Rules involved in Informal Speech and Non-Standard Dialects

_wanna_ contraction.

In informal/fast speech "want to" can be contracted/pronounce as [wʌnɔ] which even has a written form _wanna_. Examples:

I wanna sleep for the next two days.
They wanna go home.
Does he wanna see the house?
We wanna talk to your doctor.
Do you wanna go?

This contraction is not merely sloppy, slurred or lazy pronunciation but is in fact sensitive to syntactic environments and rule governed. _Wanna_ contraction can't occur whenever the verb _want_ is followed by _to_. Consider first the following. Can contraction take place there?

1. He wants to leave.
2. Bill wants to watch TV.
3. He wanted to go, but couldn't.

How can we account for these? Now, what about the following? Can _wanna_ contraction occur in these?

4. Who do you want to buy food?
5. Who did you want to speak first?
6. How much time do you want to pass before we go?

How to account for these?

Rules in non-standard dialects. The use of _be_ in AAVE/BE/Ebonics/Inner-City English (ICE):

Missing copulas (be) from Labov et al. (1968):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AAVE</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. She the first one started us off.</td>
<td>She is the first one who started us off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I think he a Jew.</td>
<td>I think he is a Jew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. He a eat-and-runner.</td>
<td>He is an eat-and-runner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. He fast in everything he do.</td>
<td>He is fast in everything he does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. You crazy!</strong></td>
<td><strong>You are crazy!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. They not brothers.</strong></td>
<td><strong>They are not brothers.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I know, but he wild, though.</td>
<td>I know, but he is wild, though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. He in eighth.</td>
<td>He is in the eighth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. We on tape.  We are on tape.
10. But everybody not black.  But everybody is not black.
11. He just feel like he gettin' cripple up from arthritis.  He just feels like he is getting crippled up from arthritis.
12. Boot always comin' over my house to eat, to ax for food.  Boot is always coming over to my house to eat, to ask for food.
13. He gon' try to get up.  He is going to try to get up.
14. Cause we, we gon' sneak under the trainstile.  Because we are going to sneak under the trainstile.

So, in each of the AAVE sentences, the copular verb, *be*, or some form of it, is missing (at least compared to more "standard" varieties of English). Is this laziness? Sloppiness? Does AAVE have a grammar? Indeed, AAVE does have a grammar and this is not laziness or sloppiness, but a rule-governed dialect of English. We'll see this below.

Other questions: Does AAVE have a verb *to be*, or perhaps more reasonably does it have a present tense form of the verb? This latter pattern, not having an (overt) form of the verb *be* in present tense is attested in various languages. It is reported for Hungarian and apparently Hebrew. In Cochabamba Quechua, the simple 3rd person singular form of the verb is null.

It is also well known that forms of *be* are frequently left out in the utterances of young children (in the 18 to 24 month age range) (examples reported in Labov et al. (1968)):

That a lamb.  Kathy in there.
It a my book.  Tiny balls in there.

First, we can see that the verb itself does exist in AAVE:

15. I was small; I was sumpm' 'bout one years o' baby.
16. She was likin' me…she was likin' George too.
17. If we wasn't playin' now, it wouldn't a happen.

18. You got to be good, Rednall!  *You got to good, Rednall!  
19. Each year he will be gettin' worse all the time.
20. His wife is suppos' a be gettin' money for this child.
21. Don't be messin' with my old lady.  *Don't messin' with my old lady.

How might we account for these.
Now consider the following where we find that overt present tense forms do exist:

22. My sons, they ain't but so big.
23. It ain't no cat can't get in no coop.

24. Is that a shock? or is it not?
25. Are you down?
26. Aren't you goin' hit her again?

27. You ain't the best sounder, Eddie! I ain't! He is! *I ain't. He.

28. He is better than the girls is, now.
29. It always somebody tougher than you are.

31. I don't care what you are. *I don't care what you.
32. Do you see where that person is? *Do you see where that person?

Finally, consider the following, where the verb is stressed:

33. Allah is God.
34. He is a expert.

How can we account for these?

So, would we expect the copula to disappear in the following standard sentences when they are rendered in AAVE?

1. What a fool he is.
2. He is as good as he says he is.
3. How beautiful you are.
5. Here I am.
6. What is it?
7. What is it for?
8. Who is there? He is, unfortunately.
9. He is unfortunately here.
10. Bill is wild during the day and Tom is at night.

A few final notes. Labov found that generally, *am, did not delete, but almost always occurred as *I'm. Out of 1192 instances I + copula only 5 deleted the copula completely. There was only one instance of *I's (I is) and that may have been an intentionally funny usage. This suggests that others impression of AAVE speakers saying *I's a be goin' as
fas' as I can are perhaps attempts to further exaggerate the dialect and the AAVE speaker's apparent ignorance.

Note also that the omission of the copula generally seems optional and many instances of it were recorded where it might be predicted to be absent:

1. Tha's my daily routine: women.
2. Tha's all, but I ate twice.
3. Wha's your name again?

A final extra (and neat) feature of AAVE: invariant be:

1. But it don't usually be that way.
2. 'cause he be mad…
3. I be with the Jets—you know—a lot. They o.k.
4. …when you don't be talkin' about else all the time.
5. Mos' a time, I be lookin' at another picture.
6. I never be in the fights.

At least part of the function, though not all, is to mark habitual events or states.
Non-Standard Grammar and Language Teaching

One of the most important facts uncovered within linguistics in the last 50 years is the revelation that non-standard dialects of English (and other languages) are not sub-standard with respect to linguistic structure, communicative function, logic or sophistication. They may be sub-standard in terms of social acceptability, but this characterization crucially depends on which society, class and sub-group the individual is operating in. Standard English itself may not be appropriate for all situations, but in most positions of power and authority in the U.S., it is the variety against which others are judged. It is these social factors which determine the standard, not the inherent communicative abilities of the dialect/language themselves.

As the not so distant Ebonics debate of 1996/1997 showed, and as students in my classes continue to reveal, this fact is not widespread, common knowledge. It is an issue which must be constantly reinforced with each new generation, particularly since attitudes about and knowledge of non-standard dialect can have a significant impact on the education of minority dialect speakers.

In this presentation, I want to discuss this impact and look in-depth at a few non-standard properties, such as those featured below in sentence (0).

(0) Couldn't nobody see nothin'.

With a detailed look at such structures, I hope to show the following three things:

1. How in terms of linguistic structures and communicative ability, non-standard dialects are not defective but follow logical and systematic patterns.
2. How studying the grammar of non-standard dialects can actually enrich our understanding of standard dialects and their structure.
3. How studying the non-standard form can help in teaching those who speak a non-standard dialect to master the standard variety as well.

1. Non-Standard Dialects and Educational Crises

A recurring educational problem is the fact that reading proficiency levels of African American elementary and secondary students consistently lag behind those of white students. As the data below in Table 1 shows, the percentage of African American students reading below grade level remains two to three times as high as for white students in the same grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
In addition, African American students are frequently over-diagnosed and mislabeled as suffering language disorders and being communicatively impaired (van Keulen 1998).

Although there are likely a variety of factors that lead to these educational difficulties, language differences and attitudes toward African American speech patterns have been implicated as causal factors in these failures (Baratz and Schuy 1969, Edwards 1985, Dandy 1991, Labov 1995, Rickford 1999).

2. Language Factors in Reading Failure

Certain non-standard dialect features, including features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), have been identified as posing obstacles for the dialect speaker to learn to read and ultimately master the standard English (SE) variety presented in the classroom. Another, and perhaps even larger, obstacle however, is negative teacher attitudes toward the non-standard dialect and ultimately, toward the speaker of that dialect.

"Experimental approaches to the effects of speech on teacher's attitudes show that it is the most powerful single factor in determining teacher's predictions of student performance. The main effect of a child speaking AAVE was to affect the teacher's attitudes toward the child, with a resultant negative expectation that affected teachers' behavior toward the child in many ways" (Labov 1995:49).

Even if the teacher does not view the student negatively, teaching methods which stigmatize the dialect may be internalized by the student as a negative self-perception and may disrupt student learning and discourage future participation. A striking documented example is provided by Smitherman (1977, pp. 217-218):

Student (excitedly): Miz Jones, you remember that show you tole us bout? Well, me and my momma 'nem---

Teacher (interrupting): Bernadette, start again, I'm sorry, but I can't understand you.

Student (confused): Well, it was that show, me and my momma--

Teacher (interrupting): Sorry, I still can't understand you.

Student silent

Teacher: Now, Bernadette, first of all, it's Mrs. Jones, not Miz Jones. And you know it was an exhibit, not a show. Now, haven't I explained to the class over and over again that you always put yourself last when you are talking about a group of people and yourself doing something? So, therefore, you should say what?

Student: My momma and me -- t

Teacher (interrupting): No! My mother and I. Now start again, this time right.

Student:Aw, that's okay, it wasn't nothin'.

Furthermore, although this needs to be confirmed with additional research, I would suggest that such stigmatizing teaching methods may also negatively impact later student
composition. Students may be so paralyzed by worries of form that they fail to write down content in any form.

3. Can Linguistics Help with the Reading Crisis?

Linguistics can address the impediments to reading caused by differing linguistic structures and to some extent the negative perception of non-standard dialects.

Linguistics can provide insights in the following four ways:

1. Reveal systematic patterns and structure in the non-standard dialect and even show how studying non-standard dialects can help us better understand the structures of standard dialects and ultimately better understand universal linguistic properties. Although this won't provide a cure for negative attitudes and stereotypes, which are tied up in larger socio-cultural viewpoints, it can help improve attitudes and foster a more open atmosphere towards critical examination of dialects and teaching methods as educators and policy makers struggle with various language policy issues.

2. Suggest alternative teaching strategies that is relatively free of stigmatization and which will not inhibit and discourage student learning and participation.

3. Identify structural differences in a non-standard dialect which might interfere with mastery of reading and writing in the standard.

4. Suggest teaching strategies which might be able to overcome the impediments discovered in 3.

4. Goal of this Presentation

I will look at various stigmatized features found in non-standard dialects and how they might be dealt with in terms of 1-4 above.

For issues 1 and 2, I will look at the heavily stigmatized feature of double/multiple negation and a related, but less well-known phenomenon of Negative Inversion. The problem of double negatives is particularly one of language attitudes making it perfect to address issues 1 and 2 by

A. Showing that double/multiple negation is systematic, not illogical, and operates on the same mechanism as found in standard English. Moreover, I will show that studying this feature along with Negative Inversion can actually help understand features of the standard.

B. Showing that the traditional usage account of double negatives, although perhaps successful in eradicating multiple negation in student writing, has a larger negative impact by stigmatizing non-standard dialects and not providing an accurate account of standard English usage.

For issues 3-4 above, I will consider some examples of final consonant cluster simplifications. Again, I will show that they follow a systematic pattern and illustrate
A. How the reduction may have a significant impact on student reading comprehension and, in particular, student writing ability. This results from a phonological (sound) process deleting crucial grammatical information.

B. How alternative teaching evaluations may be needed to identify the root problem and then suggest alternative teaching methods which may help alleviate the problem cases.

5. Sub-standard vs. Non-standard

Non-standard dialects, AAVE in particular, are often characterized as sub-standard, that is, in some way linguistically deficient, especially when compared with SE. AAVE is often condemned as being "lazy" or "broken English," perhaps like what a second language learner might speak. Sometimes, it is taken even further with claims that such dialects actually have no "discernable rules" at all (William Raspberry Washington Post 12/26/1996). In other words, popular sentiment is often that the dialect has no grammar at all and that the orderly patterns found in the standard are replaced by chaos in the dialect. Such observations are often extended to the speakers themselves, with people believing that a dialect where "you can say pretty much what you please, as long as you're careful to throw in a lot of `bes"(Raspberry ibid) is the result of laziness or even intellectual inferiority on the part of the speaker.

However, linguistics has repeatedly demonstrated that this is not case. As I hope to show today non-standard dialects are systematic and rule-governed, just as all human language is. The non-standard dialects employ many of the same mechanisms found in a variety of the world's languages, including Standard English. As the Linguistic Society of America's resolution on Ebonics notes:

"the systematic and expressive nature of the grammar and pronunciation patterns of the African American vernacular has been established by numerous scientific studies over the past thirty years. Characterizations of Ebonics as 'slang,' 'mutant,' 'lazy,' 'defective,' 'ungrammatical,' or 'broken English' are incorrect and demeaning."

6. Structure in Non-Standard Grammar and Language Attitudes

I will analyze the structure of a couple of properties found in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and a variety of Southern white dialects, including a dialect I have for now labeled West Texas English (WTE). These properties are illustrated in the following sentences:

(1) a. I don't tell nobody what happened… Negative Concord
   (AAVE; M 13)

b. Couldn't nobody see nothin'. Negative Inversion with Negative Concord
   (WTE; M 56)

These sentences are the result of two related mechanisms, **negative concord** and **negative inversion**.

**Negative concord** is agreement of negative morphology between one or more indefinites and sentential negation (not, -n’t) within a clause.

**Negative inversion** is the placement of a negative auxiliary at the beginning of a declarative. Note that although the sentence in (2b) has the word order most commonly associated with yes/no questions, it is interpreted as a declarative statement, as the translation indicates.

### A. The Structure of Negative Concord

**Standard English Negative Polarity Items (NPI):** Words that must be either in the "scope" of a negative element or in a few other highly restricted contexts. Outside of these contexts, these words and sentences that contain them are generally uninterpretable (marked below in (2) with an asterisk). In the **scope of a negative element** can be understood as meaning that an overtly marked negative word (not, -n’t, nobody, nothing, none, never) precedes the NPI within the same clause (NPIs are underlined).2

(2) a. I didn't buy any lottery tickets. (SE)  
b. *I bought any lottery tickets. (SE)  
(3) a. I didn’t eat even a single French fry. (SE)  
b. *I ate even a single French fry. (SE)  
(4) a. I didn't eat fried food at all today. (SE)  
b. *I ate fried food at all today. (SE)  
(5) a. I haven't ever been to France. (SE)  
b. *I have ever been to France. (SE)  
(6) a. I haven't seen the movie yet. (SE)  
b. *I have seen the movie yet. (SE)  
(7) a. I haven't visited her in years. (SE)  
b. *I have visited her in years. (SE)  

Since NPIs must be in the scope of a negative element, they are often blocked from appearing in subject position:

(8) a. I didn't visit anybody at school today. (SE)  
b. Nobody visited anybody at school today. (SE)  
c. *Anybody didn't visit me at school today. (SE)  

**Negative Concord.** In the non-standard dialects, negative indefinites behave essentially like standard NPIs. Negative words, like nothin', nobody, none, etc., must be in the scope of a negative element, in particular within the scope of not or –n’t.

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2 This is a an oversimplification, but sufficient for the purposes of this presentation. For a more detailed introduction to the nuances of NPI distribution, the reader is referred to Hoeksema (2000) and the references therein.
(9) a. I didn't buy no lottery tickets.  
   b. *I bought no lottery tickets.  

(10) a. I didn't visit nobody at school today.  
   b. *I visited nobody at school today.  

Negative Concord then is essentially the result of choosing Negative Polarity Items which under certain configurations may independently indicate negation or which historically did so. Negative Concord still makes use of the same mechanisms found in English whereby indefinites in a negated clause must agree with the negative element. The differences in the dialects simply reflect differences in word choices.

We noted that in the non-standard dialects words like nobody behave like SE NPI elements such as anybody. They must be in the scope of a negative element. What happens, however, when nobody occurs as a subject which is typically not in the scope of a negative element, such as –n't? This leads us to the phenomenon of Negative Inversion.

**B. Negative Inversion Patterns**

As noted, in WTE, nobody cannot appear as the subject of a sentence because it will then be outside of the scope of negation:

(11) *Nobody won't believe you.  

To get nobody within the scope of –n't, the NIDs have a mechanism called Negative Inversion (NI) in which a negative auxiliary (one suffix with –n't) may be moved before the negative subject in order to bring it within the scope of –n't. This gives a word order like that of yes/no questions but is interpreted as declarative. Negative Inversion applied to the ungrammatical (11) yields the grammatical (12) below:

(12) Won't nobody believe you.  
     'Nobody will believe you.'

Again, this rearrangement of words does not occur randomly or because the speaker is "unable" to put them in the "correct" order, but happens for a specific reason (to bring the NPI subject under the scope of –n't). This process again follows systematic patterns, and, in fact, makes use of the same negative fronting mechanism found in Standard English and throughout the history of English. As noted by Fischer et al. (2000:312) "[...] V[erb]-movement in negative-initial sentences […] is one of the two

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3 NID stands for Negative Inversion Dialects, all of which also exhibit Negative Concord. With respect to these properties the dialects are generally quite consistent. The example sentences abstract away from other differences found in the dialects, particularly pronunciation differences.

4 This is one of the few places where there is some variation among the Negative Inversion dialects. Sentences like these may be acceptable in certain varieties of AAVE and other Southern dialects, but are out in WTE. The Negative Inversion pattern seems to be the most common pattern, however, and it seems some additional mechanism is involved in dialects that find (11) acceptable.
environments (the other being questions) in which English throughout its history has had V[erb]-movement to [sentence initial positions]."

1. **Negated Auxiliaries**

   The first pattern to note is that Negative Inversion, as its name suggests, applies to all and only those auxiliary verbs in the NIDs which may support the negative suffix –n’t. These are essentially the same as in SE with a few variations, including ain’t (which can stand for both present tense be+n’t as in (13a) and perfective have+n’t (13b)) wasn’t, don’t, didn’t, won’t, wouldn’t, can’t, couldn’t, shouldn’t and hadn’t. Examples below:

   (13) a. Ain’t nobody leaving until I give the word. (WTE)
   "Nobody is leaving until I give the word.”
   b. Ain’t none of us been here before. (WTE)
   "None of us have been here before.”
   c. Wasn’t no more than ten people allowed in at a time. (WTE)
   "No more than ten people were allowed in at a time.”
   d. Don’t nobody live there. (WTE)
   "Nobody lives there.”
   e. Didn’t nowhere near a thousand people go to that concert. (WTE)
   "Nowhere near a thousand people went to that concert.”
   f. Won’t none of the students go to the party. (WTE)
   "None of the students will go to the party.”
   g. Wouldn’t no gentleman act like that. (WTE)
   “A gentleman wouldn’t act like that.”
   h. Can’t no dog but Ol’ Blue do that trick. (WTE)
   “No dog but Ol’ Blue can do that trick.”
   i. Couldn’t neither of ‘em fit in the car. (WTE)
   “Neither of them could fit in the car.”
   j. Shouldn’t nobody be allowed to act like that. (WTE)
   “Nobody should be allowed to act like that
   k. Hadn’t nary a soul set foot in that house ‘til Dave moved in (WTE)
   “Not a soul had set foot in that house until Dave moved in.”

Verbs which do not allow –n’t suffixation, such as certain other semi-auxiliaries like better (He better not do that.) and all lexical main verbs cannot undergo inversion and appear above the subject.

Similarly, if -n’t fails to suffix to the auxiliary, the auxiliary cannot raise:

(14) a. Won't none of the students go to the party. (NID)
   b. *Will none of the students not go to the party. (NID)
   c. *Will none of the students go to the party. (NID)
   d. *Will not none of the students go to the party. (NID)
Note that this is different from yes/no question formation in SE where the auxiliary may appear before the subject with or without negation.

(15) a. Won't John be coming to the party? (SE)  
    b. Will John not be coming to the party? (SE)

2. Comparing Questions and SE Negative Inversion to the NIDs

Other properties distinguish Negative Inversion from yes/no questions and suggest that the two processes are structurally distinct. For example, Negative Inversion sentences can appear in certain subordinate clause structures in which question inversion cannot occur.

(16) a. I had wondered why wouldn't nobody call me. (NID)  
    b. I had wondered why Bill would call me. (SE)  
    c. *I had wondered why would Bill call me. (SE)  
    d. Why would Bill call me? (SE)

(17) a. I asked if wasn't nobody allowed to leave. (NID)  
    b. I asked if nobody was allowed to leave. (SE)  
    c. *I asked if was nobody allowed to leave. (SE)  
    d. Was nobody allowed to leave? (SE)

So, although (16c) and (17c) represent embedded questions (cf. the related matrix questions in (16d) and (17d), question inversion is not allowed. In the exact same environments, however, NI is possible, again suggesting distinct structures for the two types of inversion.

In fact, there is a form of "negative inversion" found in SE, and to a lesser extent in the NIDs, which seems to have the same structure as questions. It behaves in a parallel fashion to wh-question formation (questions involving who, what, when, etc.). Some negative-like phrase, such as scarcely, hardly, never, not often, seldom, etc, raises to Spec, CP and the auxiliary appears in C:

(18) a. Not a word did he say. (SE)  
    b. Rarely have I seen such insolence. (SE)  
    c. Never in a million years would I believe that. (SE)

Again, however, although this type of sentence involves negative and negative-like elements, it is still structurally distinct from the Negative Inversion sentences. This is evident when considering which kinds of subjects the auxiliary is allowed to raise over. Questions and SE "negative inversion" allow the auxiliary to raise over definite subjects, such as proper names (19a), pronouns (19b-c) and subjects introduced by the (19d), underlined below:

(19) a. No sooner had Jack got in the shower than the phone rang. (SE)  
    b. Never would I do such a thing. (SE)
c. Isn't he here yet?  
   d. Are the teachers going to the party?

However, this is not the case for NID Negative Inversion. In Negative Inversion sentences, the negative auxiliary cannot precede a definite subject (Note crucially that the following sentences are bad on a declarative reading, but may be fine as questions.):

(20)  
a. *Ain't Jack doin' nothin' wrong.  
b. *Wouldn't I do that.  
c. *Didn't the teachers go to the party.

Observe that (20a) shows that Negative Concord with a non-subject is not sufficient to allow Negative Inversion. Negative Concord is not a necessary condition either. Negative Inversion can be found with certain non-negative subjects as well (though never definite ones):

(21)  
a. Didn't many people go to the party.  
b. Didn't everybody finish the test.  
c. Can't a lot of people do what you just did.  
d. Wasn't all of 'em happy.  
e. Doesn't much interestin' happen around here.

3. Parallel with SE not Subject

Although the subjects in (21) are not negative, they do have something in common with negative subjects. They are quantified. Quantifiers such as every, many, and none indicate how many of the entities that a noun phrase refers to have the properties denoted by the sentence, that is, how many referents the sentential proposition is true of.

The sentences in (21) have an exact parallel in the Standard English sentences below in (22).

(22)  
a. Not many people went to the party.  
b. Not everybody finished the test.  
c. Not a lot of people can do what you just did.  
d. Not all of them were happy.  
e. Not much interesting happens around here.

In both (21) and (22) the ordering of negation before the quantified serves the same function. In both cases, negation is logically interpreted before the quantifier resulting in a distinct meaning from related sentences which maintain the typical order of subject before negation. For example, (23) below receives an interpretation distinct from the related sentences in (21a) and (22a):

(23)  
Many people didn't go to the party.
In (23), while we know that the number of people who didn't go to the party is many, it is also logically possible that still many people did in fact go to the party. In (21a) and (22a), repeated below, the meaning is slightly different. The sentences, which have an identical interpretation, indicate that the number of people who went to the party was not many:

(21) a. Didn't many people go to the party. (NID)
(22) a. Not many people went to the party. (SE)

The dialects parallel one other not only in which subjects allow negation to precede them (either not in SE or auxiliary-‘n’t in the NIDs), but also in which subjects do not allow this. As already noted for the NIDs, definite subjects cannot be preceded by negation. This is also true of SE as seen below in (24-6).

(24) a. *Not Jack has seen the baby yet. (SE)
   b. *Ain't Jack see the baby yet. (NID)
(25) a. *Not the student will answer the question. (SE)
   b. *Won't the student answer the question. (NID)
(26) a. *Not they ate all the food. (SE)
   b. *Didn't they eat all the food. (NID)

Similarly, certain quantifiers in subject position such as each, several and most cannot be preceded by not in SE nor a negated auxiliary in the non-standard dialects. Again, the dialects exactly parallel one another with respect to the set of items that cannot be preceded by negation.

(27) a. *Not each boy could run more than a mile. (SE)
   b. *Couldn't each boy run more than a mile. (NID)
(28) a. *Not several people left the party early. (SE)
   b. *Didn't several people leave the party early. (NID)
(29) a. *Not most people believe what you are saying. (SE)
   b. *Don't most people believe what you are saying. (NID)

They also parallel each other in that they can both appear in embedded sentence contexts (30a-b) whereas question inversion cannot (30c).

(30) a. I had asked if not many people enjoyed the party. (SE)
   b. I had asked if didn't many people enjoy the party. (NID)
   c. *I had asked if did many people enjoy the party. (SE/NID)

Uncovering this parallel then helps reveal what structure drives Negative Inversion in the non-standard dialects. Once again, we can see that not only are the non-standard dialects structured and rule governed, but that they make use of the same grammatical mechanisms found in the standard variety. The differences between standard and non-standard are not differences between having grammatical mechanisms
or not or between having more or less sophisticated grammatical mechanisms, but simply in how the mechanisms are applied. This essentially boils down to a few differences in word choice.

4. Differences Between SE and NIDs

So, what does account for the difference between SE and non-standard dialects with respect to Negative Inversion? There are two simple differences which yield the striking surface variations. First, in SE, *not* may be placed before certain quantified subjects to provide certain sentence interpretations. In the non-standard varieties, -*n't* suffixed to an auxiliary may occur before the same quantified subjects to provide the same interpretations. Second, the non-standard dialects allow Negative Concord and can use the mechanism of Negative Inversion to satisfy the requirements of Negative Concord.

In SE, *not* can appear before certain quantified subjects, while in the non-standard an auxiliary accompanies -*n't*. This difference can be attributed to the fact that *not* is an independent word, while -*n't* is not. *Not* can appear by itself at the beginning of the sentence, but -*n't* cannot. Since -*n't* can only be a suffix and cannot stand alone, it requires the auxiliary to be placed with it to phonologically support the suffix. This is schematized below:

(31) **Standard English**  | **Non-Standard English**  
---|---
many people can go | many people can go  
*not* many people can go | -n't many people can go  
N/A | can't many people go  
Not many people can go. | Can't many people go.  

Interestingly, this exact same phenomena existed in Old English (Fischer et al. 2000). The phonologically weak negative *ne* typically appeared sentence initially and required the inflected verb to follow it (32a), providing phonological support just as -*n't* requires the Modern English auxiliaries to do. The independent negative *no* could stand on its own, without a supporting verb and may have even blocked verb raising (32b) (negatives in bold, inflected verb underlined):

(32) a. **ne** *sende** se deofol δa fyr of heofenum, þeah  
*not-* sent the devil the fire of heaven though  
*þe* hit ufan come  
*it* from- above came  
*the devil did not send fire from heaven, though it came from above*  
*(Homilies of Ælfric I (Pref) 6.13)*  

b. **No** he wiht fram me foldtþum feor fleotan *meahte*, hraþor  
*not* he thing from me on waves far swim could quicker  
on holme; **no** ic fram him wolde  
in water *not* I from him wanted
In no wise could he swim far from me on the waves of the flood, more quickly on the sea; I would not consent to leave him

(Beowulf 791)

The same mechanisms are at work between the Modern English dialects. The weak form of the negative, -n't, requires the auxiliary to support it, the strong form, not, does not.

In addition to the quantificational contexts shared with SE, the non-standard dialects can also extend the use of Negative Inversion to NPI contexts. This is a very natural extension. Given the Negative Concord requirement that negative words like nobody must be preceded by –n't and the possibility of Negative Inversion, then it is natural to use Negative Inversion to place a negative subject such as nobody within the scope of negation.

(33) **Non-Standard English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nobody can go</th>
<th>sentence with negative subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-n't nobody can go</td>
<td>negative must be within scope of –n't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't nobody go</td>
<td>auxiliary to support –n't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't nobody go</td>
<td>pronounced string</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Actually, a similar process may happen in SE. NPIs like anybody are also generally barred from appearing in subject position. They too must be within the scope of negation. Based on what we have seen so far then we might expect this situation to be rectified in SE by placing not before the NPI subject. Such strings sound a bit awkward, however. This can be accounted for because there is an additional rule in SE that replaces not plus a subject NPI with the corresponding negative indefinite, so not anybody becomes nobody.

(34) **Standard English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anybody can go</th>
<th>sentence with NPI subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not anybody can go</td>
<td>NPI must be within scope of not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody can go</td>
<td>nobody replaces not anybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody can go</td>
<td>pronounced string</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that the replacement rule can be blocked and an NPI can appear in subject position if another word intervenes between not and the NPI as in the following

(35) **Not even anybody** I know could do what you just did. (SE)

Once again we see that the non-standard dialects not only follow a particular systematic pattern, but do so using the same mechanisms as the standard dialect. Although the resulting sentences may on the surface seem to be wildly divergent from the SE dialect, the differences can be accounted for by two rather simple differences, the use of apparent negative words like nobody as NPIs and the use of –n't as a pre-subject negator instead of not.
C. What Non-Standard Dialects Can Teach Us About SE

Interestingly, the parallels between SE and the non-standard dialects not only help us understand the structure of the non-standard varieties, but can help us better understand the structure of the standard variety. Because dialects often differ minimally, they can often provide the perfect environment for studying various structures, since most variables are held constant between dialects. And in fact, the non-standard dialects can provide insights into the structure of SE with respect to the issues we have been discussing.

For example, a priori it might be assumed that strings such as not many people, not everybody, not a lot of people, etc. are subjects in sentences like those in (22), repeated below.

(22) a. Not many people went to the party. (SE)
b. Not everybody finished the test. (SE)
c. Not a lot of people can do what you just did. (SE)
d. Not all of them were happy. (SE)
e. Not much interesting happens around here. (SE)

Such an idea, predicts that these hypothesized subjects should behave much like other phrases identified as subjects such as those in (36).

(36) a. Two teachers won the award. (SE)
b. A boy wearing one red shoe ran across the street. (SE)
c. No more than three people came to visit me all day. (SE)

In particular, the vast majority of phrases that can serve as subjects can also appear in object positions. This does not seem to be the case for those subjects in (22):

(37) a. *I amused not many people that day. (SE)
b. I amused two teachers that day. (SE)
c. I amused a boy wearing one red shoe that day. (SE)
d. I amused no more than three people that day. (SE)

(38) a. *The boss interviewed not everybody today. (SE)
b. The boss interviewed two teachers today. (SE)
c. The boss interviewed a boy wearing one red shoe today. (SE)
d. The boss interviewed no more than three people today. (SE)

This difference is not merely one of negation, either. If it were, we would expect no more than three people in (37d) and (38d) to be as impossible as not many people and not everybody in (37a) and (38a) respectively.

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5 We have already seen one case, NPIs, where the converse is not true.
Additional evidence that *not many people* and *not everybody* are in some way different from *no more than three people* can also be found in the non-standard dialects. In the Negative Concord dialects, if *not many people* and *not everybody* form phrases, then they should have the same distributions under the scope of negation that other negative phrases like *nobody* and *no more than three people* have. They do not, however, reinforcing the idea that these words do not in fact form a phrase:

(39) a. *Didn't nobody amuse not many people* that day. (NID)
   b. Didn't nobody amuse *no more than three people* that day. (NID)

(40) a. *The boss didn't interview not everybody* today. (NID)
   b. The boss didn't interview *no more than three people* today. (NID)

(41) a. *Weren't not many people* amused that day. (WTE)
   b. Weren't *no more than three people* amused that day. (WTE)

(42) a. *Wasn't not everybody* interviewed today. (WTE)
   b. Wasn't *no more than three people* interviewed today. (WTE)

So, what can account for the differences between *not many people* and *no more than three people*? The theory that was developed to account for Negative Inversion actually predicts these differences. The account of Negative Inversion identified *many people*, *everybody*, etc. in (22) as the subjects of those sentences instead of *not many people* and *not everybody*. Negation is added into the structure in a position above the subject instead of in its more usual position below Tense (below the auxiliary) as in the following:

(43) NegP₂
    /   \
   Neg    TP
    \  /  \  /
     not DP₁ T'  \
       / \  /
      many people T  NegP₁
        /  \
       will VP
         /  \  /
        tᵢ  V'  DP
            /  |
           V  amuse me

Not many people will amuse me.

The subject position in (43) in Spec, TP is only filled by *many people*. *Not* sits outside of the subject position. Since there is no evidence of an additional Negative

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6 Perhaps *not* is moved from its lower position to the higher one.
Position immediately before the object position (here filled by me), the sequence not many people cannot usually occur post-verbally. Instead, if the lower Negative Position (NegP1) is filled by not the main lexical verb will intervene between not and the object blocking the sequence not many people as shown below in (44):

(44)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TP</th>
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*I will amuse not many people.

Interestingly, although the hypothesis that sequences like not many people and not everybody could function as subjects looked initially plausible for SE, such a hypothesis would likely never occur with the non-standard dialects. Just as the raised auxiliary in yes/no questions is not likely to considered part of the subject, neither would a raised negative auxiliary.

7. The Myth of Double Negation

We have now seen that Negative Concord and Negative Inversion are not lazy, haphazard, illogical processes ungoverned by grammatical rules, but instead rely on the same grammatical processes that can be found in Standard English. Now, I wish to consider the impact of these observations on language teaching.

In traditional usage, double negatives are said to be unacceptable in (standard) English because logically two negatives are introduced and the first cancels out the second. Such sentences aren't negative but positive, and the speaker is in fact contradicting himself.

While this double negative myth may in fact be quite good at eradicating Negative Concord in writing, it does not mean it is the best approach for doing so. It has a number of drawbacks including the fact that it stigmatizes the non-standard dialects, isn't the correct account of what is actually going in SE, can undermine the credibility of the teacher and misses an opportunity to explicitly teach grammar, which has been shown as one way to aid non-standard dialect speakers master the standard as well.
1. The double negative myth stigmatizes the Negative Concord dialect saying that they are illogical since logically two negatives should yield a positive. As we have already seen, however, such stigmatizing can have a negative impact on learning, making the student feel inadequate and unable to learn.

2. The double negative myth is actually the wrong account of Standard English. It fails to make clear the differences between SE and non-standard English.

   It is not a problem of logic. If two negatives always logically cancel each other, this should be true of all languages, past and present. This is not the case. Many modern languages, among them French, Spanish and Italian, as in (45) below, employ Negative Concord as the standard way of expressing a single instance of logical negation.

   (45) a. Gianni non telefona a sua madre
      Gianni not telephones to his mother
      Gianni does not call his mother. Zanuttini (1991)
   
      b. Nessuno telefona a Gianni
         no one telephones to Gianni
         No one calls Gianni. Zanuttini (1991)
   
      c. Gianni non telefona a nessuno
         Gianni not telephones to no one
         Gianni doesn't call anyone. Zanuttini (1991)
   
      d. *Gianni telefona a nessuno
         Gianni telephones to no one
         Haegeman (2000)

   Note that for the Italian (45d) failure to do Negative Concord results in an ungrammatical sentence.

   Varieties of Standard English did this in the past as well.

   (46) a. & ne bid dær noenig ealo gebrown mid Estum.
      and no ale is brewed among the Ests (OE; Orosius 1 1.20.18; Howe and Walker 2000:125)
   
      b. But nevere gronte he at no strook but oon.
         But he never groaned at any of the blows but one. (ME; Canterbury Tales; Howe and Walker 2000:125)
   
      c. I cannot goe no further.
         (Early ModE; As You Like It; Howe and Walker 2000:125)
d. **Never shall none** be born fairer than she.
   (Caxton, *Blanchardyn*; Gordon 1972:221)

e. **I will not budge for no man's pleasure,** I.
   (Early Mod E; *Romeo and Juliet*: III.i.58; Gordon 1972:221)

While double negation may deny a previous negation (in both standard and non-standard varieties of English), this is not the same as asserting the corresponding affirmative. As Pinker (1994:377) notes, no one out the blue says "I can't get no satisfaction," to indicate that they easily achieve contentment. To deny a previous negation requires then, a context with a previous negation and focal (heavy) stress on the second negative in the double negative sentence.

"As hard as I try not to be smug about the misfortunes of my adversaries, I must admit that I can't get no satisfaction out of his tenure denial."

If the special intonational properties are missing, the SE speakers interpret such sentences as instances of Negative Concord just as the non-standard dialect speakers do.

3. As such, the double negative myth is often presented dishonestly. That is the student may be informed that the teacher or other SE representatives cannot understand the double negation or interpret it as indicating a positive. This is likely to undermine the credibility of the teacher. Students know that they did not intend a positive statement with a Negative Concord and may be aware that everyone else (the teacher excluded) knows this is as well.

Furthermore, many students can see at least another hole in the traditional theory. By the logic of the argument that is usually given, then, while two negatives produce a positive, three must give a negative, four a positive and five a negative statement.

(47) a. I'm **not** giving no student the money. 2 negatives = positive
b. I'm **not** giving no student nothin'. 3 negatives = negative
c. I ain't **never** giving no student nothin'. 4 negatives = positive
d. **Nobody ain't never giving no student nothin'.** 5 negatives = negative

This is not how English, or any natural language for that matter, works. Now, we can see why this doesn't work once we realize that double negation in SE is a denial of a previous negation. A quintuple negation then would have to be a denial of a denial of a denial of a denial of a negative statement. English lacks the intonational mechanisms to do this repeatedly within a single clause in addition to the taxing memory requirements. Of course, once we really understand what's going on in Standard English we can explain why the schema in (47) doesn't, in fact, work. If we only have the double negative myth to fall back on, it is hard to say why this should be so.

4. It misses an opportunity to explicitly review real grammatical phenomena with the students. Explicitly teaching grammar and providing a contrastive analysis of SE and
non-standard varieties has been advocated as one of the best methods for aiding non-standard dialect speakers to master SE (Labov 1995, Green 1995, Rickford 1998, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998) and has been supported by several educational programs and research studies (Taylor 1989, Parker and Crist 1995, Harris-Wright 1999).

In the context of Negative Concord and Negative Inversion, the comparisons I have been making today between SE NPI and Negative Concord and between SE not + subject and non-standard Aux-n't + subject can be made explicit to the student. Note that not only does this help compare the dialectal differences but can also help introduce and review other basic grammatical concepts such as negation, clauses and subjects, which will be useful for the student in further studies of SE grammar. Indeed, the latter concept of subjects is at the heart of much of the domain of prescriptive rules, including subject-verb agreement, pronoun choice (nominative vs. accusative) in conjunctions, who/whom distinctions, and passives to name a few.

In particular, introducing NPIs to negative contexts and showing Negative Concord speakers the SE approach can be done quite easily and in a non-stigmatizing approach. All non-standard dialects will be familiar with the NPIs used in SE, not only from exposure to other dialects and variation within their dialects, but also because these same elements are used in other non-negative contexts where NPIs may also appear. For example, NPIs can also appear in questions as in (48).

(48) a. Did anybody see my book? (SE/WTE)
   b. Did you buy anything? (SE/WTE)

The non-standard dialects do not use negative words like nobody and nothin’ in these contexts but use the same words as in SE. An attempt to do so results in either ungrammaticality, because the negative word is not preceded by –n’t, or is interpreted as a negative question, just as similar SE sentences would be as in (49).

(49) a. Did nobody see my book? (WTE)
   b. Didn’t you buy nothin’? (WTE)

To provide a positive question, the Negative Concord speakers will employ the same polarity items as SE. Thus, the non-standard dialect speakers are already familiar with these words. The teacher just needs to observe that SE presses these same items into service in negative contexts as well where Negative Concord dialects use other elements. The students just need to know where else to use these already familiar words.

Knowledge of linguistics and appreciation of linguistic structure can not only improve teacher attitudes and thereby student performance but can also provide specific steps and methods teachers can use to help their students master the standard dialect.
8. Conclusion

Linguistics can help with a variety of language educational issues by elucidating the structure of the non-standard varieties, revealing systematic patterns, understanding how these differences interfere with learning the standard, and suggesting alternative strategies for overcoming these barriers. It is then our duty to place this information in the hands of English teachers and future English teachers who will be on the frontlines working with non-standard English and non-native English speakers.

References


