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Tamara D. Wells

University of Missouri-St. Louis, miste1@hotmail.com

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**Your Words or Mine: Discourse Conflicts for Speakers
of African American English**

Tamara D. Wells

M.A. Educational Administration, Lindenwood University, 2005
B.S. Elementary Education, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2000

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Advisory Committee

Nancy Singer, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Nicholas Husbye, Ph.D.

Rebecca Rogers, Ph.D.

Inda Schaenen, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This qualitative action research study captured the voices of middle school students as they talked about being first language speakers of AAE and their efforts to appropriate SAE as a marker of school success. The following compelling questions were at the forefront of this study: How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English? In what ways are the complexities of African American youths' identities revealed through their use of African American English and Standard American English? How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by African American middle school students who are speakers of African American English? In what ways do my teacher beliefs and practices as a speaker of African American English Language construct language ideologies in the Language Arts classroom?

Participants took part in C.H.A.T. Academy: Children Having Academic Talks about languages, dialect and identity. C.H.A.T. Academy provided an academic space for students to exchange organic dialogue about how they form agency around their language ideologies and identify themselves as speakers in academic settings. The aim of the chats was to see how middle school students would interact socially during talks about the role African American English and Standard American English plays in their discourse. An additional purpose of this study was to examine how these conversations about language would shape the ideas expressed during oral and written activities.

Keywords: African American English, Standard American English, Ethnography, C.H.A.T. Academy

PREFACE

Three main areas of focus were established in this qualitative action research case study aimed at highlighting multiple voices with ethnographic underpinnings-student agency, student voice and my own development of language ideologies as an ELA teacher. In considering student voice, I examined middle school voices while implementing self-created C.H.A.T. Academy curriculum lessons to collect (a) audio recorded classroom conversations, (b) monologues as shared stories, (c) a written extended playbill, (d) a video recorded theatrical production of shared stories and monologues and (e) a student attitudinal survey and teacher testimonial. This study examined how explicit talk about language during social interaction helped students to form agency around their identity as they constructed and represented meaning about discourse conflicts between their first language of African American English (AAE) and Standard American English (SAE).

C.H.A.T. Academy

Middle school student participants participated in C.H.A.T. Academy over a four-week period of time. The shaping of language ideologies emerged during C.H.A.T. Academy sessions. This acronym represents Children Having Academic Talks about languages, dialect and identity. As a teacher researcher, I developed C.H.A.T. Academy with the goal of allowing for an academic space for students to exchange organic dialogue related to African American English (AAE) and Standard American English (SAE) and how they identify themselves as speakers in academic settings. The aim of the chats was to see how middle school students interact socially during talks about the role AAE and SAE plays in their discourse. I was particularly interested to hear how the

participants negotiated their language ideologies during academic settings and the impact it had on their identity.

C.H.A.T. Academy Curriculum

Embedded into our ELA time, C.H.A.T. Academy followed the outline of a collection of self-created lessons framed around curriculum standards as based on state expectations. Furthermore, I created C.H.A.T. Academy curriculum to coincide with New Century Middle School's (a pseudonym) newly adopted English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum with designed themes of changes within history, society and ourselves. In this way, C.H.A.T.'s curriculum served as an extension of ELA instructional time. The purpose of sharing C.H.A.T. Academy curriculum was to make prevalent the C.H.A.T. sessions, which can be used by other practitioners around the topic of AAE discourse conflicts and the negation of language ideologies. Student participants, along with myself as the teacher researcher, shared writing and oral ideas indicative of the following research questions:

- How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English?
- In what ways are the complexities of African American youths' identities revealed through their use of African American English and Standard American English?

- How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by African American middle school students who are speakers of African American English?
- In what ways do my teacher beliefs and practices as a speaker of African American English Language construct language ideologies in the Language Arts classroom?

The findings are represented in the C.H.A.T. Academy artifacts such as a written extended playbill and video recorded theatrical production.

C.H.A.T. Academy Artifacts

Extended Playbill and Theatrical Production

Jewitt (2008) expressed that no one mode is indicative to a whole process when considering meaning making of new information. As a result, another contribution of C.H.A.T. Academy were the artifacts consisting of the extended playbill inclusive of student and teacher researcher monologues as shared stories recorded from written but mainly oral firsthand accounts of experiences and the filmed production and footage as collected data based on personal stories that demonstrated the negotiations of language and identity from myself as the teacher researcher and the student participants of C.H.A.T. Academy.

Current studies (Aydogduc, Cakmakci & Kapucu, 2015; Schul, 2014) support the notion that the usage of filmed digital documentaries is a modality that “opens a new dimension of classroom experience,” (Schul, 2014, 16) as this medium being representative of enjoyable familiarity for students. Digital documentaries, also referred to as desktop documentaries, are defined as the recording of material on a typical

laptop/desktop personal computer (Schul, 2014). This information can be useful to practitioners who are interested in unpacking negotiations of language, dialect and identity in their academic settings by way of multimodal affordances of written student stories (monologues), told in a variety of forms of English, along with video recorded footage from class discussion, and the production of the compilation of collected data in the form of a digital documentary and a scripted play derived from data collection. This is represented in my research as a video recorded theatrical production of shared stories and monologues entitled, “Masks and Monologues: Your Words or Mine”.

and what I could do. Our kitchen refrigerator served as a visible reminder of my accolades, adorned with certificates of achievement, top reader for multiple months in the Cardinal reading group, and 1st place ribbons for spelling, grammar and writing. For years, I considered reading writing and speaking my greatest academic strengths.

This assumption of my competence in English Language Arts held until my middle school years. Starting in 6th grade, I was enrolled in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program as a “deseg” kid. We were the children who were bused from our familiar inner city neighborhoods to nearby, yet unfamiliar, county schools. In my case, I was bused into a suburban, predominantly White and affluent area. Faced with being a minority in my classes, I first noticed the lack of familiar mahogany, coffee and caramel brown faces. Now, I found myself either as the only black student, or as one of a few persons of color surrounded by White students and teachers.

Prior to transferring, I had a love for writing. Whether it was a poem, a play, or a song, I found creating in words to be one of my favorite past-times. The passion I had for writing was not limited to home. I reveled in allowing the transparency of my inner thoughts, reactions, aha moments and memories to pepper the pages of my array of journals and notebooks.

Unfortunately, these feelings transitioned dramatically during my 6th grade year. Almost immediately I was blatantly aware that my essay papers, once embellished with colorful stickers of praise for a job well done, now had comments such as, “DO OVER!”, “THIS IS NOT CLEAR.”, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN?” and frequent sprinkles of red question marks of dissatisfaction were splattered across my pieces of writing. Essentially, my awareness of self as a successful student began to diminish. During these times, it was not unusual to see the pages in my personal journals and English

papers littered with personal questions of uncertainty about my abilities, or a written recap of the day, documenting how I denied my peers the inside scoop on what I scored on my assignments. “What did you get? Hey, what did you get, Tamara, what did you get on your paper?” These whispered questions from neighboring peers were met with shamed silence. Covering the messages doodled to myself, I repeated the mantra in my head: “This sucks. I suck. I can’t do it. I just don’t think I fit in!”

My grades in 6th grade English, along with the teacher’s written questions and comments of concern, as it related to my written work, had morphed into an ominous beast that followed me from class to class, and basically anywhere I would need to share my thoughts aloud or on paper. The beast manifested as a jaded cloud of diminishing self-esteem lurking around my study areas at home, the kitchen table, the student desk in my bedroom, even my most sacred writing spot tucked away in my bathroom. In no time, the rainbow-colored butterfly cover of my personal diary at home lost its allure, as I was hesitant to record the memories of my day. Not with my writing! Ultimately, there had been an abrupt interruption to my voice as I knew it orally, and as I expressed it by way of words on paper. The agency I once embraced as a zealous student at last had transitioned into a belief that I lacked ability.

It was not long before my teacher, a seemingly young and likeable, twenty something White woman, had a personal conference with me. “Where do you live, Tamara?” Having had confidence in speaking prior to entering 6th grade, I was disturbed and somewhat confused by this question and wondered how my response would be connected to the red markings on my writing assignments. I would learn that she considered my style of writing and speaking to be a result of my inner city living. She

stated, “Honey, you write the way you speak.” From the saddened look on her face I resolved that this was a bad thing.

What I already understood was that the way my family, friends and myself spoke at home, was clearly unlike the way the “county” kids spoke, and this made us different. The type of “different” that makes an individual feel uncertain about their abilities, provokes efforts to speak and write like the others, or makes an impressionable tween throw up her hands in surrender and defeat.

Mask of Language/Chameleon of Words

“We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes-
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.” (Dunbar, 1896)

I longed to fit in and so for the first time in my life, I put on a language mask. This involved me copying the Standard American English (SAE) lexicon of White students in academic settings. As described by Dowdy (2002), the primary function of this mask was to allow me to be a chameleon of words. I became this chameleon of words mainly by switching my AAE discourse to copy the versions of SAE used by my White peers and teachers. By wearing this mask, I was capable of fitting into the approved discourse of my academic environment.

According to the Merriam Webster online, [Def. 2] (n.d) a mask is a tool that one may use to alter one's exterior appearance and, sometimes, one's personality temporarily. The influence of a mask may be very personal or have broader social implications just as mine did. My mask had the dual purpose of allowing me to copy the SAE discourse in

addition to leaving behind the familiar patterns of AAE in my written and oral presentations. My mask brought about an inner spirit of empowerment and intelligence. I was empowered when I switched from my home language to SAE during classes. The results exposed other people's reactions to me, the mask wearer, as being more relatable, understood and smart. This dual influence served as a basic characteristic of the affordances of me wearing the mask of language. I believed the mask was also what made me the chameleon of words relatable and educationally “attractive” to my peers. My idea of being a chameleon has multiple meanings. Not only is a chameleon a type of lizard that can change the color of its skin to look like the colors that are around, a chameleon is also a person who often changes his or her beliefs or behavior in order to please others or to succeed (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d). Publicly wearing this language mask as a middle school student allowed me to assimilate into the White culture of my peers and teachers. It was a quick fix to what I resolved as my language problem. On the other hand, similar to what Dunbar (1896) writes in his poem, outwardly my language mask may have revealed a sense of happiness, inwardly my language mask was indicative of the debt I had to pay as speaker of African American English.

As a result, I expeditiously and thoroughly learned to dress myself in a mask of language and became a chameleon of words, replicating the speech and writing patterns of my White counterparts. I copied them. In many cases I copied them in lieu of a personal understanding of what it meant to talk White, all the while sacrificing and burying my first language far away from my school setting until it was safe to resurface at home.

In class I took notes on the way the White students spoke. These notes were symbolic of the mask I wore at school. At home, in the mirror, I practiced. I mimicked.

This allowed me to fit in at school. At school, my successes soon returned. As a result, I chose to work harder to assimilate with the Standard American English used while at school and for completing assignments. In doing so, the red markings began to decrease and I experienced more successes. This is the origin of my negotiations of language ideology. My beliefs about language as an English Language Arts teacher (ELA) had been compromised at a young age when considering the inherent meanings of the various forms of the English language.

AAE: Stigmatic stereotype and misconceptions of its native speakers

Even today, the affinity I hold for my first language is challenged both inside and out of my professional setting. For instance, can you translate, “I’m a real gansta. Yo, yo, I’m da shiznit! All them fools best recognize when I roll up to the hood!” (Quiznatic.com, 2014). This is a game found on Quiznatic.com. It is a frequently played Facebook game that offers its players a wide span of quiz games. The particular game entitled, “Can You Translate Ebonic Words?” is often found in Facebook newsfeeds, and is representative of similar games that include questions to rate things such as, “How Black are you?” Quite frankly, this is not a favorable characteristic to identify with being an African American and first language speaker of African American English (AAE). Nor is it *how* I would like to be identified as a first language speaker of AAE.

Background and context of study

Categorically, speakers of AAE have been stigmatized due to such forms of stereotype and mockery based on the differences of speech variation that AAE exhibits as compared to SAE. These feelings informed my practice as an ELA educator and my very identity as a first language speaker of AAE. Frequently, I morphed into the chameleon of masked language to assimilate with those I was conversing with. I did this to avoid

undesirable judgment or treatment from non-native speakers of AAE. An example of this happened during a previous exchange with Melanie, a colleague of mine. She offered my students and me pieces of caramel apple taffy. I carefully declined explaining that I don't favor that kind of candy because it can pull at my fillings and the dentist would not be pleased. Melanie retorted, "Oh you mean fillings, not feelings, I gotcha, that's kinda like your Ebonics; that's why I was confused." Her reference to "my Ebonics" was coupled with a chuckle, likely associated with her inability to distinguish differences in the variations of English. Later on, I found myself in the mirror practicing the pronunciation of the words *feeling* and *filling* because prior experiences as a chameleon of language would not allow me to ignore this verbal exchange. She would not have the opportunity to chuckle at my language again.

As a result of exchanges such as the one with Melanie, I began to define my role as an ELA teacher and sought to turn my students into chameleons too. Many, if not most, of the students in my classes speak AAE as a first language and this form of English is frequently visible in their writing. At the start of my doctoral journey, my goal was to train my African American students to use only SAE, or the "proper language" as I would refer to it. I would remind the students daily that they would be labeled negatively if their first language leaped from their mouths. I would often say to my students, "People are going to laugh at the way you speak and label you as less than intelligent." This had been my experience; as a result, my goal was to research strategies and test interventions to help rid my students of "improper English". This goal of mine came out of sheer concern for their future interactions with non-native speakers of AAE in hopes that first language speakers of SAE would have reason to laugh at or correct my students' speech patterns. It was imperative that the oral and written discourse used in

my classes was in SAE ONLY. Another reason I adopted this as an expectation was because I considered it the correct language and more importantly, I wanted them to master it, in hopes that they would not, like me wind up passing through a stage of self-doubt or self-loathing and trudge through any exchange of discourse wearing a mask.

My experiences were the driving force during the initial days of my pilot study. For example, during this time, I assumed that beginning the day with several daily oral grammar sentences written incorrectly so that students could correct them, was the perfect intervention for the lack of SAE my ELA students used when writing and speaking. This was a routine assignment mainly because this is what my middle school teachers assigned to us as students as a means to “fix” our “bad” English. My thinking was compromised when capturing field notes from the position of teacher researcher. There was a verbal exchange during a grammar mini lesson between two 6th grade Advanced ELA student participants, Brandon and Alia (pseudonyms). The exchange between Brandon and Alia began in what ended as a transformational class discussion. My grammar lesson was structured in a manner that after the students made the grammar changes on their papers, volunteers would be called to the front of the class to share their correction and the purpose behind the changes they made to the sentences. Alia corrected Brandon by explaining to him that the grammar change he offered was correct only if we were speaking proper English, not if we were speaking other kinds of English. Brandon’s reply to her was that proper English was the *only* way to speak and this is how smart people talk; therefore, she was wrong. The controversy that arose from this conversation ignited when Alia proclaimed, “It’s called di-a-lect! So that does not make me wrong; it just means I know more than one way to talk. And I’m not dumb neither, cus I can talk more than one way, so I’m smarter than you, boom!

As the teacher, and presumed expert on ELA in the classroom, my students turned to me for the final response. “Let’s not talk about whose words are smarter, we need to move on, we’ll come back to this later.” Unexpectedly, my own assumptions about language were challenged, as a result of hearing these two students strongly debate opposing views to one another. It was at this point I absolutely understood that my students were not going to settle with wearing the mask that I, the teacher leader, was continuing to wear and unconsciously forcing on them. My students helped me to recognize that there was more to language than giving them a few sentences to correct during a grammar lesson. Not only were they not wearing a language mask, they were challenging my ideologies about language.

Bahktin’s concept of speech genres can be applied to Alia’s statement about speaking in more than one discourse. Bahktin (1986) uses the term spheres to refer to speech genres (Rockwell, 2000). The spheres of speech originate as utterances. Utterances exist not as generic speech patterns, rather they function as fluid patterns of speech that have as their goal communicative meaning in a situated exchange between speaker and audience. Speakers attach their own interpretation and meaning to their speech. Bahktin’s (1986) theory on speech genres also points to the idea that these speech patterns can exist in the form of mixed genres from various spheres. Having access to multiple genres of speech such as the variations of English, allows speakers to hone their meaning delivery to a wider array of audiences. This research led me to believe that other speakers of AAE experience conflicts of discourse and language ideologies.

Statement of the problem

Delpit (2002) contends that the home language of students should impart upon them a sense of pride and personal voice. Additionally, when educators avoid discussion or misinform students about their home language, these distortions have a lasting negative effect. Middle school students assigned to my previous ELA classes were talking about their first language of AAE. The conversations that occurred during social interactions in my class revealed a range of nuances with regard to the construction and representation of what it means to be a first language speaker of AAE and how agency shapes identity.

An example of this phenomenon was illustrated in my pilot study findings, discussed below. As my own understandings of discourse genre and identity unfolded as a doctoral student, I became open and interested to hear middle school voices in new ways. When I opened the door for my students and I to talk about language ideologies in the classroom, I noticed how we constructed new understandings about ourselves and our language, discourse and identities. Like my students, I developed new insights about AAE and became interested in leveraging these insights in ELA curriculum. For these reasons, when deciding on questions to guide my dissertation research topic, I decided to examine the perspective of AAE speaking middle school students, as they construct and represent meaning about their identities during writing activities and social interaction. Languages are dynamic and powerful systems of identity construction (Bahktin, 1986; Rockwell, 2000), and I wanted to document the journey of middle school students and myself as the teacher researcher in re-appropriating home languages through intentional Language Arts curricula and activities.

Purpose of the study

New Century Middle School (NCMS) is a nine-year-old middle school, and is one of four middle schools in a large suburban school district. NCMS services approximately 621 students in grades six through eight. Ninety-six percent of the student population is African American, while four percent is categorized as White or other. Seventy-one percent of NCMS's students receive free or reduced lunch.

At the end of the 2011-2012 school year, NCMS was the only middle school in the district to be labeled by the state as a school of concern. This was a result of consistently low state test scores. For these reasons, the school adopted what the state labeled "the transformational model" meaning the current staff of teachers remained but a new principal was placed in the building. Under this new leadership, NCMS made consistent gains, landing as the top scoring middle school in this district in all content areas, but especially in reading.

The 2015-2016 school year welcomed a new administrator assigned to the building as a result of the need for the former principal to move to another school in the district newly chosen to implement the "transformational model" that had increased our test scores. As a result, the motto for the 2015-2016 school year is Challenge, Support, and Motivate. With regard to academics, the message is high expectations in academics and social skills to promote enriched learning by building foundations for an increasingly changing global society.

Pilot study: Exploring AAE beliefs and usage

During the 2014-2015 school year, I conducted a pilot study with a focus on the following research questions:

1. How do middle school students use talk to construct and represent meaning related to AAE?
2. How does their use of AAE shape their identities?

I particularly examined the perspective of one AAE speaking student named Tatum, and her outlook on self and the variations of spoken and written discourse used in various settings. This pilot study was conducted as a means to inform my practice as an ELA teacher in using AAE as an actual platform for instruction in such a way that I could move beyond disjointed grammar lessons such as the daily sentence correcting, to lessons that would appropriate conversations around SAE and AAE and the space for both to exist without ushering one as right and the other as wrong.

The aim of the pilot study was to capture the voice of a middle school student, Tatum, as she talked about being a first language speaker of AAE. Also in this pilot study I examined how this talk shaped Tatum's identity as she constructed and represented meaning about her first language. As Tatum responded to a Google image of an AAE speaker, she demonstrated conflicts and alignments with speakers of AAE. The findings made visible that Tatum negotiated her language ideologies through an analysis of her reactions to a Google image of an AAE speaker. This image was shown to her as visual prompt to solicit feedback. Tatum stated, "It's a certain way you gotta talk. They makin our language look like, look like uneducated and unproper. Now I know, I know you know like there is two different languages." Tatum did not find the image relatable or favorable to positive identity development for AAE speakers. Tatum disassociated herself as a speaker of AAE, after seeing the visual prompt that associated AAE speech with ignorance. She clearly communicated her negative response to the visual prompt; therefore, critiquing the message in the image. Conversely, there were some internal

struggles of identity and awareness represented during Tatum's response to the visual image that were not revealed during her response to the verbal prompt of, "What do you already think or feel about the way you speak here at school or the way you speak at home. Do you even think about it?" The lines below are an excerpt from Tatum's concluding response about her discourse and the openness for judgment it brings when used.

TR: Makes me want to change the way I speak
Cuz
It don't feel good
I want to prove them wrong
I want to show them I can speak
Now I know
I know
You know like
There is two different languages
So I can accept being corrected
Cuz like
What you say
And how you say it
At whether at home or in public
Can make people judge you

As a result of the conflicts of discourse Tatum shared in the pilot study, in addition to reflecting on my personal experiences of grappling with speech patterns and identity, I realized that what Tatum and I shared was a consciousness and connection of language to judgment. Whether either of us chose to speak AAE or SAE, there was a recognizable sense of awareness that was poignant in our experiences as first language speakers of AAE. This awareness has guided my dissertation topics as I became interested in the perspectives of other people about AAE and SAE.

Research Questions

As result of my pilot study, I was interested in learning more about the perspective of other student voices. I wanted to know if other felt as Tatum did. How

could an ELA teacher affirm positive identities that embrace mastery and value for both AAE and SAE in balanced and creative ways? Consequently, the following compelling questions were at the forefront of my current study:

- How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English?
- In what ways are the complexities of African American youths' identities revealed through their use of African American English and Standard American English?
- How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by African American middle school students who are speakers of African American English?
- In what ways do my teacher beliefs and practices as a speaker of African American English Language construct language ideologies in the Language Arts classroom?

Overall, this study examined the perspectives of multiple AAE speaking students, their outlook on self, and the variations of spoken and written discourse used in specific contexts. The information gleaned from this research inquiry benefited not only myself as a middle school ELA teacher of AAE speakers in addition to other educators and students who, unlike me, were more vocal about the misinformation and judgments around AAE. Having an avenue to share their voice and embracing their bilingualism moved these students to unmask the role of language in positive identity development.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature in this chapter is sub-sectioned to discuss research findings and theories in areas directly linked to my research questions. The following subsections are addressed in this chapter:

- African American English and linguistic diversity
- Identity: Affirming possible selves through written and oral discourse
- Literacy acquisition during social interaction
- Language Arts teaching: Negotiation of dialect ideologies

African American English and Linguistic Diversity

African American English (AAE) is a derivative of Standard American English (SAE) spoken in the U.S. with distinguishable grammatical, vocabulary and pronunciation, which in most cases have been linked to African Americans. As an extension of this information some linguists argue that AAE is more of a dialect than an independent language. A dialect is “a variety of the language associated with a regionally or socially defined group” (Adger, Christian, & Wolfram, 2007, p.1). Similar to this research, other findings refer to AAE as a variety of English used by some African Americans, that has lexical, phonological, syntactic, and semantic patterns intertwined with what is recognized as SAE (Green, 2002).

Mainstream society in the United States has become familiar with AAE, for example, through the popularity of rap lyrics. Many of the linguistic features of AAE are now integrated into SAE lexicon. Since languages are dynamic systems of communication, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics will continue to evolve and change

over time. However, the use of AAE or other home dialects and languages other than SAE in school settings, remains controversial.

Bob Fecho (2004) speaks to his initial perspective of the linguistic diversity that his students brought into the classroom. Prior to conducting a study on the differences in language, he shares about a teachable moment that he experienced with students during their oral presentations in class. He speaks specifically of student Kenya, and his reactions to her use of AAE in her oral presentation. During Kenya's presentation he publically labeled her speech, "Black English" (Fecho, 2004, p.54) and critiqued it as, "needs improvement" (p.54). Fecho's students spoke out expressing that since Kenya had in common with her listeners the same race (Black), why should her way of speaking be marked as a deficit? Moreover, his students inquired about their confusion toward the need for Kenya to switch to SAE when speaking to a Black audience.

Fecho's research started as a result of this occurrence in his classroom. He speaks of transactions as the basis of the evolvement of his research. Transactions as defined by Fecho (2004) are the interactions of various cultures during the exchange of discourse. "In those transactions, learning occurs" (p.52). Fecho's research was focused on three specific students in his class based on the research question, "How does learning about language connect you to your world" (p.56)? Fecho's findings were that it was not a matter of *if* his students could code-switch their AAE into SAE. His findings concluded that his students were more concerned with the notion of why they would feel disposed to do so (Fecho, 2004).

While Fecho welcomed the diversity of language forms in his classroom as a means of facilitating appropriate transactions, Geneva Smitherman speaks of her educational experience adversely. Smitherman (1998) states in order to be successful in

her learning environment she had to be quiet. Having been a strategy that worked during her early years as a student, it did not have the same impact during her college years.

Smitherman, along with several of her Black peers, failed a speech test and were required to enroll into speech therapy. Smitherman's work posits, that although some speakers of AAE survived educational experiences such as hers, there were casualties as a result of those who failed to see AAE as, "a system of communicative practices in which may be found some of the richest and most expressive forms of African survivals in the African American speech community"(Smitherman, 1998, p. 141). Additional studies that assess how to best cultivate a multi-lingual approach to acquiring diverse genres of speech will be reviewed in this study.

Identity: Affirming possible selves through written and oral discourse

Research documents that AAE speaking students feel marginalized when writing in academic settings (Fernsten, 2005). This is a result of AAE speaking students' perspective that their written discourse is received as being "flawed which creates conflict, struggle, and tension" (p. 372). Further findings of this research suggest that as a result of this conflict, struggle and tension, students maintain a feeling of uncertainty about their discourse and identity. While trilingualism (Delpit, 2002) refers to the theory that there are at least three variations of English that individuals should learn in order to lead a well-rounded social and economic life, the English dialect used at home by speakers of AAE, which is inclusive of the first language and mother tongue, has traditionally been identified as one of those variations not appropriate for academic discourse (Delpit, 2002). Yet, Fernsten affirms Chris Weedon's (1997) assertion that instead the idea that, instead of valuing one language variety over the others, educators should use various discourses or genres as a means of exploration and study in order to

empower student understanding of the power these different discourses have when used in numerous settings (Fernsten, 2005).

Rather than feeling disempowered and devoiced (Richardson, 2003) when acknowledging the trilingualism framework, writers using various forms of English can be categorized as “skilled users of different languages” (Delpit, 2002, p. 373). Joanne Dowdy (2002) speaks of the mask of language and how the “mask” serves as a figurative analogy of how she became a chameleon of language. Dowdy wore this “mask” of language to please teachers, family members and others. In order to maintain the respect of her peers, she masked her first language dialect to accommodate the acceptable form of SAE. The expectation was that she use the standard form of English (SAE) at all times to demonstrate intelligence, thus leading to more knowledge and power. The implication of this notion is that not speaking SAE equated to a lower intelligence level.

Subsequent views on using SAE are expressed by George Yancy (2004) who states that in his use of SAE, he is not able to capture the experiences during discourse without feeling as if his ideas become “truncated and distorted” (2004). Yancy makes his next point switching SAE to AAE to demonstrate that the message of the discourse is at the forefront rather than the form of English used to communicate the message: “Who Do I BE?” (p. 282); when the medium is the message, one has got to get wit da medium” (p. 276). This question of identity as it relates to African Americans gets at the core of AAE and goes beyond the lexicon differences. It challenges the culture, values and identity.

African American English speakers’ cultivation of literacy during social interaction

I am particularly interested in using sociocultural theory as an analytic frame to understand how middle school speakers of AAE shape ideas during social interaction.

Sociocultural theory positions human learning as a social process (McLeod, 2014). In summary, social interaction is a vital function in development because learning is through the interaction with others (2014). Sociocultural theory is derived from the work of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky in the 1920's and 1930's (Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky's findings indicate that cognitive development is derived from social interactions and guided learning. From a sociocultural lens, findings such as Vygotsky's, detail that literacy development is fostered by way of meaningful social encounters (Everson, 1991; Mahn, 1996; McLeod, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, sociocultural theory supports the significance of language as a mediational tool in the formation of mind (1996).

Language acquisition formats tools of cognition. Vygotsky's (1978) research reveals the union between thought and word as separate entities that do not function as a whole on their own. "Word meaning is a phenomenon of thought only in so far as thought is embodied in speech, and of speech only in so far as speech is connected with thought" (1978). Vygotsky (1978) determined three levels of speech development: social (external speech) or audible speech, private speech (Piaget's egocentric speech) and (automatic internalized knowledge) inner speech. Egocentric speech is a significant part of verbal activity that transitions to inner speech when a person is faced with a situation that offers some difficulties or frustrations (Everson, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Egocentric speech or self-talk, goes through what Vygotsky considers an evolution starting with social speech that eventually leads to the development of inner speech, a type of internal cognitive process to monitor thought. Additionally, egocentric speech is a type of self-talk when we unconsciously use language without notice of audiences to self-regulate our thinking about a topic or activity that stretches us in our zone of

proximal development. During the phase of egocentric speech, thought finds meaning in reality and form undergoes a transition from interpsychological (social) to intrapsychological (internal) functioning (Vygotsky, 1978). The notion of interpsychic and intrapsychic is supported by research which argues that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: First on the social level (interpsychological), and later on the individual level (intrapsychological); initially between people, before it happens inside of the child (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, we mimic social speech to monitor thought. Thought precedes mastery of a problem achieved by inner speech or automatic speech (1978).

To this end, Vygotsky speaks of inner speech. "Inner speech is our students' first true perception of reality, and because of its interactive nature, it serves our students best when it has had a chance to develop socially" (Everson, 1991, p. 9). Inner speech also functions as a tool that enables writers to plan their ideas before writing, when social interaction is a factor. To this end, inner speech is positioned as speech for oneself derived from speech from others (egocentric speech).

Everson (1991) provides insight on Vygotsky and the teaching of writing when considering inner speech and socialization. Further research also shares an analysis of the connection between thinking and speech but goes on to show how we internalize the tools of thought through social (audible) speech (Everson, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Everson (1991), "Language learning is a natural phenomenon and a social one. Students learn more when they work in a nurtured environment of communal sharing and collaboration with peers and mentors" (p. 8). For Vygotsky, the social context influences more than just attitudes and beliefs. It has profound influence on how we think, as well as what we think. Lapp, Fisher and Frey (2014) note that students'

ability to communicate their ideas effectively is significant in learning. This notion originates and is facilitated through discourse interaction. Further findings extend this notion by stating, “By listening to our thinking-hearing our ideas take shape-we begin to formulate what we really mean” (p.7). Furthermore, this research theorizes that the exchange of discourse should continue as students listen to what their peers are saying in order to sharpen and make clear their ideas (2014).

As a whole, the key role of speech is for the purposes of communication and social contact (1978). In addition to Vygotsky’s research, Rahimi’s (2013) research connects the notion that humans use speech and writing to arbitrate their social environment and identities. Collectively, these findings will be relevant when observing the interaction of student participants as it relates to the cultivation of their literacy, language and identities. The participants will be afforded with the ability to make meaning of ideas, while they are working in a learning environment where they are interacting with peers and the teacher researcher.

Language Arts teaching: Negotiation of dialect ideologies

Bidialectal is a term used by sociolinguists to denote a speaker’s varying speech patterns used to negotiate between dialects in social contexts (Godley & Escher, 2012, Goodman & Buck, 1973). Rahman (2008) speaks of other research findings such as that of AAE speakers and the state of grappling that occurs in academic and professional settings between the usage of SAE and AAE. He refers to this as an either-or-mentality where negotiations between language ideologies of AAE and SAE have not served the African American community well (2008).

A question posed in Rahman’s research asked, “Why do I sometimes speak SE? Answer: The whole idea of perceived intelligence” (2008, p. 167). Research responds

with the notion that language ideologies are associated with varying levels of education, and social class. Largely present in Rahman's research findings were several themes representative of the negotiation of language ideologies. These themes ranged from willingness and acquired value in switching between SAE and AAE speech patterns, closeness in family bonds when only using AAE during discourse no matter the context and a sense of expectation to use only SAE during discourse. Yet negotiations come at the loss of identity (2008).

“How can I help kids gain fluency in Standard English-the language of power-without obliterating the home language which is a source of pride and personal voice?” (Christensen, 2003, p. 4). When considering the connection of ideological dialectal language negotiations, to that of my role as a first language speaker of AAE and as an English Language Arts teacher, there are areas of ambiguity as it relates to instruction for my first language student speakers of AAE. Marcyliena Morgan (2009) expressed that this is an area characterized by a history of controversy. The discourse surrounding AAE instruction and identity continues to focus on its ideological context based on the historical significance and function within the speech community and AAE's function in educational settings (2009). Brown (2006) speaks of a mutual influence with regard to research on language and the perceived noticeable linguistic features that AAE and SAE bring forth. This notion results in the need for further investigation of meta-language as a component in understanding the users and uses of language (2006).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to see what would happen when I intentionally created space for African American students to use, practice and reflect on AAE during their English Language Arts time in addition to capturing the voices of middle school students

as they shared experiences and perspectives as they related to AAE during social interaction. An additional purpose of this study was to examine how these conversations about AAE would shape the ideas expressed during written and oral activities. This was primarily a qualitative action research case study of multiple voices with ethnographic underpinnings. In considering students, my data includes (a) audio recorded classroom conversations, (b) monologues as shared stories (c) a written extended playbill (d) video recorded theatrical production of shared stories and monologues, (e) a student attitudinal survey and teacher testimonial.

Study design

This was a qualitative action research study that utilized some of the tools of ethnography. Ethnography is an anthropological tool using thick description to communicate a culturally situated reality (Frank, 1999). Qualitative action research is a cyclical process of observing, reflecting and taking action to improve practice (Hendricks, 2013). My goal was to create a curriculum unit that can be used by other practitioners to open up new ways of integrating home language and academic language skills to support positive identity development. Qualitative research methods focused on research participants as active agents in order to gain insight into practitioner research questions (2013). Participants of this study were a convenience sample of students and teachers with whom I work. Three sections of my advanced ELA classes were invited to participate in this study. The student participants selected were based on the number of returned student assent and parent consent forms. Additionally, members of the ELA and 6th grade professional learning community were invited to participate in this study as a result of the organic conversations that took place during our weekly meetings. My

interest was in native speakers of AAE who were exposed to counter narratives about the value of AAE and how SAE and AAE were mutually interactive.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English?
- In what ways are the complexities of African American youths' identities revealed through their use of African American English and Standard American English?
- How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by African American middle school students who are speakers of African American English?
- In what ways do my beliefs and practices as a speaker of African American English Language construct language ideologies in the Language Arts classroom?

C.H.A.T. Academy

Student participants participated in C.H.A.T. Academy over a four-week period of time. This acronym represented Children Having Academic Talks about languages, dialect and identity. As a teacher researcher, I developed C.H.A.T. Academy with the goal of allowing for an academic space for students to exchange organic dialogue related to AAE and SAE and how they would identify themselves as speakers in academic settings. The aim of the chats was to see how middle school students would interact socially during talks about the role AAE and SAE plays in their discourse. I was particularly interested to hear how the participants negotiated their language ideologies

during academic settings and the impact it had on their identity. Embedded into our ELA time, C.H.A.T. Academy took place twice weekly over the span of four weeks in the form of 50 minute lessons. Collectively, I created lessons framed around curriculum standards as based on state expectations. Furthermore, I created C.H.A.T. Academy curriculum to coincide with NCMS's newly adopted curriculum designed themes of, changes within society and ourselves. In this way, C.H.A.T.'s curriculum served as an extension in the ELA learning time that took place around speaking, listening and writing.

Participants

My position in this study was as a teacher researcher.

Students. Students in my 6th grade classes were invited to participate in the C.H.A.T. Academy sessions. This included three sections of 6th grade advanced English Language Arts students from NCMS. Students in these classes were assigned according to their 2014-2015 state test results along with 5th grade Scholastic Inventory Reading scores. Our school went to leveled ELA classes during the 2nd trimester of the 2012-2013 school years. Although there was considerable controversy about the advisability of tracking academically for core subjects, the district decided to group by scores. Collectively their data on both assessments ranged from Proficient to Advanced.

Teacher Researcher. I served as a participant in this study in the capacity of teacher researcher. I have been an educator for 15 years. During this time span, I was an elementary teacher for six years and an Instructional Specialist for two years in the elementary school setting. My most recent work has been in the middle school setting as a Team Leader and 6th grade English Language Arts teacher along with one year as a

Writing Facilitator servicing teachers with professional development on writing instruction across the curriculum.

I identify myself as a first language speaker of AAE. During the course of this study, I unwrapped findings of my previous experience as an inner-city student in the Desegregation Program and speaker of AAE positioned in a predominately White school. My experiences participating in a large desegregation program have informed my practice historically as an ELA teacher. Experiences in the past, such as when my middle school English teacher informed me of the ways my home language interfered with the writing I produced for class assignments, led to average marks due to the large number of what was perceived as grammatical errors. I was told that I was writing as I spoke and that this was totally unacceptable. As a result, written and verbal discourses were at the forefront of this study as I reflected and unpacked my own attitudes and beliefs about the place of AAE in schools. My beliefs have changed drastically as I deepened my understandings through reading and dialogue.

This qualitative study depicted the traditions of Action Research (Hendricks, 2013) and Ethnography (Frank, 1999). Table one in Appendix A outlines the research questions, data sources and methods of analysis as it pertains to each C.H.A.T. session. Examples of data to be collected include (a) audio recorded classroom conversations, (b) monologues as shared stories, (c) a written extended playbill, (d) video recorded theatrical production of shared stories and monologues and (e) student attitudinal survey and teacher testimonial. This study aimed to capture the voices of middle school students as they talked about being first language speakers of AAE and their efforts to appropriate SAE as a marker of school success.

I have established three main areas of focus in this study—student agency, student voice, and my own development as an ELA teacher. In this study I examined how explicit talk about language during social interaction helped them to form agency around their identity as they constructed and represented meaning in the shaping of ideas during writing activities.

Finally, with regard to my own learning, I reflected on the transformation in my own understandings and practices around the use of AAE and my intentional curricular planning to integrate the study of language ideologies as it related to achievement and identity in 6th grade ELA work. Implicated in my own changing beliefs were some of the readings and dialogue in my doctoral program that opened up new ideas about language and identity.

Another contribution to the study is an extended playbill inclusive of the shared stories and monologues of the student participants and myself as the teacher researcher with regard to our experience with language, dialect and identity. Additionally, these shared stories were recorded in the form of a video recorded theatrical production. This information can be useful to practitioners who are interested in unpacking language and identity in their academic settings.

Data Collection

Students participated in a series of lesson activities in C.H.A.T. Academy over the span of four weeks. Each session lasted approximately 50 minutes, twice weekly in the months of February and March. Table two, Appendix B is a layout of the lesson planned activities constructed for each session. The lessons took place during ELA time. Because state standards specify standards in speaking, listening and writing, all students participated in the lessons. Only shared stories and monologues from students who had

signed parental consent and student assent forms have been published in the extended playbill and video recorded in the theatrical production for future purposes of publication and shared findings. Table three in Appendix C contains the questions for the student attitudinal survey.

Data Analysis

Using data collected from each C.H.A.T. session, 15 students were active participants in the exchange of discourse during social interaction activities. Initially, I planned to analyze the data collected from their verbal and visual responses as listed in the planned lessons (Table three, Appendix B) in addition to the attitudinal survey results as performed in my previous pilot study. However, the participants in this study were more enthralled with the organic (natural) conversation that was scheduled to take place during the sessions. As a result, my focus progressed to the participants' "chat" more so than pressing them to complete the written attitudinal surveys and written form of the shared stories and monologues. Ultimately, I captured student responses related to the attitudinal survey questions by way of their organic verbal "chats".

In my pilot study, I called on several approaches to analyze the speech interaction that took place during the lessons using the lens of: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), counter narratives and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to analyze AAE in the categories of ways of interacting (genre), ways of representing (discourse) and ways of being (style). On the other hand, for this study, I geared my analysis to mainly identify and capture specific themes of the shared stories and monologues as they related to language, dialect and identity relevant to the research questions. This is represented in the written extended playbill and video recorded theatrical production.

My data analysis went through several phases, as I outline in this section. My first step was to transcribe of the data as representative in the oral recordings of their shared stories using Jeffersonian conventions (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999; Nikander, 2008). Next, I video recorded the participants' discourse as it provided both a visual and oral representation of CDA, utilizing Fairclough's framework of the three orders of discourse to analyze AAE in categories as referenced by Rogers and Wetzel (2014):

- ways of interacting (genre)
- ways of representing (discourse)
- ways of being (style)

The mode of genre pertains to the ways in which speakers and participants interact with discourse. Additionally, it is a framework for the speaker's audience to comprehend the speaker's discourse and specific linguistic features such as story telling, turn taking during narratives, repetition and re-voicing (Fairclough, 2013).

The ways of representing (discourse) were also useful when identifying and assessing the perspectives present and unwrapped by occurring themes and the relationships that existed between the two. There was also a significant consideration for the lexical choices and the choice of vocabulary used during the sharing of narratives. These examples of discourse most closely concerned with the speaker's utterances situated and supported ways that themes were represented allowing for a view of different perspectives (Fairclough, 2003). Specific to this study I documented discourse representative with a combination of formal and informal language used during the narratives of the student participants to promote validation or pose a rhetorical question, critical for an assessment of the relationships that exist within the narrative's speaker and

audience. The final domain is referred to as ways of being (style). Style refers to a sense of identity and how it is being applied socially.

Final Product

The purpose of sharing C.H.A.T. Academy sessions was to make available the curriculum of lessons that can be used by other practitioners around the topic of AAE discourse conflicts. Student participants shared their writing ideas indicative of the research questions as represented in text as individual monologues and shared them as written artifacts in an extended playbill and a video recorded theatrical production related to the C.H.A.T. Academy curriculum. These artifacts represent findings of how talk is used to construct and represent meaning related to AAE in addition to the agency formed around their identities during the social interaction sessions and the evolution of teacher ideologies around discourse conflicts.

Extended

PLAYBILL®

Masks and Monologues

YOUR WORDS

~OR~

MINE



**DISCOURSE CONFLICTS FOR
SPEAKERS
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH**

Order of Playbill

Masks and Monologues



SECTION I

- ~Abstract
- ~Background and Context of Study
- ~African American English

SECTION II

- ~Teacher Researcher Monologue I
- ~Director’s Note
- ~Student Monologues
 - Don’t You Understand Me?**Shelbie*
 - Snapback*.....*Crystale*
 - Ouch, What Was That For?*.....*Angel*

- ~Teacher Researcher Monologue II
 - ~Director’s Note
 - ~Student Monologues
 - Talkin’ Right*.....*Dante*
 - I’m Not the Same As Them*.....*Aspen*
 - Why They Look At Me Like Dat.*.....*TySean*

Section III

- ~Teacher Researcher Monologue III
- ~Director’s Note
- ~Teacher and Student Testimonials

Section IV ~ C.H.A.T. Academy Curriculum

Abstract

This qualitative action research study captured the voices of middle school students as they talked about being first language speakers of AAE and their efforts to appropriate SAE as a marker of school success. The following compelling questions were at the forefront of my current study: How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English? In what ways are the complexities of African American youths' identities revealed through their use of African American English and Standard American English? How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by African American middle school students who are speakers of African American English? In what ways do my teacher beliefs and practices as a speaker of African American English Language construct language ideologies in the Language Arts classroom?

Participants took part in C.H.A.T. Academy: Children Having Academic Talks about languages, dialect and identity. C.H.A.T. Academy provided an academic space for students to exchange organic dialogue about how they form agency around their language ideologies and identify themselves as speakers in academic settings. The aim of the chats was to see how middle school students would interact socially during talks about the role African American English and Standard American English plays in their discourse. An additional purpose of this study was to examine how these conversations about language would shape the ideas expressed during oral and written activities.

Keywords: African American English, Standard American English, Ethnography, C.H.A.T. Academy

Mask of Language

Chameleon of Words

We Wear the Mask

*“We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes-
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties. Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.
(Dunbar, 1896)*



**Background and Context
Of Study**

At the start of my doctoral journey, my goal was to train my African American students to use only Standard American English (SAE), or the “proper language” as I would refer to it. I would remind the students daily that they would be labeled negatively if their first language leaped from their mouths. I would often say to my students, “People are going to laugh at the way you speak and label you as less than intelligent.”

This had been my experience. As a result, my goal as a doctoral student was to research strategies and test interventions to help rid my students of “improper English”.

~

This goal of mine came out of sheer concern for their future interactions with non-native speakers of African American English (AAE) in hopes that first language speakers of SAE would have no reason to laugh at or correct my students’ speech patterns. It was imperative that the oral and written discourse used in my classes was in SAE ONLY. I wanted them to master it, in hopes that they would not, like me, wind up passing through a stage of self-doubt or self-loathing and trudge through any exchange of discourse wearing a mask.

~

According to Bahktin (1986), speakers attach their own interpretation and meaning to their speech. Bahktin’s theory on speech genres also points to the idea that these speech patterns can exist in the form of mixed genres from various spheres. This research led me to believe that other speakers of AAE experience conflicts of discourse and language ideologies.



Section II



Your Words or Mine

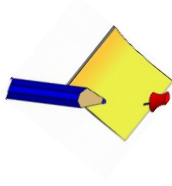
Teacher Researcher Monologue Part I

It never really occurred to me that there was such a difference in the way I spoke as compared to my peers growing up because we all spoke the same language both at home and school. School was always a place where I excelled. Confident, zealous and thirsty to learn new concepts, ideas and ways of life, education was a significant part of my life even as an elementary student. Teachers called attention to me as an exemplary student in reading, writing and speaking. As early as second grade, I earned the title of emerging chief communicator of words and oratory. Although I wore this hat with modesty meekness and humility, I was aware of who I was and what I could do.

Our kitchen refrigerator served as a visible reminder of my accolades, adorned with certificates of achievement, top reader for multiple months in the Cardinal reading group, and 1st place ribbons for spelling, grammar and writing. For years, I considered reading writing and speaking my greatest academic strengths.

This assumption of my competence in English Language Arts held until my middle school years. Starting in 6th grade, I was enrolled in the Voluntary Student Transfer Program as a “deseg” kid. We were the children who were bused from our familiar inner city neighborhoods to nearby, yet unfamiliar, county schools.

Prior to transferring, I had a love for writing. Whether it was a poem, a play, or a song, I found creating in words to be one of my favorite past-times. The passion I had for writing was not limited to school. At home, I reveled in allowing the transparency of my inner thoughts, reactions, aha moments and memories to pepper the pages of my array of journals and notebooks. Unfortunately, these feelings transitioned dramatically during my 6th grade year. Almost immediately I was blatantly aware that my essay papers, once embellished with colorful stickers of praise for a job well done, now had comments such as, “DO OVER!” “THIS IS NOT CLEAR.”, “WHAT DO YOU MEAN?” and frequent sprinkles of red question marks of dissatisfaction were splattered across my pieces of writing. Essentially, my awareness of self as a successful student began to diminish.



Director's Note

African American English and Linguistic Diversity

African American English (AAE) is a derivative of Standard American English (SAE) spoken in the U.S. with distinguishable grammatical, vocabulary and pronunciation characteristics (Godley & Escher, 2012). Similar to this research, other findings refer to AAE as a variety of English used by some African Americans that has lexical, phonological, syntactic, and semantic patterns intertwined with what is recognized as SAE (Green, 2002).

How do middle school students use talk and other modalities to construct and represent meaning related to the use of African American English and Standard American English?



DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND ME ~Shelbie

We went in Macy's because my mom wanted pumps that is pink. She went to go look and tole me to go ax the saleslady. But when I went to go ask her she was like "EXCUSE ME!" So I jus repeated it, "Ya'll got pumps that is pink?" She ack like she couldn't git it so she went to git somebody else. And was like, "What is she trying to say?" I said it again, "Ya'll got pumps that is pink?" Den dey jus gone look at each

other like... Don't you understand me? I was like, dang we both speak English, but I didn't say it to dem tho. I felt kinda dumb cuz I was like don't you understand me? I jus felt kinda stupid.



SNAPBACK ~Crystale

Let me tell it! So I was jus talkin to my brother havin a normal conversation bout a video game an I was tellin him, "That ain't right." Den Chris my stepfather that is another color HE came ovah to me and said, "AIN'T IS NOT A WORD. You shouldn't have that in your vocabulary." I snapped back! "Well why can't I have ain't in my vocabulary when I been sayin' dis word for like...all my life. You can't tell me to change one word in my vocabulary jus cuz." Which made me angry. I jus get angry when people tell me, "You not posed to do this and you not posed to do dat. So den I had to like snap back at him cuz things get on my nerves easily when I'm talkin. Anyway, my MOM didn't even say nothin' bout the word ain't because she uses it too.



OUCH, WHAT WAS THAT FOR ~Angel

My nana be poppin' me on my arm when I be talkin' sometimes. Talkin' bout I'm talkin wrong. Man that stuff hurt and it's aggravating! Don't nobody like gettin' popped for something they ain't even tryin' to do. I be like, "Ouch, what was that for?" She jus keep tellin' me to come closer. I ain't even do nothin'. It's a habit. So I jus lookeded at her. She say, "Answer me properly." But, it's a habit and I'm used to saying it that way.



Your Words or Mine

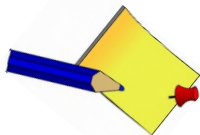
Teacher Researcher Monologue Part II

I longed to fit in and so for the first time in my life, I put on a language mask. This involved me copying the Standard American English (SAE) lexicon of White students in academic settings. As described by Dowdy (2002), the primary function of this mask was to allow me to be a chameleon of words. I became this chameleon of words mainly by switching my AAE discourse to copy the versions of SAE used by my White peers and teachers. By wearing this mask, I was capable of fitting into the approved discourse of my academic environment.

I was empowered when I switched from my home language to SAE during classes. The results exposed other people's reactions to me, the mask wearer, as being more relatable, understood and smart. I believed the mask was also what made me the chameleon of words relatable and educationally “attractive” to my peers.

My idea of being a chameleon had multiple meanings. Not only is a chameleon a type of lizard that can change the color of its skin to look like the colors that are around, a chameleon is also a person who often changes his or her beliefs or behavior in order to please others or to succeed.

*Publicly wearing this language mask as a middle school student allowed me to assimilate into the White culture of my peers and teachers. It was a quick fix to what I resolved as my language problem. On the other hand, similar to what Dunbar writes in his poem, *We Wear the Mask* (1896) outwardly my language mask may have revealed a sense of happiness, inwardly my language mask was indicative of the debt I had to pay as speaker of African American English. As a result, I expeditiously and thoroughly learned to dress myself in a mask of language and became a chameleon of words, replicating the speech and writing patterns of my White counterparts. I copied them. In many cases I copied them in lieu of a personal understanding of what it meant to talk White, all the while sacrificing and burying my first language far away from my school setting until it was safe to resurface at home. At home, in the mirror, I practiced. I mimicked. This allowed me to fit in at school. At school, my successes soon returned. As a result, I chose to work harder to assimilate with the Standard American English used while at school and for completing assignments. In doing so, the red markings began to decrease and I experienced more successes. This is the origin of my negotiations of language ideology.*

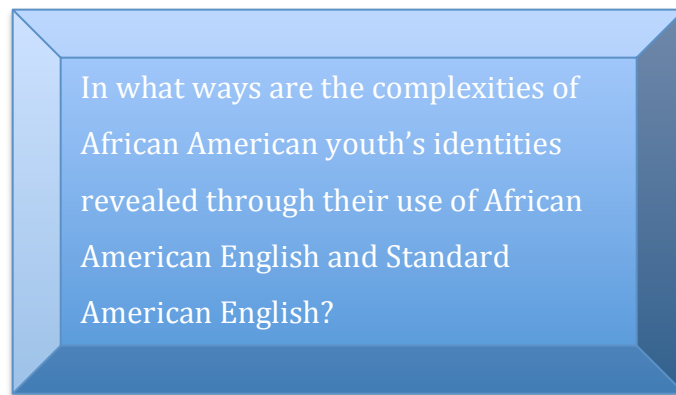


Director's Note

Identity: Affirming possible selves through written and oral discourse

Research documents that AAE speaking students feel marginalized when writing in academic settings (Fernsten, 2005). This is a result of AAE speaking students' perspective that their written discourse is received as being “flawed which creates conflict, struggle, and tension” (p. 372). Further findings of this research suggest that as

a result of this conflict, struggle and tension, students maintain a feeling of uncertainty about their discourse and identity. While trilingualism (Delpit, 2002) refers to the theory that there are at least three variations of English that individuals should learn in order to lead a well-rounded social and economic life, the English dialect used at home by speakers of AAE, which is inclusive of the first language and mother tongue, has traditionally been identified as one of those variations not appropriate for academic discourse (Delpit, 2002). Yet, Fernsten affirms Chris Weedon's (1997) assertion that, instead of valuing one language variety over the others, educators should use various discourses or genres as a means of exploration and study in order to empower student understanding of the power these different discourses have when used in numerous settings (Fernsten, 2005).



Rather than feeling disempowered and devoiced (Richardson, 2003) when acknowledging the trilingualism framework, writers using various forms of English can be categorized as “skilled users of different languages” (Delpit, 2002, p. 373). Joanne Dowdy (2002) speaks of the mask of language and how the “mask” serves as a figurative analogy of how she became a chameleon of language. Dowdy wore this “mask” of

language to please teachers, family members and others. In order to maintain the respect of her peers, she masked her first language dialect to accommodate the acceptable form of SAE. The expectation was that she use the standard form of English (SAE) at all times to demonstrate intelligence, thus leading to more knowledge and power. The implication of this notion is that not speaking SAE equated to a lower intelligence level.

Subsequent views on using SAE are expressed by George Yancy (2004) who states that in his use of SAE, he is not able to capture the experiences during discourse without feeling as if his ideas become “truncated and distorted” (2004). Yancy makes his next point switching SAE to AAE to demonstrate that the message of the discourse is at the forefront rather than the form of English used to communicate the message: “Who Do I BE?” (p. 282); when the medium is the message, one has got to get wit da medium” (p. 276). This question of identity as it relates to African Americans gets at the core of AAE and goes beyond the lexicon differences. It challenges the culture, values and identity.



TALKIN' RIGHT ~Dante'

Umm see like a year ago when I was at my Auntie's house that live in Tennessee. She's White. I was talkin' to one of my friends, he Black. I kept gettin hit on the head cuz she kept tellin me I wasn't talkin right.

So den I would talk like her and I'd get in trouble cuz she thought I was mockin' her cuz I put emphasis on what I would say, kinda like she do.

When I stop “TALKING” like her and start talkin' like I usually do and den she got um (I need another word), she got even more angry than before. And den you know, she kept sayin, “Why do you keep talking like that? That's not proper English, use Standard English. You here me talk all the time (mimicking aunt's tone) use standard English boy!”

It's kinda funny but forreal, forreal I was kinda angry aaaaand kinda annoyed cuz she kept talkin about it and tryin' to correct me. Dat's why I mocked her cuz it felt good at the time to get her back. I think it annoyed her.



I'M NOT THE SAME AS THEM ~Aspen

Where I used to live in another part of the state they have accents and they speak proper. Like very proper and well they speak what people see as proper. I jus use the word proper cuz dat's the way that they see it. If it was jus me I would jus say it's like White people. I'm not the same as them cuz, I don't always drag on, like you know, actually say the whole word. Or I use a d instead of th and things like dat.

When I went down there I was talking to some of my friends that I had before I left. They act-ed like they couldn't understand the way I was talking. So den I had to switch the way I was talking. Dis because of the fact that I didn't speak the same way dat they did and I didn't like dat. But whenever I did that, I didn't feel comfortable.

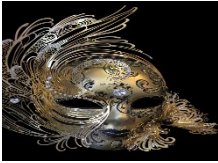
Cuz, I mean I, I changed the whole way dat I was cuz the way they was looking at me and the way dat it made me feel. Like if it was for something professional I wouldn't have a problem with it. To me it kinda made me feel like dey didn't accept me for who I was. But I like da person I am cuz I get to surround myself with people who understand the way I talk, if I talk proper or if I talk like I'm still outside like if I'm still in the streets. I guess that's why I like it down here cuz you don't get judged. But down there, dey still see me as a little ghetto Black girl dat's pretty much all they see me as cuz I guess I'm not the same as them.



WHY THEY LOOK AT ME LIKE DAT ~Tyrese

I was on my way to Memphis and den we had stopped and went to a gas station. Den it was all country people in dat gas station'and den I kep askin nem, "Let me git like fithy on one." And dey act like I was dumb or somethin'. Dey was staring at me like, "WHAT?" I was like dang why dey look at me like dat for? I kept sayin, "Fithy on one." I mean I KNOW It's not fithy, but dat's how I say it, if that's why they lookin'! But dey kep lookin' at me like I was STUPID. I was thinkin', "Am I joke or somethin'?" and den, I finally said IT, "FIFTY on one."

Section III

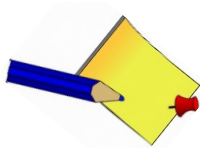


Your Words or Mine

Teacher Researcher Monologue Part III

Melanie, a colleague of mine offered my students and me pieces of caramel apple taffy. I carefully declined explaining that I don't favor that kind of candy because it can pull at my fillings and the dentist would not be pleased. Melanie retorted, "Oh you mean fillings, not feelings, I gotcha, that's kinda like your Ebonics; that's why I was confused." Her reference to my "Ebonics" was coupled with a chuckle, likely associated with her inability to distinguish differences in dialect.

Later on, I found myself in the mirror practicing; Practicing the pronunciation of the words feeling and filling. My prior experiences as a chameleon of language would not allow me to ignore this verbal exchange. She would not have the opportunity to chuckle at my language again.



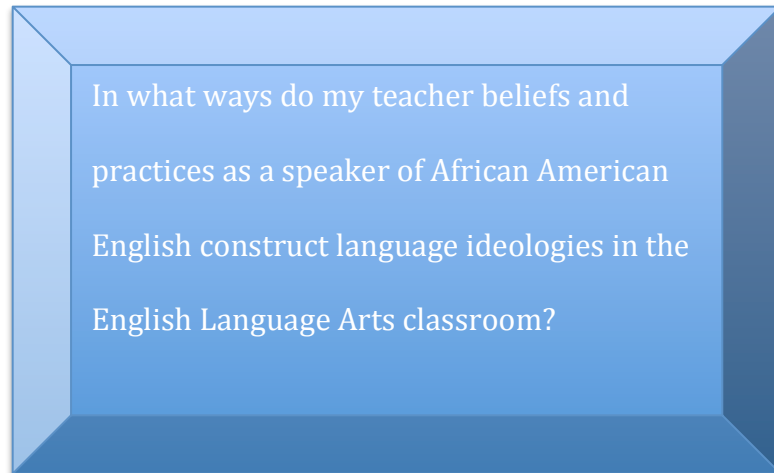
Director's Note

Language Arts teaching: Negotiation of dialect ideologies

Categorically, speakers of AAE have been stigmatized due to such forms of stereotype and mockery based on the differences of speech variation that AAE exhibits as compared to Standard American English (SAE). These feelings inform my practice as an English Language Arts (ELA) educator and my very identity as a first language speaker of AAE. Frequently, I morph into the chameleon of masked language to assimilate those with whom I was conversing. I do this to avoid undesirable judgment or treatment from non-native speakers of AAE. As a result of exchanges such as the one with Melanie,

during my early years of teaching my previous conflicts of language defined my role as an English Language Arts teacher. As a result, I sought to turn my students into chameleons of language.

Many, if not most of the students in my classes speak AAE as a first language and this form of English is frequently visible in their writing. At the start of my doctoral journey, my goal was to train my African American students to use only SAE, or the “proper language” as I would refer to it. I would remind the students daily that they would be labeled negatively if their first language leaped from their mouths. It was imperative that the oral and written discourse used was in SAE ONLY. This was because I considered it the correct language and more importantly so that they would not have to trudge through any exchange of discourse wearing a mask. This was the driving force during the initial days of my doctoral pilot study.



Most recently, my thinking was compromised when capturing field notes from the position of teacher researcher of a verbal exchange during a grammar mini lesson between two 6th grade Advanced ELA student participants called Brandon and Alia (pseudonyms). The exchange of discourse between Brandon and Alia began in what ended as a transformational class discussion. Alia corrected Brandon by explaining to

him that the grammar change he offered was correct only if we were speaking proper English but not other kinds of English. Brandon's reply to her was that proper English was the only way to speak and this is how smart people talk; therefore, she was wrong. The controversy that arose from this conversation ignited when Alia proclaimed, "It's called di-a-lect! So that does not make me wrong; it just means I know more than one way to talk. And I'm not dumb neither, cus I can talk more dan one way, so I'm smarter than you boom!"

My current findings are that as the teacher, and presumed expert on ELA in the classroom, my students turned to me for the final response. "Let's not talk about whose words are smarter, we need to move on, we'll come back to this later." Hearing these two students say these words to one another unexpectedly challenged my own assumptions. It was at this point I absolutely understood that my students were not going to settle with wearing the mask that I, the teacher leader, was continuing to wear and unconsciously forcing on them.

My students helped me to recognize that there was more to language than giving them a few sentences to correct during a grammar lesson. Not only were they not wearing a language mask, they were challenging my ideologies about language.



K. Price, 6th grade Teacher~ Now I understand that there is some kind of value we as teachers should place on the language our students bring to school from home. Now I still expect them to code-switch but at least I know that they come to us with more than one way of speaking.

T. Weiner, Reading Specialist~ Watching and reading these monologues confirms that we need to be more vigilant with how we approach our students. There is a need for cultural competence, sensitivity and awareness. This is the type of information we can use to help propel our students forward. Look at how these stories impact how they feel about themselves. Eye opening.

P. Johnston, 6th grade Teacher~ I am grateful that we have people like you and your students who open themselves up and share their stories, feelings, beliefs...Makes me want to go back and reflect on my experiences and interactions with children.

V. Shanklin, Interventionist~ C.H.A.T. Academy! I enjoyed this. I would love for others to take part in this academy.

Section IV

C.H.A.T. Academy Lessons

Sessions 1 and 2

1. Introduce objective of C.H.A.T. Academy
2. Create appropriate learning target
3. Define key terms-*African American English (AAE)*, *Standard American English (SAE)*, *dialect*, *chameleon*, *mask of language*
4. Students will complete pre-attitudinal survey on language ideologies of AAE
5. Show Ted-Talks video: Three Ways to Speak English Jamila Lyiscott
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmJ5xQ_mc
6. Students reflect in journals
7. Students share their reflections with peer groups
8. Recorders of the group will document key ideas on chart paper
9. Reporters will share ideas of group members
10. Teacher researcher shares personal journey as first language speaker of AAE

Sessions 3 and 4

1. Students will take a gallery walk around verbal prompt posters. With post-its in hand, they can add ideas, aha's or questions related to the ideas they preview
2. Review previous sessions' keywords. Introduce the term, *monologue*
3. Student groups will have an option to create non-linguistic representation of AAE and SAE speakers
4. Student will justify their non-linguistic representation in individual journals
5. Teacher researcher will share Google images of AAE and SAE
6. Students will reflect in their journal while previewing the Google images identifying similarities and differences in their representations, to the Google images
7. Teacher will read excerpt from *Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson
8. Students will share journal reflections

Sessions 5 and 6

1. Teacher will review learning target for C.H.A.T. Academy
2. Teacher will share draft of personal monologue
3. Students will conduct elevator conversations sharing the main points they will share in their monologues regarding their language ideologies
4. Students will begin drafting personal monologues

Sessions 7 and 8

1. Teacher will share final copy of monologue and mask as non-linguistic representation of monologues
2. Students will brainstorm mask ideas
3. Students will continue the writing process to complete a final copy of monologue
4. Students will begin to design masks

Sessions 9 and 10

1. Students will finish masks
2. Students will share their monologue and reveal their mask
3. Complete post-attitudinal survey

Student Attitudinal Survey

1. What do you feel about the way you speak?
2. Are your family members speakers of African American English at home?
3. What is your first impression of someone who speaks African American English?
4. What do you think about children who speak African American English at school?
5. What do you think about adults who speak African American English at school?
6. Do you generally judge others by the way that they speak?
7. Have you every changed the way you speak depending on your surroundings and who you were conversing with? If so explain.
8. Do you feel that learning about different forms of English will help you to understand more about yourself as an African American student? Please explain your answer.



**These responses were collected during the final attitudinal survey. The earlier attempts at getting students to write their responses was not feasible as the students demonstrated an anxiousness to share their stories orally in an organic format. During our final meeting, the following responses were captured orally as students concluded their social interaction time together.*

Aspen, 6th grade student~ I don't judge people but I know that teachers in some classes judged my language because I was the only Black student and used different words and spoke to me as if I couldn't understand the way that they spoke to other students. So yes, I pretty much will change my languages so I can show them that I can comprehend if they use Standard English.

Daren, 6th grade student~ If you have a Black teacher who speaks African American English I feel that they would understand me because I am Black and speak the same language so I think it's fine if they don't always use Standard English around me. It's ok, as long as they use both so that they accommodate the way that I speak and not just use one kind of language and reject my kind of English and degrade me but they can also help me get better with standard language.

Arrion, 6th grade student~ I understand that people grow up in different families so I can understand that some of them was not taught two kinds of English. So I can relate because I can understand. It's just different ways that you was raised.

Raegen, 6th grade student~ Tone and mood means a lot. I would say it as it doesn't matter what race, if a Black teacher or White teacher said it (corrected me) in a rude tone. I would get offended by any race if they just called me out in front of the class. So the tone for the teacher and the mood for the student. Like if you're a student and most of the time you don't want people to just keep correcting the way you speak. That's how I feel about my language.

Amori, 6th grade student~ I don't think that I should speak the same way everywhere. Being around certain people, if you already have experience or you think somebody has problems with the way you speak or something like that, I would think that you need to switch your language or dialect cuz then that way you wouldn't put yourself in that situation and then you wouldn't have to feel bad or ashamed of your own language if someone doesn't understand it.

Leah, 6th grade student~ Sometimes I gotta switch it (my language) up like in my writing so all people can understand.

JoJo, 6th grade student~ You should have a language for each environment. Like in the video when she said she was trilingual. So basically it's ok to be trilingual, to have a different way to speak in each environment.

Tress, 6th grade student~ I don't have to change how to say stuff, but I choose to because I don't want people saying things about me and behind my back. I don't have to but I choose to.

Dante, 6th grade student~ At first I knew a little bit about how I should speak at home and how I should speak at school. But taking C.H.A.T. Academy and doing like the monologues and stuff, that helped me a lot because now I feel like that it's supposed to be like a right time and place to use certain languages and I can put it into my future and stuff like that. I think if I didn't take C.H.A.T. Academy now, in an interview in the future, I'd be saying slang and stuff like that and they would be like, I'm not appropriate for the job and they would decline my request. So I think that this really helped a lot especially like with our future paths and stuff.



Tamara D. Wells is the author of *Masks and Monologues*, *Your Words or Mine: Discourse Conflicts for Speakers of African American English*. She is a middle school Advanced English Language Arts educator and doctoral student. Residing in the community of the students she teaches, she is committed to lifelong learning, holding the regard that learning happens both in and outside of the classroom. Being a self-proclaimed writer of personal journals and story sketches, over the past several years, she has written, produced and directed several plays for middle school Black History programs, and pep assemblies. Overall she is a coach, who also enjoys being coached especially by the brilliant minds she encounters each day in various settings.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Research Design for C.H.A.T. Academy sessions

Research questions	C.H.A.T. 50 minute sessions	Data source	Method of analysis
1. How do middle school student use talk to construct and represent meaning related to African American English?	Week 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 1 • Session 2 	Student pre-attitudinal survey Verbal prompt Audio recorded discourse Student journals Teacher researcher field notes	Narrative analysis Critical discourse analysis - Fairclough's ways of interacting (genre)
2. How does the use of African American English shape the identities of English Language Arts middle school students?	Week 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 3 • Session 4 	Visual prompt Audio recorded discourse Student journals Teacher researcher field notes	Multimodal analysis Critical discourse analysis -Fairclough's ways of being (style) ways of interacting (genre)
3. How does social interaction during writing activities inform the ideas expressed by English Language Arts middle school students who are speakers of African American English?	Week 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 5 • Session 6 • Session 7 • Session 8 • Session 9 • Session 10 	Audio recorded discourse Student products: journals monologues masks Teacher field notes	Multimodal analysis Critical discourse analysis -Fairclough's ways of representing (discourse)
4. In what ways do the beliefs and actions of an English Language Arts teacher about the use of African American English and Standard American English shape discourse?	Ongoing	Audio recorded discourse Student products: Journals Monologues masks post attitudinal survey teacher field notes	Multimodal analysis Narrative analysis

Appendix B

Table 2: C.H.A.T. Academy Lessons

Sessions 1 and 2

11. Introduce objective of C.H.A.T. Academy
12. Create appropriate learning target
13. Define key terms-*African American English (AAE)*, *Standard American English (SAE)*, *dialect*, *chameleon*, *mask of language*
14. Students will complete pre-attitudinal survey on language ideologies of AAE
15. Show Ted-Talks video: Three Ways to Speak English Jamila Lyiscott
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmJ5xQ_mc
16. Students reflect in journals
17. Students share their reflections with peer groups
18. Recorders of the group documents key ideas on chart papers
19. Reporters will share ideas of group members
20. Teacher researcher shares personal journey as first language speaker of AAE

Sessions 3 and 4

9. Students will take a gallery walk around verbal prompt posters. With post-its in hand, they can add ideas, aha's or questions related to the ideas they preview
10. Review previous sessions' keywords. Introduce the term, *monologue*
11. Student groups will create non-linguistic representation of AAE and SAE speaker
12. Student will justify their non-linguistic representation in individual journals
13. Teacher researcher will share Google images of AAE and SAE
14. Students will reflect in their journal while previewing the Google images identifying similarities and differences in their representations, to the Google images
15. Teacher will read excerpt from *Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson
16. Students will share journal reflections

Sessions 5 and 6

5. Teacher will review learning target for C.H.A.T. Academy
6. Teacher will share draft of personal monologue
7. Students will conduct elevator conversations sharing the main points they will share in their monologues regarding their language ideologies
8. Students will begin drafting personal monologues

Sessions 7 and 8

5. Teacher will share final copy of monologue and mask as non-linguistic representation of monologues
6. Students will brainstorm mask ideas
7. Students will continue the writing process to complete a final copy of monologue
8. Students will begin to design mask

Sessions 9 and 10

4. Students will finish mask
5. Students will share their monologue and reveal their mask
6. Complete post-attitudinal survey

Appendix C

Table 3: Student Attitudinal Survey

9. What do you feel about the way you speak?
10. Are your family members speakers of African American English at home?
11. What is your first impression of someone who speaks African American English?
12. What do you think about children who speak African American English at school?
13. What do you think about adults who speak African American English at school?
14. Do you general judge others by the way that they speak?
15. Have you every changed the way you speak depending on your surroundings and who you were conversing with? If so explain.
16. Do you feel that learning about different forms of English will help you to understand more about yourself as an African American student? Please explain your answer.