

'Ain't' ain't Standard English, or is it: dealing with 'Ain't' 「Ain't」について：「Ain't」はスタンダードイングリッシュだろうか？

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Abstract

There are some English expressions that occur frequently but are not looked on well. *Ain't* is one of these. This paper contends that expressions like *ain't* do deserve attention. Justification for this is simply the fact that its use is pervasive and is part of English. But how to deal with this issue? Philological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of *ain't* are discussed with reference to example text deconstructions. Part of this is how *ain't* occurs in rhetorical questions, a common discursive construction in English language. In order to explore *ain't* further, a small-scale questionnaire survey was conducted requiring respondents to deal with *ain't* occurring in rhetorical questions in context. It was hypothesized that people who do not grow up with English would have trouble dealing with ambiguous polarity of *ain't* as well as the questions. However pragmatic sense enabled most respondents to cope. Learning English later or even being in a lingua franca English culture does not guarantee being able to deal with something like *ain't*. But attention to pragmatics, particularly context of situation helps.

本稿では、広く使用されている *ain't* という英語表現を、言語学的、統語論的、意味論的そして語用論的な概念を用いて考察する。具体的には、*ain't* が修辞疑問においてどのように使用されているかについて述べる。さらに、各コンテキストにおいて修辞疑問で使用される *ain't* に関する小規模のアンケート調査を行った、その結果を示す。結果から、語用論、特に、状況コンテキストに焦点を当てることで *ain't* の理解が容易になることを明らかにする。

In the wake of the first two *The Godfather* movies in the 1970s there came a series of television commercials for Castrol Oil aired in Australia. Taking up the American Chicago-New York-New Jersey mobster theme, it featured a Prohibition Era gang-boss and his mechanic, named Sol, who is servicing the boss's car. Wanting to make an impression by economising, the mechanic tells of the cheap oil he is using instead of Castrol, the quality stuff. The boss is not impressed, telling Sol, "*Oils ain't oils, Sol!*" while in the background somebody is getting wacked. Needless to say, Sol is impressed and changes to Castrol. After all, as the boss had implied in his statement, there are different kinds of oils and some oils are better than other oils.

Even though the scenario is taken from an olden-day urban criminal-class context from the north eastern USA, it was transferable to Australian television audiences due to their regular immersion in American

cultural scenarios on film and on television. I recall “*Oils ain’t oils, Sol!*” entered our repertoires when I was growing up there in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ain’t is selected because it is a kind of unofficially mainstream English-language item but it is pervasive. It never seems to be prescribed institutionally and it appears to be rarely if ever taught. *Ain’t* reflects customary English-language behaviour, and it also reflects orthodox views regarding standard forms in use of English. For instance, the following quotes from a learners’ dictionary, a grammar book and a guide to English usage reflect authoritative attitudes to *ain’t*:

- “In non-standard English, *ain’t* (pronounced /eɪnt/ or /ent/) is used as a contraction of *am not*, *is not*, *have not* and *has not*” (Swan 1995. p 134 No 145 Note 4)
- “/eɪnt/ [verb] short for “am not”, “is not”, “are not”, “has not”, and “have not”; many people do not consider this to be correct English ...” (*Longman Active Study Dictionary* 1991. p 36)
- “In negative questions, *aren’t I?*, ..., widely used in [British English], but it is felt to be somewhat affected in American English. In negative declarative sentences there is no generally acceptable form for *am not*. *Ain’t* is a [non-standard] construction used, esp. in [American English], ...As well as serving as a contracted *are not*, *ain’t* is also used for *am not*, *is not* ..., *has not* and *have not* ... All these examples are taken from [very informal] American English”. (Leech & Svartvik 1994. No. 482 Note a p 243)
- “Slang contraction of *is not*, *are not*, *am not*, *do not* or *does not* [sic]”. (urbandictionary.com 2003)

The provisos of ‘slang’, ‘non-standard’, ‘not ... correct’, ‘very informal’ in the first three need to be noted, though the last from the wiki-sourced urbandictionary.com reflects popular acknowledgement of the slang-status of the expression.

This paper examines *ain’t* as an expression that transcends orthodox and traditional grammar and even pragmatics. *Ain’t* is used as an example here of how to deal with non-standard expressions specifically what to tell English learners and users who have not grown up in an English language culture. After rationalising this examination, philology and textual usage of the expression are considered before deconstructing *ain’t* syntactically and identifying how it can be used for discursive and more specifically for rhetorical purposes. This is done using different texts incorporating various language functions of *ain’t* in identifiable contexts. Then, brief primary research findings are analysed in order to test validity of points drawn from earlier discussion, and on this basis suggestions are made about how users and learners of English might treat *ain’t* as a non-standard yet pervasive English expression.

Why *Ain’t*

I suppose it comes down to a kind of top-down/bottom-up dichotomy that so frequently occurs in language analysis, commentary and education. Top-Down means being told what to say or mean from the top: institutions and others with power or prestige in the culture or community; Bottom Up being more organic,

originating from patterns and behaviour in people's up-take and use of, say, language or an expression. This dichotomy is evident in Paolo Freire's (1972) arguments for liberation pedagogy. This holds that people begin to learn when they become conscious of their environment in ways that they are not told about (p 57) including the culture and the language therein, instead of just taking in what is told to them by institutions. Being taught thus is like deposits of knowledge in a banking model of education that he ardently criticises (he calls it "necrophilic". p 51). In relation to just one expression, *ain't*, his is an exaggerated view, but it illustrates how people's home-grown language, with its pragmatic and rhetorical norms, might become real and preferred to them. So, why do teachers, schools and governments tell people not to use *ain't*, if it is a normal expression for them to use?

Ain't occurs three times in the title of this paper, and in that usage syntactically and semantically it is hard to take in. There are other, similar expressions – *wanna* from *want to* and *gonna* from *going to* - which are quite straight forward. They formed primarily and predictably from phonemic corruption when people spoke fast. In language zones characterized by this kind of language modification behaviour – such as in parts of North America - forms like *wanna* and *gonna* would seem like evidence of English dialect formation. *Ain't* is syntactically and discursively far more complex, as is explained later. And at the Top it is ignored, neglected, avoided, discouraged and at times prohibited.

I on the other hand am interested in finding a resolution of the issue of how to deal with *ain't*. In a world of English online in games and on electronic audio and visual media, from the mouths of people in popular culture and occurring in their written texts, down to the texts surrounding a person in their own immediate milieu, *ain't* occurs and is used repeatedly, continuously to the extent that it becomes part of lingua franca repertoire in some language communities. If I am an English teacher I should know how to deal with expressions like *ain't*. As such investigating *ain't* from this perspective could become a guide for dealing with similar euphemism or dialectical forms.

Ain't

Ain't ain't – or 'isn't' - standard English, if one checks in language textbooks and grammar books as above or asks most teachers, who would prefer *isn't* or *aren't*. However, *ain't* is quite pervasive in English in North American vernacular cultures from movies to popular music to comics to many people's everyday vernacular. Googling *ain't* produces links to countless popular songs, quotes from movies, even book titles, a couple of examples of which are examined below. On the other hand, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Vol 1 p 276) cites sources of *ain't* from as early as the 18th century, as a corruption of a contracted form of *~am not*, or *amn't* as it became, as well as *hain't* for *have not* and *has not*. From these origins current form and use of *ain't* evolved.

i . Polarity of *Ain't*

An attendant commentary article on the current OED website (Weiner 2013), on Middle and Early Modern English grammar, contains a section about multi-negative forms, giving cited examples like

Hee absented not himselfe in no place' (Philemon Holland, 1606. Underlining mine).

or, *He did not absent himself from any place (or He was present in every place)*. Multi-negative is a complication of polarity. Polarity is an aspect of language modality, or how meaning can be altered or adjusted, most commonly through changing the language form. Modality is an aspect of syntax that engages quite closely with semantics. From a pragmatics standpoint, modality features as a way for people to control language form in order to convey the stance they need or want. This is considered later in relation to rhetorical questions which are common in discourse incurring English and in which *ain't* often occurs.

Polarity basically is the alternatives of expressing affirmation of existence (eg. that something *is*) or negation, that something does not exist (eg. *is not*). Thus, there can be either affirmative (ie. any normal proposition frequently conveyed with a verb) polarity, or negative (ie. any proposition incurring *not* being the commonly recognized form though also use of *no* either as a quantifier or expressing non-existence of something). Affirmative and negative polarity can also be modulated, through use of modal verbs, adverb constructions or a combination of both (eg. *The egg was perhaps boiled*, or *The egg may not have been boiled*).

~isn't~, *~aren't~* and *~haven't* each carry negative polarity, and it is for these common, standard forms that *ain't* is substituted as a euphemism. *Ain't* is problematic because it becomes ambiguous – as surely as it carries a signifier of negative polarity (ie. *~n't*), its use frequently incurs affirmative polarity.

The following example demonstrates this:

You are not a hound dog!

can be expressed euphemistically as

You ain't a hound dog!

This is straight forward negative polarity without complication. Alternatively,

You are nothing but a hound dog! (or You are not anything but a hound dog!)

similarly contains negative polarity in use of *nothing* (ie. *no* –thing) though the simple proposition is modulated by use of *but* which conveys a nuance of exceptionality. Further though, the same proposition has been euphemistically rendered as

You ain't nothin' but a hound dog ...,

which is the title of an iconic American English-language popular song in the mid 20th-century sung by Elvis Presley. As such it is an easily identifiable part of cultural heritage of which the full nuance and meaning are accessible only through familiarity with English language use incurring *ain't*, divorced from polarity norms as it is.

In the OED article, Weiner (2013) notes that double and other multiple negative patterns were unremarkable, becoming non-standard much later than the early 17th century example he cites. Still, if double or multiple negatives are so unremarkable and non-standard, how and why has their use become so pervasive?

ii. *Ain't* Use

It is tempting to consider how easily a double negative lends itself etymologically to use of *ain't*. For instance, the title of a North American soul blues song from 1972 by Bill Withers contains a relevant vulgar pattern ('vulgar' meaning 'quite colloquial' or 'common usage', as opposed to 'rude'), and an additional similar lyric:

Ain't no sunshine when she's gone
It's not warm when she's away...
 ... *And this house just ain't no home ...* (Withers 1971)

These patterns modulate the verb 'to be', and would be an existential mood pattern with an elipted adverb *there* (*There is not any sunshine when...*) and a simple relative process (... *this house just is not a home*), both in negative polarity, if more conventional grammar form were used. Use of *ain't* like in this song is on purposeful display as an artefact of African-American language culture. Yet, it is in deliberate contrast to the prevailing white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture of the time – *ain't* bearing a kind of attractive, 'cool' vulgarity. Use of *ain't* in another, raunchier popular ballad's refrain articulates present tense perfect mood with another multiple negative, in Bachman Turner Overdrive's

Baby, you ain't seen nothing yet,
B-b-b-baby, you ain't seen nothing yet (Bachman 1974).

This could have been *Baby, you have not seen anything yet*. These two lyric texts are analysed in more detail later.

Elsewhere in America, a recent Yale University concord analysis (Yale Grammar Diversity Project) has found regional predominance of multiple negative patterns (including pervasive use of *ain't*) in eastern American states, especially in the Appalachian region (*ain't* is reported as especially prevalent), the mid-south around Alabama and inland Texas. *Ain't* is noted as occurring regionally around the United States in other grammatical functions. Yet *ain't* is not even listed in two Australasian English dictionaries I looked at, though that does not preclude actual absence of its usage in Australasia.

Weiner (2013) refers to provenance of *ain't* in Cockney of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The famous contemporary novelist Charles Dickens (who wrote of east and south London society) was then becoming overwhelmingly popular. Some of his characters' register could have in turn affected contemporary common English usage. This could make *ain't* an archaic form in zones of Cockney usage, as a more common current form reportedly is *innit*¹, which has a similar function to *ain't* but which better resembles *isn't it*. Still,

¹ For *innit*, oxforddictionaries.com says this: contraction British informal, Isn't it (often used in conversation when seeking confirmation or as a general filler): it's the easiest way, innit? we all want to get highly paid jobs, innit?

though *ain't* originated in England, these days it is more commonly identified with English in North America.

Exploring usage of *ain't* according to other, sociological variables, at the time of an earlier wave of feminism (1970s), pioneering gender-sociolinguist, Robin Lakoff (1975), generalized rightly or wrongly, that

... little boys are less apt than little girls to be scolded for saying “ain't” or at least they are scolded less severely, because “ain't” is more apt to remain in their vocabularies than in their sisters’ (p 55)

So, *ain't* figures as evidence of variation of English among socially definable classes of people. Similarly, later analysis of the British National Corpus by Rayson, Leech and Hodges (1997) found that across “occupationally-graded social class categories A-E [*categories used in these authors’ analysis which they divide between A-C and D-E*] are commonly used in market research and other social survey work”. Divided into upper and lower brackets, *ain't* featured high on the list of items used in the lower social bracket which was significantly different from items in the higher one. Rayson et al. (1997) are often cited for their reliable and exhaustive corpus sample, even if their criterial deconstruction is left wanting. In contrast, a study of the use of different hedging expressions by Ishikawa (2014 – not specifically *ain't* though) selected respondent samples from Great Britain, the Philippines and Japan to represent the Inner, Outer and Extending circles of Kachru’s (1985) convenient model of World Englishes. He then further segregated them by gender forming six groups. Needless to say substantial differences were found leading to a conclusion that significant differences in English usage exist, no matter the reliability of study findings. Ishikawa (2014 p 252) also accepts unquestioningly Lakoff’s unsubstantiated observation about a gendered pattern of use of *ain't*.

The point here is that researchers will presume different usage of English among different social groups though simultaneously talk of English presumably as a monolithic entity. Yet, as I type *ain't* even now, each time it is underlined red signifying an error, according to Microsoft Word version 8.1 Australian-English version. But what does my computer know about context?

In contrast, context of situation has been utilised for use of *ain't* for very strong semiotic and public purpose, as in this wartime poster (in Figure 1). It features a bust portrait of Hitler, who was a very demonized identity at the time, as in this image of artillery shells firing at his head. *Ain't* occurs in a rhetorical question, *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?*, affirming the correctness and maybe righteousness of to *shell out work to ... shell out this jerk*², Hitler. As propaganda in the home country, the poster seeks to convey its message as strongly as possible including ignoring conventions of proper English form (eg. *Is it not the truth?*) for the effect of tapping into vernacular culture, from a US wartime public institution to the American population surrounding that institution. Further, in as far as propaganda is a form of advertising, the express message in the poster, *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?*, becomes a slogan signifying a more complex, more implicit message similarly to *Oils ain't oils, Sol!* in the Australian Castrol Oil ad, or “Ain't *ain't* standard English” in the title of this paper.

² To ‘shell out’ here means to allocate or to give out; ‘to shell (this jerk)’ means either to close him up in a shell, or as the image suggests, to shoot him with big artillery bullets or ‘shells’.

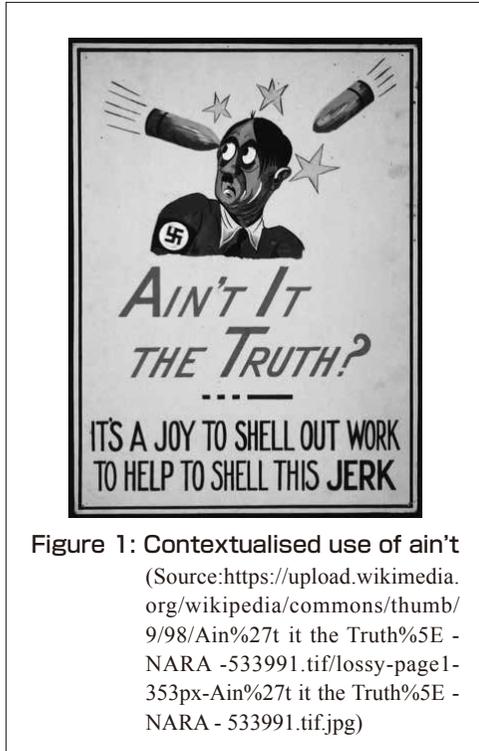


Figure 1: Contextualised use of ain't

(Source:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/98/Ain%27t_it_the_Truth%5E-NARA_-533991.tif/lossy-page1-353px-Ain%27t_it_the_Truth%5E-NARA_-533991.tif.jpg)

iii. *Ain't* in Rhetorical Questions

AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?, as rhetorical question, raises further discursive and syntactic issues. Rhetorical questions occur when somebody proposes something which seems quite obvious, either hypothetically, on a phenomenological basis or in context. Being labelled 'rhetorical' suggests something said as part of a larger chunk of discourse rather than just a simple question to stand on its own. As such rhetorical questions are frequently used for confirmation, for persuasion or for soliciting agreement and disagreement. Syntactically they frequently feature negative polarity: ie. use of *no*, *not* or *nor*.

Isn't it cold today?, or *It's cold today, isn't it?*, could be said by someone to another person there when it is snowing, to emphasise their assessment of condition in the environment as a proposition requiring the second person to agree or disagree. It is common for agreement to occur if, say, it is indeed cold – *Yes it*

is. An alternative form can be *Ain't it cold today?* or *It's cold today, ain't it?*. Appropriate answers of explicit agreement can include *Yes.*, *Yep.*, or *Yeah, it is.*, even and further expressions containing rhetorical use of negative polarity: *Yes, it is, isn't it?*, and also *Yeah, ain't it?* (or even *Ain't it the truth?!*). Or more emphatically, the contrastingly strong affirmative polarity in *Yes, you are right* (in data reported below one similar euphemistic response was *No shit, Sherlock!* expressing sarcastically explicit, strong affirmation– *No shit!* being a vulgar expression in this context meaning *Yes! Of course!*, despite its ironic negative polarity).

This is quite common to the extent that rhetorical questions and answers expressing agreement can be taken as adjacency pairs. Adjacency pairs are usually two sets of expressions which are bound by context and may occur together with such frequency as to seem normal. If someone answers a question like

It's cold today, isn't it?/ain't it?,

with disagreement on a snowy day, such as *No.*, *No, it isn't.*, or *No it isn't, is it?*, or *No, it ain't.*, the disagreement is unexpected to the extent of being unusual. Why? One reason is that in context, a common expression of agreement such as even a simple *Yes* would be anticipated. A further, more fundamental reason is because it would seem illogical to the person who is commenting on feeling freezing cold to hear another person disagree or deny that common environmental condition. In any case, polarity is the key syntactic (and modal) issue here.

One discursive peculiarity of rhetorical questions is that they presume consciousness of an interlocutor by the poser of the rhetorical question. In other words, it is like someone asking a question and needing somebody to

answer it, or there is no point and this rhetorical device would likely not be used. But it is used - a rhetorical question carries implication that another person would normally agree. This is another pragmatics point, Implicature, in the use of rhetorical questions in communication acts.

For people accustomed to the language behaviour of rhetorical questions, producing and taking in messages is not so problematic. However if people are not familiar with the nature of rhetorical questions, then maybe they cannot take in the nuance and meaning and may respond by disagreeing unintentionally. This hypothesis was explored in the small primary research study discussed later.

iv. *Ain't ain't* always Negative Polarity

As mentioned before, *ain't* carries negative polarity as it contains *n't* (*not*). Returning to three textual examples deconstructed before, *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?* is fairly straight forward with a single negative (*~n't*) conveying the proposition that *IT* is not true. The two song lyrics are more complex, containing double negatives:

- *Ain't no sunshine when she's gone ... And this house just ain't no home ...* are from a song that repeatedly includes *ain't* apparently purposefully. It seems to reflect tone and style of African-American vernacular in what is a generic Soul and Blues song seeming to reflect something of the culture in this way. In fact it is hard to imagine that a standard alternative, such as *There is not any sunshine when she is gone ... and this house just is not any home*, could reflect the same, with the separation of *is* and *not* becoming stressed and therefore emphatic and loud. Both the lines containing *sunshine* and *house* resound with images of loss and attendant life change. Maintaining this tone seems to require both lines to contain similar constructions of double negatives incorporating the verb to *be*. Though a double negative construction is systematically problematic for this communicative purpose (as explained next), in a sense the double negative polarity reinforces the literary tone imbued with negative feelings of grief and loss that pervade these lyrics.
- *Baby, you ain't seen nothing yet, B-b-b-baby, you ain't seen nothing yet* is even more complex. At first, *you ain't seen nothing yet* runs as *~n't ... nothing*, or *not nothing*. *Not nothing* implies 'something' (ie. that there is something), which is affirmative polarity. It is almost mathematical, in as far as negative bound by another negative produces a positive (eg. $-1 \times -1 = +1$). The next line proceeds with the same as before, reiterating the double negative in *You ain't seen nothing yet*, again for emphasis. However this textual item contains a syntactic clue as to how people come to produce it. It could be expressed in a more standard way as *You have seen nothing yet*, or the syntactically more complex *You haven't seen anything yet*. The latter version contains a standard pattern, *~not anything~*. In the sense that *nothing* is equivalent to *no-thing*, *not anything* is the same yet more common. *Any(thing)* frequently occurs as part of an expression carrying negative polarity, such as in the question, *Is there any (cake) left?* (anticipating *No, none left*), or *Is there anything more to do?* Equivalent expressions are *Is there some (cake) left?* (anticipating, *Yes there is some left*) or *Is there something left to do?* respectively. Yet both sets carry different contextual presumptions based on implicature signified by *some or any*:

- Saying ~*some (thing)* presumes something exists in a clearly simple, straight forward instance of affirmative polarity. In other words, the grammar is simpler
- use of *any*~ carries an expectation of nothing, and such a proposition in interrogative mood anticipates a negative answer, such as *No (there isn't)* – or *No (there ain't)*. The grammar is more complex. And cognitively it is more complex, containing the extra elements *not+any* beyond say the simpler structure with the affirmative polarity explained above. Grammatically simpler structures are possible: eg. *No, there is no cake*, or *No there is nothing to do*; or *No there is not cake*, or *No, there is nothing more to do*. None of these show standard grammatical error forms. However, they are fairly neutral in as far as they reflect presumed polarity. This means that people could say each of these if they are not picking up another person's expectation that there is something on one hand (affirmative), or not something (ie. not anything) on the other hand.

But if someone were not accustomed to this range of alternative forms, especially the double complexity occurring when *any* is used, it is not surprising that a kind of simplification or regularization occurs resulting in use of the construction, *ain't*. *Ain't* here begins to be used to express either affirmative or negative polarity. Back to the song lyric, *Baby, you ain't seen nothing yet*, which is uttered after something significant has occurred in the song³. That significant something is relegated in the lyric to the status of *nothing* – nothing compared to the expectation of what is to come. In deconstruction the syntax moulded onto the pragmatics becomes quite complex.

Could this be a reason why an expression like *ain't* comes into use, to defuse the need for complex standard language forms needed to convey a message heavily laden with subtexts? In context, *ain't* is obviously clear or it would not be used. Yet, if the preceding text analysis and discussion is anything to go by, *ain't* actually is not so simple. Clearly the meta-concepts would be hard to teach – I would not like to have to teach this on a daily basis and students might react quite negatively if they needed to learn rubrics like these. Even so, users of English can and do recognize and use *ain't*, very often. Those people obviously learn it, or learn about it. Still, *ain't* is left as an item that people have been told not to use and also have not been taught. This paper questions this status of *ain't*.

These three example texts show how *ain't* can be adapted by users for their own literary and rhetorical purposes. To this extent they are pragmatically more appropriate than more standard forms like *aren't* or *is not* which might not be chosen just because they are standard forms. In the same way, *ain't* lends itself readily to rhetorical questions which are part of pragmatically complex discourse heavy with implicature that does not allow utterances with *ain't* to stand alone. This is all how a user of *ain't* may conceive language to use. There is a flipside, how people take in language containing non-standard things like *ain't* in different texts, in different contexts.

³ The song as a ballad proceeds with the singer telling of falling in love with 'a devil woman' who showed him a good time, followed by "and she said "You ain't seen nothing yet ...""

v. *Ain't*: taking it in

Linguists so frequently focus on words and expressions at face value only. Consequently so do language teachers and from then on also their students. If there is a problem, teachers and students both have recourse to things like dictionaries which are produced by, well, linguists! I have so far attempted to present a philology and etymology of *ain't* and also a deconstruction of its usage in context from both rhetorical and pragmatics perspectives. It is easy to conclude that though not standard *ain't* has acquired normal usage. It is taking-in of *ain't* by reading or hearing it to which I wish to turn now. In real life a given person hearing a remark or expression with *ain't* (or any chunk of spoken language that comes across as complex, confusing or just incomprehensible), that person may have the option of checking meaning or asking for clarification: such as *What? (it) is or (it) isn't?*, or *Do you mean 'there are' or 'there aren't'?* Somebody reading a text containing *ain't* or something similar has recourse to checking other parts of the text for references or other contextual clues, not to mention grammar patterns in surrounding language. Even so, some language and rhetorical patterns are not necessarily clear to some people. I am thinking of language students of course. Now I wish to explore how different people take in *ain't*, and thereafter consider what awareness they need to facilitate this.

vi. *Ain't* is English, ain't it?

Whatever English is, it includes *ain't*. Deconstruction of usage of *ain't* shows how ostensibly wrong English becomes quite normal English in some contexts. It can be thought of as another kind of English. Are there other aspects in which Englishes *ain't* Englishes? Of course there are – there must be. A key variable is Context, probably the crucial one. A discourse analysis picture of context engenders Situation, an established Hymesian concept (Hymes 1964 cited by Brown & Yule 1983 pp 38, 41), including who is there, where, when and also what happened before and what people want. Then there are further interrelated pragmatics aspects (discussed below) that all effect and affect language form and rhetorical style. Also, pragmatics is not language-specific⁴ – there is too much other contextual stuff that people need to be aware of in communicative language use, even if they are experts in the language. Even so, if pragmatics affects language form in the first instance, language form choices affect pick-up of pragmatic cues in the first instance. Thus *ain't* can produce a peculiar pragmatics distinguishable from *is/are not*, *have not*, *am not*, *is/are not any*. For instance, in the propaganda text, *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH* is very euphemistic, local vernacular in mid-twentieth century North America: to have a mass audience identify with the message, this form links more than the more whining and probably less convincing rhetoric of *IS IT NOT THE TRUTH?*, which seems more appropriate if it were coming from the contemporary US President Roosevelt's more academically founded Brains Trust advisory group.

As has been demonstrated, *ain't* can be appropriate or inappropriate in different contexts, and the appropriateness of usage affects implicature, which duly affects face. An easy example is a discussion task in a book

⁴ '(Not) language-specific' here appears ambiguous: meaning, say, the pragmatics in a communication event can run in quite similar ways if people use English, another language or a mix, provided there communication breakdown doesn't occur; as well, pragmatic conditions for use of say, English, or another language, like Indonesian or Wolof – if pragmatics conditions vary, this occurs more due to different attitudes, assumptions and dispositions embedded in cultures which communication events occur or cultures from which participants in the events have come.

about American English (Amberg & Vause 2009 p 82 Task 5.1), asking readers/students to investigate the proposition, "*Ain't* is not a word". The issues of correct form or appropriateness assume priority, ahead of source of the expression, frequency in texts, syntactic function as opposed to semantic function. Yet it is these issues in American English to which these authors wish to sensitise readers. Of course though, in response to the discussion question, *ain't* is often found listed with other words in authoritative dictionaries; yet more importantly, what does "word" mean in the context of this task in any case?

All of this means that *ain't* attracts different pragmatics and therefore different understandings in different contexts. This form might sometimes be standard but more often is not. And, if a user of English does not use standard forms, the user can be interpreted differently to how they prefer or intended to be understood. The issue then is not whether people need to know about *ain't*, and not even whether to use it. Rather knowing English incurs instead knowing what and when to use different forms including, I suppose, *ain't*. In this sense, *ain't* is just one item among many many, which a person can know about and then can use, and an item which people do use at different times anyway.

To know English therefore, would require knowing other English forms and probably quite a lot of them. Or all? No – fortunately common sense summed up in advice from the OED prefaces says

Lexicographers ... must include all the 'common words' of literature and conversation, and such of the scientific, technical, slang, dialectical and foreign words as are passing into common use and approach the position or standing as 'common words' well knowing that the line which they draw will not satisfy all their critics. For the domain of common words widens out in the direction of one's own reading, research, business, provincial or foreign residence, and contracts in the direction with which one has no practical connection: no one's English is *all* English. (OED1989 Vol 1 p xxv)

The last bit is the kicker. In the diagram (Figure 2), by the way, 'Literary' does not mean 'Literature'. It merely includes Literature. Literary rather includes also texts in common media – in the late 20th century that included magazines, newspapers and things published in print media. Nowadays (early 21st century) that includes online media. Then also there is the new need to distinguish between colloquial texts and media on one hand and purely colloquial and interactional on the other. Yet, the interesting and relevant point is all English across all its different semantic and syntactic fields cannot be known by all people. This point is salient, in as far as arguably there are different Englishes also for different fields (eg. vocational and cultural registers) as much as there are different Englishes across the world. The OED may compile them all, but a person cannot know nor use them all.

vii. *Ain't* ain't so Semantic

Where does all this place *ain't*? *Ain't* is not necessarily specific to one 'English' or another. However, as its use is not institutionally supported, it is less likely to be taught or become explicit enough to be picked up by people coming into English from the outside as second or foreign language learners. At least it makes it into the OED though. Further, a limitation of the advice from the OED is that listing and explaining English items, including auxiliary syntactic items like *ain't*, is lexicographer's work. They focus on words. Even though

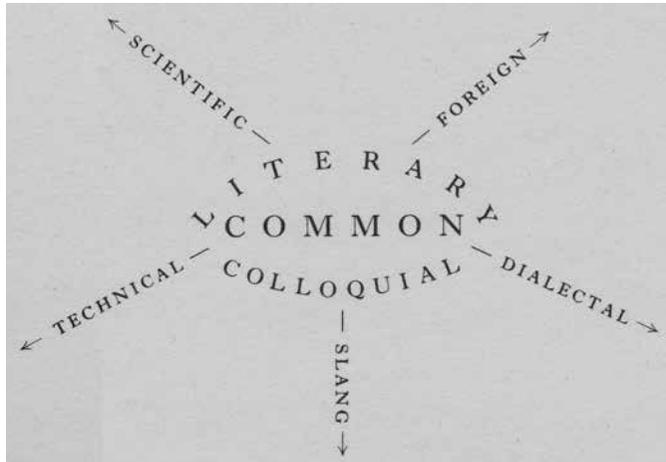


Figure 2: The Extent of English. The OED also points out that “It is not possible to fix a point at which the ‘English language’ stops, along any of the divergent lines”. (Source: OED Vol 1 p xxiv)

many other dictionaries do the same, the OED is different in as far as it cites textual usages from current and past texts to support its meaning explanations. I cited the OED’s explanations of *ain’t* before, linking it back to the 18th and 19th centuries. *Ain’t* however is semantically weak: as it is, it does not convey distinct meaning like a concept or something tangible (unlike nouns which usually lie in a particular context or induce understanding from their surrounding text). *Ain’t* – whatever it is – is referred to as a verb by the *OED*, or part of a verb pattern, and is syntactically stronger in function than semantically. In fact *ain’t* needs semantically stronger items to go with in order to be meaningful.

This should mean that with *ain’t*, we need to consider the grammar. But we have done that - it is problematic with its contrasting polarity modality and sporadic ambiguity about the auxiliary verbs it replaces. It is time to consider pragmatics in order to find a satisfactory way to deal with *ain’t*. As in the case with rhetorical questions analysed above, context of situation is always significant. Or is it really not so simple?

viii. Pragmatics as a Way to Deal with *Ain’t*

Context of situation as a perspective is part of the wider Pragmatics. Pragmatics, as a big part of interpretation, is not new. Brown & Yule (1983 p 26) cite Morris (1938) making this comment half a century before them. They in turn place pragmatics as a significant part of discourse analysis, which incidentally is what everyone does automatically whenever they read or hear some text or utterance. Like most linguists, Brown & Yule tend to dwell in the spoken language, listing “reference, presupposition, implicature and inference” (p 27) invoking social aspects of language more than syntactic. This engages with ideas of Gricean pragmatics - that natural language cues carry lots of extra significance that needs to be accounted for, but which cannot be done through traditional grammatical analysis (Grice 1975). This almost lends itself to understanding use of an item like *ain’t* as alluded to earlier. Several similar lists of canonical pragmatics topics by key commentators and researchers in pragmatics literature are cited by Ariel (2010 p 95) though they also draw in

speech acts and other aspects of conversation analysis. A euphemism like *ain't* also occurs in written texts as seen earlier, but its use rather seems to keep the integrity of spoken usage after lifting it into a written mode (eg. the *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?* sign).

Ariel goes further in a critical examination of language analysis dichotomization - "Grammar as Code, Pragmatics as Inference" (2010 p 97) - to say that actually,

If the extralinguistic factor is tied to a specific linguistic entity in a rule-governed manner, grammar is involved (Ariel 2010 p 101)

This also lends itself to an item like *ain't* as I have tried to demonstrate: *ain't* does adhere to certain rules, though sometimes more than one (contradictory) rule at a given time. This can explain *ain't*'s occasional apparent ambiguity. It is not as if *ain't* is not a good fit, or its use is by people who do not follow nor even know the right grammar rules anyway. Still, *ain't* IS used, often. As much as any other language item that is used, a frequent-use item like *ain't* incurs grammar, even if it is not the traditional one. On this point, it is tempting and worthwhile to go down the path of systemic functional grammar (SFG) which splits understanding of language into spoken and written modes. But space limits discussion to this crucial observation by SFG grammarian Michael Halliday (1985 p 96):

It is only after language is written down that it becomes an object accessible to conscious attention and systematic study; so grammar begins with writing, and it codifies written language. The so-called 'traditional grammar' that came into the 'grammar schools' was a theory of written language

Does that mean that, if *ain't* is essentially a spoken euphemism, it belongs in the pragmatics domain so pragmatics rubrics apply and traditional grammar does not? Of course that *ain't* true! Instead, *ain't* typifies how pragmatics factors take on extra immediacy in spoken discourse. People utilize these factors in order to modulate language form and syntax (ie. including use of grammatical standard forms) into forms more appropriate for conveying what they want to say in context. This produces a simple scale: *if people know and are accustomed to using a repertoire of grammar they probably will; on the other hand, if people don't know or are not accustomed, then they probably won't.*

In this sense, using *ain't* should not be considered wrong – it certainly should not be considered wrong due to not following orthodox English grammar form. Rather, it is used – a lot – and as such can be considered to be just extra English language repertoire.

Exploring People Dealing with *Ain't*: a simple exploratory study

Short of carrying a conversational context with me and observing simultaneously and introspectively how different people would respond to questions, it was decided to provide contexts and to have people introspectively respond to embedded contextual cues in texts. This was in spite of the detached perspective of hypothetical situations. This was done through the medium of a questionnaire, entitled 'Questionnaire about Questions' (shown below), which was considered a vague though relevant self-explanatory title in order to mask its aim. The aim of course was to provide a task in which respondents could be observed.

Questionnaire about Questions

This is about how people answer questions. Please help by telling what answer you would say.

Imagine these situations and tell what you would say. You can say whatever you like, but please agree or disagree – and say Yes or No in your answers please

(eg. You lost your purse. You go back to a shop where you just bought something. You ask the cashier, who has a purse there on the counter. He says, *This is it?* You say Yes, that's mine.)

1. You are doing online shopping. Your friend is with you. You find something nice to buy but it is not cheap. You check how much money you have in the bank online. The computer says that you have very little money. Your friend says, *You haven't got any money, have you?*

What do you say?

2. It is raining outside the window at work. You are watching TV at lunchtime. The man tells the weather, saying that it is raining. Your colleague says, *Ain't it the truth?*

What do you say?

3. Your friend is sad. He tells you that his wife has gone away. He says, *There ain't no sunshine when she's gone, ain't there?*

What do you say?

4. You were watching your sister's volleyball game. Her team won the second last game and goes into the championship final. You tell her *Congratulations!* Your sister says, *You ain't seen nothing yet!*

What do you say?

5. You are at a bus stop. Other people are there. Today is cold and it is snowing. Somebody standing next you says, *It is cold, isn't it?*

What do you say?

Extra Questions.

Where are you doing this questionnaire (ie. place/city/country) ?

What language or languages did you grow up with?

What languages have you learned?

What language or languages do you use these days?

How is your English: Zero A little OK Not bad Good Quite good No problem! ?

What age group are you: 0-10, 10-15, 16-22, 23-30, 31-45, 46-60, over 60 ?

Five scenarios were constructed for subjects to take roles as interlocutor-participants in scenarios with an explicated context. Some action or development has taken place, and another participant comments as rhetorical questions or similar remark on that action or development. Three of these items incorporated *ain't* as used in the three text-segments analysed above. Two other rhetorical question items were included: one simple and one more complex in a more standard form without *ain't*. Subjects were asked in the questionnaire how they would respond to someone there posing a rhetorical question or similar emphatic remark.

All questionnaires were distributed to bi- and multilingual subjects at my own Kochi University, except for four which were distributed through proxies at a technical college in Kyushu in Japan and two sent overseas online. Eighteen were done in person or interactively online in the presence of the researcher, who afterwards provided explanatory feedback about each item to respondents. As this was planned as an exploratory study, there was conscious effort to find as wide a variety of users of English as possible - by their early formative home language culture and also current situation regarding English - rather than random sampling or observing special control and experiment groups.

It was hypothesized that previous and current language culture background (including linguistic and pragmatics behaviour) would affect how subjects took in and responded to rhetorical question forms, specifically those incurring *ain't*.

At no time was anything personal or confidential entered into data collection. Some profiling was done regarding respondents' language cultures when growing up, the present, self-assessment of English level and age group.

i . Results

<i>Languages respondents grew up with</i>	
<i>Multilingual</i> (ie. 2 or more)	4
<i>Monolingual:</i>	
Japanese	8
Indonesian	3
Chinese	2
Javanese	1
German	1
English	1
Bulgarian	1
Mongolian	1
Total	22

Table 1: Languages which Respondents Report Growing up with.

Of 24 questionnaires distributed, 22 were returned usable. The sample size of 22 could scarcely be generalizable, however it was an attempt to explore ethnographically how various subjects might respond if the investigation showed promise for moving forward. Actually attention was paid deliberately to selecting a wider variety than any attempt at random distribution or a controlling variables within a particular population, which could be undertaken in subsequent studies. The only variables controlled explicitly were adults as opposed to children, and bi / multi-linguals as opposed to monolinguals.

Respondents included people who self-assessed their English levels from 'A little' (1) to 'No problem!' (2) with a cluster rating themselves as 'Not bad' (5) and 'Good' (8). All of them were studying or working in a university context currently or recently. Rather than use ethnicity- or geography-based labels to denote language backgrounds, respondents were asked what languages they had grown up with: four noted growing up with more than one language (Wolof

– in the Senegal region in West Africa - and French; Japanese, Swedish and Russian; Indonesian and Chinese; and English, Hindi and other Indian languages). For convenience, these are referred to as L1 Multilinguals. The rest appeared to have had monolingual younger lives (L1 Monolinguals), which are shown in Table 1. The rest of data commentary focusses on this L1 monolingual sub-group of 18 respondents.

In data collected, generally subjects responded to the five questions registering explicit agreement using ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ (or euphemistic variants, eg. *Yep!*, *Sure*, ...) in their answers, especially for Questions 1 and 5. Questions 2, 3 and 4 specifically incorporated *ain’t*. At least 50% of responses to these questions were not explicit, either implying agreement, were non-committal or moved conversation towards a new theme. L1 multilinguals tended towards this behaviour more than L1 monolinguals, but the difference is not significant due to the minute sample. In any case subjects’ opting not to respond by explicating ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ agreement actually had been overlooked as a potential outcome.

Yet, the same point did produce a set of discernible patterns among data provided by L1 monolinguals: firstly, overall most could agree with the propositions in each question. This outcome ran counter to the hypothesis that people not brought up with English would show confusion or error when faced with a rhetorical question. Indeed Question 5 (*It is cold, isn’t it?* ie. Agreement would incur ‘Yes’) produced 17 out of 18 responses of explicit agreement incurring ‘Yes’ or a variation.

However, Question 1 was more complex with two items affecting polarity (*You haven’t got any money, have you?* ie. Agreement would incur *No*) plus the inverted polarity in the tag question *~have you?*. Four out of eight who grew up with Japanese, two out of three with European languages and one with Chinese as their early L1 responded with explicit agreement. However all respondents growing up with a language from the Indonesian zone and two with Japanese explicitly disagreed using *Yes*. The other five respondents seem simply to have avoided the register of the question. These data is presented in Table 2.

ii. Results Regarding *Ain’t*

This survey originally was constructed to examine how different English users dealt with *ain’t*, and Questions 2, 3 and 4 were included specifically for this purpose. Results are inconclusive mainly because of the small non-random sample. But one pattern is discernible: that use of *ain’t* incurring simpler syntax, as in Question 2, had more successful responses than if more complex syntax is incurred (as in Questions 3 & 4). This pattern coincides with the general pattern for rhetorical questions which is examined in the next section in connection with data shown in Table 2.

One other outcome had not been considered before: that respondents themselves would not use *ain’t*. No respondent did so, even five who assessed their own English as ‘Quite Good’ or ‘No Problem!’ Why not use *ain’t*? It is tempting to conclude that respondents may not have understood how to, or perhaps were not accustomed to it as per the simple language repertoire scale deduced and stated above. However, on closer speculation over response texts, using *ain’t* may not have been appropriate to respondents’ meaning or just was not required.

Thus, a summary outcome regarding *ain't* is logically that people seem to be able to cope with it, albeit more so if the syntax is less complex, more so if they can grasp the context of situation, reference and other pragmatic cues. This issue is elaborated more below.

iii. Results: Rhetorical Questions and Remarks Generally

The telling pattern is that the simpler proposition in Question 5 (about the cold) scored almost total explicit agreement (17 out of 18) in contrast to Question 1 about money (7), which contained more complex though standard language forms and expression of polarity. Results for Questions 2, 3 and 4 featuring *ain't* also follow this trend of response success declining with increasing language complexity. Indeed Number 4 is not even interrogative mood though its apparent euphoric emphasis of tone (after winning at volleyball) correlates with the emphatic suggestions in the rhetorical questions in Questions 2 and 3.

Questions	Response polarity anticipated in context	Agree explicitly (ie. uttering 'Yes'/'No')	Disagree explicitly (ie. uttering 'Yes'/'No')	Other responses (including no response)
1 <i>You haven't got any money, have you?</i>	Negative (No)	Jpnese-4; Chinese-1 European lang.-2 (Total 7)	Jpnese-2; Indonesn (zone)-4 (Total 6)	Jpnese-2; Monglian-1 Chinese-1; Eurpean lang.-1 (Total 5)
2 <i>Ain't it the truth?</i>	Affirmative (Yes)	Jpnese-5; Indonesn Zone-3; European lang-1 (Total 9)	0	Jpnese-3; European lang.-2; Chinese-2; Indonesn zone-1; Mongolian-1(Total 9)
3 <i>There ain't no sunshine when she's gone, ain't there?</i>	Negative (No)	Jpnese-2; Indonsn zone-2; European lang-1 (Total 5)	Indonesn zone-2; Jpnese-1; Chinese-1 (Total 4)	Jpnese-5; European lang-2; Chinese-1; Monglian-1 (Total 9)
4 <i>You ain't seen nothing yet!</i>	Negative (No)	Jpnese-1; Chinese-1 (Total 2)	Jpnese-2; Indonesn zone-1 (Total 3)	Jpnese-5; European lang-3; Indonesn zone-3; Chinese-1; Mongolian-1 (Total 13)
5 <i>It is cold, isn't it?</i>	Affirmative (Yes)	Jpnese-8; Indonesn zone-4; Chinese-2; European lang-2;; Mongolian-1 (Total 17)	0	Euprean lang.-1 (Total 1)

Table 2: Totals of L1 monolinguals' responses by Explicit Agreement/Disagreement utterances

There are no conclusive data pertaining to significance of the languages which respondents grew up with, for instance pertaining to language distance from English. As well, the 4 multilingual L1 respondents showed no clear pattern, except that when they used 'Yes' or 'No' they were was only one occasion where there was disagreement (Indonesian and traditional Chinese languages) for Question 1. Another L1 multilingual with Wolof and French responded to each question in explicit agreement, which is similar to two of the three European L1 monolingual respondents.

But the small number of respondents limits these results just to being interesting if tantalizing points to explore further in the future. However, if growing up with more than one language makes people more sensitive to or appreciative of different rhetorical styles, this is also worth further exploration. Suresh Canagarajah (2013) discusses this phenomenon in terms of translingual practice:

Translingual practice applies more to the strategies of engaging with diverse codes, with the awareness that the shape of the final textual products might vary according to the contextual expectations. While translingual practice might find expression in codemeshing for multilinguals in certain contexts, in others it might find representation in a text that approximates and reconfigures “standard English”. (p 8)

This does not mean, say, that *ain't* must be part of some kind of standard lingua franca English. It most definitely does mean that, say, rhetorical questions, and even an expression like the English euphemistic *ain't*, can become like a standard expression or standard style in some circumstances though not in others. The point is to be able to recognize it and be able to deal with it. Having to deal with the different styles and different ways of meaning in different language codes often simultaneously and over a long formative period of time naturally reinforces aptitude for this. All the respondents were adults ostensibly beyond their formative periods in childhood and youth. Further, the data from the L1 multilinguals suggest their better aptitude than overall results from the L1 monolinguals.

It is possible to speculate that the L1 multilinguals might have grown up in translingual situations. For instance, Canagarajah often uses examples of codemeshing in South Asia where different local languages and English are often used together in the same language event. In the present study, one respondent originally from Mumbai has described this feature in his school and home life. It is easy then to speculate that having grown up in translingual situations gives people like these L1 multilinguals more aptitude for dealing with ambiguous or vague discourse, things like rhetorical questions or constructions using *ain't*, than people who grow up with only one language. This is like the dated idea of native speakers of a language being masters of the language while non-native speakers cannot really master it. Instead now in a sense there are people who are native translinguals and people who are not. This is contentious speculation and certainly needs to be explored further.

iv. Results: Dealing with *Ain't* in a Pragmatic Way

Besides patterns in the response statistics, other behaviour of pragmatic-significance was observed in subjects' actual response texts. One significant observation was consistent disagreement by three Indonesian L1 monolingual's who repeatedly disagreed explicitly but elaborated their responses by affirming implicit agreement and empathy with original propositions:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>You haven't got any money, have you?</i> | Yes, I don't have much money to shopping |
| 1. “ | Yes, can you lend me some? |
| 3. <i>There ain't no sunshine when she's gone, ain't there?</i> | Yes it is, your wife is a beautiful person |
| 4. <i>You ain't seen nothing yet!</i> | Yes, keep fighting. |

This evidence suggests that interlocutors can be properly and appropriately synched into discourse in the context of situation and can express what they want to say in language that follows no set standard.

Further analysis presented frequently interesting evidence in actual subjects' individual response texts (which were linguistically as well as pragmatically significant), such as in the pragmatics of non-committal responses and responses leading away from the original propositions. Evidence from a bigger sample would be worth proper deconstruction to reveal patterns in pragmatics, language and the interplay between them, as suggested by Ariel (2010).

Discussion

At the outset of discussion the gaping absence of generalizability in this exploratory study needs to be reiterated. Yet, even findings from the small sample data analysed here suggest that different users can cope with the language in rhetorical questions including those incurring *ain't*. However, language errors can affect meaning then causing possible mistaken take-up of pragmatics cues. Yet, if people are sensitive or synched in to the context or are otherwise contextually aware, there is the likelihood that respondents cope by avoiding dealing directly with the rhetorical-question forms altogether. This only very tenuously follows the original straight forward hypothesis - that people who have not grown up with English might become confused with rhetorical questions and also with potential ambiguity in use of *ain't*.

Rather there appears a more fundamental principle: that people engage with propositions put to them to the extent that they can engage with the language in the context of situation. Beyond that they may avoid the overly complex required language though continuing to engage with the context to the extent that they can. This latter, more distant level of engagement depends on how able they are to respond implicitly or even to take a lead in moving the theme of conversation away. It is like saying that pragmatic, strategic or general communicative competence supersedes grammatical or other linguistic form-focused competence.

So far, just from this short review of *ain't*, and small-scale exploratory survey, the picture emerges of particular and appropriate language register and styles for some people, distinguishable though still appropriate register and style for others. There is another aspect, evident in the three text examples of song lyrics and a slogan: *You ain't seen nothing yet*, *Ain't no sunshine ...*, and *AIN'T IT THE TRUTH?*. These items can be taken as stand-alone expressions in other contexts. In other words, maybe *ain't* should never be considered on its own. Maybe no specific language item should be considered without a context?

In any case the orthodox view concerning *ain't* remains identified with less educated, younger or lower class people though this feature these days is alluring to other social groups.

Conclusion: Learning about *Ain't*

Though focussing a lot on rhetorical questions, this paper actually is about *ain't*. It is just that *ain't* so frequently occurs in rhetorical questions that contextual use of *ain't* becomes an essential relevant issue in the

discussion. The ulterior purpose has been to realise just what to do with *ain't* regarding its status and place in English that people use and what learners learn.

This paper has discussed *ain't* as a non-standard English euphemistic expression from various philological, discursive, syntactic and pragmatic perspectives. In part this has been a case study of how to deal with dialectic and other non-standard expressions that occur frequently but are not institutionally recognized as proper or appropriate.

Features of *ain't* include:

- Philology from early modern British English *ain't* was transplanted to North America where it became a widely used spoken euphemism. As a spoken-style euphemism it has been easily picked up in literary texts especially in electronic and online media reaching a wide range of people who use English regularly, especially in English-language home cultures. *Ain't* is normally classed as a non-standard and even incorrect form by lexicographers and linguists, and can carry this integrity when used in context, such as for conveying irony
- Semantically weak though syntactically strong, *ain't* carries grammatical function as a number of verb auxiliaries, especially to be (*am/is/are not*), and *have/has* (past participle).
- Syntactically, *ain't* carries negative polarity. However, as a blend of syntactic functions (ie. modal verbs to *be* and *have*), it can be used in different mood patterns, including interrogative for questions, including rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are a common rhetorical device for people from English home-cultures, and are used for making comments or other declarative statements with the purpose of soliciting consensus or coercing agreement. *Ain't* has frequent irregular use which can produce double negative polarity, for which contextual cues are the key to accurate understanding.
- Pragmatically significant, *ain't* carries non-standard or informal integrity, which if used is significant for implicature. However this works only if the user, or reader/hearer is familiar with the status of *ain't* in the immediate English-language culture.

To sum up, there is a lot of baggage carried by *ain't*. Lots of the above cannot be learned explicitly such as by being taught; lots can best be acquired through experience, becoming accustomed and acculturated. There is a lot to pick up and learn, likely too much for what time learners and teachers have available. Too much for just one item, *ain't*, and probably too much for any other single item too.

An aspect of *ain't* examined in this paper is how it is used. Usage patterns of *ain't* of course draw in features associated with it – for instance rhetorical questions drew in interrogative mood, polarity, pragmatic implicature and characteristic English-language rhetorical devices. Alternatively, incidences of *ain't* in texts were analysed, though they also were selectively narrow. A similar approach is available, however, through concordance. Concordance is having a textual corpus (ie. national corpora, literary texts like the works of Shakespeare or Stephen King and so on) and potentially identifying each individual usage of a given item through the whole text. Reference was made earlier to a concordance study of the incidence of *ain't* in the United States (Yale Grammar Diversity Project). Relevant concordance analyses are available. A segment from a Canadian example of *ain't* concordance of is shown below:

012. red two we might of got them, but er, ordering ten is a lot AIN'T it? Mm, you as soon as he can, eh got MOT next month Y
013. h that, you know, seventy five percent! Well it's got to be AIN'T it? The office procedures, she said, is simple anyway,
014. e'll say our Bev's, our Bev's been, you know, and the money AIN'T run in or his pit pension ain't gone in you know and t
015. ew weeks well Yeah she's having seven weeks Oh yeah is she? AIN'T she? And then David's coming over and having three wee
016. r to school last week, anyway I think it were last Thursday AIN'T she? Mm Thursday aye er, she come home and I said to h
017. t, and my get it on i n't it? It's gorgeous that But er, he AIN'T spent his yet, I've spent mine, I've spent mine. Go on
018. an that and that it only wants wiping over, you know. No we AIN'T spent much on bedroom have we? No Not if you want to b
019. were someone's decided to finish, what's gone off? Well you AIN'T that. I told him you were poorly. Said she's poorly.

Figure 3: Example of Concordance of ain't (Source: <http://www.lex tutor.ca/>)

Concordance is not new. Software programs are available, and it has wide application including discourse analysis and pedagogy. The main limitation is again focus on a particular item and its form, again within a limited part of a whole text.

It could be argued that more holistic approaches are better. Concordance is a step towards this but focusing on single items or types of expressions is still limiting learning to just these forms. A more discursive approach would consider language and communicative functions. An example is *ain't*, and alternatives to *ain't*, to convey a given meaning for a communicative purpose or within a given context. Or further: using texts incurring types or styles of language of which *ain't* is just one item. Texts are able not only to be examined, but also of course can be produced by learners and others.

A final aspect of how to deal with *ain't*, is don't! This means treating language and texts on a needs basis: letting learners learn what they want to or need to. Or, if *ain't* (or any other item) occurs, then the user or learner needs to deal with that. For instance dealing with *ain't* is more urgent in North America than in Australasia where it seems to occur far less often. Pragmatics sense and awareness help but so does paying some attention to some aspect of the language form (or all of it). This view finds that focus solely on given expressions, specific language forms and even particular communicative functions to be suffocating and naïve. There is so much else in the mix that users and learners of the language need to deal with.

This final aspect enables users and learners to deal with items like *ain't* that are ignored, discouraged or shunned in orthodox specific-language programs. After all, language is just one mode of communication. Beneath even that coda is another, that specific standard language forms are not the only language that people use and certainly not the only thing that they need to know from one language-use context to another.

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