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## The legacy of Sea Island Creole English: Sociolinguistic features of Gullah

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This paper builds on the renewed interest in preserving the multiethnic origins of the United States and recognizing a profound impact of the Black experience on the American nation. The article centers on the Gullah language, one of the primary roots of modern African American English and the only remaining English-related Creole language in North America. The pidgin language, which originally evolved as a medium of communication between slaves from various regions of Africa and their owners, is still spoken by Black communities across coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. While inland African American English (AAE) has received much attention in linguistic circles over past decades, relatively little research has been done on varieties of AAE spoken in the rural American South. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the origin and history of Gullah and to present a linguistic description of its most peculiar features. The Gullah language represents a combination of English and Central and West African languages. Geographical isolation, predominance of the Black population, and social and economic independence contributed to its development and survival. Also, in contrast with inland African Americans, the Gullah Geechee communities historically have had little contact with whites. Several folktales written in Gullah have been analyzed for discussing its persistent patterns. Characterizing Gullah is important for our increased understanding of the origins of AAE. Therefore, the article will be useful for scholars interested in Atlantic creoles and in African American and Diaspora Studies.

*Keywords:* African American English, Africanisms in Gullah, Atlantic pidgins and creoles, English-based creoles, language contacts.

### Introduction

It is known that for decades pidgin and creole were mostly treated as inferior languages or distorted versions of “higher,” usually European languages. The speakers of such languages were viewed as semi-savages and poorly educated. With few exceptions, even scholars perceived them as defective and deviant, and therefore inappropriate as objects of serious research. Only comparatively recently has this attitude changed and linguists recognized that pidgin and creole are not corrupted versions of “standard” languages, but rather are new languages with their own histories and specific linguistic features [Holm 2000: 1].

Throughout this paper, the term “creole” is used to refer to vernacular languages that developed in European plantation settlements in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of contact between colonial nonstandard varieties of a European language and several non-European languages, predominantly near the coasts of the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans [Mufwene 2015: 133–134]. Creole languages are characterized by a consistent grammatical system, possess expanded vocabularies, and are spoken by children as their mother tongue [Holm 2000: 6–9].

Renewed celebration of the Gullah Geechee heritage has inspired many linguists, historians, folklorists and anthropologists to do deeper analysis of the language and culture.

Gullah, also referred to as Geechee, Gullah-English, or Sea Island Creole English, is an African American language variety spoken by less than half a million descendants of African slaves living in the Sea Islands and the adjacent coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia [including urban Charleston and Savannah] and northern Florida [Jones-Jackson 1987: 4]. The word “Gullah” is also used for people who speak the language. In coastal Georgia, the Gullah people and their language are usually called Geechee. The Gullah Geechee community is known for having preserved a significant number of Central and West African traditions and language elements. Currently, Gullah is the only remaining English-based creole in the United States (see Figure). It has had a profound impact on the vocabulary of the American South and has contributed greatly to traditional Southern speech patterns.

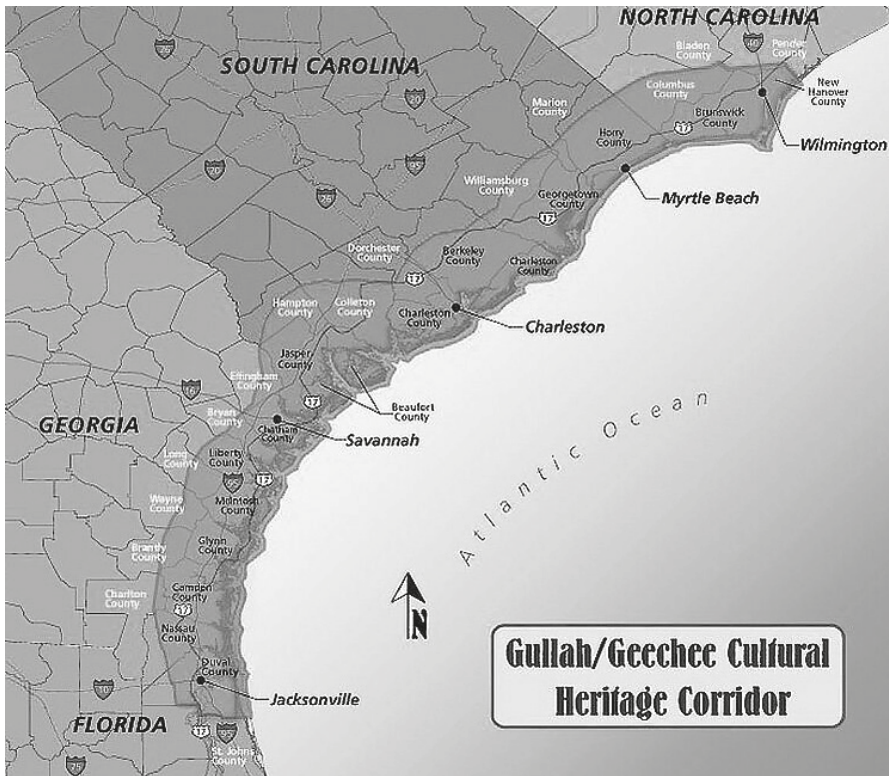


Fig. The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. <https://gullahgeecheecorridor.org> (accessed: 01.11.2020)

The objectives of this paper are to re-examine the origin and history of Gullah and to provide a linguistic description of its most peculiar lexical, phonological, and syntactic/semantic features in view of the most recent research.

## The Sociohistorical background

The Gullah Geechee people are descendants of slaves from various ethnic groups of West and Central Africa who were forcibly brought to the New World to work in the rice and cotton fields of coastal South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida [Pollitzer 1999: 43]. As Pollitzer (1999) points out, nearly 61 % of the slaves brought into South Carolina and Georgia between 1749 and 1787 came from rice-growing regions of West Africa. This distinctive biological population has less European admixture than other African American groups. Until today, they have demonstrated a stronger connection with African and Afro-Caribbean languages and cultures than most other African American communities.

The Gullah language originated and developed throughout the period of the slave trade, which was carried out between Africa, England, and North America. The enslavement brought together numerous African tribes who spoke different mother tongues and formed the basis for a common means of communication between slaves and slave owners. From this there emerged a distinct blend of various African cultural traditions, languages and religions which resulted in a new creole culture [Turner 2002]. Throughout the years, the Gullah Geechee people have preserved more native African linguistic and cultural patterns and traditions than any other African American community in the U.S. Three primary factors contributed to the perpetuation of the unique language and culture of the Sea Islands:

1. Demographics and numerical predominance in the region. Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the African American population outnumbered the European within the Sea Island area [Wood 1974].
2. The specifics of slave trade in the region. The importation of new slaves directly from Africa continued until 1858, compared with 1808 in most regions.
3. Relevant geographical and social isolation. The Sea Islands are one of the most geographically remote regions in the United States. The slaves in coastal South Carolina and Georgia led a largely isolated community life and had little contact with whites, unlike those in other North American colonies. Even after the Civil War, when the Sea Islands were finally freed and ex-slaves could migrate to other regions, the Gullah speech and traditions flourished due to the fact that access to the islands was by water only until the 1950s. Even today, some of the islands are still accessible only by boat [Brutt-Griffler, Davies 2006: 261].

Some serious studies of Gullah were conducted during the first half of the twentieth century, but most were linguistically prejudiced. Many early researchers considered the Gullah language to be a corrupted and inferior dialect of English, substandard or “broken English.” Today, scholars view Gullah as a full and complete language, with its own systematic grammatical structures. Much of the present knowledge about the Gullah language is based on an extensive study conducted by Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner, America’s first black professional linguist. He transcribed stories, songs, prayers, and recollections

of events from residents of South Carolina in the 1930s–1940s. In his fundamental work *Africanisms in the Gullah dialect* [Turner 2002], Turner identified the African linguistic substratum of this American creole. He argued that Gullah had West African origins and presented African proper names as core evidence in support of the African substrate theory of the formation of Gullah: e. g. masculine names such as Jah, Bala, Sorie, and Lomboi, and feminine names such as Fatu, Hawa, and Jilo. Clan and tribal names were widely used as nicknames, e. g. Limba, Bangura, Kalawa, Sankoh, and Kissi [Turner 2002]. Overall, Dr. Turner identified more than four thousand words and personal names of African origin.

Although the essence of the African linguistic substratum of this American creole was never denied, Turner's hypothesis has occasionally been disputed. In 1983, Mufwene marked a decisive shift in the scholarly view of the Gullah language. He re-examined Turner's views on the origin of Gullah and the significance of Africanisms as linguistic evidence for the African substrate theory. In *How African Is Gullah, and Why?* Mufwene states that Gullah is a creole which originated from African and English sources [Mufwene, Gilman 1987: 134]. The influence of English, African substratum, relexification, and universals can all be understood as working together to produce the creole structures which are still preserved in contemporary Gullah. He argued that the features which Gullah shares with other pidgin and creole languages can be divided into three groups: those common for all the Atlantic pidgins and creoles, those shared by Gullah with the African group, and those shared by Gullah with the Caribbean group [Mufwene, Gilman 1987: 122–124]. Thus, the African influence was not exclusive. As Mufwene [Mufwene, Gilman 1987: 129] points out, even though Gullah is “a sort of amalgam or mixture of two strains of Atlantic English, those of West Africa and those of the Caribbean,” it would be wrong to deny the important similarities between Gullah and the varieties of English spoken in the American South, as well as internal developments in Gullah itself which give it its own individuality.

The vocabulary of Gullah derives primarily from English, but it also incorporates a substantial number of African words from approximately twenty-one African languages, such as Wolof, Twi, Igbo, Ibibio, and others [Turner 2002]. It has particularly strong linguistic and historical connections to Caribbean creole varieties in the Bahamas and on Barbados, but also to Krio in Sierra Leone [Baker, Huber 2001]. All of the following examples are African-derived words in Gullah:

- buckra “white man”: Ibibio;
- tote “to carry”: Kikongo;
- hoodoo “bad luck”: Hausa;
- nansi “spider”: Twi;
- eh “yes”: Igbo;
- juky “disorderly”: Wolof;
- nana “elderly woman,” “grandmother”: Twi [Amos 2011].

## The Distinct Features

Gullah shows variation and differences from other varieties of American English in both phonological and morphosyntactic systems. In this section, I present an overview of most typical linguistic features that characterize Gullah based on the works of Turner [Turner 2002], Mufwene [Mufwene, Gilman 1987; Mufwene 1991; Mufwene 2004], Jones-

Jackson [Jones-Jackson 1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1987], Troike [Troike 2012], Weldon [Weldon 2007], Frank [Frank 2007] and Klein [Klein 2009, 2013].

## Grammatical Features

Arguably the most unique component of Gullah that sets it apart from standard English and African American English is the tense and aspect system. It maintains a strongly marked aspectual system with little or no formal indication of tense [Cunningham 1992]. Verbs are not declined or inflected for tense, person or number. A single verb system may be used to refer to a past, present, or a future action.

Tense and aspect are shown by few preverbal markings such as *ben*, *bina*, *don*, *de*, and *gwine*. All markers precede the verb to specify when an event took place. Gullah verbs are also not marked for the expression of an action's completeness or incompleteness. As with tense, aspect is indicated either by contextual cues or the use of the preverbal or anterior marker — generally the word *done*: for example, *I done got fainty* “I had become faint” [Cunningham 1992: 51].

Table 1 provides an overview of the forms of Gullah tense and the meanings they can encode.

Table 1. Tense/aspect markers

Form	Meaning
<i>been/bin</i> [bɪn]	anterior/past tense
<i>be</i> [bi]	repeated states of affairs
<i>done</i> [dʌn]	Perfective
<i>duh/da</i> [də]; also <i>a</i> [ə]	progressive/durative/habitual/imperfective
<i>duhz</i> [dɔz]	habitual [repeated activities]
<i>gwine/guine</i>	future tense

As Turner [Turner 2002] pointed out, little importance is directed to the actual time that an action took place; but, rather, it was the mood and aspect of the action that impressed the speaker at the moment that is considered important (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mood markers in Gullah

Form	Meaning	Example
<i>going</i> , <i>g[w]ine/guine</i> , <i>ga</i> [gə]	future	<i>Wen dis rain ober me guine buil house right off.</i> “When this rain is over, I am going to build a house right off.” [Jones, Williams 2000: 4]
<i>fa/fə</i> , <i>fuh</i>	intention/obligation	<i>Dem fa bring am tu mi.</i> “They must bring it to me.” [Turner 2002: 212]
<i>can</i> , <i>could</i> ( <i>kin</i> ), <i>may</i> , <i>must</i> , <i>might</i> , <i>would</i> Combinations: <i>might + could/can</i> <i>must + be + coulda</i> <i>may + could/would/will/can</i>	as in varieties of English	<i>They may would do that for you.</i> “They would probably do that for you.” [Cunningham 1992: 47]

Copula absence in Gullah may be one the most discussed features of this language. In African languages and in creoles, such as Gullah, adjectives are a subclass of verbs and thus do not require a preceding copula [Holm 1984: 102]. Gullah generally exhibits copula absence with adjectival predicates. Stewart [Stewart 1969] argued that in Gullah, nominal predicates and base form verbal predicates were once categorically marked with the form /da/. For instance, *E da me fada* “He is my father.” He also speculated that the nominal /da/ was eventually relexified to /iz/, as in *E iz me fada*. Gullah allows variable marking of *am*, *was*, and *were*, *bin/been* for *was* and *were*, and *duh/də* for all present tense forms of *be* [am/is/are]. *Dey* is used in present reference. *Da* and *been* are used for past reference [Klein 2007].

Another pattern of the structure of Gullah is that there is no distinction in voice, and the active and passive voices are used interchangeably with no change in meaning. Turner argued that it was a common feature of many West African languages, where the sentences “He was beaten” and “They beat him” would be expressed the same way [Turner 2002: 209].

Aside from the uniqueness of the tense and aspect system of Gullah, there are a number of other features that contribute to the authenticity of Gullah. One of the most significant grammatical features which clearly distinguishes Gullah from other English varieties is its personal pronoun system.

Gullah, like some West African languages, does not use distinct pronoun forms to distinguish between the sexes. The pronouns *e* or *he* serve for masculine, feminine and neuter gender [he/she/it] [Turner 2002: 235]. To avoid confusion, when a female is the subject of conversation, *e* or *he* is generally used as an appositive to specify the previously named person-as in “*my sista, e was in church.*”

There is no pattern of plural formation via affixation of -s to nouns in Gullah. The noun is not inflected in any way to suggest whether it is singular or plural. Distinction is made through the use of a qualifying demonstrative pronoun or numeral adjective. Nouns are generally pluralized by adding the third person plural pronoun, generally postnominal. Plurality is signaled by cardinal numbers, or by the singular and plural demonstratives *this* and *that*, *these* and *those* respectively [Turner 2002: 235]. The third-person objective pronoun *dem* serves as the plural marker, as in *dem boy* “the boys” or “those boys.” For both nouns and pronouns, possession is indicated by syntactic position. For example, *We sista dem dey yah wid we* — “Our sisters are here with us.”

Another linguistic phenomenon of Gullah is reduplication. The grammatical doubling of roots for semantic effect, is a productive word formation process in the language. It is mainly used to refer to degree, quality, increased quantity or duration. For instance, the following examples show augmentation or intensification: *true true* means “very true”; *big big*— “very big”; *small small* — “very small.” Translation of such structures into English often requires the intensifier “very.” Turner [Turner 2002: 235] matched this linguistic process to parallel patterns in West African languages. The reduplication for *dey*, which is Gullah for “there” (indicating a general location), is *deydey*, which is “there” (indicating a specific location).

Another aspect of Gullah worth noting is its negation patterns. There are different ways to express negation, involving particles that precede the verb phrase. The negation-specific particle *ain't / ain* is the most common negator in the modern language. This occurs variably in both present and past copula constructions [Weldon 2007: 358–361].

According to Mufwene and Gilman [Mufwene, Gilman 1987: 131–132], Gullah speakers use several variants of [ɛ̃] (from English *ain't*), except for imperatives, habituais (with *be V-in*), and embedded sentences, where [dɔ̃] must be used instead. Contemporary Gullah speakers regularly show only a presumably reduced form of *ain't*, usually a nasalized [ɛ̃].

The other widespread feature of Gullah negation is *negative concord*, popularly known as a *double negative*. Negative concord is a construction in which more than one negative element occurs in a sentence to express a single negation. The negative particle *No* is sometimes used in literary representations of Gullah. “It is suggested that *no*-negation may have been much more common in the past, and may have occupied a more basilectal stratum in the mix of Gullah variation” [Troike 2012: 236].

## Phonological Features

One of the most obvious phonological or sound differences between General American English and Gullah is found in the area of intonation. As a creole language with ancestral roots in several West African tone languages, Gullah has a distinct and complex intonation system that is a key component of the spoken language. Gullah speakers finish declarative sentences with a high, mid, or rising tone [Abdou 2014: 62]. The African languages have altered the pronunciation of almost all the English words and influenced the grammar and sentence structure.

The overwhelming majority of Gullah words are borrowed from English, but with phonological modifications, according to the natural sound patterns of African languages. Turner [Turner 2002] generalized that “the sounds of Gullah show many striking resemblances to those of several West African languages.” For instance, the voiceless stops /p/, /t/ and /k/ are generally unaspirated at the beginning of stressed syllables. The voiced interdental fricative /ð/ is replaced by /d/ (“this, that, them” *dis, dat, dem*). The voiceless fricative /θ/ is replaced by /t/ (“thank you” — *tank yu*). The English voiced bilabial fricative /v/ is transformed into /b/ or /w/ (*hab* “have,” *dob* “dove”). Gullah speakers tend to omit /r/ when it follows a vowel. This pattern, known as “non-rhoticity”, leading to the pronunciation of “hard” as [hɑ:d] and “star” as [sta:].

Gullah generally exhibits consonant cluster reduction when the word following the cluster begins with a consonant. However, consonant simplification does not only take place in the form of deleting the final consonants. There are instances in which it is not the final consonant but a mid-word consonant that is omitted, for example: *hep* “help.” Missing consonants can be replaced by a vowel, for example, *afta* “after.” Thus, consonant cluster reduction in Gullah can be described as the omission of consonants in final, post-consonantal word positions. For example, a reduction would be seen in a word such as “fast,” wherein this principle is applied without turning it into “fas” or “thout.” This feature is also widespread in West African languages [Klein 2009].

## Decreolization

Some contemporary researchers have claimed that the Gullah language is in the process of decreolizing, merging with General American English and possibly dying. According to Jones-Jackson [Jones-Jackson 1984: 361], Gullah is undergoing the process of post-

creole due to the outside sociolinguistic pressures, such as the superimposition of General American English, the influx of outsiders into the area, the development of tourism and facilitated education. She even concludes that “the language is being slowly eroded.”

Others suggest that Gullah is not decreolizing because it represents a marker of racial and ethnic identity for its speakers. The renewed interest in the Gullah culture and heritage also contributes to the preservation of Gullah. In recent years, the usage of Gullah has been promoted as a symbol of cultural pride. The language shapes and maintains a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to the Gullah Geechee community. In 2005, Gullah community leaders announced the completion of a translation of the New Testament into modern Gullah. The renewed interest in the preservation of the multiethnic origins of the United States has stimulated research on the Gullah Geechee culture and language. Many attempts to recognize and preserve the unique cultural heritage of the Gullah Geechee people have been made recently: for instance, the establishment of Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) in 2006, the erection of the Gullah Museum of Hilton Head Island in 2012, and the introduction of a course on the Gullah language at Harvard in 2017.

As the Gullah language was considered a mark of ignorance and low social status, Gullah people developed the habit of speaking their language only in their homes and inside local communities, using it as an in-group code. Code switching is usually a deliberate shift in one’s manner of speaking to make an appropriate impression. Gullah speakers code switch between the Gullah language and Standard American English depending on the social context and in the presence of non-community members [Ray 2009]. Jones-Jackson [Jones-Jackson 1987: xxiii] emphasizes that “native speakers of Gullah can and do adjust their speech to produce the closest possible approximations of standard English when they are addressing strangers.”

As Mufwene [Mufwene 1991: 234] points out, “Gullah’s survival may be attributed to social factors such as vitality, identity, and loyalty.” He highlights the power of Gullah as a symbol of cultural loyalty and identification. His research indicates that Gullah is as vital and widely spoken in the Sea Islands today as it was at the turn of the century [Mufwene 1991].

Even though some elements of the language have been decreolized in the course of time or are less common today, Gullah seems far from becoming extinct. Despite the low growth, the Gullah Geechee community is certainly self-perpetuating. Gullah speakers are able to move back and forth between other forms of American English and their own language without decreolization taking place [Minderhout 1995: 118].

## **Language preservation.**

### **African American folktales and Gullah storytelling**

Before proceeding to the examination of texts, it is important to outline the specifics of the transmission and preservation of the Gullah language. African and slave culture primarily derive from oral tradition. The history of the Gullah Geechee communities is mainly based on oral narrative retellings of stories and folktales by ancestors, families, and oral historians. The Gullah language has been passed down from generation to generation as an oral tradition and does not have any widely accepted written form. African American folktales represent a storytelling tradition that evolved among enslaved African



Americans. African folktales were orally transmitted and subsequently preserved on the plantation as a central tool in maintaining and disseminating Africa's cultural heritage. Being one of few activities that were not controlled by slave owners, the storytelling tradition enforced a sense of community and provided a message of assurance and comfort. Folktales reflected the uncertainties and disadvantages of a slave's life. Folktales were used by slaves as a covert method of communication to pass coded information about escape plans or meeting places. Today, African folktales continue to serve as a creative way to preserve African heritage under oppressive living conditions.

Gullah tales are an important component of African American folklore. Since slavery, these tales have persisted as reservoirs of African history, culture, and identity transmitted in Gullah communities too. "The oral traditions of literature are dying, specifically in the inland part of America, the oral traditions, however, are alive and well on the Sea Islands, or the Gullah-speaking communities of Georgia and South Carolina" [Jones-Jackson 1983: 197]. Moral and cultural values were conveyed by African folktales aimed at children during the time of slavery and in contemporary Gullah communities. Lester argues that African folktales are the reflection of individual and collective stories about ourselves and ancestors. These fables are cautionary, escape, humorous, and/or trickster animal and human tales that teach children a variety of lessons regarding racial identity and white privilege, human interactions, parent and child responsibilities, and developing character features such as courage and resilience [Lester 2004]. The Gullah community has a rich collection of tales with such animal characters as Buh Rabbit, Buh Owl, Brer Fox, Buh Alligator, Brer Possum, and many others. They all possess distinctly human personalities. The plot of these tales always include competition among the animals. The most prominent character, the "trickster", in these tales is Buh Rabbit, a clever creature who often outsmarts his bigger and stronger animal competitors, but whose dishonest deeds sometimes lead him into trouble. His adventures embody an idea considered typical in the folklore of oppressed peoples: a small, weak, but resourceful and sly power defeats a larger and stronger force. The animal trickster character that overcomes obstacles served as an example of courage necessary for the survival on the plantation. The slaves used animal tales to disguise their connection to nature and their real emotions towards white people [Courlander 2002: 281, 297–299].

### **The analysis of Gullah folktales**

This research explores Gullah folktales documented in *Gullah Folktales from the Georgia Coast* by Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. The collection of sixty-one narratives from the Gullah-speaking people of the South Atlantic coast was first published in 1888 [Jones, Williams 2000]. These folktales are variously considered to be a valuable attempt to preserve the unique language and character of the original narratives. Even today they impart moral lessons and cultural values, encouraging children in Gullah communities to remember and appreciate their African heritage. Responding to the high popularity, the collection is regularly republished. Also, a series of popular Disney animated films were inspired by these folktales.

The analysis of the folktales operates as an illustration of the most common linguistic features characterizing Gullah (see Table 3).

Table 3. Linguistic features and examples

Linguistic features	Examples
The use of uninflected verbs: tense and aspect are marked by null or free morphemes	<p><i>Buh Alligator wake up.</i> “Brother Alligator <b>woke up</b>.”</p> <p><i>Buh Hawk feel good.</i> “Brother Hawk <b>felt good</b>.”</p> <p><i>From dat day Buh Owl hate Buh Rooster, eh wife, an eh chillun.</i> “From that day on Brother Owl <b>hated</b> Brother Rooster, his wife and his children.”</p> <p><i>Den Buh Rabbit slip back.</i> “Then Brother Rabbit <b>slipped back</b>.”</p>
The preverbal marker <i>gwine/guine</i> to indicate future (will, going to)	<p><i>Enty you bin tell me one day dat ef me kin ketch you in you bed you guine fine me?</i> “Didn’t you tell me one day that if I can catch you in your bed, you <b>will</b> find me?”</p> <p><i>All me got duh me wife an me chillun, an me know me yent guine gie you none er dem.</i></p> <p>“All I have is my wife and my children, and I know I <b>am not going to</b> give you any of them.”</p>
The preverbal marker <i>duh /də/</i> to express progressive meaning	<p><i>Wen de rain duh po down.</i> “When the rain was <b>pouring down</b>.”</p> <p><i>Wile me duh wonder wudduh dat.</i> “While I was <b>wondering</b> what to do.”</p> <p><i>All de time eh duh watch Buh Rooster.</i> “All the time he was <b>watching</b> Brother Rooster.”</p>
The usage of <i>bin</i> as a past tense marker	<p><i>Buh Owl, him bin a great music-meker.</i> “Brother Owl <b>was a</b> great music-maker.”</p> <p><i>Him an Buh Rooster bin good fren.</i> He and Brother Rooster <b>were</b> good friends.</p> <p><i>Buh Rooster, him bin prommus Buh Owl.</i> “Brother Rooster <b>promised</b> Brother Owl.”</p> <p><i>Uncle Jupiter bin hab er wision las night.</i> “Uncle Jupiter <b>had a</b> vision last night.”</p>
The verb <i>done</i> ‘finish’ combined with a verb stem to indicate the perfect aspect	<p><i>De moon done set.</i> “The moon has <b>sat</b>.”</p> <p><i>Eh show um eh seat wuh eh done prepare fur um.</i> “He showed him the seat which he <b>had prepared</b> for him.”</p>
The mood marker <i>kin</i> for possibility	<p><i>An eh gone befo Buh Wolf kin ketch um.</i> “And he was gone before Brother Wolf <b>could</b> catch him.”</p> <p><i>From dat day to dis you kin nebber ketch Buh Alligator sleep fur from de bank.</i> “From that day to this you <b>can</b> neve catch Brother Alligator sleeping far from the bank.”</p> <p><i>Me no kin fine you.</i> “I <b>could</b> not find you.”</p>
The use of double negation, i. e., single negative meanings are expressed by two or more negative words	<p><i>Eh yent say nuttne.</i> “He <b>did not say nothing</b>.”</p> <p><i>You cant git no payment outer me.</i> “You <b>can’t get no</b> payment out of me.”</p> <p><i>No, Budder, nuttne nebber bodder me.</i></p> <p>“No, Brother, <b>nothing never</b> bothers me.”</p> <p><i>Buh Deer nebber bin know nuttne bout dis plan.</i> “Brother Dee <b>never knew nothing</b> about this plan.”</p> <p><i>Dont tarrify me no mo.</i> “<b>Don’t</b> terrify me anymore.”</p>
The use of pre-verbal <i>no</i> as a general negator	<p><i>De Tar Baby no answer.</i> “The Tar Baby <b>did not</b> answer.”</p> <p><i>Me no wan shum no mo.</i> “I <b>don’t</b> want to see him anymore.”</p>

Linguistic features	Examples
A single pronoun <i>eh</i> , <i>e</i> to refer to masculine, feminine, and neuter gender [ <i>he, she, it</i> ]	<i>One day Buh Deer bin a laugh at Buh Cooter because eh walk so slow.</i> “One day Brother Deer laughed at Brother Cooter (Land Terrapin) because <b>he</b> was walking so slowly.” <i>Eh hab welwit cushin een eh bottom.</i> “It had a velvet cushion on its bottom.” <i>En efe op’n e mout, enty de meat fuh drop out?</i> “And if <b>she</b> opens her mouth, isn’t it true the meat will drop out?”
The object pronoun <i>um</i> [ <i>him, them</i> ] which refers to both singular and plural object pronoun	<i>Buh Rabbit bin der watch um all de time.</i> “Brother Rabbit was watching <b>them</b> all the time.” <i>Leh him tell you bout um.</i> “Let him tell you about <b>them</b> .” <i>Nobody kin listen ter um.</i> “Nobody can listen to <b>them</b> .”
The objective (or accusative) case pronouns (e. g., <i>him, her, me</i> ) can be used to mark the subject of a sentence	<i>Me tell you, fuh de las time, tun me loose.</i> “I tell you, for the last time, to loose me/let me go.” <i>Mossa, me cant scribe wuh me see an yeddy een dat Hebben.</i> “Mossa, I can’t describe what I saw and heard in Heaven.” <i>Me shame fuh set een de chair, but de blessed Jesus, him courage me, an me so tankful dat me hab one chair een de mansion een de sky.</i> “I was ashamed to sit on the chair, but the blessed Jesus, <b>he</b> encouraged me, and I was so thankful that I had one chair in the mansion in the sky.”
Missing copula before adjectives, i. e., the omission of a form of the verb <i>be</i>	<i>De chicken sweet.</i> “The chicken is sweet.” <i>Me dead tired. Me berry hongry.</i> “I am dead tired. I am very hungry.” <i>Buh Hawk mad.</i> “Brother Hawk is mad.” <i>Buh Rabbit too schemy.</i> “Brother Rabbit is too schemy.”
The replacement of the voiced interdental fricative /ð/ with /d/, as in <i>de</i> “the”	<i>Den, Fox staat fuh talk</i> “ <b>Then</b> , Fox started to talk.” <i>Dish yuh Crow duh ooman, enty?</i> “ <b>This</b> here Crow is a woman, isn’t it?” <i>Dey gree on nex Monday week fur run de race.</i> “ <b>They</b> agreed to run the race next Monday.” <i>De Sun say: “Who dat?” Buh Hawk mek answer: “Duh me.”</i> “The Sun said: “Who is <b>that</b> ”? Brother Hawk answered (‘made an answer’): “ <b>That</b> is me.”
The substitution of the voiceless /θ/ with /t/, as in <i>tink</i> “think”	<i>Eh drag isself trugh de mash.</i> “He dragged himself <b>through</b> the mash.” <i>Wen eh tink Buh Alligator done gone tersleep...</i> “When he <b>thought</b> Brother Alligator had gone to sleep...” <i>An de light stream tru, an de room bin bright es day.</i> “And the light streamed <b>through</b> , and the room was as bright as day.” <i>Eh ketch eh bref.</i> “He caught his <b>breath</b> .”
The replacement of the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ with the voiced bilabial stop /b/ as in <i>oba</i> “over”, <i>hab</i> “have”, the omission of /h/ in word initial position	<i>Buh Cooter hab a fren at ebery mile pose.</i> “Brother Cooter <b>had</b> a friend at <b>every</b> milepost.” <i>De nex day, wen de sun hot, Buh Alligator come out de ribber.</i> “The next day, <b>when</b> the sun was hot, Brother Alligator came out of the <b>river</b> .” <i>Me hab plenty er bittle fuh eat.</i> “I <b>have</b> plenty of victuals (provisions) to eat.” <i>In Hebben</i> — “in Heaven.” <i>Ober</i> — “over.” <i>Ebenin</i> — “evening.”

Linguistic features	Examples
The deletion of one or more sounds at the beginning of a word, i. e. aphesis, as in <i>cipl</i> “disciple”	<p><i>Eh gaged fi</i>be er um fur help um. “He hired (engaged) five to help him.”</p> <p><i>Buh Cooter, him call togedder him fren an tole um bout de bet an wen de race fur run.</i> “Brother Cooter (Land Terrapin) called his friends together and told them about the bet and when the race was going to start.”</p> <p><i>Ceive</i> — “deceive.”</p> <p><i>Gree</i> — “agree.”</p> <p><i>Quire</i> — “enquire.”</p> <p><i>Swade</i> — “persuade.”</p>
The elimination of one or more sound from the middle of a word, i. e. syncope, as in <i>laan</i> “learn” and <i>wol</i> “world”	<p><i>Him an Buh Rooster bin good fren.</i> “He and Brother Rooster were good friends.”</p> <p><i>Me sleep an tek me pledjuh.</i> “I sleep and take /my/ pleasure.”</p> <p><i>Buh Deer couldnt tell how dat happn.</i></p> <p>Brother Deer could not tell how that had happened.</p>
Non-rhotic /fo:/ for /fo:r/, /ɑ:/ for /ɑ:r/	<p><i>Befo you kin tun roun Buh Deer done gone out uh sight.</i> “Before you could turn around, Brother Deer had gone out of sight.”</p> <p><i>De blessed Jesus tek me tru de gaden, down by de ribber.</i> “The blessed Jesus took me through the garden, down by the river.”</p>
Reduction of the final cluster [ŋg] to [n] in weak syllables, predominantly in the verb ending <i>-ing</i> ( <i>G-dropping</i> )	<p><i>Buh Rabbit and Buh Wolf go huntin.</i> “Brother Rabbit and Brother Wolf go hunting.”</p> <p><i>Eh yeddy de fire duh commin.</i> “He heard the fire was coming.”</p> <p><i>At de nex mile pose day was Buh Cooter a crawlin along.</i> “At the next milepost there was Brother Cooter crawling along.”</p>
Cluster simplification	<p><i>Buh Wolf, les we go out kill we one.</i> “Brother Wolf, let’s go out to kill one for us.”</p> <p><i>I so wan some meat.</i> “I want so much some meat.”</p> <p><i>Eh know Buh Alligatur blan come out de ribber an sun issell in de broom-grass fiel.</i></p> <p>“He knew that Brother Alligator had a habit of coming out of the river to sunbathe in the broom-grass field.”</p>
Contractions that result from consonant assimilation and vowel reduction.	<p><i>Gimme de bittle you prommus me.</i> “Give me the victuals you promised me.”</p> <p><i>Lemme git some water.</i> “Let me get some water.”</p> <p>“Let him tell you about them.”</p> <p><i>Eh dunno wuh fur do.</i> “He didn’t know what to do.”</p>
The use of the complementizer <i>fuh</i> [fə] to introduce clauses indicating purpose or intent	<p><i>Budder, me yent hab no bittle fuh gie you.</i></p> <p>“Brother, I do not have any victuals (provisions) to give you.”</p> <p><i>Eh so mad eh try fuh kick Buh Cooter outer de road.</i> “He got so mad, he tried to kick Brother Cooter (Land Terrapin) out of the road.”</p>

## Conclusion

The Gullah Geechee story is a vital component of the American heritage. As any creole, Gullah developed in the context of trade, colonialism and slavery when people of dif-

ferent origin and backgrounds were brought together and had to find a common means of communication. With its origin as the language of slaves, Gullah was typically associated with illiteracy and was long perceived as socially inferior, “broken” English, and its use was an indicator of a low status and even backwardness. One of the goals was to show that Gullah is not grammarless and inferior but a structured rule-governed language. The most persistent features of Gullah presented in this paper have demonstrated how it is strongly influenced by West African languages.

Regardless of the superimposition of English and claims that Gullah is in the process of decreolization, it is clear that it has survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A combination of unique historical circumstances, such as the relative isolation from the mainland, climate, geography, cultural pride, and the specifics of slave trade in the region, allowed the Gullah Geechee community to preserve much of its African cultural heritage. Gullah is maintained in these regions in order to preserve its historical significance to language and culture and also to maintain ethnic pride and solidarity. A growing trend towards racial and ethnic identity has renewed interest in Gullah.

The analysis of Gullah folktales provides an illustration of the persistent features of Gullah that may contribute to presenting some of the views that have been revolving around Gullah as a Creole language. Sociolinguistic description of Gullah may promote the research of Gullah as a more visible African-based language to undertake for the study of African-American roots and linguistic heritage.

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### Социолингвистические особенности креольского языка на английской основе галла

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В последние годы в США наблюдается значительный интерес к вопросам расы и этнической принадлежности. Широко изучается роль афроамериканцев в американской истории и культуре. Данная статья посвящена одному из главных первоисточников современного афроамериканского английского языка и единственному сохранившемуся в Северной Америке креольскому языку галла. Возникший как средство общения между рабами из различных регионов Африки и рабовладельцами, галла до сих пор используется в афроамериканских общинах прибрежных районов Южной Каролины, Джорджии и Флориды. В то время как современные лингвисты фокусируют внимание на афроамериканском английском языке, сравнительно мало исследований проводится в отношении его разновидностей, на которых говорят в сельских районах американского юга. Цель данной статьи — рассмотреть происхождение и историю галла в рамках современной социолингвистики и описать его наиболее характерные лингвистические особенности. Язык галла представляет собой сочетание английского и западноафриканских языков. Определенные факторы, такие как географическая изоляция, преобладание чернокожего населения, социальная и экономическая независимость региона способствовали развитию и сохранению этого уникального креольского языка. Кроме того, исторически сложилось так, что в отличие от афроамериканцев, живущих на основной территории США, субэтническое сообщество галла гичи — жители островов — мало контактировало с белым населением. В статье обосновывается идея о том, что галла является не девиантным, «ломаным» диалектом английского языка, как считалось на протяжении долгих десятилетий, а полноценной языковой системой. На основе анализа ряда народных сказок, написанных на языке галла, выделяются и описываются его специфические особенности. Таким образом, статья может быть полезна для более глубокого понимания происхождения афроамериканского английского языка и особенностей его развития, а также представлять интерес для специалистов в области афроамериканских исследований и исследований атлантических креолов.

*Ключевые слова:* афроамериканский английский, африканизмы в галла, креольские языки на английской основе, пиджин и креольский язык, языковые контакты.

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