

# The connection between regional variation in African American English and regional variation in hip-hop music

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Steven Gilbers, Nienke Hoeksema, Kees de Bot & Wander Lowie  
*University of Groningen*

s.r.k.i.gilbers@rug.nl, hoeksema.nienke@gmail.com, c.l.j.de.bot@rug.nl, w.m.lowie@rug.nl

Regional variation in African American English (AAE) is salient to many of its speakers, especially those involved with hip-hop culture, in which great importance is assigned to regional identity, and regional accents are a key means of expressing regional identity (Morgan, 2001). In hip-hop music, regional variation can also be observed, with different regions' rap performances being characterized by distinct "flows" (i.e. rhythmic and melodic delivery), possibly due to certain language varieties being better suited for certain flows (Kautny, 2015).

The present study is concerned with regional variation in AAE speech and rap, specifically regarding the United States' East and West Coasts. It intends to establish (1) how East and West Coast AAE differ regarding vowel duration and prosody (rhythm and melody), (2) how East and West Coast rap flows (rhythm and melody) are distinct, and (3) whether regional variation in speech and music are related to each other. To this end, free speech and rap recordings of 20 prominent African American members of the East and West Coast hip-hop communities were phonetically analyzed regarding vowel duration, rhythm (a.o. degree of syllable isochrony, musical timing), and melody (i.e. pitch fluctuation).

The results show that compared to West Coast AAE, East Coast AAE has shorter vowels, is more isochronous, and is more monotonous. Correspondingly, East Coast rap flows were found to be less rhythmically diverse and less melodic. This supports the idea that regional flows may derive from regional prosody. The data provide evidence for an intricate relationship between regional dialects and regional styles of music. They also suggest that the influence of sociolinguistic factors (in this case: expressing regional identity linguistically) is not limited to the domain of language, but that it may cross over into the domain of music as well.

**References:** • Kautny, O. 2015. Lyrics and flow in rap music. In J. A. Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to hip-hop*, 101–117. Cambridge: CUP. • Morgan, M. 2001. "Nuthin' but a G thang": Grammar and language ideology in hip hop identity. In S. L. Lanchart (ed.), *Sociocultural and historical contexts of African American English*, 187–209. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.