Language and Identity: a study of African American Vernacular English and its status in American society

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Abstract

The present thesis aimed to explore the relationship between language and identity with a particular focus on the status of African American Vernacular English in the American society. The research questions that were addressed in this research study were: 1. «How are Americans' speaking habits influenced by their ethnicity?» 2. «What are Americans' perception of African American Vernacular English, and how is this related to their general opinion about the American identity?» 3. «How do Americans react to the more frequent use of African American Vernacular English in today's society?».

In order to address the research questions, this thesis made use of a quantitative methodology. This study was based on the results from an online survey conducted in the USA, consisting of a total of 36 questions. Each question contained a statement that was rated by the from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). A total of 173 participants took part in the survey. The data was analyzed according to four social factors: gender, age, ethnicity, and geography.

It is difficult to provide a general conclusion on this survey based on the number of participants compared to the overall population in America. However, considering the variety in the demographics of the participants, this thesis could provide an indication based on the results. The overall result from the participants are relatively indecisive, but when looking at the different social factors it shows a more nuanced picture of AAVE in American society. The findings indicated that women tend to use ethnic dialects less than men. The findings also gave an indication that the age group 18-29-year-olds was open to and accepting of AAVE. The 55+ year-olds, on the other hand, were more skeptical of AAVE and its use in contemporary society. African Americans had an ambivalent relation to AAVE. African American participants expressed that the way they speak is part of their identity, and found it offensive that other ethnic groups used features of AAVE. However, 1/4 of the African American stated that they code-switch.

Keywords: African American Vernacular English, language, identity, American pop culture, ethnicity

Preface

The first meeting that I had with African American culture was when I first moved to America in 2014. The African American culture caught my attention most because of the police violence and injustice against African Americans that happened in the US, at that time. I made several African American friends and got introduced to the phrase 'white privilege'. The power-struggle between 'white' and 'black' Americans were intriguing for a foreigner like myself. Shortly after my stay in the US I fell in love with a man, referred to as a 'halfrican American', which means that he is half African American. I then started to experience the injustice and racism of black people firsthand. These experiences are therefore are my motivation for writing this thesis. I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the American society.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

1   Introduction

The thesis will explore the relationship between language and identity and will especially focus on the status and identity of African American Vernacular English in the USA today. This is a quantitative study based on the results from a questionnaire distributed among American citizens (the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 1). The informants rated a series of statements concerning how they view language and identity in relation to their ethnicity, their perception of African American Vernacular English and General American English, and what relation they have to African American Vernacular English in contemporary society. The findings from the questionnaire were analyzed in relation to social factors, such as gender, age, ethnicity and geographical area. The aim of this research study is to find out what the general perception of African American Vernacular English is in America.

The research was conducted online throughout the USA. Every geographical area within the USA were relevant for this thesis. The states were divided into geographical areas; the Midwest, the North-East, the South and the West. However, some states were not included due to lack of participants from those states. The research study was conducted over the time period 1st of October – 1st of December 2019. It was important to gather as many participants as possible with different demographics, so that the thesis would consist of all types of people.

According to Unites States Census Bureau[1], Americas population consisted of approximately 13,4% African Americans in 2019 without including individuals of mixed-race (United States Census Bureau). It is therefore important to gain an in-depth understanding of the 'general' American's mindset when it comes to the oral culture of African Americans. There have been several research studies on African American Vernacular English, but none of them have focused on how the general American perceives African American Vernacular English in a contemporary society.

African American Vernacular English is an ethnic dialect. An ethnic dialect is a dialect that is spoken by a particular ethnic group (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 45). Speaking the same linguistically when you are a member of an ethnic group, might be used to connect with their

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[1] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI225218#RHI225218 Accessed 30 April 2020

ethnic identities (Benor 2010: 160). When a certain ethnic group is behaving the same way linguistically, it is often referred to as a speech community (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 62). Behaving the same way linguistically might also be referred to as being a part of a Community of Practice. Communities of Practice and speech communities are closely related; however, Communities of Practice focus more on constraints of natural language variation (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 173). Speaking is a part of our identity. Kroskrity (2000: 111) argues that the sole core of identity is the linguistic construction of being a part of one or more social groups.

Americans, especially White Americans, has had prejudice against African Americans for decades, and notably against their ethnolect. This thesis will therefore build on previous scholarly work regarding this subject. African Americans have suffered from prejudice and racism since they got to America. In the 17th century the African slaves' way of talking was compared to monkey talk (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 77). In the beginning of the 20th century the media impersonated African Americans through 'Black Face' which mocked the way they talked. It was entertaining because the way 'Black Face' and African Americans talked, was supposed to express poor education and grammar (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 84). Reyes (2010: 405-406) argues in her work that African American Vernacular English is viewed as 'wrong', 'improper', and 'ignorant'. Even though there is prejudice against African Americans who speak African American Vernacular English, other ethnicities have started to borrow features and expressions to gain social prestige, but without the discrimination (Reyes 2010: 405-406).

Finding out to what extent people use language as an identity marker and if they are aware of this, is important both for the present study and the field of sociolinguistics. This is important to find out because it says something about people's habits when it comes to how language is used, and whether they are making deliberate choices to use language to identify themselves, or if this is subconscious. How African American Vernacular English has started to be used by other ethnic groups despite the reputation, is interesting because people frown upon the dialect, yet still adapt some of the features.

The research questions that will be addressed through this study are:

1. How are Americans' speaking habits influenced by their ethnicity?
2. What are Americans' perception of African American Vernacular English, and how is this related to their general opinion about the American identity?

3. How do Americans react to the more frequent use of African American Vernacular English in today's society?

The research questions will be answered through quantitative data which consist of a questionnaire. The participants will rate the different topics. Each question on the questionnaire will consist of a statement where the participants will rate a statement from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). There are also some follow-up questions that are open-ended so that the participants can elaborate. The data was analyzed in regard to the social factors (gender, age, ethnicity and geographical area) to determine whether some social groups had different opinions than others.

Following the introduction, the thesis is divided into five more chapters. Chapter two consists of the relevant theoretical background. The chapter introduces (among other topics) identity, dialect, the historical background and the features of African American Vernacular English, and the American pop culture. Chapter three explains and justifies the research method chosen for this thesis. The chapter also includes how the research study was conducted. Chapter four presents the findings. The findings consist of figures as well as an explanatory text. In the next chapter, Chapter five, the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions and the theory, followed by a conclusion in Chapter six, which also makes suggestions for further research on the topic.

2 Theoretical background

The theoretical background consists of a general overview of the terms identity, dialect and African American Vernacular English, based on previous research in the field. Identity is explained further in social settings such as group identity, speech community and Community of Practice. Identity is explained with regards to language and speaking habits. Dialect is explained specifically in terms of standardization and ethnic dialects, and also includes a historical chapter on the Americanization process. This chapter explains the process of developing dialects in America, and what happened during the Great Migration when so many foreigners settled in America. The aftermath of the Great Migration is explained through the development of ethnic dialects. The final section of the theoretical background focuses on African American Vernacular English and consists of the historical background and features of African American Vernacular English, as well as its use in today's society.

Human beings use language to communicate with each other. However, this communication could vary immensely. Ethnicity, cultural background, age, economy and religion, are some of the factors that can affect the way people communicate. Sociolinguistics refers to language use in different social settings. These social settings could be the media we are exposed to, casual conversations and social norms (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 1). Language means, in a sociolinguistic context, a single linguistic norm or a group of related norms (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 28). A sociolinguistic study such as the present thesis, is therefore, a study of our everyday life, how language is used in social settings, casual conversations, language through media and how language is used when it comes to social norms and policies (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 1).

2.1 Identity

The contact between humans mainly happens in some kind of linguistic form. Either by speaking, writing online, writing a letter or talking over the phone. By getting to know how people write, talk or communicate, we are able to '*size them up*' in a different way than we could from not communicating with them (Joseph 2004: 3). As Kroskrity (2000: 111) says; «Identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories». Identity therefore plays an important part when it comes to sociolinguistics. We

cannot determine who a person is based entirely on how they speak; however, we could get a deeper understanding of who they are. Joseph (2004: 3) calls this the 'deep' identity.

According to Joseph (2004: 1-2) «There are…two basic aspects to a person's identity: their name, which serves first of all to single them out from other people, and then the deeper, intangible something that constitutes who one really is, and for which we do not have a precise word». Our identities are dynamic and are constantly changing. Identities can change and shift throughout life. They consist of several different layers of identities, some of which might also be in conflict with each other. There is also something called a group identity, which means that you are a part of a certain social category (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 8). The individual identity consists of several group identities. Joseph (2004: 5) states that «The group identities we partake in nurture our individual sense of who we are but can also smother it. Individual identity is established in part by rank relative to others with the same group identity». In other words; the group identity and the individual identity are closely related. Joseph (2004: 4) argues that there is a distinct difference between an individual identity and a group identity; an individual identity is more on the 'pointing' or 'name level' and the group identities are so general that it does not constitute what one thinks.

Identities are fluid, which means that people can identify themselves with a person in one situation and not in another (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 73). Human beings have several identities, based on at least two factors; the universal factor and the consciousness of other selves. The universal factor means that all individuals have different roles (e.g. mother, husband, boss etc.), and these different roles change according to the context that we are in (Joseph 2004: 8). The other factor is the consciousness of other selves, which is a theory presented by Smuts. Smuts (1926: 254) thinks that the self is a social construction that is constructed on a language. Joseph explains Smuts' theory of the consciousness of other selves: «I cannot know what it is to be you from the inside. All I can do is to construct my own version of you, based on what I have observed of you, and of others…only your own version of you is the *real* you, and yet no one but you can know that version» (Joseph 2004: 8).

A lot of the research done on the relation between language and identity comes from the post-structuralist idea. The post-structuralist idea is that the social practice, for example language use, produce and reproduce the social world. The speaker's identity is constantly reconstructed and redefined through discourse, however, the speaker's identity does not exist outside of

discourse (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 72). Identity is the outcome, not the source, of linguistic practice (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588). A criticism of the post-structuralist theory of language is that the theory cannot explain the conflicts over the social meanings that could occur in a language. The word 'feminist' for example, can mean different things for people within the same speech community (Hornberger and McKay 2010: 349).

2.1.1 Speech community

Being a part of a speech community means that people are behaving the same way linguistically. Being a member of a speech community means that people are a part of the same group. A group in this particular setting, is two or more people who have something in common (e.g. ethnicity, religion, vocational etc.). The group that they are a part of could be temporary or quasi-permanent (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 62-63). The group can also be more than its members, meaning that the members can come and go, but the group itself remains. It is easy to stereotype members of a certain group, thinking that every member has a certain characteristic behavior. Stereotyping groups is a part of essentialism, which means that; «…people can be placed into fixed social categories and that all members we assign to a category share certain traits which we see as the essence of this category» (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 63).

There are certain challenges when doing research on a speech community; speech communities are often created for the sole purpose of doing research. It is therefore important to remember that every group consists of individuals with their own complex identity (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 64). Lyons (1970: 326) argues that a real speech community is «…all the people who use a given language (or dialect)». This definition explains what a speech community is. However, this definition has also deficiencies. Take the English language for example, which is a modern lingua franca and is spoken worldwide. This produces speech communities that are to some extent isolated from each other. It is therefore important to think about what other factors, besides the language, are shared within the speech community. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 64) states that: «Speakers do use linguistic characteristics to achieve group identity with, and group differentiation from, other speakers, but they use other characteristics as well: social, cultural, political, and ethnic…». They further argue that one should consider other criteria in addition to linguistic features to get a full comprehension of the speech community (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 64).

A common definition of a speech community in sociolinguistics is «…speakers in such a community share some kind of common feeling about linguistic behavior in that community, that is, they observe certain linguistic norms» (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 65). The norms people share in a speech community do not need to be of a linguistic nature. The speakers in a community share social norms in discourse (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 66). The social norms are important in a speech community because when the speakers talk with each other they «…behave as though they operate within a shared set of norms, local knowledge, beliefs, and values» (Morgan 2001: 31).

2.1.2 Community of Practice

When doing research on language and identity, Community of Practice is a useful term to be aware of. A Community of Practice (sometimes referred to as CofP) can be explained as a group of people that have certain things in common or behave in a certain way in different situations. Community of Practice is closely related to speech community; however, Community of Practice focus more on understanding the constraints on natural language variation (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 173). Since Community of Practice focuses more on the speakers' engagement in the social practices, it gets a greater framework for understanding linguistic features of the sociolinguistic variation (Meyerhoff 2004: 526). Examples of a Community of Practice can be a new workplace, a new organization or when you are becoming a part of a new family (through marriage, adoption etc.) (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 174). All of these groups involve learning. When joining a new community, you need to learn how to perform in a way that benefits the group's status. Community of Practice is closely related to group identity, you are influenced to behave in a certain way. Community of practice is defined by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998: 490) in this way: «…an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagements in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor». The Community of Practice can identify their group members by the different social practices, not just their language (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 69).

There are three crucial factors of Community of Practice: Mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement involves regular interaction. It is the regular interaction that makes the community of practice possible. Joint enterprise means a process; «…a shared goal or joint enterprise will have to be specified more fully in order for the notion

7

of the Community of Practice to be useful to a wider range of research programs in the social sciences» (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 175-176). The final crucial factor of Community of Practice is a shared repertoire. This means that over time, the community, should have a shared repertoire such as specialized terminology and linguistic routines. However, some members of a Community of Practice are so-called 'peripheral members', which means that they are not 'fully' committed to the community. This can be someone who does not interact with the community as often (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 174). The members of the community who do interact often are called 'core members'. Since the involvement in the community can differ between the members, the shared repertoire will therefore differ. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 176) have listed the most critical characteristics of a community of practice;

- Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- Mutually defining identities
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- A shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective in the world

The goal of analyzing the variation of the Community of Practice is to get a better understanding of the social aspect of the language. Meyerhoff (2004: 530) argue that we must avoid situations where we define speakers in a social category:

> If the so-called enterprise is specified at such a high level of abstraction we begin to (1) be divorced from the sensitive social goals of the CofP; (2) lose a good deal of the explanatory power of the CofP; and (3) be left with something very little different from established notions such as groups (in intergroup theory) or social strata in the speech community.

One can be a member of several different Communities of Practice. The role each member has in a Community of Practice will reflect somehow on their personal history and their goals (Meyerhoff 2004: 531).

2.2   Dialect

The defining factor in determining whether a variety is a language, or a dialect is, according to sociolinguists, a sociopolitical identity rather than linguistic similarities or differences. Power and solidarity are two concepts that are used to understand the relationship among language and dialects. The concept of power means that the person has more of something important, for example power, status and money, than others. The standard dialect in a language is the most powerful dialect. According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 32) the standard dialect often become the most powerful dialect based on non-linguistic factors. On the other hand, solidarity means that people can adopt a certain dialect to resist power or to be independent. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 32-33) argue that: «Part of having power is having the ability to impose your way of speaking on others as a, or the, prestigious dialect, that is, a standard language. The process through which a standard language arises is primarily a sociopolitical process rather than a linguistic one». According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 28-29) «'Dialect' is used for local varieties of English…, and for various types of informal, lower-class, or rural speech». Examples of local dialects of English are Boston English or Scouse English. People's dialects are often related to where they grew up, which is referred to as vernacular by linguists.

2.2.1   Standardization

Standardization is a process where a language has been *codified* in a certain way. When two or more people communicate with each other, the system that they use while communicating is called a code. Before standardization happens there needs to be somewhat a common approval to what should be in the language and what should not (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 33). As Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 34) put it: «The standard variety is also often regarded as the natural, proper, and fitting language of those who use – or should use – it. It is part of their heritage and identity, something to be protected, possibly even revered». There needs to be a common approval of what the language should look like, something to idealize (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 33). Agreeing on what should be the vernacular norm is difficult. It is difficult because it means to facilitate those who speak that variety. Another difficult aspect of selecting

what should be the vernacular norm is the possibility of creating a social hierarchy. Those who speak the selected variety would enhance their social position. In contrast, it would diminish all of the other varieties. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 35) argue:

> The standardization process itself performs a variety of functions. It unifies individuals and groups within a larger community while at the same time separating the community that results from other communities. Therefore, it can be employed to reflect and symbolize some kind of identity: regional, social, ethnic, or religious.

Whatever the consequences of the standardization process, it is an ongoing process for active languages. The standardization process attempts to delimit the diversity and variety of a language (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 36). However, variety and diversity are a natural part of a language and facilitates the languages to change.

The standard version of a language is often viewed as a goal for all speakers. The educated elite, or the upper-class, is often associated with speaking a standard version of their language, and others view them as educated because they speak the standard version (Lippi-Green 2012: 57). There are five factors that define what the Standard English variety is: It is usually used in print, normally taught in schools, learned by non-native speakers, spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts. The English language is constantly changing and developing, and so is the definition of what Standard English is (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 36-37).

The variety that eventually became the model for a standard variety of English, was the one used in and around the court in London. The Court was permanently removed from Winchester to London as a result of the Norman Conquest, after a long process that lasted until around the 17th century. This London variety became the dialect that the educated preferred and was later promoted as a 'model dialect' for the society. The London dialect was also the main dialect, although not the only variety, that was carried overseas to foreign countries. The Standard English today is similar in different varieties of the English language. The grammar and the vocabulary do not vary much among the different English varieties around the world (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 37).

The United States has always been looked at as a multicultural country filled with all kinds of ethnicities and cultures. The 'melting pot' is the symbol of people with different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and languages, melting together to become one united nation. Language was an important factor of the American national identity; it was important that immigrants and their children learned English. In return, the immigrants were promised that they would be met with acceptance into the American society and social mobility (Pavlenko 2002: 164). The American national identity was built on one's desire to commit oneself to the liberal political principles; democracy, liberty, equality and individual achievement. You could be a part of the American national identity despite your origin. However, this definition of American national identity was restricted by race. Up until 1870, the American national identity was restricted to 'free white persons'. The other racial groups in America; Asian immigrants, African Americans and Native Americans, were included in the middle of the twentieth century (Pavlenko 2002: 165).

In the 18th and 19th century there were some public outbursts regarding the maintenance of the immigrants' native language. Several of the immigrant groups had newspapers in their native tongue, and by the end of the 19th century, almost every extensive immigrant group had several different newspapers, both weeklies and dailies. Multilingualism were tolerated in the 18th and 19th century due to other, more important political issues, such as territorial expansion. Therefore, immigrants maintained their native languages for several generations (Pavlenko 2002: 168-169). The education system was positive and supportive of the linguistic diversity and the Spanish language even got its way into the public high schools and college curricula (Pavlenko 2002: 171). Up until the 1880s, the US were tolerating the maintenance of different colonial and immigrant languages, however, of only European origin (Pavlenko 2002: 174).

The years from 1880 to 1924 is referred to as the Great Migration because approximately 24 million immigrants came to the US during this time. The combination of being overwhelmed by all of the immigrants and World War 1, which created an anti-German hysteria, led to the rise of the Americanization, Anglicization, and Anglo-Saxonization. The Americans wanted English monolingualism to be a part of the American national identity. There were several reasons for the anti-immigrant movements: First, when the immigrants arrived there were newspapers, schools, churches, synagogues and so on, in their native language. However, the

'new' arrivals were looked at differently than the 'old' immigrants (Pavlenko 2002: 174). The second reason is that the old immigrants primarily came from Northern Europe (England, Scandinavia etc.) and they were considered to be relatively assimilable. They were therefore tolerated or ignored (Pavlenko 2002: 174-175). The new arrivals primarily came from Southern and Eastern Europe (Russia, Slovenia, Italy etc.), and their differences were more distinct when comparing them to the Anglo population. The third reason is that the new immigrants had different religious beliefs; most of them were either Jewish or Catholic. The fourth reason is that some of the new immigrants were involved in the socialist movement, and since they were able to vote, they were a potential threat to the political balance in the US (Pavlenko 2002: 175).

There were various organizations in the 1880s and 1890s that offered to help the new immigrants to learn English; this was a used to speed up the assimilation process. Nonetheless, it became clear that these efforts were of little use. Many of the new arrivals still did not speak English. It did not help that some of the immigrants were reluctant to learn English. The division between the mainstream American society and the different ethnicities got even greater when the new immigrants struggled to get jobs (Pavlenko 2002: 176). As a result of this division; «The new rhetoric hailed English proficiency as a key aspect of American national identity, without which true citizenship was impossible» (Pavlenko 2002: 178). The political leaders started to get more engaged in the American national identity, where the English language played a critical role. In every community where there was an immigrant community, the schools offered evening courses where the immigrants could learn English and civics (Pavlenko 2002: 180). Even though there was much focus on the English language, other languages were also socially accepted because those languages were looked at as «…valuable for the moral and intellectual development of American youth» (Pavlenko 2002: 181). Those languages were Spanish, French and Latin.

In spite of the American government's effort to minimalize the use of the immigrant's native tongue by taking out the languages from the curriculum in the schools, it did not do much. Only 20% of the children at the time, continued their education after finishing elementary school. Therefore, the people who were affected by the limited language instruction were mainly the privileged population (Pavlenko 2002: 182). Many immigrants appreciated the efforts from the American government to teach them English. The Americanization process continued and became more aggressive, the '100 percent Americanization campaign' was launched, demanding the immigrants to give up their culture and languages, both in public and in private.

This campaign upset most of the immigrants, even those who had been supporting the Americanization process earlier. Leaders of immigrant groups started to revolt against the campaign, using media; both American and ethnic press. Ultimately the social pressure from the immigrants gave results. The language choices people made was to be seen as a personal and/or a family matter (Pavlenko 2002: 191). Pavlenko (2002: 192) states «Rather than to encourage a creative blending of features in order to create a new nation, the 'melting pot' practices promoted a removal of features, most notably language, that differentiated new immigrants from their Anglo-Saxon hosts».

2.2.3 Ethnic dialect

This thesis focus on the ethnic dialect, or ethnolect African American Vernacular English. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 38) defines dialect in this way: «A dialect is a subordinate variety of a language». An ethnic dialect is therefore a dialect that is spoken by a particular ethnic group, for example Latin Americans, Asian Americans and African Americans. The ethnic dialect is created through social impacts. The development process of ethnic dialects has not been researched enough, and there is consequently little information about how and why they develop. Ethnic dialect is not something that comes automatically because of someone's ethnicity, they are learned and formed by exposure. Several of the speakers of an ethnic dialect might be monolingual, it is a way of speaking a majority language by a specific group (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 45). However, speakers of a certain ethnic dialect use it either consciously or subconsciously to 'fit in' with a particular group of people or to distinguish themselves from others (Benor 2010: 160). Similar to other dialects, ethnic dialects are not a monolithic entity, one can speak a certain ethnic dialect in several different ways (Benor 2010: 165).

Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 45) states that: «The connection between race/ethnicity/ nationality and linguistic variety is one that is entirely socially constructed, it is in no way linked to any inherent attributes of a particular group». This means that speakers do not necessarily have the same ethnicity as the majority of the group. Benor states that in Western societies the ethnic groups are fluid. People can change their ethnic identification through their life course (Benor 2010: 168-169). «Ethnic group membership is constructed not just on the basis of decent but also on the basis of symbolic practices, including language. In addition, an increasing number of Americans consider themselves part of two or more ethnic groups» (Benor 2010: 169). The boundaries of an ethnic group are fluid, and its members might be core-, marginal-,

or non-members. It is important to take this into consideration while doing research (Benor 2010: 170).

Benor (2010: 160) defines ethnolinguistic repertoire as: «…a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities». We use linguistic variation to align ourselves with a certain type of people, which happens either consciously or subconsciously. There are several challenges with using an ethnolect approach in research. One challenge is that there is such a broad variety within an ethnic group; some 'members' might use few to no elements of the ethnic dialect, while other members can use several or all. This variation within a group is called intra-group variation (Benor 2010: 160-162).

Another challenge is that the speakers of an ethnic dialect might be aware that they speak differently than others. Speakers may therefore adjust their use of the distinctive features while speaking to people that are not members of their 'group' (Benor 2010: 166). This is called code-switching, style-switching or bidialectal use (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 73, Benor 2010: 166). Code-switching has, according to Ennaji (2005: 142-143), seven functions; referential, directive, phatic, metalinguistic, expressive, solidarity and clarification function. Referential function is used to 'bridge a communicational gap'. Directive function is to exclude or include certain participants in the conversation. Phatic function is used to change the tone of the conversation. Metalinguistic function is used to impress audience with multilingual skills. When using code-switching for expressing a multilingual identity, it is called the expressive function. Code-switching could also be used to express solidarity to a certain group. The clarification function is used to clarify (Schipor 2018: 37-38).

A speaker of an ethnic dialect may also change the way they speak over their life course. The reason for this could be change in social class, religion, gender, sexual orientation and so on. The drastic change of the way one speaks may be referred to as an intra-speaker problem. The final challenge, to be addressed, is the non-member's use of a group's ethnic dialect. Non-group members may use elements of an ethnic dialect for impression or parodies, and some politicians may use it to 'bond' with members of that particular group (Benor 2010: 168).

Latin American English

People from Spanish descent are by far the largest immigrant group in the USA. The Hispanic population increased by over 50% in the 1900s, and the Hispanic population has continued to grow. It is said that the Hispanic population has grown almost four times as fast as the overall population in the USA (Wolfram et al. 2004: 339). Latin American English, or Chicano English, is spoken mostly by Latin Americans or people from a Spanish-speaking country. Chicano English is often used to address the ethnic dialect spoken by people of Spanish descent; however, Latin American English include other varieties such as Puerto Rican communities and Latin Americans of varied backgrounds (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 50). According to Hornberger and McKay (2010: 408), Latin American English emerged from contact between English and Spanish language varieties. It is considered as an ethnic dialect in the English language because it is learned as a native language. Speakers of Latin American English often live in communities in which Spanish is frequently spoken. The speakers of Latin American English do not necessarily need to speak Spanish themselves (Bayley and Bonnici 2009: 1350). Hornberger and McKay (2010: 408) states that: «The use of Latino English varieties also becomes important in the construction of ethnic identity for both bilingual and monolingual English-speaking Latinos».

Even though most of the speakers of Latin American English is of Spanish descent, the English that they speak is not English with a Spanish accent or grammatical transfer (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 45). Some features that are found in Latin American English are multiple negation, regularization of irregular past tense verbs, absence of past tense marking, vowel reduction, and monophthongization. There are also some features from African American Vernacular English that are used in Latin American English, such as habitual be and zero copula (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 50-51).

Asian American English

People from Asia immigrated to the USA in two big waves; the first was during the gold rush in California in the mid-1800s, and the second wave came during the Vietnam war in 1975. Asian Americans consists of groups that stems from East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia (Hornberger and McKay 2010: 410). Asian Americans are a complex group, because there is no singular culture, religion or history (Han and Hsu 2004: 6). Asian Americans are as diverse as America. Han and Hsu (2004: 6) states that «…the distinction 'Asian American' often serves

as a conveniently powerful mechanism to propagate stereotypes about these different people and cultures». Similar to Native Americans, Asian Americans do not have a single heritage shared among them, and they do not have a distinct ethnic dialect in English. Even though Asian Americans do not have a distinct ethnic dialect, Hornberger and McKay (2010: 410-411) argues that some Asian Americans tend to create ethnic identities using different varieties of English, such as African American Vernacular English. Asian Americans do not pass as fluent speakers of African American Vernacular English; they mainly use some features of it. According to Reyes (2005: 511), Asian Americans do so to participate in an urban youth style.

2.3 African American Vernacular English

African American Vernacular English, or AAVE, is an ethnic dialect that is spoken mainly by African Americans. AAVE goes under several names, and some of them are: Vernacular Black English, Black English, African American English, Ebonics (Magnusson 2008: 1). This thesis will refer to African American Vernacular English, as AAVE. Research suggests that the AAVE is used the most by the youth in the working-classes (Reyes 2010: 404). It is difficult to get an exact number of speakers when it comes to AAVE, because of intra-group variation. This means that some speakers of AAVE might use few features of AAVE, other members might use several or all of the features (Benor 2010: 160-162; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 14).

AAVE has linguistic features that include morphological, phonological and syntactic characteristics. Some of the core features of AAVE are: *Consonant cluster reduction*, which means that the final consonant of a word is not pronounced (test = tes); *the verbal –s marking*, where the suffix –s is present or absent on finite words (She likes school = she like school); *the zero copula* (He is nice = He nice); and finally, *the habitual be*, which means that the copula is not conjugated but is used in the same form (We are boys = We be boys) (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 47-48).

2.3.1 Historical background

The history of AAVE started when the slaves were brought to the US in the 17th century (Magnusson 2008: 2). The African slaves were looked upon as savages and animals, and it was therefore unheard of that they were able to have their own languages. The slave masters thought the African languages sounded like 'monkey talk' or 'savage gibberish'. The slave masters were also afraid that the African slaves would organize a rebellion, because the African slaves could communicate among each other without the slave masters understanding what they said.

Divisive tactics were therefore used to prevent the slaves from communicating in 'uncontrolled forms'. The divisive tactics that were used were mixing slaves from different regions in Africa so that they did not have the same linguistic or cultural background, which made it more difficult for the slaves to communicate. They also forbade the slaves to speak their native language and made it illegal for slaves to learn how write and read the English language, and they also separated the children from their parents (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 77). What the slave masters did accept, however, was singing. The slaves started to sing songs as a way to communicate (Hall and Damico 2007: 80).

There are two main opposing theories in the debate of the origin of AAVE; the dialectologist and the creolist hypothesis. The dialectologist theory argues that AAVE has originated from British English. The dialectologists think that since British English was not the slave's native language, they spoke it with a different pronunciation and with different grammatical features. The slaves' version of British English later became an ethnic dialect. The dialectologist theory is the first official theory of the origin of AAVE (Wolfram and Thomas 2002: 478). The dialectologist theory is similar to the Anglicist hypothesis of origin: The Anglicist hypothesis of origin argues that AAVE has no characteristics that cannot be found in other varieties of English (McDavid 1965: 258). This theory states that AAVE is 'just' another American English dialect.

The creolist theory is, however, based on the belief that AAVE originated from a plantation creole that was decreolized after the slavery ended, which has resulted in the modern-day AAVE. However, some linguists think that a language shift is the reason why AAVE emerged. The African slaves spoke their native language as well as learning English. This resulted in the use of features from their native language mixed with English (Wolfram and Thomas 2002: 478-479). This theory is similar to the neo-Anglicist hypothesis which states that African Americans have maintained some features from their native languages (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 49).

2.3.2 American pop culture

AAVE has for decades been misrepresented in a negative manner in the media through racist stereotyping (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 88). In 1926 for example, the 'Black voice' was used to mock the African Americans migration to the US (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 83). African Americans were also mocked on television, with the use of 'Black face'. The language used by Black face expressed poor education, for example by saying '*now ain't that sumpin*'. Coleman

and Daniel (2000: 84) states that:

> It should be made clear that entertainment media's early symbolic racism would set the stage, with some lasting permanence, for an 'anti-black effect' that would dominate all forms of media and the treatment of African Americans and Black issues. Even contemporary television series such as 'The Fresh Prince of Bel Air' …continued to bastardize the Black voice.

Hall and Damico (2007: 80) states: «Through television, radio, and the Internet, the African American cultural experience is revealed not only to other African Americans, but it is also communicated to a diverse global world». A study done by Ueland (2018: 16), shows the clear use of the African American culture in media for entertainment purposes. The study, which analyzed characters form the TV-series *Orange is the New Black*, showed that AAVE features are not just 'reserved' for African Americans, but is also used by white characters. The study also indicated that the use of AAVE-features were exaggerated (Ueland 2018: 12-16). AAVE is looked upon as 'wrong', 'ignorant' and 'improper' by Americans (Reyes 2010: 405-406). It is becoming more normal for non-African Americans to use certain features of AAVE in their speech to gain local social prestige, however, they do not suffer the daily discrimination that African Americans do because they speak 'improper' (Reyes 2005: 510).

According to Cutler (1999: 439), the black culture has provided European Americans with inspiration of language, fashion and music. AAVE has contributed greatly to the American slang over the past decades (e.g. hip, gig) (Reyes 2005: 509). The use of AAVE in music is believed to especially influence the youth (Gazi 2017: 1). Hall and Damico (2007: 80) states that African Americans use the same creativity today through contemporary media platforms that they used when the African slaves communicated through songs. AAVE is famously known for being a source of inspiration when it comes to music.

Language is constantly developing. Change in the language could happen for several reasons; Language changes through time and space when speakers distance themselves from one another, this process is the creation of dialects of the languages (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 142). Another kind of language change is called externally motivated. This means that the change happens through language contact (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 197). The externally motivated language changes consist of a constant mixing of other languages, shifting, and borrowing words from for example music (Pennycook 2010: 72-73). Pennycook (2010) writes about the Malaysian music group 'Too Phat', who use African American features in their music, such as '*Hip Hop be connectin'* (Pennycook 2010: 42-43). That quote is from Too Phat's music,

where they have used habitual be and also consonant cluster reduction, which are some of the core features of AAVE (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 47-48). Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 75) argue that: «The mixed codes of the street, and the hypermixes of hip hop, pose a threat to the linguistic, cultural and political stability urged by national language policies and wished into place by frameworks of linguistic analysis that posit separate and enumerable languages».

Through the recent decades the Internet has made its entry in the contemporary society. Social media have become immensely popular in recent years, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. An important part of the social media is writing; therefore, the Internet is flourishing with diversity in textual styles (Eisenstein 2014: 1). According to Hall and Damico (2007: 80) African Americans bring their creativity, culture and historical experience when they use social media. The African American culture and history is therefore revealed to not only African Americans, but it is communicated to people throughout the world. African American culture has become mainstream through the exposure it has gotten in social media (Hall and Damico 2007: 86). Hall and Damico (2007: 87) argue that the use of social media and creating digital texts have provided opportunities to the African American youth to seek, speak, listen and translate the values of their historical culture. Illbury (2019: 2) has discovered through his research on Twitter that users of all linguistic levels use features of AAVE in their tweets. Illbury's study was conducted on white gay men, however, his study showed that several words of AAVE origin have made an impact on the gay community regardless of race. AAVE terms are especially popular through 'internet memes', which are videos, pictures or GIFs with a pictorial representation of a cultural artefact (Illbury 2019: 14).

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how AAVE is viewed today in terms of identity, if people deliberately make language choices to identify themselves with AAVE, and what role AAVE plays in the American pop culture and in what way AAVE extends to other ethnic groups.

3 Methodology

The research questions that will be addressed in this research study are:

1. How are Americans' speaking habits influenced by their ethnicity?
2. What are Americans' perception of African American Vernacular English, and how is this related to their general opinion about the American identity?
3. How do Americans react to the more frequent use of African American Vernacular English in today's society?

In order to address these questions, this thesis makes use of a quantitative methodology. According to Dörnyei (2007: 24), quantitative research method «…involves data collection procedures that result primarily in numerical data which is then analysed primarily by statistical methods». This study is based on the results from an online survey conducted in the USA, consisting of a total of 36 questions. Each question contained a statement that was rated by the participants from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). A total of 173 participants took part in the survey, which took place from October 1st to December 1st in 2019.

3.1 Methodological approach

A quantitative research method primarily consists of numerical data which are analyzed by statistical means. In contrast, a qualitative research method consists of open-ended, or non-numerical data which are analyzed by a non-statistical method (Dörnyei 2007: 24). Dörnyei (2007: 27) explains:

> Most data collected in the social sciences, regardless of whether it is QUAL or QUAN, is related to people-what they do, what they are like, what they think or believe in, what they plan to do, etc. Because people differ from each other in the way they perceive, interpret, and remember things, their accounts will show considerable variation across individuals. The problem is that no matter how well-funded our research is, we can never examine all the people whose answers would be relevant to our research question, and therefore we have to face the fact that the final picture unfolding in our research will always be a function of whom we have selected to obtain our data from.

According to Dörnyei (2007: 32), the most important feature in quantitative research method is the use of numbers. This opens up for different possibilities, but it also sets some limitations;

20

numbers are meaningless without the contextual background, and without specifying what category to use the specific numbers in. In quantitative research, the researchers are more interested in the variables rather than the cases, the common features of a certain group, is more important than the individual cases (Dörnyei 2007: 33).

Dörnyei argues that the strengths of quantitative research method are; «…the quantitative inquiry is systematic, rigorous, focused, and tightly controlled, involving precise measurement and producing reliable and replicable data that is generalizable to other contexts» (Dörnyei 2007: 34). The downsides of quantitative research method are that the responses are being generalized which means that the subjective variety of the individual is not justified. Another downside with quantitative research method is that the research method does not cover the reasoning behind the particular answers or observations (Dörnyei 2007: 35).

3.2   Data collection

According to McCombes (2019) there are two different ways of collecting data; probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling means that you collect your data randomly and that everyone in the group you are researching have a chance to get selected. Non-probability sampling means that the selection of participants is based on convenience, meaning that the participants are selected based on non-random criteria. The sampling method used in this thesis is non-probability sampling, because it was considered the best way to access participants within the timeframe of the present thesis. Ease of access is an important aspect of non-probability sampling, and this is also the main reason why it is so commonly used in research. However, there are also disadvantages of the non-probability sampling methods. For instance, there is a high degree of uncertainty if the data collection is representative for the population when it comes to convenience sampling, it is therefore difficult to conclude with generalizable results. Voluntary response sampling is also not completely representative because some people are more likely to volunteer than others (McCombes 2019).

Two methods within non-probability sampling were used to collect the data for this thesis; convenience sampling and voluntary response sampling. Convenience sampling means getting participants that are the most accessible to the researcher. In this case, the researcher used social media platforms to reach US citizens. The potential participants were contacted with a direct message by the present author on the platforms Facebook and Instagram. The survey was not

shared publicly to avoid participation from people of other nationalities. The participants selected by the convenience sampling were selected by the present author.

With regard to the second method that was used to gather data for this thesis, McCombes (2019) explains that a «…voluntary response sample is mainly based on ease of access. Instead of the researcher choosing participants and directly contacting them, people volunteer themselves». For the present thesis, this sampling method was used through the online survey site www.surveymonkey.com. SurveyMonkey offers researchers to 'buy' responses, which means that people who are signed up to SurveyMonkey may choose to take your survey in return for a small payment. The researcher may choose which criteria must be followed before the members of SurveyMonkey take the survey. In this case, the only criterion was that the participants had to be US citizens. The reason why voluntary response sampling was used in addition to the convenience sampling was that it turned out to be difficult to get enough people to participate by just using convenience sampling.

3.2.1 Conduction of survey

The two surveys are identical, and the only difference is how the participants were recruited. Both of the surveys were conducted through SurveyMonkey. The two surveys were conducted separately; however, the results were later conflated and analyzed together. The survey conducted through convenience sampling was active from 1st of October to 1st of December in 2019. The length of the active period was chosen in order to get as many participants as possible to participate in the survey. There was a total of 41 participants that were recruited from convenience sampling.

The voluntary response survey had a different timeline and was only active from November 1st to November 7th in 2019. The reason why the voluntary response survey was only active for a week was because the survey automatically switched to offline when the right number of participants had conducted the survey. The right number of participants refers to how many responses that were bought, in this case 100 responses. However, SurveyMonkey allowed more participants to conduct the survey because there were several participants that had started the survey but did not complete it. In total there were 132 participants that conducted the voluntary response survey.

SurveyMonkey was used to design and conduct the survey online, which meant that the participants were able to conduct the survey from their phone, computer or through mail. The survey was 100% anonymous, and the participants could choose to skip questions that they felt were uncomfortable answering. The participants could spend as much time as they pleased to finish the survey. However, SurveyMonkey measured that the average time the participants spent on the survey was around 5 minutes. There was a total of 173 participants, including participants who skipped one or more questions.

3.2.2   The questionnaire

The survey consisted of 6 questions regarding personal information, 25 statements, and 5 open-ended questions for the participants to further explain their opinion. The participants were asked to rate statements from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree).

Questions 1-6 on the survey pertain to personal information about the participants, such as gender, age, ethnicity and state.

- **Question 1.** Gender: ___Female   ___Male
- **Question 2.** Age: _____
- **Question 3.** Ethnicity (*You can tick off multiple boxes*): European American (Caucasian), African American, Latin American, Native American and other (open-ended so they could specify)
- **Question 4.** State: _____
- **Question 5.** Your profession: _____
- **Question 6.** Parents'/guardians' profession(s): _____

Questions 7-17 are non-personal questions regarding the participants' perception on the way they speak, their identity regarding the way they speak and the connection to their ethnical group.

- **Question 7.** I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group.
  - o **Question 8.** If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), please give examples here:
- **Question 9.** I speak differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities.

23

- **Question 10.** I talk differently with my friends than I do with my parents/guardians.
- **Question 11.** I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English.
- **Question 12.** The way I speak is a part of my identity.
- **Question 13.** I speak differently than my ethnical group.
- **Question 14.** There is prejudice against the way I speak.
- **Question 15.** I am embarrassed of the way I speak.
- **Question 16.** Someone has corrected me while I spoke a certain way.
  - **Question 17.** If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why did they correct you?

Questions 18-28 are non-personal questions regarding the participants' perception of African American Vernacular English.

- **Question 18.** I use curse words.
  - **Question 19.** If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), please say why, and who do you curse in front of?
- **Question 20.** There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English.
- **Question 21.** I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English.
- **Question 22.** It is common to speak African American Vernacular English.
- **Question 23.** It is common for different ethnic groups to speak African American Vernacular English.
- **Question 24.** African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted.
- **Question 25.** General American English is the proper way to speak.
  - **Question 26.** If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why do you think so?
- **Question 27.** Every American should speak in the same way.
- **Question 28.** I speak African American English.

Questions 29-36 are non-personal questions about the participants' perception on how African American Vernacular English is used in pop culture.

- **Question 29**. I use African American slang because everyone else is using it.
  - **Question 30**. If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement

above), please give examples of the words you use here.

- **Question 31**. I listen to rap music.

- **Question 32**. I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music.

- **Question 33**. I relate to the language used in the music I listen to.

- **Question 34**. It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media.

- **Question 35**. It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English.

- **Question 36**. I think American pop culture consists of a variety of different cultures.

3.3 Analyzing the data

Due to the framework of the thesis the focus was more on the general social factors instead of the social class factors. The personal questions about profession and parents' profession were therefore omitted from the analysis.

The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and organized and analyzed according to four social factors: Gender, age, ethnicity, and geography. The percentages used are rounded up or down to give whole numbers instead of numbers with decimals. The deviations from numbers with decimals to whole numbers are of little importance. In terms of gender, the participants could choose between 'male', 'female' and 'other'. No participants selected the option 'other', so in the following analysis only 'male' and 'female' are included.
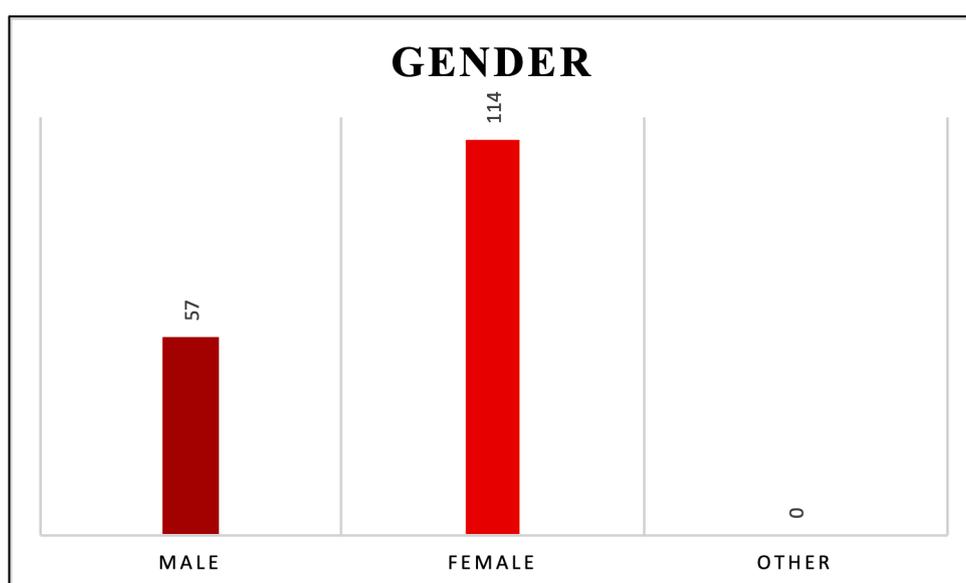
Figure 1 Participants: Gender distribution

Figure 1 shows that there was a clear difference between the different genders. There are twice as many female participants as male participants. The genders are therefore not accurately compatible with each other.

The second factor considered was age. In the questionnaire, the age groups that the participants could select were: '5-17-year-olds', '18-29-year-olds', '30-54-year-olds' and '55+ year-olds'.
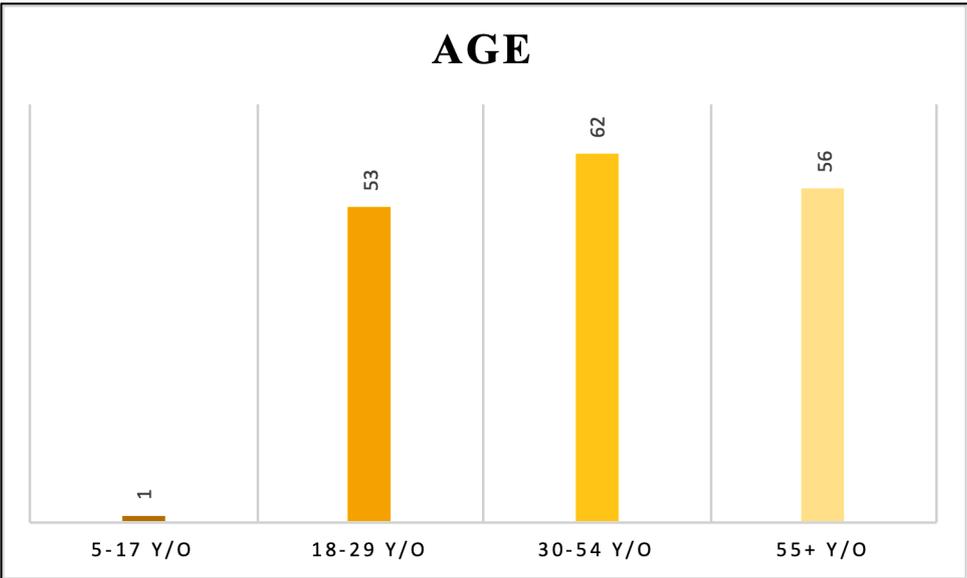
Figure 2 Participants: Age distribution

There was not an extensive difference in the participant number between the different age groups, except for the age group '5-17-year-olds' (Figure 2). The age group '5-17-year-olds' were omitted from the analyze because of the low number of participants. The results from the other age groups were comparable.

The third factor considered was ethnicity. In the questionnaire the participants could select the following options when stating their ethnicity: 'European American', 'African American', 'Asian American', 'Latin American', 'Native American', and 'other'. The participants could select multiple ethnicities if they were biracial. If the participants selected 'other', they were asked to specify their ethnicity.

ETHNICITY
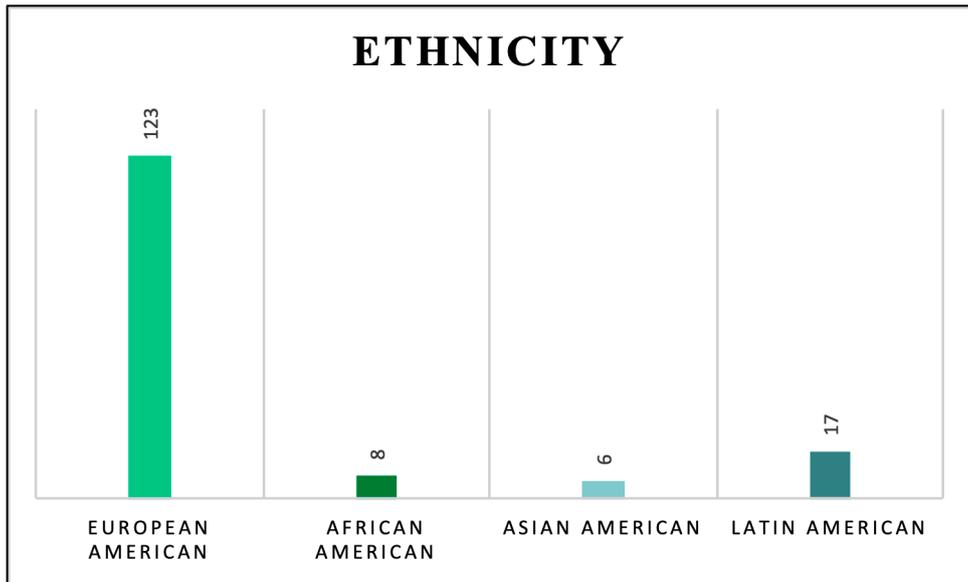
Figure 3 Participants: Ethnic distribution

The number of participants within each ethnic group varied immensely. Figure 3 shows that 123 participants were 'European American', compared to 8 participants who were 'African American', 6 participants were 'Asian American', and 17 participants were 'Latin American'. The findings from the different ethnic groups are not accurately compatible. 19 participants were not included in the ethnic distribution. This was because they did not specify their ethnicity, or that their ethnic group had less than 6 participants, which would have been insignificant for this research.
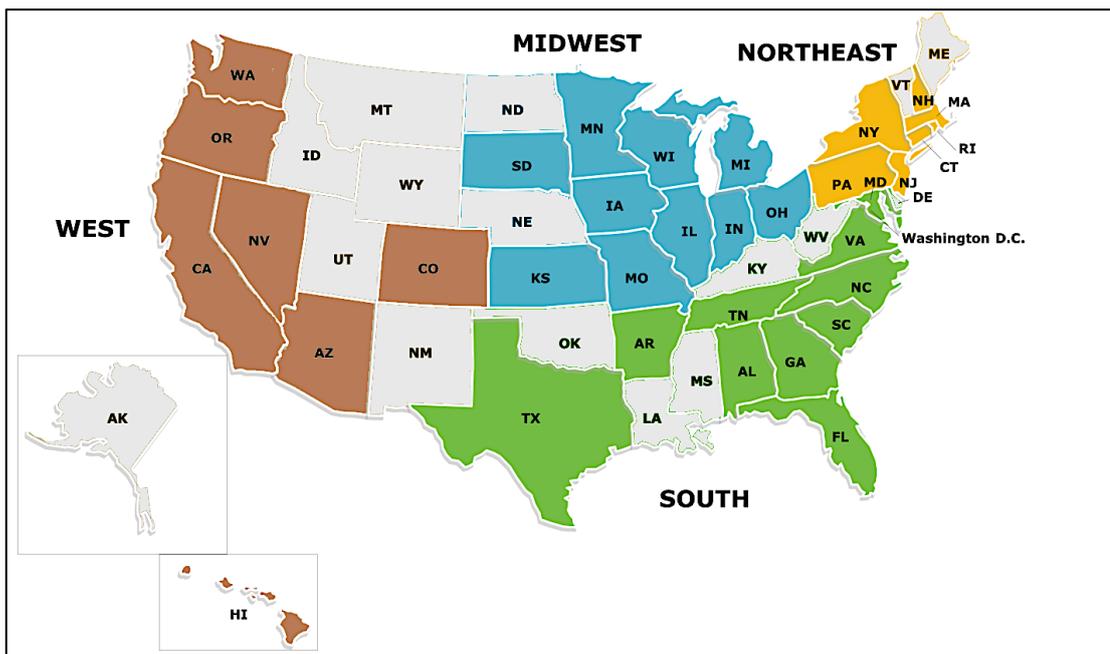
Figure 4 Participants: Geographical area and state distribution

The last factor analyzed was geographical areas. In terms of geography, the USA was divided into four different geographical areas; the Midwest, the North-East, the South and the West. Figure 4 shows which states in the different geographical areas the participants were from. The Midwest has the blue color-code, and the states included here were Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. There was a total of 31 participants from the Midwest. The North-East has the yellow color-code, and the states included in this area were Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York and Pennsylvania. There were 46 participants from the North-East. The South has the green color-code, and the states included here were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. There were 50 participants from the South. The West has the brown color-code, and the states included were Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. There were 35 participants from the West. Some states are omitted from the list above, as there were no participants from those states. 8 participants were not included in the geographical areas because they did not specify their whereabouts, however they were included in the rest of the survey.

3.4   Reservations

When collecting data for a survey, there are several error sources. One of the most obvious error source is the participant reliability. One cannot know if the participant is being honest and expressing his/her meaning, or if the participant is just answering something in order to complete. The participants might also specify the wrong gender, age, etc. This is something that needs to be considered when analyzing the results. It might be difficult to get an equivalent distribution of the different social factors, because of the voluntary nature of the study; the result in this case is therefore that some groups are underrepresented in comparison to others. To be able to present somewhat comparable results all graphs in the analysis are based on percentages rather than actual numbers.

It is argued above that the best way to test or confirm the three research questions is through a quantitative research (see Chapter 3.1). As Streefkerk argues: «This type of research can be used to establish generalizable facts about a topic» (Streefkerk 2020). It is, however, difficult to generalize the result of this survey since the survey consists of a low number of participants compared to the millions of people who live in America. In this research study there were 173

participants. According to Worldometer[2], the American population were approximately 330 420 000 in early March 2020. Nevertheless, because of the diverse demographic of the participants, the survey is thought to give an indication towards a more generalizable result.

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[2] https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/ Accessed 12 March 2020

4   Presentation of findings

The survey consisted of 25 statements of a non-personal nature (starting from Question 7), and 5 open-ended questions for the participants to further explain their opinion. The participants were asked to rate the statements from 1 (disagree) - 5 (agree). The open-ended questions were only available for participants who answered 4 or 5 on the previous statement. For instance, if the participant answered 4 or 5 on the statement in Question 25 - «*General American English is the proper way to speak*» -, they got a follow-up question; Question 26: «*Why do you think so?*» where the participant got a chance to explain their opinion. Participants who answered Question 25 by rating the statement from 1-3, were taken directly to Question 27.

In addition, the first six questions in the survey asked for personal information about the participant, concerning gender, age, ethnicity and state. The participants had the option to choose either '*female*', '*male*' or '*other*' while selecting gender. No participants selected the option '*other*', and therefore this is not included in the analysis. The participants could choose between four age group categories; '*5-17-year-olds*', '*18-29-year-olds*', '*30-54-year-olds*' and '*55+ year-olds*'. Only one participant selected the age group 5-17-year-olds, it was therefore not included in the age distribution. The participants could choose between six different options regarding their ethnicity: 'European American', 'African American', 'Asian American', 'Latin American', 'Native American', and 'other'. The participants could select multiple options if they were biracial. If the participants selected 'other', they were asked to specify their ethnicity. Some ethnicities were not analyzed due to few participants, this includes Native Americans among other biracial ethnicities. The participants also had to write what state they currently lived in. The geographical areas were divided into '*the Midwest*', '*the North-East*', '*the South*', and '*the West*'. 8 participants answered that they lived abroad or did not specify which state they lived in, hence were these omitted from the geographical areas.

The questions analyzed were the questions in the survey that were relevant for the research questions in this thesis. The survey was made to capture a wide range of areas that could be further explored, for example how language is affected by pop culture and if people code-switch when talking to people of other ethnicities. Considering the framework of the thesis, which is a maximum of 80 pages, several questions were therefore omitted from the thesis as they did not add anything to the overall analysis in relation to the research questions.

In the following presentation of findings, the questions or statements are organized into three main categories: Language use and ethnicity; AAVE versus General American English; and AAVE in pop culture. These are the questions that were analyzed:

Language use and ethnicity

- Question 7: I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group.
- Question 10: I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities.
- Question 11: I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English.
- Question 12: The way I speak is a part of my identity.
- Question 13: I speak differently than my ethnical group.

AAVE versus General American English

- Question 20: There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English.
- Question 21: I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English
- Question 24: African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted.
- Question 25: General American English is the proper way to speak.
  - Question 26: If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why do you think so?

AAVE in pop culture

- Question 32: I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music.
- Question 34: It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media.
- Question 35: It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English.

Each question is analyzed in terms of overall figures, and where applicable also with regard to gender, age, ethnicity and geography. A short summary of the main findings follows each sub-section.

4.1 Language use and ethnicity

4.1.1 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group»
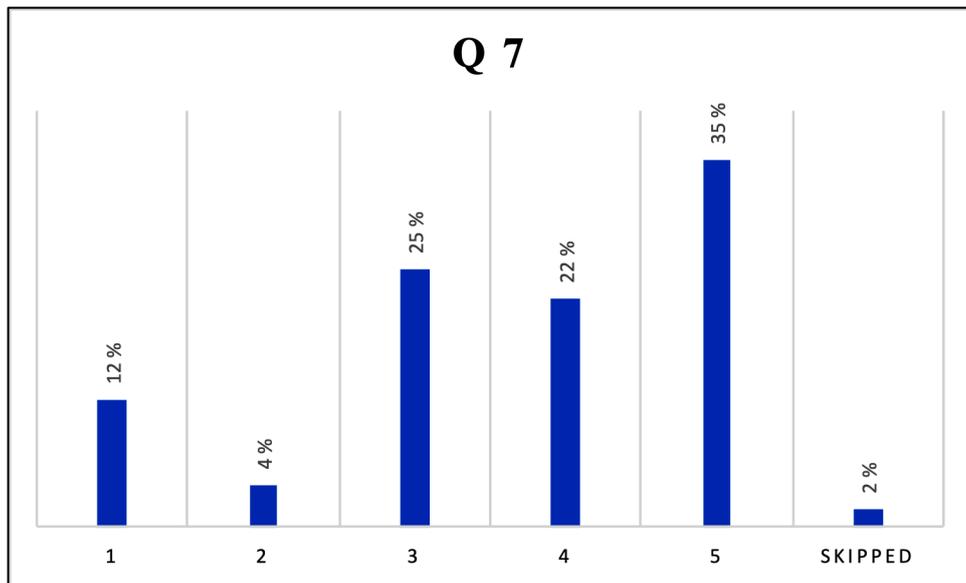
Figure 5 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group» - overall distribution

Question 7 was the first question pertaining to non-personal information. As shown in Figure 5, 35% of the participants completely agreed with the statement, and 22% agreed to some extent. There were 12% who disagreed completely and 4% who disagreed to some extent. The distribution of ethnicity conform to the overall result, and was therefore not included.

Gender
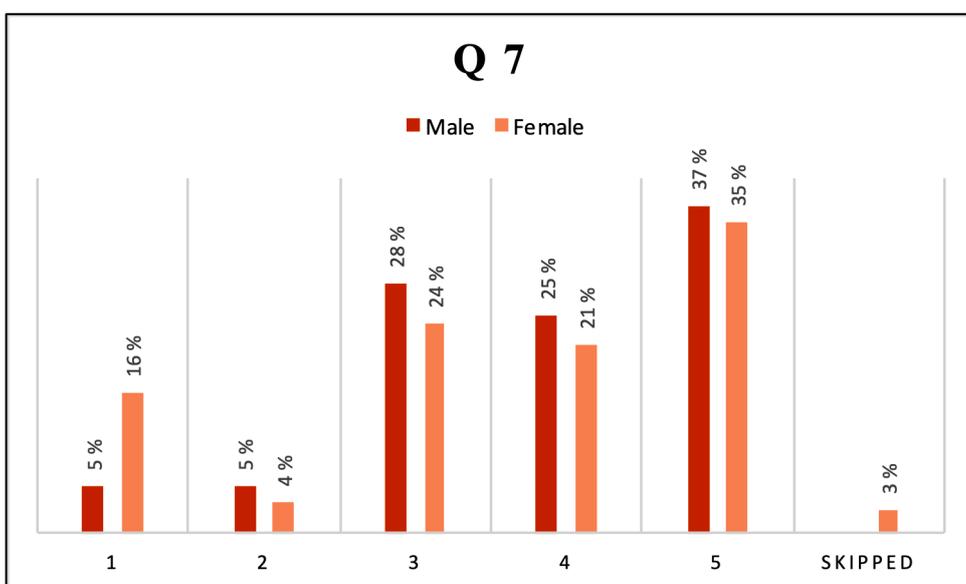
Figure 6 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group» - gender distribution

32

When divided into genders, Figure 6 shows a discrepancy between those who completely disagree with the statement: 16% of the females answered that they completely disagreed, while only 5% of the males answered the same (Figure 6).

Age
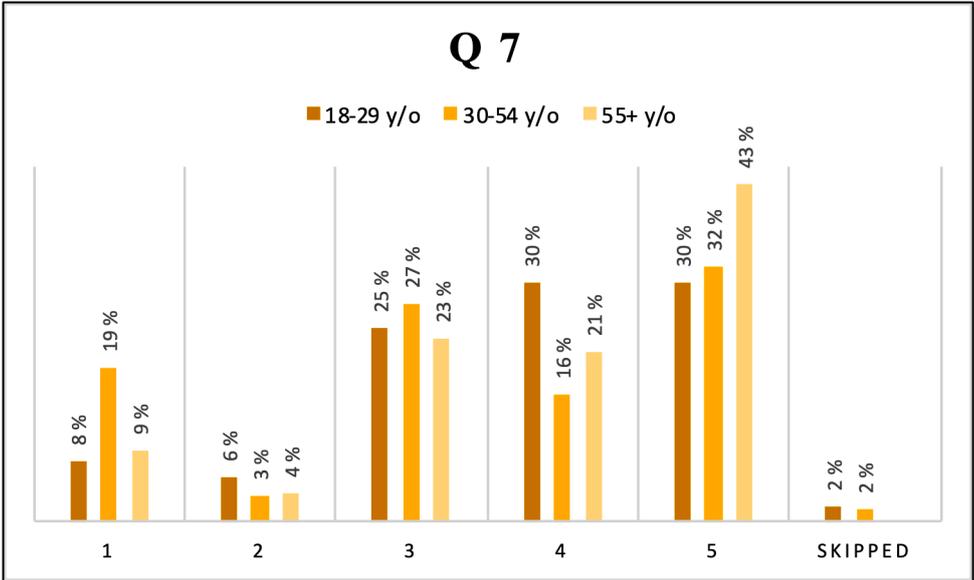
Figure 7 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group» - age distribution

30-54-year-olds shows an overall much higher percentage of disagreement with the statement compared to the other age groups (Figure 7). 55+ year-olds agreed the most and disagreed the least with the statement.

Q 7

■ The Midwest   **■** The North-East   **■** The South   **■** The West
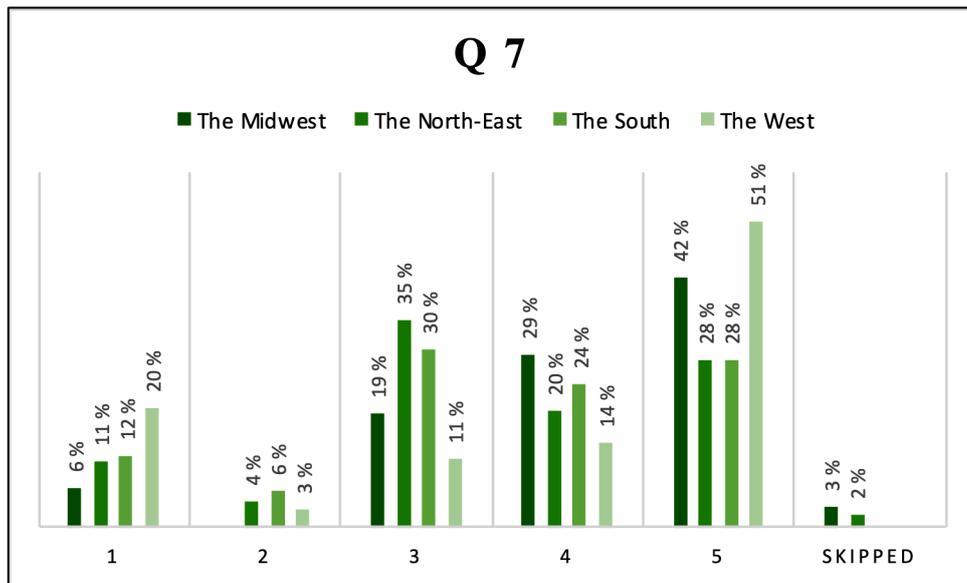
Figure 8 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group» – geographical distribution

Geographically, the West (Figure 8), was the area that stood out the most; it had the highest percentage of participants that disagreed with the statement 20%, compared to the Midwest (6%), the North-East (11%), and the South (12%). The West also had the highest percentage of participants that agreed with the statement with 51%, compared to the Midwest (42%), the North-East (28%), and the South (28%).

Q 7

■ Male   **■** Female
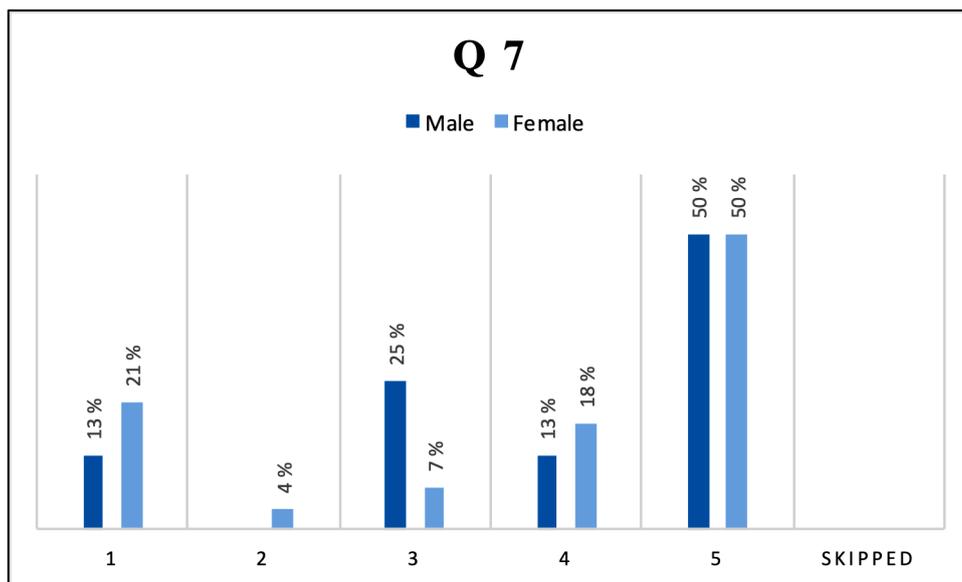
*Figure 9 «I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group» – The West: Gender distribution*

As Figure 9 shows, there were no difference between the genders on who agreed with the statement; both are attested with 50%. However, there was a slight difference between the genders when it came to how many of the participants disagreed with the statement; 13% of the males and 21% of the women. Male and female participants were not directly comparable, as women outnumbered men almost 4:1 in the West (8 male participants and 28 female participants); nonetheless, the figure conformed to the gender distribution results for this question; women agreed less with this statement than men (Figure 6).

4.1.2 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities»
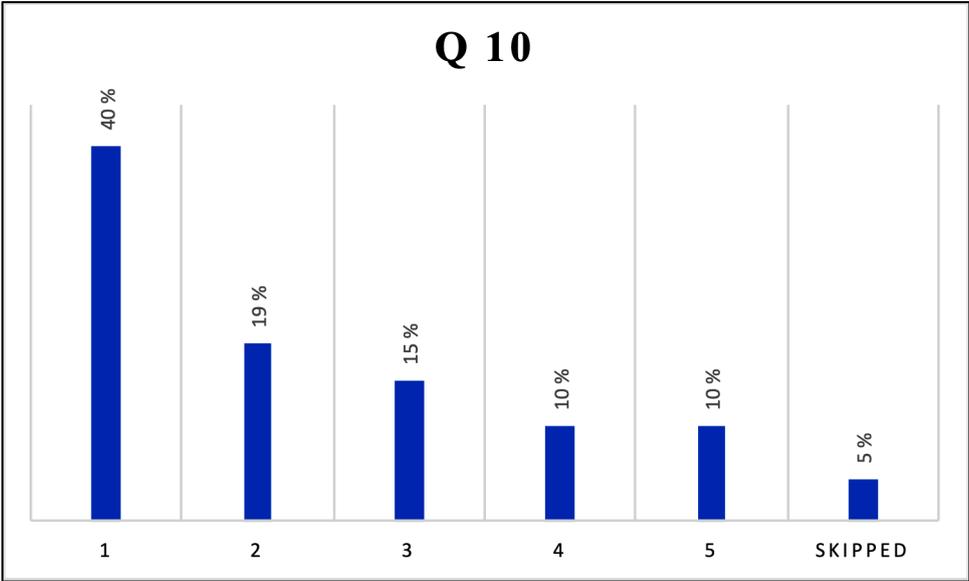
Figure 10 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities» - overall distribution

The participants rated the statement «*I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities*». As Figure 10 shows, 40% of the participants disagreed with the statement, and 19% disagreed to some extent. 10% of the participants agreed completely with the statement, and 10% agreed to some extent.

Gender

Q 10

■ Male ■ Female

	1	2	3	4	5	SKIPPED
Male	37 %	19 %	23 %	9 %	11 %	2 %
Female	49 %	21 %	14 %	10 %	2 %	6 %
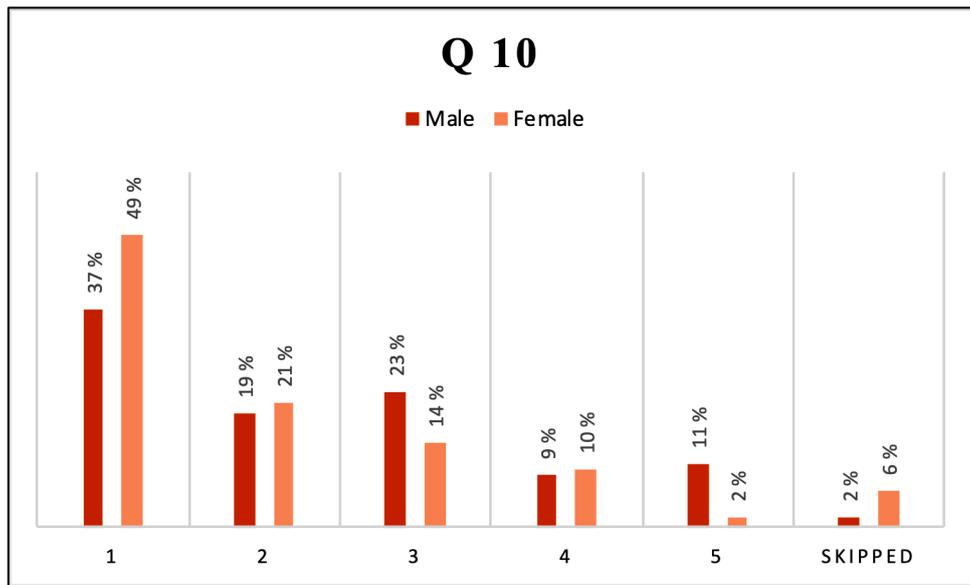
Figure 11 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities» – gender distribution

According to Figure 11, 49% of the female participants disagreed, and 21% answered that they disagreed to some extent with the statement on Question 10. In comparison, 37% of the male participants disagreed with the statement, and 19% disagreed with the statement to some extent. However, 11% of the male participants answered that they agreed, compared to the female participants where only 2% agreed with the statement.

Age

Q 10

■ 18-29 y/o ■ 30-54 y/o ■ 55+ y/o

	1	2	3	4	5	SKIPPED
18-29 y/o	34 %	17 %	26 %	17 %	2 %	4 %
30-54 y/o	40 %	27 %	18 %	5 %	6 %	3 %
55+ y/o	61 %	14 %	7 %	7 %	5 %	5 %
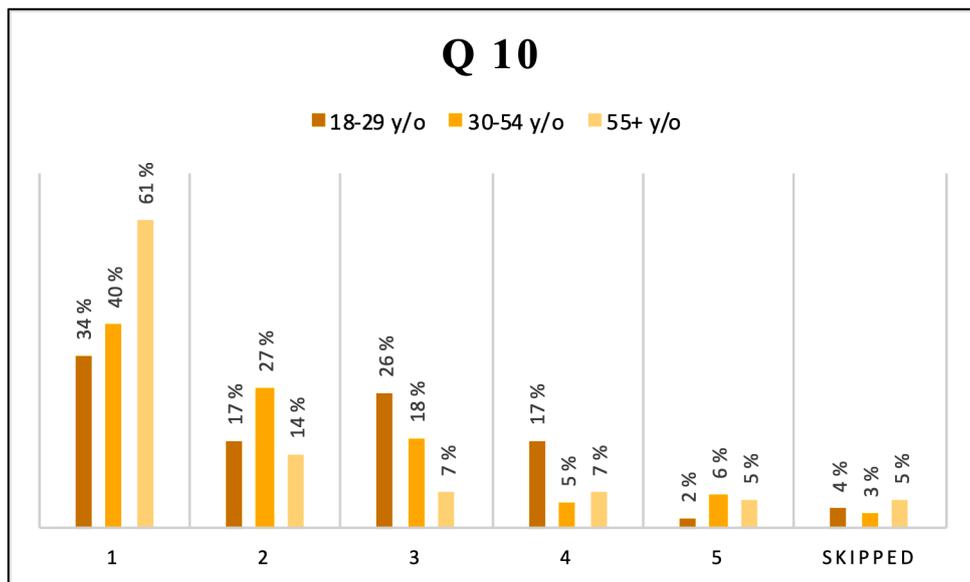
Figure 12 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities» – age distribution

36

Figure 12 shows how the different age groups rated the statement: «*I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities*». There was little difference between the age groups, however, the age group 55+ year-olds disagreed with the statement the most with 61%, compared to 34% (18-29-year-olds) and 40% (30-54-year-olds).

Ethnicity
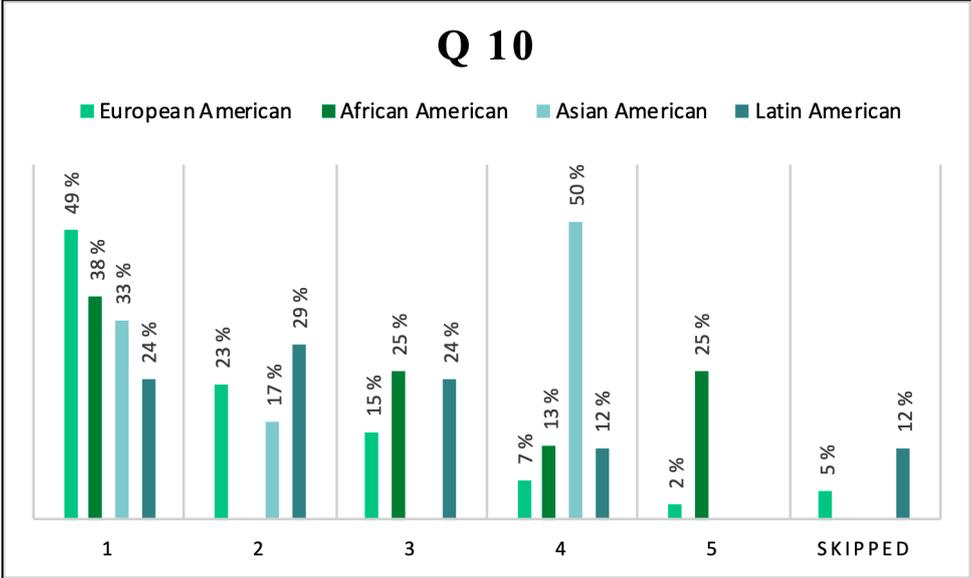
Figure 13 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities» - ethnic distribution

Figure 13 shows that African Americans were the ethnic group that had the highest percentage of participants that agreed with the statement on Question 10. European Americans was the ethnic group that disagreed the most and stated that they did not adjust their language when talking to people of other ethnicities (Figure 13).
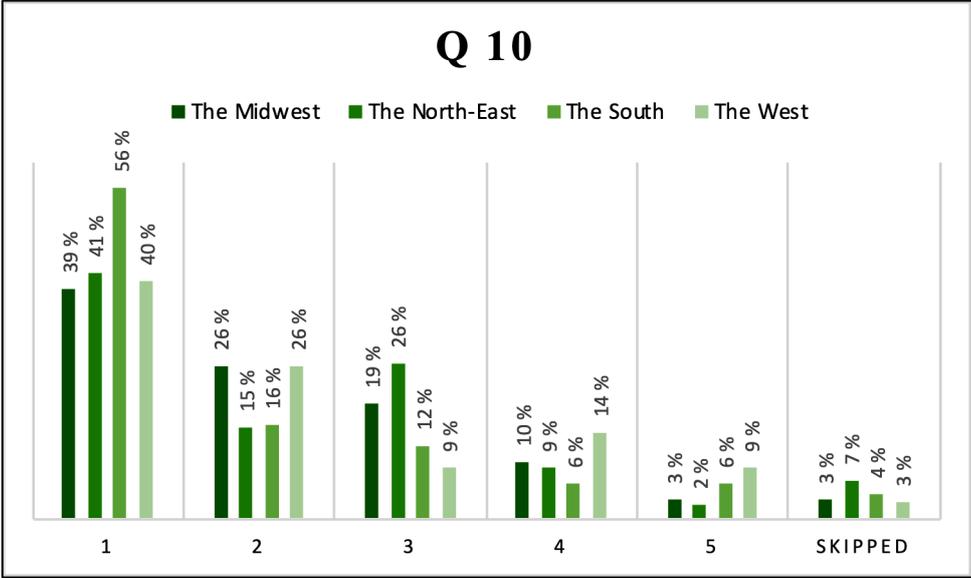
Figure 14 «I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities» - geographical distribution

There were little differences between the four geographical areas (Figure 14). The West had a slightly higher percentage of people who agreed or agreed to some extent, while the combined columns for disagreed and slightly disagreed were more or less equal for all four areas.

4.1.3 «I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English»
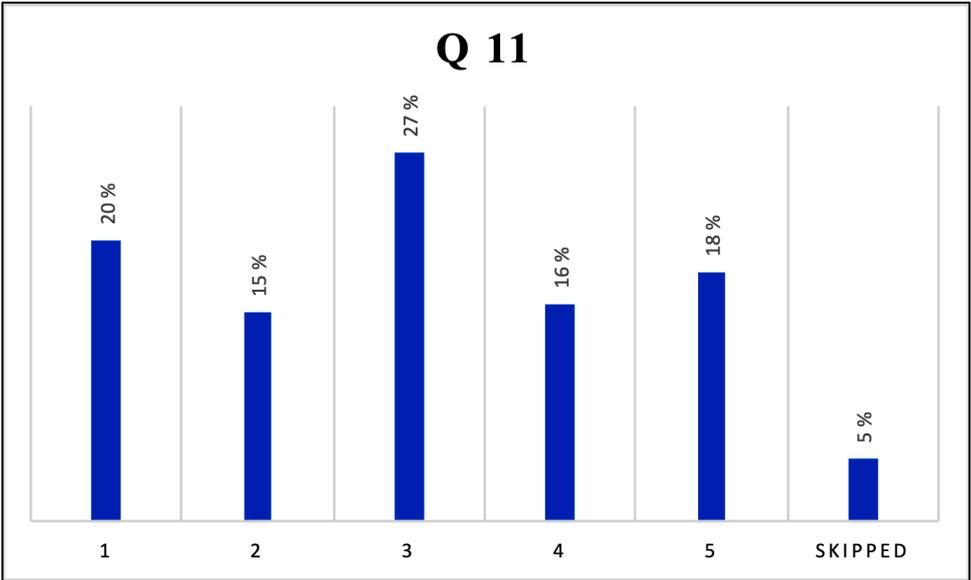
Figure 15 «I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English» – overall distribution

The participants rated the statement: «*I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English*» on Question 11. 20% of the participants answered that they disagreed with the statement and 18% answered that they agreed (Figure 15). The distribution of genders and ethnicities were similar to the overall result, and therefore of little importance.

Age
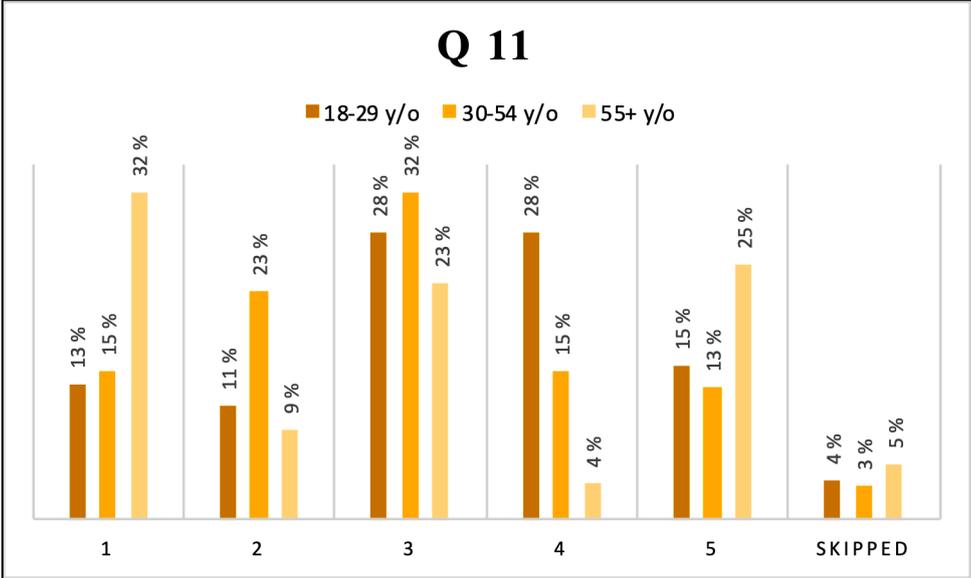
Figure 16 «I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English» – age distribution

The age distribution in Figure 16 generally conforms to the overall results for this question. However, the age group 55+ year-olds stood out at either end of the scale; 32% of the participants answered that they disagreed with the statement and 25% answered that they agreed with the statement, which was almost twice as much as the other age groups.

Geography

Q 11
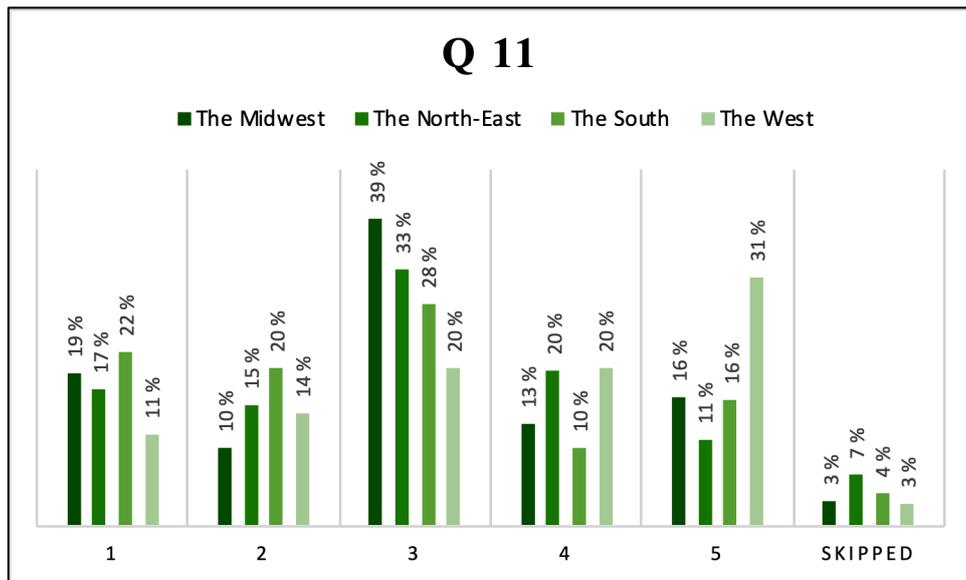
Figure 17 «I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English» – geographical distribution

There was little difference geographically. However, the West (Figure 17) stood out. 31% of the participants from the West answered that they agreed with the statement, which were twice as many as for the other areas, while only 11% from the West disagreed, compared to 17-19% for the other areas.

4.1.4 «The way I speak is a part of my identity»

Q 12
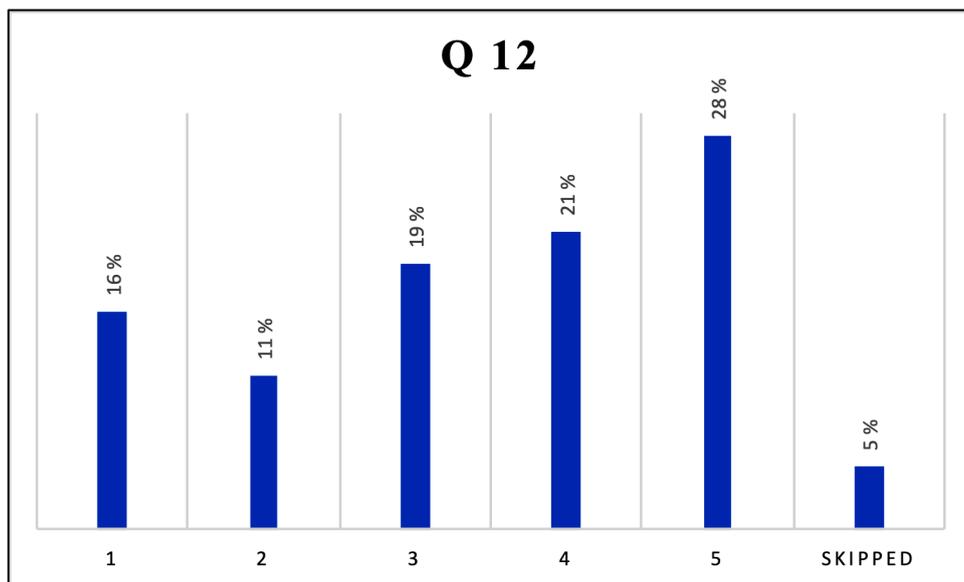
Figure 18 «The way I speak is a part of my identity» – overall distribution

Question 12 asked the participants to rate the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*». Figure 18 shows that there were more participants that agreed or agreed to some extent with the statement, than disagreed. There was no significant difference in the distribution of genders.

Age
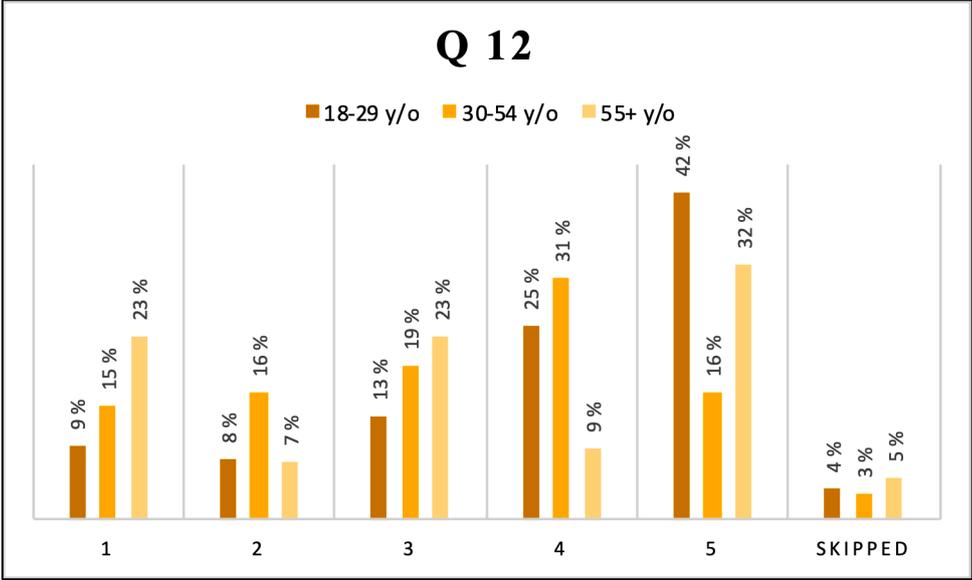
Figure 19 «The way I speak is a part of my identity» - age distribution

Figure 19 shows that the age group 18-29-year-olds agreed the most and disagreed the least with the statement. It is interesting that the 55+ year-olds agreed twice as much as the middle-aged group.

Q 12
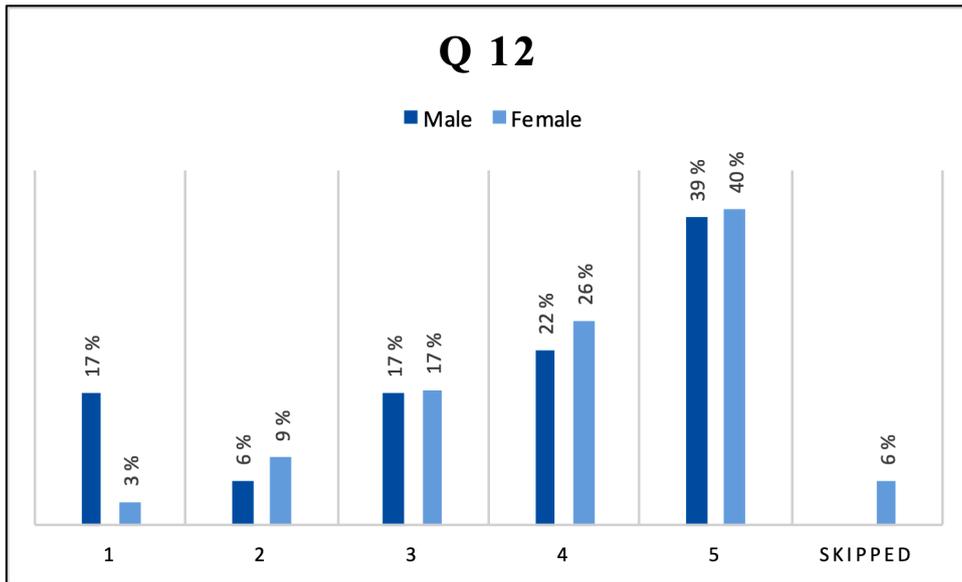
Figure 20 «The way I speak is a part of my identity» - 18-29-year-olds: Gender distribution

Figure 20 shows the female participants in the age group 18-29-year-olds. The figure shows that the women agreed slightly more than the men, while the men disagreed much more than the women.

Ethnicity

Q 12
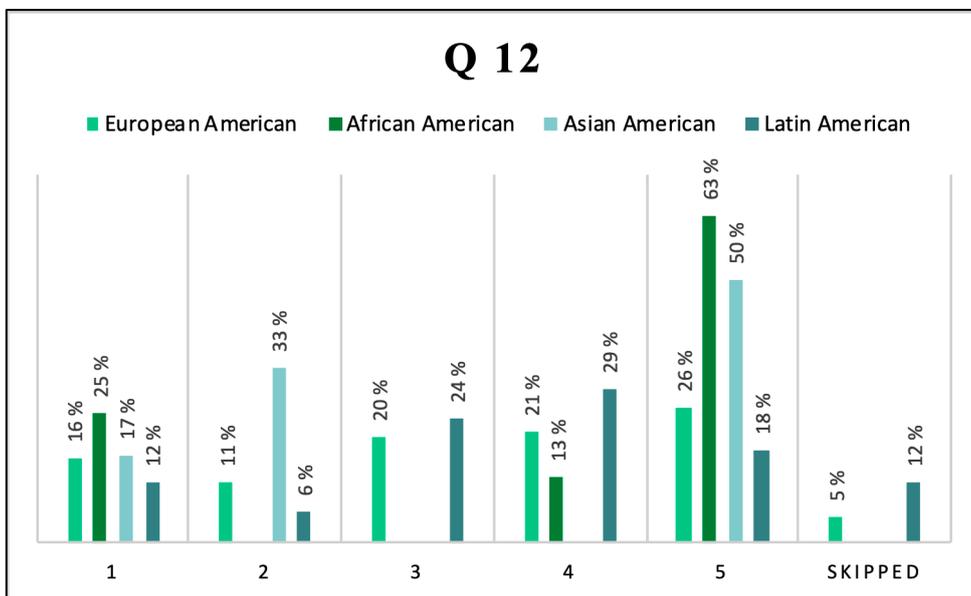
Figure 21 «The way I speak is a part of my identity» - ethnic distribution

African American and Asian American participants were the ethnic groups that agreed the most with the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*» (Figure 21). However, African Americans and Asian Americans were also the ethnic groups that disagreed the most with the statement compared to the other ethnicities.

Geography

Q 12

Legend: ■ The Midwest ■ The North-East ■ The South ■ The West

	1	2	3	4	5	SKIPPED
The Midwest	16 %	23 %	13 %	16 %	29 %	3 %
The North-East	7 %	11 %	24 %	20 %	33 %	7 %
The South	22 %	4 %	22 %	24 %	24 %	4 %
The West	11 %	9 %	20 %	29 %	29 %	3 %
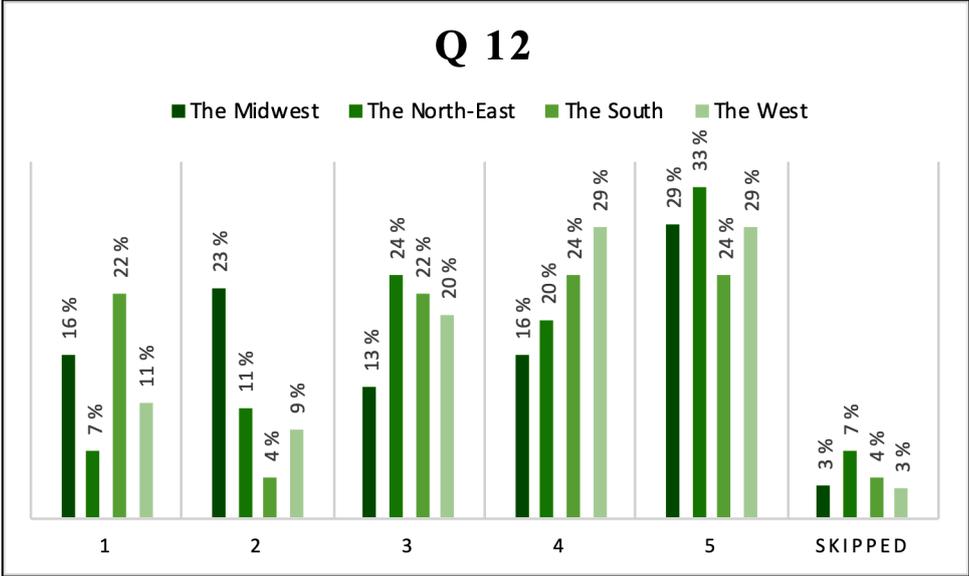
Figure 22 «The way I speak is a part of my identity» – geographical distribution

The South and the North-East were the geographical areas that stood the most out (Figure 22). In the South, 22% of the participants answered that they disagreed with the statement, while in the North-East only 7 % answered the same. The South also showed the least agreement with the statement, with 24%, while 33% form the North-East agreed.

«I speak differently than my ethnical group»
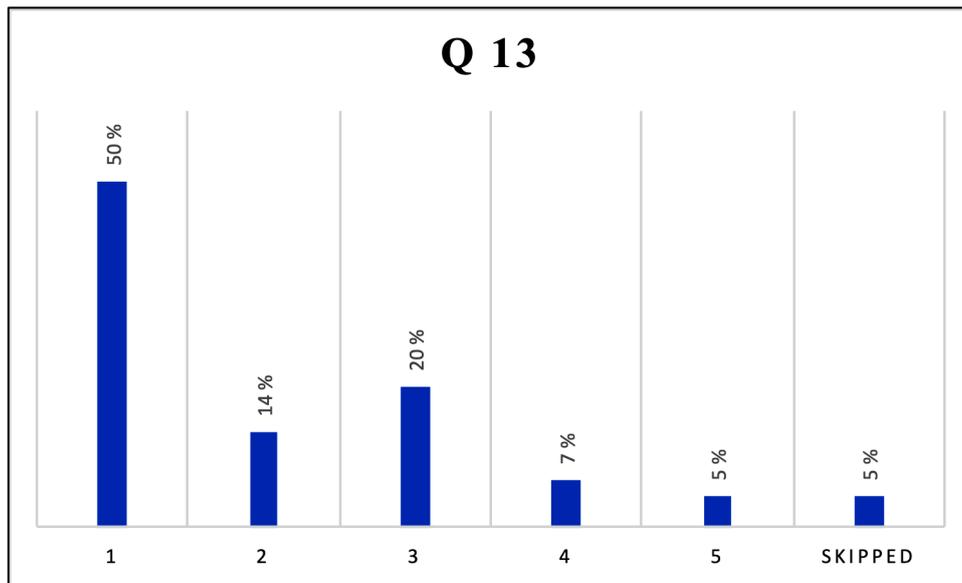
Figure 23 «I speak differently than my ethnical group» – overall distribution

Figure 23 shows what the participants answered on the statement «*I speak differently than my ethnical group*». 50% of the participants disagreed with the statement, while only 5% agreed. There were no significant differences in the gender-, age-, ethnicity-, and geographical distribution of the participants.

4.1.6   Summary

The majority of the participants agreed with the statement on Question 7 (Figure 5), stating that they either speak in a certain way or use certain words that are common for their ethnic group. The statement in Question 10 «*I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities*», 40% of the participants (Figure 10) disagreed. The findings from Question 10 indicates that they do not find it necessary to adjust features of their daily speech when speaking to people of other ethnicities.

The majority of the participants agreed with the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*» on Question 12 (Figure 18). 50% (Figure 23) of the participants said that they disagreed with the statement «*I speak differently than my ethnical group*» on Question 13, which indicates that they speak the same way as their ethnical group. However, when the participants were asked «*I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of*

American English» on Question 11, the majority of the participants disagreed (Figure 15). These findings may indicate that people are not aware of how language is used as an identity marker.

African Americans was the ethnic group that had the highest percentage of participants that expressed that they talked differently when speaking to people of other ethnicities (Figure 13). Meanwhile, European Americans was the ethnic group that disagreed the most with the statement, stating that they do not code-switch when speaking to people of other ethnicities. African Americans was the ethnic group that agreed the most with the statement on Question 12: «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*», followed by Asian Americans (Figure 21). However, African Americans and Asian Americans were also the ethnic groups that disagreed the most with the statement.

4.2   AAVE versus General American English

4.2.1   «There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English»
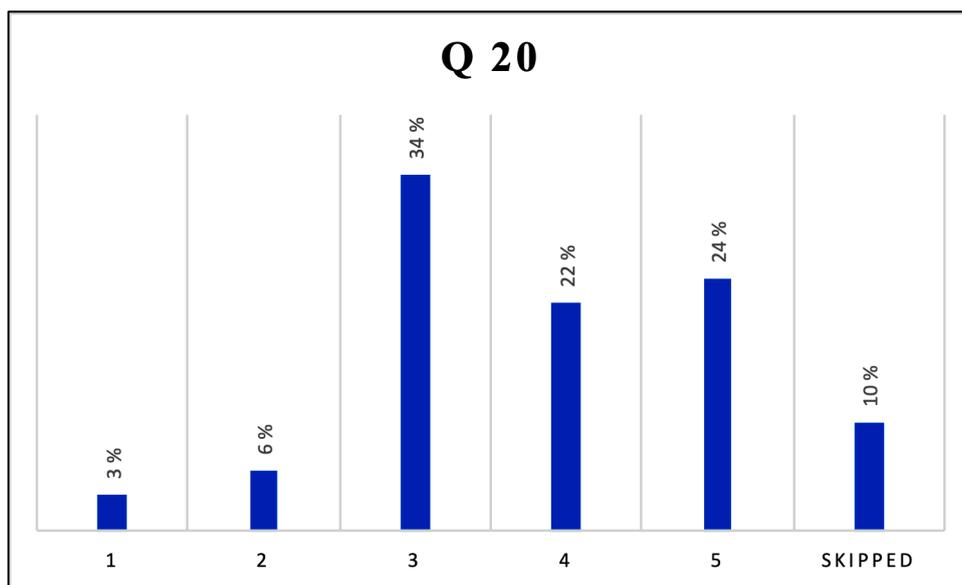
Figure 24 «There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English» – overall distribution

While the largest number of people answered indifferently (34%), very few people actually disagreed with the statement (9%), and half of the participants agreed or agreed to some extent with the statement (Figure 24). There was no significant difference in the distribution of ethnicity, it was therefore omitted.
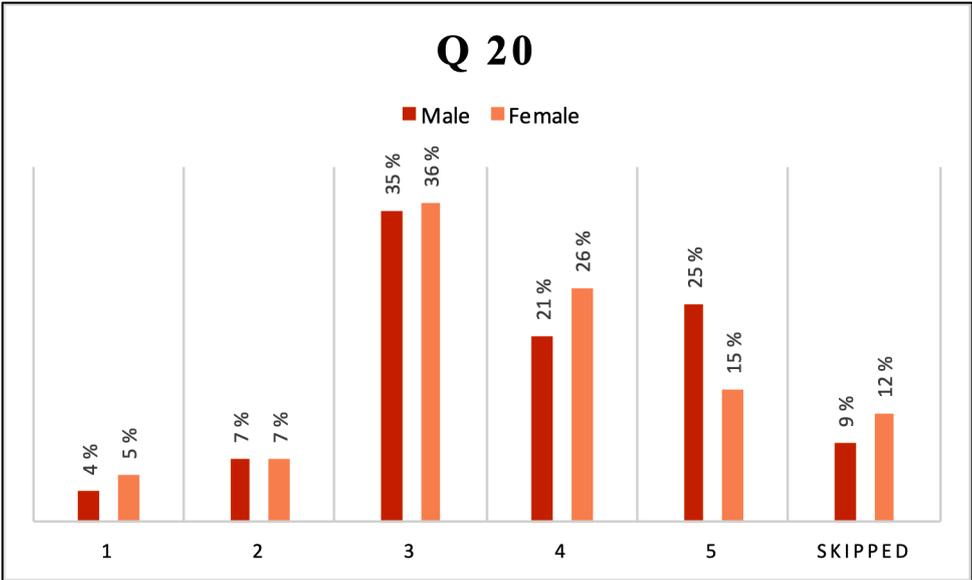
Figure 25 «There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English» – gender distribution

When divided into genders, Figure 25 shows that there were little differences from the overall result. There was a slight difference in whether they agreed or agreed to some extent; however, the combined percentages between these two options are more or less equal for both genders.

Age
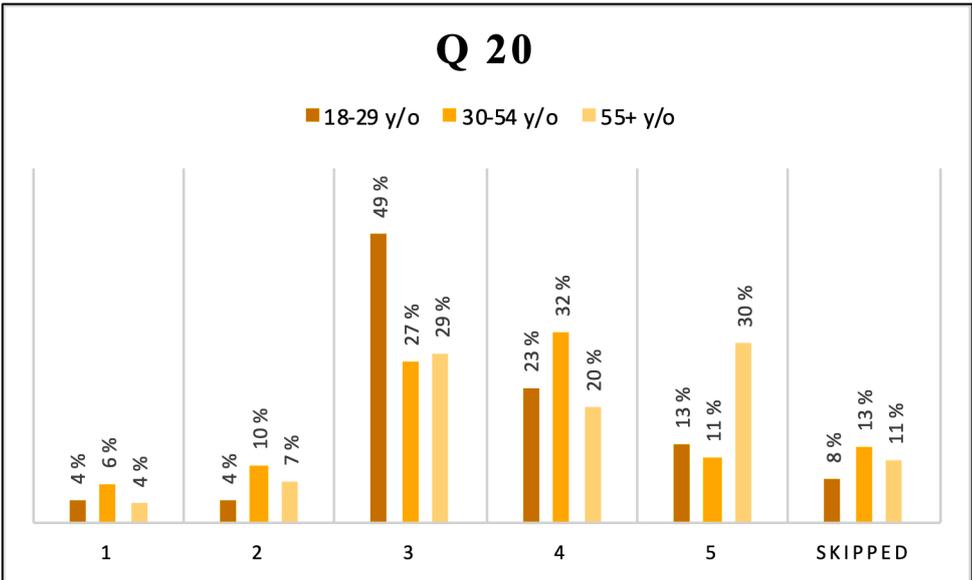
Figure 26 «There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English» – age distribution

Figure 26 shows that the age group 55+ year-olds stood out compared to the other age groups; 30% of the participants agreed, compared to 13% (18-29-year-olds) and 11% (30-54-year-olds). 20% of the 55+ group agreed to some extent, meaning that half of this age group more or less agreed with this statement.

Geography
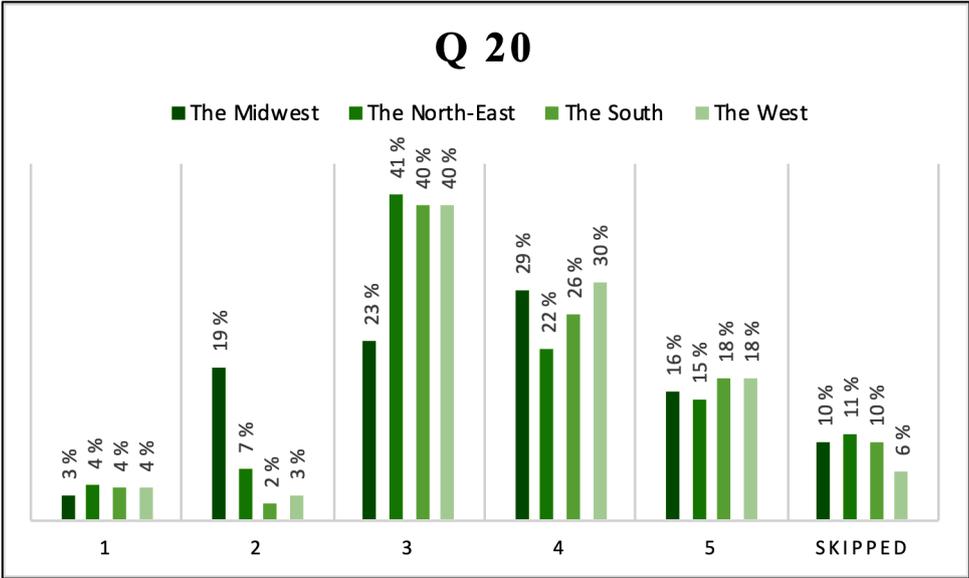
Figure 27 «There is a clear difference between African American Vernacular English and General American English» – geographical distribution

The Midwest stood out; 19% disagreed to some extent compared to the other geographical areas which varied from 2-7% (Figure 27). The Midwest was also the area which had the lowest percentage of insignificant answers (23% versus 40-41%).

4.2.2 «I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English»
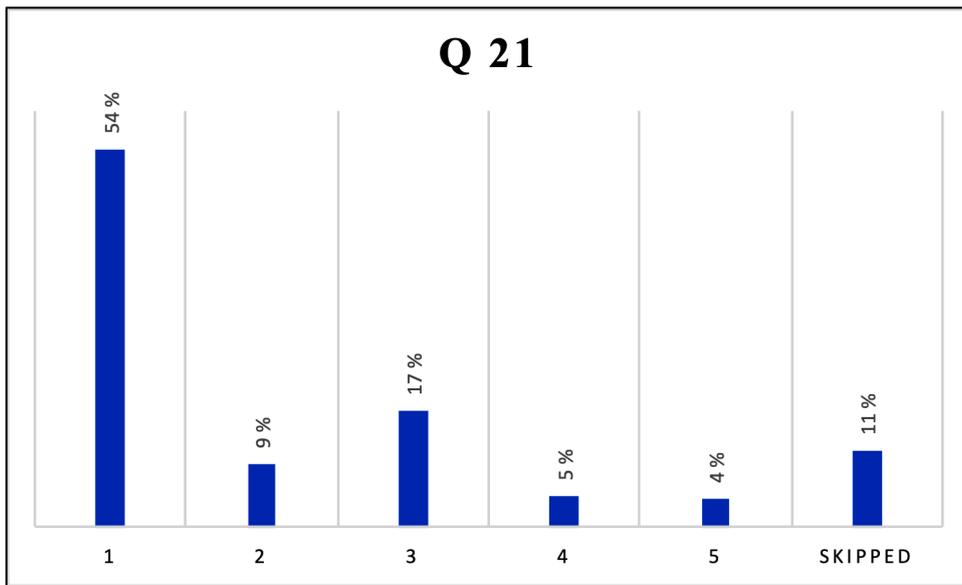
Figure 28 «I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English» - overall distribution

Figure 28 shows what the participants answered on Question 21, which had the statement; «*I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English*». 54% of the participants disagreed with the statement, and 4% agreed. There were little differences from the overall results in the gender- and age distribution.

Ethnicity
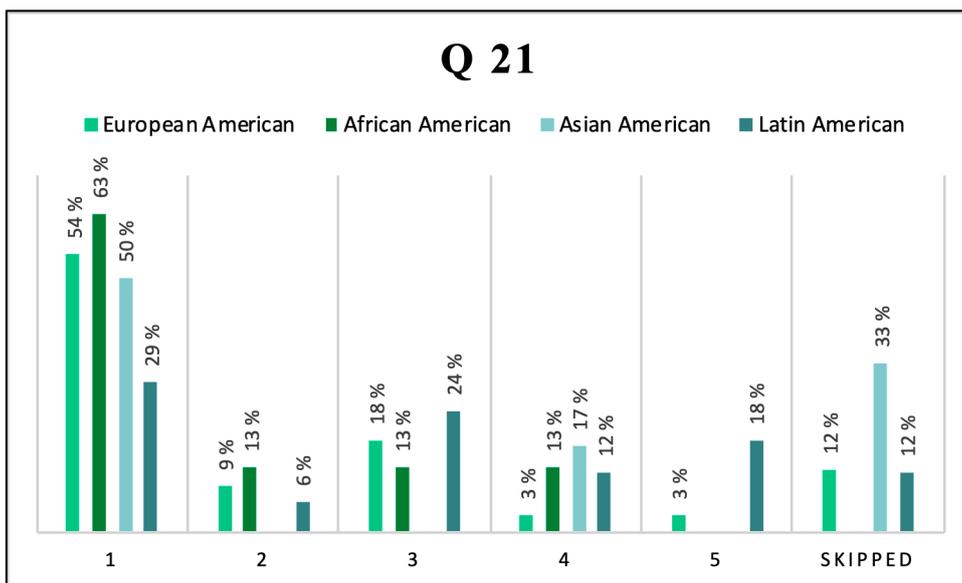
Figure 29 «I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English» - ethnic distribution

18% of the Latin American participants expressed that they had never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English (Figure 29). Figure 29 shows that 13% of the African American participants stated that they agreed to some extent with the statement.

Geography
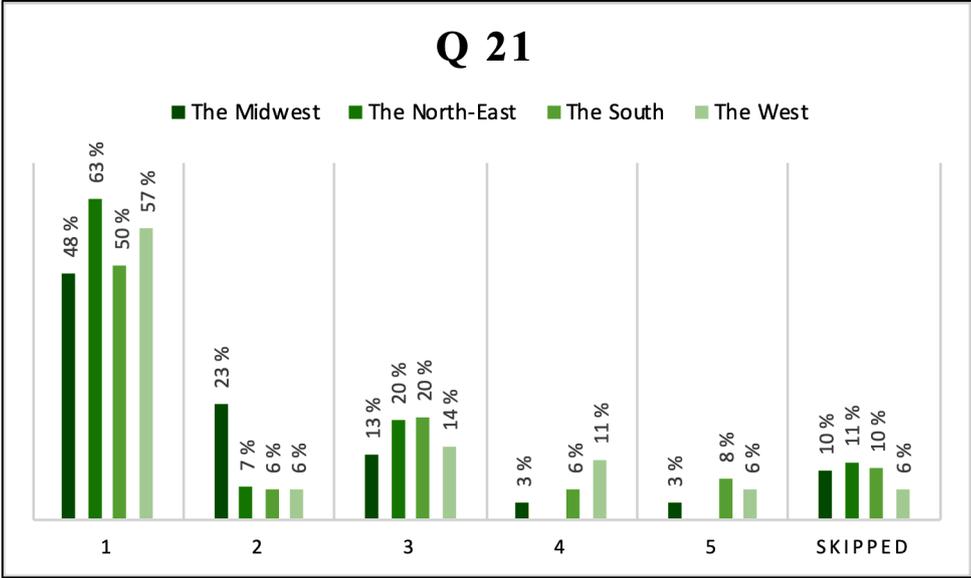
Figure 30 «I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English» - geographical distribution

Figure 30 displays the result from the different geographical areas, and the result did not differ much from the overall results (Figure 28). The South and the West stood out in terms of agreeing with the statement. 8% from the South and 6% from the West agreed with the statement compared to 0-3% from the other geographical areas.

4.2.3 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted»
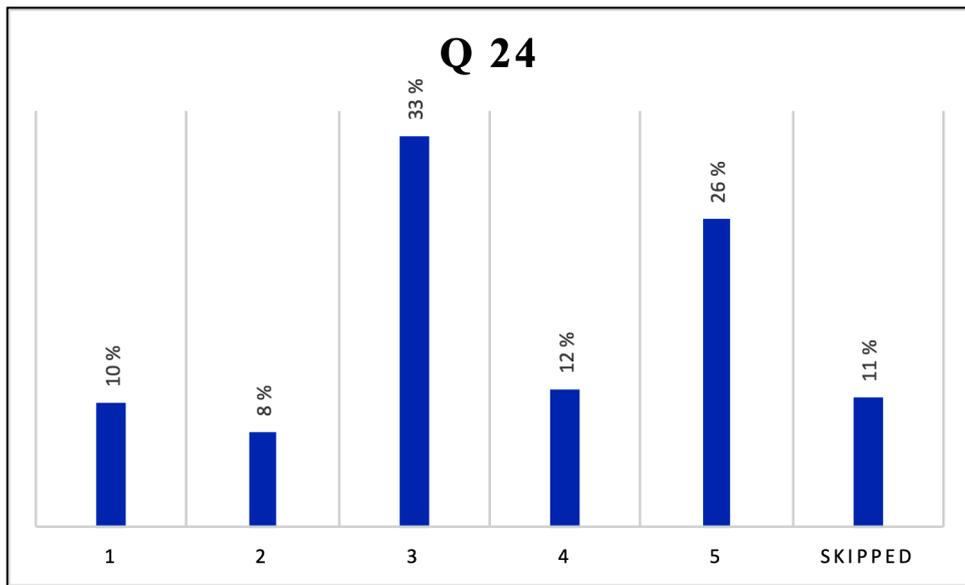
Figure 31 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - overall distribution

Figure 31 shows the overall results on Question 24, where the participants rated the statement: «*African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted*». The majority answered indifferently and did not have a specific opinion about the matter. Besides that, most of the participants agreed or agreed to some extent.
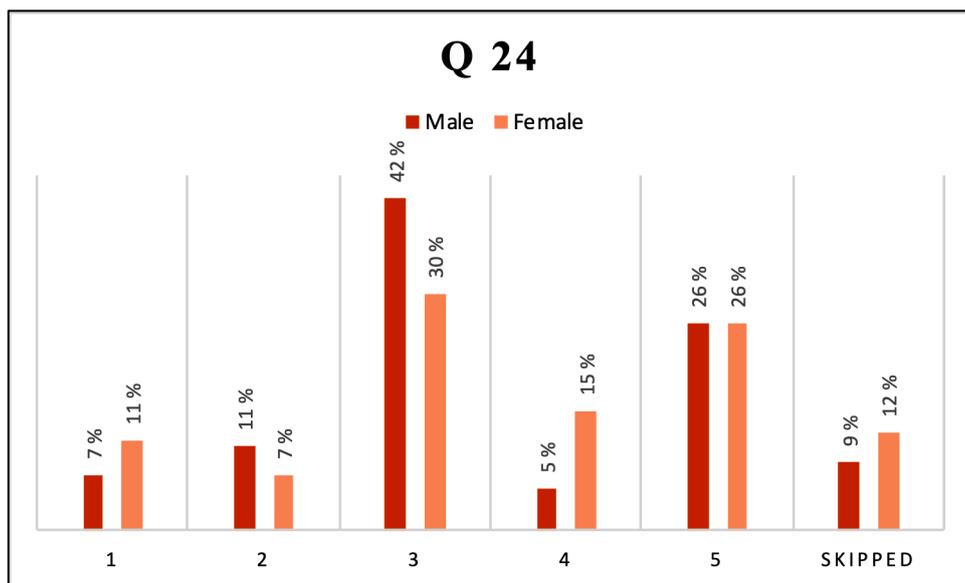
Gender

Figure 32 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - gender distribution

Figure 32 shows what the different genders answered on Question 24. The female participants answered somewhat the same as the overall result (Figure 31). The male participants, however, did not have a specific opinion about whether AAVE should be socially accepted.

Age
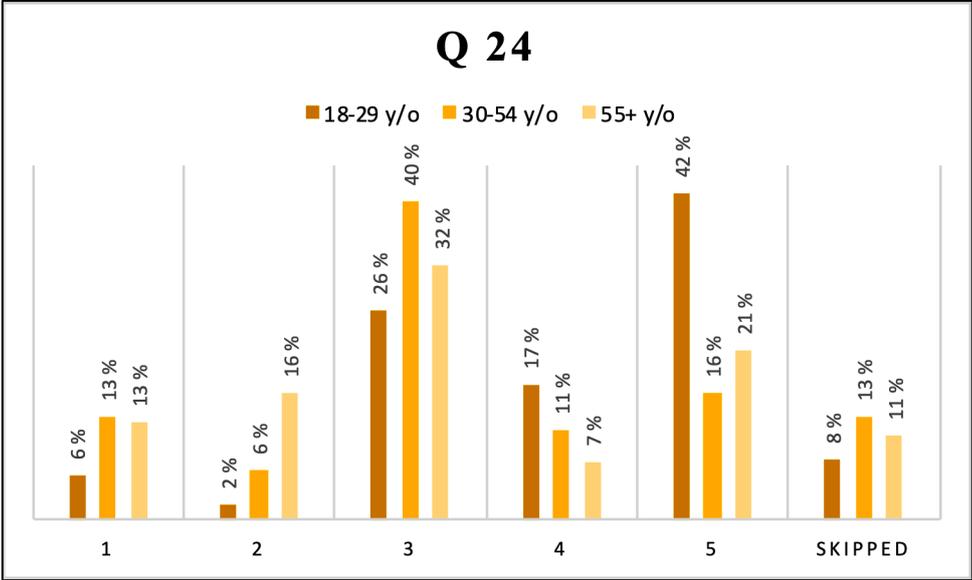
Figure 33 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - age distribution

The age group 18-29-year-olds was the age group that stood the most out (Figure 33). The youngest participants agreed twice as much as the other age groups. The age group 18-29-year-olds also had a higher percentage of participants that agreed to some extent with 17% versus 7-11%.
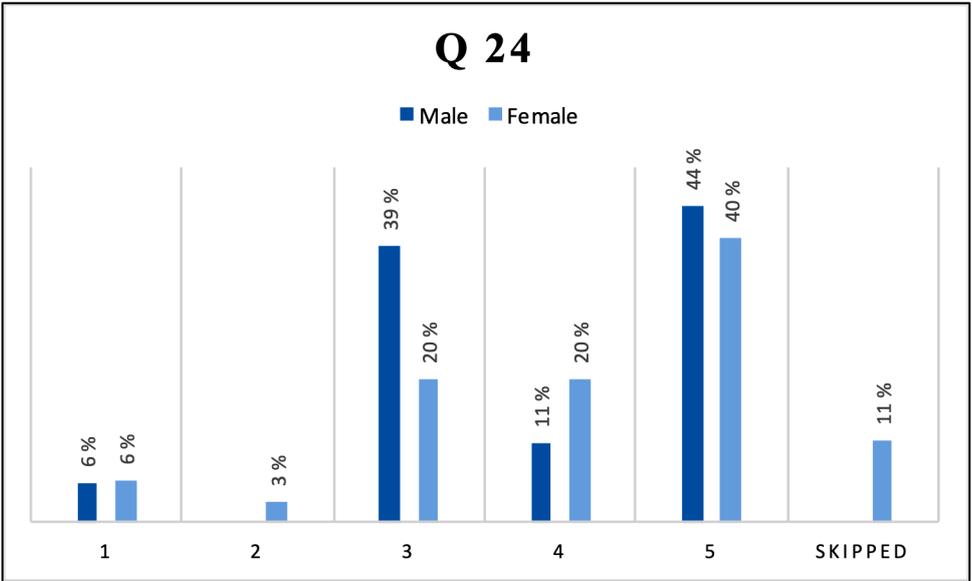
Figure 34 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - 18-29-year-olds: Gender distribution

51

Figure 34 did not differ much from the overall results. However, the male participants were twice as much unsure whether AAVE should be socially accepted than the female participants.

Ethnicity
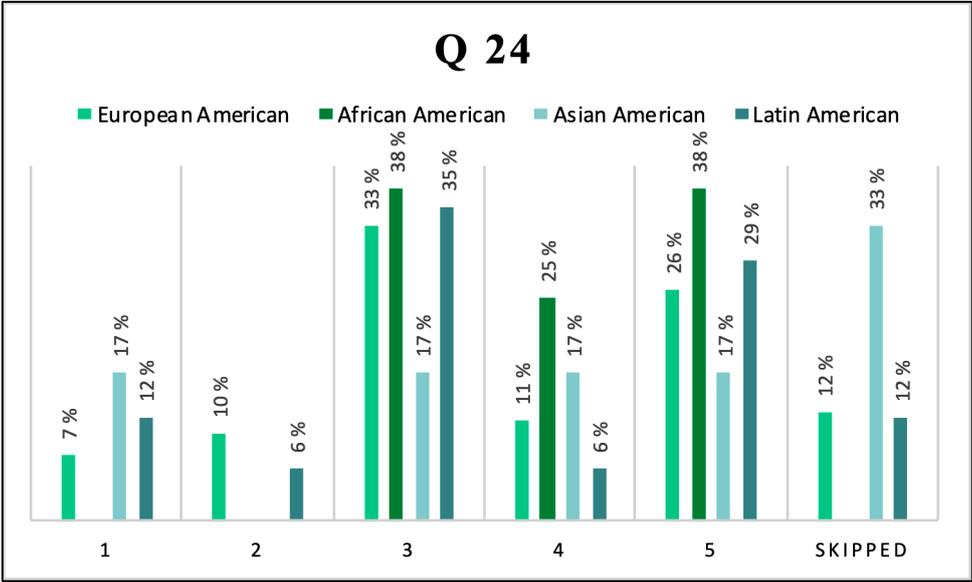
Figure 35 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - ethnic distribution

Two ethnic groups stood out: African Americans and Asian Americans (Figure 35). 38% of the African American participants did not have a clear opinion on whether AAVE should become socially accepted. The Asian American participants had split opinions, 17% disagreed, 17% had an unclear opinion, and 34% agreed in general with the statement on Question 24.
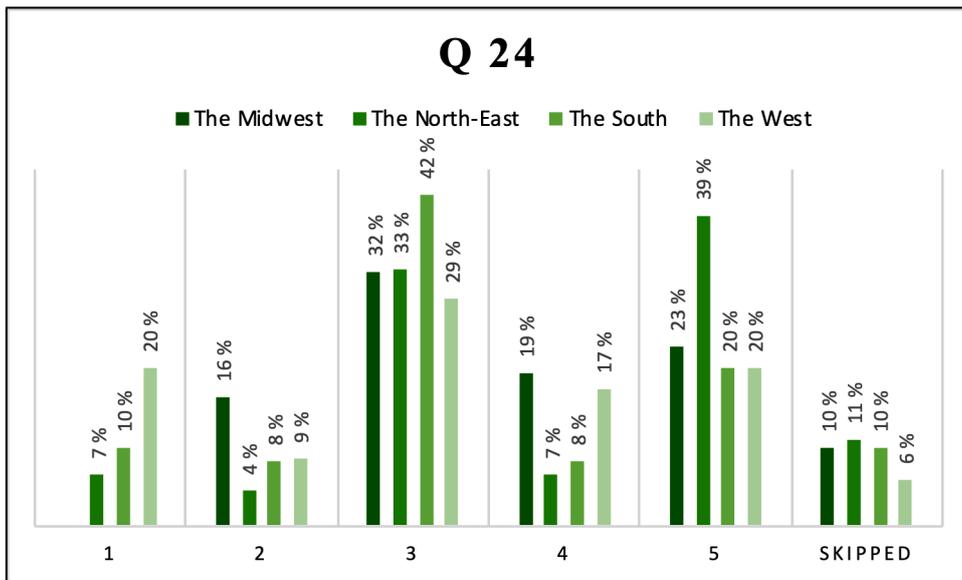
Figure 36 «African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted» - geographical distribution

There were two geographical areas that stood out from the others; the Midwest and the North-East (Figure 36). There were no participants from the Midwest that disagreed with the statement, and the majority of the participants either agreed or agreed to some extent. The North-East area agreed twice as much as the other areas with 39%, compared to 20-33% from other areas.

4.2.4   «General American English is the proper way to speak»
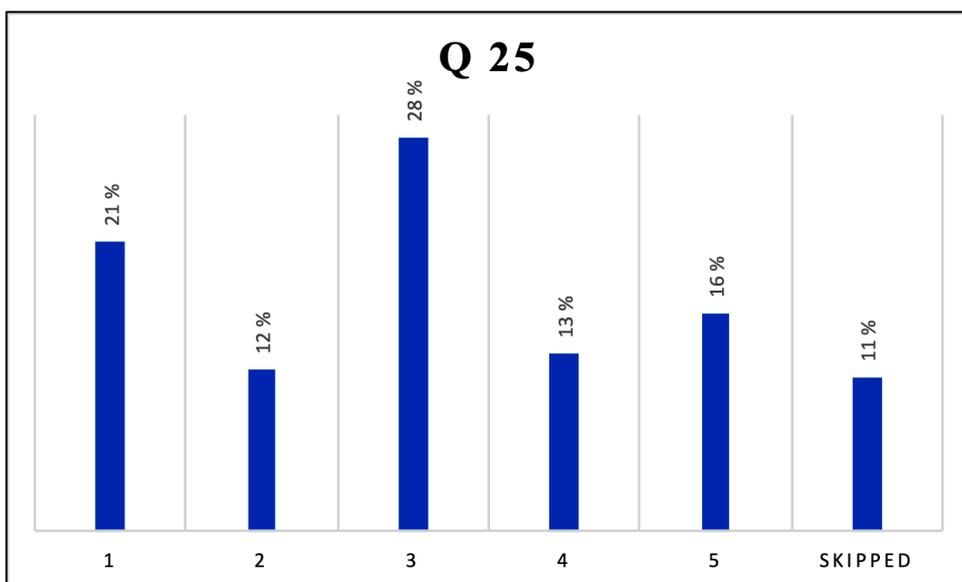
Figure 37 «General American English is the proper way to speak» - overall distribution

Figure 37 shows the overall results for Question 25; the participants rated the statement: «*General American English is the proper way to speak*». More participants disagreed than agreed with the statement. The majority of the participants did not have a specific opinion about the topic. There were no significant differences to the overall result when the genders and ethnicities were distributed.

Age
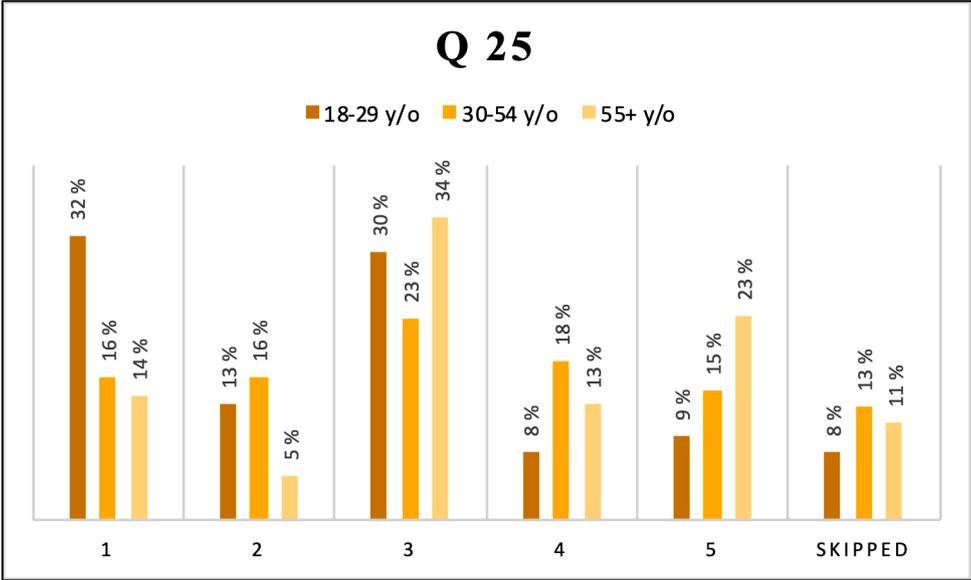
Figure 38 «General American English is the proper way to speak» - age distribution

The age group 18-29-year-olds agreed the least with the statement, they also disagreed the most with 32% compared to 14-16% (Figure 38). The majority of the age group 30-54-year-olds and 55+ year-olds did not have a specific opinion. However, the age group 55+ agreed the most and disagreed the least with the statement.
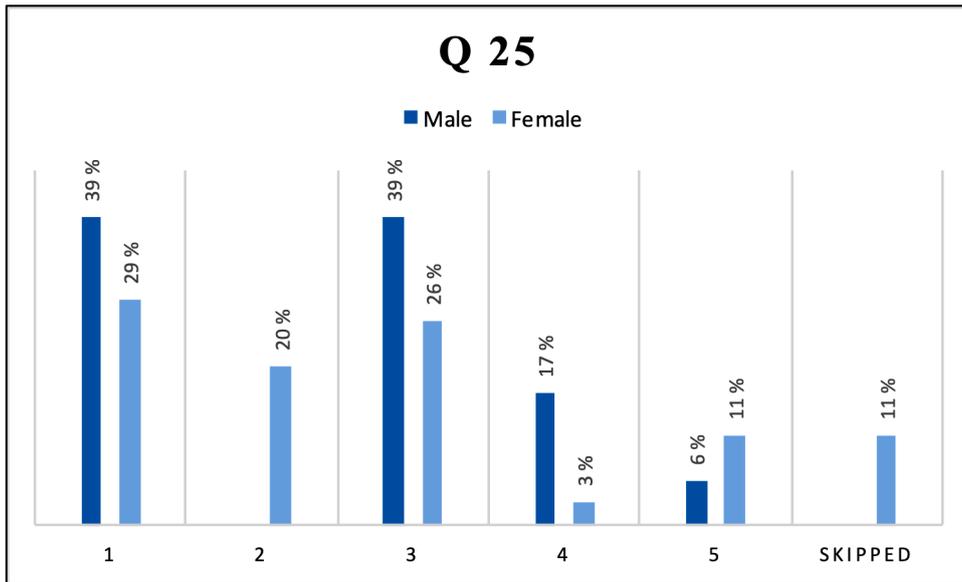
Figure 39 «General American English is the proper way to speak» - 18-29-year-olds: Gender distribution

The male participants in the age group 18-29-year-olds disagreed the most with the statement compared to the female participants (Figure 39). However, 20% of the female participants disagreed to some extent, whereas no male participants ticked that box. Female participants agreed almost twice as much as the male participants with the statement.
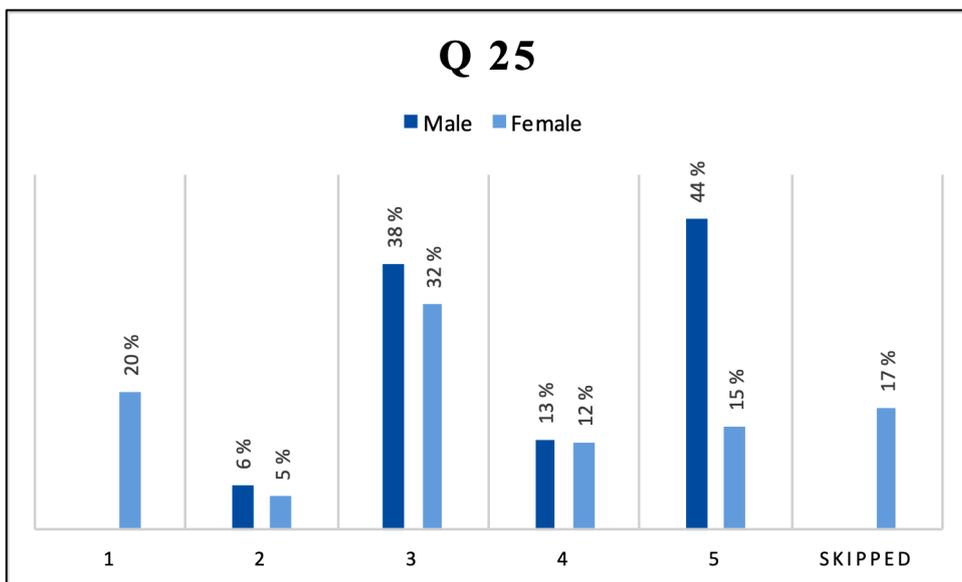
Figure 40 «General American English is the proper way to speak» - 55+ year-olds: Gender distribution

Figure 40 shows what the age group 55+ year-olds answered when distributed into genders. The male participants agreed to the statement over twice as much as the female participants

55

(Figure 40). 20% of the women disagreed, compared to 0% of the men. 17% of the female participants skipped and no male participants skipped this question.

Geography
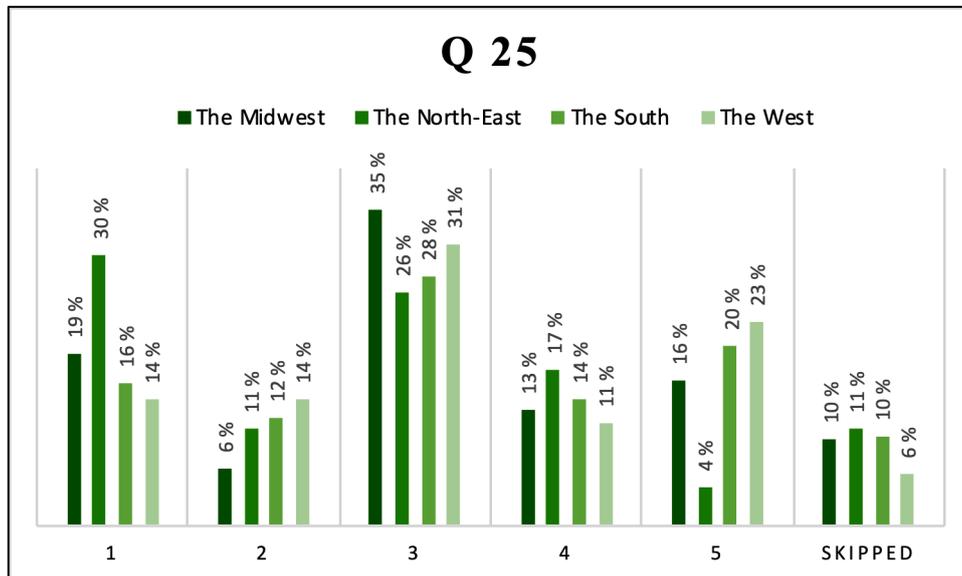
Figure 41 «General American English is the proper way to speak» - geographical distribution

As Figure 41 shows, the North-East was the geographical area that disagreed the most with the statement on Question 25, with 30% compared to 14-19%. The North-East was also the area that had the lowest percentage of participants that agreed with the statement (4%).

4.2.5 «If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why do you think so?»

Question 26 was the only open-ended question included in this analysis. It was a follow-up question after Question 25. The participants elaborated on why they agreed or agreed to some extent with the statement: «*General American English is the proper way to speak*». 47 participants answered the follow-up question. Spelling errors have been silently amended, while the syntax has been kept.

NR	ELABORATED OPINIONS
1	We are a melting pot - so people should speak the way they are comfortable as long as it isn't offensive to others
2	No reason
3	Straight English with slang words is ideal. We are all basically able to understand but slang adds flavor or a twist
4	Because
5	This question lack specificity I think
6	I think people should be able to speak their cultural language
7	Some people think so and don't but it's easier to understand
8	Because it has the capabilities to describe a wider range of subjects, events, and emotions
9	Na
10	It sounds fine to me
11	Indifference
12	Any country your go people try and learn that way though people shouldn't be judged for not knowing as well
13	It's how I believe
14	Historically language used by a larger number of people
15	It is grammatically correct
16	Proper use of English
17	Use of correct grammar
18	Because it is the standard for business, government and education in the US
19	Proper language conveys societal intellectual abilities
20	African American English uses poor grammar and it is ignorant
21	Grammar
22	There is a time and a place for everything. Proper English should be spoken in settings like work, school, or when speaking to any professional. It comes across as being educated and mindful of how others speak, interpret, and understand you. Improper English and slang is fine too, it can be done at work in certain settings, but is found mostly used when talking to certain friends, and family
23	It sounds more intelligent than using slang
24	It's what's taught in school and expected in the work place
25	I'm not saying theirs is wrong, but its dumbing down language when incorrect spelling follows along a dialect 'nah'm sayin?'
26	Clear communications is important to a society. Misuse of English demonstrates a lack of education
27	I think if one speaks more American English they will be more accepted
28	It is the accepted norm
29	We live in America and the English language is our native language
30	All majorities in my country speak American English
31	We are in America
32	Most 'common' form of English (in America)
33	National language derives from English not slang
34	It is the standard. People need a standard in order to best communicate

35	To succeed in the professional/job world one will have more opportunities for advancement if you speak the same as your professional peer do; and also if your job has you interact with the public or customers
36	Just because you are black doesn't mean you have to speak like 'black'. We are all Americans. Oh, and it's Black, not 'African American'. We celebrate Black history month in February as a nation. Not African American history month. Having a darker skin tone doesn't mean you have dual citizenship. We are all just simply American
37	American English is standard English which it is a English speaking country
38	It is the accepted way of speaking in our country and is understood by most Americans
39	It is standard in US
40	When in America speak English. My dad was from Denmark and only spoke English
41	Because it's the most common so it is easily understood by Americans
42	English is the historical language since the founding of the USA
43	Common language better understanding and no miscommunication or misunderstanding. English has multiple meanings on a lot of words as it is
44	How can we be one nation indivisible if we speak different languages. I am, by the way, treating the 'African-American Vernacular' questions in this survey to be the same as 'Ebonics'
45	We understand each other better and in school/business we are on a "even playing field"
46	It's most common in mass communication
47	We are a society of norms. To be a coherent society, we need some consistent in language, values, etc.

Figure 42 «If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why do you think so?» – overall distribution

Figure 42 shows what the participants answered on Question 26. The two main arguments that were frequently repeated was; the use of AAVE is associated with lack of education and poor grammar (highlighted in light blue), and when you live in America you should speak General American English so everyone can understand and because it is the accepted norm in their society (highlighted in dark blue).

4.2.6   Summary

The findings showed a high percentage of participants that were unsure of the difference between AAVE and General American English (Figure 24). The majority (30%) in the age group 55+ year-olds, rated that they thought there was a clear difference between AAVE and General American English (Figure 26). The majority of the participants disagreed with the statement «*I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English*» (Figure 28). The age group 18-29-year-olds had the highest percentage of participants that agreed with

the statement «*African American Vernacular English should be socially accepted*», with 42% (Figure 33).

Despite the age group 18-29-year-olds being the age group that were the most unsure if they had ever heard anyone speak AAVE, they were the age group where most of the participants thought that AAVE should be socially accepted (Figure 33). The age group 55+ year-olds were the age group that agreed the most with the statement «*General American English is the proper way to speak*» with 23%, while the age group 18-29-year-olds was the age group that agreed the least with the statement with 9% (Figure 38). The majority of the participants that agreed with the statement «*General American English is the proper way to speak*» on Question 25, elaborated that the reason why they thought so was because of it expressed a lack of education and that is not the accepted norm in the American society (Figure 42).

Latin Americans was the ethnic group that had the highest percentage of participants that stated that they had never heard anyone speak AAVE (Figure 29). Interestingly enough, 13% of the African American participants agreed to some extent with the statement, meaning that they had never heard anyone speak AAVE (Figure 29). The African American participants were unsure whether AAVE should become socially accepted (Figure 35).

4.3   AAVE in pop culture

4.3.1   «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music»
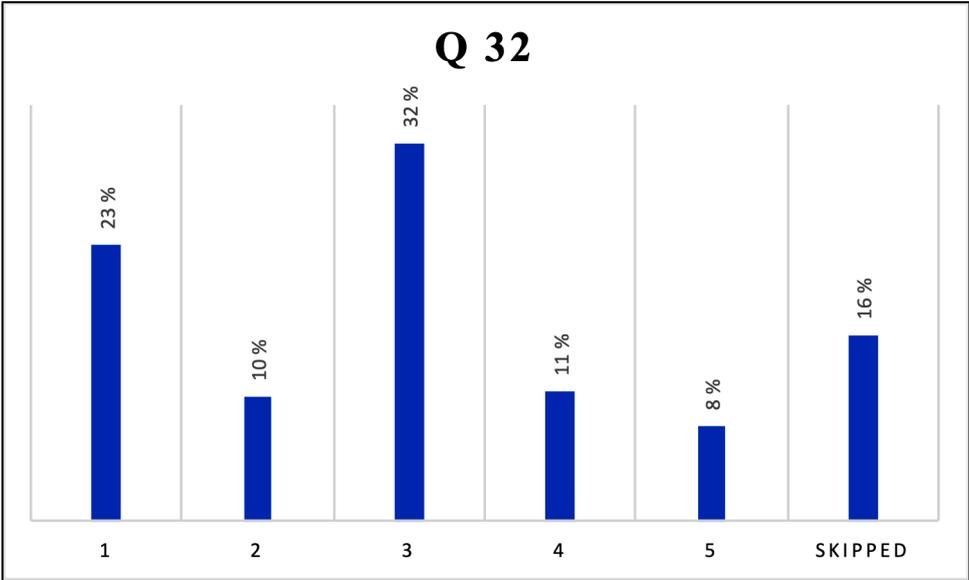
Figure 43 «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music» - overall distribution

59

Figure 43 shows the overall result for Question 32. The participants rated the statement; «*I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music*». The majority of the participants answered indifferently. More participants disagreed rather than agreed with the statement.

Gender
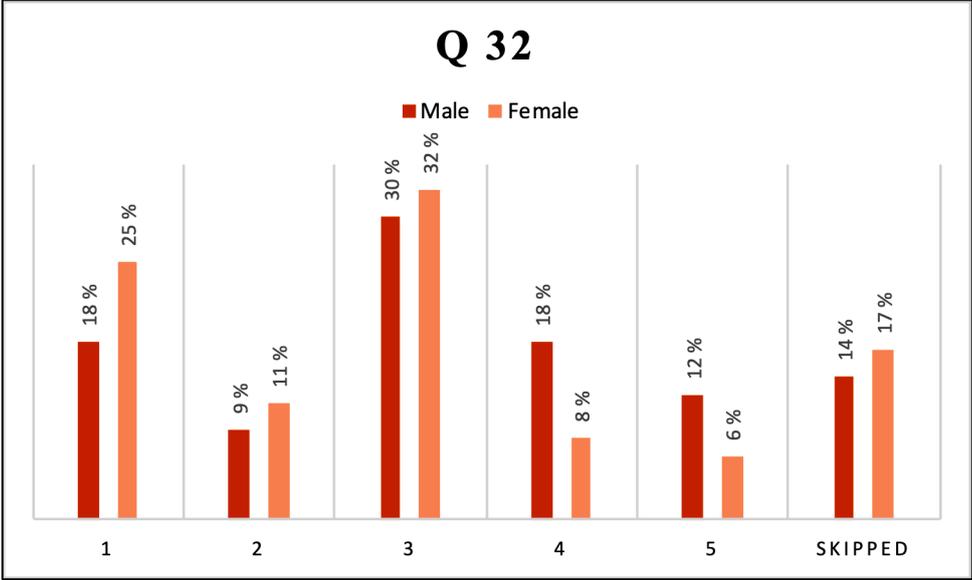
Figure 44 «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music» - gender distribution

There was a clear difference between the participants when they were distributed into different genders (Figure 44). The female participants had a higher percentage of participants that disagreed or disagreed to some extent than the male participants. The male participants agreed in general more with the statement than the female participants.
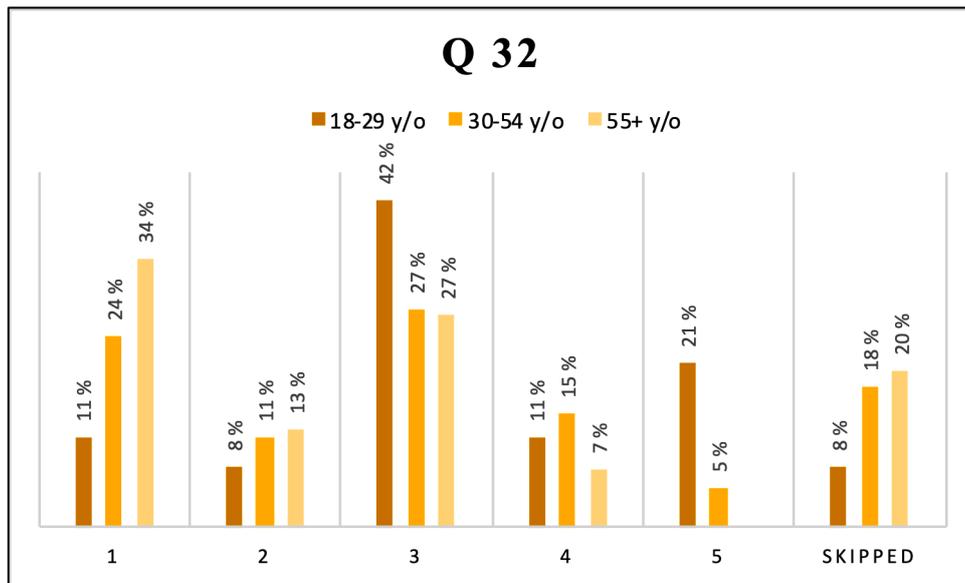
Figure 45 «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music» - age distribution

The youngest age group (18-29-year-olds) exceeded the 30-54-year-olds 4:1 of participants that agreed with the statement (Figure 45). There were no participants in the age group 55+ year-olds that agreed with the statement. The 18-29-year-olds was the age group that disagreed the least with the statement with 11%, compared to 24-34% from the older age groups.

Ethnicity
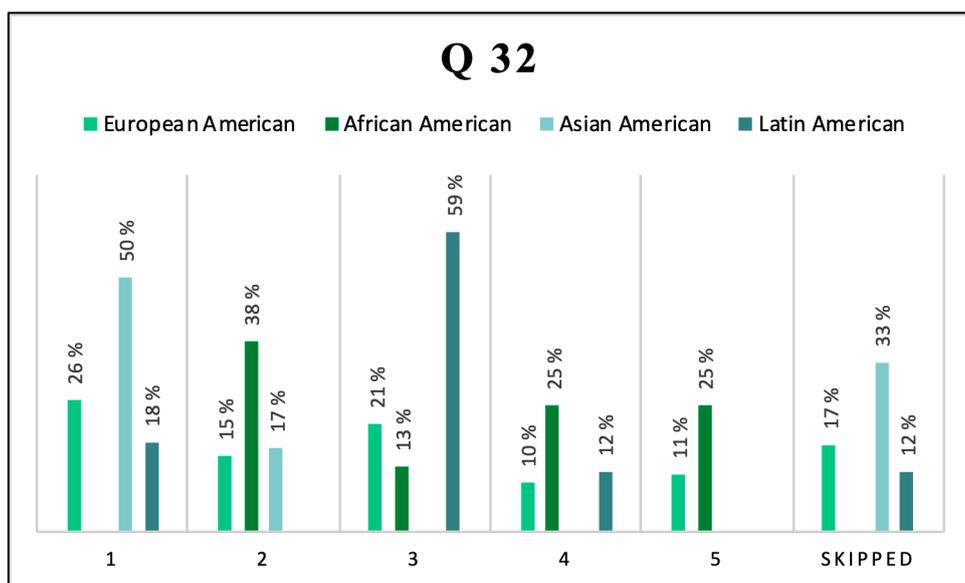
Figure 46 «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music» - ethnic distribution

61

Asian Americans was the ethnic group that disliked the use of AAVE in music the most (Figure 46). 38% of the African American participants disagreed to some extent with the statement «*I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music*», however, the majority expressed they enjoyed the use of AAVE in music.

Geography
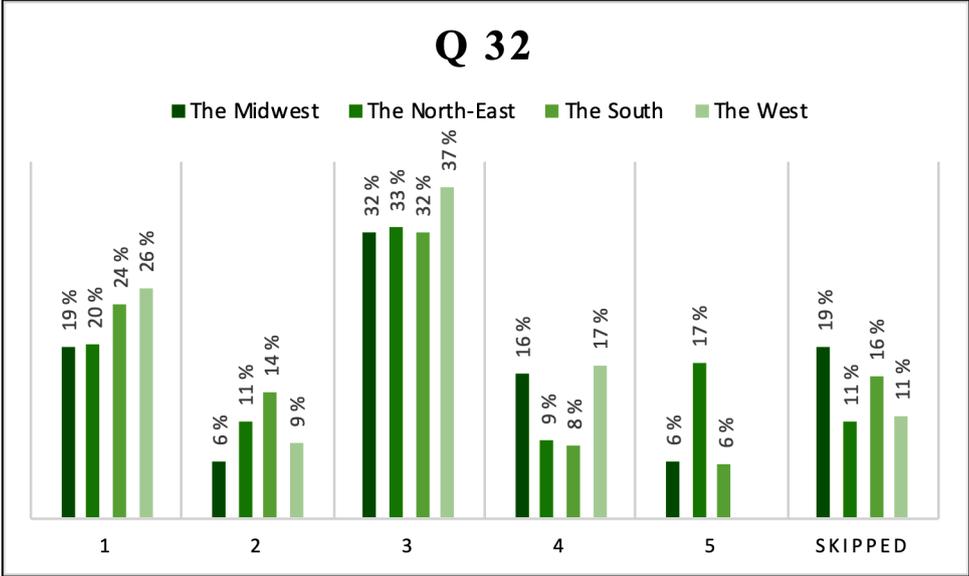
Figure 47 «I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music» - geographical distribution

17% of the participants from the North-East area agreed with the statement on Question 32, compared to the Midwest and the South where 6% of the participants agreed (Figure 47). No participants from the West agreed with the statement. The different geographical areas had similar percentages of participants that disagreed with the statement, varying from 19-26%.

4.3.2 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media»
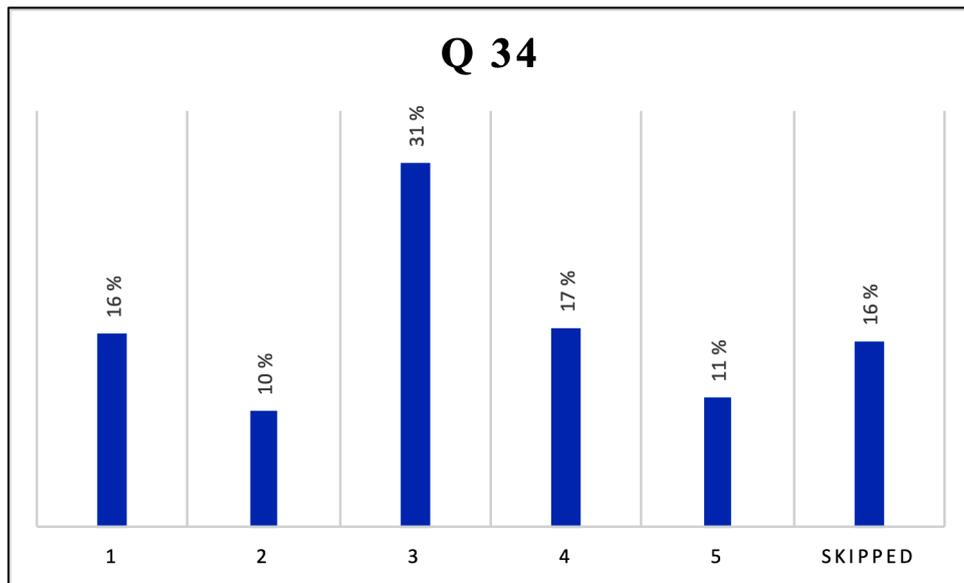
Figure 48 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media» - overall distribution

The participants rated the statement: «*It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media*». The majority of the participants did not have a specific opinion (Figure 48). The percentages of who disagreed and disagreed to some extent and those who agreed and agreed to some extent were close to equal.

Gender
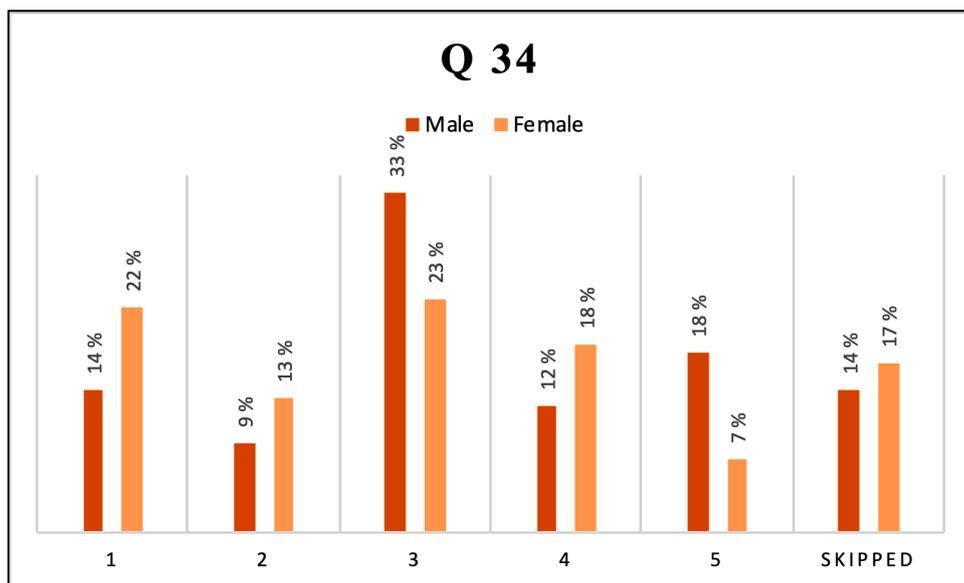
Figure 49 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media» - gender distribution

The female participants disagreed more in general with the statement than the male participants (Figure 49). The male participants agreed with the statement slightly more than the female participants.

Age
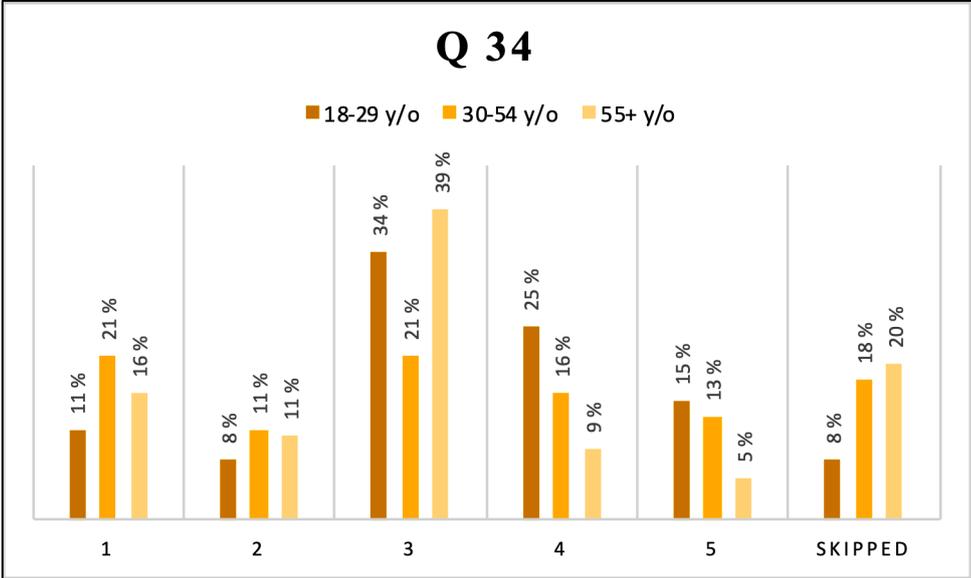
Figure 50 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media» - age distribution

55+ year-olds agreed the least with the statement on Question 34 (Figure 50). Only 5% of the 55+ year-olds agreed compared to 13-15% from the younger age groups. The age group 18-29-year-olds agreed more in general compared to the older age groups. The youngest age group was also the age group that disagreed the least with the statement.
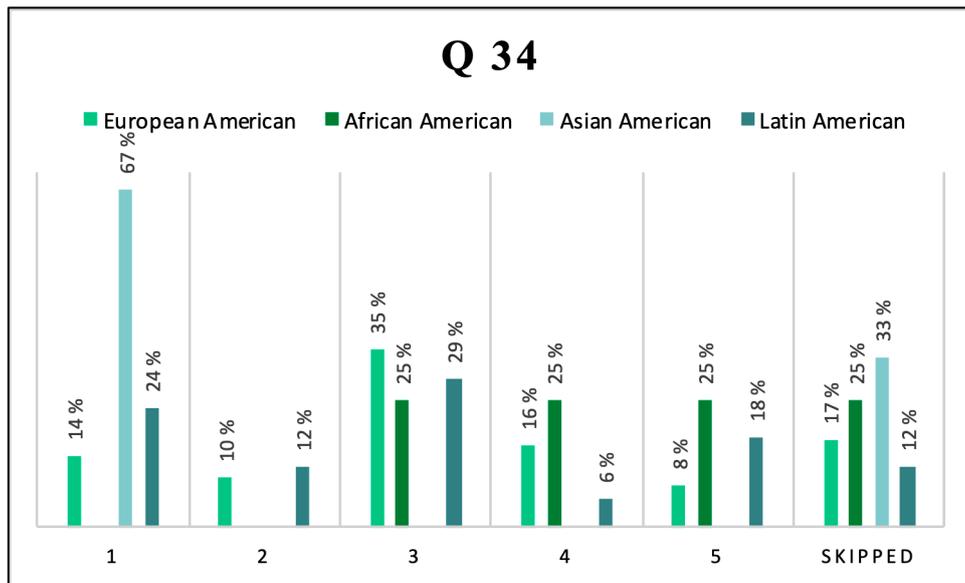
Figure 51 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media» - ethnic distribution

Figure 51 shows that the African American participants agreed the most with the statement «*It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media*». Despite that the majority agreed with the statement, 25% of the African American participants had an unclear opinion on whether it is popular to use AAVE on social media or not. Asian Americans were the ethnic group that disagreed the most with the statement with 67%. The majority of the European American participants had an unclear opinion.

Geography
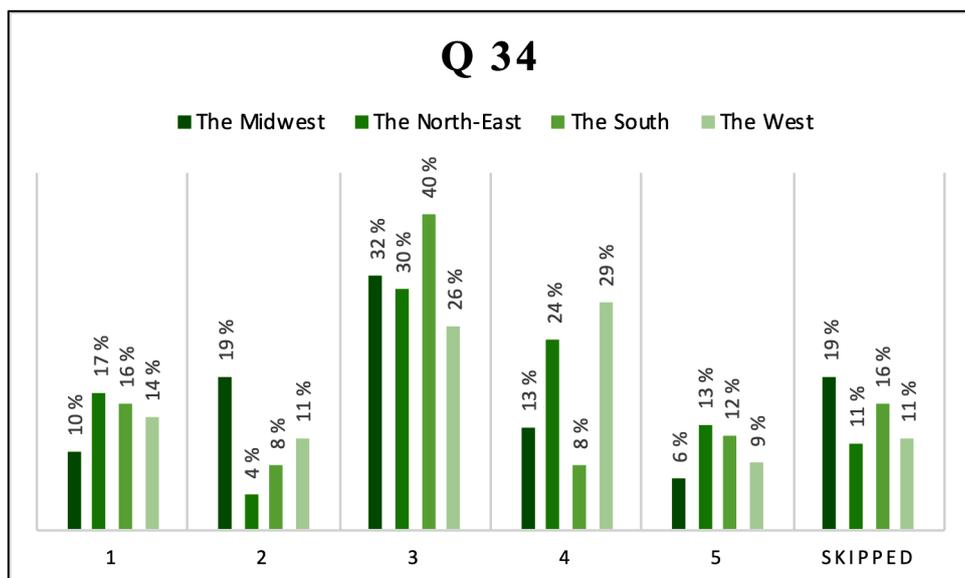
Figure 52 «It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media» - geographical distribution

65

The Midwest was the geographical area that disagreed the least with the statement, however had the highest percentage of participants that disagreed to some extent (Figure 52). The North-East and the West were the areas that agreed the most with the statement in general.

4.3.3 «It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English»
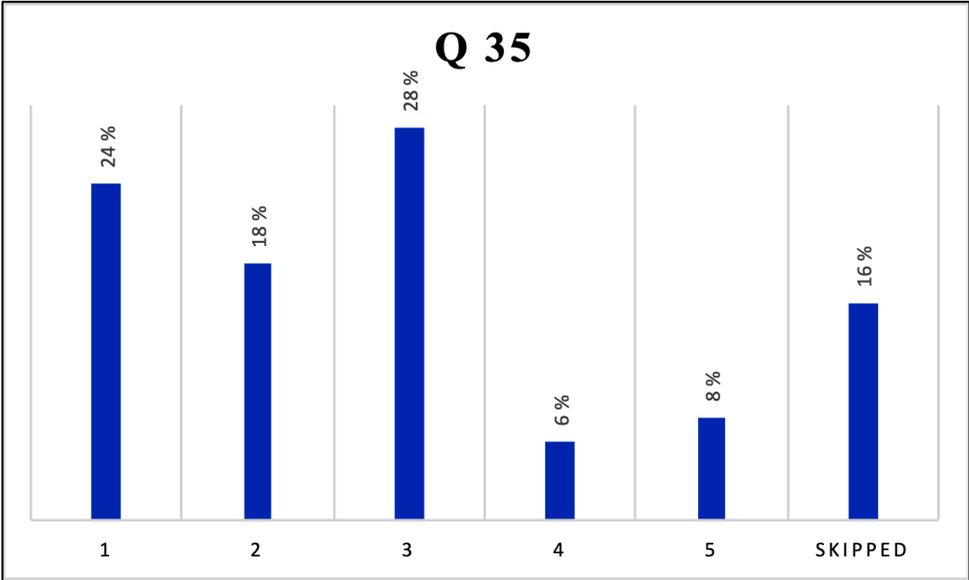
Figure 53 «It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English» - overall distribution

Figure 53 shows what the participants answered on Question 35, where they rated the statement: *«It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English»*. Over 40% of the participants disagreed or disagreed to some extent, while under 15% agreed or agreed to some extent with the statement (Figure 53). The distribution of geographical areas showed little difference from the overall result.

Gender
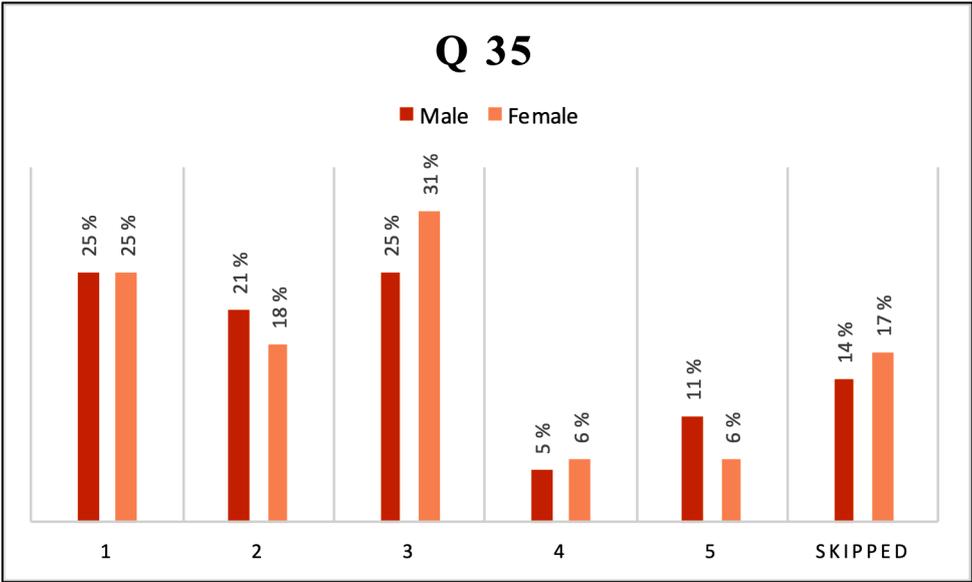
Figure 54 «It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English»
- gender distribution

Figure 54 shows that there was a slight difference between the results from the female participants and the male participants; 6% of the female participants agreed with the statement and 11% of the male participants agreed with the statement.

Age
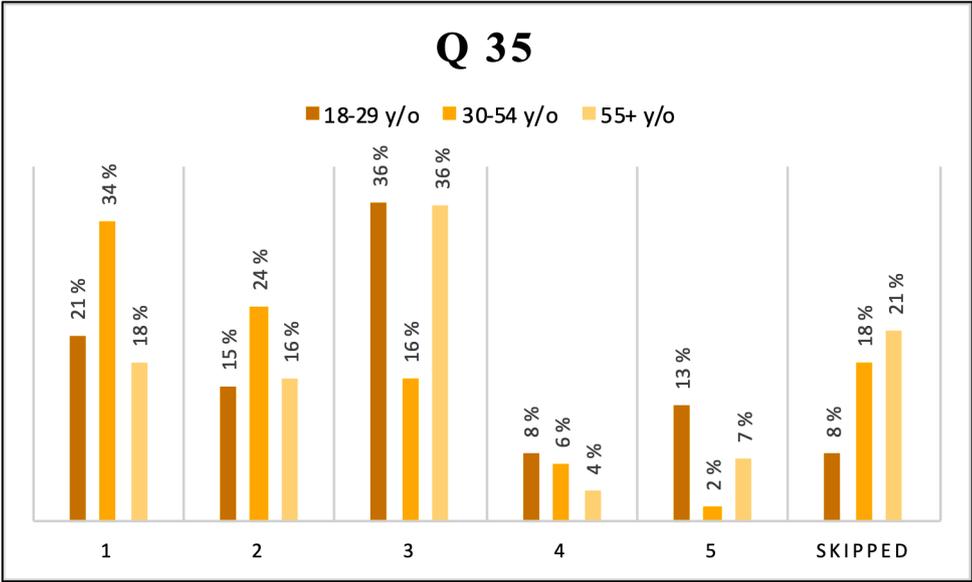
Figure 55 «It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English»
- age distribution

18-29-year-olds was the age group that had the highest percentage of participants that agreed or agreed to some extent with the statement (Figure 55). The age group 30-54-year-olds agreed the least and disagreed the most with the statement. 30-54-year-olds was also the age group that had the lowest percentage of participants that did not have a clear opinion with 16%, compared to the other age groups where 36% ticked '3'.

Ethnicity
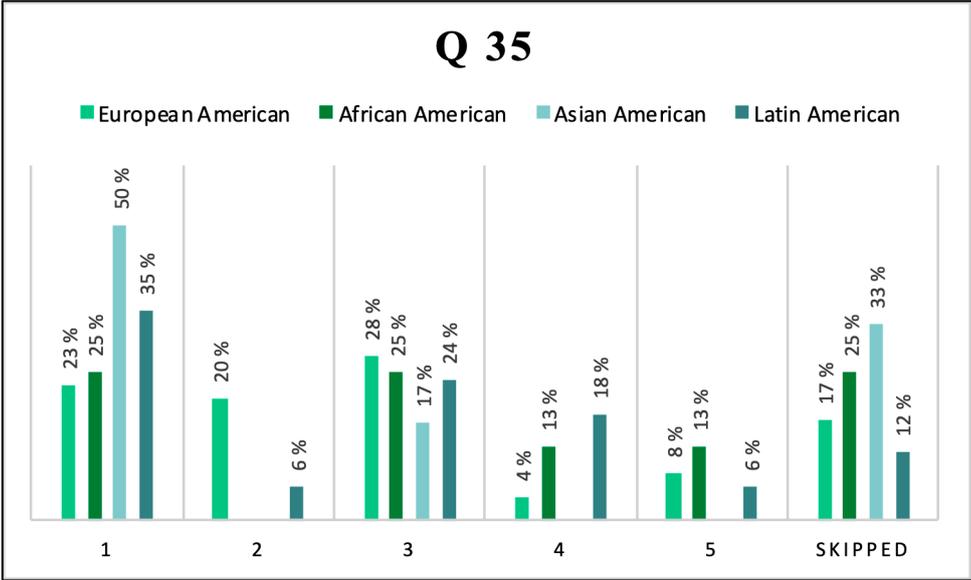
Figure 56 «It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English» – ethnic distribution

African American and Latin American participants were the ethnic groups that agreed the most with the statement «*It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English*» (Figure 56). However, 25% of the African American participants disagreed with the statement. Most of the European American participants disagreed with the statement, stating that it is okay for people who are not African American to use AAVE.

4.3.4 Summary

Only 8% of the participants answered that they like the use of AAVE in music (Figure 43). The result also shows that 12% of the male participants liked the use of AAVE in music, compared to the female participants where 6% agreed (Figure 44). The youngest participants (18-29-year-olds), had the highest percentage of participants (21%) that agreed with the statement, and therefore enjoyed the use of AAVE in music (Figure 45). 5% of the age group 30-54-year-olds

agreed, and no one in the age group 55+ year-olds agreed. The majority of the participants were unsure whether it was popular or not to use AAVE or slang on social media (Figure 48). The results from Question 32 and Question 34 shows that people do not accept AAVE as a part of the pop culture. However, the youngest generation seems to enjoy it more than the elder generations. Most of the participants disagreed with the statement «*It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English*» (Figure 53). 18-29-year-olds agreed more with the statement than the other age groups (Figure 55).

The Asian American participants was the ethnic group that disliked the use of AAVE in music the most (Figure 46). The findings show that the African American participants did not like the use of AAVE in music either. However, the African American participants was the ethnic group that agreed the most that AAVE is popular to use in social media. The majority of the European American participants had an unclear opinion on whether AAVE was popular to use in social media or not (Figure 51). Most of the European American participants disagreed with the statement «*It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American Vernacular English*» on Question 35 (Figure 56). Even though 1/4 of the African American participants thought it was okay for people of another ethnicity to use AAVE, 13% did not think that was okay.

5 Discussion

Our first meeting with new people is always exciting, even if some do not reflect too much on it. We can all remember the excitement of the first day in a new class or a new job. Some are more conscious while others are less aware about how we measure others and how they measure us. One important feature about us is our language. The language and the way we speak can give much information to our surroundings. When starting in a new job, for example, it is important for the employer that the new employee is socialized into the company's culture. For the new employee it is important to adapt to the new environment as soon as possible by watching how others act. Language is an important part of this. In this thesis I have looked into this question from another perspective; are people's language influenced by their 'group', in this case ethnicity, and are they aware of their ethnic groups' particular features when it comes to the use of language?

In the following discussion the three research questions (see Chapter 1) are presented in separate sections. To each research question the findings from relevant questions in the survey are presented and discussed with relevant theory. More specifically, questions 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13 are discussed in Chapter 5.1 '*Perception of own ethnicity*', questions 20, 21, 24, 25 and 26 are discussed in Chapter 5.2 '*Perception of AAVE*', and questions 32, 34 and 35 are discussed in Chapter 5.3 '*Today's use of AAVE*'.

5.1 Perception of own ethnicity

The first research question, «How are Americans' speaking habits influenced by their ethnicity?», explores the participants' perception of their speaking habits, especially in relation to their ethnic identity. Five questions (questions 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13) in the questionnaire relate to this research question, all of them trying to get the responders to reflect on their own language from different perspectives.

Identity is divided into two; individual identity and group identity. Group identity means being a part of a social category, which could be, for instance, religion, class or ethnicity. Our individual identity is nurtured by the group identities we partake in (Joseph 2004: 5; see Chapter 2.1, p. 5). According to Smuts the 'self', meaning who we are, is constructed by a language (Smuts 1926: 245; see Chapter 2.1, p. 5). The way we speak is therefore a crucial factor when

identifying who we are and to which group we belong. According to Bucholtz and Hall, identity is the outcome, not the source, of linguistic practice (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 558; see Chapter 2.1, p. 6). The findings from this research study shows that there was just a slight difference between participants that agreed with the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*» and participants that disagreed or did not have a specific opinion (Figure 18). It was interesting that so many seem to be unaware of how identity and speaking habits are connected. When people meet for the first time, the first impression is often based on how the interlocutor behaves linguistically. We are then able to draw certain conclusions about that person (Joseph 2004: 3, see Chapter 2.1, p. 4-5). Even though the findings from the overall results were inconclusive, the majority of the African American and Asian American participants agreed with the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*» (Figure 21). Since the Asian Americans do not share heritage nor have a distinct ethnic dialect in English, they often use other ethnic dialects such as AAVE to stand out (Reyes 2005: 511, see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 16).

Over 50% of the participants recognized that they use words or speak in the same way as their ethnic group (Figure 5). Behaving the same way linguistically means that people are a part of a speech community (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 62-63; see Chapter 2.1.1, p. 6). Being a part of a speech community means that the linguistic behavior is the same or similar, but they also share social norms, local knowledge, beliefs and values (Morgan 2001: 31; see Chapter 2.1.1, p. 7). Even though most of the participants agreed that they are a part of a speech community, 1/4 of the participants did not have an opinion on the matter (Figure 5). This could imply that they are unsure if they use words and phrases that were common for their ethnic group. A reason for this might be the change in the different dialects. Fought (2004: 446) suggests that some dialects are becoming more alike and states that ethnic dialects such as AAVE may converge with local varieties of General American English.

Ethnic dialect is a subordinate variety of a language, spoken by a specific ethnic group. An ethnical dialect is created through social impacts. Ethnical dialects are learned and formed by exposure, disregarding someone's ethnicity (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 45; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 13). The findings in Question 13 suggests that the majority of the participants speak in the same way as their ethnic group (Figure 23). This corresponds with the findings in Question 7 (Figure 5), where most of the participants stated that they used words or phrases that were common for their ethnic group. However, over 30% of the participants had an unclear opinion to the statement «*I speak differently than my ethnical group*» or agreed with the statement

(Figure 23). The result could be explained through the increase of a 'mixed-race' population in the USA (Fought 2004: 444). Many speak differently than their ethnic group because individuals who have parents that represent different ethnic groups might choose to identify themselves as belonging to one of the ethnicities, both of them, or neither, which will have an effect on their language (Fought 2004: 444).

Even though the majority of the participants stated that they speak in the same way as their ethnic group, the findings in Question 11 imply that they do not affiliate with their ethnic group by speaking in the same manner (Figure 15). The findings from Question 13 and Question 11 contradict each other. Why would people speak in the same way as their ethnic group if they do not feel some sort of unity? It would be more natural to speak the standard variety, which has a higher social prestige than ethnic dialects. Ethnic dialects do not come automatically because of someone's ethnicity (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 38; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 13). Speakers of an ethnic dialect often use it to 'fit in' or distinguish themselves from others (Benor 2010: 160; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 13). It is therefore interesting that so many of the participants do not feel connected to their ethnic group when they use the same type of American English. The contradictory result might also be connected to the phenomenon 'crossing'. Crossing is when people deliberately use styles that are common for other ethnic groups (Fought 2004: 455). The participants might use crossing and therefore not feel connected to just one ethnic group.

The alternation between different dialects are called code-switching (Schipor 2018: 29). The participants could code-switch for several reasons: As referential, directive, phatic, metalinguistic, expressive, solidarity, or clarification function (Ennaji 2005: 142-143; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 14). Most of the participants answered that they do not code-switch when speaking to people of other ethnicities, however, 35% of the participants had either an unclear opinion or stated they code-switch (Figure 10). Speakers of an ethnic dialect might be aware of the differences from the standard dialect. It might therefore be easier to adjust some of the features when talking to an interlocutor of another ethnic group (Benor 2010: 166; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 14). 25% of the African American participants expressed that they code-switch (Figure 13). A possible explanation for why so many of the African American participants code-switch could be that they use the metalinguistic function to impress their interlocutor (Ennaji 2005: 142-143; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 14). They might feel the need to impress their audience because AAVE is not a prestige dialect.

Most of the participants stated that they do not feel connected to their ethnic group when speaking in the same way. It is therefore not surprising that there was such a large number of participants that expressed that they code-switch (Figure 10). On the other hand, it is interesting that so many of the participants code-switch when almost 50% stated that the way they speak is a part of their identity (Figure 18). If the way they speak is a part of their identity, why feel the need to code-switch? A possible reason might be that they code-switch for other reasons than because they are ashamed of the way they speak.

The findings in Question 7 shows, when distributed into genders, that there were more women that disagreed with the statement «*I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group*» than men (Figure 5). A possible explanation for this might be that women tend to be more aware of the social prestige of linguistic variables (Trudgill 1972: 182). The most prestige variation of a language is the standard dialect. The standard dialect is often the 'goal' for all speakers and is often associated with upper-class and the educated elite (Lippi-Green 2012: 57; see Chapter 2.2.1, p. 10). According to Cheshire (2004: 426-427) previous research shows that:

> …women have to acquire social status vicariously, whereas men can acquire it through their occupational status earning power. Women are more likely, therefore, to secure and signal their social status through their use of the standard, overtly prestigious variants.

Figure 10 shows that men tend to code-switch more than women. This might have something to do with the fact that women tend to use the standard variety, and therefore do not need to code-switch (Trudgill 1972: 182).

The oldest generation of participants (55+ year-olds) were the most opinionated when it came to the perception of their speaking habits. The 55+ year-olds were the age group which had the highest number of participants that used words or phrases that were common for their ethnic group (Figure 7). The findings from Question 11 were interesting as the 55+ year-olds had the highest percentage on both ends of the scale (disagreed versus agreed) (Figure 16). The oldest age group therefore had a split opinion on whether they felt connected or not to their ethnic group when speaking the same type of American English. In spite of their split opinion on Question 11, the 55+ year-olds were quite consistent with their answers when it came to code-

switching on Question 10 (Figure 12). Over 60% of the 55+ year-olds stated that they do not code-switch when talking to people of other ethnicities. According to Chambers (2004: 355), the oldest generation tends to only have minor varieties of change in their language, compared to the youngest generation who has a greater frequency of variety. This might be an explanation for why the 55+ year-olds stated that they used words that were common for their ethnic group, because they are not affected to the same degree by features from other ethnic groups or popular slang and/or phrases. This could also be a reason for why 61% of the 55+ year-olds stated that they did not code-switch (Figure 12).

5.2   Perception of AAVE

Questions 20, 21, 24, 25 and 26 were the main questions related to answering the research question «What are Americans' perception of African American Vernacular English, and how is this related to their general opinion about the American identity?». This research question aimed to explore what kind of relationship the participants have with AAVE, and how their opinions are related to the American identity.

AAVE is an ethnic dialect mainly spoken by African Americans (Magnusson 2008: 1; see Chapter 2.3, p. 16). AAVE has linguistic features which includes morphological, phonological and syntactic characteristics such as consonant cluster reduction, the verbal – s marking, the zero copula and the habitual be (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 47-48; see Chapter 2.3, p. 16). The findings showed a surprisingly high percentage of participants that were unsure if there is a clear difference between AAVE and General American English (Figure 24). A possible explanation for this outcome is the converging of AAVE with local varieties of General American English (Fought 2004: 446). It could therefore be difficult to distinguish the differences between the them.

When the participants rated the statement «*I have never heard anyone speak African American Vernacular English*», most of the participants disagreed, meaning that most of the participants have heard someone speak AAVE (Figure 28). It is not surprising that most of the participants stated that they have heard someone speak AAVE, because AAVE has been deliberately used in the media since the early 20th century. In the beginning AAVE was used as racist stereotyping through Black Face (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 84; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 17-18). In recent years, AAVE has been used to portray the African American community through contemporary television, without the racial prejudice (Hall and Damico 2007: 80; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18).

Some TV characters of other ethnicities have also been shown to include AAVE features in their speech (Ueland 2018: 16; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18).

Despite the findings that the majority of the participants have heard someone speak AAVE, 1/4 participants were unsure if they had heard it, or stated that they had not heard it (Figure 28). Surprisingly enough, there was a small percentage of African American participants that agreed in some way with the statement. This means that they have seldom or never heard anyone speak AAVE (Figure 29). This is especially interesting since we know how AAVE is exposed in the American pop culture, through television, music and social media (Gazi 2017: 1; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18). The findings could be connected to Question 20 where most of the participants were unsure whether there was a clear difference between AAVE and General American English (Figure 24). If you are unsure of the features of AAVE, how can you then determine if you have heard it? The participants were not consistent when rating these two statements.

In the last decades, AAVE has become an essential part of the American pop culture. It has provided inspiration to language, fashion and music (Cutler 1999: 439; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18). AAVE has especially made an impact on social media, where features of AAVE are popular to use as 'Internet memes'. In addition, it is becoming more common to speak AAVE among other ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans (Hornberger and McKay 2010: 411; see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 16). Even so, most of the participants had an unclear opinion whether AAVE should become socially accepted (Figure 31). The reason why so many do not have a specific opinion about it, might be because of the ongoing prejudice against AAVE. People who speak AAVE are often associated with ignorance and lack of education (see Figures 42 and 57). It is often perceived as 'improper' and 'wrong' (Reyes 2010: 405-406; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18).

The results from Question 25 «*General American English is the proper way to speak*», shows that there are more participants that do not acknowledge General American English as the proper way to speak English in America (Figure 37). However, there were only a slight majority of the participants that disagreed rather than agreed with the statement. A reason for why people do not acknowledge General American English as the proper way to speak might have something to do with the increase of mixed-race individuals in America, which affects their language (Fought 2004: 444). Mixed-race individuals may be more exposed to different ways of talking, and therefore become more open to other varieties. Another explanation could be the

more frequent use of AAVE and other ethnic dialects, such as Latin American English, in pop culture and on social media. (Gazi 2017: 1; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18).

There was a high number of participants that thought General American English could be explained through the American history (Figure 42). The USA is a multicultural country, often referred to as the 'melting pot'. The melting pot represents different nationalities, backgrounds, religions and languages. American national identity consists of four simple principles; democracy, liberty, equality and individual achievement, one could therefore be a part of the American national identity regardless of one's origin and native language (Pavlenko 2002: 164-165; see Chapter 2.2.2, p. 11). However, Americans consider the language to be an important part of the national identity, especially English monolingualism (Pavlenko 2002: 180; see Chapter 2.2.2, p. 12). Since language is such an important part of the American identity, it might be important for the participants to speak General American English instead of the subordinate varieties of their language to show unity.

Question 26 was a follow-up question of Question 25. Only participants that acknowledged that «*General American English is the proper way to speak*» and ticked either '4' or '5', were directed to this follow-up question to elaborate on their opinion. There was a total of 47 participants that further explained their opinion. The majority of the answers could be divided into two different categories; education and American identity.

Education	American identity
«…Misuse of English demonstrates a lack of education»	«How can we be one nation indivisible if we speak different languages»
«Proper language conveys societal intellectual abilities»	«We live in America and the English language is our native language»

Figure 57 The table consists of examples from the two main categories on Question 26.

Figure 57 shows excerpts of what the participants in the different categories answered when explaining why they thought General American English was the proper way to speak (Figure 42). In the 17th century the slave masters thought African languages were 'monkey talk' or 'savage gibberish'. At that time in history Africans were viewed as animals and savages, which means that their intelligence level could not be compared to the intelligence of a white man

(Coleman and Daniel 2000: 77; see Chapter 2.3.1, p. 17). Such misrepresentation continued well into the 20th century; when the 'Black voice' was used to mock African Americans. 'Black face' was a popular character back in the 1920s and was supposed to express poor education (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 83; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 17-18). In this study, some participants stated that speaking AAVE is dumbing down the language, it does not sound intelligent, and that it is not grammatically correct. This indicates that the reason why people think General American English is the proper way to speak, is because their perception of AAVE is that it expresses poor education and that AAVE is not a part of the 'American identity' (Figure 57).

When distributing the participants into age groups, it is clear that there is a generational gap between the different age groups. The youngest generation (18-29-year-olds) agreed twice as much as the other age groups with AAVE becoming socially accepted (Figure 33) and disagreed strongly with the statement «*General American English is the proper way to speak*» (Figure 38). The results from the age group 18-29-year-olds indicate that the youngest generation is more open to diversity. The 18-29-year-olds grew up in a more inclusive society, where AAVE is an essential part of the American pop culture (Cutler 1999: 439; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18).

The oldest generation (55+ year-olds), however, is the age group that acknowledged the most that General American English is the proper way to speak (Figure 38). The oldest generation was also more aware of the differences between AAVE and General American English (Figure 26). A possible explanation for these findings is that the society in which the oldest generation grew up, discriminated against African Americans, and especially the way they spoke (Coleman and Daniel 2000: 84; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 17-18). Therefore the 55+ year-olds might have more prejudice against AAVE than the youngest generation.

5.3   Today's use of AAVE

As mentioned in Chapter 5.2, the youngest generation has the opinion that AAVE should be more socially accepted. The next research question explores the use of AAVE today, especially in social media and music; «How do Americans react to the more frequent use of African American Vernacular English in today's society?». Questions 32, 34 and 35 were used to find out Americans' reaction to the more frequent use of AAVE in contemporary society.

Americans have been taking interest in black culture, such as hip-hop, music (rap), breakdance and graffiti art, for quite some time now (Bucholtz 1997: 1). European American rap artists are making their entrance in the music industry; such as G-Eazy, Post Malone and Iggy Azalea. It is not uncommon that AAVE features are heard frequently in songs sung by white rappers or artists. According to RollingStone the genre leading the way is hip-hop and R&B (Wang 2018). Hip-hop and R&B are genres often associated with African American culture. Despite the increase in popularity among music genres related to African American culture, participants in this research study did not enjoy, or have a specific opinion on the use of AAVE in music (Figure 43). The findings from the ethnic distribution on Question 32 (Figure 46), shows that ethnic groups such as Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans also disliked the use of AAVE in music to some extent, despite the fact that these ethnic groups all use features of AAVE (Wardhaugh and Fuller 2015: 50-51; Reyes 2005: 511, see Chapter 2.2.3, p. 15-16; Magnusson 2008: 1; see Chapter 2.3, p. 16). There can be several reasons for this outcome; the participants may not enjoy the music genres where AAVE is often used or because the participants might find the use of AAVE in music offensive. Another reason might be that the participants do not know which AAVE features are used, because it might be difficult to separate AAVE from General American English (see Chapter 5.2, p. 74).

Not only are Americans taking more interest in the black culture but have also adapted some of the culture themselves. Some call it cultural borrowing, others see it as cultural theft and cultural appropriation. According to Cutler (1999: 439; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 18), white appropriation of black culture is not something new. Black culture has been a source of inspiration for Americans for a long time. Now more than ever, European Americans are adapting to black culture. Rappers, such as Vanilla Ice, are conscious of their race and therefore selecting a stage name to defuse claims that they are pretending to be black (Bucholtz 1997: 4). The majority of the participants thought that it is okay for people of other ethnicities to use AAVE (Figure 53). Despite the overall results, African American and Latin American participants found it more offensive than the other ethnic groups that people who are not African American use AAVE features (Figure 56). The youngest participants (18-29-year-olds) agreed almost twice as much as the other age groups that borrowing features from other ethnicities was not acceptable (Figure 55). One reason for the findings could be that the youngest generation is often associated with being «politically correct». They are more concerned about behaving correctly in order to avoid offending others.

In contemporary society, the media plays a significant role in the daily life. Eisenstein points out that writing therefore has a more important role now than before. Social media are used by people all over the world regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity and religion. Since there is such a widespread in the variety of people on social media, there is also diversity in the textual styles (Eisenstein 2014: 1; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 19). AAVE is no exception. A study conducted by Illbury (2019: 2) shows that «…across all linguistic levels, features typically found in AAVE are frequently used in tweets by these individuals». Using AAVE in so-called 'Internet memes' has attained viral status and has become popular (Illbury 2019: 14; see Chapter 2.3.2, p. 19). The majority of the participants did not have a specific opinion on whether it is popular to use AAVE features in social media (Figure 48). However, African American participants thought that AAVE was more popular in social media than the other ethnic groups (Figure 51). The overall result is remarkable since the theoretical background proves otherwise. A possible explanation for the result on Question 34 might be that the other ethnic groups are not exposed as much as African American participants to features of AAVE on social media. Considering the results from Question 20, which showed that most of the participants were unsure of the difference between AAVE and General American English (Figure 24), the participants might not be aware of that they are being exposed to features of AAVE on social media.

Women disagreed more than men with the statement «*I like the way they use African American Vernacular English in music*» (Figure 44). Also, women also did not agree as much as men, that it is popular to use AAVE on social media (Figure 49). A possible explanation for this outcome could be explained through previous studies on linguistic variation between the sexes. Women tend to be more aware of the social significance of linguistic variables, because the social position of women is less secure than men's position (Trudgill 1972: 182). Women tend to use language of prestige, which is often a variety close to the standard language. Why women like AAVE features in contemporary society less than men, may therefore be explained by the fact that women do not use subordinate features as often as men in their speech because of the social prestige.

Another possible explanation for why women like AAVE features in contemporary society less than men might be because of the connotations that follow with slang. According to Trudgill (1972: 183), working-class speech tends to have masculine connotations. Some features are associated with toughness and roughness, which are not considered to be desirable for women,

who often tend to desire feminine features (Trudgill 1972: 183). Women might not like AAVE features in contemporary society as much as men, because the characteristics are not as appealing to them, as they are to men.

The generational gap appears quite clearly in Figure 45. The youngest generation (18-29-year-olds) expressed that they were fond of the use of AAVE in music, while the oldest generation (55+ year-olds) did not like it at all. However, the results from the 18-29-year-olds were not overwhelmingly positive, which could be interpreted that the majority of the age group 18-29-year-olds did not have a specific opinion about the use of AAVE features in music. The findings from Question 32 are not surprising, because hip-hop, R&B and rap music are often music genres that younger people listen to. However, it is interesting that the majority of the 18-29-year-olds did not have a specific opinion about the use of AAVE in music, when the most popular genres among youths are music related to African American culture. As mentioned above (see Chapter 5.2, p. 77) the oldest generation expressed that in their opinion General American English is the proper way to speak (Figure 38). Since the older generation in this study thinks that General American English is the proper way to speak, it is no surprise that no one liked the use of AAVE in music. The oldest age group also agreed the least with that AAVE was popular to use in social media (Figure 50). Social media platforms are usually the younger generation's areas. It might be an explanation that the social media platforms used by 55+ year-olds do not generate the same words and slang used in the younger participants' platforms.

6   Conclusion

The present study has explored the relation between language and identity of Americans, especially related to AAVE; the study has also explored how language is influenced by ethnicity. A survey was conducted through an online questionnaire that consisted of 6 personal questions, 25 statements and 5 open-ended questions. The participants rated each statement from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). The questionnaire was then analyzed with regards to the social factors; gender, age, ethnicity and geographical areas. As the data have shown (see Chapter 4) the general conception of AAVE varies depending on the different social factors.

After the survey, the obtained data was analyzed in order to find possible answers to the three research questions. The first research question was «How are Americans' speaking habits influenced by their ethnicity?». There were no significant findings related to this particular question, in fact the responses given to the relevant questions were not consistent. The majority of the participants acknowledged that they spoke in the same way as their ethnic group. At the same time, they stated that they do not affiliate with their ethnic group by speaking in the same way. Since the majority did not feel connected to their ethnic group while speaking the same type of American English, it was interesting that such a large number of participants stated that they code-switched. In conclusion, most of the participants acknowledged that they used words or phrases that are common for their ethnic group and that the way they speak is a part of their identity. However, the participants expressed that they do not think their speaking habits are influenced by their ethnicity.

The second research question was more specifically directed towards AAVE: «What are Americans' perception of African American Vernacular English, and how is this related to their general opinion about the American identity?». The findings from the survey showed that the participants were unsure of the distinct differences between AAVE and General American English, although most of the participants have heard someone speak AAVE. Furthermore, most of the participants thought that AAVE should not become socially accepted, but at the same time they stated that General American English was not the proper way to speak. The prejudice against AAVE seems to apply to the older generations, since the majority of the 18-29-year-olds thought that AAVE should, in fact, become accepted. The participants who thought General American English was the proper way to speak, justified their opinion by

saying that the use of AAVE shows a lack of education, poor grammar, and that AAVE is not a part of the American identity.

With regard to the final research question, which was «How do Americans react to the more frequent use of African American Vernacular English in today's society?», the older generations did not enjoy the use of AAVE in music, while the youngest age group did. The majority of the participants were unsure whether AAVE words or phrases are popular to use in social media, while the youngest age group thought it was. The age group 18-29-year-olds also thought that people of other ethnicities should not include features of AAVE in their daily speech, while the majority of the other age groups thought it was okay to do so.

It is difficult to provide a general conclusion on this survey based on the number of participants compared to the overall population in America. However, considering the variety in the demographics of the participants, this thesis could at least provide an indication based on the results. The overall results from the questionnaire are relatively indecisive, but when looking at the different social factors it shows a more nuanced picture of AAVE in American society. The findings indicated that women tend to use ethnic dialects less than men. According to Trudgill (1972: 182) women are often more aware of the social prestige that comes with speaking an ethnic dialect, and therefore often tend to speak a more standard version of the language. The findings also gave an indication that the age group 18-29-year-olds was open to and accepting of AAVE. The 55+ year-olds, on the other hand, were more skeptical of AAVE and its use in a contemporary society. These findings are not surprising since, according to Chambers (2004: 355), the youngest generation is usually more open to change and linguistic variety than the older generation.

African American participants strongly agreed with the statement «*The way I speak is a part of my identity*» (Figure 21) and found it offensive that other ethnic groups used features of AAVE. However, 1/4 of the African American stated that they code-switch. It is not surprising that some African American participants code-switch, since AAVE is viewed as ignorant, improper and not a part of the 'American identity' (Figures 42 and 57). Dropping some of the features of AAVE to speak the standard variety, makes sense since General American English is associated with being educated (Lippi-Green 2012: 57; see Chapter 2.2.1, p. 10).

This study is about language and identity in the American society, and as shown above, the two last research questions were specifically related to African American Vernacular English. Even if the overall results from the survey were relatively indecisive, there is one reflection that is relevant to note related to the participants response to «*General American English is the proper way to speak*», and the following open-ended question (Figures 37 and 42). Many of the participants stated that speaking subordinate varieties of English indicates lack of education. If African American Vernacular English and other subordinate varieties of English are linked to social status, this might result in ethnic groups being more segregated, and that code-switching might be used more frequently in order to adapt in various social arenas. In the American society, which is considered to be 'the melting pot', this is something to be aware of.

6.1   Evaluation of the research study

The central part of this study was to conduct a survey in the USA, including Americans citizens only. There were, however, problems in obtaining a sufficient number of participants. Several potential participants expressed that they thought it was racist that the present author, who is white, should write about AAVE and conduct a survey with statements regarding this topic. The participants also expressed that it was racist to focus on the differences between AAVE and General American English and stated that the topic is not something they would like to discuss. Therefore, some people did not participate in the survey because of this, and some might have had a negative mindset when conducting the survey.

There were also some problems with gathering participants from the age group 5-17-year-olds. The present author initially contacted several schools (high schools), most of which did not want their pupils to participate in the survey. One school did allow their pupils to participate in the survey; however, for unknown reasons, it was difficult to get a signed consent form from their parents, and consequently, the results from this school could not be used in this study. The age group 5-17-year-olds was therefore not represented in this thesis.

6.2   Further research

As the present study was restricted to the social factors gender, age, ethnicity, and geographical areas, further research may include social class factors such as income and profession. These social factors might be interesting to include in further research to find out whether AAVE is perceived differently in the different social classes. Due to limited resources, the research could

not gather more than 173 participants. Further work should include a higher number, to get a more reliable study. A future study could also include mixed-method or qualitative research methods to get more information about why people have certain opinions.

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Research study: questionnaire

1. **Gender:** ____Female   ____Male

2. **Age**:_____

3. **Ethnicity** (*You can tick off multiple boxes*):

European American (Caucasian)	African American	Asian American	Latin American	Native American

4. **Your profession:** _____

5. **Parents'/guardians' profession(s):** _____

6. **State**:_____

Please rate your agreement with the statements below from 1 (disagree) to 5 (completely agree):

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
7	I speak in a certain way and use certain words that are common for my ethnic group.					
8	If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), please give examples here:					
9	I speak differently with my friends than I do with my parents/guardians.					
10	I talk differently when I speak to people of other ethnicities.					
11	I feel connected to my ethnic group when we speak the same type of American English.					
12	The way I speak is a part of my identity.					

13	I speak differently than my ethnical group.					
14	There is prejudice against the way I speak.					
15	I am embarrassed of the way I speak.					

Please rate your agreement with the statements below from 1 (disagree) to 5 (completely agree):

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
16	Someone has corrected me while I spoke a certain way.					
17	If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why did they correct you?					
18	I use curse words.					
19	If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), please say why, and who do you curse in front of?					
20	There is a clear difference between African American English and General American English.					
21	I have never heard anyone speak African American English					
22	It is common to speak African American English.					
23	It is common for different ethnic groups to speak African American English.					
24	African American English should be socially accepted.					
25	General American English is the proper way to speak.					

26	If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), why do you think so?					
27	Every American should speak in the same way.					
28	I speak African American English.					

Please rate your agreement with the statements below from 1 (disagree) to 5 (completely agree):

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
29	I use African American slang because everyone else is using it.					
30	If you agree (if you have ticked either 4 or 5 in the statement above), please give examples of the words you use here:					
31	I listen to rap music.					
32	I like the way they use African American English in music.					
33	I relate to the language used in the music I listen to.					
34	It is popular to use African American words and/or slang on social media.					
35	It is wrong for people who are not African American to use African American English.					
36	I think American pop culture consists of a variety of different cultures.					