

Elnara Putayeva

Department of Language and Culture (Linguoculturology)
Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku

African elements (Africanisms) in modern American English

Abstract

The article deals with the influence of words of African origin on the formation of American English (AE) word stock. It provides new interpretation of Africanisms and shows the significance of this part of vocabulary in determining the characteristics of the American culture. The investigation is based on the existing sources (mainly lexicographic works) and is aimed at their new structural and functional analysis. As a result of the research, it became clear that most of the words of African origin were introduced to English spoken in America in the 17th century and some in the 18th and 19th centuries. The number of words and expressions from African languages that were introduced was closely related to African Americans' way of living, their spiritual beliefs, rituals, attitudes, and various objects used by them such as weapons. The word stock of the English language was enriched due to the assimilation of loanwords from languages of Africans living in America. A significant contribution to AE is the great amount of words naming animals, fruit and foodstuff, names of states, rivers and lakes, cities and towns.

Keywords: American English (AE), Africanisms, African languages, American culture, loanwords

1. Introduction

Language is part of culture. It is the primary mean of communication. Language is a type of guide to reality, and the medium of expression for the society. No

language can exist in isolation from other languages. In its historical development the English language has derived a lot of loanwords from other languages. The article deals with the problem which has a significant importance in the lexicology of American English (AE), i.e. the influence of Africanisms, or “the words of African origin” on the word stock. Thus, the fact is indisputable that AE was under the influence of members of African cultural-linguistic groups who had been enslaved to work in what would become the USA. This article is about the influence of these newly acquired words on AE and American cultural heritage. Numerous examples are provided of Africanisms in AE referring to religion, music, cuisine, cattle breeding, agriculture, folklore, and some other fields of communication. Both enslaved and free Africans and Afro-Americans had a great impact on the formation of the word stock of AE and gave color and variety to the speech of its native speakers.

One of the features of the English language, as well as many other languages, is assimilating new words from different languages into the vocabulary. At various stages of its development, English has received a number of new words mostly from Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, etc. The influence of the Renaissance with the French language hegemony greatly enriched the English lexicon. The political power gained over time has made the English language more accessible irrespective of geographic barriers. The influence of various languages spoken by the people in British colonies on the English language began to be felt gradually since the 16th century.

One of these influences was the variation created by Africanisms in the language. Firstly, it is important to define the meaning of the term “Africanism”. An Africanism is any cultural or linguistic property of African origin surviving in the Americas or in the African Diaspora (Collin 2006: 38). The study of Africanisms in the USA has been the subject of much debate over the elements of African culture in North America, as for some researchers, Africanisms survived in North America by a process of cultural transfer, cultural blinding, and cultural transformations. African nations, unlike European ones, were deprived of their freedom to transfer their kinship structures, courts, music, and military. The term “Africanism” refers to the traces of African languages and cultural property preserved on the North American continent. The settling of African slaves in North America and the establishment of links between the continents contributed to the exchange of language and culture. African Americans are considered citizens and residents of African descent in the United States (Mufwene 1993). Many African Americans are descendants of the West African-born Blacks who lived in the USA during the slavery times (O'Connor et al. 2013). The group of people who arrived

in America in August 1619 have been described as “the first Africans to set foot on the North American continent” but that is incorrect. For example, as historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. has pointed out, Juan Garrido became the first documented black person to arrive in what would become the USA, when he accompanied Juan Ponce de León in search of the Fountain of Youth in 1513, and they ended up in present-day Florida, around St. Augustine. The first newcomers were brought in 1526 to the colony of San Miguel de Guadalupe and they arrived at Point Comfort, Virginia, not Jamestown (Waxman 2019). Later this practice continued and thousands of black Africans were brought to the Caribbean to work as slaves. Peoples of African origin that were first influenced by American culture were those represented by Mande and Wolof, the ethnic groups from Senegambia region, and the impact that these peoples have had on the ever-evolving American English and culture of the 17th century are still felt today. Words of Wolof origin in American English include e.g. *bug* ‘insect’, *dig* ‘understand’, *guy* ‘boy, fellow’, *honky* ‘red-eared person’, *juke* ‘box’, *fuzz* ‘police’, *hippie* ‘bohemian’, *phony* ‘fake’, *rooty-tooty* ‘foolish’ and others (Dalglish 1982).

The initial arrival of Africans in the New World, after being forcefully taken from their homeland, marked the beginning of a totally new way of life in enslavement. The linguistic borrowings are linked to the adaptation processes and may be regarded as a transformation of cultural beliefs and attitudes. This transformation, mostly out of necessity, revealed new forms of spiritual and social expressions in the speech of African Americans. These African American expressions are now an integral part of the American vocabulary. In fact, the African Americans’ immeasurable contributions to all aspects of American life (family structure, politics, economics, cuisine, and the arts) demand recognition and respect of all Americans. Historians, archeologists, and anthropologists have tried to uncover any new information helping to understand the diverse cultural transformation of Africans and these efforts can only be beneficial to Americans. However, non-African linguists continue to appropriate these and claim, in some cases, that linguistic features that demonstrably date back well over 100 years were started by white people in the 1980s. As Kamron & Duha (2017) indicated the commonly used term “African-American” is a marker of the integrationist tradition among black people in the USA (Kamron & Duha 2017). However, they claimed that some words and constructions before being absorbed into colloquial American speech were a reflection of the anti-American African tradition in which Africans maintained a distinct African identity in the face of enslavement, oppression, and European and Asiatic linguistic and cultural hegemony. In recent investigations it has been demonstrated that varieties of speech of African

Americans have maintained aspects of African languages throughout the continent while remaining distinct from Standard American English. Thus, anti-American African (AAA) is preferred to other terms in the literature such as so-called African American Vernacular English/Black English. Thus, it is worth noting that some words and constructions of African origin are still not fully accepted in Standard American English and can be found predominantly in Colloquial English (Kamron & Duha 2017: 85-7).

The purpose of the study was to determine the importance of loanwords from African languages, as well as to show the significance of Africanisms in AE and American culture, to present new interpretations of Africanisms, etc. It will also contribute to a wider picture of the significant role that people of African origin played in the process of shaping American culture. In the current paper, I propose to examine factors that have an impact on the formation of AE and relevant culture of linguistic groups living in the USA. These influences are definitely related to the factors under which that very formation process had taken place. For this purpose, I investigated the following subthemes:

1. Initial resources of loanwords,
2. Semantic references of Africanisms,
3. Reasons of restriction in vocabulary stock,
4. Cultural principles giving way to realization of the diversity in culture.

2. Sources and methods

Surveys were mainly used in this study, the purpose of which was to describe the characteristics of loanwords derived from languages of African origin. The study was designed as a systematic review. The chosen methods were aimed at summarizing analyses and synthesizing current knowledge by selecting studies in this field. Systematic reviews focus on synthesizing the findings of many different studies in a way that is transparent and accountable.

In the process of research and preparation of the article, general scientific methods of studying information sources were used in order to clarify and concretize the process and conditions of forming the American English, and to discuss various approaches to the research of the term of "Americanisms". The first direction in the definition of Americanism is called the diachronic, historical or genetic approach, where any lexical unit of American origin, regardless of the area of modern development, can be called an Americanism. Following this approach as reflected in the dictionaries of American English (prepared under the direction

of William A. Craigie in 1936 or by Mitford Mathews in 1952) all lexical units recorded in American speech for the first time are considered to be Americanisms, regardless of its version in which any of them is currently being developed (Lartseva 2014b: 55-59). The second approach is called the synchronic or functional approach, which advocates the interpretation of any lexical unit used by Americans, regardless of their origin, as Americanisms. Cheryukanova (2003), Schweitzer (1963), Pankin (2011), Filippov (2011) and other linguists are considered to be supporters of this direction (Lartseva 2014a: 48). The third approach is a combination of the previous two approaches (diachronic and synchronic), and is supported by Visov (2001), Algeo (2001), Tomaxin (1982), Crystal (1975) and others (Lartseva 2014b: 55-59). An important place was occupied by the structural and functional analysis, which made it possible to identify the essence and structure of the process of forming the American English, and on this basis, to concentrate on the various conditions of this process in the activities of different linguistic groups and languages existing in the USA.

Discourse analysis has become an increasingly preferred method in many spheres, as it lies in the border of stylistics and rhetorical analysis. The form of analysis implies the close study of social and discursive situations that often disagree with the traditional scope of arguments. It is interesting to note that from a methodological point of view, while research on loanwords, cognitive or otherwise, has been able to focus on its subject matter without necessarily considering facts, things are quite different when cultural transition comes under analysis. I adopted a thematic analysis approach, i.e. I preferred to stay as close as possible to the actual words in the data. Thematic analysis method was used to closely examine the data to identify different patterns.

This article deals with the problem which played a significant role in the formation process of AE and American culture – that is the influence of the words of African origin. The article is dedicated to the influence of these new words on American English and American cultural heritage. While investigating this theme, one can realize that a lot of research has already been carried out in this area. A great number of books have already been written on this topic including, i.a., Puckett's *Black names in America: Origins and usage* (1975), Kellersberger Vass' *The Bantu speaking heritage of the United States* (1979), Dalgish's *Dictionary of Africanisms: Contributions of sub-Saharan Africa to the English language* (1982), Holloway's *Africanisms in American culture* (1990), and Holloway and Vass's *The African heritage of American English* (1993).

One of the first investigators in the field of the study of Africanisms in American culture was Herskovits (1895-1963) who wrote several books and monographs

on the cultural continuity from African cultures as expressed in African-American communities. Also Puckett who became famous for his publication of *Folk beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926), the first anthropological study of African traits found in the Southern society. This book presented 10,000 folk beliefs of southern Blacks that revealed African features in the African American customs, folk and religious beliefs. Other early studies examining African carryovers were those by Woodson and Du Bois called *The African background outlined* (1936). Here, the authors examined technical skills, arts, folklore, and spirituality among the Africans and especially put the light on African influences in religion, drama, music, dance and poetry.

3. Africanisms in American English

3.1. Africanisms as a contribution to AE lexical stock

A study of the lexicon and semantics of AAE (African American English) should reveal information about the type of meaning that is associated with different lexical items (words and phrases) in the language system, and it should also reveal information about uncommon meaning of variants. When speakers know a language system, they have access to the lexicon of that system, so speakers who know AAE know the unique meanings of elements in the lexicon of that system. In such cases, speakers have two lexicons, one for African American-specific words and phrases and another for general American English, or they have only one lexicon in which both groups of words and phrases are listed. Whatever the structure, the African American and general American English lexicons vary. There are lexical items that sound the same but have different meanings. For example, the word *kitchen* is used by African Americans in the same way it is used commonly by other speakers of American English, but it is also used uniquely by African Americans to refer to the hair at the nape of the neck.

Africans made relevant contributions in agricultural system, dance, folklore, food culture, and language. African cultural retentions were found at various levels of the plantation workforce. As it was mentioned above, some of the earliest groups to have a major impact on American culture were Mande and Wolof, people from nowadays Gambia and Senegal. The dominant groups of Africans arrived at South Carolina were Senegambian by origin. They were the first Africans to have retained some elements from their language and culture within the developing language and culture of America. The acculturation process was mutual as well as reciprocal: Africans assimilated white culture and planters adopted some aspects of African customs and traditions, including African

methods of cultivation, African cuisine, breeding cattle, and the use of herbals to treat different diseases. The other important indigenous groups from Africa which made a great contribution to American culture are speakers of various Bantu languages. Bantu musical contributions include: *banjos*, *drums*, *diddle bows*, *jugs*, *gongs*, *bells*, *rattles*, and the *lokoimni*, a five-stringed harp. Living in relative isolation from other groups, they were able to maintain a strong sense of unity and to retain a cultural vitality that laid foundation for the development of African American culture. The banjo occupies its own distinct place in the transmission of cultural heritage. This is the musical instrument commonly known as *mbanza* in Africa (Zimbabwe, Gambia, Guinea, Angola, etc.). Until the middle of the 19th century it was greatly loved by black people (Ward 2003). However, sometimes there have been attempts to discredit and underestimate African cultures by various means. For example, in the explanatory dictionary, *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the word *banjo* is described as similar in form to the *bandurriay* used by both Spanish and Portuguese (Holloway & Vass 1993). It was a way to show that Africans did not have their own musical instrument and they „had stolen it” from the Europeans. It is worth adding that in 1781 Jefferson wrote: “The instrument proper to them [African American] is the *banjar*, brought from Africa, and which is the [form] of the guitar, its chords being precisely the four lower chords of the guitar” (Holloway 1993). This quote once again proves that this instrument was brought by Africans.

Another example is that although the word *jazz* is derived from the word *jaja* used in West Africa and has the meaning ‘to dance’, OED does not present the true origin of the word but relates it to Portuguese (Holloway & Vass 1993). The same can be said about the *phony* ‘fake’, a version of the Mandinka-based *fori* word used in English.

In his article “What Africa has given America?” Herskovits (1990) answered this question by saying “jazz, R&B, and gospel”. In addition to these musical genres, the list of other musical instruments that make up the vocabulary includes *diddle bows*, *mouth bows*, *Quilts*, *washtub bass*, *gongs*, *rattles*, *idiophones*, *loco*, and some other words including the names of tools (Holloway 1990). What North America has taken from Africa are coffee, peanuts, guinea melon, watermelon, yams, and sesame seeds. To these, African Americans added African cooking methods and a group of African foods that included collard greens, dandelion greens, turnip greens, and black-eyed peas (Collin 2006: 40-41).

Fulani peoples were responsible for introducing open grazing patterns, now practiced throughout the American cattle industry. This practice is used worldwide in cattle culture today. Open grazing made practical use of an abundance of land

and a limited labour force. The 18th century descriptions of West African animal husbandry bear a striking resemblance to what appeared in Carolina and later in the American dairy and cattle industries. The harvesting of cattle and cattle drives to centers of distribution were also adaptations of African innovations. The historian Peter Wood¹ has argued that the word *cowboy* originated from this early relationship between cattle and Africans in the colonial period, when African labour and skills were closely associated with cattle breeding. Africans stationed at cow pens with herding responsibilities were referred to as *cowboys*, just as Africans who worked in the “big house” were known as *houseboys*. Much of the early language associated with cowboy culture had a strong African flavour. A related term of cowboy culture is *buckaroo*, an Efik/Ibibio word also derived from *mbakara*. Another African word that found its way into popular cowboy songs is *dogie* which grew out of the Kimbundu and Swahili words *kidogo* ‘a little something’ and *dodo* ‘small’. Africanisms are not exclusive to African American culture, but contributed to an emerging American culture. One area that has been largely ignored in the debate over African cultural survival in the USA is the survival of African culture among white Americans. Lots of Africanisms have entered southern culture as a whole, including the *banjo*, the elaborate etiquette of the South with respect for elders, its use of terms of endearment and kinship in speaking to the neighbours, and its general emphasis on politeness. White Southerners have adopted African speech patterns and have retained Africanisms from *baton twirling* and *cheerleading* to such expressions and words as: *bodacious*, *bozo*, *cooter*, *goober*, *hullabaloo*, *hully-gully*, *jazz*, *moola*, *pamper*, *buddy*, *tote*, etc. These are only some of the ways in which African cultures contributed to what was to become American culture. Americans share a dual cultural experience – European on one side and African on the other (Collin 2006: 41).

3.2. Restrictions and barriers to the penetration of African vocabulary into AE

There were two different reasons for restriction of the vocabulary that occurred during the colonial period. New concepts have become familiar in connection with the discovery of new lands. For example, the English-speaking explorers had to use the words *chimpanzee* and *gorilla* when they stepped on the New World as there were no alternative words in the language to name animals they had never encountered before. Although some devotees did not think that the

¹ The author of *Black majority: Negroes in colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (1974).

transfer of words from the colonial peoples to English was a “prestigious” event, they could not prevent English from acquiring new words from the languages of indigenous people. The purpose of the speech barrier was the idea that the English language was “higher” (in terms of prestige) and that the languages spoken by colonized and enslaved people were “lower”.

On the other hand, another reason why few African languages were expelled from interaction was spread of various infectious diseases in African countries. Thus, some infectious diseases prevalent in Africa in the 17th and 18th centuries prevented the English from communicating with the Africans who had come to the area for trade. This, in turn, hampered the communication between language carriers. It is not surprising that at that time only a few words were translated into English from Swahili, passing through the language of traders on the East African coast (Wolfram 2000: 40-42).

Since the Africans continued to influence the English language, studies show that over a half-century period more than half a million people have been brought to the colonies in America. In a passage from a traveler to the State of Carolina in the early 18th century we come across such a sentence: “Given that the population of 14 000 is white and 32 000 is dark, this country is more like the Zanzibar (Holloway 1993: 27).

The colonialists in America were always trying to destroy the linguistic “legacy” of Africans. The process was so fast that it became necessary to preserve and trace any facts about the Africans past. Studies by Holloway and Vass suggest that about 70% of Africanisms present in Modern English language were acquired during that period (Holloway & Vass 1993).

A turning point was Stono Rebellion (1739) led by an Angolan named Jemmy. A band of twenty slaves organized the rebellion on the banks of the Stono River. After breaking into Hutchinson’s store the band armed with guns called for their liberty. As they marched, overseers were killed and reluctant slaves were forced to join the company. The band reached the Edisto River where white colonists descended upon them, killing most of the rebels. The survivors were sold off to the West Indies. After the Stono Rebellion, South Carolina authorities made attempts to reduce provocations for rebellion. In a colony that already had more Blacks than Whites, the Assembly imposed a prohibitive duty on the importation of new slaves from Africa and the West Indies. The Assembly enacted a new law requiring a ratio of one White for every ten Blacks on every plantation and passed the Negro Act of 1740 which prohibited enslaved people from growing their own crops, assembling in groups, earning money except given by their owners or learning to read (Sutherland 2018).

3.3. Africanisms as African cultural heritage

It is an undeniable fact that the vocabulary of a language plays an important role as a path to the universe of knowledge of its speakers and to their worldview. Words are taken as labels of aspects of culture and thus are index of the cultural world of society. If a language does not have a term for some notion, it means that that very thing is probably not important in that culture (Humboldt 1988). From a relativist point of view, there is no particular language or culture that names everything or covers the whole amount of knowledge of the world (Nettle & Romaine 2000: 50-57). When Africans were enslaved in Africa and carried to the New World, they brought with them names as the means to identify their environment and themselves. In Table 1 some words naming animals (beginning with the letter “k”) taken from dialects of Gullah² are presented as examples:

TABLE 1. Words naming animals in dialects of Gullah

Borrowed word	Meaning
<i>kambaboli</i>	a gray bird
<i>kandi</i>	a rabbit
<i>kanka</i>	a large fish
<i>kekele</i>	a marsh bird
<i>kimbi</i>	a hawk
<i>kimbimbi</i>	a quail
<i>kinkwawi</i>	a partridge
<i>kulu</i>	a blue and white marsh bird
<i>kusu</i>	a parrot
<i>kuta</i>	a tortoise

Source: Mphande 2006

There are many sources documenting African names in American history and culture, including documents of enslaved Africans, ship logs, court records, and historical accounts. and relations of rebellions of the enslaved and witch trials. Most of these names are of either West African or Central African origin and

² Gullah – the communities of the Sea Islands of South Carolina.

some have since changed their linguistic forms, although many have retained their African form. It is possible to give some examples: okra was grown by slaves in Brazil from the 16th century and was known under various names such as *quiabo* (currently in use) or its variations *gombo*, *quigombo*, *quingombo*, *quingobo*, *quimbombo*, *quingongo*, and *quibombo*. All these forms are derived from the Bantu languages (Kimbundu, Kikongo, Chokwe) of the Angola region and were brought to the New World through the Portuguese.

Two large groups of the words under discussion were African words used in the speech of the Mande and Bantu people. The Mande people were ethnic minorities living in the Senegambia region and brought to the USA as slaves. They were doing pottery and handicrafts. Based on the analysis carried out by Holloway and Vass, the enslaved people from these linguistic groups were able to influence American culture as more and more they became involved in work in house and on plantation (Holloway & Vass 1993).

African folktales have allowed American English to borrow new words from the languages of African nations. In the main plot line of the tales of these various peoples, the weak animals triumphed over powerful animals. In this way, the enslaved Africans sought to express their conviction that they would be free in the future. The enslaved Africans, trying to express their feelings and emotions in poems and songs, unconsciously spread their culture, thus facilitating new words to penetrate into AE. The main cause for this may be the widespread distribution of fiction stories and songs of various genres among American-born populations – Hausa, Fulani, Mandinka, etc., who bring up American children. The tales such as “Brother Rabbit” (“Brer Rabbit”), “Brother Wolf” (“Brer Wolf”), “Brother Fox” (“Brer Fox”) and “Uncle Rumus” are just a few of such adapted African folk tales. “Brer Rabbit”, “Brer Wolf”, “Brer Bear” and “Sis’ Nanny Goat” were part of the heritage the Wolof shared with other West African peoples such as the Hausa, Fula (Fulani), and Mandinka. The hare (rabbit) stories are found in parts of Nigeria, Angola, and East Africa. Among the Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo (Bini) peoples of Nigeria we have the spider (*ananse*) tales, found throughout much of West Africa including Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. On the other hand, slaves speaking Bantu languages were working in fields and thus it was not possible to observe their influence on the culture of Whites. However, their isolation during this period allowed them to preserve their culture without external influence. As demonstrated by the findings of Holloway and Vass (1993), Africans have been able to transform their former cultures into African American cuisine, music, language, religion, dance, philosophy, and art.

As a result, the Mande and Bantu-speaking peoples were able to introduce a number of African words into the American English. These words, in addition to covering different groups of meanings, have influenced the English language at various stages in the historical development of the language. These include words that cover musical instruments and genres, agriculture and livestock, culinary, religion, folklore, and more. Examples include: *collard greens*, *dandelion greens*, *turnip*, *black-eyed peas*, *okra*, *banana*, *kidney peas*, *peanuts*, *millet*, *sorghum*, *yams*, and many more. Such words are mainly considered to be related to American agriculture.

The first words to be included in the American English vocabulary in the domain of livestock are *cowboy* and the related words. For example, one can observe the spread of these borrowings in some written sources where *bronco* 'horse-carving slave', *kiddog* 'small instrument', and *dodo* 'small tool' are used.

Azawakh is a trained dog species living in West and North Africa, *basenji* is a dog species that lives in Central Africa. Other such words are: *gerenuk* 'antelope', *jumbo* 'elephant', *macaque* 'monkey', *zebra* 'zebra'. South American cuisine includes *gumbo*, *okra*, *couscous*, *mkatra*, *foutra*, *injera*, *ugali*, *cambuulo*, *kuku paka*, and more. Although it is thought that such dishes were originally attributed to American cuisine, these names are clear examples of African linguistic influence.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has a strong anti-racist impact in a few words accepted as African. For example: the word *mojo* is used in the commentary by Holloway and Vass (1993) as "a thing of magic power and influence" but in OED it has been interpreted as "a symbol of sorcery in Africa". Another example is the *juju* which has been described as an unrealistic object in West Africa respected by the indigenous peoples, and *voodoo* is considered to be a special magical rite for the Blacks. In the OED these explanations have been interpreted as a kind of barbaric ritual (Holloway 1993).

Describing the early development of African American speech poses a linguistic and historical challenge. For linguists, the reference to limited historical records written for purposes other than linguistic documentation is always contradictory. Writing was not a legal skill for early African Americans in the North America, which made early accounts problematic and questionable in terms of distinctness.

When African slaves were first brought to America nearly 500 years ago, they did not have intention to find a better way of life, they did not seek heaven in the economic system of the country, and it was not their own choice or will to be there. Those who came first were indentured servants who served their masters

for some years and were then sent to further live their own lifestyle. Slavery, which became legal in 1661, deprived African Americans of all civil rights. But later on slavery was abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865 and it brought some peace to the society. Contrary to some requirements, only a minority of the white population owned slaves, but the whole system was based on a well-ordered society, with well-defined classes where members of each "group" were considered to be the non-slaveholding farmers, the businessmen, the farmers, the freed Africans, and the slaves.

Culture refers to the totality of a people's ways of life and includes the basic conditions of existence, behaviour, style of life, values, preferences, and the creative expressions. The way of life for African Americans in what is now the USA was not different in major respects from the ways of other ethnic minorities. The strength of the African American people might be considered to be found within their family, within its segregated communities, and within the individuals. For years, African Americans have been masters of internal and external hostilities. Other historical responses included advocacy and direct confrontation. All these responses represented various ways of surviving and living, and doing efforts to maintain a sense of "balance".

One may ask a question: Who and what is the African American like, culturally, socially, and in the oppressive context of the racial domination? The democratic multiculturalists insist that African American studies are not a discipline like physics or psychology but a broad intellectual dialogue and exchange which incorporate divergent perspectives and concerns. Compounding the challenges for the study of the Black experience is the fact that the social composition of the African American community itself has changed greatly since the 1960s. One cannot really speak of a "common racial experience" which parallels the universal opposition Blacks felt when confronted by legal racial segregation. Moreover, the contemporary Black experience can no longer be defined by a single set of socioeconomic, political, and/or cultural characteristics. Social scientists estimate that the size of the black middle class, for example, has increased by more than 400 percent in the past three decades (Ongiri 2010: 102). For the middle third of the African American population, its recent experience has been a gradual deterioration in its material, educational, and social conditions.

The cultural diversity within the black community in the USA arises from multiple factors, including skin tone, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and place of origin. The cultural diversity within the white community in the USA primarily arises from the individuals' ethnic affiliation (e.g. Polish, Irish, Italian, etc.) (Alstine et al. 2015: 127).

These place-based group boundaries serve as markers for race group interactions in both “black” and “white” America.

3.4. African traces of the lexical transfer

Many names of food in English come from African languages. The *yam* was the most common food of Africans on ships forcedly travelling to the Americas. Actually, most Americans assume a *yam* to be a sweet potato. The word *yam* is of West African origin. Two languages spoken there have similar versions of the word. In Fulani, the word is *nyami* and it means ‘to eat’. In Jamaican Patois – an English-based language with African influences – the word *nyam* still means ‘to eat’ (Patwell 1992: 8193). In the late 1500s, the Portuguese changed the word to *inhame* and later the Spanish further transformed it to *iñame* (Holloway & Vass 1993). Its first usage in English was recorded as *igname*. By the mid-1600s, the English spelling had changed to *yam*.

A name of a vegetable of an African origin is *okra*. Okra is a green plant which is often used in soups and similar dishes. The original word was *okuru* from the Igbo language of Nigeria. Okra was taken to the USA in the early 1700s. During colonialism different cultures mixed becoming a Creole culture. Nowadays, okra is considered to be the main part of Creole cooking, especially its most known dish *gumbo*. The next word is *banana* which is believed to come from Wolof, a West African language of Senegal, Gambia, and Mauritania. In Wolof, the word is pronounced [banana]. But most of the researchers also relate this word to *bana* with the same meaning from the Mande language of Liberia.

Along with the names of food, American English has also borrowed other categories of words from African languages. An example can be the word *jumbo*. In American English the word *jumbo* is an adjective which means ‘very large, or big of its type’. Today, the word can be found in many places where different types of products are sold, in supermarkets, stores, and even in restaurants. This word came into usage in an extraordinary way. *Jumbo* was the name of an African bull elephant that was a zoo animal and a circus performer. At his largest he stood 3.6 meters tall. After his death, his name became a synonym for “huge” (Smallwood 2015). But in the early 1820s, *jumbo* was used as a slang word to refer to a big, clumsy person or a huge thing. Some dictionaries define the word *nzamba* as ‘elephant’, although this may be an outdated meaning. Many common words are believed to be of African origin (cf. Wikipedia: English words of African origin 2020). Table 2 presents the examples of selected borrowed words and their language of origin.

TABLE 2. Examples of borrowed words and their language of origin

Borrowed word	Language of origin	Initial meaning
<i>tango</i>	Ibibio	to dance
<i>merengue</i>	Fulfulde	to shake, to tremble
<i>kwashiorkor</i>	Ga	swollen stomach
<i>mumbo-jumbo</i>	Mandingo	incomprehensible talk
<i>jamboree</i>	Swahili	celebration by emancipated slaves

Special group of names that are considered to be taken from languages of African people refer to dance. For example *tango*, which is the name of a rhythmic dance mostly associated with Latin America, is proven to owe its etymology to Ibibio, a language spoken in southeastern parts of Nigeria. It's considered to be derived from the Ibibio word *tamgu* which can be translated as 'to dance'. *Merengue* is a well-known Caribbean dance, which is reputedly a misrepresentation of the Fulani *merereki*, the word meaning 'to shake' or 'tremble' (Vazquez & Fuller 2020). Other common words with African roots, widely used in American English, are: *kwashiorkor* from the Ghanaian language Ga, meaning 'swollen stomach', *mumbo-jumbo* ('incomprehensible talk', derived from Mandingo, which is mostly spoken in Mali, Gambia, Liberia, Guinea), or *jamboree* (from Swahili, meaning 'celebration by emancipated slaves') (Kperogi 2015: 85).

4. Conclusions

The cultural principles of the USA owe much of their creativity and originality to African, Latino, American Indian, and Asian elements. Multiculturalism suggests that the cross-cultural literacy and realization of the diversity is critical in understanding the essence of the American experience thoroughly. Common multiculturalism seeks to highlight the cultural and social diversity of the USA's population, trying to make people more sensitive to differences such as race, gender, age, language, and physical ability.

American English went under some influences of African people who had been enslaved to work in what would become the USA. This research article was aimed to demonstrate the influence of these newly acquired words on American English and American cultural heritage. In the article I tried to present a number of examples of Africanisms in American English referring to religion, music, cuisine,

cattle breeding, agriculture, folklore, and some other fields of communication. I came to the conclusion that both enslaved and free African peoples and Afro-Americans had a great impact on the formation of the word stock of AE and American culture, and enriched the speech of its native speakers.

However, over the last ten years many immigrants and refugees from Africa have entered into a “competition” with the Afro-Americans in addition to having different cultural and political backgrounds. Similar problems occur in relations between African-Americans and the African population in Africa, where the Afro-Americans are not only disturbed by the cultural and psychological diversity of those who are supposedly their descendants, but are often kept by them at a distance, considered essentially as Americans (Bolaffi et al. 2003: 6).

The study and research of African influences in America are being collected into the stories of historical plots. The stories and statements reflect the views of the communities they serve and the enterprises that manage them. The addition of Africanisms to the interpretation might change the way visitors assess the notion and possibly attract new visitors. The degree and extent of vernacular cultural contexts is formed by Africanisms of African descendants and their collective culture in the USA. As Africanisms are currently researched and added new interpretations by many researchers, most investigators are encouraged to evaluate their cultural resources for African American culture.

As mentioned above, I conclude that in some cases, the isolation of Africans from the local population and the penetration of American families allows to observe the interlingual relations. The people of African descent, living in isolation, protected their language and culture, at least to some extent, from external influences. However, the members of the immigrant ethnic groups that interacted with the natives contributed to the enrichment of American English. Thus, in this case, since there were no relevant words in the language to express many concepts, new words were taken from the languages spoken by these groups and adapted in accordance with the rules and norms of American English. American English has been enriched by the borrowed words and has formed a unique vocabulary. These words are considered to be a clear example of the centuries-old historical ties and interactions of people representing various African ethnic groups. When we look at the semantic features of the words derived from the languages of African linguistic groups, we see that words related to the lifestyle, plants and animals, toponyms, food and transport names, and words of religious and spiritual character highly predominate. The borrowings which have been discussed in this paper have had a profound influence on the formation of American English, as well as were a direct contribution to the enrichment of the

vocabulary. Notwithstanding, words are not the only means of creating variation in language, it is their derivations that have created diversity in the language and made American English both distinct from the other world's Englishes and at the same time variable.

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