

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale of the Study

A dialect is a variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary, especially a variety of speech differing from the standard literary language or speech pattern of the culture in which it exists. It is used by people who live in different geographical areas and social groups. A dialect is a complete system of verbal communication with its own vocabulary and grammar (Wikipedia encyclopedia, 2005. Online, The American heritage dictionary of the English language, fourth edition, 2000. Online, Fromkin & Rodman, 1998)

Many people have different mastery types of English so they speak different dialects of English. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) that is spoken by African Americans is one of regional dialects of the United States (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998). AAVE is discussed more extensively than other American dialects because it provides an informative illustration of the regularities of a dialect of a standard language and the systematic differences from the American Standard English language. Besides AAVE, this linguistic variety is also commonly referred to as Black English (BE), Black Vernacular or Black English Vernacular (BEV), Inner City English (ICE), and Ebonics. It has its own grammar and syntax. It is a type of Southern American English lect (dialect, ethnolect and sociolect) of American English. With pronunciation that in some respects is common to that of southern U.S. English, the dialect is spoken by many blacks in the United States. AAVE shares many characteristics with various Creole English dialects spoken by blacks in much of the world. AAVE also has grammatical origins, and pronunciation characteristics in common with various West African languages. These people have their own living styles and one of them is hip hop culture. Hip hop is a cultural movement that began among urban African Americans and Latinos in the Bronx New York City in the early 1970s, and has since spread around the world. Hip hop songs always contain AAVE grammatical features and slang words.

Because of the unique style and culture, people, especially teenagers including those in Thailand, admit hip hop or rap music easily.

The fact is the music industry has grown up rapidly during the early years. Radio sets around the world hourly testify to the dominance of English in the popular music scene today. Many people make their first contact with English in this way (Light, 1995). Interestingly, AAVE songs appear to be more popular than other dialects or languages in the U.S. and the lyrics of Black English songs spread around the world (Biagi, 1994). Besides, music channels such as MTV and Channel V also involve in spreading of hip-hop songs, as Light (1995, p. 93) mentions that hip hop is black America's CNN which is the name of the most popular news TV channel. The sound of the English language, through popular hip hop songs, is heard almost everywhere. Thus, many students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who listen and learn English from popular songs experience many English dialects, one of which is African American Vernacular English. It might be said that hip hop songs can encourage Thai EFL learners to understand that there is another English dialect which becomes more important in the world of communication.

#### **Statement of the problem**

Many teachers of English have long recognized that songs and music work well in language classes and they are so immediately motivating to most students (Murphy, 1992). Songs are so readily available to the teacher as an authentic text (Schoepp, 2000, p. 4) and Krashen (1992) also states that authentic texts are so valuable for language acquisition. We use English as a tool of worldwide communication but it is important to know that English consisted of many dialects included AAVE. A number of articles (e.g. Medina, 2002, Beliaevsky, 2001, Diamond & Minicz, 1994) tell us how to use songs and give explanations for why songs might be good pedagogical tools, but few studies have been conducted on the reasons why hip hop songs might be suitable for teaching and learning, and whether the particular linguistic features and slang words in the songs are understood by the students.

### **Significance of the Study**

As university students of EFL tend to enjoy listening to hip hop songs, it is very interesting to see to what extent they can understand AAVE features and slang words commonly found in the songs. In addition, a survey of students' attitudes toward hip hop songs and EFL learning should help an EFL teacher to determine whether to introduce a variety of English like AAVE to their students and include it as part and parcel of the classroom materials. This study intended to determine student's knowledge of AAVE patterns in popular hip hop lyrics. Therefore, this study will be of great benefit to teachers, students and hip hop music lovers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purposes of this study are: (1) to explore students' attitudes toward hip hop songs, and (2) to determine students' knowledge of AAVE features in popular hip hop lyrics on the Billboard Chart. AAVE features in the study consisted of AAVE slang and grammatical features. Consequently, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the views held by students at Naresuan University towards the appreciation of hip hop songs?
2. To what extent can students at Naresuan University identify AAVE slang words in popular hip hop songs?
3. To what extent can students at Naresuan University identify AAVE grammatical features in popular hip hop songs?
4. Is there any significant difference between the AAVE knowledge of freshmen (the first year students) and that of juniors (the third year students)?

### **Limitation of the study**

This study is restricted to investigate the knowledge of an English dialect of students at Naresuan University. The study is based on the following conditions:

1. The target population is English-major students in the first and the third year of study at Naresuan University.

2. The hip hop songs are selected from the top 50 positions in the popular hip hop albums on the Billboard chart in December 2005 which were made available to the public and recorded on CDs.

3. The study excludes the songs, artistic aspects and the musical instruments used.

### Variables of the Research

Interdependent variables are first year students and third year students at Naresuan University.

Dependent variables are information obtained from the students in both groups.

### Hypothesis

Based on the research questions mentioned earlier, it is hypothesized that students at Naresuan University have positive attitudes towards hip hop songs, but they can hardly understand AAVE slang words and grammatical features. However, there is a significant difference between the AAVE knowledge of freshmen and that of juniors.

### Definitions of Terms

To clarify particular terms that are used in this study, the following definitions are provided.

1. **AAVE:** African American Vernacular English
2. **SAE:** Standard American English
3. **Hip hop:** a form of popular music that originated among inner-city African American youths.
4. **Lyric:** the language of a song that was sung by the singer.
5. **Grammatical features:** the structures in the hip hop lyrics.

6. **Slang:** the specialized vocabulary and idioms of those in the same work, way of life, and so forth.

### **Expected Outcome**

The results of the study may encourage EFL teachers and learners to realize that English does not have only a standard dialect but many dialects. In the real world, non-native speakers experience many dialects. To know other dialects of English is good for effective communication, as the key knowledge for communication is to be able to understand our interlocutors, especially those who share our interests (hip hop music lovers). To be open-minded to a variety of English other than the Standard English is another way to open the door to a bigger world of thought, language, and knowledge.

