CHAPTER V

AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

5.1 Preliminaries

This chapter is devoted to study the sociolinguistic features of the selected autobiographies written by African American writers. It exhaustively studies the linguistic experimentation made by African American writers. The autobiographies under study are *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington, *Black Boy* by Richard Wright and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. Factors influencing the use of characters language like social class, age, gender, power and solidarity are taken into account while discussing the sociolinguistic features of the characters’ language. The chapter also thoroughly interprets the sociolinguistic aspects of address terms and greetings, blessings and curses, abusive terms, honorific terms and kinship terms, code mixing and code switching. Each character has linguistic uniqueness and it is to be studied in detail. Therefore, studying the characters from the perspective of Sociolinguistics gives authenticity to the characters and thus, enriches the level of autobiographies.

5.2 Factors Influencing the Characters’ Language

It is observed that African American writers write under the influence of various social factors. Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou have got a kind of education which enhanced their skills of writing. In most cases, they use proverbs and idiomatic expressions. These writers make it easy for the native as well as foreign readers to comprehend the context and realize meaning of the words. Moreover, these writers’ realizations of the traditions, history, politics in general and society in particular help them to present African American culture through their autobiographies.
5.2.1 Social Class/Race Factor

Social class is one of the most important factors, which influence the language of the characters. Most of the characters in African American autobiographies under study belong to different social classes. They interact with each other by using one or more linguistic features of African American English (AAE). Even the characters who are not African American also seem to have characteristics of AAE in their speech.

A wide variety of terms have been used to describe English as spoken by African Americans in the United States. The nomenclature includes Ebonics, which simply means ‘black speech’ (a blend of the words ebony ‘black’ and phonics ‘sounds’), Black English, and African American Vernacular English. African American English is the more encompassing term used throughout this chapter to refer to all varieties of English used by characters in the autobiographies of Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou.

Social class is perhaps the most controversial social factor, which increases variation in the use of language. The researcher, by analyzing some categorically selected conversations from the selected autobiographies, attempts to show how language variation is one of the social practices through which the social stratification is maintained.

A) Up from Slavery

This autobiography is a documentary on the complexity and contradictions in the life of a slave from the African community. The characters depicted in this autobiography come from the slave community and face racial discrimination. Their masters always look down upon them and harass them for petty things. The slaves have no voice to articulate their genuine feelings. Let us study the following extract carefully:

“I am sorry, Mr. Douglass, that you have been degraded in this manner,” Mr. Douglass straightened himself up on the box upon which he was sitting, and replied: “They cannot degrade Frederick Douglass. The soul that is within me
no man can degrade. I am not the one that is being degraded on account of this treatment, but those who are inflicting it upon me.” (p.100)

The above conversation is between the white passenger and the great black leader, Mr. Frederick Douglass. Mr. Douglass narrates the incident of racial discrimination. Once he was forced to ride in the baggage-car on account of his colour. One of the white passengers begs his pardon. Frederick Douglass’ expression ‘The soul that is within me no man can degrade’ reflects himself as a man with an indomitable spirit. It is the best example of how the character’s language is greatly influenced by social class. Let us examine another instance:

“We wants you to be sure to vote jes’ like we votes. we can’t read de newspapers very much, but we knows how to vote, an’ we wants you to vote jes’ like we votes,” He added: “We watches de white man, and we keeps watching de white man till we finds out which way de white man’s gwine to vote, den we votes ‘actly de other way. Den we knows we’s right.” (p.111)

The above expression is made by the coloured man in which he urges Booker to vote like Black people. The Black people vote against the White people. The linguistic units such as ‘we finds out which way de white man’s gwine to vote, den we votes ‘xactly de other way’ clearly show the racial discrimination of the Black people and their wrongheaded voting practices.

“Any nigger that’s got any love for his race, or any respect for himself, will bring a hog to the next meeting.” (p. 141)

The above linguistic expression is uttered by an old coloured man. He gives a large hog as a contribution toward the expenses of the Tuskegee building. He appeals to all the niggers to contribute for the building.
“Washington, you have spoken before the Northern white people, the Negroes in the South, and to us country white people in the South; but in Atlanta, to-morrow, you will have before you the Northern whites, the Southern whites, and the Negroes all together. I am afraid that you have got yourself into a tight place.” (p.213)

The above expression is used by a white farmer. Booker T. Washington is invited for one of the opening addresses in the Exposition at Atlanta. The white farmer’s comment ‘in Atlanta, to-morrow, you will have before you the Northern whites, the Southern whites, and the Negroes all together. I am afraid that you have got yourself into a tight place’ clearly denotes Washington’s situation. He is totally uncomfortable. The linguistic units used by the farmer reflect the influence of social class on his speech.

**B) Black Boy**

*Black Boy* is a sociological document, which reveals a disturbing social situation.

“Where you from?” a boy asked abruptly.

“Jackson,” I answered.

“How come they make you people so ugly in Jackson?” he demanded. There was loud laughter.

“You’re not any too good-looking yourself,” I countered instantly. “Oh!”

“Aw!”

“You hear what he told ‘im?”

“You think you’re smart, don’t you?” the boy asked, sneering.

“Listen, I ain’t picking a fight,” I said. “But if you want to fight, I’ll fight.”

“Hunh, hard guy, ain’t you?”

“As hard as you.”
“Do you know who you can tell that to?” he asked me.

“And you know who you can tell it back to?” I asked.

“Are you talking about my mama?” he asked, edging forward.

“If you want it that way,” I said.

“Take back what you said,” the boy challenged me.

“Make me,” I said.

The crowd howled, sensing a fight. The boy hesitated, weighing his chances of beating me.

“You ain’t gonna take what that new boy said, is you?” someone taunted the boy.

The boy came close. I stood my ground. Our faces were four inches apart.

“You think I’m scared of you, don’t you?” he asked.

“I told you what I think,” I said.

Somebody, eager and afraid that we would not fight, pushed the boy and he bumped into me. I shoved him away violently.

“Don’t push me!” the boy said.

“Then keep off me!” I said. (pp.79-80)

The above conversation is between Richard and the schoolboy. The linguistic utterances of the schoolboy “Where you from?” and “How come they make you people so ugly in Jackson?” seem innocent enough but consists of direct insults. Through these simple questions, the boy is trying to incite Richard’s anger. He tries to provoke him into a fight. The verbal attack and counterattack could define a sounding session. This conversation also brings up a point to notice about the social status of the participants. Richard’s response is a salient characteristic of this talk because of the effectiveness of his witticism. He is really successful in making a statement about his social status which will be evaluated by overt comments such as “Oh!” “Aw!” and “As hard as you.” Richard Wright’s exchange contains both laughter and
commentary. The linguistic utterances about mothers such as “Do you know who you can tell that to?”, “And you know who you can tell it back to?”, “Are you talking about my mama?” and “If you want it that way,” depict the acid test in intrablack peer confrontations. This conversation serves as Richard’s initiation into the school’s social sphere. Each boy involved in this conversation has his social identity. This conversation also depicts a characteristic of the language of African-American males. In black social situations, men make fun of each other with acerbic, phallocentric statements about one another, or family members, all done in pure jest. In a combative situation, like the aforementioned peer confrontation, the same statements are insults.

“Do you want this job?” the woman asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, afraid to trust my own judgment.

“Now, boy, I want to ask you one question and I want you to tell me the truth,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, all attention.

“Do you steal?” she asked me seriously.

I burst into a laugh, then checked myself.

“What’s so damn funny about that?” she asked.

“Lady, if I was a thief, I’d never tell anybody.”

“What do you mean?” she blazed with a red face.

I had made a mistake during my first five minutes in the white world. I hung my head.

“No, ma’am.” I mumbled. “I don’t steal.”

She stared at me, trying to make up her mind.

“Now, look, we don’t want a sassy nigger around here,” She said.

“No, ma’am.” I assured her. “I’m not sassy.” (p. 127)
The above conversation is between Richard and a white woman. Language functions as a powerful device that portrays white woman attacking Richard’s individuality. When Richard Wright searches for jobs and interacts with white people for the first time, he experiences the reality—a Negro’s reality—of the white world. The linguistic unit “Now, boy, I want to ask you one question and I want you to tell me the truth,” describes incredulity and senselessness of the woman’s expectation that he would honestly answer such a question. The language the white woman speaks is insulting and depicts how unintelligent they perceive him as. The white woman’s linguistic unit “Do you steal?” reveals how the Whites insult the Blacks. She believes that black people do not have enough sense to lie about stealing. The linguistic unit “Now, look, we don’t want a sassy nigger around here” shows a heartless and barbaric outlook of the white lady towards the black people. Richard’s linguistic unit such as “No, ma’am. I’m not sassy” shows his emotional response to mistreatment. Richard interacts with white people for the first time. This conversation shows how the white woman uses an insulting language and depicts how unintelligent she perceives the black people.

“What grade are you in school?”

“Seventh, ma’am.”

“Then why are you going to school?” she asked in surprise.

“Well, I want to be a writer.” I mumbled, unsure of myself; I had not planned to tell her that, but she had made me feel so utterly wrong and of no account that I needed to bolster myself.

“A what?” she demanded.

“A writer.” I mumbled.

“For what?”

“To write stories,” I mumbled defensively.

“You’ll never be a writer,” she said. “Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?”

“Nobody,” I said. (p. 129)
The above conversation is between Richard and a white woman. This conversation is an account of how Richard’s boyish ambitions are almost dashed by the white woman for whom he works. Linguistic units such as “You’ll never be a writer,” and “Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?” throw light on a White woman’s attitude toward Richard. Such words of the established classes clearly show their myopic vision and sadistic attitude towards the depressed classes. She tries to discourage him for writing. The lady’s diction of “nigger” portrays her belief that he cannot write because he is black. Her word choice of “earth” also illustrates how absurd she finds the idea of him being a writer. The conversation bears great impact of social class on the language used by the characters.

“Is this the nigger?” he asked a black boy as he pointed at me.

“Yes, sir,” the black boy answered.

“Come here, nigger,” he called me.

I went to him.

“They tell me my dog bit you” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

I pulled down my trousers and he looked.

“Humnnn,” he grunted, then laughed. “A dog bit can’t hurt a nigger.” “It’s swelling and it hurts,” I said.

“If it bothers you, let me know,” he said. “But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger.” (pp.142-143)

The above conversation is between the white man (Richard’s boss) and the black boys. The conversation throws light on the notions of racial supremacy by emphasizing the perceived difference between social class of the blacks and whites. The white brickyard owner repeatedly calls Richard “Nigger” which is an informal slang term used by slave owners. It is used to refer to their slaves because they did not want to dignify them with a real name. It is insulting to black people because it can
signify that you are undeserving of a birth-given name, simply because your skin is dark. The linguistic unit “A dog bit can’t hurt a nigger” implies that a nigger is not human enough to suffer any harm from a dog bite. “But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger” indicates white conception of the African American body. Here, the white man in charge of the brickyard does not seem to understand that African Americans feel pain in the same way that white Americans do.

C) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

In this autobiography, we come across how social classs of the characters influence the language they use in certain speech situations.

Let us examine the following extract:

“What’s your name, girl?” It was the speckled-faced one. Mrs. Cullinan said,

“She doesn’t talk much. Her name’s Margaret.”

“Is she dumb?”

“No. As I understand it, she can talk when she wants to but she’s usually quiet as a little mouse. Aren’t you, Margaret?”

I smiled at her. Poor thing. No organs and couldn’t even pronounce my name correctly.

“She’s a sweet little thing, though, ”

“Well, that may be, but the name’s too long. I’d never bother myself. I’d call her Mary if I was you.” (p.107)

The above conversation is between Mrs. Cullinan and other ladies. Maya is working as a maid and cook’s helper for a white woman named Mrs. Viola Cullinan. One evening, one of Mrs. Cullinan’s friends asks Maya her name. Instead of Maya, Mrs. Cullinan answers for her, “Her name’s Margaret.” The lady makes an insulting remark “Is she dumb?” Mrs. Cullinan responds “No. As I understand it, she can talk when she wants to but she’s usually quiet as a little mouse. Aren’t you, Margaret?”
Mrs. Cullinan’s act of calling “Margaret”, a close but incorrect pronunciation, instead of “Marguerite” is one of the ways of the Whites of insulting African-Americans. The linguistic utterance “Well, that may be, but the name’s too long. I’d never bother myself. I’d call her Mary if I was you” reveals that Maya is disgraced and the honour of being called by her right name is taken away from her. The conversation throws light on how the white ladies make fun of black women by mispronouncing their names. The impact of social class is clearly seen on the language used by the characters in this conversation.

5.2.2 Age Factor

In the African American autobiographies, characters of different age groups use different kind of language. The following extracts show how the age factor plays an important role in influencing the characters’ use of language.

A) Up from Slavery

In this autobiography, one comes across several instances where age factor dominates as far as the linguistic behaviour of the characters is concerned. Consider the following extract:

“Uncle Jake, I will give you guitar lessons; but, Jake, I will have to charge you three dollars for the first lesson, two dollars for the second lesson and one dollar for the third lesson. But I will charge you only twenty-five cents for the last lesson.” Uncle Jake answered: “All right, boss, I hires you on dem terms. But, boss! I wants yer to be sure an’ give me dat las’ lesson first.” (p.94)

The above conversation is between an old coloured man, Uncle Jake and the young master. The coloured man wishes to take guitar lessons from one of his young masters who does not have faith in the ability of the slave to master the guitar at his age. That is why the young master charges some dollars per lesson. The first lesson costs high while the last lesson costs low. The linguistic units such as ‘I wants yer to be sure an’ give me dat las’ lesson first’ reveals the influence of age on the language of Uncle
Jake. The old coloured man wins the verbal fight against the young master with his words.

“I am so glad that I have been permitted to do something that was real hard for the General before he dies!” (p.56)

The above expression of former student expresses his feelings of gratitude for his teacher. The term ‘General’ refers to the late General Samuel C. Armstrong, one of the great teachers of Hampton Institute. Armstrong suffers paralytic attack during the last stage of life. His student gets an opportunity to push his wheel chair up a long, steep hill. The linguistic expressions of the student show the impact of age on the use of language. The teacher is worshipped by the student.

“Mr. Washin’ton, God knows I spent de bes’ days of my life in slavery. God knows I’s ignorant an’ poor; but,” she added, “I knows what you an’ Miss Davidson is tryin’ to do. I knows you is tryin’ to make better men an’ better women for de coloured race. I ain’t got no money, but I wants you to take dese six eggs, what I’s been savin’ up, an’ I wants you to put dese six eggs into de eddication of dese boys an’ gals.” (p.132)

In the above expression, an old coloured woman who is about seventy years of age expresses her wish to contribute in Washington’s work at Tuskegee. She has spent the best days of her life in slavery. She appreciates the work of Mr. Washington and Miss Davidson. Her linguistic units such as ‘you are tryin’ to make better men an’ better women for de coloured race’ clearly show the impact of age on the language of the character. Being poor, an old woman offers six eggs as her contribution into the education of young boys and girls.

“Washington, always remember that credit is capital.” (p.146)
Mr. George W. Campbell, the white man, is a fatherly figure for Washington. His linguistic expression ‘always remember that credit is capital’ is an advice given by Campbell to Washington. Campbell, like any other elderly person, asks Washington to keep his credit high.

“Don’t do that. That is our building. I helped put it up.” (p.150)

In the above expression, an old student warns a new student not to damage the looks of school building by lead pencil marks or by the cuts of a jack-knife. The linguistic expression such as ‘That is our building. I helped put it up’ reveals old student’s attachment to building in general and the school in particular. The senior student asks junior to take care of the school building. The influence of age factor on the use of language of the character is evident in the above expression.

B) Black Boy

“There he is!”

“Naw!” I screamed.

“Come here, boy!”

“Naw!”

“The house is on fire”

“Leave me ‘lone!”

He crawled to me and caught hold of one of my legs. I hugged the edge of the brick chimney with all of my strength. My father yanked my leg and I clawed at the chimney harder.

“Come outta there, you little fool!”

“Turn me loose!” (pp.5-6)
Richard’s first lesson in the power of language comes violently in the opening scene of *Black Boy*. Richard prefers to hide under the burning house rather than face punishment for setting it afire. His father drags him out from his hiding place. Richard’s linguistic units “Naw!” and “Leave me ‘lonel!” renders him willful, stubborn, and disrespectful of father. The utterance “Turn me loose!” reveals the characteristic of self-reliant individual. Richard’s father uses aggressive words “*Come outta there, you little fool!*” which is disturbing for him. This conversation reveals the fact that age factor has great influence on the use of language of the characters.

“How big is the boat?” I asked my mother.

“As big as a mountain,” she said.

“Has it got a whistle?”

“Yes.”

“Does the whistle blow?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“When the captain wants it to blow.”

“Why do they call it the Kate Adams?”

“Because that’s the boat’s name.”

“What color is the boat?”

“White.”

“How long will we be on the boat?”

“All day and all night.”

“Will we sleep on the boat?”

“Yes, when we get sleepy, we’ll sleep. Now, hush.” (p.8)

The above conversation is between Richard and his mother. Richard’s mother tells him that they are going to Memphis on the boat called Kate Adams. Like any curious
boy, Richard asks his mother several questions about the trip. The linguistic units such as “How big is the boat?”, “Does the whistle blow?” and “Why do they call it the Kate Adams?” show imagination power of a little boy. Mother’s linguistic units “Yes.” and “Because that’s the boat’s name.” reflects that she is not interested in answering all the reasonable questions asked by her son. Mother does not have authoritative voice and thus rejects an explanation and justification for Richard’s individualism. This conversation reveals the impact of age on the language used by the characters.

“Kill that damn thing!” my father exploded... He went inside, grumbling. I resented his shouting and it irked me that I could never make him feel my resentment. How could I hit back at him? Oh yes... He said to kill the kitten, but my hate of him urged me toward a literal acceptance of his word.

“He said for us to kill the kitten,” I told my brother.

“He didn’t mean it,” my brother said.

“He did, and I’m going to kill ‘im” ...

“He didn’t mean for you to kill ‘im,” my brother said.

“Then why did he tell me to do it?” I demanded...

(After killing the kitten and the father being made aware of the fact.)

“What in God’s name have you done?” she asked.

“The kitten was making noise and Papa said to kill it,” I explained.

“You little fool!” she said. “Your father’s going to beat you for this!”

“But he told me to kill it,” I said.

“You shut your mouth!”

She grabbed my hand and dragged me to my father’s bedside and told him what I had done.

“You know better than that!” my father stormed.

“You told me to kill ‘im,” I said.
“I told you to drive him away,” he said.

“You told me to kill ‘im,” I countered positively.

“You get out of my eyes before I smack you down!” my father bellowed in disgust, then turned over in bed. (pp.10-11)

The above conversation is between the Wright family (Richard, Brother, Father and Mother). All the linguistic utterances in the extract demonstrate the influence of age on the use of language of the characters. The linguistic unit “Kill that damn thing!” is an order given by father in anger. Richard’s brother suggests with linguistic utterance “He didn’t mean for you to kill ‘im,” that the father actually mean to make it silent or ‘don’t kill’. The son intentionally takes the order literally and kills a small kitten to assert his first triumph over his father. Later Richard and his father’s linguistic exchanges “I told you to drive him away,” and “You told me to kill ‘im,” reveal the power of words. Richard is convincing in his argument while his father is dubious in his speech. Almost all the linguistic expressions clearly show the impact of age on the use of language of the characters.

“Mama, I’m hungry,” I complained one afternoon.

“Jump up and catch a hungry,” she said, trying to make me laugh and forget.

“What’s a hungry?”

“It’s what little boys eat when they get hungry,” she said.

“What does it taste like?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then why do you tell me to catch one?”

“Because you said that you were hungry,” she said, smiling. I sensed that she was teasing me and it made me angry.

“But I’m hungry. I want to eat.”

“You’ll have to wait.”

“But I want to eat now.”
“But there’s nothing to eat,” she told me.

“Why?”

“Just because there’s none.” She explained. (p.13)

The above conversation is between Richard and his mother. The topic of conversation is ‘hunger’. Richard is hungry and begs for food. His mother’s linguistic utterance “Jump up and catch a hungry” is an attempt to shift his focus away from his hunger. Richard then wants to know what a hungry is. Mrs. Wright continues her good-humoured word play “It’s what little boys eat when they get hungry”. This utterance depersonalizes Richard’s hunger, suggesting that other little boys have experienced his situation and coped with it. Although her words are nonsense, she offers them as calming balm. When his mother cannot explain how a hungry tastes, Richard wonders why he should catch one. “Because you said you were hungry,” Mrs. Wright replies. She is using humour to tease Richard out of his gloomy mood and to take his mind off his hunger pangs. A loving parent will do what she can to alleviate her child’s pain, which is something Mrs. Wright is able to do with humour. Mrs. Wright’s linguistic utterances are the examples of making use of humour to sweeten a sour situation.

“They b-beat m-me,” I gasped. “They t-t-took the m-money.”

I started up the steps, seeking the shelter of the house.

“Don’t you come in here,” my mother warned me.

I froze in my tracks and stared at her.

“But they’re coming after me,” I said.

“You just stay right where you are,” she said in a deadly tone. “I’m going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself.”

She went into the house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was about. Presently she returned with more money and another note; she also had a long heavy stick.
“Take this money, this note, and this stick,” she said. “Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you, then fight.”

I was baffled. My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before.

“But I’m scared,” I said.

“Don’t you come into this house until you’ve gotten those groceries,” she said.

“They’ll beat me; they’ll beat me,” I said.

“Then stay in the streets; don’t come back here!”

I ran up the steps and tried to force my way past her into the house. A stinging slap came on my jaw. I stood on the sidewalk, crying.

“Please, let me wait until tomorrow,” I begged.

“No,” she said. “Go now! If you come back into this house without those groceries, I’ll whip you!” (pp.15-16)

The above conversation is between Richard and his mother, Mrs. Wright. Richard’s linguistic utterances “They b-beat m-me,” and “They t-t-took the m-money” reveals that he trips over his tongue with terror. Richard returns home without grocery money and explains that some neighbourhood thugs have stolen the money. He is seeking the shelter of the house as they are after him. Her linguistic unit uttered in a deadly tone “I’m going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself” suggests that like an able mother, she tries to toughen her child to help him survive his physical as well as emotional wounds. She wants to inculcate coping skills in her son for survival in a hostile environment. Mrs. Wright sends Richard to the store again. She warns Richard “Don’t you come into this house until you’ve gotten those groceries,” and “Then stay in the streets; don’t come back here!” Mrs. Wright gives Richard the choice of staying in the streets or returning home with the groceries. Mrs. Wright’s method “If those boys bother you, then fight” may be the only effective yet ruthless way to force growth on a young boy. She is successful in teaching Richard the lesson:
a child must learn to defend himself or he might not survive. Richard’s mother like any other African American parents is especially stern with her children to prevent potentially worse public humiliations. The impact of age is clearly seen on the language used by the characters involved in this conversation.

“Then why did the ‘white’ man whip the ‘black’ boy?” I asked my mother.

“The ‘white’ man did not whip the ‘black’ boy,” my mother told me. “He beat the ‘black’ boy.”

“But why?”

“you’re too young to understand.”

“I’m not going to let anybody beat me,” I said stoutly.

“Then stop running wild in the streets,” my mother said. (p.21)

The above conversation is between Richard and his mother. Richard, in his early childhood, encounters an incident of societal oppression when he sees a “black” boy whipped by a “white” man. He asks his mother why the incident happens and his mother says, “The ‘white’ man did not whip the ‘black’ boy, He beat the ‘black’ boy”. Richard’s mother provides him moments of learning. The best example of his mother in a teaching role involves diction-the choice of certain words for certain conditions and circumstances. The words he learns to use are “whip” and “beat” and less directly “man” and “boy”. “Beat” associates with punishment for doing something wrong while “whip” is when someone hits another person for amusement. She does not go into detail on how it is different, only says “you’re too young to understand.” These teachings influence him later in life because he does not let anyone hit him.

“This is Saturday,” a black girl said to me.

“Yeah. But why you say it?” I asked.

“They gonna make a lotta money in there today,” she said, pointing to the door through which the man had disappeared.
“How?”

Another black man went up the steps and into the flat.

“Don’t you know?” the girl asked, incredulous.

“Know what?”

“What they selling . . . ?”

“Where?”

“In there where the men went,” she said.

“Nobody sells things in there,” I said

“You kidding?” the girl said in honest disbelief.

“I ain’t. What they selling? Tell me.”

“You know what they selling,” she said, looking at me with a teasing smile.

“They don’t sell nothing in there,” I said.

“Aw, you just a baby,” she said, slapping her dingy palm through the air at me in a contemptuous gesture. (p.55)

The above conversation is between Richard and a black girl. Their linguistic utterances, like any other children, are full of innocence. The black girl tells Richard that his neighbours are going to make a lot of money. Richard wants to know “How?” The girl’s linguistic utterances such as “Don’t you know?”, “What they selling . . . ?” and “In there where the men went,” hints what is happening over there. Richard’s linguistic utterance “I ain’t. What they selling? Tell me.” reveals that he, like any other nine-year old boy, does not know what they are selling. Moreover, the black girl’s linguistic units “You kidding?” and “Aw, you just a baby,” depicts the innocence and age of Richard. This conversation reflects the impact of age on the language used by characters.

C) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The impact of age on the characters’ use of language is also evident in this autobiography. Let us study the following extract carefully:
“Now no one is going to make you talk—possibly no one can. But bear in mind,
Language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is
language alone which separates him from the lower animals.”
That was a totally new idea to me, and I would need time to think about it.
“You grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get, that’s good, but
not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes
the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning.” (p.98)

Mrs. Bertha Flowers is the aristocrat of Black Stamps. The above expressions show
Mrs. Flowers’ power of words in her conversation with the ten-year-old Maya. The
linguistic expression “Now no one is going to make you talk—possibly no one can. But
bear in mind, Language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is
language alone which separates him from the lower animals” reveals the universal
truth that the language is the powerful means of communication which clearly
separates humans from all other animals. She explains Maya that words do not mean
as much on paper as they do when they are spoken. Mrs. Flowers helps Maya
rediscover her voice after her rape. She encourages her to start speaking again by
giving her books to read aloud and poems to recite. Mrs. Flowers uses standard form
of language to enlighten Maya on the importance, and dominant effect, of expression
through an individual voice.

“What you doing sitting here by yourself, Marguerite?”
She didn’t accuse, she asked for information. I said that I was watching the
sky. She asked, “What for?”...
She looked up- “Well, you can’t see much sky from here,” Then she sat down
...
Louise had grabbed my hand. “I was falling” -she shook her long braids- “I
was falling in the sky.”
I liked her for being able to fall in the sky and admit it. I suggested “Let’s try together. But we have to sit up straight on the count of five.” Louise asked. “Want to hold hands? Just in case?” I did. If one of us did happen to fall, the other could pull her out. (pp.140-141)

The conversation is between Maya and her friend Louise Kendricks shows the sincerity and feeling with which children speak. The conversation takes place when Maya meets Louise while at a church picnic. Maya is off by herself in a clearing looking at the sky when Louise arrives. They talk and soon begin playing a game of falling back and pretending they are falling into the sky. This is one of the best examples of everyday experiences brought to life by the talk of little Maya and Louise.

5.2.3 Education Factor

A) Up from Slavery

“The adjoining recitation-room needs sweeping. Take the broom and sweep it.” (p.52)

Miss Mary F. Mackie is the head teacher at the Hampton Institute. Washington presents himself before the head teacher for getting admission at the Institute. However, he fails to make favourable impression upon her. Her linguistic units such as ‘recitation-room needs sweeping. Take the broom and sweep it’ is an order given by the head teacher to the student. Naturally, the linguistic units reveal the influence of level of education on the utterance. The teacher uses very standard form of language.

“I am so grateful to you, Mr. Washington, for giving me the opportunity to help a good cause. It is a privilege to have a share in it. We in Boston are constantly indebted to you for doing our work.” (pp.184-185)
The above expression is made by a gentleman from Boston. He, in a very sophisticated language, thanks Washington for giving an opportunity to help a good cause. The linguistic expressions 'It is a privilege to have a share in it. We in Boston are constantly indebted to you for doing our work' suggests the feeling of honour for permitting to donate. The language used by the character reveals the impact of education on the utterances.

B) Black Boy

“Ella,” I begged, “please tell me what you are reading?”

“It’s just a book” she said evasively, looking about with apprehension. “But what’s it about?” I asked.

“Your grandmother wouldn’t like it if I talked to you about novels,” she told me.

I detected a note of sympathy in her voice.

“I don’t care,” I said loudly and bravely.

“Shh- You mustn’t say things like that,” she said.

“But I want to know.”

“When you grow up, you’ll read books and know what’s in them,” she explained.

“But I want to know now.”

She thought a while, then closed the book.

“Come here,” she said.

I sat at her feet and lifted my face to hers.

“Once upon a time there was an old, old man named Bluebeard,” she began in a low voice. (p.34)
The above conversation is between Richard and Ella, a young schoolteacher. One day, Richard finds her reading books sitting upon the front porch. Richard musters up the courage to ask what she is reading. Richard’s linguistic expression “please tell me what you are reading?” reflects his hunger to gain knowledge. The teacher’s reply “Your grandmother wouldn’t like it if I talked to you about novels” suggests that Richard’s grandmother disapproves his interest in books. Richard’s linguistic unit “I don’t care,” shows his courage and defiance for the sake of knowledge. At the end of the conversation, Richard’s insistence “But I want to know now” compels the teacher to tell him the story of Bluebeard and his seven wives. The boy feels mesmerized. This conversation shows the impact of education on the language used by the characters.

“Richard, what is this you’re putting in the papers?” she asked.

“A story,” I said.

“About what?”

“It’s just a story, granny.”

“But they tell me it’s been in three times.”

“It’s the same story. It’s in three parts.”

“But what’s it about?” she insisted.

I hedged, fearful of getting into a religious argument.

“It’s just a story I made up,” I said.

“Then it’s a lie,” she said.

“Oh, Christ,” I said.

“You must get out of this house if you take the name of the Lord in vain,” she said.

“Granny, please... I’m sorry,” I pleaded. “But it’s hard to tell you about the story. You see, granny, everybody knows that the story isn’t true, but...”

“Then why write it?” she asked.
“Because people might want to read it.”

“That’s the Devil’s work,” she said and left. (pp.146-47)

The above conversation is between Richard and his Grandmother. Richard is studying in eighth grade and his grandmother is an illiterate woman. Grandmother’s linguistic utterance “Richard, what is this you’re putting in the papers?” reveals how Richard’s grandmother questions him about writing and she also calls him a liar because he writes stories that aren’t true. Moreover, Granny’s linguistic units such as “Then why write it?” and “That’s the Devil’s work,” suggest that she thinks writing as immoral or something to do with the devil. On the contrary, Richard’s linguistic utterances “It’s just a story I made up,” and “Because people might want to read it” show us his confidence as a writer. The impact of education on the language used by the characters is clearly seen in this conversation.

C) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

“Uh... this this... this... uh, my niece. She’s...Uh...Just come from school.”

Then to the couple- “You know... how, uh, children are... th-th-these days...they play all d-d-day at school and c-c-can’t wait to get home and pl-play some more.”

The people smiled, very friendly.

He added, “Go on out and pl-play, Sister.”

The lady laughed in a soft Arkansas voice and said “Well you know, Mr. Johnson, they say, you’re only a child once. Have you children of your own?”

...

“No, ma’am... no ch-children and no wife.” He tried a laugh. “I have an old m-m-mother and my brother’s t-two children to l-look after.” (p.12)
The above conversation is between Uncle Willie and the schoolteachers from Little Rock. The left side of Uncle Willie’s face is paralyzed so that he has difficulty in speaking. When two teachers with a fancy car visit the Store, he pretends that he can speak normally. He applies his linguistic skills with all the pauses and stutters as “Uh... this this... this... uh, th-th-these, d-d-day, c-c-can’t, pl-play, ch-children, m-m-mother and l-look”. Speech impediment along with breaks in the sentences is the sign of influence of education on the language of the characters.

“What was the defendant wearing?” That was Mr. Freeman’s lawyer.

“I don’t know.”

“You mean to say this man raped you and you don’t know what he was wearing?” He snickered as if I had raped Mr. Freeman “Do you know if you were raped?” (p.84)

The above conversation takes place in the court between Mr. Freeman’s lawyer and Maya, a rape victim. This conversational piece can be considered as an ideal testimony in child sexual abuse prosecution. At the age of Seven, Maya was raped by her mother’s boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. She fell very ill and eventually her rape was discovered and the rapist was sent to court. Maya was sent to testify in court where she was interrogated and mocked. The linguistic utterance made by Mr. Freeman’s lawyer “What was the defendant wearing?” is ostensibly a trivial question which reveals how a well educated lawyer interrogates the victim in the court. On the contrary, the less educated victim, Maya’s linguistic response “I don’t know” shows the child’s reluctance to testify, her inability or unwillingness to give details. Further, the lawyer’s linguistic utterances such as “You mean to say this man raped you and you don’t know what he was wearing?” and “Do you know if you were raped?” are part of a series of ambiguous questions that force Maya to destabilize her credibility. The linguistic utterances of the lawyer reveal how easily language can be used as a weapon against those who have not mastered it.
5.2.4 Gender Factor

A) Up from Slavery

Instances of linguistic variation based on gender are not found in the autobiography *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington.

B) Black Boy

“You stop that, you evil gal!” she shouted. “I want none of that Devil stuff in my house!”

*Her voice jarred me so that I gasped. For a moment I did not know what was happening.*

“I'm sorry, Mrs. Wilson,” Ella stammered, rising. “But he asked me-”

“He's just a foolish child and you know it!” Granny blazed. (p.35)

This conversation is between Mrs. Wilson, Richard’s grandmother and Ella, the schoolteacher. Mrs. Wilson gets annoyed when she finds Ella reading a book for Richard. She does not like reading books/novels as she is illiterate. In African American society, women speak differently with each other. Mrs. Wilson yells at Ella “You stop that, you evil gal!” This linguistic utterance reveals that how an illiterate old woman interacts with a young girl. The other linguistic unit “I'm sorry, Mrs. Wilson,” is a response from an educated young girl to the old woman.

“You oughtn't have that in your house,” my mother told her.

“It’s my house and I’ll have in it what I damn please,” the land lady said.

“I wouldn’t ‘ve moved in here if I had thought you were running that kind of business,” my mother said.

“Don’t talk to me like that, you high-toned bitch” the landlady shouted.

“What do you expect children to do when you do that?” my mother asked.
“The bastard brats of yours ain’t no angels!” the landlady said. “You’re just a common prostitute!” Aunt Maggie pitched in.

“And what kind of whore is you?” the landlady shouted.

“Don’t you talk to my sister like that!” my mother warned.

“Pack up your rags, you black bastards, and get!” the landlady ordered. (p.57)

The above conversation is between Mrs. Wright, the landlady and Aunt Maggie. The three ladies talk to each other differently. Mrs. Wright’s linguistic utterances such as “I wouldn’t ‘ve moved in here if I had thought you were running that kind of business,” reflect the social nature of a human being. Mrs. Wright does not want to be a part of evil practices in the society. On the other hand, the landlady’s degrading profanities such as “The bastard brats of yours ain’t no angels!”, “Don’t talk to me like that, you high-toned bitch” “And what kind of whore is you?” and “Pack up your rags, you black bastards, and get!” clearly show how a cheap woman talks to other woman. Her linguistic units include slang words like ‘bastard’, ‘bitch’ and ‘whore’. She does not bother about linguistic and social behaviour. The abundant use of derogatory terms describes her social status as prostitute. This conversation is the best example of how women speak to each other in certain situations in African American society.

“What the hell” he snarled. “Every morning it’s these damn eggs for breakfast.”

“Listen, you sonofabitch,” the woman said, sitting too, “you don’t have to eat ‘em.”

“You might try serving some dirt,” he said and forked up the bacon. (p.130)

The above conversation is between a white couple which takes place at the breakfast table in a white household. They use bad language against each other which shocks
and terrorizes Richard. Linguistic units such as “What the hell” and “you sonofabitch” reveals amazingly offhand manner of cursing each other. The language used by white couple is influenced by gender factor.

C) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

“Bailey, you’ve let your children come between us.”

“Kid, you’re too sensitive. The children, er, my children, can’t come between us, unless you let them.”

“How can I stop it?”-she was crying-“They’re doing it.” Then she said, “You gave your daughter your jacket.”

“Was I supposed to let her freeze to death? Is that what you’d like, kid?” He laughed. “You would, wouldn’t you?”

“Bailey, you know I wanted to like your children, but they . . .” She couldn’t bring herself to describe us.

“Why the hell don’t you say what you mean? You’re a pretentious little bitch, aren’t you? That’s what Marguerite called you, and she’s right.”

I shivered to think how that revelation would add to her iceberg of hate for me.

“Marguerite can go to hell, Bailey Johnson. I’m marrying you, I don’t want to marry your children.”

“More pity for you, you unlucky sow. I am going out. Goodnight.” (p.243)

The above conversation is between Bailey Johnson (Maya’s father) and his girlfriend, Dolores. Dolores’ linguistic utterance “Bailey, you’ve let your children come between us” is an accusation on Bailey for letting his children come between them. Bailey’s reaction “Kid, you’re too sensitive. The children, er, my children, can’t come between
“us, unless you let them” suggests that he is very casual about his girlfriend’s objection. His further comments reveal that she is jealous without cause. She says she wants to marry him, but dislikes Maya and doesn't want her around; he storms out, and leaves her crying there.

5.3 Linguistic Experimentation

Some sociolinguistic features, which make an impact on the linguistic expressions of the characters in the selected African American autobiographies, have been offered in the earlier part of the chapter. Now let us study the variations in linguistic expressions of the characters.

The term African American English, formerly referred to as ‘African American Vernacular English’ and much earlier as ‘Black English’, refers to the varieties of English spoken by African population transported to the United States during slavery period. These speakers are geographically spread out across the entire country. However, the African Americans were originally settled in the South (from Texas in the West to the Carolinas in the East) where they were kept as slaves to provide a labour force for the plantations of the whites in this region.

The study of African American autobiographies of Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou shows that they have used many words and expressions from the African American dialect to give the flavour of African American experiences effectively and precisely. The remarkable feature of these autobiographies is that simple but more communicative language is used in them. These writers used some vocabulary items and conversational expressions from their own dialect without distorting its original meaning, which is contrary to the practice of mainstream writing. Of course, there are few African American writers who have taken efforts to use sophisticated language in order to impress the upper class people, yet, it is the vernacular language that has been more effective in creating the aesthetic sense in their expressions.

However, some scholars have condemned these autobiographers for the use of African American vernacular in their literary works. They are of the opinion that the
use of unsophisticated and primitive African American dialects for writing literature shows ignorance of literary traditions of the African American writers. However, the use of natural language of African Americans is more suitable to communicate the experiences and the realities of their lives than the artificial language borrowed from the Whites. They mobilize linguistic tools to convey meaning and portray linguistic identity.

The writers of the selected African American autobiographies have made linguistic experimentation at phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. Let us study some examples of phonological experimentation from each of the selected autobiographies.

5.3.1 Phonological Experimentation

Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Maya Angelou are the African American writers born in southern part of United States of America. They try to present the life of Southern Blacks through their autobiographies. Most of the characters from their autobiographies come from the southern part of United States of America. They use Southern American English, which shares many of the phonological features of African American Vernacular English.

A) Deletion of Word-final Consonants

It is observed that there is a deletion of the voiced plosives /d/ and /g/ in most of the utterances uttered by the characters. They, usually, delete these consonants when they appear at the end of the word. Some of the examples given below show this deletion:

“I wants you to take dese six eggs, what I’s been savin’ up, an’ I wants you to put dese six eggs into de eddication of dese boys an’ gals.” UFS (P.132)

“I want you to take these six eggs, what I’ve been saving up, and I want you to put these six eggs into the education of these boys and girls.”
B) Alliteration and Assonance

Richard Wright, in his autobiography *Black Boy*, profusely uses the poetic device of alliteration and assonance. Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the sentence. We have the repetition of the /b/ sound in the title of the text *Black Boy* that is repeated several times in the text. We have examples of the repetitions of /l/, /d/, /b/ and /t/ consonants.

i) leave me ‘lone  
ii) dread and distrust  
iii) bruised and bleeding  
iv) take your time

There are two examples of the use of assonance, which is the repetition of vowel or semivowel in the sentence. The following examples illustrate the fact:

i) Face that made me. /ei/  
ii) Fighting for my knife. /ai/

The repetition of the diphthongs /ei/ and /ai/ occur in the above examples.

5.3.2 Morphological Experimentation

Morphology is the field of the linguistics that studies the internal structure of the words. It is very important to study the morphological structure of the selected African American autobiographies. The writers of the selected autobiographies have made the skilful inclusion of the instances of reduplication, capitalization and initialism as discussed below:

A) Reduplication

Reduplication is nothing but repetition of a word or a phrase as it is or with a slight change. This linguistic device is generally used for emphasizing an action. The
characters in the African American autobiographies under study use such reduplication. Consider the following examples:

i) “Again we packed. Again we said good-bye. Again we rode train. Again we were in West Helena.” BB (p.52)

ii) “I must, must, MUST get along until I could get my hands on enough money to leave.” BB (p. 170)

iii) “…my impulses, my speech, my movement, my manner, my expressions had increased my anxiety.” BB (p. 171)

Bold words in the above sentences are repeated which help to create a powerful cohesive effect.

B) Capitalization
Capitalization is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase. Booker T. Washington is generous with capitals. He uses capitals at the beginning of the chapters. All the letters of the first word are capitals.

Up from Slavery

i) Emancipation Proclamation .............. (p.5)

ii) Civil War ...................................... (p.7)

iii) Negroes ...................................... (p.14)

iv) General Government ..................... (p.16)

v) Federal .......................................... (p.24)

vi) Congressman................................. (p.39)

vii) Governor ................................. (p.39)
viii) Bishop ........................................... (p.39)
ix) President ........................................ (p.39)
x) Reconstruction ................................. (p.83)
xi) Legislature ...................................... (p.109)
xii) New Year ....................................... (p.134)
xiii) Thanksgiving ................................. (p.136)
xiv) Atlanta Exposition .......................... (p.207)
xv) General Manager .............................. (p.216)
xvi) Southern Railroad ............................ (p.216)
xvii) Negro Building .............................. (p.227)

Black Boy

It is widely known that the first word of a sentence and all proper nouns are always capitalized. However, Richard Wright uses capitals for all the letters of the first word at the beginning of all the chapters of his autobiography. These capitals are used to make readers aware of the new beginning. Richard Wright is also very generous with capitals. Apart from this, following are some examples of capitalization:

i) Civil War ....................................... (p.38)
ii) Union Army .................................... (p.38)
iii) Father .......................................... (p.43)
iv) Second Coming ............................... (p.89)
v) Union Army ..................................... (p.95)
vi) Holy Ghost ..................................... (p.104)
vii) Coca-Cola ..................................... (p.171)
viii) Jim Crow ...................................... (p.176)
ix) ROOMS ....................................... (p.182)

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Maya Angelou is also very generous in using the capitals. In this autobiography also, we come across several examples of capitalization. Some of them are listed below:

i) “To Whom It May Concern” .......(p.5)
ii) Store ........................................(p.6)
iii) Fun House of Things...............(p.6)
iv) New Day.................................. (p.7)
v) Kingdom Come ...................... (p.23)
vi) Good Book ............................. (p.35)
vii) Kingdom of Heaven ............... (p.35)
viii) King’s English .......................... (p.89)
ix) Mother Dear .........................(p.117)
x) MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN ...... (p.139)
xi) Dear Valentine ........................ (p.145)
   xii) Depression ............................ (p.186)
   xiii) Maker ................................. (p.201)
xiv) Bright Hereafter .................... (p.203)

C) Initialism

Initialisms are abbreviations which consist of the initial (i.e. first) letters of words and which are pronounced as separate letters when they are spoken. Richard Wright and Maya Angelou, in their autobiographies, use this linguistic device as is evident in the following examples:
Black Boy

i) O.K. – All Correct (p.194)

ii) U.S. – United States (p.202)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) C.M.E. Church - Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. (p.125)

ii) A.M.E.Z. Church - African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. (p.130)

iii) M. J. – Marguerite Johnson (p.143)

iv) A.D. – Anno Domini (p.144)

v) T. V. – Tommy Valdon (p.144)

vi) P. E. – Physical Education (p.170)

vii) A. & M. – Agricultural & Mechanical (p.170)

viii) C.C.C. - The Civilian Conservation Corps. (p.223)

ix) R.O.T.C. - The Reserve Officers’ Training Corps. (p.190)

C) Pidgin Expressions

Up from Slavery

“dat’s de truf” – That’s the truth. (p.246)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

“So er this is Daddy’s er little man? Boy, anybody tell you errer that you er look like me?” He had Bailey in one arm and me in the other. “And Daddy’s
baby girl. You’ve errer than been good children, er haven’t you? Or er I guess
I would have er heard about it er from Santa Claus.” (P.55)

5.3.3 Syntactical Experimentation

Syntactic structure is a significant feature of the linguistic study. The writers of the selected African American autobiographies have made different experiments with the language at syntactic level. Some interesting deviations in syntactic structures are seen in the autobiographies under study. One comes across with some of the peculiar features such as the use of aphesis, syncope and apocope, null auxiliary, double negation, double contraction and concord in the selected autobiographies. Let us illustrate them one by one.

A) The Use of Aphesis, Syncope and Apocope

**Aphesis:** This is the omission of an initial letter of a word, that is to say, the loss of an unstressed vowel or consonant at the beginning of a word. This deletion or loss of initial letter in a word is characteristic of spoken words where the speaker rushes over words and thereby deletes some sounds in the initial position. See the examples below:

**Up from Slavery**

There are two examples of aphesis found in this autobiography. They are as follows:

i) “board 'round.” (p.29)
   “board **around**.”

ii) “… den we votes 'exactly de other way.’” (p.111)
   “… den we votes **exactly** de other way.”

The bold words in the above examples indicate the deletion or loss of letters ‘a’ and ‘e’ at the beginning of words ‘around’ and ‘exactly’.
Black Boy
There are several expressions in this autobiography in which the characters speedily pronounce the words and in doing so delete some sounds in the initial position. The following examples make the fact clear:

i) “Leave me 'lone!” (p.5)
   “Leave me alone!”

ii) “I killed 'im.” (p.10)
    “I killed him.”

iii) “'Cause you gonna smell up this air in a minute!” (p.68)
    “Because you gonna smell up this air in a minute!”

iv) “Both of 'em fought me,” (p.109)
    “Both of them fought me,”

v) “write 'n speak lak dat pretty boy from Jackson.” (p.120)
    “write and speak lak dat pretty boy from Jackson.”

The bold words in the above examples indicate the deletion or loss of letters.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
In this autobiography, also one comes across some glaring examples of aphesis. The bold words in the following examples indicate the deletion or loss of letters.

i) “Ritie, don’t worry 'cause you ain’t pretty. (p.67)
   “Ritie, don’t worry because you ain’t pretty.

ii) “I ain’t worried 'bout this fight.” (p.133)
    “I ain’t worried about this fight.”

iii) “'Twasn’t no interest.” (p.193)
    “It wasn’t no interest.”
**Syncope:** This is the omission of middle letter of a word, that is to say, the loss of an unstressed vowel or consonant from the middle of a word. Let us study some of the examples occurred in the selected autobiographies one by one.

**Up from Slavery**

In this memoir, one comes across two examples of syncope. They are:

i) “Mr. *Washin’ton*, God knows I spent *de bes’* days of my life in *slavery.*” (p.132)
   “Mr. *Washington*, God knows I spent the best days of my life in slavery.”

ii) “*Chris’mus* gifts! ‘*Chris’mus* gifts!’” (p.133)
    “*Christmas* gifts! ‘*Christmas* gifts!’”

The bold words in the above examples indicate the omission of middle letters ‘g’ and ‘t’ from the words ‘Washington’ and ‘Christmas’ respectively.

**Black Boy**

There is only one instance of syncope in this memoir in which middle letter ‘d’ is omitted.

i) “Yes, *ma’am*. A dollar.” (p.61)
   “Yes, *madam*. A dollar.”

**Apocope:** This is the omission of a last letter of a word, that is to say, the loss of an unstressed vowel or consonant at the final position of a word.

**Up from Slavery**

In this autobiography, one comes across several expressions of apocope in which the characters missed out the last letters of the words. The bold words in the following examples illustrate the fact:

i) “... I wants yer to be sure an’ give me dat *las’* lesson first.” (p.94)
“... I want you to be sure and give me that last lesson first.”

ii) “We wants you to be sure to vote jes’ like we votes.” (p.111)
    “We want you to be sure to vote just like we vote.”

iii) “I wants you to take dese six eggs, what I’s been savin’ up, an’ I wants you to put dese six eggs into de eddication of dese boys an’ gals.” (P.132)
    “I want you to take these six eggs, what I’ve been saving up, and I wants you to put these six eggs into the education of these boys and girls.”

One does not come across any example of apocope in other African American autobiographies under study.

B) Null auxiliary

In English grammar, generally, an auxiliary must precede a lexical verb and a modal auxiliary must precede a non-modal auxiliary. In the African American autobiographies under study, it is noticed that the writers follow a distinct syntactic phenomenon in which ‘auxiliary drop’ or deletion of auxiliary is seen in several sentences.

Black Boy

In this memoir, it is observed that the characters consistently omit the auxiliary in their utterances. Some of the examples are given below:

i) “Mrs. Hoskins, he dead.” (p.48)
    “Mrs. Hoskins, he is dead.”

ii) “You kidding?” (p.55)
    “Are you kidding?”
iii) “Where you from?” (p.79)
   “Where are you from?”

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
The characters, in this autobiography, do not use the auxiliary in their linguistic expressions. Consider the following examples:

i) “How you, Sister Flowers?” (P.94)
   “How are you, Sister Flowers?”

ii) “You going to Sister Flowers’s.” (p.96)
   “You are going to Sister Flowers’s.”

iii) “What we gone do?” (p.110)
   “What are we going to do?”

iv) “What you doing sitting here by yourself, Marguerite?” (p.140)
   “What are you doing sitting here by yourself, Marguerite?”

C) The Use of Double Negation
The writers of African American autobiographies under study deploy double negation for negative statements. Multiple negators such as ‘don’t’, ‘ain’t’, ‘no’, ‘nothing’, ‘never’ are used in a single negative sentence. Some examples are given below:

Up from Slavery
In this autobiography, there is an instance of double negation.

i) “I ain’t got no money” (P.132)

Black Boy
The characters in this memoir freely make use of double negation as is evident in the following expressions:
i) “I ain’t got nothing,” (p.29)

ii) “They don’t sell nothing in there,” (P.55)

iii) “The bastard brats of yours ain’t no angels!” (P.57)

iv) “That ain’t gonna do you no good.” (p.70)

v) “I ain’t got no money.” (p.143)

vi) “She don’t seem to like you no more.” (p.196)

vii) “I don’t wanna fight nobody.” (p.209)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Double negation is profusely used in this autobiography. Consider the following examples:

i) “Don’t mind, don’t pay that no mind.” (p.109)

ii) “It wasn’t not no dream.” (p.158)

iii) “No sir, I ain’t never seen nothing so clear as that little angel baby.”

(p.167)

iv) “I ain’t no moneylender, ...” (p.189)

v) “’Twasn’t no interest.” (p.193)

vi) “We ain’t done nothing wrong.” (p.198)

vii) “...it ain’t no trouble when you pack double.” (p.270)

D) Concord

In the selected African American autobiographies, it is noticed that there are several syntactic structures in which the subject and the verb of the sentence do not agree with each other. This non-adherence becomes a violation of the English language norms as in Standard English the verb must agree in number and tense with the subject. All the African American autobiographies under study are crammed with the
distinct patterns like the use of plural subject with a singular verb and the use of first person singular pronoun ‘I’ with the singular verb ‘does’. Let us study some examples from each autobiography one by one.

**Up from Slavery**

i) “All right, boss! I hires you on dem terms.” (p.94)

“All right, boss! I hire you on dem terms.”

ii) “We wants you to be sure to vote jes’ like we votes.” (p.111)

“We want you to be sure to vote jes’ like we vote.”

iii) “Den we knows we’s right.” (p.111)

“Then we know we’re right.”

iv) “God knows I’s ignorant an’ poor.” (p.132)

“God knows I’m ignorant and poor.”

v) “I knows what you an’ Miss Davidson is tryin’ to do.” (p.132)

“I know what you and Miss Davidson are trying to do.”

**Black Boy**

i) “You ain’t gonna take what that new boy said, is you?” (p.80)

“You aren’t gonna take what that new boy said, are you?”

ii) “Brother and Sister Wilcox is sho’ly the meanest ---” (p.94)

“Brother and Sister Wilcox are sho’ly the meanest ---”
iii) “You ain’t never been in jail, is you?” (p.177)

“You aren’t never been in jail, are you?”

iv) “You in safe hands here.” (p.183)

“You are in safe hands here.”

v) “She don’t seem to like you no more.” (p.196)

“She doesn’t seem to like you any more.”

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) “You children is the most ungrateful things I ever did see.” (p.53)

“You children are the most ungrateful things I ever did see.”

ii) “I does the outside.” (p.96)

“I do the outside.”

iii) “I’d call her Mary if I was you.” (p.107)

“I’d call her Mary if I were you.”

iv) “I likes it better too.” (p.109)

“I like it better too.”

v) “That white man don’t mind hugging that niggah now, I betcha.”

“That White man doesn’t mind hugging that Nigger now, I bet you.”
vi) “Ain’t you said you wasn’t feeling well, Joyce?” (p.149)

“Aren’t you said you weren’t feeling well, Joyce?”

vii) “... I knows you a God-fearing woman.” (p.151)

“... I know you are a God-fearing woman.”

viii) “... I treats enerybody right.” (p.220)

“... I treat enerybody right.”

E) Double Contraction

A contraction is a word or phrase that has been shortened by dropping one or more letters. In writing, an apostrophe takes the place of the missing letters. African American autobiographers use double contractions in conversational pieces. Double contraction is a contraction of three words with two apostrophes. They may look odd in print, but certain multiple contractions such as ‘I’d’ve’, ‘wouldn’t’ve’ and ‘shouldn’t’ve’ are fairly common in African American speech.

Black Boy

In this autobiography, one comes across two examples of double contraction. They are as follows:

i) “I wouldn’t’ve moved in here...” (p.57)

ii) “You shouldn’t’ve spoken to me.” (p.104)

In the above examples, the bold words are contracted forms of ‘would not have’ and ‘should not have’ respectively.

One does not come across any example of double contraction in other autobiographies.
5.3.4 Code Switching and Code Mixing

The writers of African American autobiographies under study use the CS and CM strategies to express certain specific social function in social interactions. There are several examples of code mixing which reveal the social background and educational level of the characters. The following examples illustrate the fact:

**Up from Slavery**

i) “But, boss! I wants *yer* to be sure an’ give me *dat* las’ lesson first.” (p.94)

ii) “*We* wants you to be sure to vote *jes’* like we votes.” (p.111)

iii) “…which way *de* white man’s *gwine* to vote…” (p.111)

iv) “*Den* we knows we’s right.” (p.111)

v) “*I’ve sho’ gwine* to hear him.” (p.214)

**Black Boy**

i) “*Come outta* there, you little fool.” (p.6)

ii) “*I’m gonna* get you outta here!” (p.56)

iii) “*Hell, I ain’t gonna* stand near you, nigger!” (p.68)

iv) “*Cause you gonna* smell up this air in a minute!” (p.68)

v) “*Man, I’d be scareda the buildings!*” (p.70)

vi) “*Gimme* that knife, mister,” (p.95)

vii) “*write ‘n speak lak dat pretty boy from Jackson.*” (p.120)

viii) “*You, git* way *frum* me, you young’un,” (p.121)

ix) “*Wanna drink, boy?*” (p.158)

x) “*Laud, today! Ahm still working for white folks!*” (p.198)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) “Lemme have a hunk uh cheese and some sody crackers.” (p.7)

ii) “Just gimme a coupla them fat peanut paddies.” That would be from a picker who was taking his lunch. (p.7)

iii) “Put some more in that sack, child. Don’t you try to make your profit offa me.” (p.15)

iv) “That white man don’t mind hu+gging that niggah now, I betcha.” (p.133)

v) “Annie, I done tole you, I ain’t gonna mess around in no niggah’s mouth.” (p.193)

vi) “... I’ll be okey-dokey.” (p.263)

The bold words in the above examples indicate the strategy of code mixing.

5.3.5 Power and Solidarity

The principles of power and solidarity are operative in the memoirs under consideration. The powerful people make use of blessings and curses, whereas the powerless people make use of polite forms of expressions.

Black Boy

“You know better than that,” she said, tapping a ruler across my knuckles.

“Better than what?” I asked, amazed, nursing my hand.

“Just look at that floor,” she said.

I looked and saw that there were many tiny bits of walnut meat scattered about... At once I knew that the boy in front of me had been eating them; my walnuts were in my pocket, uncracked.
“I don’t know anything about that,” I said.

“You know better than to eat in the classroom,” she said.

“I haven’t been eating,” I said.

“Don’t lie! This is not only a school, but God’s holy ground,” she said with angry indignation.

“Aunt Addie, my walnuts are here in my pocket ...”

“I’m Miss Wilson!” she shouted.

I stared at her, speechless ...

“I didn’t put these walnuts on the floor!”

“Then who did?”

My street gang code was making it hard for me ...

“I don’t know who did it,” I said finally.

“Go to the front of the room,” Aunt Addie said.

I walked slowly to her desk, I saw her go to the corner and select a long, green, limber switch and come toward me. I lost control of my temper.

“I haven’t done anything!” I yelled.

She struck me and I dodged.

“Stand still, boy!” she blazed.

“Hold out your hand!”

I held out my hand ... She stung my palm until it was red ...

“Put down your hand and go to your seat,” she said.

I walked in a fog of anger toward my desk.

“And I’m not through with you!” she called after me.

“Through with me?” I repeated. “But what have I done to you?”

“Sit down and shut up!” Aunt Addie bellowed. (pp.91-93)
The above conversation between Richard and Aunt Addie takes place in the classroom of religious school where Aunt Addie is a teacher. Their linguistic utterances depict that they are literally at each other’s throats. One afternoon, Aunt Addie reproaches Richard for eating in school, pointing at walnut crumbs on the floor under his desk. Knowing that it was the boy in front of him who had been eating walnuts, Richard denies the accusation. In doing so, he accidentally calls her “Aunt Addie” instead of “Miss Wilson”. She is furiously distraught and assaults him. Richard does not want to tattle and withstands Aunt Addie’s lashings. This conversation makes us clear that how African American women in the teaching profession communicate in the African American vernacular. Through their use of African American discourse, they index a social identity and communicate a particular stance or point of view that cannot be expressed in Standard English. African American English enables these women to communicate cognitive, affective content not available in the standard form of the language, to create and maintain social relationships and express solidarity with listeners.

Let us consider another example:

“Well Richard Wright, here’s your speech,” he said with smooth bluntness and shoved a stack of stapled sheets across his desk.

“What speech?” I asked as I picked up the papers.

“The speech you’re to say the night of graduation,” he said.

“But professor, I’ve written my speech already,” I said.

He laughed confidently, indulgently.

“Listen, boy, you’re going to speak to both white and colored people that night. What can you alone think of saying to them you have no experience...”

I burned.

“I know that I’m not educated, professor,” I said. “But the people are coming to hear the students, and I won’t make a speech that you’ve written.”

He leaned back in his chair and looked at me in surprise.
“You know, we’ve never had a boy in this school like you before,” he said.

“You’ve always had your way around here. Just how you managed to do it, I don’t know. But, listen, take this speech and say it. I know what’s best for you. You can’t afford to jus say anything before those white people that night.” He paused and added meaningfully: “The superintendent of schools will be there; you’re in a position to make a good impression on him. I’ve been a principal for more years than you are old, boy. I’ve seen many a boy and girl graduate from this school and none of them was too proud to recite a speech I wrote for them.” (p.153)

The above conversation is between Richard and the Principal of the school. Richard is bestowed with the honour of valedictorian. When summoned to the Principal’s office, Richard is handed over “the speech you’re to say the night of graduation”; it is the one that would “speak to both white and colored people.” Richard states “But professor, I’ve written my speech already.” Richard’s linguistic units “I know that I’m not educated, professor,”, “But the people are coming to hear the students, and I won’t make a speech that you’ve written” make the Principal perturbed yet amused. The language used by the Principal is quite reminiscent of the dialogue patterns between whites and blacks. Whites stereotyped blacks as lazy, simple and adolescently foolish. In the conversation, the Principal calls Richard “boy” multiple times. The Principal’s linguistic unit “I know what’s best for you. You can’t afford to just say anything before those white people that night” shows how the Principal is condemning Richard’s personal speech in a condescending manner. His voice, his tone is quite casual for a conversation between the Principal and the student. This mix of trying to overpower and informality creates for an awkward atmosphere. It also sends a mixed message: He wants Richard to succeed, saying that “the superintendent of schools will be there; you’re in a position to make a good impression on him”, yet tells him this news in a patronizing tone.

Instances of power and solidarity are not found in other autobiographies.
5.3.6 Address Terms and Greetings

Address Terms

The characters in the selected African American autobiographies use different types of address terms in different contexts. Their choices consist of personal names, general and occupation titles, terms of intimacy and personal pronouns. Some of the address terms used in these autobiographies are worth studying from sociolinguistic point of view.

Up from Slavery

i) “Mars’ Billy.” – Slaves address their masters in this fashion. (p.12)

ii) “Yankee” – the word is used to refer an American from the Northern States in the USA (p.19)

Black Boy

i) “They’ll call you a colored man when you grow up,” she said. (P.43)

‘Colored’ is an insulting term used by the White people in the United States to address to the Black people. Here, Mrs. Wright tells Richard that when he grows up, he will be called a colored man by White people.

ii) “Elder, this is all a mistake.” (p.103)

iii) “Professor, I’m going to say my won speech that night,” (p.153)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) “Bailey, my baby. Great God, Bailey.” (p. 35)

ii) They also told me how I got the name “My.” After Bailey learned definitely that I was his sister, he refused to call me Marguerite, but rather addressed me each time as “My Sister,” and in later more
articulate years, after the need for brevity had shortened the appellation to “My,” it was elaborated into “Maya.” (P.68)

iii) Bailey persisted in calling her Mother Dear until the circumstance of proximity softened the phrase’s formality to “Muh Dear,” and finally to “M’Deah.” (P.68)

iv) “Wait a minute, little lady.” (p.114)

v) “Dentist Lincoln. It’s my grandbaby here.” (p.186)

vi) “Boss, surely we ain’t done nothing ...” (p.198)

Greetings

There are various forms and ways of greeting each other. Different terms of greeting are used by the characters in the selected African American autobiographies. Some of the examples are self explanatory.

Black Boy

i) “Good morning, Richard,” (p.78)

ii) “Hello, Richard,” (p.178)

iii) “Hy,” (p.192)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) ‘Hy y’ all,” (p.16)

ii) “Good morning, child,” or “Good afternoon, child,” (p.21)

iii) “Hello, Reverend Thomas.” (p.35)

iv) “Good day, Mrs. Henderson.” (p.94)

v) “Evening, Sister Henderson.” (p.120)

vi) “Good day, ladies and gentlemen.”(p.215-16)
5.3.7 Blessings and Curses

Blessings and curses are the linguistic expressions of great importance in social interactions. One instance each of expression of blessings and curses occur in the selected African American autobiographies. They are given below:

Up from Slavery

“amens” (p.246)
It means ‘so be it or truly’. It has been generally adopted in Christian worship as a concluding word for prayers.

Black Boy

“you’re bad,” he said. “You better watch your step, young man, or you’ll end up on the gallows.” (p.95)

In the above expression, Grandapa curses Richard for going after Aunt Addie with a knife. Grandpa threatens Richard that the result of his action, in the world they live in, will lead him to gallows.

5.3.8 Abusive Expressions

In the autobiographies under study, one comes across several incidents in which the characters use offensive language and lash out swearwords for other characters. The derogatory terms or abusive expressions are used to insult people, to hurt someone and to put someone down.

Black Boy

Richard Wright’s Black Boy is loaded with the terms of racial abuse. ‘Nigger’ and ‘black’ have been used to indicate the white men’s derogatory attitude towards black people. Moreover, the swear words such as ‘prostitute’, ‘bitch’, ‘bastard’ and ‘sonofabitch’ are some common abusive terms used for the Black people. Some of the abusive expressions are made bold in the following examples:
i) “You’re just a common **prostitute!**” (p.57)

ii) “Don’t talk to me like that, you high-toned **bitch!**” (p.57)

iii) “That goddamn lousy **bastard sonofabitching bucket!**” (p.84)

iv) “Why, you **impudent black rascal!**” (p.137)

v) “You’re just a young, **hotheaded fool.**” (p.153)

vi) “Well, walk, you **black sonofabitch!**” (p.159)

vii) “You’re a lucky **bastard.**” (p.159)

viii) “I’ll rip your gut string loose with this f-k-g bar, you **black granny dodger!**” (p.166)

ix) “Sock ’im in his f-k-g piece!” (p.212)

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I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) “My policy is I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a nigger’s” (p.189).

ii) “Stand up when you see a lady, you contemptuous **scoundrel.**” (p.189-90)

iii) “she’s a **whore.**” (p.245)

iv) “...you **silly old bitch.**” (p.245)

The bold words or part of the words in the above examples are abusive terms/expressions used by the characters in the autobiographies.

One does not come across any abusive expression in the autobiography *Up from Slavery.*
5.3.9 Honourific Terms

It is noticed that the writers of the African American autobiographies under study use the most common honorific terms in English like Mr., Sir, Mrs., Ms., Miss, Madam, etc. in their autobiographies. The following examples illustrate the fact:

**Up from Slavery**

i) *Governor Bullock introduced me with the words, “We have with us to-day a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization.”* (p.217)

The above linguistic expression is made by Governor Bullock in which he uses an honorific term ‘a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization’ for Booker T. Washington.

ii) “‘Mister.’”(P.247)

The above term ‘Mister’ is an honorific used for Booker T. Washington by a number of people who have come to shake hands with him after his address. This is the first time they have ever called a Negro as ‘Mister’.

**Black Boy**

i) “‘I’m doing all I can, Your Honor,” he mumbled, grinning. (P.24)

‘Your Honor’ is an honorific term which acts as complete replacements for a name. The Judge of the court is often addressed as ‘Your Honor’.

5.3.10 Kinship Terms

In the autobiographies under study, one comes across kinship terms used by the characters to indicate relationships with each other. Most of them are associated with African American culture. It is found that various features like sex, generation and collateral kinship distance differentiate the kinship terms used in these autobiographies. The following examples illustrate the fact:
Up from Slavery

i) My mother’s husband (p.24)
   The term is used for Father.

Black Boy

i) Papa – Father (p.10)
   ii) Mama – Mother (p.12)
   iii) Granny – Grandmother (p.25)
   iv) Grandpa – Grandfather (p.38)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) Momma – Grandmother (p.6)
   ii) Bibbi – Sister (p.66)
   iii) Bubba – Elder Brother (p.169)
   iv) Daddy – Father (p. 219)

5.3.11 Diminutive Expressions

There are several expressions in the selected autobiographies which suggest evaluative or expressive and stylistic connotative meaning e.g. affection, intensification. Some of them are as follows:

Up from Slavery

i) Hon. – Honourable (p.89)
   ii) Mr. – Mister (p.99)
   iii) Dr. – Doctor (p.106)
   iv) Rev. – Reverend (p.106)
**Black Boy**

i) *Mulatto* (p.25)
   
   In the African-American community, mulatto is a term used to refer to a person who is born from one white parent and one black parent.

ii) “*Gotta match?*” (p.180)
    
    “*Have you got a match?*”

iii) Cafe – Cafetaria (p.192)

**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

i) Jr. - Junior (p.5)

ii) c/o – Care of (p.5)

iii) St. – Saint (p.60)

iv) Ritie – Marguerite (p.67)

v) Ju – Junior (p.90)

vi) Ma – Mother (p.109)

vii) Sis – Sister (p.160)

viii) Dr. – Doctor (p.186)

ix) Dad – Daddy (p.228)

**5.3.12 Unusual Spellings**

There are several instances of unusual spellings in the African American autobiographies under study. These spellings are deviations of standard spellings. Some of the unusual spellings from the autobiographies are listed below:
**Up from Slavery**

i) Gotten – Got (p.8)

ii) Yer – You are (p.94)

iii) Dat – That (p.94)

iv) Jes’ – Just (p.111)

v) De – The (p.111)

vi) Gwine – Going (p.111)

vii) Den – Then (p.111)

viii) Sho’ – Sure (p.111)

ix) ’xactly – Exactly (p.111)

x) An’ – And (p.132)

xi) Dese – These (p.132)

xii) Eddication – Education (p.132)

xiii) Gals – Girls (p.132)

**Black Boy**

i) Naw – No (p.5)

ii) ’lone – Alone (p.5)

iii) Outta – Out of (p.6)

iv) ’im – Him (p.10)

v) Kungry - This is an unusual spelling which is used by Richard’s mother to shift his focus away from his hunger. (p.13)

vi) Gal - Girl (p.35)

vii) Color – Colour (p.41)

viii) Gonna – Going to (p.55)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

i) Gonna – Going to (P.7)

ii) Lemme – Let me (P.7)

iii) Gimme – Give me (P.7)

iv) Coupla – Couple of (P.7)

v) Offa – After (p.15)

vi) Mizeriz – Mistress (p.22)

vii) Miz – Miss (p.32)

viii) Spake – Speak (p.35)

ix) Goeth – Goes (p.97)

x) Gawd – God (p.110)

xi) Niggah – Nigger (p.133)

xii) Betcha – Bet you (p.133)

xiii) Winnah – Winner (p.136)

xiv) Champeen – Champion (p.136)

xv) Git – Get it. (p.149)
5.3.13 Other Sociolinguistic Features

Despite of the above-mentioned sociolinguistic features, one comes across other sociolinguistic features in the selected autobiographies. They are as follows:

Up from Slavery

A) Inverted order sentence:

It is a sentence that does not follow the typical order of subject-verb-object as is evident in the example given below:

i) Work in the coal mine I always dreaded. UFS (p.38)

B) Double Inverted Comma:

Booker T. Washington uses double inverted comma to mark off a word or phrase that is being discussed in the passage. He generously makes use of double inverted comma to explain the ‘term’. The following examples illustrate this fact:

i) “cat-hole” UFS (p.3)

“cat-hole” is a contrivance which almost every mansion or cabin in Virginia possessed during the ante-bellum period. The “cat-hole” was a square opening, about seven by eight inches, provided for the purpose of letting the cat pass in and out of the house at will during the night.
ii) “big house”  
*UFS* (p.9)  
“big house” - the master’s house.

iii) “blue-back”  
*UFS* (p.27)  
“blue-back” is Webster’s spelling-book.

iv) “board ’round”  
*UFS* (p.29)  
“board ’round”- the teacher was to spend a day with each family.

v) “Ku Klux”  
*UFS* (p.77)  
“Ku Klux” - bands of men who had joined themselves together for the purpose of regulating the conduct of the coloured people,

vi) “patrollers”  
*UFS* (p.77)  
“patrollers” - bands of white men—usually young men—who were organized largely for the purpose of regulating the conduct of the slaves at night

vii) “Black-Belt”  
*UFS* (p.108)  
“Black-Belt” is the counties where the black people outnumber the white.

**Black Boy**

A) Auxiliary

In *Black Boy*, there is an instance in which auxiliary ‘do’ is used instead of ‘to be’ form. The bold word in the following example makes the fact clear.

i) “*Mr. Hoskins . . . he done been shot. Done been shot by a white man.*”  
*BB* (p.48)

“*Mr. Hoskins . . . he has been shot. Has been shot by a white man.*”
B) Alteration of words

  i) “... Yeah, goddammit, they will catch you now.” BB (p.70)

Goddammit – is alteration of three words God, damn and it. It is used to express anger, irritation, contempt, or disappointment.

C) Using infinitives

Only one example of ‘use of infinitives’ is found in this autobiography. It is used to pass the message.

  i) ‘What Griggs was saying was true, but it was simply utterly impossible for me to calculate, to scheme, to act, to plot all the time’ BB (p.162)

D) One-word sentence

Richard Wright profusely uses one-word sentences in his autobiography. This becomes one of the remarkable features of the autobiography. Some of the examples are stated below:

  i) Loneliness. BB (p.141)
  ii) Reading. BB (p.141)
  iii) Doubt. BB (p.141)

E) Use of Dash

Dashes are punctuation marks that separate the written material. They show a more abrupt pause or shift in a sentence. Dashes add more emphasis to the material they set off. This emphasis can add drama or emotion to the affected words, phrases, or clauses.
I asked Bailey, “Ooday ooyay inkthay isthay is our atherfay, or ooday ooyay inkthay atthay eeway are eeingbay idkay appdnay?” Bailey said, “My, we're in St. Louis, and we're going to see Mother Dear. Don’t worry.” Dad chuckled and said, “Oohay oodway antway ootay idkay appnay ooyay? Ooday ooyay inkthay ooyay are indlay ergbay ildrencbay?” CBS (P.59)

The above conversation in English is -

I asked Bailey “Do you think this is our father, or, do you think that we are being kidnapped?” Bailey said, “My, we’re in St. Louis, and we’re going to see Mother Dear. Don’t worry.” Dad chuckled and said, “Who would want to kidnap you? Do you think you are lindberg children?”

B) Use of Spanish

One comes across several Spanish expressions in this autobiography. Some of the characters in the autobiography use Spanish language for communication. Some of the examples are stated below:
i) Coq au vin - Chicken in wine sauce. CBS (p.228)

ii) Prime ribs au jus - Beef ribs served with natural juices. CBS (p.228)

iii) Cotelette Milanese - chicken breast cutlets dredged in egg, grated Parmesan cheese and crumbs and braised in butter. CBS (p.228)

iv) Mercados - Mexican grocery stores. CBS (p.229)

v) Adios - Goodbye. CBS (p.231)

vi) Bonita - Pretty. CBS (p.231)

vii) Esposita - Little bride. CBS (p.231)

viii) Cantina – Saloon CBS (p.232)

ix) “Cómo está usted?” - How are you? CBS (p.232)

x) Zapata - Mexican revolutionary (1878–1919). CBS (p.232)

xi) La niña - little girl. CBS (p.232)

xii) “Dónde está mi padre?” - Where is my father? CBS (p.234)

xiii) Paisano - Peasant. CBS (p.234)

xiv) “Dónde vas?” - Where are you going? CBS (p.234)

xv) Senoritas - Young, unmarried women. CBS (p.234)

xvi) “Si, si” - Yes, yes. CBS (p.237)

xvii) “Gracias”- Thanks. CBS (p.237)

xviii) “Pasa” - Pass. CBS (p.239)

xix) Policías - Police officers. CBS (p.239)

xx) “Borracho” - drunk. CBS (p.240)

xxi) “Quién es?” - Who is this? CBS (p.240)

xxii) “Mi padre” - My father. CBS (p.240)

xxiii) Pobrecita - Poor little thing. CBS (p.241)

xxiv) “Qué tiene? - What do you have? CBS (p.241)
C) The Use of Double Plural Noun Markers

There are instances of overcorrection where the speaker applies both the general plural marker ‘-s’ and the specific plural markers for irregular nouns at the same time. In Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Momma also uses double plural nouns like Grandchildrens, mens and womens. Example:

“*Sister Henderson sure got some smart grandchildrens.*” CBS (p.15)

D) Run-on sentence:

A run-on is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses (i.e., complete sentences) are joined without appropriate punctuation or conjunction. This is generally considered a stylistic error, though it is occasionally used in literature and may be used as a rhetorical device.

i. “*The people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union...*” CBS (P.172)

5.4 Conclusion

The present chapter is devoted to the use of language and dialect by the characters in the selected African American autobiographies. As the researcher has explained earlier in this thesis, the characters in the autobiographies under study come from a region of United States of America where the standard language is scarcely used and the regional dialect is more prevalent. This is shown through ‘phonological’, ‘morphological’ and ‘syntactic’ features of the study. In this chapter, the researcher has given as many examples as were evident in the autobiographies for each factor and linguistic feature.