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Interpreting the Naygur Song: Evidence of Dialect Variation and Languaculture
in Claude McKay's "Quashie to Buccra"

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Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, phonological variations became distinctive features for much of black dialect poetry. Through reduction and deletion, authors such as Claude McKay emphasized the inseparability of language and culture (what linguists refer to as languaculture), demonstrating the deep interconnection between the dialect form and black cultural identity. The goal these authors pursued was to illustrate and to celebrate idiosyncrasies in black culture while employing these phonological alternations to regain power over their language, their culture, and their lives. In essence, these works broke the linguistic borders and barriers of a white privileged English language.

Still, in poems such as "Quashie to Buccra," McKay seems constrained to a bicultural approach, shifting between a linguistic style that mirrors black culture and poetic approaches that are traditionally European and white. Three questions thus evolve from this literary conversation: 1) What are the phonological features McKay employs and why? 2) How does language reveal a power struggle between the black minority and the white elite during a time of cultural revival and social change? and 3) What sociocultural features impact the forms of language that McKay explores in his dialect works? This paper will explore these core issues in order to understand the larger socio-cultural project that McKay endeavored to examine in his dialect works.