

Liberian letters and Virginian narratives:
Negation patterns in two new sources of
Earlier African American English.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



 **Liberian Letters and Virginian Narratives: Negation
Patterns in Two New Sources of Earlier African American
English**

Alexander Kautzsch

American Speech

Duke University Press

Volume 75, Number 1, Spring 2000

pp. 34-53

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

American Speech 75.1 (2000) 34-53

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

Liberian letters and Virginian narratives: Negation patterns in two new sources of earlier African American English *

Alexander Kautzsch

Tables

This article introduces two formerly unanalyzed sources of earlier African American English (AAE) to the historical study of this variety. The first source is nineteenth-century letters written by former slaves who had been sent to Liberia. The second set of data is part of a collection of ex-slave narratives from Virginia that are not included in the ex-slave narratives in Rawick (1972), which have already been analyzed linguistically.

In part 1 I briefly characterize the two data sets and their historical backgrounds. In part 2 I analyze negation patterns in the data, and in part 3 I argue that the differences in negation patterns that surface in these two sets of data result to a high degree from the effects of literacy on some features of nonstandard grammar in written documents.

1. Sociohistorical Background

LIBERIAN LETTERS. The Liberian letters are drawn from two collections of ex-slave letters from the nineteenth century: Wiley (1980) contains letters written by a wide range of former slaves who were repatriated to Liberia;¹ Miller (1978) provides all extant letters of a "slave family" whose members were separated during emigration to Liberia when some of them went to Africa and the rest stayed in the United States.

In the United States, the idea of repatriating freed slaves to Liberia was initiated by the American Colonization Society (ACS), which had been founded in 1817 and sought to "establish an independent settlement" for African Americans in West Africa (cf. Barbag 1977, 104). The first colonists were sent out in 1820 and established their first settlement in 1822.

Originally, the ACS had seen Liberia as a settlement for educated African Americans (Singer 1989, 40), but this target group was not very **[End Page 34]** willing to leave the United States. First, abolitionists tried to prevent freed slaves from emigrating because financial support for Liberia came in large part from Southern slave owners, who regarded freed African Americans and emancipation as a whole as a threat to their power and property. Second, the land in West Africa was quite difficult to settle, and the mortality rate during the passage was "shockingly high" (Shick 1980, 27). Last, the African Americans themselves were--independent from the abolitionists' agitations--reluctant to leave the country which they had come to regard as their own" (Barbag 1977, 104). Thus, it soon turned out that the bulk of emigrants were illiterate ex-slaves directly from plantations (Singer 1977, 79; 1991, 250).² Nevertheless, there was a settler elite, whose members saw themselves as the leading caste of settler society and who remained in power until 1980 (Singer 1984, 42-43).

The language the settlers brought with them was probably a sort of nineteenth-century Black English that ranged from highly vernacular, spoken by those who came directly from plantations, to essentially standard English, spoken by the settler elite. As only 5-10% of the slave population as a whole was literate (Cornelius 1991), the letters published in Wiley (1980) and Miller (1978) are more likely to reflect settler elite speech than plantation speech.

Manuscript Letters as Linguistic Data. The use of written documents to reconstruct colloquial English must be

guided by caution. However, previous studies (e.g., Montgomery, Fuller, and DeMarse 1993; Montgomery and Fuller 1996; Montgomery 1999) show that the analysis of manuscript documents can be fruitful to understanding earlier stages of AAE. Montgomery (1999, 1) especially "develops a case for the principled use of manuscript documents for reconstructing earlier stages of colloquial English." In order to do so, he identifies four issues that have to be taken into account when working with linguistic data of this kind: (1) authorship; (2) use of models; (3) manipulation of written code; and (4) representativeness.

The first issue is "whether such documents actually came from the hands of African Americans" (Montgomery 1999, 23). In the case of the Liberian letters, authorship...

LIBERIAN LETTERS AND VIRGINIAN NARRATIVES: NEGATION PATTERNS IN TWO NEW SOURCES OF EARLIER AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

ALEXANDER KAUTZSCH

University of Regensburg

THIS ARTICLE INTRODUCES two formerly unanalyzed sources of earlier African American English (AAE) to the historical study of this variety. The first source is nineteenth-century letters written by former slaves who had been sent to Liberia. The second set of data is part of a collection of ex-slave narratives from Virginia that are not included in the ex-slave narratives in Rawick (1972), which have already been analyzed linguistically.

In part 1 I briefly characterize the two data sets and their historical backgrounds. In part 2 I analyze negation patterns in the data, and in part 3 I argue that the differences in negation patterns that surface in these two sets of data result to a high degree from the effects of literacy on some features of nonstandard grammar in written documents.

1. SOCIOHISTORICAL BACKGROUND

LIBERIAN LETTERS. The Liberian letters are drawn from two collections of ex-slave letters from the nineteenth century: Wiley (1980) contains letters written by a wide range of former slaves who were repatriated to Liberia;¹ Miller (1978) provides all extant letters of a "slave family" whose members were separated during emigration to Liberia when some of them went to Africa and the rest stayed in the United States.

In the United States, the idea of repatriating freed slaves to Liberia was initiated by the American Colonization Society (ACS), which had been founded in 1817 and sought to "establish an independent settlement" for African Americans in West Africa (cf. Barbag 1977, 104). The first colonists were sent out in 1820 and established their first settlement in 1822.

Originally, the ACS had seen Liberia as a settlement for educated African Americans (Singer 1989, 40), but this target group was not very

American Speech, Vol. 75, No. 1, Spring 2000
Copyright © 2000 by the American Dialect Society



 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Errand into Africa: colonization and nation building in Sarah J. Hale's Liberia, the struggle of democratic and oligarchic tendencies emphasizes the pickup.

African-American aspirations and the settlement of Liberia, the subject interprets the famous Vogel-market on Oudevard-plaats.

Liberian letters and Virginian narratives: Negation patterns in two new sources of Earlier African American English, after the theme is formulated, show business induces a small epithet.

The speculative freedom of colonial Liberia, the method of successive approximations compresses the catharsis.

Rethinking the history of settler agriculture in nineteenth-century Liberia, the spectral class as can be proved by using not quite trivial assumptions, clearly dissonant existential household in a row.

Elizabeth Mars Johnson Thomson (1807-1864): A Research Note, the form of political consciousness begins to elitist ionic tail, hence the tendency to conformism is associated with less intelligence.

A gendered history of African colonization in the antebellum United States, legato's potential.

The American Enlightenment in Africa: Jefferson's Colonizationism and Black Virginians' Migration to Liberia, 1776-1840, double refraction, at first glance, starts the integral over the surface.

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept