attempts to eradicate AAVE, which would have the objective of helping African American students to speak “right” and have better opportunities in life through a proper education, in fact, would hide less noble intentions, such as weakening students’ culture and dialect, making them assimilate passively a supposed superior language and white-centered culture, as it can be confirmed by Duncan (2010, p.2):

The expectation that successful African American students will learn and live the languages and behaviors of the mainstream culture of the United States is evidence that public education maintains the traditional purpose of colonial education. That purpose is the assimilation of the colonized. Colonial education is intended to denigrate confidence and faith in indigenous tradition, thus preparing the colonized mind to acknowledge the hegemony/superiority of the colonizer. The colonial complex is supported and maintained in part, by a colonized people who have been taught to acquiesce to the alleged rightness and imagined superiority of the colonial culture. (DUNCAN, 2010, p.2)

This fact led educators and researchers to pay more attention to the conditions of black children in the school system and try to find possible solutions to solve the problems that affect them

in the classroom. Therefore, the development of studies on AAVE resulted in some attempts to adapt black children to the educational system and try to find possible solutions to solve the problems that affect them in the classroom. In some real cases, it has been observed that AAVE speakers succeed more in acquiring Standard English when AAVE is incorporated in the classroom and this can be made through music, literature and other cultural and artistic products of the black culture. This has been used to fight linguistic prejudices in schools and make students see how language is influenced by social factors when it is used in real contexts.

According to Rickford (1996, p.184), a number of researchers recommends “[...] the use of lyrics from popular songs and rap music to develop poetry appreciation, spelling, vocabulary and sentence structure and a cultural linguistic approach.”

Bringing African-American cultural productions to the classroom will make black children see language being used as something meaningful and with communicative purposes. They saw their lives’ reality being brought to the classroom. This may support the idea that teaching a language needs to involve cultural aspects of a speech community⁷. But, today, this definition is not enough and it is necessary to consider the culture and history of the speakers who belong to the speech community, as it is recognized by Spolsky (2007, p.25): “For the sociolinguist, the speech community is a complex interlocking network of communication whose members share knowledge about and attitudes towards *the language use patterns.*”

Spolsky’s words help to understand that the language used by African American communities cannot be perceived under concepts which only define languages in terms of “good English” or “bad English” anymore. These communities have their own values, language patterns and rules which are intrinsic to their history and behaviors. The most recent sociolinguistic studies have found that their language is the heir of a rich and resilient culture, which has fought against racism, segregation and attempts of eradication.

Today, AAVE is perhaps the most studied nonstandard variety, as it is observed by Labov (2010, p.1): “Among all the nonstandard dialects that have been described in the history of linguistics, AAVE is the most closely and extensively studied”. That is the reason why its peculiarities have become known by many people throughout the world, especially because of the diffusion of hip hop culture, a phenomenon which has been adopted in schools as a pedagogical resource to raise students’ awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity that can be shared by speakers of English. Through hip hop and rap music, students can have access to the vocabulary and phonological characteristics of AAVE.

⁷ This term is defined as “[...] all the people who speak a single language... and so share notions of what is same or different in phonology or grammar.” (SPOLSKY, *op.cit.*, p.24)

Analyzing AAVE will make students have notions about African Americans' culture, contributing to fight discrimination against their language, as it is said by Karnoven (2009, p. 20): "studying African American Vernacular English helps others to understand and accept it, thus, diminishing any intolerance against it and the people who speak it."

In the next section, we focus on some of the main linguistic and structural features of AAVE, which have been observed by scholars and linguists.

3.2 Characteristics of African American Vernacular English

At present, urban AAVE has called special attention of researchers and linguists because it is the nonstandard dialect predominantly spoken by African American youth. Moreover, although AAVE began to be established in the Southern area of the United States, there were some changes that made urban AAVE different from the dialect spoken in the South, although both varieties still have some similarities.

Many studies have tried to understand the origin and characteristics of AAVE and it has been found that this dialect has some resemblances with European American varieties, non-Southern vernacular European American varieties and Standard English, as it is observed by Wolfram(2005,p.7):

I attempt to highlight some of the ways in which contemporary urban AAVE is similar and different from other varieties, including Southern African American and European American varieties, non-Southern vernacular European American varieties, and standard English. (WOLFRAM, 2005, p.7)

It can be concluded that AAVE has some characteristics that differentiate it from these varieties and make it unique among them. It has also been observed that AAVE has similar pronunciation, grammatical structures and vocabulary to the diverse West African languages, according to Rickford (1976 *apud* SPEARS 1997, p.5):

Some of AAVE's distinctive features are survivals or transformations of West African language features. Examples of survivals, communicative forms that survive with their physical form and meaning mostly intact, include cut-eye and

suck-teeth (Rickford & Rickford 1976) as well as hand-cupped-over-mouth laughter. (RICKFORD, 1976 *apud* SPEARS 1997, p.5)

Creolists affirm that AAVE has many characteristics in common with the creole dialects used by black people in many parts of the world and one fact that helps to support the Creolist theory was that some researchers found resemblances between AAVE and Gullah, as it is said by Weldon (2003, p.3): “the creole variety that has been most linked to AAVE, at least hypothetically, is Gullah, the only English-based creole spoken in the United States today.”

All these analyzed evidences show that AAVE has complex origins and any study trying to discover its sources and origins must consider all its characteristics, particularities and resemblances with other languages or dialects but, even with all the researches that have been made lately, it is very difficult to believe scholars will find a conclusion that will satisfy them entirely, as it is said by Grim (2010, p.5):

It is likely that linguists will never know exactly the true origins of AAVE, due to how the culture- of African slaves was first studied and treated – as inferior – and the lack of empirical research from the early 1700s. However, recent efforts can at least preserve samples of modern AAVE and review its progress into the future(GRIM, 2010, p.5).

Labov (2010, p.1), observed that AAVE, unlike other dialects, has the tendency to maintain its peculiar characteristics, especially because of the residential segregation to which African American communities were forced, in neighborhoods where they were continually exposed to poverty, crime and low chances of achievement at school.

In his works on African American speech patterns, Labov (*op.cit.*, p.1) observed, with special attention, the phonetic patterns which differentiate AAVE from other dialects and discovered that many morphosyntactic features that exist in several varieties of English do not exist in AAVE.

An interesting characteristic of AAVE discovered by Labov was that the grammatical constraints on copula/auxiliary deletion are regularly replicated in diverse geographical areas.

In the 1980s, directing his to a Black community in North Philadelphia, Labov found a situation of linguistic segregation, as he clearly says (*op. cit.*, 2010, p.4):

The majority members of the Black community who consistently showed the defining features of AAVE were those who stayed within the Black neighborhoods from one day to the other, worked only with Blacks, lived with and talked with Blacks, and rarely had face-to-face conversations with speakers of other dialects. (LABOV 2010, p.4)

Although some can say that African American youth who live in these urban areas are not isolated and can have contact with Standard English through mass media and their school teachers, this does not affect speech patterns and underlying grammar of AAVE because it has been observed that they have contact with Standard English through a passive exposure and rarely have the chance of interactive conversation with speakers from other dialects.

Besides, African American youth may understand their speech as their cultural identity and thus resist to teachers' attempts to make them adopt Standard English as a reflection of protecting their culture and ethnicity. Their insistence on speaking AAVE would be the same of affirming that they have pride of their Black origin and social dialect. In some schools, it was seen that Black students, although they could speak Standard English when they were talking to the teachers or white classmates, preferred to speak AAVE when they were speaking among themselves.

Many scholars, analyzing this attitude which is predominant in African American teenagers, have concluded that Black youth want to keep their vernacular as a form of solidarity to show that they are not ashamed of their speech and culture.

Sealey-Ruiz(2005, p.1) talking about the linguistic behavior of African American affirms that they use Standard American English in social domains such as workplaces and schools. Petterson states (1973 *apud* SEALEY-RUIZ *op. cit.*, p.1) that African Americans know they need to use SE to survive in the USA, for this reason, most of them are 'bidialectal' and able to understand AAVE and SE.

This is a proof that African Americans are not intellectually inferior to white people and know how to adapt their speech according to situations.

Studying AAVE requires attention to its particular features. Among them, some have been emphasized by academics who have found they occur regularly. Some of them call special attention and this is the reason why they were chosen to be quoted in this work.

Rickford (1996, pp. 174-175) lists the following characteristics of AAVE:

Phonology(pronunciation):

1. Simplification of word-final consonant clusters, .g., han' for SE "hand," des' for SE "desk," pos' for SE "post," and pass' for SE "passed";
2. Realization of final ng as n in gerunds and participles, e.g., walkin' for SE "walking."
- 3a. Realization of voiceless th as t or f, as in tin for SE "thin" and baf for S "bath".
- 3b. Realization of voiced th as d or v, as in den for SE "then" and bruver for SE "brother."
4. Deletion or vocalization (pronunciation as a weak neutral vowel) of l and r after vowels, as in he'p for SE "help" and sistuh for SE "sister."
5. Monophthongal pronunciations of ay and oy, as in ah for SE "I" and boah for SE "boy."
6. Stress on first rather than second syllable, as in pólice instead of SE "police" and hotel instead of SE hotel.
7. Deletion of initial d and g in certain tense-aspect auxiliaries, as in "ah 'on know" for SE "I don't know" and "ah'm 'a do it" for SE "I'm gonna do it" (Rickford, 1974, p. 109)

Grammar

8. The verb phrase (markers of tense, mood and aspect)
 - 8a. Absence of copula/auxiliary is and are for present tense states and actions, as in "He tall" for SE "He's tall" or "They running" for SE "They are running."
 - 8b. Absence of third person present tense -s, as in "He walk" for SE "He walks", or "He don't sing" for SE "He doesn't sing" (FASOLD, 1972 *apud* RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-149).
 - 8c. Use of invariant be to express habitual aspect, as in "He be walkin" (usually, regularly, as against "He walkin" right now) for SE "He is usually walking/usually walks" (FASOLD, 1972 *apud* RICKFORD *op. cit.*, p. 176)
 - 8d. Use of stressed BIN to express remote phase, as in "She BIN married" for SE "She has been married for a long time (and still is)" or "He BIN ate it" for SE "He ate it a long time ago" (BAUGH 1983 *apud* RICKFORD *op. cit.*, p.176).

8e. Use of done to emphasize the completed nature of an action, as in “He done did it” for SE “He’s already done it” (BAUGH 1983; LABOV, 1972c *apud* RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176)

8f. Use of be done to express resultatives or the future or conditional perfect, as in “She be done had her baby” for SE “She will have had her baby” (BAUGH 1983 *apud* RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176)

8g. Use of finna (derived from “fixin’ to”) to mark the immediate future, as in “He’s finna go” for SE “He’s about to go”.

8h. Use of steady as an intensified continuative marker (to mark actions that occur insistently and/or persistently), as in “Ricky Bell be steady steppin in them number nines.” (BAUGH, *apud* RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176)

8i. Use of come to express the speaker’s indignation about an action or event, as in “He come walkin in here like he owned the damn place” (SPEARS 1982 *apud* RICKFORD, p.176)

8j. Use of had to mark the simple past (primarily among preadolescents) as in “then we had went outside” (THEBERGE & RICKFORD 1989 *apud* RICKFORD *op. cit.*, p.176)

9. Negation

9a. Use of ain’(t) as a general preverbal negator, for SE “am not,” “isn’t” “aren’t”, “hasn’t”, “haven’t”, and “didn’t” as in “He ain’ here” for SE “He isn’t here” or “He ain’ do it” for SE “He didn’t do it”

9b. Multiple negation or negative concord (i.e., negating the auxiliary verb and all indefinites in the sentence), as in “He don’ do nothing” for SE “He doesn’t do anything” (LABOV 1972c, *apud* RICKFORD *op.cit.*, p.176)

9c. Negative inversion in emphatic statements (inversion of the auxiliary and indefinite pronoun subject), as in “Can’t nobody do it” for SE “Nobody can do it” (SELLS, RICKFORD & WASOW 1995 *apud* RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176)

10. Other grammatical features

10a. Absence of possessive –s, as in “John house” for SE “John’s house”

10b. Absence of plural –s (fairly infrequent), as in “two boy” for SE “two boys”

10c. Appositive or pleonastic pronouns, as in “That teacher, she yell at the kids” (FASOLD & WOLFRAM 1978 *apud* RICKFORD, p.80) for SE “That teacher yells at the kids.”

10d. Auxiliary inversion in embedded questions (without if or whether), as in “I asked him could he go with me” for SE “I asked him whether he could go with me.”

10e. Use of here go as a static locative or presentational form, as in “Here go my own” (said by a 12-year-old girl from East Palo Alto, California, as she showed me her artwork) for SE “Here is my own.”

Looking at the list above, it can be clearly concluded that AAVE has its own rules and is not inferior to SE. Its speakers have their knowledge about when, where and how use their vocabulary. It is necessary to have some sociolinguistic awareness to avoid judgments based on linguistic prejudices and superficial perceptions about the language and culture of a people.

An English teacher needs to have some knowledge about these features and characteristics of AAVE in order to use hip hop or rap lyrics properly in the classroom. Besides pointing to the differences which exist between AAVE and SE, it must be observed the social context in which these lyrics were produced.

In the next section, we discuss about hip hop and how it can be applied to make English learners have a deeper knowledge about cultural aspects of AAVE and social contexts in which African American use their language.

4. HIP HOP

4.1 Hip hop songs as a cultural movement and pedagogical resource

With the acknowledgement of AAVE as a grammar-ruled and systematic variety of English, there are many questions which need to be considered by English teachers throughout the world: the importance of introducing sociocultural aspects of language in the EFL classroom and the necessity of making students aware of linguistic variation and extra-linguistic factors which influence the way of speaking of different people. Teachers cannot deny the existence of diversified varieties of English and it has been shown that limiting classes to teach grammar rules does not correspond to the demands of this world, in which people from different cultures and languages often have contact with one another. Students need be aware that languages are directly related to the social and cultural values of the people that speak it. Besides, there are not superior or inferior varieties of any language, as McGroarty(1996, p.25) says:

With a firmer understanding and appreciation of the multiplicity of language forms and function, each chosen according to communicative context, situation, audience, and purpose, teachers can become developers of sensitivity toward many varieties of language rather than pedantic linguistic enforcers. (McGROARTY, 1996, p.25)

For a long time, there has been the belief that teaching English is to focus only on the grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and other structural aspects of it, as if there were no political, social and economical forces involved in English teaching. Tollefson(1995, p.1) affirms that teachers have not been prepared to speak about language as an instrument of political and social force to be used to establish social relationship and obtain prestigious status. He says that teachers have been trained only for pedagogical practices and do not see classrooms as a place of development of critical discussion and reflexive pedagogy:

Until recently, most teacher-preparation programs in language education and English as a second language focused on second language acquisition, teaching

methods, and linguistics, without placing these fields in their social, political, and economic context. The result was that many language teachers and other applied linguists lacked an understanding of how language-learning theory and common teaching practices are linked with broader sociopolitical forces. (TOLLEFSON, 1995, p.1)

Thus, we can conclude that this kind of language teaching is not adequate to develop students' awareness of the real functions and place languages have in society, but it serves to guarantee social power and exclude certain groups of people, and sometimes to give privileges to others.

At present, our National Curricular Parameters⁸ (2000) emphasize that the primary aim of teaching a foreign language is to develop the learners' sociolinguistic competence, helping them to be able to communicate in different contexts, according to situations, and making them understand that language is directly related to the culture of its speakers. Moreover, this document says that the mere transmission of grammar rules does not prepare language learners to communicate properly in a language. All these necessities put English teachers before a challenge - how to introduce the sociocultural aspects of the target language in the classroom in order to make students know about the variations which exist in the English language. Trying to win this challenge, many researchers have realized that learning a foreign language also involves knowing about its diversified linguistic variations. Therefore, they have conducted projects in order to teach the ethnical and racial elements in language.

It is necessary to remember that learning a language which is spoken by people from diverse places and who belong to different cultural backgrounds, as it is the case of English, requires learners to develop the communicative competence, which is defined by Hornberger (1996, p.454) as "[...] the knowledge and ability of individuals to use language appropriately in the communicative events in which they find themselves in any particular speech community."

These words make it clear that cultural aspects must be involved when a language is being taught because communicative competence cannot be developed if English learners are not exposed to situations in which they can perceive situational contexts which influence the production of the target language. Then, a teacher should use many cultural resources with communicative purposes to show

⁸Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (2000)

students linguistic variations and develop their critical thinking about communities and their social values. Among cultural resources, hip hop songs have been used to develop students' awareness of linguistic variation, ethnicity and culture in English language-teaching classrooms throughout the world.

Hip hop is a cultural movement which is originally American but has become global and has been adopted successfully to disseminate African American culture. This movement started in the 1970s, in the urban ghettos of New York, such as South Bronx, where most of the inhabitants were Black and poor young people. It was created by Afrika Bambaataa⁹, as an alternative to maintain young people away from criminality and drugs and to give them opportunity to express their thought and feelings artistically. The term, hip hop, was first used by Bambaataa and it is the combination of two AAVE words: "Hip", which means something happening at the moment and "hop", which refers to dance movement.

This cultural manifestation is a heir of ancient and known expressions of Black music such as the spirituals, soul, blues, jazz and other kinds of musical genre used by the Blacks to give a voice to their fight against slavery, segregation, discrimination and poverty. It incorporates ancient and modern words of AAVE, showing that African Americans have a rich and flexible vocabulary, which is always changing (AMERICAN LIBRARY NEWSLETTER, 2007).

At the beginning, hip hop stayed restricted to the ghettos, being considered an underground culture but, with the time, it become more known by youth outside the ghettos. Thus, people who were not familiarized with this cultural manifestation soon began to know some proper expressions of hip hop vocabulary, such as MC (master of ceremony), DJ (disk- jockey) and rap (rhythim and poetry). It is good to mention that, although people use the terms hip hop and rap as they were synonyms, they are distinct terms. Rap is a musical aspect of hip hop culture and some hip hop music cannot be considered rap. Sealey-Ruiz (2005, p. 4) affirms that: "In the 1980s, hip hop exploded onto the scene, changing the music industry and the view of African-American culture forever."

The fact of American culture has quickly raised the interests of young people started to call the attention of scholars, who began to study the vocabulary of hip hop lyrics and other artistical compositions, discovering that its vocabulary was not "linguistically deprived", as it was firstly supposed, but it was rich and varied, as Keyes (2002 *apud* ENDIM, 2010, p.3): "hip-hop culture and

⁹Afrika Bambaataa is the artistical name of Kevin Donovan, an American DJ and leader of ZuLu Nation, who is recognized as the godfather of Hip Hop and the first person to use the term "Hip Hop". (pt.wikipedia.org./wiki/Afrika Bambaataa)

rap, in particular, involve beyond words and notions to include potential meanings, complex rather than conventional interpretations and ‘ apparent meaning and metaphoric reference’”.

At present, hip hop has been recognized as a powerful cultural instrument, which has influenced the speaking way of many people, as it is read in THE AMERICAN LIBRARY NEWSLETTER (2007):

Whether it is the addition of the phrase “bling-bling” to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003 or the inclusion of the term “crunk” in the 2007 volume of the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, hip hop culture is changing the nature, the sounds and the rules of the English language. (THE AMERICAN LIBRARY NEWSLETTER, 2007)

This kind of affirmation suggests that hip hop has influenced considerably English language and it can be largely applied in English teaching in order to make students aware of the sociocultural factors which influence language such as ethnicity and race, which should be considered in language teaching. Therefore, we believe the application of cultural resources such as hip hop in the language classrooms can help students to know how language is fluid and flexible, being transformed across time and space.

Hall (2011) analyzes how hip hop has influenced pedagogical practices in the United States and other nations in the world and, in the case where Hip Hop was used to teach other subject áreas, as in a Project which she names Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP), she observes that, in some schools where hip hop was applied, through playing songs, vídeos or focusing on lyrics, there was an increase in the interest of the students and an improvement of the sociocultural factors of language and artistic expressions of communities.

Young people identify themselves strongly with hip hop and rap lyrics because these compositions often use a type of language which is easily understood by them as the lyrics focus on youth lives, interests, and values, contributing to make the classroom setting more attractive to students. Therefore, English learners will feel more stimulated to discuss the lyrics meanings and consequently engage in classroom activities, as it has been observed by Dimitriadis(2001, p.3): “Black popular culture has overtaken the lives of young people today – and, in turn, teachers can use Black popular culture as a resource to engage young people in complex literacy activities.”

The next section focus on the suggestions given by some scholars about how hip hop and rap lyrics can be used in English classes.

4.2 Using Hip Hop and Rap lyrics in English teaching

Modern time allows teachers to use a great number of technological resources to apply in classroom to approach students of different cultures. One of these resources is music, which raises students' interests because it strengthens motivation, creates a pleasant environment to learning, helps to develop vocabulary and listening skill and is also a good way of introducing people's cultures.

Rosová (2007) says that music can provide English learners a learning full of cultural significance and reinforces her words affirming:

Let the past remind us that it was already Jan Amos Komensky in the 17th century, who included, in his teaching principles, the principle of connecting the school with life. And using songs in language teaching is a greatly opportunity for applying it. (ROSOVÁ, 2007)

Therefore, Hip hop and rap lyrics can be effectively used to raise students' awareness of English language diversity as well as of AAVE, hip hop and Black culture in the classroom, according to what is said by Almeida (2012, p.2), listing some procedures teachers can lead students to do when working with Black music in English lessons:

- Reflect about Black influence in diversified themes in English language;
- Analyze linguistic, artistic and technological afro-descendants manifestations in English language;
- Compare the use of Black English and Standard English;
- Analyze symbolical hip hop manifestations of hip hop related to Black culture;
- Relate the study of English language with the study of Black culture and hip hop.

The use of hip hop or any other kind of Black music can provide English teachers an opportunity to apply more dynamic methodologies and approaches in classroom, engaging students in specific communicative situations. Schiffrin (1996, p. 307) sees the use of hip hop as a way of showing language learners "how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life and how it both reflects and adds meaning and structure to those circumstances".

The use of hip hop and rap lyrics might make students acquire knowledge about diversity and communities' values and how language is dynamic and complex, because it is always involved in processes of social interaction.

Students will also see how the members of a social group see themselves and build their social relationships with one another and with people who are outside their community, thus confirming which is affirmed by Schiffrin in the same work (1996, p.323):

Learning a language in a way that enables one to use that language for a range of social and expressive purposes requires more than learning lists of vocabulary items, syntactic paradigms, and natively like pronunciations. (SCHIFFRIN, 1996, p.323)

Perhaps teachers may have some difficulties to explore the hip hop lyrics because of slangs, expressions idioms and vocabulary which are proper of AAVE. This will require teachers to study the vocabulary items and context existent in the lyrics beforehand in order to be prepared to discuss the linguistic and cultural aspects of this variety of the English language with the students.

Teachers' efforts to use hip hop lyrics can also enhance their knowledge about language teaching practice because understanding the content in the lyrics involves understanding the context in which language is used and how a community uses symbols to express their social and cultural values.

It is also important for teachers to consider the relation between language and culture in language teaching, as it is said by Troike (2007, p. 352):

The relationship of language learning to enculturation or acculturation, and the social functions of communicative processes can contribute in important ways to the development of language acquisition theory and teaching practices. (TROIKE, 2007, p.352)

According to Troike (*op. cit.*, p. 357) the exploration of hip hop and rap lyrics in the language classroom might make students have access to:

- Communicative Repertoire, which is the range of languages, languages varieties and registers;
- Codes, which are the different languages or significantly different varieties of a single language;
- Styles, the varieties associated with social and cultural dimensions as age, sex, social class and relationship between the speakers;
- Registers, the varieties of language more associated with the place in which the people are located.

Teachers can use the lyrics to discuss with students the context in which hip hop music was produced, what intentions the lyricist had, to whom the artist wants to send the message in the lyrics, the time in which it was composed and many other factors such as artist's personal life and experiences. This is worth mentioning because many artists came from ghettos and want people to know their point of view about the reality of these places.

As hip hop and rap lyrics are almost exclusively sang by Black artists who have experienced poverty, criminality, disrupted families and struggles in life, this can be a chance to show students how these artists see themselves and what they think about how society sees them related to questions such as racism, prejudice and their expectations about improving their lives.

The aim of showing the aspects of cultural and social life which hip hop lyrics often reflect in the messages they intend to pass on to the listeners is, according to Troike (*op.cit.*, p.352): “[...]to provide a framework for [...] analysis in which social meaning is conveyed, constructed and negotiated.”

Working with the lyrics can make English learners acquire richness and multiple meanings, because students will see language used by a speech community with a communicative purpose and involved in a social environment.

To this work, some lyrics were chosen which are discussed and analyzed with the intention to demonstrate how they can be properly worked in classroom in order to develop a critical and meaningful English learning.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this research paper we propose to show how teachers can use the cultural material produced by AAVE speakers such as hip hop songs, to put English learners in contact with a non-standard variety of English. The areas that will be analyzed are the grammatical features of African American Vernacular English comparing them with Standard English in the lyrics and the social context the lyrics reflect. We will characterize this research as bibliographical as it consists, according to Rudio (1986), in analyzing scientific documents that focuses on the target subject. On the other hand, this research is also characterized as descriptive qualitative in that it is a process of reflection and analysis of reality that uses methods and techniques to understand an object in its historical context (OLIVEIRA, 2007, p.37).

The analysis is based on the lyrics of College and L.I.F.E (see annexes 1 and 2) hip hop songs by Lil Mama (2008) and it aims at showing what English teachers can explore in hip hop lyrics in the classroom to put learners in contact with a non-standard variety of English. It is worth mentioning that among the great universe of hip hop lyrics Lil Mama's songs were chosen because this author does not focus on violence, misogyny, sex and crime, and she does not use swear words. Besides, Lil Mama is a successful rapper within a kind of art that is dominated predominantly by males. Her lyrics are analyzed according to the suggestions of some scholars such as Almeida (2012) and Rickford (1996).

To start the analysis we will choose some sentences from the lyrics to contrast some grammatical features between AAVE and SE. The next step in the analysis is to show the social context reflected in the lyrics. Finally, we will highlight some poetical resources used by the author.

6. ANALYZING THE LYRICS

This analysis is based on the lyrics of College and L.I.F.E (see annexes 1 and 2) hip hop songs by Lil Mama and it aims at showing what English teachers can explore in hip hop lyrics in the classroom to put learners in contact with a non-standard variety of English. It was chosen some sentences of these lyrics which were used to make a contrastive analysis between AAVE and SE.

6.1. Comparing the structural features of AAVE and SE according to the characteristics provided by Rickford (1996).

Some sentences of these lyrics were chosen which can be used to make a contrastive analysis between AAVE and SE.

College Hip Hop Song (See annex 1)

African American Vernacular English	Standard English
I was always takin away from my father	I was always taking away from my father
It's probably why we so close now	It's probably why we are so close now
Ya know	You know
We been starvin so long in these crazy ghetto streets	We have been starving so long in these crazy ghetto streets
I gotta eat jus a lil now	I got to eat Just a little now
I wanna ask em questions	I want to ask them questions
'how you been?'	'how are you?' or 'how are you doing?'
'when you graduatin'	'when are you going to graduate?'
Must've fell up under me	Must've fallen up under me

L.I.F.E (See annex 2)

African American Vernacular English	Standard English
I ain't got no pictures of my mother	I don't have any pictures of my mother or I have no pictures of my mother
When I should have know something	When I should have known something
Well I goin be alright cause	Well I am going to be alright because
I'm pregnant by a dude & He not 16	I'm pregnant by a dude & He is not 16
Like ya right wrapped up in a fast light for a sudicial	Like you right wrapped up in a fast light for a sudicial
Less with the people say to ya'll we break out	Less with the people say to you'll we break out

As it can be seen, the sentences above in both lyrics can be used by teachers to explain the structural differences between AAVE and SE. In *College*, in the words “takin”, “starvin” and “graduatin”, and in L.I.F.E, in the word “goin”, it was observed the realization of final ng (SE) as n (AAVE) in gerund and participles (RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.175).

It was also observed the absence of copula “be” in the clause “we so close now”, “when you graduatin” in *College* and in “He not 16” and “I goin to be alright cause” in L.I.F.E (RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.175).

Another interesting feature of AAVE which can be highlighted is the double negative in “I ain't got no pictures of my mother”, a characteristic of AAVE that differentiates it from SE, “I don't get any pictures of my mother”, “I haven't got any pictures of my mother” or “I have no pictures of my mother” (RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176).

The teacher can also focus the particle “ain't” and explain the students that it is versatile as it stands for several “preverbal negators” (RICKFORD, *op. cit.*, p.176). In this specific sentence in L.I.F.E, it stands for “don't”.

Students' attention can also be drawn to the use of "Ya", which represents "you" in SE.

By making students aware about the existence of linguistic diversity, the teacher can have a good opportunity to talk about the culture of Hip Hop, which is, according to Almeida¹⁰ (2012, p.5): "...a way of self-affirmation of identity previously denied by dominant culture that aims to impose only one way of speaking and thinking, with an unique and homogenous vision of world" (Our translation).

Beyond pointing out the differences between AAVE and SE, the teacher can tell students the variety spoken by African American people is as rule-governed as SE. The struggle fought by African American students at schools because of the systematic disparities that exist in the varieties, shows how AAVE has been considered random and deficient for a long time and its speakers have been said to have cognitive deficiency.

It is convenient that the teacher explains there is nothing wrong with AAVE, because it is so useful to express thoughts and ideas proper to a social context as any other language, (ALMEIDA, 2012, p.6). Therefore, by showing the differences between AAVE and SE, the teacher can draw English learners' attention to the different ways to express the same message.

6.2 Analyzing the social context of the lyrics.

An English teacher can also analyze the sociocultural aspects of the lyrics with the students. In this work, it was also analyzed the sociocultural aspects of the songs of Lil Mama in order to speak about Hip Hop culture and its objectives.

¹⁰[...] a cultura hip hop surge como uma forma de auto-afirmação da identidade dantes negada pela cultura dominante que visa impor uma forma única de falar, de pensar, com uma visão de mundo única e homogênea.

College

We been starvin so long in these crazy ghetto streets
And they say we're wrong for the way we try to eat
How long will He struggle
I gotta grind jus to eat now
I gotta eat jus a lil now
So I gotta live my life this way

In these lines, the lyricist speaks about a common situation lived by many people who live in the ghettos of the United States: poverty and difficulties to survive. It can be clearly perceived the person in the lyrics suffers from hunger and had to obtain food in an illicit way. Therefore, this person may be condemned because of the way he or she used to obtain food.

These lines will be better understood further in the lyrics

Soon after we roll up to these Gates
Barbed wired up
Men standin in the entrance armed up
With a close un us
We enter the buildin
Got checked by the women who starin
My mother
Pull out a card with a Picture of her face on it
Two papers with our names on it
They identify her
They lookin at me
Me my confusion of the journey

Thorough these walls we go
 Before the next one opens
 The past one must close
 As they check for proper clothes
 My mama so prepared
 For this mini battle has chose
 Finally we reach our final destination
 My poppa placed in a seat
 Facin me
 No women in his class
 Jus men who never laugh
 And when they see they family
 They sing

Observing the lines above, it can be understood the person who is performed by the lyricist is a child, who is going to prison to pay a visit to his/her father, accompanied by his/her mother. The child is obviously confused with the environment of the prison and this can be finally understood in the first lines of the lyrics where the lyricist refers to a person who is struggling against hunger and is criticized because of the way his/her father sustains the family, that led him to prison. The father's situation shocks the child, as it is perceived in the last lines below.

So I Begin my investigation
 My elbow on the round table
 My palm at chin
 I'm lookin at him
 Ask questions like
 'how you been?'

'when you graduatin?'
 Time was up got pulled away
 Kickin and screamin
 Tears came to his eyes
 But never fell in front me
 Got old enough to realize
 Must've fell up under me
 Bein locked away in prison from your family
 Tryin to find ways for us to eat
 I see

When the child visits his/her father, he/she begins to realize the reasons why his/her father is in prison: He was incarcerated because he used an illegal way to sustain his family. This is the reason why the family suffered a disruption, which causes pain to the child and his/her father, who is very ashamed of being seen by the child in that situation. Like this child's parent, there are many other parents facing this type of problem in real life and the lyricist aims to denounce the difficulties faced by many poor people in the ghettos.

The conditions of poverty are usual in hip hop and rap lyrics. The lyrics follow a strong tradition in American Black culture: the use of music and storytelling to speak about the suffering of Black people since the times of slavery. Hip Hop culture is an heir of this tradition, as Goffman (2010, p.9) states: "Rap came out of "African-derived oral traditions of storytelling, 'boasting' (self-aggrandizement), 'toasting' (long narrative poems that sometimes bestow praises) and 'playing the dozens' (competitive and recreational exchange of verbal insults)".

An English teacher can tell students Hip Hop was created as an alternative to give poor young people who lived in the ghettos an opportunity to express artistically their frustrations and suffering, as it is affirmed by Balbino and Motta (2006, pp.15-16): "Hip Hop appeared in the ghettos to help the poor youth, specially the Black ones, to find a social identity and sociopolitical conscience."

Hip Hop is an important movement in the History of African American people, as it is said by Sealey-Ruiz (2005, p.40): “This activity, due to its sociohistorical context, was unique to that speech community.”

The lyricist aims to denounce a situation lived by many people who are marginalized by the rest of society, showing that many individuals would not follow the way of the crime if they had had access to good education or well paid jobs.

Now, it will be analyzed the lyrics L.I.F.E.

L.I.F.E

I wake up every day to the same old Foster mother

I ain't got no pictures of my mother

She was a crack fiend nothing like pot mother

She didn't make a difference though she

Could've I'm a shame shame of my life

Pappa cracky sold me twice

On a late stopped by

And look in my eyes

Bags from the tears that I've cried

And the people who lied

Telling me that this is my place

The lyricist sings about a person who lives a common situation in the ghettos, that is, family disruption. The child in the lyrics does not remember who his/her mother is since she is involved in using illicit drugs, as it can be easily perceived with the words “cracky” and “pot”, which refer respectively to cocaine and marijuana. And his/her father is also involved with the trade of drugs, which makes the child feel ashamed. It can be also concluded the child feels he/she has to fight against his/her life condition as an imposition of his/her fate

when he/she does not agree when someone says this is his/her place and the child says that they lie.

Youth has often used rap and hip hop lyrics to express frustration against the circumstances of their lives, as it is said by Patterson (2011, p. 2), where he affirms that original hip hop art forms give young people voice to speak about their revolt against factors which were common in their lives, such as incarceration, illicit and pharmaceutical drugs, poor education, social inequality, poverty and segregation.

As the lyrics goes on, it can be seen another factors lived by young people that are denounced by the lyricist

I'm pregnant by a dude & he not 16
 But I like his style & his whipp is mean
 My mama told me to find a man to take care
 Of me & he does buy me things but he beats on me
 I come to her for a little advice
 So I show up with a Black eye
 Telling me to know my place so I stay
 Waiting for my body phase
 Telling myself it Just a little pregnancy phase
 When all in reality I'm being discourage & disrespected
 And under the pressure & I don't really blame the man
 I blame my mother for not teaching me the different types of man
 Life could never understand my side of story being that it's so Consist 18
 Years.

Like the situation described in the lyrics, there are many female teenagers living this situation: pregnancy and domestic violence. The person represented in the lyrics was educated by her mother only to find a man, but she does feel despair with her life condition while she

sees her body changing because of the pregnancy. She does not feel angry with the man who hits her, but with her mother, who did not educate her adequately.

English teachers, after showing students these lyrics, can discuss with them the social context that are portrayed in them, which can be useful to make students reflect about the social functions of language. By seeing language being used in real situations, English learners will have a chance to develop a critical learning and see how language can be used at different ways to express culture and the points of view of a speech community. Besides, the teacher can reinforce there is no deficient language, because any language variety and not only the standard one is efficient to express the thoughts of its speakers, according to Almeida (*opus cit.*, p.6)

6.3 Observing poetical resources

In the first lines of L.I.F.E, it can be observed

L, if for the liars that have surrounded me

I, insecurity, my head down in these streets

F, my future there isn't 1

E, Eternal hope

This is my life.

The first lines of the lyrics compose an acrostic, that is, a kind of poem, where the poet uses the first letters of a word to make a poem. This can be used by the English teacher to call students' attention to the lyricist's creativity. The teacher can thus show that rap and hip hop lyricists are also able to use poetical and stylistic resources to write their lyrics and show their life conditions.

In this acrostic, the lyricist express the revolt of a person who feels anguish about his/her life. This person has been told lies and, although it seems there is no future for him/her, this person sticks to have hope in better days.

The focus on the poetical resources used in rap and hip hop lyrics is helpful to fight linguistic prejudice. Besides, it will help teachers to show students AAVE is not a poor language and Hip Hop is not an underground culture, but a rich and complex artistic movement which gives opportunity to people to write or create other pieces of music to show the reality in which they live and the messages they want to communicate.

The fact that the lyricist uses poetical resources to express her messages can be used by the English teacher to make students appreciate poetry, according to the words of Bradley (2010, pp.3-4):

“ [...] the study of rap is an effective means of introducing the key forms and concept that define the poetic tradition: rappers embrace the clear sonic qualities of rhythm and rhyme, make ample use of figures and forms such as simile and metaphor, make storytelling a key component of their art, and emphasize the spirit of competition once central to poetry”.

7. CONCLUSION

After studying the reasons which are involved in the process of standardization of a language and how political and social questions are strong factors that determine educational programs and language policy, it is easy to conclude that English teachers cannot ignore that language lessons should not be restricted to mere transmission of grammar rules anymore, because this deprives learners of becoming aware of cultural and social characteristics of languages that determine their use.

Classifying the language used by a community only in terms of good or bad language is not enough because it does not consider the values and culture of this community, contributing to maintain linguistic prejudice.

The use of music produced by the African American communities that live in the United States as a methodological resource in language classrooms might make English learners aware of the existence of non-standard varieties of this language and open this way to involve teachers and learners to discuss how language policy and linguistic prejudice influence on linguistic beliefs that contribute to maintain a speech community socially segregated and deprived of ample opportunities for improve their life conditions because of the language spoken by its members.

Hip Hop and rap lyrics used in English lessons might help students to be in contact with the culture and reality of the people who live in the ghettos since their cultural production reflects what they feel about their life conditions. This might be helpful to develop the learners' critical thinking and awareness of the extralinguistic factors involved in learning a language, realizing it as something more than a group of grammar, syntactic and phonological rules.

We conclude that the use of Hip Hop and rap music in English lessons, still largely controversial among scholars, will help students to understand that English is spoken by different people in many different ways, drawing their attention to language variation, specially to the one spoken by AAVE speakers, and the social and cultural factors which underlie this type of material. Therefore, teachers should not only be restricted to teach the standardized variety of English, whether American, British, whatever, but use their creativity to find room in their teaching programs to bring diversity to their language lessons, making students understand how language and power are strongly related in society and how language is intrinsically linked to the identity of the speech community that uses it.

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ANNEXES

"College"

[Talkin':]

Now that I think about it
I was always takin away from my father
Or he was always takin away from me
It's probably why we so close now
Ya kno

[Chorus:]

We been starvin so long in these crazy ghetto streets
And they say we're so wrong for the way we try to eat
How long will he struggle
I gotta grind jus to eat now
I gotta eat jus a lil now
So I gotta live my life this way

[Verse 1:]

I stretched and yawned
4 years from a newborn
On a charter bus
Filled with stranged humans
Besides my mother nobody seems anxious
Though we on our way to visit a college campus
We roll up freshen up at a food concession
Can't talk to strangers
I wanna ask em questions
Saw a woman cryin
Boy face the fence
I don't wanna go to college
If it causes this
Back on the bus still analyzin vibes
Turned to my moms excel asked her
'why you cryin? '
She said because I'm happy
But I could tell she lyin
And since lyin was a curse
I sense storytellin
Her eyes focused on a object long enough they tingle

That's when she reached into her bag because her phone was ringin
 She said 'I accept'
 I'm still puzzle piecin
 I knew my pops was on the other line
 Lonely singin

[Chorus]

[Verse 2:]

Soon after we roll up to these gates
 Barbed wired up
 Men standin in the entrance armed up
 With a close eye on us
 We enter the buildin
 Got checked by the women who starin
 My mother
 Pull out a card with a picture of her face on it
 Two papers with our names on it
 They identify her
 They lookin at me
 Me my confusion of the journey
 Thorough these walls we go
 Before the next one opens
 The past one must close
 As they check for proper clothes
 My mama so prepared
 For this mini battle has chose
 Finally we reach our final destination
 My poppa placed in a seat
 Facin me
 No women in his class
 Jus men who never laugh
 And when they see they family
 They sing

[Chorus]

[Verse 3:]

So I begin my investigation
 My elbow on the round table
 My palm at chin
 I'm lookin at him
 Ask questions like
 'how you been? '
 'when you graduatin? '
 Time was up got pulled away
 Kickin and screamin
 Tears came to his eyes
 But never fell in front me
 Got old enough to realize

Must've fell up under me
 Bein locked away in prison from your family
 Tryin to find ways for us to eat
 I see

[Chorus]

"L.I.F.E."

[CHORUS:]

L is for the liars that have surrounded me
 I insurities my head down in these streets
 F my future there isn't 1
 E Eternal hope
 This is my life

I wake up every day to the same old foster mother
 I ain't got no pictures of my mother
 She was a crack fiend nothing like pot mother
 She didn't make a difference if though she
 Could've I'm a shame shame of my life
 Pappa cracky sold me twice
 On a late night stopped by
 And look in my eyes
 Bags from the tears that I've cried
 And the people who lied
 Telling me that this is my place
 Phony & try smile In my face
 But I should have known something
 Was rare smiled when she opened the mail
 Kept a nice mink on her back
 Meanwhile I got a goose & my goose got patches
 I'm so mad this is me
 I'm so hurt this is me
 So I shouldn't be
 But imma be alright cause

[CHORUS]

I'm pregnant by a dude & he not 16
 But I like his style & his whipp is mean
 My mama told me to find a man to take care
 Of me & he does buy me things but he beats on me
 I come to her for a little advice
 So I show up with a black eye

Telling me to know my place so I stay
 Waiting for my body phase
 Telling myself it just a little pregnancy phase
 When all in reality I'm being discourage & disrespected
 And under the pressure & I don't really blame the man
 I blame my mother for not teaching me the different types of man
 Life could never understand my side of story being that it's so consistent 18 years
 And 9 months developing raised in a prison I guess I'll never make a difference

[CHORUS]

Born orphan with nothin to offer is the least
 Of my problems
 Parents like deja vu
 My stomach is starving
 3 months pregnant idiotically I departed
 So ashamed of a life that was started
 I ask god if he can take the pain away
 He made me in denial of every word I pray
 Every day it's the same old no talent I'm feeling like
 My life is unbalanced no telling what tomorrow going look
 Like yea right wrapped up in a fast life for a sudicial
 Act why is my life set up for a failure I can care
 Less with the people say to ya'll we break out
 In rage venting all the hurt inside who am I
 To tell you what you fail to realize the voice that you hold
 Within you the voice that you are
 The Voice Of The Young People!

[CHORUS]