The characteristics of several nonstandard dialects of American English are presented in this paper in the form of an inventory of features. It has been compiled with the recognition that nonstandard dialects are governed by pronunciation and grammatical rules and that within the broad category of nonstandard dialects, regional and ethnic variations occur. The code used in the inventory to designate major varieties of nonstandard dialects consists of: (1) NS—used in all nonstandard varieties of American English, including northern white NS, southern white NS, and black English; (2) SWNS—southern white NS; (3) S—southern white standard (possibly considered nonstandard in some northern contexts); and (4) BE—black English. The inventory includes sections on consonant cluster reduction; the "th" sounds; the "r" and "l" sounds; final "b," "d," and "g"; nasalization; vowel glides; verb constructions; the copula verb concord; negation; the possessive forms; plurals; pronominal apposition; relative clauses; questions; demonstratives; and pronouns. (JM)
A LINGUISTIC DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL DIALECTS

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and  
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In this section, we shall present an abbreviated inventory of some of the descriptive characteristics of several different nonstandard dialects of American English. We have opted to present these in terms of an inventory of features rather than a lengthy discursive account. This means that many of the finer details have been omitted here. More elaborate accounts of these features can be found in Labov, et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969), Fasold and Wolfram (1970) and Wolfram and Fasold (1974).

The following description of various nonstandard American dialects clearly demonstrates their systematic nature. Like all languages, these dialects are governed by regular pronunciation and grammatical rules. In short, what is distinctive about nonstandard dialects is that they are held in low esteem by the speakers of standard dialects and usually by their speakers as well. Nonstandard dialects are not any less a language or any less capable of performing all of the tasks of a language than a standard dialect. It is important to note that many of these features occur variably. That is, a particular dialect may be characterized by the frequency with which certain variants occur rather than their categorical occurrence.

Within the broad category of nonstandard dialects, there are variations which are regional and ethnic. The following code is used here to designate some major varieties of nonstandard dialects and to indicate in which of these dialects certain features are most often found:

- NS Used in all nonstandard varieties of American English, including: Northern White NS, Southern White NS and Black English.
- SWNS Southern White NS
- S Southern White Standard (nearly considered nonstandard in some Northern contexts).
- B Black English
Pronunciation

Consonant Cluster Reduction

(BE/some SWNS dialects)

1. Word-final consonant clusters ending in a stop can be reduced when both members belong to a base word: tes (tests), das (desk), han (hand), and bui (build).

Reduction also occurs when grammatical suffix -ed is added to produce such words as rubbed, rained, messed, looked. Reduced: rub, rain, mess, and look.

When both members of a cluster are either voiced or voiceless, then the rule operates (as above), but when one member is voiced and the other voiceless (e.g. jump, rent, belt, gulp, etc.), the rule does not operate.

In Standard English (SE), final member of a cluster may be absent if following word begins with a consonant (bes' kind, tol' Jim, col' cuts, and fas' back are acceptable in SE).

Reduction takes place when consonant cluster is followed by a vowel or a pause as well as a consonant: wes' en' (west end), bes' apple (best apple). The type of clusters affected by this rule are given in Table 4.

(BE/some SWNS)

2. Plural Formations: words ending in -sk, -eg, and -ok, add the -es instead of a plural. Plural formations follow consonant reduction rule in which words such as desk, test, ghost, and wasp become desks, tests, ghosts, and wasps.

(BE)

3. Underlying Structure of Consonant Cluster: clusters present in testing, scolding, tester, coldest. When suffix begins with vowel the cluster is present. Some dialects having testing, scolding, etc., may not have underlying cluster.

The Th Sounds

(NS)

1. Artic. initial: d/θ as in joy for they
           t/θ as in right for their (special kind of g- unaspirated, tense).
Table 4. Consonant Clusters in which the final member of the cluster may be absent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonetic Cluster</th>
<th>Type I</th>
<th>Type II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[st]</td>
<td>test, post, list</td>
<td>missed, messed, dressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sp]</td>
<td>wasp, clasp, grasp</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[sk]</td>
<td>desk, risk, mask</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[št]</td>
<td></td>
<td>finished, latched, cashed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[zd]</td>
<td></td>
<td>raised, composed, amazed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[žd]</td>
<td></td>
<td>judged, charged, forged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ft]</td>
<td>left, craft, cleft</td>
<td>laughed, stuffed, roughed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[vd]</td>
<td></td>
<td>loved, lived, moved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[nd]</td>
<td>mind, find, mound</td>
<td>rained, fanned, canned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[mu]</td>
<td></td>
<td>named, foamed, rammed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[id]</td>
<td>cold, wild, old</td>
<td>called, smelled, killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[pt]</td>
<td>apt, adept, inept</td>
<td>mapped, stopped, clapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[kt]</td>
<td>rect, contact, expect</td>
<td>looked, cooked, cracked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Where there are no examples under Type I and Type II the cluster does not occur under that category.*
2. **Within a word**: /d/ as in bruvah for brother, ravah for rather, havin for hadin.

(some BE dialects)

3. **Within a word**: /d/ as in bruvah for brother, ravah for rather, havin for hadin.

(S)

4. **Voiced fricatives before nasals**: /θ/, /z/, /v/ become stops before a nasal as in /ɪdn’t/ for / isn’t/, /juva/ for / seven/.

(SWNS/BE)

5. **Word final**: /θ/ predominant production as in /Ruf/ (Ruth), /toof/ (tooth), and /souf/ (south).

(some SWNS/BE)

6. **Word final**: /θ/ predominant production as in /Ruf/ (Ruth), /toof/ (tooth), and /souf/ (south).

(BE)

7. **The R and L**

1. **After a vowel**: the /l/ becomes uh, as in /steol/ (steauh), /sister/ (sistuh).

(S)

2. **Labial consonants**: the /r/ and /l/ are absent, as in /help/ (hep), /torte/ (taught). Typically, /l/ is completely absent before labial consonants.

(SWNS/BE)

3. **Between vowels**: the /r/ or /l/ may be absent between vowels (Cal’, stol’, or Mal’y, for Cal’l, stol’, or Mal’l).

(SWNS/BE)

4. **Effect on vocabulary and grammar**: consistent loss of /r/ at end of word has caused merging of two words. The change caused by the absence of /r/ in /thaw/ and their or in you and your brings them phonetically closer together. These forms are then produced: It is /thaw/ book or It is /you/ book.

(BE)

5. **Effect on vocabulary and grammar**: consistent loss of /r/ at end of word has caused merging of two words. The change caused by the absence of /r/ in /thaw/ and their or in you and your brings them phonetically closer together. These forms are then produced: It is /thaw/ book or It is /you/ book.

(SWNS/BE)

6. **Loss of /l/ may affect contrived forms, such as in future metal will. Tomorrow
5. **After initial consonant -r:** the r may be absent when it follows a consonant in unstressed syllables, giving *protect* for *protect* or *p'fect* or when following vowel is either an o or u, giving *th'ow* for *throw* and *th'ough* for *through*.

6. **Social stigma:** absence of r and l not as socially stigmatized as other non-standard pronunciation rules because certain types of r and l absences are standard for some standard Northern dialects (e.g. New England dialect).

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1. **Devoicing:** at end of syllable voiced stops b, d, and g are pronounced as the corresponding voiceless stops p, t, and k. This does not mean that *pig* and *pick*, *bud* and *butt*, and *cab* and *cap* sound alike in BE, for they are still distinguished by length of vowel. English vowels are held slightly longer when following sound is voiceless. For example, the *u* in *bud* is held longer than the *u* in *butt*, although the *d* in *bud* is pronounced as a *t*.

In unstressed syllables rule can operate for all non-standard dialects, as in *stupid* for *stupid*.

2. **Deletion of d:** in some varieties of BE d is absent more frequently when followed by a consonant, such as *bal' man*, *cool' holding*, etc. The addition of an -s (realized phonetically as *z*) suffix produces a *kid* for *kids* and *books* for *boards*.

3. **Closest for t, d before syllabic l or u.** This results in pronunciations of *wil'l*t.
Nasalization

1. The -ing suffix: the use of -in for -ing, such as in singin', buyin', and runnin' is a feature characteristic of American English.

2. Nasalized vowels: Use of nasalized vowel instead of nasal consonant is most often found at end of syllable, for example final consonant is dropped in man, bun, and run. The final vowel is then nasalized giving ma', bu', and ru'. Not consistent. Usually found in unstressed syllables, e.g. mailman.

3. The influence of nasals on i and e: before a nasal consonant i and e do not contrast, making words such as pin and pen or tin and ten sound identical.

4. Articles: difference between a and an is neutralized so that a occurs before words beginning with vowels and consonants, e.g. a apple, a orange, a bus.

Vowel Glides

The vowel glides as in av (e.g. side and time) and ov (e.g. boy and toy) are generally pronounced as i in, e in and o in and o in.

Absence of glide more frequent when followed by a voiced sound or a pause; more likely to be absent in side, time, and toy than in kite, bright, or fight.

Other

Str- words (string, street) may become skr- words (skring, skreet).
Past Forms

1. Regular: the -ed suffixes which mark past tense, past participial forms and derived adjectives are not pronounced because of consonant reduction rule, where finished, cashed, forged, cracked and named are pronounced in SE as finished, cashed, forged, cracked, and named and in BE as finish, cash, forge, crack, and name.

   Where -ed is added to a base ending in -t or -d, it is pronounced as -ed. It is rarely absent. However, the -id can be reduced to d in SE and NS: Eliminating i in -id in such forms as wanted or started leave wanted wanted or stard, which are reduced to -d. This results in He stard crying (He started crying) and He wanda go (He wanted to go).

2. Irregular: tendency to regularize past forms for irregular ones by added -ed; knowed for knew, teach for taught. Relatively infrequent in NS dialects.

   Extended use of non-past form. Small set of verbs may use no different form for past and non-past contexts. Most prominent one as in Yesterday he went. Others include say (NS in particular) and give.

Perfective Constructions

1. General: the Perfective Constructions in NS and SE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>I have walked.</td>
<td>I have walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>I(‘ve) walked.</td>
<td>I’ve walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td></td>
<td>I had walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>I had walked.</td>
<td>I’d walked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completive</td>
<td>I done walked. (SNS/BE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remoto Time</td>
<td>I been walked. (BE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Past perfect tense** is formed with *have* plus a general past form. Some NS speakers give *He done it*, *He did it*, and *They have did it*.

3. **Completeive Aspects with Done**: done plus a past form *I done tried*. This form denotes an action started and completed at a specific time in the past.

4. **Remote Time Construction with Been**: been construction indicates speaker thinks of action having taken place in the distant past. Unlike done, the been construction is used solely in NS, according to data available at this time. **FUT CONSTRUCTIONS ARE RELATIVELY RARE IN NORTHERN CITIES**.

I been had it there for about three years. You won't get your dues that you been paid.

**Third Person Singular Present Tense Marker**

1. **General**: the suffix *-s* (or *-es*) is used to mark the third person singular in the present tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walk</td>
<td>we walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you walk</td>
<td>you walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he walks, the man walks</td>
<td>they walk, the men walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NE)
2. The verb do used as an auxiliary in

3. Have and Do: third person forms (has and does) are absent, giving He have

4. Hypercorrect Forms: absence of -s

This accounts for sentences such as

1. Gonna: gonna, as in other dialects, is a future indicator. Is and are are frequently deleted when gonna is used.

2. Will: will is used to indicate future

SE produces a reduction of gonna: numa (I'mana go). In BE three reductions not observed in SE are found: mini (I'mana go), mon (I'mon go), and ma (I'ma go).
Invariant be

1. **General**: the verb to be appears in Sc in one of the three variant forms is, was, or were. In Sc the form be can be used as a main verb (I be here in the evening and sometime be be busy).

   The use of invariant be in BE has two explanations.

2. **Will be or would be**: be begins with a labial consonant making it likely that 'll before be will be absent. 
   Application of this rule is fairly common in BE and occurs sometimes in SE, giving sentences like He be here pretty soon and They be gone by evening.

   The contracted form of would is 'd which can merge with the b of be or be removed by the final elimination rule. A sentence such as if you gave him a present, be be happy is possible, both in SE and SC.

3. **Distributive or Homogeneous**: the other source of invariant be is possible in BE without tense specification and seems to describe "an object or an event distributed intermittently in time." To say "I'm good" is to assert a permanent quality, while I be good means that the speaker is good sometimes. This form of invariant be is quite socially stigmatized.

   A-verb-ing

This use of a prefix tends to occur only in Appalachian speech with the present participle of the verb. It seems to indicate a uniquely durative action--a relatively long-term activity. Sample sentences are I was a-farming in those days, Shes a-working in the field.

Abbreviations of North English

1. **General**: when contracted forms of the
Copula Verb Concord

They was there. You was there. Some speakers show no person number agreement with be. This pertains to both past (You was there) and present forms of to be. It's use with past tense forms (e.g. You was there) is much more frequent than with nonpast forms (They is here).

Negation

1. The use of ain't instead of has and ain't for the negative forms of in, are, am, and auxiliary have and has, e.g. I fin't gonna do it or He ain't done it.

2. In some varieties of SE ain't corresponds to SE didn't. He ain't gonna.
Multiple Negation

1. **Negative concord**: He didn't do anything.
   Negative attached to main verb and all
   indefinites following the main verb.

2. **Proposed negative auxiliary**: Couldn't
   nobody do it. A sentence with indefinite
   noun phrase having a negative marker
   before the main verb may have a negati-
   vized form of the verbal auxiliary
   placed at the beginning of the sentence,
   such as can't, wasn't and didn't.

3. **Negative auxiliary**: Nobody didn't do it.
   The negative marker is placed in the
   noun phrase with the indefinite element,
   providing the NP comes before the main
   verb. In BE, both this rule and one
   which attaches a negative marker to
   the main verb are used.

4. **With negative adverbs**: He never hardly
   does it. The adverb is used to express
   negation in addition to negative place-
   ment on another adverb, an auxiliary
   or a negativized indefinite (e.g.
   He never hardly does it, He don't
   hardly do it, and Hardly nobody is
   good).

5. **Negative concord across clause boundaries**: occasionally, negative concord takes
   place across clauses. This results
   in sentences like There wasn't much
   I couldn't do with the meaning "There
   wasn't much I could do" or Ain't no
   cat can't cat in no coop meaning that
   "no cat can get into any coop".

Possessive

1. **With common nouns**: where 's possessive
   is found in SE, BE indicates possessives
   by the order of words. The boy's hat
   becomes The boy hat. BE speakers in
   Northern urban areas alternate between
   's and its absence.

2. **With personal names**: 's is used with
   first name in compound noun forms as
   in John's Dream car. This is an
   example of hypercorrection, resulting
from some familiarity with the need to add possessive -s without knowledge of the SE rules for its placement in
compound nouns.

1. Absence of the plural suffix: plural suffixes of SE (-s or -es) are occasion-
ally absent in BE. This results in He took five book and The other teacher,
the'll yell at you. The absence of plural suffix in Northern urban BE
occurs less often than the absence of the possessive suffix. Most speakers of
BE have the use of plural markers in their grammar.

The absence of plural markers in cent
and year is because the grammar of BE
allows the optional use of plural
markers with nouns of measure and is
found in SWNS.

2. Regular plurals and irregular nouns:
some nouns in SE form plurals by vowel
change, one feet, two feet, or with no
suffix at all (one deer, two deer).
For some speakers, these nouns take
the regular -s suffix (two feets, two
deers).

Pronominal Apposition

Pronominal apposition is the construction
in which a pronoun is used in apposition
to the noun subject of the sentence.
The nominative form of the pronoun is
used (My brother, he bigger than you
or That teacher, she yell at the kids
all the time).

Relative Clauses

1. Relative pronoun deletion: in most SE
dialects a relative pronoun is obligatory
if the relative pronoun represents the
subject of the subordinate clause. In
some NS dialects, this relative can be
deleted, giving sentences like That's
the dog bit me or There's a man comes
down the road or "That's the dog that
bit me" and "There's a man who comes
down the road" respectively.
2. **Associative use of which:** In **SE** which is generally used to replace non-animate nouns. In some **NS** dialects (and also some **SE** ones) which can be used without this antecedent, appearing to be used as a type of associative or conjunction. This is found in sentences like *He gave me this cigar which he knows I don't smoke cigars* or *His daughter is marrying Robert Jenkins which he doesn't approve of her marrying a divorced man.*

3. **Other relative pronoun forms:** There are speakers of nonstandard English who use forms other than *who, whom, which* and *that* as relative pronouns. These speakers seem largely to be of White rural varieties of English. Examples appear in *A car what runs is good to have* and *There's those as can do it.*

**Questions**

1. **Indirect questions:** *I want to know where did he go?* The direct question for *He went somewhere* is *Where did he go?* For the indirect question, the inverted form of the direct is used "I want to know did he go?"

**Existential it**

*It's a store on the corner. Is it a show in town? It is used in place of the standard English there, which serves an existential or expletive function.*

**Demonstratives**

1. **Them for those:** Sentences like *I want some of them candies use the demonstrative then where SE would have those.*

2. **Use of here and there as demonstrative:**
here and there may be added to the demonstratives then and then to produce sentences like I like these here pants better than than there ones.

Pronouns

1. Nominative/objective neutralization: occasionally, the forms used in SE as objectives may be used as subjects, as in Him ain't playing. Mostly found to be strictly age-graded so that typically found only among pre-adolescents.

2. Coordinate nominative/objective neutralization: in coordinate subject noun phrases, objective forms are much more common in all nonstandard varieties, giving Me and her will do it, or Him and me work together.

3. Non-possessive case for possessives: occasionally nominative or objective case of personal pronouns may be used, giving James got him book or She want she mother.

4. Absolute possessive forms: in SE the absolute possessive form of personal pronouns pattern according to the following paradigm:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mine</td>
<td>ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yours</td>
<td>yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his, hers, its</td>
<td>theirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except for mine, all the forms end in s. Some NS dialects regularize the pattern by adding -n to mine as well, giving min's. Others move in the other direction toward regularization, adding n to some of the other pronouns, producing yourn, hisn, hern, ourn and theirn.