

Understanding Linguistic Patterns: *Uninflected be in African American English*

Examining the data: Read each pair of sentences in list A, and decide which sentence in each pair sounds better. For example, in the first sentence pair, does it sound better to say, “They usually be tired when they come home” or “They be tired right now”?

For each pair of sentences, select the sentence that sounds better with the *be*.

LIST A

They usually be tired when they come home.
They be tired right now.

When we play basketball, she be on my team.
The girl in the picture be my sister.

James be coming to school right now.
James always be coming to school.

My ankle be broken from the fall.
Sometimes my ears be itching.

Once we have gone over the answers, examine the data for a pattern. Describe it below:

Applying the rule: Now that you understand when African American English speakers use *be*, use your rule to predict whether or not a speaker of African American English would use the sentences in list B. Select *Yes* if the sentence follows the dialect pattern, or *No* if it does not.

LIST B

1. The students always *be* talking in class.
 2. The students *don't be* talking right now.
 3. Sometimes the teacher *be* early for class.
 4. At the moment the teacher *be* in the lounge
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Understanding Linguistic Patterns: *Plural –s absence on nouns*

In English, we form a regular plural by adding an -s sound to nouns, so that we say *one dog* but *two dogs* or *a cat* but *two cats*. In Outer Banks English, there is a set of words that do not require an –s sound to make them plural. You can uncover the pattern that determines when a word needs an –s to make it plural and when it does not. List A gives sentences that have nouns that require the addition of the –s to nouns to be plural. List B contains nouns that do not need the plural -s.

LIST A: *Nouns that require -s to be plural*

1. We caught two hundred **cats**.
2. How many **dogs** does he have?
3. There are two **bucks** sitting in the backyard.
4. They have lots of **ponies** down below.
5. They have three **sisters**.
6. It's about six **teachers**.

LIST B: *Nouns that do not require -s to be plural*

1. We caught two hundred pound_ of flounder.
2. How many bushel_ does he have?
3. There are two pint_ sitting in the backyard.
4. There are lots of gallon_ of water.
5. They have three acre_ for building.
6. It's about six mile_ up the road.

Rule 1

Examine the lists to determine what properties the nouns in LIST B share. How are the nouns in LIST A different?

Write a rule that explains the first part of this dialect pattern.

LIST C has the same nouns that were in LIST B, but they are given in sentences that require the plural -s. Compare these sentences to those in LIST B.

LIST C: *Sentences with nouns that require -s to be plural.*

1. We had **pounds** of flounder that spoiled.
2. Sometimes people use **bushels** instead of **pounds**.
3. The **pints** of ice cream are in the freezer.
4. We had **gallons** of water in the skiff.
5. The best **acres** are owned by the government.
6. The beautiful beach goes for **miles**.

Rule 2

What is different about the use of the weight/measure nouns in LIST B versus LIST C?

What would these sentences be like without the plural –s? Would they be confusing? Are the sentences in list B confusing?

Write a rule that explains this part of the dialect pattern.

Use your two rules to predict which of the nouns in LIST D may or may not have the –s. If you have stated the rule for plural -s correctly, you should be able to do this without guessing. Select *Yes* if the –s can be dropped or *No* if it cannot be dropped.

LIST D: *Predicting plural -s absence*

1. She had three pound_ of fish left.
2. She had pound_ of fish left.
3. It's forty inch_ to the top.
4. It's inch_ to the top.
5. There are rat_ in the yard.
6. There are six rat_ in the yard.