BEST PRACTICES IN THE MULTIDIALECTAL HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS:

IMPLEMENTING CODE-SWITCHING AND CODE-MESHING

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, for instilling in me a passion for education and a drive to help others; to my students, for reminding me it's never too late to learn; to my daughter, for inspiring me to set the best example I can; and to Andrew, without whom this would not be possible.

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Linguists define dialect as a form of a language, and they agree that all dialects are equally legitimate forms of the language. The stratification of dialects, however, is based on social hierarchies and results in some dialects being privileged and others carrying stigma. The bias against nondominant dialects results in language discrimination and limits one's access to social power. This inequity gives rise to additional obstacles that impede academic success for students who speak a nondominant variety. A significant portion of those obstacles can be addressed with appropriate teacher training and the incorporation of language studies in the secondary English classroom. Language studies will benefit students who speak the dominant dialect by preparing them for interactions with the wide varieties of English they will encounter in the increasingly diverse and global workforce. Students who speak nondominant dialects will be equipped with the tools to navigate and challenge the standard language ideology.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAE: African American English
AAVE: African American Vernacular English
SE: Standard English
SAE: Standard American English
ME: Mainstream English
CA: Contrastive Analysis
GAE: General American English

Introduction

"I got a math test next period that imma fail. Math be the subject i struggle with the most. Don't nobody in that class understand what we doin. I was gone miss the bus on purpose. I got a headache but i'm just gone thug it out because I'm cool like that. Today is a weird day not gone lie."*

Journal entries like this one, reflective of my students' primary dialects, land on my desk every Friday. I start each of my 10th grade English class periods with a two-minute free write. Students are encouraged to write about whatever is on their minds. I do not assess grammar, mechanics, or spelling—my only requirement to earn full credit is to write for the full two minutes. At the end of the week, each student circles one entry for me to read and respond to. I have found that, in addition to their candidness, I enjoy how much my students' voices come through in their journals, and I strive to foster that authenticity in other writing assignments all year.

I come from a diverse dialectal background. I was born into a White, lower middle-class family that speaks a dominant dialect with hints of Southern American English, thanks to my grandparents' Kentucky roots. I grew up, however, in an urban, predominantly Black neighborhood in Indianapolis and attended schools with primarily Black students. For much of my youth, I felt torn between two worlds. At school, I was frequently made fun of for my Whiteness and experimented with Black English (BE) to better fit in. If any of that dialect followed me home, though, I was redirected for "acting Black."

*This is a composite of three different students' journal entries from the same week

My senior year of college, I was placed in two inner-city, predominantly Black schools for student teaching. I found that my comfort with and acceptance of BE helped me build rapport with my students. Because I did not interrupt them to correct their English, students felt more comfortable speaking in class and chatting with me during the passing period.

A year later, my first teaching job was at a suburban school with about 80% White students. Only some of the few Black students in attendance spoke BE, and I was surprised by the perception of some of my White students, some of whom would openly mock BE. One White student even expressed surprise when a BE-speaking classmate shared a stellar test score. The White student admitted that he had assumed his classmate would perform poorly because of how he spoke in class.

I was intentional even in those early years of my career about choosing texts by authors from a wide range of cultures, but I found it difficult to allow students to incorporate nondominant dialects in their writing. I was under enormous pressure to prepare my students to successfully complete the state's standardized test, by which our whole staff and school district would be assessed. I walked the tightrope of encouraging students to use their voices but cautioning them not to stray too far from the expectations of the test assessors, who were unlikely to be as open to dialectal diversity as I was. As badly as I wanted to promote dialect equity and destigmatize nondominant dialects, I felt like my hands were tied.

This is my thirteenth year teaching high school English. I am in a more diverse school district now, and my classroom buzzes with a multitude of dialects. Each brings a unique flavor to our discussions, new ways of expressing ideas we all share and ones we

have never before considered. My district hangs its hat on the pedagogical framework of Culturally Relevant Teaching, and I am encouraged to craft a curriculum as reflective of my students' lived experiences as possible. Still, when it comes to writing instruction, I feel bound by the restrictions placed by the College Board, my students' future employers, and much of mainstream society. I know I am not alone in this struggle.

This project is my response to these seemingly conflicting goals. In order to better serve my students and hopefully provide guidance to other teachers, I have surveyed the literature to deepen my understanding of dialect diversity and how the standard language ideology impacts my students, who are primarily speakers of nondominant dialects. I have traversed the no-man's-land in the battle between code-switching and code-meshing, and I have come to the conclusion that students should be armed with both strategies. By being taught to think critically about context, audience, and purpose, students can make informed decisions about when and how to use all of the tools in their language toolboxes. Based on practices I have discovered in my research as well as activities I have used in my own classroom, I present a pedagogical framework for incorporating language studies into the multidialectal high school English class. I also discuss the importance of teacher education and training.

Chapter One: Dialects

A few years ago, on the last day of school, a student gave me a handmade thank-you card. Inside, he had written "You the only teacher that don't irritate my soul." I laughed out loud. Coming from this particularly reticent and generally affectless student, it was a huge compliment. I hung the card behind my desk, taped open so the inscription could be easily seen.

The next year, while waiting for me to write her a pass to the restroom, a student stood looking over the various cards and notes that were taped behind my desk. When she noticed that particular card, she asked if it bothered me when students used incorrect grammar on cards and letters, given the fact that I was, after all, an English teacher. I responded that no, it was the message that mattered to me. I reflected on her question and decided that, had the student who made the card written his message in General American English, it wouldn't have sounded like him. His use of dialect gave the message an authenticity that would have been otherwise missing. In retrospect, I wish I had more explicitly clarified for this student that the grammar was correct—for the dialect the student was using.

The card and the resulting conversation are great examples of why dialect should be an integral part of classroom conversations. The student who wrote the card used his own dialect (Black English). Because of this, his voice came through and the message felt genuine. The student who read the card a year later did not recognize the legitimacy of the language. She even expected me to be "bothered" by how the message was written. It was clear that this student thought the dialect was just "incorrect grammar," and if she

was never taught otherwise, she would very likely carry this deficit perspective into future interactions with speakers of nondominant dialects like BE.

In this section, I will discuss language standardization, define *dialect*, and explore the two dialects that are most prevalent in my classroom and most significant to this paper: General American English and Black English. I hope to dispel these common misconceptions: 1) General American English is not a dialect; 2) General American English is the only "correct" form of the language; and 3) Black English is "incorrect" or "lazy" speech. These misconceptions must be eliminated in order for dialect equality to be achieved.

Language Standardization

Standardization of language is inevitable. Each society establishes norms regarding clothing, speaking, family structure, and so forth. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes note that language standardization results from the practical reality that diverse populations who share a language need to be able to communicate with each other (10, 328). It is unavoidable that groups of people will establish norms; these norms help people function cohesively by outlining proper behavior. Of course, functioning cohesively is also much easier when there is a shared language, and just as behavior is normed, language is also standardized.

In some countries, formal language academies are responsible for determining what is standard within a language. These academies determine which new words to adopt into the official dictionary and specify which grammatical forms and pronunciations will be considered standard (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 10). In

countries like the United States, where no official academic entity is responsible for establishing a linguistic standard, that power is held by the dominant group. Victoria Purcell-Gates explains that in some countries, the dominant group speaks an entirely different language, but in most countries, the same language is spoken and the dialects of that language spoken by marginalized people become "socially marked" as inferior (133). However, language is not static; it evolves with its speakers. What is considered standard in a language changes over time. That evolution also results in multiple variations within a single language: dialects.

Defining Dialect

Dialects are varieties of a language with their own phonology, vocabulary, and grammar which result from language changing over time in different ways among different groups of speakers (Hagemann 76). Linguists such as Richard F. Young, Walt Wolfram, Natalie Schilling-Estes, and Michael Stubbs agree that dialects are legitimate, rule-governed language systems. They are not random, and they are not failed attempts at using the standard variety of a language. An interesting note here is that, given that they are rule-governed, dialects are also standardized. A user of a dialect conforms to the standards of that particular dialect (whether it is the dominant dialect or a nondominant dialect).

According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, almost all languages in the world consist of dialects, "varieties of the language that are particular to a group of speakers" ("Dialects"). Richard Young explains that people acquire dialects by adopting the speech patterns of the people around them (15). This means that babies do not have to be directly

taught dialects. No flashcards are needed here: babies acquire dialects by mirroring what they hear. For example, a baby who is surrounded by a Pennsylvania German-English dialect will naturally acquire this dialect without any intentional instruction from the parents.

Dialects can be drawn along geographic as well as social lines. A dialect may be spoken among members of a particular region, such as the Virginia Piedmont dialect, or among speakers of a certain social class or profession (R. Young 3). For example, Cockney is a dialect of English often spoken by working-class Londoners. As a language evolves, people who are geographically or socially connected continue to "share language norms," which results in their speaking a shared dialect of their language ("Dialects"). That is, people in the same region, social class, or profession will continue to hold on to old speech patterns or develop new speech patterns while the language of people outside of those regions or social circles evolves differently. Linguists disagree on the total number of American English dialects, with some claiming there are as few as three, others arguing for more than 20, and others yet who insist that it is impossible to know the exact number of dialects (R. Young 7).

Some people do not believe that they speak a dialect, but they are mistaken. Because one's way of speaking is perceived by that person as normal, a common misconception is that dialects are spoken by "other people," but to speak a language means to speak a dialect of that language (R. Young 12; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes note that what is perceived by one person as normal "turns out to be another group's language peculiarity" (3). Although a speaker of one dialect may perceive a different dialect as incorrect, linguists, such as Stubbs, argue that "no

language or dialect is inherently superior or inferior to any other" and "all languages and dialects are suited to the needs of the community they serve" (70). From a linguistic perspective, all dialects are equally valid.

Dialects are not so different from the standard form of the language or from other dialects of the same language that the differences impede mutual comprehension ("Students' Right to Their Own Language" 6). This means that as long as two speakers share the same language, they can still understand each other even if they speak different dialects of that language. Suresh Canagarajah explains that because "the underlying grammatical and syntactic structure (i.e., the deep structure, in Chomskian terms) is the same across the diverse varieties of English," one does not have to be an expert in a particular dialect of his own language in order to effectively communicate with members of that dialect community (593). In fact, any difficulty in comprehending a different dialect of one's own language is likely to be entirely attitudinal ("Students' Right to Their Own Language" 6).

We communicate quite a bit about ourselves through our dialects, and we also make inferences about others based on how they speak. As much as we might like to believe we do not prejudge others, the uncomfortable truth is that as soon as someone starts speaking to us, we start making assumptions about that person. These assumptions are based not just on what is said but how it is said: "In fact, there's a good chance that the most critical part of our impression comes from how people talk rather than what they are talking about" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1). Stubbs suggests that these suppositions are practically unavoidable (70). This is because speaking a particular dialect is a sign of membership within a cultural group. When someone uses the dialect of

a certain cultural group, we attribute characteristics of that cultural group to the individual. Making inferences about such things as a speaker's background, social status, and race based on how that person speaks is part of human nature and is "both automatic and unconscious" (Kinzler 3). Because dialects are associated with cultural identity and varying levels of social prestige, "assessments of a complex set of social characteristics and personality traits based on language differences are as inevitable as the kinds of judgments we make when we find out where people live, what their occupations are, where they went to school, and who their friends are" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1).

General American English

As it is popularly used, General American English is really an umbrella term for dominant dialects that lack socially marked characteristics, and for the sake of simplicity, I will use this umbrella term to refer to those dialects. These are generally the dialects associated with the workplace, academia, business, finance, and the media (Meurers 31). A common misconception is that the dialects labeled General American English are the truly correct form of the language, free of dialectal characteristics. The idea that these socially favored forms are not dialects is incorrect, as a dialect is simply a form of a language. Even socially favored forms "constitute dialects every bit as much as those varieties spoken by socially disfavored groups whose language differences are socially stigmatized" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2).

In the United States, the terms General American English and Standard English are used in reference to the socially privileged way of speaking, but the term General American English does not actually refer to a single dialect. No one actually speaks a

dialect called General American English or Standard English (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 11). The norms surrounding General American English are more closely linked to written English "and often only loosely related to how English is spoken" (Stubbs 72). Rather, what is taught as General American English more accurately describes a grapholect. A grapholect is the written version of a language. Walter Ong and John Hartley explain that because of the permanency of writing, grapholects are often granted "a special normative power for keeping language in order," and so the grammar and usage of the grapholect itself are then considered the "correct" version, to the exclusion of the grammar and usage of other dialects (106). When spoken English does closely follow the norms of the grapholect, it is generally the result of the speech having been written first. For example, commencement speeches, eulogies, and campaign stumps are almost always prepared in writing and then memorized and performed, so their grammar aligns with that of the grapholect (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 11). Of course, because language evolves, so too does the grapholect. An example of this evolution that I have grappled with in my own career is the singular "they." Whereas ten years ago, students' use of "they" with a singular antecedent was broadly considered problematic, many style guides now accept or prefer it as an alternative to the gendered "he."

Black English

Next, let us consider Black English (BE), one of the most widely-studied nondominant English dialects. BE is sometimes referred to as African American English, African American Vernacular English, or Ebonics. Because the goal of this paper is to examine the effects of bias against BE and to advocate for providing students with the

tools they need to navigate or even challenge this bias, it is helpful for the reader to have

a basic understanding of BE and crucial that the reader recognize how BE operates as a

legitimate language system that provides its speakers with a rich format for effective

communication.

BE is spoken mostly by Black speakers in urban American communities. Doris A.

Flowers explains that BE is considered to "index the ethnic heritage and cultural identity

of many people of African descent in the United States" (224). That is not to say that all

users of BE speak identically, as sub-varieties exist as a result of differences in social

class, style, and location (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 18). Like other dialects, BE is a

legitimate language system and is not a failed attempt to speak General American

English. It is not lazy or careless speech, but a "complex, rule-governed linguistic system

in its own right" (Pearson et al. 2) with its own rules in "syntax, phonology, semantics,

and pragmatics" (3). BE includes unique vocabulary ("ashy"), distinctive pronunciation

(/ax/ for "ask"), and grammar "that are … deeply rooted, and stable over time" (Baker-

Bell 71). Figure 1 features a number of the common features of BE (AAVE):

Common Features of AAVE (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 221-222)	
Feature of AAVE	**Example**
habitual *be*	*She don't usually be there.*
absence of copula for contracted forms of *is* and *are*	*They acting all strange.*
present tense, third-person -*s* absence	*she walk* for *she walks*
possessive -*s* absence	*man_ hat* for *man's hat*
general plural -*s* absence	*a lot of time* for *a lot of times*
been to mark an action that began a long time ago and is still relevant	*I been known him a long time.*
had +*verb* for simple past tense	*They had went outside and then they had messed up the yard.*
ain't for *didn't*	*He ain't go there yesterday.*
reduction of final consonant clusters when followed by a word beginning with a vowel	*lif' up* for *lift up*
skr for *str* initial clusters	*skreet* for *street*
use of [f] and [v] for final *th*	*toof* for *tooth*

Figure 1: Common Features of AAVE

Beyond grammar and pronunciation, BE "includes modes of discourse and rhythmic patterns" (Flowers 224). There is more to BE than what is said: *how* ideas are communicated is equally important. "In addition to its grammar, meaning, and sound, Black Language is unique for its rich rhetorical style" (Baker-Bell 71). An example of this rhetorical style is the use of signifying, defined by Bonnie J. Williams-Farrier as

> a ritualized kind of put-down, an insult, a way of talking about, needling, or signifyin on someone else. Sometimes it's done just for fun, in conversations with friends and close associates. Other times, the put-down is used for a more serious purpose. In this communicative practice, the speaker deploys exaggeration, irony, and indirection as a way of saying something on two different levels at once. (225)

Signifying is often used "to express Black cultural knowledge, humor, or a serious social critique" and requires "verbal dexterity (skill & quickness), wit, and wordplay for it to be successful" (Baker-Bell 78). One form of signifying is "playing the dozens." It begins when the first speaker insults a family member (often the mother) of the second speaker. The second speaker must then defend his and his family's honor by retaliating with a clever slur against the first speaker's family (Abrahams 209-210). The slurs are usually exaggerated statements that would not actually describe the person, which keeps things friendly. The audience determines a winner based on who had the best comebacks (Baker-Bell 79).

Another feature of BE is semantic inversion, "a process whereby Black Language speakers take words and concepts from White Mainstream English lexicon and either reverse their meanings or impose entirely different meanings" (Baker-Bell 78). One example of semantic inversion is the use of the word "baddd" to express that something is actually very good. Semantic inversion dates back to slavery, where it was an act of empowerment among enslaved Africans to take the oppressor's language and make it theirs in a way that the oppressor would not understand (Baker-Bell 78).

Call and response, another feature of BE, is a form of communication where the audience participates by responding to the speaker. "The listeners' response during the exchange provides the addresser with cues that the listener is fully engaged in the conversation, which encourages the speaker to continue" (Baker-Bell 79). This feature of BE is commonly observed in Black churches, where the preacher will say something like "Can I get an amen?" to which the congregation replies "Amen" (Williams-Farrier 225).

Williams-Farrier calls BE rhetorical strategies "linguistic gifts" (228). These styles are an important part of Black heritage and culture. Effective use of these strategies leads to more impactful communication. April Baker-Bell writes about having students translate an interview with Black hip-hop artist Big Sean from BE to GAE. She and her students concluded that, after being translated, the message "lost its meaning, richness, or flava" (81). Speakers of BE use rhetorical strategies to shape the impact of their messages, which are not received quite the same without use of such style.

New Dialect Acquisition

James Gee differentiates between primary and secondary Discourses. The primary Discourse is the one into which a person is born. The norms of the primary Discourse are not overtly taught. They are learned by socializing with members of that Discourse, such as one's family. Secondary Discourses, however, are acquired through apprenticeship, "scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (7). As such, each person develops a primary dialect (spoken by those within the primary Discourse) and can acquire secondary dialects (spoken by those within the secondary Discourses). One strategy used to help students acquire a new dialect is called contrastive analysis (CA), which, as Rebecca Wheeler explains, "contrasts the grammatical structure of one variety with the grammatical structure of another variety (presumably the Standard) in order to add the [second] dialect to the students' linguistic toolbox" (17). Using CA, students use their understanding of their primary dialects to uncover the rules of secondary dialects by comparing them.

Contrastive Analysis in Second Language Acquisition

Contrastive analysis was developed as a foreign language acquisition tool that "investigates the differences between pairs (or small sets) of languages against the background of similarities" (Byram and Hu 1). Based on the understanding that building on prior knowledge is easier than starting from scratch, CA uses the language students already know to help them build competency in the new language. Stig Johansson explains how this strategy is useful:

> When we use a foreign language, we may make mistakes because of influence from our mother tongue – mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and other levels of language – often referred to as *interference*. This is why books in grammar and phonetics for foreign students with a particular mother tongue usually focus a lot on differences between the mother tongue – or L1 – and the target language – or L2.
> Being aware of these differences is essential in order to learn the correct and idiomatic use of the foreign language. Without such awareness, we tend to see and hear things in familiar ways, according to the categories which we are familiar with from our native language. And that is not surprising. This is the way we tend to see, hear, and interpret things in general. (9)

Putting the new language next to the learner's primary language can help the student make connections between the two. Contrastive analysis can improve "language awareness" and "advanced learners can profit from a direct comparison of their native language with the language to be learned, thus making their implicit knowledge of the differences explicit" (Byram and Hu 1).

Because it is impossible to compare every facet of one language to another, contrastive analysis does have its limits. It is not always an effective *predictor* of errors, and because of this, its use nearly died out (Johansson 11). As it is frequently used now, contrastive analysis "proceeds from the descriptions of some selected features or phenomena in the two languages" instead of trying to compare them wholesale to predict

errors. In this way, CA can help *explain* errors. "These features can include a wide range of categories, rules or rule systems, realizations of semantic concepts, various language functions, or even pragmatic categories and rhetorical issues" (Joze Tajareh 1109). The principal concept of contrastive analysis has proven helpful in dialect acquisition as well.

Contrastive Analysis and Dialect Acquisition

Students who are learning English as a second language are provided with additional supports to help them master the new linguistic system. Students who are learning a new dialect, however, are given no special instruction and are expected to learn the new dialect on their own (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 169). While learning a new dialect is not the same as learning a new language, what we know about new language acquisition can inform the strategies we develop to help students acquire new dialects (Gee 7).

One of the first steps in acquiring a new dialect is recognizing the ways in which it is similar to and different from one's primary dialect; "however, students often do not recognize these differences, and they may not even realize that there is a different variety of language that they are supposed to learn" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 172). Because students first have to recognize that differences do exist between dialects, "the obvious pedagogical solution would be techniques to make sure speakers of a stigmatized variety notice the differences between their vernacular and the standard" (Siegel "Stigmatized and Standardized" 718).

One way to expose students to multiple dialects and increase their awareness of the differences between their primary dialect and the dialect they wish to learn is through

contrastive analysis. Explicitly comparing the conventions of different dialects can help students identify similarities and differences between dialects so that they can focus on what they already know and where there are gaps in their understanding. Julie Hagemann writes that once a feature has been identified,

> students need to compare this feature with their existing knowledge of English. They're more likely to accept new information and adjust their current thinking when they see how it differs from their prior knowledge. This step requires an increased understanding of the feature in question, an understanding that can be facilitated by overtly comparing how it works in their home language to how it works in Standard English… Finally, students need to integrate this feature into their growing Standard English subsystem through practice and use. It would seem then that a pedagogical approach that encouraged students to notice, compare, and integrate new features into their linguistic systems would facilitate their language learning. (77)

To explain how the process of contrastive analysis is used in dialect acquisition, I will paraphrase an example provided by Wheeler in "Code Switch to Teach Standard English" (110-111):

Teacher notices that many of her students are not adding -s to indicate possession and identifies that they are, instead, following the BE rule for possession, which is possession = owner + owned (e.g. Tamara dog; Billy shirt). Teacher collects a number of examples from students' papers, drawing her content and data directly from her students' work.

In class, Teacher draws a chart with two columns and labels it "Possession." In the left column, she lists the examples she took from her students' papers. In the right column, she lists the same examples translated into General American English. She then walks her students through the process of inquiry. What do they notice about the examples on the left? What do they notice about the examples on the right? From their

observations, she helps students identify the grammatical rule of how to mark possession that is being followed by each dialect, as illustrated in Figure 2:

Possession	
BE	SE
Tamara dog	Tamara's dog
Billy shirt	Billy's shirt
Logan pencil	Logan's pencil
What is the rule? possession = owner + owned	What is the rule? Possession = owner+'s + owned

Figure 2: Contrastive Analysis Chart

As students add an understanding of this feature to their language repertoires, Teacher can help them examine the impact each style has on the overall delivery and reception of the message. As they write, students can make a conscious decision about how to mark possession to shape the effect of their writing.

Father-son duo John Russel Rickford and Russel John Rickford advocate for contrastive analysis. They note that the ability to read and write in GAE is "central to school success" and that teachers can build on students' understandings of their own vernaculars to help them learn GAE (179-180). But CA's usefulness is not limited to helping BE speakers master GAE: contrastive analysis can be used to expose students to any number of dialects, from those represented by the student body in the classroom to

those students encounter in literature. Much of the instructional content can be drawn directly from student writing samples, which can result in increased engagement. Students can also conduct interviews within their communities to explore how language varieties show up in various settings. Lily Wong Fillmore and Catherine E. Snow write that activities that incorporate the use of General American English while validating the "crucial role" of students' home languages and cultures "help children make the necessary transitions in ways that do not undercut the role that parents and families must continue to play in their education and development" (12). As students develop competency in General American English, they can begin making intentional choices about which dialect to use to most effectively communicate in a given context.

Special Considerations Regarding Contrastive Analysis

Teachers who use contrastive analysis must be intentional and vigilant in their presentation of dialects. Opponents of contrastive analysis express concern that, when it is not implemented with careful intention, CA perpetuates dialect stigmatization. For example, "if the contrastive analysis approach is not applied in ways that promote cultural pluralism and cultural equality, it may have negative effects on student perceptions about language and identity" (Williams-Farrier 235). Baker-Bell argues that contrastive analysis leads to implementation of the Eradication Theory (xv). She writes, "This approach creates a linguistic hierarchy that positions White Mainstream English as linguistically superior to Black Language and other linguistically marginalized languages" (23).

However, nothing about contrastive analysis inherently presents one language variety as superior to another. Contrastive analysis should not be presented to students as "correcting" a nondominant dialect by rewriting it in GAE. The nondominant dialect is already correct. Even as students are exposed to General American English, "it is neither necessary nor desirable to promote it at the expense of the language patterns children already have" (Wong Fillmore and Snow 6). Noticing the differences does not require that one form be treated as more correct than the other. Sure, educators should heed Williams-Farrier's warning and be very careful about how they implement contrastive analysis, but when used correctly, contrastive analysis promotes dialect awareness, not dialect inequality. Ideas of how to better prepare teachers to properly use CA will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Dialect Through a Teacher's Lens

This chapter has outlined some of the rules and structures of BE in hopes of helping any reader who previously viewed BE as "broken English" see that it is a rule-governed linguistic system. It is important for educators to understand that dialects are legitimate forms of language and that the variations in grammar, pronunciation, and rhetorical style are not evidence of a failed attempt to speak General American English. This will help teachers distinguish actual errors from dialect differences. Constant correction of a dialect and treatment of that dialect as "incorrect" can harm students' academic performance, sense of self, and relationships, as we will explore in the next section. Teachers should understand the relationship between dialect and culture to ensure students' cultural identities are not threatened in school. Incorporating students'

dialects into the classroom is part of teaching the whole child, and these dialects can and should be viewed by teachers as tools their students can use to communicate effectively and authentically. At the same time, it is crucial for teachers to acknowledge the perceptions that surround nonstandard dialects as they prepare their students to be successful beyond the classroom.

Chapter Two: Dialect Inequality

Me, an English teacher: I'm not looking forward to getting home. I have a sink full of dishes that need washed.

Colleague, visibly cringing: You are such a Hoosier.

Me, puzzled: What do you mean?

Colleague: I hear this all the time since moving to Indiana. You have a sink full of dishes that need *to be* washed. It's wrong to leave out the "to be." You wouldn't hear anyone in Texas saying their dishes need washed or their lawn needs mowed.

Me: ...hmmhh..

The first opportunity I had, I turned to Google for confirmation. Indeed, my search for "dishes need washed vs. dishes need to be washed" yielded a dozen results with pages addressing this very grammar issue. It turns out, infinitive copula deletion (in this case, leaving out "to be") is a characteristic of Pittsburgh English, a dialect that has crept westward into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. I learned from these results that my colleague was not the only person from outside the Midwest who found this particular linguistic quirk not only noticeable but also odd or even grating. To their discerning ears, a phrase like "the car needs fixed" sounded wrong.

It was only the second time in my life being caught unaware of a verbal faux pax (the first being in high school and learning that "antenna" is not pronounced [an-tan-uh]). Sure, I defy grammar rules all the time, but I do so knowingly. This experience, learning that a syntax I employ frequently and without hesitation is grammatically incorrect per the standard, was new. It gave me a deeper sort of empathy for my students. In some tiny

measure, I understood what it must have been like for them being told that the way they speak, what sounds natural and correct to them, is actually "wrong."

In this chapter, I will explore standard language ideology and how it results in language discrimination. I will then focus more specifically on how negative perceptions of BE held by teachers can be detrimental to students' success. It is necessary to identify the problems created by current attitudes toward dialects so that solutions can be presented that directly address the roots of those attitudes.

Standard Language Ideology

Although linguists agree that all dialects are equally valid language systems and "none has a grammar intrinsically more 'correct' than others," dialects are not treated equally by broader society (Ong and Hartley 106-7). Just as people are ranked by social hierarchies, "so are the languages, dialects, and registers that they speak" (Flowers 222). John Russell Rickford explains that the dialects spoken by the dominant social groups are associated with power and prestige, while the dialects spoken by marginalized social groups are stigmatized and associated with stereotypes about those groups, such as unintelligence and laziness (1).

In America, the standard language ideology (also sometimes called the dominant language ideology) is the belief that General American English, the form of English spoken by the (predominantly White) upper and upper-middle class, is superior (Siegel "Language Ideologies" 161). In "Econolinguistics in the USA," John Baugh explains that this ideology is not new. Most of the early settlers from Europe were wealthy, and King George gifted many of these settlers with large pieces of land. This advantage, coupled

with the exploitation of slave labor, allowed these families to amass huge fortunes. The language use of the wealthy was different from that of the poor. Wealthy families were more politically powerful and thus their way of speaking gained prestige. Furthermore, this wealth provided access to literacy and education, and thus the language use of the poor was associated with unintelligence (70-71).

Centuries later, General American English maintains a special status. According to standard language ideology, "there is a 'correct' or 'pure' form of a language: Standardized English," and this ideology is treated as gospel and considered "common sense" (Metz 456). My student labeled the Black English grammar in the thank-you card as "incorrect," and my colleague informed me that my unwitting use of Pittsburg English was "wrong" because both my student and my colleague were projecting the rules of General American English onto dialects that followed different rules. The rules and legitimacy of those dialects were invalidated under the belief that any dialect other than General American English is incorrect.

In spite of the fact that what is labeled General American English does not accurately reflect natural speaking patterns, it is still considered the gold standard in academia. The standard language ideology is often "unquestioned" in institutions such as schools (Baker-Bell 15), and so it is reproduced by schools "through the teaching of dominant cultural capital, privileging and legitimizing certain forms of knowledge, language forms, practices, and learning styles" (Bellas 225). Teachers are expected to instruct students in the proper use of General American English, to be used both when speaking and writing, and students are expected to adhere to the rules of General American English in all academic endeavors. Note these directions provided to students

completing the Writing and Language portion of the SAT: "After reading each passage, choose the answer to each question that most effectively improves the quality of writing in the passage or that makes the passage conform to the conventions of standard written English" ("SAT® Test Directions" 14). These directions reflect the notion that General American English is the ideal for which students should strive. Teachers want to equip students with the skills they need to do well on standardized assessments like the SAT (and thus access the opportunities that come with favorable scores), and knowing that the test favors GAE further incentivizes teachers to privilege it over other dialects.

Even when teachers do question the standard language ideology, they may not have the framework to present dialects as equal. In his study published in 2018, Mike Metz worked with five high school English teachers who were selected because of their interest in presenting linguistic counter-narratives, which are "alternative ways to think about language" that challenge the standard language ideology (Metz 457). Metz notes that in spite of their efforts and desire to present Black English and General American English as equals, four of the five teachers resorted to the standard language ideology when discussing language with their students. For example, one teacher had her students translate phrases in Black English into General American English, but when presenting the Black English phrases, the teacher asked her student how it would be "fixed." Using the word "fixed" instead of something more neutral, like "translated," "clearly positioned [Black English] as incorrect" (471). This study reveals that even teachers who are conscious of and wish to challenge the standard language ideology might lack the framework to do so.

Fortunately, the standard language ideology can be challenged using tools like contrastive analysis and strategies like code-switching and code-meshing, which will be explored in later sections.

Language Discrimination

Unfortunately, the opinions people have of various dialects often shape their opinions of the speakers as well. Jeff Siegel explains that "It is well known that many people have strong attitudes towards particular dialects (and their speakers)—generally positive attitudes towards standard dialects, such as standard English, and negative attitudes towards unstandardized regional or ethnic dialects, such as Appalachian English and African American English" (*Second Dialect Acquisition* 117). This language prejudice places an "unfair burden on speakers of undervalued varieties, who must continually accommodate those who hold negative attitudes toward them and/or their dialects" (Barrett "Rewarding Language" 21). Those who speak a dominant dialect do not have to worry that their speech will impact how others view them, but people who speak a nondominant dialect are burdened by negative perceptions and have to go out of their way to disprove those perceptions. It is hard to overestimate the impact language and dialect hierarchy have on our lives. Katherine Kinzler notes that the way we speak "can make the difference between getting hired or being passed over for a job. It can be a tool for political oppression and a driver of social and economic marginalization" (xii).

Linguistically, the nondominant dialects are no more or less correct than the dominant dialect, but because the dominant dialect "is devoid of socially stigmatized structures," it is treated as superior (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 13). Examples of

stigmatized structures include the absence of third person present tense -s (She *like* baseball), r-lessness (*cah* instead of *car*), and the substitution of [d] instead of [th] at the beginnings of words (*dese*, *dem* instead of *these*, *them*) (Rickford 4, 10, 11). Nondominant dialects include "social dialects, such as working-class English; regional dialects, such as Appalachian in the United States; and ethnic or minority dialects such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Australian Aboriginal English...Pidgins and creoles, such as Melanesian Pidgin and Hawai'i Creole English" (Siegel "Stigmatized and Standardized Varieties" 702). Speakers of nondominant dialects are "relegated to a particular status within their society" and often have fewer opportunities and choices (Taliaferro 19).

Differing levels of prestige can result in prejudiced treatment of speakers of nondominant dialects. Not surprisingly, considering the country's historical treatment of African Americans, BE is deeply stigmatized, and speakers of BE still experience discrimination. As noted by Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy in their co-edited book *The Skin That We Speak*, BE is often seen as improper, incorrect, and even indecent (xviii). BE is associated with slang and broken English, and speakers of BE are viewed as less trustworthy, less intelligent, and less promising (Pearson et al. 4, 8).

Where anti-discrimination laws make it more difficult to overtly use race to discriminate in the job market, housing, academics, and courts, "more subtle approaches to racism, such as language-focused racism, have been used to exclude and discriminate against linguistically and racially diverse groups" (Baker-Bell 16-7). Language discrimination leads to the perpetuation of discrimination based on race, gender, and socioeconomic prejudice (Dannenberg and Dredger 2).

This discrimination is what linguists refer to as linguistic profiling: "Whereas 'racial profiling' is based on visual cues that result in the confirmation or speculation of the racial background of an individual, or individuals, 'linguistic profiling' is based upon auditory cues that may include racial identification, but which can also be used to identify other linguistic subgroups within a given speech community" (Baugh "Linguistic Profiling" 158). Language prejudice is harder to identify because it can be disguised in terms of effective communication skills or professionalism and is therefore "perhaps one of the last accepted forms of discrimination in the United States" (Dannenberg and Dredger 2).

Examples of linguistic profiling against speakers of BE are not hard to come by. Baugh coined this term after an experience with "visual racial profiling" in the late 1980s. In "Linguistic Profiling," Baugh recounts the story of seeking housing in Palo Alto. Baugh inquired about properties with a number of landlords, employing what he calls his "professional voice," which he says he has been told "sounds white." On four separate occasions, Baugh was instantly turned away once he arrived at the appointment and the landlord realized he was Black (158-159). Baugh suspected that had the landlords been able to identify his race over the telephone, he never would have gotten the appointments in the first place.

Baugh also shares the story of Anita Henderson, a Black woman searching for housing in Philadelphia. When Henderson visited an apartment complex in person, she was shown the most expensive apartments and told they would not be available for a month. The next day, Henderson called the apartment complex and used what she

described as her "very best Standard American English" ("Linguistic Profiling" 159).

This time, she was told about several less expensive apartments with immediate vacancy.

Henderson's experience is not unique. A study by Massey and Lundy published in 2001 in *Urban Affairs Review* revealed significant phone-based discrimination based on race, gender, and social class. According to the study, White callers found it easier to reach a rental agent, were more likely to be told of a unit's availability, and less likely to pay application fees. It was also less likely for agents to mention concern about White applicants' credit worthiness. Lower-class Black women fared the worst and had to dedicate more time and effort just to get in contact with potential landlords.

When shopping for home insurance, Black homeowners may experience linguistic profiling. A 2006 study by Squires and Chadwick published in *Urban Affairs Review* reveals significant differences in the treatment of Black customers calling to obtain insurance quotes and their White counterparts. For example, the insurance agent was much more likely to ask a Black-sounding customer about the location of the home within the first two or three questions in the conversation, but not until the third or fourth question for White-sounding customers. Further, Black customers were presented with fewer or lower-quality options.

Linguistic profiling is not limited to the housing market. A 2019 study by Leech et al. published in *Health Services Research* found that Black parents who called to schedule care for their children were more likely to be told by pediatric office administrators that the practice was not accepting new patients. Black parents were more likely to be encouraged to find an office closer to home or to experience other gatekeeping requirements, such as having the patient's previous medical records faxed to

the new office before the initial appointment. Office personnel were also seven times more likely to ask Black parents if the patient was receiving subsidized coverage like CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) and Medicaid.

Phone interviews could also be problematic for speakers of nonstandard dialects. "Unfortunately, many employers have narrowly conceived notions of the relationship between linguistic performance and job competence" ("Students' Right to Their Own Language" 22). Employers tend to prefer candidates who speak a dialect close to their own while holding negative, stereotypical ideas about speakers of other nonstandard dialects. "Consequently, many speakers of divergent dialects are denied opportunities that are readily available to other applicants whose dialects more nearly approximate the speech of the employer" (22).

Black English is not safe from criticism within the Black community, either. Geneva Smitherman refers to the mixed feelings about BE within the Black community as a "'push-pull' dynamic" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 170). Take for example Black columnist William Raspberry's 1996 article, "To Throw in a lot of 'Bes,' or Not? A Conversation on Ebonics" published in *The Washington Post.* The article, written in response to the Oakland (CA) school board's resolution in favor of recognizing Black English (Ebonics) as a legitimate language system, includes a fictional conversation between Raspberry and a cab driver that is meant to mock Black English. In that dialogue, the cab driver speaks a bastardized version of Ebonics (which Raspberry refers to as "Ghettoese"). Raspberry makes it clear that he considers Ebonics a language system with "no right or wrong expressions, no consistent spellings or pronunciations and no discernable rules."

Of course, Raspberry could not be farther from the truth. Geoffrey K. Pullum points out that Raspberry's fictional dialogue contains four distinct errors in Black English, which would not be possible if Black English had "no discernable rules." Pullum argues that Raspberry "got nowhere close" to actually using Black English because Raspberry haphazardly replaced words and left off word endings with no consideration of the rules of Black English. In reality, "there is nothing random about [Black English]" (4).

Raspberry is certainly not the only Black critic of BE. After the Oakland School Board's 1996 resolution declaring that BE was its own language and that teachers should use students' primary dialects in instruction while still building student competency in General American English, poet and author Maya Angelou, who frequently used BE in her own writing, was "incensed" at the idea of BE being treated as its own language ("Hooked on Ebonics"). Angelou expressed concern that the treatment of BE as its own language would discourage Black youth from learning General American English. Similarly, minister and social activist Jesse Jackson (well-known for his use of BE rhetorical styles) called BE "garbage" and said that recognizing it as a legitimate language in the classroom was "an unacceptable surrender borderlining on disgrace" ("Jackson Criticizes"). After much discussion with the Oakland School Board about its intention to use BE in the classroom but still emphasize the importance of General American English acquisition, however, Jackson later reversed his opinion (Irvine). However, the controversy over the use of BE in the classroom certainly did not end with the uproar over the Oakland School Board's resolution.

A more recent study reveals that negative attitudes towards BE persist within the Black community, and more concerningly, among Black educators specifically. In her 2015 study, Melanie Hines-Knapp interviewed 16 educators from the Southeastern part of the United States. These educators all worked closely with BE-speaking Black students in urban schools. Of the 16 participants, ten were Black, and it is the commentary of some of those Black educators that I note here: Participant 3 commented that BE is "'most often on a lower level of speech'" (73), that BE "'looked uneducated and ghetto almost,'" and called it "'incorrect English'" (77). Participant 3 did not think it was appropriate to use BE in a classroom setting because students will be expected to use "'*correct* English'" (emphasis added) in college and career life (90). Participant 7 called BE "'a miseducation'" (77). Participant 1 associated BE with "'an underdeveloped vocabulary'" (90). Participant 9 would only use BE in the classroom "'to demonstrate what is grammatically incorrect'" (92). Participant 13 believed that the acceptance of BE was the result of "'an idea that Black urban children are not as intelligent as their White counterparts'" (93). Smitherman, too, notes that "Black teachers and educators are often more negative toward Black English-speaking children than are white educators" (*Talkin That Talk* 148). The attitudes of these Black educators reveal that, almost 20 years after the Oakland school board resolution, in-group resistance to BE continued.

BE in the Classroom

I focus on BE in this section because it is the most prevalent nondominant dialect in my classroom. Before exploring pedagogical practices that will validate my BE-speaking students while also giving them access to the dominant dialect, it is important to

examine the current treatment of BE so that I can understand the experiences my students bring to the classroom and how those experiences will influence their perception of reading, writing, and speaking.

As evidenced by Hines-Knapp's study, negative perceptions of BE persist among some teachers. It is hard to overstate the impact a teacher's attitude towards a student's identity can have on the success of the student. Wong Fillmore and Snow note that "what teachers say and do can determine how successfully children make the crucial transition from home to school," and teachers' attitudes can influence whether students enter the world as "fully participating members" or "get shunted onto sidetracks that distance them from family, society, and the world of learning" (11).

Unfortunately, in most classrooms, BE is treated as a deficit rather than a difference. That is, many teachers believe that speaking BE reflects a lack of linguistic competency. Teachers do not acknowledge or validate that these students are completely competent speakers within their own dialects. BE is devalued by teachers who treat the dialect as a problem to be fixed rather than a different but equally valid way of communicating. Instead of being treated as children who simply need to be taught GAE, BE-speaking students "are treated as careless or lazy speakers of standard English" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 163). Teachers who view minority dialects as "corrupted or degenerate forms of standardized language" may ban use of such dialects from the classroom (107). Baker-Bell suggests that when teachers lack knowledge about the culture and speech patterns their Black students bring with them, the teachers end up "silencing, correcting, and policing students when they communicate in Black Language" (Baker-Bell 20).

One harmful practice that results from negative bias is the habit of interrupting children as they speak to "correct" their grammar. For example, a student might start telling the teacher about his weekend, saying "I seen a rabbit at the fair" only for the teacher to interrupt and demand that the child repeat his sentence using the correct verb form. This is one strategy supported by the Eradication Theory, which suggests that "lower-class families (including some Blacks) had a deficient way of expressing themselves," and so these nonstandard dialects "must be totally displaced or eradicated and replaced by standard speech" (Dean and Fowler 302). Proponents of the Eradication Theory propose doing just what the name of the theory suggests: they wish to eradicate nonstandard dialects.

To erase one's dialect is to erase part of one's culture and cultural identity. In addition to being outright unethical, research shows that the Eradication Theory is an ineffective strategy that results in disengagement. "Students can be alienated from school when their spoken language is corrected for no apparent communicative reason" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 160). In the above example, the student's verb choice did not hinder communication—the teacher knew exactly what the child was trying to share (as evidenced by the teacher's ability to provide an alternate way of phrasing the student's idea). This kind of unnecessary correction does not teach students how to use General American English. It simply teaches them that what they have to say is only valuable if the listener approves of the way it is said. Such strategies completely fail to acknowledge the value of the language skills students bring with them to the classroom, which is bound to negatively impact the teacher-student relationship (Rhoden 50). The end result of constant correction is that students "withdraw into silence or rebel against the education

system" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 163). Not much learning can occur when students shut down or actively rebel.

The negative perception of BE in the school setting can be detrimental to the academic development and success of speakers of BE, leading to lasting negative impact on student placement, student-teacher interaction and relationship, student performance, student perception of self, and student in-group belonging.

Student Placement

When students use language in ways different from what teachers expect, teachers might assume there is something wrong with the students. According to Wong Fillmore and Snow, teachers may fail to recognize when "a particular pattern signals membership in a language community that speaks a vernacular variety of English" and without this understanding the "use of a vernacular variety of English or normal second-language learner features is often misinterpreted as indicating developmental delay" (9). This misinterpretation can result in the students being inappropriately placed in lower-ability tracks and/or special education classes (5). Flowers writes that many Black children have been tracked into special education programs because their nonstandard dialects are viewed as "language-related disorders" (226). Such students are labeled "language disorder/deviant" (226), and use of their dialect is treated as a language learning disability.

Smitherman suggests that these tracks might be more accurately called "traps," a fair assessment considering that once a student is placed in a particular track, it is difficult to move out of that track (*Talkin and Testifyin* 239). Wong Fillmore and Snow note that

being placed in the low-ability tracks can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; once sorted into tracks by perceived inability (often as early as kindergarten), students "behave precisely as one would expect low-ability students to behave: They are poorly motivated, low achieving, and less enthusiastic about school than they should be" (9). These students receive instruction, treatment, and materials that substantially differ from students in groups labeled as on-pace or advanced, "reinforcing any initial differences among them in speed of learning and eagerness to learn" (8). Students are likely to stay in these tracks for the duration of their academic careers.

I have certainly witnessed the results of such tracking in my own classroom. I have had students who were placed in the accelerated track—Honors English—because they use "correct" grammar when writing and have well-developed vocabularies, yet who completely lack the critical thinking and analysis skills required for such classes. At the same time, I have had students placed in my remedial classes because their writing reflects their nondominant dialect, yet the ideas communicated in their writing were insightful and indicative of a deep understanding of the curriculum. Those misplaced in my Honors English classes are usually permitted by administration to switch to a general-education course at the end of the first semester. Those students who wish to leave the remedial course to join the general-education course during the second semester are required to earn a minimum score on a standardized test before they are permitted to do so. Unsurprisingly, part of that standardized test assesses mastery of GAE, and low scores on that section often prevent students from changing courses.

<u>Student-Teacher Relationships and Interaction</u>

School is often the first place where a student is made to feel like his language, his very way of being, is somehow wrong (Delpit and Kilgour Dowdy xviii). Bias against nondominant dialects like BE impacts how teachers interact with their students, which impacts both the student-teacher relationship and the students' willingness to practice GAE. In her educator's guide for creating culturally responsible environments, Alissa Taliaferro notes that interactions between teachers and students who speak nondominant dialects are limited; teachers are more likely to engage in conversation with students who speak the dominant dialect, and therefore less likely to build relationships with speakers of nondominant dialects. This bias can result in students distrusting school and teachers, which Amanda Biviano notes makes students even more reluctant to practice GAE (28). When students are anxious about being corrected, they may simply opt not to speak (Delpit "No Kinda Sense" 41). Thus, when teachers and students of nondominant dialects do speak, the teacher typically does most of the talking. Teachers ask more closed-ended questions, and student responses are simple recall statements. This limited interaction impedes student growth, prevents teachers and students from building a solid rapport, and results in few opportunities for students to practice engaging in GAE (Taliaferro 23), which is the most effective way of mastering a new dialect, as "people acquire a new dialect most effectively through interaction with speakers of that dialect, not through being constantly corrected" (Delpit "Skills and Other Dilemmas" 379). Rusty Barrett notes that even when students answer questions correctly, they may still receive redirection for using a nondominant dialect. This pressure to "continually monitor their

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own speech to match others' views of what is appropriate or acceptable in any given context" can cause students to shut down entirely ("Rewarding Language" 20).

Student Performance

Another result of negative perceptions of BE is poor student performance as a result of lowered teacher expectations (Rhoden 4). According to a 2018 study done by Garrard McClendon and Cynthia Valenciano, teachers can create self-fulfilling prophecies about student ability, and "a teacher's bias against a student's Black English dialect may trigger lower teacher expectations and lower student performance" (113). It is my experience that students will rise or fall to meet our expectations. When teachers do not expect their students to be successful, they set a lower bar and do not push the students as hard as they do students whom they see as high-achieving. This difference in expectations can result in students not being pushed to their potential.

Further, when students sense that teachers lack faith in their potential, "they will behave in ways to make this false sense of reality true...Teachers may behave in ways to project those lower expectations and unknowingly plan inappropriate instruction for students who speak AAE centered upon preconceived notions of the children's abilities" (Rhoden 53). When teachers exhibit negative attitudes towards students' home dialects, the students are inclined to reject the dialect of school (Delpit "No Kinda Sense" 47). Barrett suggests that the negative attitude toward nonstandard dialects "might have a greater impact on students during [adolescence] when language variation comes to play a central role in the formation of individual identity" and could even be linked to drop-out rates ("Be Yourself Somewhere Else" 34).

<u>Student Perception of Self</u>

The treatment of BE in school can come as an insult to students' home identities. As Delpit writes, "the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is 'wrong' or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family" ("Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction" 150). A student who feels like his family and community are being treated derogatorily by school is not likely to see school as a safe place to engage in learning (especially when learning requires risk-taking and the potential of failure, for which a student may fear being negatively judged). Students should not be expected to deny their cultural identities. "Just because a student has left his home and is sitting within the hallowed walls of a classroom does not mean he has suddenly left behind his familial culture and dialect with which he primarily identifies" (Nelson 55).

Furthermore, students who do not feel welcome at school are less likely to perform to their highest ability. Language is closely tied to identity, and when students experience routine "correction" of their home dialects, they are not likely to feel like school is a place where they belong. Students who feel like academic success can only come at the cost of their cultural identities might feel defensive and thus actively reject the dialect and culture they feel is being forced upon them. "Making students feel that school is a welcoming environment where they are free to express their individuality is extremely difficult when the language those students speak is excluded from any aspect of the school environment" (Barrett "Be Yourself Somewhere Else" 33-4). This can result in students creating an oppositional identity.

An oppositional identity is formed "when an individual or group define themselves according to how they are different to another group (or 'outgroup'), usually a dominant group" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 170). That is, students who feel like they will not be accepted into the dominant group because of their dialects will rebel against the dominant group by defining themselves as the opposite of what that group represents. This oppositional identity "causes students to reject schooling altogether, and, unfortunately, the subject most easily rejected is the one that asks for students to speak and write in a way that seems unnatural to them, namely the English Language Arts class. This was true for my students, who saw the social world of academia as one in which they would rather 'die' than be a part of" (Biviano 28).

Social Group Exclusion

Speakers of BE who do effectively use GAE at school often do so at the cost of their cultural and personal identity and group membership. "Among the scholarship that has examined academically successful African-American students, a disturbing finding has emerged—the students' academic success came at the expense of their cultural and psychosocial well-being" (Ladson-Billings 475). BE-speaking students have often collectively created an oppositional identity. Once that identity is formed, "it is unacceptable to adopt characteristics of the outgroup. As a result, use of the [second dialect]—the standard variety that typifies the outgroup—is often stigmatised within the [primary dialect] community, and students who use it are ridiculed or even ostracised by their peers" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 170). Thus, as Gloria Ladson-Billings points out, students who adopt GAE in their school speech in place of BE are ostracized

by their peers or accused of "acting white" (475), something I have witnessed a number of times over my career. BE-speaking students face a difficult decision: master a dialect that might lead to economic and professional success, or use the dialect they speak with their friends, family, and community (McClendon and Valenciano 112).

The Case for General American English Education

Given the deleterious effects of the standard language ideology and the consequences of a deficit narrative surrounding nondominant dialects, it is completely understandable that some educators respond by refusing to teach their students the surface features of General American English, such as grammar and style, altogether (Delpit "Acquisition of Literate Discourse" 300). Delpit reports having met many of these "radical and progressive teachers" who "seek to develop literacy solely within the language and style of the students' home discourse" (300). These educators argue that the only way to empower students who speak nondominant dialects is to buck the system, for these students to "become autonomous, to develop fully who they are in the classroom setting without having arbitrary, outside standards forced upon them" (300).

Of course, Delpit does not condone this approach, and while I am completely empathetic to this reaction, I would argue that it does a disservice to students. Mastery of GAE can bring benefits that might not be otherwise attainable. I submit that we should give students every tool we can, and GAE is no exception, especially because General American English is linked to literacy and access to dominant Discourses.

<u>Literacy</u>

Students should learn General American English because there is some research that suggests competency in GAE is tied to reading comprehension (Taliaferro 19). When students who speak nondominant dialects encounter written General American English, they are presented with a mismatch between home and school languages that is "hypothesized to delay AAE speakers in learning to read" (Pearson et al. 5). This is because reading in a different dialect can complicate decoding, which is the process of using knowledge of letter sounds to correctly pronounce and comprehend written words. In their 2015 study published in *Frontiers of Psychology*, Brown et al. found that "both the behavioral and modeling evidence indicate that knowledge of alternative dialects affects acquisition and use of spelling-sound knowledge, an important component of reading." When a child reads a word written in a different dialect, the word's spelling might not match the child's mental image of the word. For example, one feature of BE is the use of [f] or [v] to replace [th]. When a child hears and says "toof" but sees "tooth" on the page, there is a mismatch that can slow processing of the written word.

Competence in General American English can prevent these sorts of mismatches from causing a student to fall behind, which can have dire consequences. "The child who falls behind in reading by grade three is four times more likely to drop out of high school than the student who reads at grade level" (Wheeler and Thomas 383). As students transition from early elementary to late elementary, the philosophy evolves from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (Wheeler and Thomas 382). Much of the content from late elementary forward is delivered in writing. Students who struggle with reading can have a hard time accessing the content. "The literature with regard to language

acquisition is clear: teachers and students need to have an understanding of the type of academic language commonly used in instruction. This includes the language found in textbooks, assessments, and other content-specific materials" (Bellas 207). The ability to access content through reading is necessary for students to succeed in school, graduate, and thrive in the workforce (Wheeler and Thomas 383).

Access to Dominant Discourses

In response to educators who propose teaching students in only their primary dialects, Delpit argues that while teaching students to become independent without forcing outside standards upon them is "a very reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized its codes," parents of students who exist outside of the framework of the dominant culture want to "ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" ("The Silenced Dialogue" 285). What Delpit is alluding to here is the ability for students to access dominant Discourses.

Gee distinguishes between discourse ("little d") and Discourse ("big d"). He defines discourse as "connected stretches of language that make sense," or, in other words, language in use (6). Discourses ("big d") are broader and more encompassing. Discourses are not just ways of talking, but ways of acting, thinking, and believing. Discourses are "ways of being in the world; [Discourses] are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances,

body positions, and clothes." Discourses can be thought of as "identity kits" that include "instructions on how to act, talk, and often write" (Gee 6-7).

To illustrate this concept, consider a hypothetical student, whom we will call Sarah. Sarah moves through a number of Discourses during her week: daughter, student, Student Council representative, friend, softball pitcher, big sister, girlfriend, and youth group leader at her church. Each of these facets of Sarah's identity calls for a specific "way of being." For example, on the field, Sarah is a dirt-covered, cutthroat competitor with a foul mouth (when out of earshot of the coaches). Come Sunday morning, her church dress is crisp and her voice soft and encouraging as she guides the younger children through a cooperative game. The way she speaks, interacts with others, carries herself, dresses, and the values she stresses change as she navigates these identities.

Siegel explains that "people have multiple and changing social identities, rather than the unitary static social identity of most psychological models, and that identity at any particular time depends on the context" (*Second Dialect Acquisition* 106). Sarah learned to manage all of these identities because she was given access to practice the Discourses through her family, school, and church community. Sarah was enculturated into each of these Discourses "through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (Gee 7). Her father was a student athlete, and her friend (who is in the grade above her) is on the softball team. Along with her coach, they introduced Sarah to the culture of sports and helped her acclimate to the expectations of the team. This access allowed Sarah to acquire the "*saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing-combinations*" associated with each Discourse (Gee 6).

Gee also distinguishes between dominant and nondominant Discourses, where dominant Discourses are those "the mastery of which, at a particular place and time, brings with it the (potential) acquisition of social 'goods' (money, prestige, status, etc.)" (Gee 8). For example, being in a fan club for an obscure television show involves membership in a nondominant Discourse. There is an identity kit associated with that particular fandom, but it is unlikely to lead to social goods in mainstream culture. Enrollment in post-secondary education, employment as an insurance broker, and service in a government position involve membership in dominant Discourses because these are Discourses that could lead to social goods.

The important thing to note here is that membership within a Discourse requires the use of the dialect spoken by the majority of the members of that Discourse, and for the great majority of dominant Discourses in America, that dialect is General American English (Gee 11). In the ideal world, all dialects would be treated equally and dialect would never be a barrier to accessing any Discourse. Unfortunately, it seems to be in our nature to divide ourselves.

Humans have, since recorded history, divided into groups, and part of group membership is a shared language or dialect. Kinzler notes that forming social groups is a "recurrent aspect of humanity" (3). The way a person speaks is a pretty good indicator of that person's membership status (or lack of) within a particular social group (iii). Research shows that individuals naturally gravitate towards those who are similar. This proclivity towards people who speak similarly is hardwired and even starts in infancy: "children seem to sense that differences in language demarcate different social groups— and they prefer people in their own group" (x). It also seems that this categorization is not

conscious or intentional. "Decades of psychology research on intergroup and interpersonal relations suggest that we can't seem to turn off our 'category detectors,' which divide the world into us and them. It is simply human nature" (ii). Because of this predilection towards people who speak similarly, those who do not master the dominant dialect will find it harder to integrate into social circles where its use is the norm.

In addition to communicating ideas, we use language to communicate our individual and group identities. "Speakers often, consciously or unconsciously, use language to convey their social identity, so members of a group may sound alike in their speech. Sounding alike also helps groups to seem distinctive when compared with others" (Wray and Bloomer 96). Mastery of the dialect of the group is an effective marker of membership because it is not easy to fake. This makes dialect an effective gatekeeper: not speaking the dialect associated with the Discourse indicates that the person is not a member of that Discourse. Even after acquiring a new dialect, using it consistently usually takes concerted effort. "Although the [second dialect] acquirers may have learned [second dialect] lexical items and rules (explicit knowledge), automaticity (implicit linguistic competence) is not achieved by the majority, especially with phonological and morphological features" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 74). When outsiders attempt to speak the dialects of groups to which they do not have membership, they are likely to receive ridicule from that group and possibly also ridicule from speakers of their primary dialects (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 146).

Moving through various contexts may require adjusting one's body language, style, and dialect; it is not uncommon to act, dress, and speak differently at home versus at work or when spending time with friends versus respected elders. Sometimes, this shift

is not even intentional. "In the course of face-to-face interaction, people may subconsciously adjust their speech to be more similar to that of their interlocutors in order to gain their approval or express solidarity." In addition to shifting speech to gain approval, sometimes the goal is the opposite—"They may also adjust their speech to be more different to express disapproval or social distance (called 'divergence')" (Siegel *Second Dialect Acquisition* 69-70). For example, students who have developed an oppositional identity might emphasize their use of a nondominant dialect to express their rejection of school.

The ability to form relationships and make connections is essential to one's success in almost every dominant Discourse. Membership within the Discourse enables the formation of those relationships and connections. "People define themselves by their social group affiliations; other people define them that way too. Social group membership determines whether and how people connect—or how they fail to find common ground" (Kinzler 3). People who do not have access to the dominant dialect will miss opportunities to connect with others who could help their careers.

This principle extends to hiring practices. Being able to speak in a similar fashion to those with whom one desires employment increases the likelihood of being hired. "The perceived assimilation builds a respect and a sense of brotherhood to the interaction, opening up new possibilities for career mobility" (Nelson 14). Once an applicant makes it through the initial resume screening process, "the most common mechanism by which a candidate was evaluated was her similarity to her interviewer" (Rivera).

People are drawn to others who share their general way of being, so most people find it easier and more comfortable to converse with others who speak their own dialect.

This means that the dominant dialect is not likely to disappear from business, finance, school, the government, or other institutions any time soon. "The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. This means that success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power," a significant aspect of which is the dominant dialect (Delpit "The Silenced Dialogue" 283). Refusing to give students access to the dominant dialect does not dismantle the system; it simply makes it harder for users of nondominant dialects to access social capital.

If we can ease our students' paths into dominant Discourses by helping them master General American English, we should do so. GAE is expected in some situations, particularly those involving obtaining employment and upward mobility within the job sector, as social mobility is almost always dependent upon language use (Taliaferro 20). One has only to revisit the studies described in the Linguistic Profiling section of this paper to understand the social benefits of mastering General American English. Delpit argues that while mastering GAE does not guarantee success, "not having access will almost certainly guarantee failure" ("Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction" 149). Yes, we can absolutely work to change the system, to dismantle dialect hierarchy, but why deny students access to a tool they can use in the meantime?

Dialect Hierarchy Through a Teacher's Lens

All teachers, but especially those who teach students whose dialectal background is different from their own, should confront their own language biases. There is a good chance a teacher may not even be cognizant of these biases, and left unchecked, they can

impact students' performance, relationships, and concept of self. Though it may be inevitable that we make judgments of others based on their language use, it is important for teachers to be mindful not to let those judgments impact their relationships with their students and the communities in which these students live. Teachers should be aware of the problems surrounding linguistic profiling and how it may shape the lived experiences of their students and their students' families as they seek access to healthcare, housing, and employment.

While respecting their students' cultural identities is important, so too is it important for teachers to consider the dialect hierarchy as they prepare students for adulthood. The power structure surrounding dialects, which grants some dialects prestige and stigmatizes others, is already being challenged as the dominant dialect evolves to more accurately reflect dialect diversity. Teachers are in a unique position to prepare students to navigate the inequities that still exist and to teach students how to amplify their voices through effective communication.

Chapter Three: Navigating and Challenging the Dialect Hierarchy

Parent-teacher conference night: the one night a year when I witness 6-foot-tall too-cool-for-school teenage boys shrink in fear. Many of my Black students' parents are bidialectal, and I know this because the change from one dialect to another happens before my very eyes. So many times over the years, I have sat down with parents to discuss concerns regarding their children's grades or behavior. During our conversation, the parents generally employ a formal tone and use GAE when talking to me. When addressing their children, though, they immediately switch to Black English. Those interactions frequently go something like this:

Parent to child, obviously angry: Boy, what you doin showin up late to class? You got somewhere more important to be? And talkin when the teacher talk? Be actin like I ain't teach you respect.

Parent turning to me, smiling, friendly but formal tone: Thank you for your time, Ms. Johnson. We'll be speaking with Christopher, and you can expect him to be on time and quiet from now on.

Parent, turning back to child: Get yo stuff. We goin home and it's gon be some changes.

As the parents march out and the students skulk away, I am left marveling at the linguistic dexterity I have witnessed. At the same time, I recognize that the parents (and students) are burdened with the expectation that they minimize the use of their primary dialect when engaging with their children's schools, especially when interacting with White teachers.

So far, we have established that, from a linguistic perspective, all dialects are equally valid-—no one dialect is more or less correct than another. In America, however, General American English has prestige status, even though it is really an umbrella term for a number of dialects that lack socially marked characteristics. Nondominant dialects are associated with negative characteristics like laziness and lack of intelligence. Speaking one of these socially marked dialects, such as Black English, can lead to discrimination in housing, employment, and healthcare. Teachers' bias against BE can result in inaccurate student tracking, poor student performance, and harm to the student-teacher relationship.

How, then, can we as educators best prepare our students? And do we prepare them for the world as it is now or the world we hope they will help reshape? That is the million-dollar question, and it has sparked decades of debate among linguists, educators, and activists. Two main schools of thought have arisen. On one side, we have figures such as April Baker-Bell, Vershawn Ashanti Young, and Y'Shanda Young-Rivera, who advocate for code-meshing and propose that incorporating nondominant dialects into all domains of interaction (formal and informal, home and business, neighborhood and government) is the most effective way to upend the current hierarchy. On the other side, we have the likes of Lisa Delpit, Rebecca Wheeler, John Russell Rickford, Russell John Rickford, Julia Thomas, and Rachel Swords, who suggest that code-switching, navigating the current hierarchy by choosing which dialect to use based on situational context, will provide students with the greatest number of opportunities.

In this chapter, I will present arguments from both sides and then situate my own professional recommendation within the broader conversation.

The Debate: Code-switching or Code-meshing?

Many speakers of nondominant dialects are bidialectal, meaning they speak more than one dialect. They have their primary dialect, which they learned from their family and probably speak at home. They also have GAE. These speakers must decide when and where to use each dialect.

Moving between dialects in different contexts is known as code-switching. The general idea of code-switching is to preserve primary dialects while providing access to Discourses that use GAE. Speakers "switch" the dialect being used to match the audience and situation; for example, BE might be utilized at home, church, and with friends, while GAE may be used at the bank, when calling customer service, and in professional offices (Barrett "You Are What You Speak" 29). As Shayla Mettille explains in her dissertation, code-switching is "one way vernacular speakers learn to cope with the dichotomy of functioning with a non-standardized language variety in a standardized language world… This bidialectalism enables them to maintain their own dialect yet use Standard English as a second dialect for different purposes" (24).

Speakers might also code-switch to accomplish a particular rhetorical goal. I see this often with students. When chatting with me at the doorway during passing periods, students often use BE. Their use of BE helps us build rapport because they are sharing pieces of their cultural identities with me and trusting (despite past experiences with other teachers) that I, a White English teacher, will not "correct" their grammar. Interestingly, though, when requesting an extension on a deadline, they are more likely to use GAE. Students consider this akin to a business interaction, which they associate with GAE because of the social dialect hierarchy.

Most critics of code-switching, including Young, Baker-Bell, and Young-Rivera, advocate for code-meshing pedagogy instead. Code-meshing is different from code-switching: code-switching involves changing dialect to suit a situation or audience, whereas code-meshing means the speaker uses more than one language variety within the same context or speech event. Examples of code-meshing could include incorporating BE into a persuasive letter addressed to the principal (Behizadeh 56) or using Spanglish in a presentation to a class with other Spanish speakers.

Professors and activists have debated which strategy should be taught to students and expected in the classroom. Just as there are concerns that contrastive analysis can be implemented in such a way that nondominant dialects are positioned as inferior, some argue that code-switching reinforces the current dialect hierarchy. On the other hand, there are concerns that code-meshing pedagogy does not prepare students to navigate the dialect hierarchy. In regards to this debate, Wheeler and Thomas write that "the battle lines have long been drawn. Positions have become entrenched and enflamed. The camps can be readily named and associated with a response to vernacular varieties in the classroom" (365).

One of the most informative conversations on this topic is a series of articles written by Young, Young-Rivera, Wheeler, Swords, and Thomas. Young is outspoken in his opposition to code-switching, while Wheeler, Swords, and Thomas present it as a compromise that allows students to maintain their cultural identities and dialects while still giving them the language tools they need to use GAE.

In 2006, Wheeler and Swords co-authored a book called *Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms.* As the title suggests, the intended

audience for the book was urban school teachers. The book provided step-by-step

guidance for teaching code-switching, which Wheeler and Swords frame as a strategy

that allows students to make language choices based on context and purpose.

That same year, Wheeler also published a similarly-situated article called "'What

do we do about student grammar – all those missing -ed's and -s's?' Using comparison

and contrast to teach Standard English in dialectally diverse classrooms." In this article,

Wheeler is straightforward about obstacles she has faced in sharing this pedagogy, and

she shares strategies that help her get her "foot through the schoolhouse door" and

present code-switching pedagogy to diverse audiences, including the controversial advice

to leave race out of the discussion (26). She cautions teachers not to use specific labels

for dialects and to instead refer to them using labels like formal/informal or home

talk/school talk. Wheeler explains that when she used terms like "Standard English" or

"African American English," the conversation was always sidetracked. Some participants

reacted to the race-based label with "stone-wall angry resistance that shuts down *all* other

communication" (26). Others were more vocal about their offence, and instead of sharing

pedagogy, Wheeler was forced to spend her limited time with the audience explaining

why she was "singling out Black students" (26). Wheeler concludes that "This work is

not about race. It's about choosing features of language to fit the setting" (26).

What I believe Wheeler is emphasizing is that her goal is not to facilitate a

conversation or professional development session over race. She acknowledges that

tackling the system that privileges GAE is beyond her scope, and vocally campaigning

for such change would limit her access to the audience she needs to reach to achieve her

goal of helping students succeed within the system that currently exists. She explains that

"despite the ethical injustice involved, I do not challenge the societal goal that students and citizens will command Standard English. To suggest that vernacular dialects be accepted broadly in the world of school, government and enterprise would bar me from the schoolhouse and silence a linguistic viewpoint for yet another generation" (29). Wheeler recognizes the "ethical injustice" of the current system, and she wants to provide teachers with tools to help their students succeed within the unjust, but very real, framework that exists.

This approach did not sit well with Young. In response, Young published an article called "'Nah, We Straight.': An Argument Against Code Switching" in which he characterizes code-switching as an inherently racist practice (54). He argues that Wheeler and Swords are wrong to suggest that code-switching can be separated from race. He aims to "expose code switching as a strategy to negotiate, side-step, and ultimately accommodate bias against the working-class, women, and the ongoing racism against the language habits of blacks and other non-white peoples" (51). Young suggests that the expectation of code-switching is similar to the Jim Crow laws that called for "separate but equal," as "the arguments used to support code switching are startlingly and undeniably similar to those that were used to support racial separation" (53). He proposes that code-switching requires Black English users to develop what W.E.B. Du Bois termed a "double consciousness" (51) where they act one way around White people and another way around other Black people (56). Young also argued that communication is richer and more effective when speakers and writers are able to "fuse" their primary dialects with GAE (65). Bidialectal speakers are already accustomed to "blending, merging, meshing dialects," and code-meshing allows them to "color their writing with

what they bring from home" (65, 72). Here, I recall that thank-you note I mentioned in Chapter 1. My student's use of BE "colored" his writing with an authentic voice that would have been missing if he had written in GAE.

The conversation continues with Wheeler and Thomas' article "And Still the Children Suffer." Much like the research we saw from Kinzler, Stubbs, Wolfram, and Schilling-Estes, Wheeler and Thomas assert that humans are hard-wired to mentally group people based on language use, so such grouping is not the result of systemic racism. They write about the "global phenomenon" where, "from infancy, humans use language to draw in-group vs. out-group distinctions," and they call this process an "inherent psychological component of humankind" (375-376). Humans begin making these distinctions in infancy, before they have been exposed to "the larger social implications associated with dialectal language use" (376). Wheeler and Thomas contend that "Code-switching is about so much more than race, and the stakes are so high that at times, even often, we find it necessary to play a shell game as we talk about power, prestige, and prejudice in the schools" (381). They then discuss consequences of not code-switching, as described previously: difficulty reading that leads to falling behind in school, increasing the likelihood that the student will drop out, as well as barriers to employment opportunities (382-384). Wheeler and Thomas speak to the importance of allowing students to maintain their cultural identities while adding GAE to students' toolboxes (365). As we have discussed, language is closely tied to cultural identity. Code-switching allows speakers of nondominant dialects to keep their cultural identities while giving them the literacy skills and social opportunities that can come with GAE. Speakers can maintain their primary dialect but switch to GAE when doing so is to their advantage.

Wheeler and Thomas close by reiterating that they wish language prejudice did not exist and all cultures were celebrated in the classrooms. Given what is at stake, however, they feel the urgency of providing students with the tools they need to succeed in the world as it is now, and they quote John Hodge and conclude that "'it is what it is'" (387).

The last installation in this conversation that I will examine is Young's response, which he co-authored with Young-Rivera: "It Ain't What It Is: Code Switching and White American Celebrationists." Clearly, based on the title, Young and Young-Rivera took issue with Wheeler and Thomas' conclusion that the language hierarchy "is what it is." They accuse Wheeler and Thomas of lacking empathy and of excusing the racism inherent to code-switching, saying that expecting students to code-switch is "a type of microaggression" (398). For much of the rest of the article, Young and Young-Rivera promote code-meshing.

Young and Young-Rivera are far from the only critics of code-switching. Code-meshing is seen by some as a more progressive, inclusive approach to language instruction. Suresh Canagarajah warns that asking students to code-switch in their writing can reinforce standard language ideology. Some teachers allow students to use nondominant dialects in informal writing contexts (personal narratives, creative writing, poetry) but then require GAE in formal writing contexts (expository essays, literary analysis). Likewise, if teachers allow early drafts to be written in nondominant dialects but require that students revise their writing to remove nondominant dialectal characteristics from the final draft, this can send the message that the students' primary dialects "are accepted only as tentative, dispensable, moves toward [GAE] norms. The editing of the other Englishes in the final product may also lump these varieties into the

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category of 'errors' to be avoided, in the eyes of the students, and lead to the gradual loss of their home language" (Canarajah 598). Of course, this is antithetical to the goal of honoring and validating students' cultures and primary dialects. Advocates of code-meshing prefer it to code-switching because there is no privilege assigned to any one dialect. Instead of suggesting that nondominant dialects be limited to informal settings, all dialects would be treated as equally valid in all settings. Young writes that code-meshing "is the new code switching; it's multidialectalism and plurilingualism in one speech act, in one paper" (Young "Should Writers Use They Own Language" 114).

Although language discrimination certainly still exists, it is becoming less uncommon to see examples of code-meshing in published nonfiction work. Rickford and Rickford, who advocate for code-switching pedagogies, celebrate and cherish BE (which they call "Spoken Soul"). They do not suggest that one has to come at the sacrifice of the other, but quite the opposite (228-229). They write that if BE is lost in pursuit of GAE, "we would indeed have lost our soul" (10). In fact, Rickford and Rickford use BE throughout the book (not only instructionally but stylistically). A few examples include the phrase "What you talkin' 'bout?" (104), their use of the terms "brother" and "sister" to label fellow Blacks (229), and their use of the word "baaad" (228).

In "Code-Meshing: The New Way to Do English," Young writes about the use of nondominant English in Professor Kermit Campbell's *Gettin' Our Groove On* and in the foreword of *Spoken Soul,* written by Geneva Smitherman (79, 80). Young himself uses BE in "'Nah, We Straight'" and "Should Writers Use They Own Language?" among other pieces. In her book *Linguistic Justice*, April Baker-Bell utilizes BE when she makes the following argument:

I have heard teachers use exceptionalism discourse with Black students by telling them that they can be the next "successful" or "rich" Black person (e.g. Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Oprah, etc.) if they speak White Mainstream English. First of all, stop telling Black kids that they can be the next such and such and let them be the first version of themselves… Also, stop playing like Oprah, Barack, Michelle, and nem don't speak Black Language. (30)

Additionally, in "Should Writers Use They Own Language?" Young presents examples of politicians code-meshing on Twitter and journalists code-meshing in articles published by respected papers like the *Washington Post* (114-115).

Of course, an argument can be made that these speakers have more linguistic freedom than the average person because of the level of prestige they have earned in part by using GAE in previous academic and professional settings. Furthermore, there are plenty of examples of speakers who *can* code-mesh choosing not to in particular situations. For example, former President Obama delivered a televised commencement speech to the high school class of 2020. The event, which prominently featured diverse speakers and art forms, was hosted by the XQ Institute in partnership with the LeBron James Foundation and the Entertainment Industry Foundation. The XQ Institute has a specific emphasis on supporting underserved and underrepresented populations: "We believe high schools are the next frontier in the fight for educational equity. And we know that equity demands action, not just aspiration" ("XQ Schools"). The commencement speech, delivered by a Black man, given at an event hosted by an organization dedicated to advancing educational equity, is in General American English ("Read the Full Transcript"). Similarly, Oprah Winfrey delivered her 2018 Golden Globes Cecil B. DeMille award acceptance speech, in which race was one dominant theme, in General American English ("Read Oprah Winfrey's"). Yes, Obama and Oprah

absolutely code-mesh in some situations, but they do also stick to General American English in other situations.

There are also additional voices in support of code-switching. McClendon and Valenciano write that educators and parents must help students learn to code-switch so that they are not excluded from opportunities in environments where GAE is expected (119). Similarly, Hagemann writes that students who speak nondominant dialects need access to GAE and "an ability to shift smoothly from their home discourse to academic English whenever they want or need to" (75).

Rickford and Rickford write that it is "indisputable" that mastery of GAE "is essential to our self-preservation" (226). They note that using GAE in the relevant contexts allowed minorities to "[wrest] judgeships and congressional seats and penthouse offices" from dominant dialect speakers who had "long enjoyed such privileges almost unchallenged" (226). GAE is a useful tool:

> For in the academies and courthouses and legislatures and business places where policies are made and implemented, it is as graceful a weapon as can be found against injustice, poverty, and discrimination. Like [Frederick] Douglas and Malcolm X, we must learn to carry Standard English like a lariat, unfurling it with precision. We must learn to use it, too, for enjoyment and mastery of literature, philosophy, science, math, and the wide variety of subjects that are conducted and taught in Standard English, in the United States, and, increasingly, in the world. We must teach our children to do so as well. (227)

Rickford and Rickford present a convincing argument in favor of code-switching pedagogies, at least as a tool to navigate the current dialect hierarchy, but this is not an indication that they lack appreciation for nondominant dialects like BE.

Baker-Bell argues that code-switching pedagogies are a form of "anti-Black racism" because of the correlation between nondominant dialects and race (20). People

who use nondominant dialects are more likely to be in the American racial minority, particularly Black. Baker-Bell argues that telling Black students they have to code-switch in order to avoid discrimination is akin to punishing them for the very existence of anti-Black linguistic racism (20). She suggests that White students are not told they must code-switch in order to be "the next Steve Jobs, Ellen DeGeneres, or Donald Trump," so expecting Black students to code-switch to be the next "Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Oprah" is "just downright racist" (30).

Baker-Bell suggests that code-switching empowers GAE speakers and disempowers BE speakers because code-switching suggests that "Black Language should be restricted to informal contexts such as outside, the beach, and the mall whereas White Mainstream English is privileged in nice restaurants, interviews, etc." (82-84). Baker-Bell challenges the practice of teaching students to use different dialects in different social contexts. She says, "respectability pedagogies perpetuate anti-blackness as they do not fully accept or celebrate Black Language, and they teach Black students to respond to racism by adhering to white hegemonic standards of what it means to be 'respectable' instead of teaching them to challenge, interrogate, and resist Anti-Black Linguistic Racism" (29). From this perspective, code-switching only perpetuates the status quo.

I disagree that code-switching pedagogies are inherently racist. Though Baker-Bell may be correct that the term "code-switching" is not frequently used in the instruction of White students, White speakers of nondominant dialects do also experience the frequent correction of their primary dialects, and the use of General American English is presented to those students as a necessary part of mainstream success. Linguistic profiling is also used to discriminate against White speakers of nondominant dialects

(Baugh "Linguistic Profiling" 163). Dialects spoken in rural communities, for example, are also often associated with lower intelligence. The deficit narrative surrounding Appalachian dialects is "perpetrated by movies and popular culture" in which speakers of the dialect are portrayed as unsophisticated and unintelligent (Biviano 28).

Students of all races, including White students, who come from rural and/or impoverished areas are also under the same pressure to adapt to the standard dialect. Dialects spoken by the working class are associated with low class status and absence of privilege (Nelson 9). Of her Appalachian students, Biviano writes "In our society, formal standard English is the grammar of the upper-class, privileged members of our society, and sadly students from lower socioeconomic status or rural schools are blocked by the barriers of class and privilege that this form of English entails" (33). The stigma against rural dialects can be so strong that teachers may not allow students to speak or read aloud unless they "drop their dialect and use 'standard English'" (Purcell-Gates 134). Kathy Brashears writes about an Appalachian teacher who worried her students would be perceived as "hillbillies who live on dirt floors" because of their nondominant dialect (6). Since their dialect is a "barrier" that leads others to perceive them as "hillbillies," these White students are also under pressure to master General American English.

Linguistic prejudice also impacts employment opportunities for White vernacular speakers:

> Unfair presumptions about intelligence, class, professionalism, and many other factors relevant to employment may greatly influence the job prospects of Appalachian English speakers… The Appalachian speaker was rated below average on professionalism, sophistication, intelligence, competence, employability, organization, industriousness, and reputability. (Sparks Ball iv, 8-9)

Biviano interviewed a teacher who reported that she had been denied employment by a principal who told her he could not hire someone with her accent (6).

In sum, true dialect equality would render code-switching unnecessary, but until attitudes towards nondominant dialects are radically reformed, code-switching allows speakers to preserve their cultural identities, limit the impact of linguistic profiling on their lives, and still access dominant Discourses where GAE is expected. Code-switching pedagogy, however, can foster dialect inequality. It is certainly an imperfect solution to a complex problem. Code-meshing promotes dialect equality and allows speakers to communicate in ways that are rich and authentic; however, there can be consequences for using a nondominant dialect in some Discourses, including obstacles to such basic needs as housing and healthcare as well as education and employment.

This Teacher's Position

So which practice should we teach our students?

Both. And more.

In the remaining chapter, I will demonstrate how contrastive analysis, code-switching, and code-meshing can be integrated into a more comprehensive language studies approach that will both prepare students to navigate the current rocky terrain of dialect bias and empower them to terraform a more equitable future.

Chapter Four: Pedagogical Application

"I am from Haiti but

too American now, they say.

Can you write in Creole?

M pa konnen

How about English?

I don´t know

What about French?

Je ne sais pas

What I am

Which I am."

These ten lines revealed more to me about this student than I had managed to learn in six weeks. I felt a bit like I was meeting her for the first time. In her explanatory paragraph, she reflected on her trilingualism and how, in Haiti, people's perceptions of her shift based on which language she uses. She also wrote a little about assumptions Americans had made about her based on her accent, how they were surprised she understood so well and could speak so articulately.

This young lady is well aware of the power language has over our identities, how we are judged by others, and our ability to access opportunities. She is learning to navigate the current dialect hierarchy, and I am confident she will use her incredible voice to challenge it.

This is the kind of understanding I hope to nurture in all of my students. I want them to feel validated and deepen their appreciation for their primary dialects. I want them to approach dialect diversity with enthusiastic and open-minded curiosity. I want to rest assured that they have the language tools they need to succeed in the world they will enter in three short years as well as the insight they need to create a more equitable future. In this chapter, I will present strategies that teachers can use to foster dialect awareness and equality in their own classrooms.

Strategy 1: Incorporate Language Studies into the Classroom

Much of language instruction is presently devoted to learning the names of the parts of speech, types of clauses, punctuation rules, and other functional concepts. Too little time is spent examining the *concept* of language. What is language? How do languages develop? How do they evolve, and why do some die out? What are dialects, and why do they exist? How is language connected to identity? How does language impact our perceptions of others? What language choices do we consciously and unconsciously make, and how are those choices impacted by our backgrounds, contexts, purposes, and audiences? Exploring these questions, among others, could help teachers foster linguistic equality, improve students' communication skills, and prepare students to succeed in an increasingly global workforce.

<u>Linguistic Equality</u>

The first step toward language equality is to foster empathy and understanding. This can be accomplished by integrating language studies into the curriculum. Exposure

to multiple dialects removes some of the stigma around non-standard language patterns, and Delpit recommends making the "actual study of language diversity a part of the curriculum for all students" ("Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction" 150). Teachers should bring a variety of dialects into the classroom, especially if linguistic diversity is not already present within the classroom or community. When discussing these language differences, teachers should also acknowledge linguistic prejudice and the dialect hierarchy and counter the dominant dialect ideology by framing all dialects as valid language systems with their own rules. Smitherman suggests that differences can be discussed, even celebrated, alongside the "recognition that, on the universal, 'deep structure' level, the world is but one community" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 219). The National Council of Teachers of English agrees, promoting pedagogy that will "expose students to the variety of dialects that comprise our multiregional, multiethnic, and multicultural society, so that they too will understand the nature of American English and come to respect all its dialects" ("Resolution on the Students' Right").

This can and should be a goal in every classroom, whether that classroom, school, or community is diverse or homogenous. Increasing *all* students' understanding of language and dialects is integral to fostering change. As Smitherman writes, "[minority students] need to study white mainstream culture as well as their own to prevent their obtaining a distorted picture of the real world of the U.S.A. On the opposite side, white mainstream students need to know about nonmainstream cultures to prevent a similar distortion" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 235). I recall my White student who assumed his Black classmate would perform poorly on an assessment because the Black student spoke BE.

Had I incorporated language studies into my classes in those early years of teaching, my students might have been less likely to buy into such stereotypes.

If it isn't addressed, the prevalent standard language ideology could create obstacles for students as they navigate language diversity. Monolingualism and monodialectalism foster the notion that a language belongs to the group who speaks the dominant dialect, and speakers of other dialects are viewed as inarticulate and less valuable (Lee and Alvarez 269). Students who speak the dominant dialect are less likely to value speakers of nondominant dialects and their cultures, which could present additional obstacles for students to "work collaboratively across cultures" to close the racial divide (Wynne 209). Language studies can help speakers of the dominant dialect develop empathy for people who speak nondominant dialects by helping those students recognize the value of different ways of speaking and the cultures that various dialects reflect. "For as long as mainstream students think that another's language is inferior to theirs, they will probably not bother to understand it, and therefore, there will be much about the other that they will always fail to understand" (Wynne 209). There is so much to be learned from other cultures and so much potential in collaboration between cultures, but without mutual language respect, that potential is lost. Thus, speakers of the dominant dialect benefit from language studies as much as do the speakers of nondominant dialects.

If code-meshing pedagogy is embraced by schools, perhaps language attitudes could be reshaped nationwide so that eventually, any dialect can be represented within a Discourse (Young-Rivera 115). "The bidialectalists foster discrimination by stating that Black dialect is unacceptable on the job market. As long as educators hold this view and influence their students, those students, who are the future businessmen, will tend to hold

this view; therefore, the discrimination will continue" (Dean and Fowler 306)**.**
Developing a healthy respect for language diversity will prepare students for positive and
productive interactions with people who speak differently, creating more equitable
opportunities for speakers of nondominant dialects.

Communication Skills

As students learn to analyze the impacts of various language choices, they will
also begin to examine their own communication goals and the choices they make in
service of achieving those goals. This metacognition can make them more thoughtful and
intentional communicators. Students are taught to think about their own communication
process and the decisions it requires: how did you choose your audience? How did you
tailor your language to that audience? Was that strategy effective? Why or why not?

This metacognition can lead to a deeper acceptance of and even appreciation for
language diversity. When students realize that they already alter how they speak and
write in different contexts, the idea of "trying on" new dialects is less foreign. According
to Rebecca Nelson, "a lesson on metacognitive awareness of dialect variances allows
students to identify the potential for becoming bidialectal, i.e. understanding that
acquiring and knowing when to use multiple dialects contributes to a stronger linguistic
toolbox for success" (181).

Global Collaboration

Incorporating language studies into the classroom can prepare our students to
navigate an increasingly global workforce. As our world becomes more connected, the

communication barriers once created by miles, borders, and oceans are disappearing, and "in order to be functional postmodern global citizens, even students from the dominant community (i.e., Anglo American) now need to be proficient in negotiating a repertoire of World Englishes" (Canagarajah 591). To combat linguistic prejudice and prepare our students to succeed in a globalized workforce, they need to be exposed to a variety of languages and dialects (Nelson 180). Smitherman writes that "multilingualism and celebration and promotion of linguistic diversity must be part of the language and literacy training of youth and their preparation for world citizenship in the twenty-first century" (*Talkin That Talk* 162).

Instead of the standard language ideology that grants ownership of the language to the speakers of its dominant variety, teachers should present English "as a plural language that embodies multiple norms and standards. English should be treated as a multinational language, one that belongs to diverse communities and not owned only by the metropolitan communities" (Canagarajah 589). This study of language will deepen students' understanding of their own English varieties and the "tools" to effectively interact with and use additional varieties (Barrett "Be Yourself Somewhere Else" 37).

Strategy 2: Honor Students' Home Languages

Teachers should incorporate activities that affirm the home dialects of their students. Such activities could include (but are certainly not limited to) journaling, narrative writing, letter composition, or ethnographies. Provide students with opportunities to write about topics that matter to them using the rich and varied language skills they bring with them to the classroom. "When students write expressively, they

should be encouraged to draw on the resources of their language as they write about the ideas that matter to them the most" (Lovejoy 81). As I mentioned in the introduction, my students start each class with a short free-write. Knowing that they have the freedom to write about what they want in whatever style they want means that students are much less resistant to this writing activity than they are when responding to assigned prompts.

Students should be supported in using the linguistic skills they bring with them from their communities. Diversity in styles among students should be noticed and celebrated. "When they are comfortable with their own language, students find it easier to write with a real sense of voice and produce written work that sounds and feels authentic" (Richards and Alfred 5). The goal is to build rapport with students and establish a learning community where their primary dialects are welcome and respected.

Potential Activities:

- As part of an exploration of students' cultures, students bring to class one artifact that represents some aspect of their cultural identity and write a paragraph that explains the relationship between the artifact and culture. Students can place their artifacts and explanatory paragraphs on their desks and participate in a gallery walk.

  I have done this activity the last several years, and students are always excited to celebrate parts of their identities that are not often acknowledged at school. It has also been neat to witness the connection between the artifacts students bring and the dialects they use in their explanatory paragraphs. For example, one student brought in castor oil and used BE to write about the role hair

plays in her culture. Another student brought in a sculpture his family displays for the Day of the Dead, and part of his paragraph was written in Spanglish.

One challenge worth noting is that sometimes my White students struggle to identify with their cultures. Many of these students, however, are members of churches, sports teams, or bands; they play collaborative video games and use social media and communicate with friends through texting. All of these are facets of culture, as well, but students might need a little more guidance to help them recognize this.

- Using George Ella Lyon's original as a starting place, have students craft their own "Where I'm From" poems. Encourage students to incorporate the sorts of words and structures they use with family and close friends. If appropriate based on the level of trust and rapport in the classroom, students can share their poems in an open-mic style.

- Research a current event, ideally one that directly impacts the students' community, and have students conduct interviews. Have students collaborate in groups to create a newspaper about the current event that summarizes their research and incorporates their interviews. Students should authentically represent the dialects of their interviewees in their articles. Students can also write editorials about these issues in their primary dialects.

- As a class, read a selection of "This I Believe" essays from NPR. Then have students choose a topic (inspired by a model essay or related to their own values and interests) and write their own "This I Believe" essay. Have students share

their essays in small groups and ask them to think about how the students' voices

come through in the writing.

Additional Resources

- NPR "This I Believe" (https://www.npr.org/series/4538138/this-i-believe).

- George Ella Lyon's website (http://www.georgeellalyon.com).

Strategy 3: Discuss Dialect and Use Contrastive Analysis

Teachers can incorporate language studies by facilitating discussions about

dialects: what they are, how they come to be, how they are perceived. Students can be

exposed to a variety of dialects (not just those they encounter within their own

communities) through children's books, excerpts from literature, videos, articles, and

interviews. Teachers should also keep in mind that many students are not even aware that

they speak a dialect— they think dialects are spoken by "other people," which can

translate to viewing speakers of nondominant dialects as "other" or "peculiar" (as my

colleague found it strange when I lamented that my dishes needed washed). In

Behizadeh's 2017 study, a group of 22 students completed a survey, and none of them

selected "African American Vernacular English" as their dialect even though the

researcher observed students using this dialect skillfully and regularly (57). Examining a

variety of dialects encourages students to examine their own language and can facilitate

awareness of personal dialect. These discussions should be framed from a perspective of

difference, not deficit, which will reassure students that their primary dialects are valued.

Here, I call back to Baker-Bell having her students translate an interview with rapper Big Sean into GAE. Much of his voice and personality was lost in this translation.

Of course, GAE should also be presented as a dialect (or an umbrella term for dialects that lack socially stigmatized characteristics) and, most importantly, teachers should be careful not to frame it as the "correct" or "proper" form of the language. It would be helpful for teachers to discuss the differences between what we label "standard English" and the way most people (even dominant dialect speakers) actually talk. For example, people are more likely to avoid starting a sentence with a conjunction when they are writing than when they are speaking.

The exploration of different dialects can lead into contrastive analysis and the introduction of the rules of those dialects. Again, when using contrastive analysis, teachers should be careful not to present one dialect as superior to the other. Contrastive analysis should not be framed in such a way as to create the impression that its purpose is to replace a nondominant dialect with GAE. Rather, contrastive analysis should provide a platform for students to notice language patterns and infer grammar rules from those patterns. One strategy is to vary the order in which dialects are placed on the contrastive analysis chart. Presenting the nondominant dialect in the left column sometimes and in the right column other times can prevent the impression that students are translating an "incorrect" language form into a "correct" language form when moving from one column to the next.

Students can also explore various rhetorical and stylistic strategies of various dialects. The students can analyze the impact various strategies have on how their message is delivered and received. "Rather than teaching grammatical rules in a

normative and abstract way, we should teach communicative strategies—i.e., creative ways to negotiate the norms relevant in diverse contexts" (Canagarajah 593). The grammar, rhetoric, and style of students' primary dialects should be validated, which "can lessen the inhibitions against dominant codes, reduce the exclusive status of those codes, and enable students to accommodate them in their repertoire of Englishes" (Canagarajah 592). The goal is to help students recognize the grammaticality of a variety of dialects, begin exploring the grammar rules of General American English, and notice how language use impacts the reception of the writer's message.

Potential Activities

- Borrow a number of children's books that contain dialect, such as *Yesterday I Had the Blues* by Jeron Ashford Frame or *Ten-Gallon Bart* by Susan Stevens Crummel. Have students try to retell the stories in their own words and make note of what changes. Do the characters feel less authentic? Is the reading less interesting?

- Pull dialect-rich excerpts from novels (consider a classic like Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or a more contemporary selection, such as *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness). Have students write short character profiles based on their language styles.

- Provide or have students find examples of dialect in cartoons or advertisements. Have students work in groups to write a brief report that discusses how dialect is used in the cartoon or advertisement and explore the purpose behind the use of

dialect. A good place to start might be the 1970s McDonald's ads that dropped the -g ending from words (a common feature of BE) and featured Black customers.

- Ask your students to write responses to a series of silly questions. Pull data from their answers to identify a particular grammar rule you want to address. Use the students' examples to complete a contrastive analysis chart as a class. They will enjoy seeing how other students answered the questions.

- Prepare a playlist of songs performed in a variety of dialects and print the lyrics. Have students mark examples of dialect in the lyrics. As a class, create a chart to examine a few key grammar characteristics in the lyrics and their General American English equivalent. Through inductive reasoning, have students identify the grammar rule that is being applied in each dialect. Discuss why the artist might have chosen to use dialect in the lyrics.

- Remember those children's books? Bring them back for a closer look at the dialect. Choose a few excerpts and create a contrastive analysis chart. Challenge students to rewrite an excerpt in a different dialect using whatever grammar rule you uncovered during your analysis.

Additional Resources

- PBS "Do You Speak American?"
  (https://www.pbs.org/speak/education/curriculum/high/regional/)
- Learning for Justice "Everyone Has an Accent"
  (https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2000/everyone-has-an-accent)

- TEDx "How We Judge Others When They Speak"

  (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj7wkh6nONE)

- Rebecca Wheeler, "Attitude Change is Not Enough"

  (https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7e31/ebf928ee531de3bb43bd77606b41e3c1031

  3.pdf)

- Katie Corrigan, "Culturally Responsive Grammar"

  (https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5271&context=

  hse_all)

Strategy 4: Allow Students to Practice both Code-switching and Code-meshing

Unfortunately, thoroughly preparing students will require an acknowledgement of the dialect hierarchy. As Delpit points out, students "must be encouraged to understand the value of the code they already possess as well as to understand the power realities in this country. Otherwise they will be unable to work to change these realities" ("The Silenced Dialogue" 293). While teachers should be diligent about validating the legitimacy of all dialects, students need to be made aware of how nondominant dialects might be perceived by others. Students should be taught to consider their format, purpose, and audience when choosing a dialect, as well as to consider the impact different styles will have on the effectiveness of their message. This will require further discussion of dialect hierarchy, linguistic profiling, and how language shapes perception. Teachers should present writing as "situated, as having a context, and the writer's choices as purposeful" (Lovejoy 84). This will help students learn how to "shuttle between communities in contextually relevant ways" (Canagarajah 593).

While students should practice code-switching so that they can do so comfortably when/if they decide it is necessary, they should also be given opportunities to practice code-meshing. Teachers can challenge the standard language ideology by exposing students to academic writing that contains code-meshed language. Examples of code-meshing are plentiful and can inspire impassioned discussion about language and equity. Students can then be encouraged to decide for themselves when to code-switch and when to code-mesh. Canagarajah writes that as students have opportunities to practice code-meshing,

> they must be trained to make grammatical choices based on many discursive concerns: their intentions, the context, and the assumptions of readers and writers. Students must understand that in certain special cases they may have to try out a peculiar structure for unique purposes (making sure that they subtly indicate to the audience that they are using this with the full awareness of the established conventions). This doesn't mean students are free to use the vernacular for all contexts of communication. Negotiating grammar means being sensitive to the relativity of style and usage in different communicative situations. (610-611)

When learning how to code-mesh, students must "not only master the dominant varieties of English, but also know how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways" (Canagarajah 598). Code-meshing forces students to think critically about how to integrate their language varieties to best accomplish their goals. It is meant to "maximize (not minimize) rhetorical effectiveness" (Young "Code-Meshing: The New Way to Do English" 81). This critical thinking and metacognition will make students better analysts and more effective writers/speakers.

Potential Activities

- Help students develop intentionality behind their decisions regarding structure, style, and dialect. Before students even begin outlining, have them identify their audience. When possible, give students some choice here to allow them to play around with how they might adapt their communication to different audiences.

  You might have them create something like an audience profile so they are thinking ahead about important decisions regarding style, structure, and language. To whom will I be speaking / who will be reading my work? What is this person's background? If my goal is to persuade my audience, will this particular audience be most moved by appeals to ethos, logos, or pathos? If my goal is to inform my audience, what background knowledge will I need to provide as a foundation? What sorts of examples will be most effective? Which sources of information will my audience consider credible? How do I want to account for my audience's possible perceptions of nondominant dialects? What impact might the use of a nondominant dialect have on how my message is received, and is this impact acceptable to me?

  As students move through the writing process, have them come back to this profile. How is it informing their writing? Facilitating peer review can offer additional accountability here. Have students share their work with classmates and explain how they are making decisions informed by their audience, context, and overall goal.

  Have students complete an author's note to submit with their final draft. I usually ask students to address the following questions: 1) What is your favorite

part of your work and why? 2) Where do you see room for improvement? 3) How did you tailor your work to your context and audience? Give specific examples of your word choice, grammar, sentence structure, and/or tone. 4) How would you score your essay on the rubric? Explain each score.

One (admittedly unoriginal) assignment I often give to introduce persuasive writing asks students to choose one complaint or concern they have about school, propose a solution, and write a letter to an audience who could help implement that solution. The last part of the assignment is a reflection where students explain how they tailored their writing to their chosen audience. They have to point to specific elements of their writing and explain why they used specific words, structures, or tones. This is an easy way for me to assess their initial audience awareness. Students who choose to write to the school board often report that they avoided slang and used "proper English" to sound professional and to be taken seriously. In one of the more interesting responses I received this year, a student chose "boredom" as his issue and suggested that Meek Mill should come teach a songwriting workshop. The student explained that he used "slang" in his letter to the rapper so he would be seen as a true fan and maybe Meek Mill would be more likely to help a student who was a true fan.

- As a class, examine Frida Kahlo's *Self Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States*, 1932. Discuss how Kahlo represents different parts of her cultural identities. If you have not discussed culture recently or at length, remind students that culture is much more than nationality, and help them brainstorm their own various cultural identities. Have students create a similarly-

styled self-portrait that includes phrases they associate with each part of their identities.

- Have students translate excerpts from their reading into one of their own dialects. For example, when reading *The Bluest Eye*, I had my class (which was mostly White) translate some of the dialogue into GAE, and students were quick to comment that the characters suddenly felt flat. During a unit where we read *Antigone*, students translated portions of the text into modern "text lingo." Suddenly, the characters felt more relatable to the students.

- Read "Legal Alien" by Pat Mora. Have students write a two-stanza poem about their cultural identity in which they use two different dialects. Students whose primary dialects are closer to the standard can practice shifting based on context. For example, the first stanza could be written to reflect how they speak to respected elders, like grandparents, and the second stanza could be written in the kind of text lingo they use with their friends. I had one student write a poem that highlighted the contrasts between her identity as a Sunday School mentor and her identity as a student athlete.

- Give students a prompt and an audience and have them write a paragraph. Then have them write a response to the same prompt but a different audience. Have a discussion about what changes they made and why.

- Watch a video of Jamila Lyiscott performing her spoken-word poem "3 Ways to Speak English." This is a favorite among my students. Elaborate upon this by listening to the recording or reading the transcript of Lyiscott's 2014 interview with NPR called "What Does it Mean to be 'Articulate'?" As a class, discuss

Lyiscott's argument. How does she support it in both her poem and the interview? How do the dialectal characteristics in her poem and in the interview impact her message?

- Delpit shares that some teachers have students work in groups to create bilingual or bidialectal dictionaries. She also suggests that students can gain experience using GAE by memorizing and performing parts of dramas. This might be especially effective for students who fear correction or feel like their identities are threatened by the use of GAE because students are playing the part of someone else who speaks GAE rather than using it for their own purposes ("Culturally Responsive Instruction" 151).

- Following any writing assignment that allows students to code-mesh, have them write an author's note to submit with the assignment. The author's note should be a metacognitive reflection in which students explore how they made decisions about their language, what goals they hoped to accomplish, and how they considered their audience.

- Have students research a topic of interest and then share their new knowledge in three different formats or to three different audiences. Discuss how the format or audience influenced their language choices.

- After examining a number of rhetorical or stylistic strategies, have students experiment with these "linguistic gifts" in their own writing. Have students share their writing in small groups and discuss what worked, what didn't, and why.

- NPR's "Code-switching: Are we all Guilty?"

  (https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122528515)

- "From Ghetto Lady to Critical Linguist" by Geneva Smitherman (1990).

Strategy 5: Use Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies

Ladson-Billings introduced the phrase *culturally relevant teaching* in the early 1990s. She defines it as "a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that school (and other institutions) perpetuate" (469). In other words, teachers should design curriculum that not only incorporates students' lived experiences and cultures but also empowers them to identify and confront a system built on linguistic inequality. This requires teachers to engage with the school community, especially for teachers who do not live within the communities of their students. It is important for teachers to "build strong family and community partnerships… [recognize] the important cultural contributions that families make… and connect classroom activities to students' homes" (Bellas 205-207). According to Judith Baker, developing familiarity with students' cultures will help teachers anticipate the difficulties their students might encounter when acquiring a new dialect (56). This will further allow teachers to identify verbal developmental norms within a cultural context (Mettille 13).

This is a complex, ongoing process that certainly requires more discussion than can be provided here. As communities change and evolve, so must a teacher's

approaches. Teachers should be encouraged to remain engaged with the community. Schools should offer regular professional development tailored to the characteristics of the communities they serve.

Strategy 6: Preparing Students to be Activists

Some students may wish to challenge the dialect hierarchy and actively work towards equality. These students may wish to buck the system by code-meshing. It is crucial that they enter the language wars with a concrete understanding of the negative consequences that can result from challenging the hierarchy. This is not to scare students away from activism, but to make sure they have a fighting chance and can enter the battle fully cognizant of what they face: Wheeler and Thomas write that these students "must then accept the consequences of their choices. ALL speakers who choose a socially stigmatized language style will be subject to social standards about appropriateness of language use in context, and Blacks in the United States are especially subject to these social judgments" (385).

Those students who do wish to advocate for social change have many avenues. These students should be provided with "critical literacies and competencies to name, investigate, and dismantle white linguistic hegemony and Anti-Black Linguistic Racism" (Baker-Bell 86). Below are some potential paths:

- Turn the critical lens inward and examine their own language biases.
- Be intentional about building relationships with people who speak a different dialect

- Write letters to the editor or media stations when they observe language bias in reporting the local news. In the letter, students should clearly explain how the coverage perpetuated bias.

- Host a diversity club or event where students from diverse backgrounds (who might not normally interact) have a chance to form relationships.

- Oppose any school policy that results in exclusion of a particular cultural group

Of course, when these students grow up and enter the dominant Discourses where linguistic bias is a gatekeeper, they can more actively work to shift the paradigm from within.

Implications for Teacher Training

To be prepared for success in a global economy, students need versatile language skills. Students will be faced with dialectal diversity, so they need to be prepared to navigate a spectrum of linguistic interactions. They should also be knowledgeable in how their speech can best support their goals based on audience, format, context, and style.

Teachers are in the unique position to foster these skills from the time students enter kindergarten to the time they graduate from high school (and beyond). Teachers do not have to wait for change to come from above; they "have some relative autonomy to develop textual practices that challenge dominant conventions and norms" even before policies are examined or changed at the administrative level. Canagarajah describes the classroom as "a powerful site of policy negotiation" because "the pedagogies practiced and texts produced in the classroom can reconstruct policies ground up" (587).

Unfortunately, given the current state of most teacher education programs, teachers enter the field without the necessary knowledge, insight, and tools to make the needed changes. "The U.S. teaching force is not well equipped to help these children and those who speak vernacular dialects of English adjust to school and learn joyfully: Too few teachers share or know about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, or understand the challenges inherent in learning to speak and read Standard English" (Wong Fillmore and Snow 3). A linguistics course was part of my undergraduate program, but the class focused on memorizing the International Phonetic Alphabet and diagramming sentences, neither of which was particularly helpful when I began my career working with students who speak a variety of dialects. Teacher training needs to include basic linguistic training and culturally relevant pedagogical strategies.

One goal of linguistics training would be reshaping teachers' attitudes towards dominant and nondominant dialects. Taliaferro suggests that the first step towards more equitable language instruction is to help teachers become aware of their own biases (18). In fact, "examining classroom teacher perceptions and attitudes about AAE may provide a missing piece in the puzzle in the achievement gap" (Rhoden 7). Negative opinions of dialectal diversity may be an obstacle to effective language instruction and prevent students from becoming the most effective communicators they can be (Taliaferro 23). After all, "educators who have a better understanding of dialectal diversity are less likely to make pejorative judgments about vernacular speakers" (Taliaferro 20). As we explored in the case of BE in the classroom, negative perceptions of nondominant dialect speakers can influence teachers' perceptions of students' "intelligence, ability, and character," which can result in the mislabeling of students as speech deficient, poor relationship

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development between teachers and students, lower self-image, and overall poor performance (Taliaferro 22).

Generally, these negative perceptions of nondominant dialects result from a lack of understanding. For example, some teachers are unaware that their students are even speaking a dialect and confuse it instead for "broken English" (Rhoden 5). Teachers, too, have been exposed to the dominant language ideology, but training in sociolinguistics could provide teachers with a more equitable perception of language differences. As our classrooms become more diverse, it is important for teachers to understand that when students use language in ways they do not expect, it could be the result of a different dialect system and not an indication of a language deficit (Dannenberg and Dredger 4). Even the most basic exposure to sociolinguistics could reshape how teachers view dialectal diversity. Teachers could quickly come to understand that their own dialects are reflective of their cultures and backgrounds and are not more correct than nondominant dialects (Wong Fillmore and Snow 6).

Linguistics training would also help teachers more effectively support their students' language development. Lack of familiarity with students' primary dialects makes it impossible for teachers to distinguish between genuine errors and simple differences in dialectal grammar. For example, a student who writes "We went to Dedreik house" might be using BE, as possessive -s absence is a common feature of BE. However, a student who writes "We goed to Dedreik's house" is incorrectly conjugating the irregular verb go. This is not a feature of BE. A more intimate understanding of their students' dialects could help teachers discern between language problems that will

resolve themselves with time and which require intervention (Wong Fillmore and Snow 8).

Teachers' linguistic training should be applicable to the students they will teach. In "What Teachers Need to Know About Language," Wong Fillmore and Snow present an excellent overview of the types of linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts, as well as course descriptions, that should be part of teacher training. These linguistics courses need to be paired with pedagogical strategies that will help teachers design a curriculum that presents students with counter narratives that "make visible and interrogate the assumptions at the core of the dominant language ideology" (Metz 457). Such strategies must center students' cultural identities and validate the contributions students can make to the learning environment.

Final Thoughts

Preparing all teachers to work in multidialectal classrooms will benefit students. Even if a teacher's students all speak the dominant dialect, incorporating language studies into the curriculum will help students effectively communicate with speakers from around the country and world as they enter the workforce. Teachers need a grasp on basic linguistics and culturally relevant pedagogy, so these courses should be a required component of every teacher-preparation program.

It is in the students' best interests for teachers to implement a curriculum based on the students' needs. A teacher must help students grow toward their potential. This means giving students the tools they need to be agents of change, but it also means preparing students for reality as it is now. Regardless of the students' backgrounds, mastery of GAE

will open doors that may otherwise be inaccessible. Students need to understand that how they speak will impact how others perceive them, and with this understanding, they can make educated choices about which language variety to use in a given situation.

Conclusion

Although our classrooms are becoming more diverse, the standard language ideology persists and can result in discrimination against and limited opportunities for speakers of nondominant dialects. Teachers are faced with the conundrum of honoring students' primary dialects while preparing them for success in a society that expects them to use General American English to access many social goods. The traditional approach has been to replace students' nondominant dialects with GAE, but this deficit perspective leads to decreased student performance and sometimes an outright rejection of school altogether. Pedagogies that seek to eradicate students' primary dialects should be replaced by a more holistic goal of exposing students to a variety of dialects with a focus on the inherent equality of those dialects, as well as adding new dialects to students' language toolboxes instead of replacing the tools they already have.

Two approaches to navigating the dialect hierarchy, code-switching and code-meshing, are sometimes presented as being at odds; however, I would argue that they are both useful tools to reach the same set of goals. We want our students to enter the world prepared, and we want to empower them to contribute to a more fair and equal society. Those who cannot access the dominant dialect may find that language is a gatekeeper that prevents social mobility. As Wheeler, Swords, and Thomas argue, being able to switch from one dialect to another can allow speakers of nondominant dialects to access social circles and institutions where the use of the dominant dialect is expected.

As these experts acknowledge, and as those such as Young, Young-Rivera, and Baker-Bell argue, when language serves as a gatekeeper, an unfair burden is placed on speakers of nondominant dialects who are then expected to shuttle between dialects for

no other purpose than meeting others' (often arbitrary) expectations. Unfortunately, this is the reality many of our students will face when they leave our classrooms, and it is in their best interests that we equip them with the tools they need to access those Discourses. We don't have to stop there, though. Students can also be taught to think critically about their language use and how they might make conscious choices involving code-meshing to challenge the dialect hierarchy.

Additionally, language studies should be incorporated into all secondary English classrooms so that even those students who speak a dominant dialect can develop an appreciation for language diversity and a respect for the validity of nondominant dialects. All students should be exposed to a variety of dialects. Contrastive analysis is a useful tool to help students identify the differences in dialects while still validating their grammaticality and shared deep structure. Thoughtful consideration of various rhetorical and stylistic approaches will lead to both richer conversations and writing.

Teacher-preparation programs should emphasize sociolinguistics and culturally relevant pedagogy regardless of the communities the teachers will likely serve. This work cannot be solely the responsibility of urban educators or those who teach in multidialectal classrooms. All students benefit from thinking critically about language, and the standard language ideology must be challenged from all sides.

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