

Bantu Words in American English

Week 11 Lecture 02

African Contributions Part 4

This lecture was last updated on 08 May, 2017
This lecture was last updated on 15 November, 2014

Bantu Words in American English: The learning objectives for week 11 part 02 are:

- to understand the main facts about the slave trade as they help to understand African contributions to the Americas**
- to learn some of the ways in which African Bantu languages have influenced the development of American English**

Bantu Words in American English

Terms you should know for week 11 part 02 are:

- Middle passage
- Bantu languages
- Slang
- Black English (African-American Vernacular English)
- Play the dozens: the "dozens" is a form of competitive poetry common among African Americans. It is probably the origin of rap and has its own origin in the Bantu languages of Africa where competitive poetry is also common.

Bantu Words in American English

Week 11 Additional Sources : Updated 2011 and 2017

Curtin, Philip D. 1969. *The Atlantic Slave Trade; a Census*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Eltis, David and David Richardson. 2010. *Atlas of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

McWhorter, John. 2017. *Talking Back, Talking Black: Truths about America's Lingua Franca*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press.

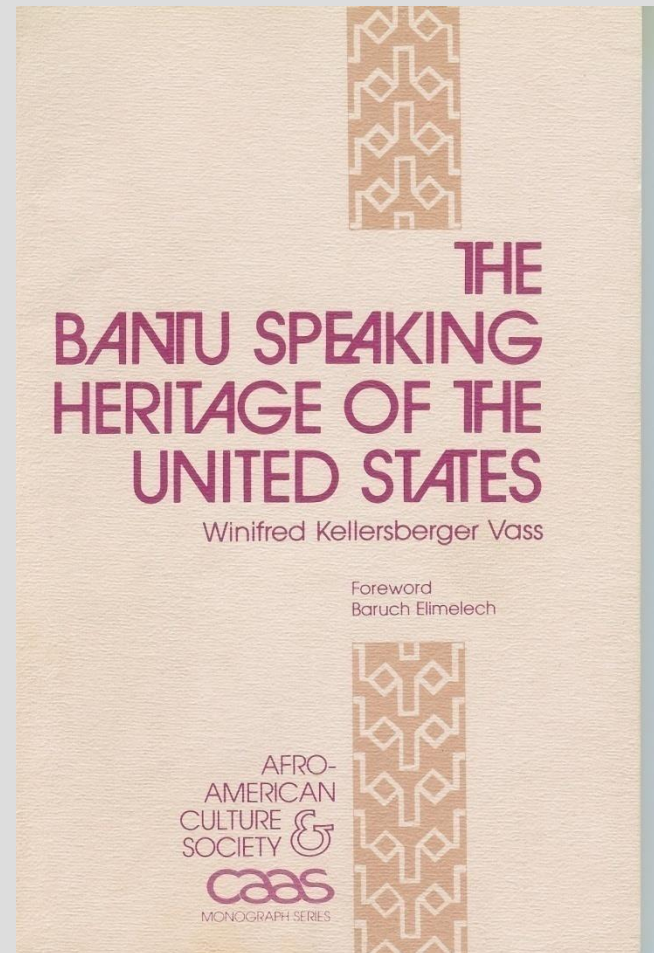
Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database.

<http://slavevoyages.org>

Bantu Words in American English

The Week 11 Lecture
02 is based primarily
on

Vass, Winifred Kellersberger.
1979. *The Bantu Speaking
Heritage of the United States*.
University of California at Los
Angeles. Center for Afro-
American Studies. Monograph
Series. No. 2.



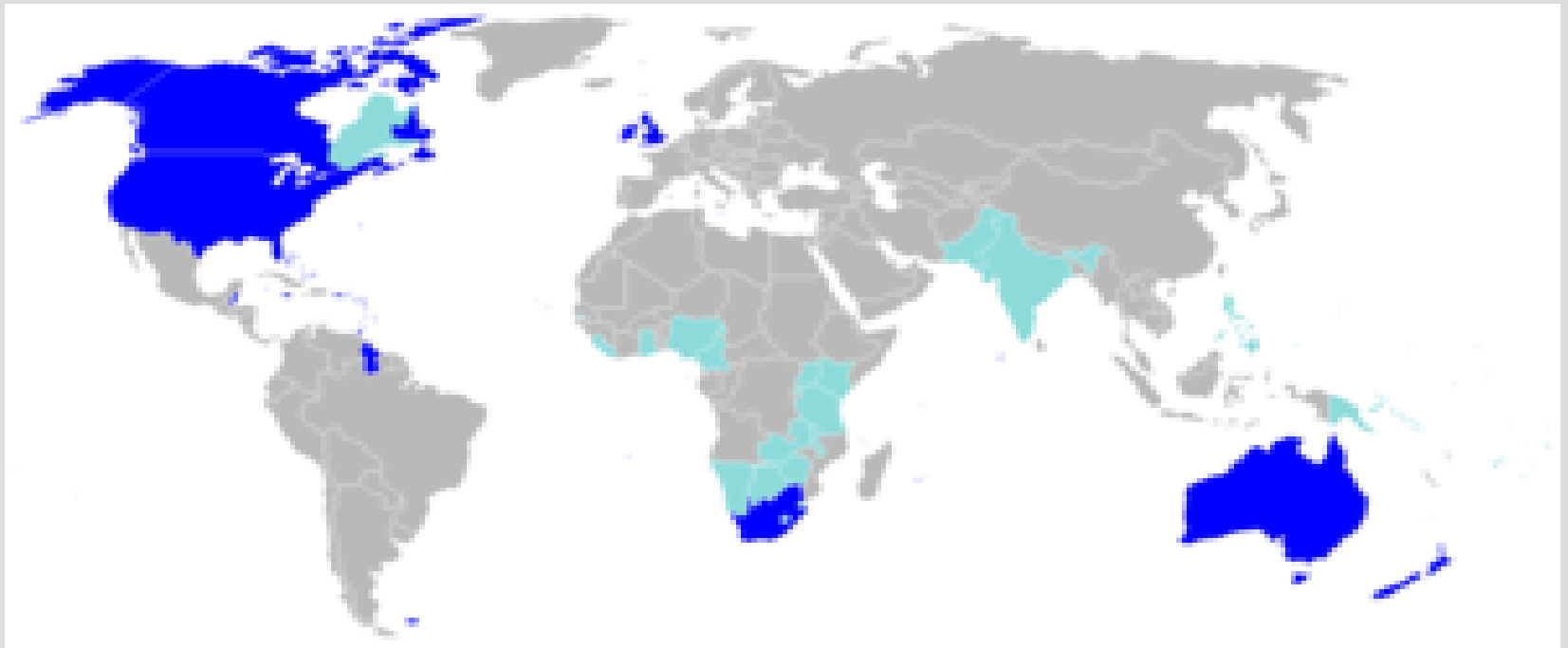
Bantu Words in American English

1. The English language is the most important language in the world today.
 - 360 million native speakers
 - Up to 1.5 billion who speak English as a second language

Bantu Words in American English

2. English spoken in widely different parts of the world

- Spread largely because of British empire, once the world's largest



Bantu Words in American English

- 3. The wide geographic spread of English over the past 400 years has led to regional accents and vocabulary differences from original, “British” English.**
- 4. We have Jamaican English, Indian English, South African English...and...**

Bantu Words in American English

5. American English

6. American English was influenced by about 200 words from Native Americans as we noted earlier in the course: including the names of about 26 US states. We saw examples in week 06.

Bantu Words in American English

7. Many New Jersey place names are also from Native American words:

- Watchung [hill]
- Kittatinny [great hills]
- Hackensack [a local clan name]
- Wanaque [place where the sassafrass grows]

Bantu Words in American English

8. You can look up New Jersey place names and their origins at:

<http://www.getnj.com/origname/originintro.shtml>

Native American names are highlighted in red and are translated into English.

Bantu Words in American English

9. American English differs from British English:

- A lorry is a truck.
- A lift is an elevator.
- A fortnight is two weeks.
- A chemist is a person who works in a drugstore.
- A dual carriageway is a divided highway.

Bantu Words in American English

9. American English has received minor influences from many immigrant groups and their languages:

Bantu Words in American English

10. French:

- À la carte
- Adieu
- Au pair
- Chic
- Prairie

Bantu Words in American English

11. Spanish

- Canyon
- Mesa
- Ranch
- Albino
- armada

Bantu Words in American English

12. Dutch

- Kill [small streams in NYC area]
- Stoop
- Hock
- Brandy
- Apartheid
- Decoy

Bantu Words in American English

13. German

- Hamburger
- Wiener
- Kindergarten
- Delicatessen
- Diesel

Bantu Words in American English

14. Italian

- Umbrella
- Bank
- Ghetto
- Graffiti
- America

Bantu Words in American English

15. Russian

- **Bistro**
- **Pogrom**
- **Vodka**
- **Steppe**

Bantu Words in American English

16. Yiddish

- Schmooze
- Chutzpah
- Kvetch
- Nosh
- Nudnik

Bantu Words in American English

17. Arabic

- Admiral
- Alcohol
- Algebra
- candy
- Genie
- Mafia
- magazine
- Mattress
- Zero

Bantu Words in American English

18. Hindi

- Bangle
- Cot
- Dungaree
- Jungle
- Shampoo
- sugar

Bantu Words in American English

19. Farsi (Persian; Iranian)

- Caravan
- Azure
- Khaki
- Serendipity
- Tiger

Bantu Words in American English

20. Chinese

- Ginseng
- Chow mein
- Ketchup
- Kowtow
- Tea

Bantu Words in American English

21. Japanese

- Bonsai
- Origami
- Honcho
- Futon
- Tofu

Bantu Words in American English

22. Dravidian [South Indian] languages

- Pariah**
- Teak**
- Curry**
- Atoll**
- Mango**

Bantu Words in American English

22a. Ancient Egyptian

- Pyramid
- Desert (from ancient Egyptian deser meaning “red”)
- Paper (from Egyptian papyrus)
- diamond

Update: 15 November, 2014

Bantu Words in American English

22b. Hawaiian

- Aloha
- Hula
- Ukulele
- Wiki (as in a wiki or Wikipedia)
- Wiki means "fast" in Hawaiian. For more info on how Wikipedia got its name, click [here](#).

Foreign Words in American English

22c. If you like this kind of thing, you can surf around for all kinds of English words of origins you might not have expected:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Lists_of_English_words_of_foreign_origin

Bantu Words in American English

22d. Words travel the world following migrations, conquests and adoption.

Consider the ancient Egyptian word "djebet" or "mud brick."

Bantu Words in American English

22e. It became "tobe" in Coptic, widely thought to be the later Egyptian in use at the time of the Arab conquests....

Bantu Words in American English

22f. The Arabs around 640 CE put a definite article "al" on it as is customary in their language and it became "al-tuba."

Bantu Words in American English

22g. Then they brought it to Spain as “adobar,” after which the Spanish conquistadors took it to the North American continent in our “Southwest” area where after 4,000 years and 7,000 miles of travel it finally landed as...

Bantu Words in American English

22h. Adobe

Source: Hessler, Peter. 2017. [Talk Like an Egyptian: Learning the Language of the Prophet and the People](#). *The New Yorker*. April 17, 2017. Pages 48 – 57. Especially page 50.

Bantu Words in American English

**23. Less well known is the influence of the
African languages on English...**

...particularly American English

Bantu Words in American English

**24. The Bantu
languages are
widely
distributed in
Africa.**



Bantu Words in American English

25. There are estimated to be 310 million speakers of Bantu languages

26. A few years ago a woman named Winifred Kellersberger was studying at UCLA.

Bantu Words in American English

27. She had grown up the daughter of Christian missionaries in Zaire, Central Africa [where the Ishango Bone was found]

28. Kellersberger was trilingual in English, French [the government language in Zaire]...and...

Bantu Words in American English

29. Tshiluba...a Bantu language spoken by her African schoolmates and common in Katanga Province of Zaire.

30. Tshiluba has 47% Bantu based vocabulary.

Bantu Words in American English

- 31. Kellersberger was struck by the resemblance of some of the phrases used by her African American classmates at UCLA...they sounded a bit “Bantu.”**
- 32. So, she decided to study Bantu influences on American English for her Ph D dissertation.**

Bantu Words in American English

33. There hardly could have been a better fit between student and study.

34. Kellersberger developed a logical design for her research:

Bantu Words in American English

35. Bantu words came into English via the slave trade.

36. Therefore the slave trade had to bring Bantu speakers into the US

37. And...she had to find a mechanism to explain how Bantu words would get borrowed into English.

Bantu Words in American English

38. Let's begin with the slave trade – you already know some things about it from the reading for this week – topic 01, the African rice contributions as described in Judith Carney's book and the lecture for this week on African rice.

Slave Trade Facts: Updated 2011

39. How Many Came?

See Week 11

Lecture 01 (on African rice)

Slides 65–75

**for the basic facts now updated and
more detailed...then...**

Slave Trade Facts

40. By about 1850 1/3 of all Africans lived outside Africa.

41. Who were the traders?

Portuguese

Spanish

Dutch

French

British

North Americans

Cubans

Brazilians

Some local Africans

Slave Trade Facts

42. Who supported the slave trade?

- In 1808, the US Congress outlawed the slave trade. Merchants were able to continue slave trading in the New World until 1870. Slavery was abolished legally within the United States in 1865 by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.**

Slave Trade Facts

43. From where did they come?

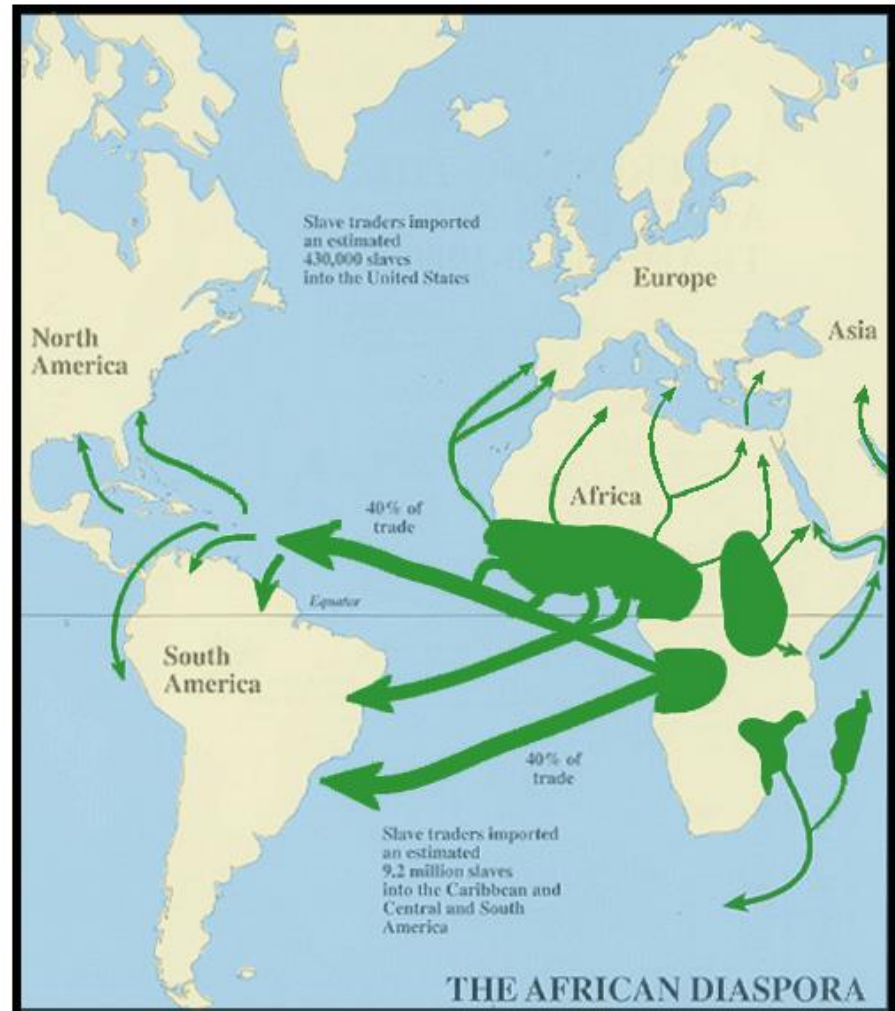
- From 1701 to 1810 about 59% came from **West Africa: Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana), etc.**



Slave Trade Facts

44. From where else?

- The other 41% came from the coast of Angola (Angola= Gullah, the name of the Sea Island peoples off the U. S. Georgia coast) and from south and eastern Africa—that is, from Bantu speaking areas.



Slave Trade Facts

45. What languages did they speak?

- A large proportion spoke types of Bantu**
- The peak US slave importing years were 1741-1810, coinciding with the period when most slaves imported came from Bantu speaking areas, especially Angola.**

Slave Trade Facts

46. . Where did the slaves go in the New World?

- North America: 7%
- (U. S. 5%)
- Caribbean: 42%
- South America 49%

Slave Trade Facts

**47. Some of the major
Bantu languages are:**

Kongo	Lwena
Rundi	Swahili
Shona	Zulu
Tshiluba	Bemba

Slave Trade Facts

48. Kellersberger discovered that Bantu languages are a more likely source for American English words than are West African languages, even though slightly more West African slaves came to the US overall.

Slave Trade Facts

49. The reason is that Bantu languages have more common features among themselves than do the more diverse West African languages and thus the Bantu speakers had more opportunities to share common words on the slave plantations.

Slave Trade Facts

- 50. This meant they could maintain parts of their vocabulary against the pressures of the plantation culture to abandon their languages and learn English only.**
- 51. While some West African grammatical forms came to influence black English in the US, Bantu words became absorbed into both black and white English.**

Bantu Words in American English

52. Kellersberger also came up with a social mechanism to explain language adoption:

53. Conquerors tend to impose their vocabulary at the top of the status hierarchy of a language: the “high” language.

Bantu Words in American English

54. For example, French words are “high” words in English because, after AD 1066, William the Conqueror imposed French via the English court and aristocracy. Anglo-Saxon words are the roots for coarse and filthy talk. (All “dirty” – four letter – words in English are Anglo-Saxon; none are French.)

Bantu Words in American English

55. Bantu words in American English had to make their way up from the bottom of the status hierarchy, and therefore we see them mostly in the arena of what we call “slang.”

56. The word “slang” is officially “of unknown origin.”

Bantu Words in American English

English Word	English Meaning	Bantu Word	Bantu Meaning
Ballyhoo	Publicity, blatant advertising	Balapu	Read about it
Banjo	Stringed instrument	Mbanza	Stringed instrument
Boogie-woogie	Instrumental blues for piano, using melodic variations over a constantly repeated bass figure	Mbuki-mwuki	To shuck off clothes and dance with abandon
Bodacious	Extreme(ly)	Botesha	To pulverize to the finest grind
Cahootin	To go along at high speed	Kahuta	To trail along
Diddle	To cheat, swindle	Dinga	To trick, cheat
Goober	Peanut	Nguba	Peanut
Gumbo	Southern dish of okra, corn, butterbeans, etc.	Kingumbo	Okra
Hullabaloo	Noise, uproar	Halua-balualua	When come those that are coming

Bantu Words in American English

English Word	English Meaning	Bantu Word	Bantu Meaning
Jambalaya	Creole dish of tomatoes, onions, shrimp, etc.	Tshimbolebole	Dish of tender cooked corn
Jazz	Music originating in New Orleans	Jaja	Cause to dance
Jiffy	In a moment	Tshipi	In a moment
Jive	Insincere talk	Tshivuma	The noise of talking
Jubilee	Celebration	Diuba, juba	To beat the time
Kook	Unusual, peculiar person	Kuku	Dolt, blockhead
Lollygag	To be idle, loaf	Lalakana	To wander about aimlessly

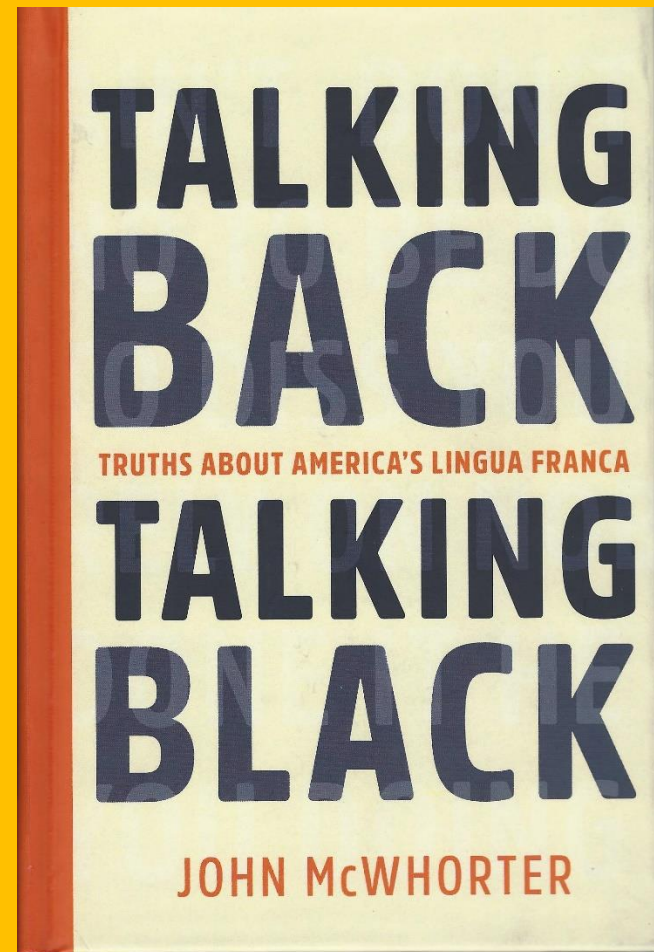
English Word	English Meaning	Bantu Word	Bantu Meaning
Mooch	To pilfer; to acquire by petty thievery	Umusha	To remove from its place
Play the dozens	Slander one's or another's parents	Mpala disonguela	I refuse the slander
Ruckus	Noisy commotion	Lukashi	Loud clapping, shouts
Tote	Carry, pick up	Tota	Lift, carry, pick up
Yam	Red sweet potato	Nyambi	Sweet potato

Update 2017 (American) Black English

The importance of slang in American Black English should not lead us to think of Black English as an “inferior” language. Or – as bad or imperfect English.

Update 2017 (American) Black English

U.S. African-American
linguist John McWhorter
explains in his 2017
book...



Update 2017 (American) Black English

How American Black English is a logical and rule-based dialect of what is called “standard English.” Various forms of English occur around the world.

Update 2017

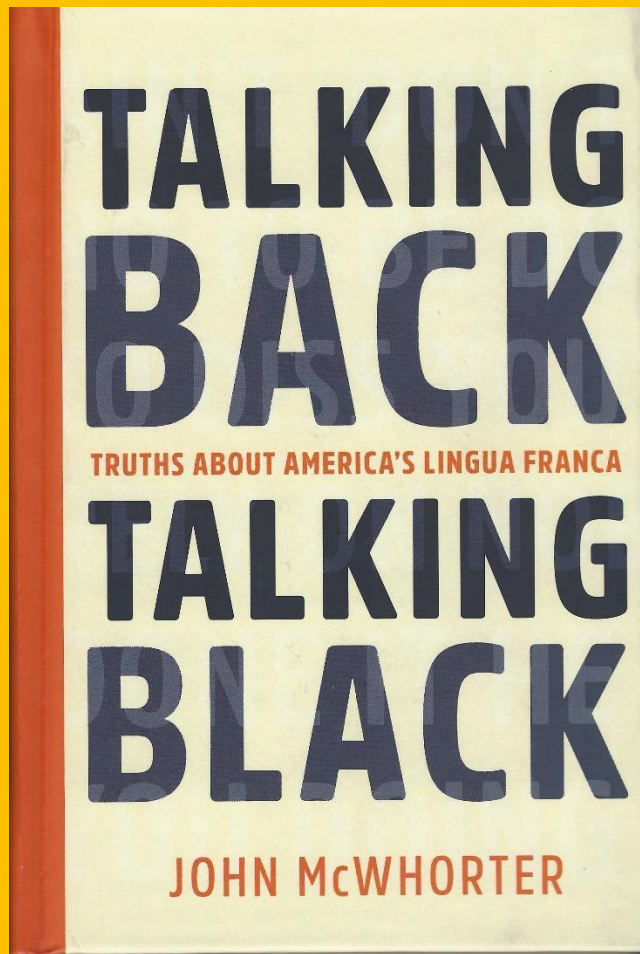
(American) Black English

Check out McWhorter's book: he explains how the following words have different meanings in Black English than in other forms of English:

Be	Up
Done	Had

You will be surprised at what you will discover.

And he provides much additional insight into how language works in multicultural societies like ours.



Update 2017 (American) Black English

And learn what the “N-word” really means and why there are two such words, not one.

Bantu Words in American English

End of Week 11

Lecture 02

African Contributions Part 4