



Rhetorical argument, folk linguistics, and content-oriented discourse analysis: A follow-up study



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HIGHLIGHTS

- The current study is a replication of Preston (1994).
- Participants felt that AAE was neither proper nor appropriate.
- Participants believed that vernacular varieties will be acquired by those living in a certain context.
- Participants did not consider the reasons why non-standard varieties might persist.

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ABSTRACT

In 1994, Dennis Preston published “Content-Oriented Discourse Analysis and Folk Linguistics”, in which he applied Deborah Schiffrin’s argument structure analysis and Vantage Theory to folk-linguistic data. The present study applies Schiffrin’s analysis to similar folk-linguistic data, as both Preston’s and my subjects discussed African American English. Preston found that his subjects used Oppositional Argument while the subjects in the present study used Rhetorical Argument. According to Schiffrin’s analysis, arguments contain *positions*, *dispute*, and *support*. The resulting analysis compares the conclusions that can be drawn from each set of arguments, such as social and distributional facts about language variety, and facts about variety acquisition and use.

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1. Introduction

In 1994, Dennis Preston published “Content-Oriented Discourse Analysis and Folk Linguistics” in which he demonstrated how discourse analysis techniques can be used to determine folk beliefs about linguistic topics. Discourse analysis, he argued, has mostly concerned itself with the structure, rather than the content, of conversations. Through the use of analysis of argument moves, the underlying beliefs of the folk, these “patterns and consistencies of folk belief which are hidden from casual investigation” (286) can be brought into relief.

1.1. Folk linguistics

Discourse analysis is a well-established approach to analyzing data, and folk linguistics is becoming more so, with publications, conference presentations and even a special issue of the *AILA Review*. The now-thriving study of folk linguistics was first proposed by Hoeningswald (1971) and later taken up most prominently by Preston in various studies. Preston (1989) wrote that “impressions, classifications, and caricatures of language and language use” by nonlinguists “are part of the information needed to understand the status of and regard for language use in speech communities” (xi). Niedzielski and Preston (2003), in the only book-length study of American folk linguistics, note that “elicitation and the process of reasoning about language in discursal settings may be more valuable than the elicitation of static, prepackaged folk belief” (301). Other studies putting forth discourse-based attitude analyses are Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2009), who argue it is important to keep in mind that in studying language attitudes, we are observing not a pure abstraction, but something that is regularly made relevant in everyday life—and in everyday life, expressions of attitudes are rarely (if ever) stated without any sort of

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back-and-forth with other people. An analysis that examines attitudes in interaction therefore looks at their most contextualized and least abstracted form (200).

Hall-Lew and Stephens (2012) investigated “Country Talk” in which they elicited linguistic attitudes and definitions through interviews rather than free conversation. Studies such as these show that we must consider folk beliefs about language as part of the total package of linguistic competence. This metadiscourse about language can help linguists develop relevant research and educational programs.

Dennis Preston has been the most prolific researcher in the field of folk linguistics, sometimes using maps (Preston, 1996), other times interviews (Preston, 1994; Niedzielski and Preston, 2003), to gather folk beliefs on language. Other researchers such as Martinez (2003) used written questionnaires to gather material on folk belief regarding language varieties: in this case, Spanish along the Texas/Mexico border. Recent research by Cukor-Avila et al. (2012) also used map data to investigate Texans’ perception of dialect variation within the state.

1.2. Argument

I will concentrate on Preston’s (1994) article here. In this case, Preston broke his article into two parts, demonstrating two analytical techniques that can be used for folk-linguistic study. The first analysis Preston used was a codification of argument structure proposed by Deborah Schiffrin (1985, 1987, 1990) and the second, Vantage Theory, as proposed by MacLaury (Preston cited unpublished papers by MacLaury and Trujillo). Rather than further attempt to replicate the Vantage Theory portion of the analysis here, I will concern myself in this article with Schiffrin’s analysis, applying it to my data, and comparing my findings to Preston’s.

Other schemes of analyzing arguments have been proposed. Toulmin (2003/1958) proposed a model of argument that involves *claims*, *warrants* and *data*. The *claims* are supported by a *datum* which is offered as support for the original assertion. The *warrant* is the step – usually based on some common sense rule – that links the *datum* to the *claim*. A *modal qualifier* (*probably*, *possibly*) may be used if there are any exceptional conditions bearing on the link between the warrant and the conclusion. In addition, *warrants* have *backing* which are the scientific principles, laws, or statistics that validate the truth of the warrant.

van Eemeren et al. (2002) considered argumentative discourse to involve a difference of opinion. In this framework, people express opinion as a *standpoint* which can be met with *doubt* or an *opposite standpoint* from the listener. The first is called a *nonmixed difference of opinion*, the second a *mixed difference of opinion*. *Critical discussion* ensues when the two parties aim to resolve their differences through the stages of *confrontation*, *opening*, *argumentation*, and *conclusion*. The standpoint can be *justified* or *refuted*. “The speaker must believe that the listener (a) does not already fully accept the standpoint, (b) will accept the statements used in the argumentation, and (c) will view the argumentation as an acceptable defense (or refutation) of the proposition to which the standpoint refers” (53). The standpoint can be defended through one or more single arguments that consist of two premises each. *Multiple argumentation* “consists of alternative defenses of the same standpoint, presented one after another” (64).

Jackson and Jacobs (1980) proposed a discourse analytic framework to everyday conversational argument. The opening turn of an argument is known as the *arguable*. The interlocutor may dispute the truth of the utterance, resulting in a *propositional* argument. An argument at the *performative* level has to do with the sincerity conditions or felicity conditions of the attempted speech act. Although Jackson & Jacobs call their method discourse analysis, the categories they use (adjacency pairs, presequences, insertion sequences, etc.) are from conversation analysis. An interesting section of the article treats enthymemes in conversational arguments. Enthymemes occur because all the premises of the argument are not explicitly stated nor are they explicitly linked to the conclusion. How detailed the speaker must be depends on the needs and demands of the listener. In other words, the unstated premises are those that the listener accepts without a need for further explanation.

Preston (1994) presented his own understanding of argument, citing earlier work by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), Jacobs and Jackson (1979) and Schiffrin (1985, 1987, 1990). Preston’s analysis focused on the categories presented in Schiffrin (1987): *position*, *dispute*, and *support*, which he claimed are similar to those found in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), who proposed similar categories of *opinion*, which can be *attacked* (*disputed*) by the listener or *defended* (*justified*) by the speaker. Preston differed slightly from these categories in that he recognized, following Schiffrin, that there can be arguments without disputes (rhetorical arguments) but that the data in question (Preston, 1994) consisted of oppositional argument. He further explained that positions can be difficult to identify, yet a dispute will clearly point to the position that is being disputed. Preston also claimed that “positions which are only supported and not disputed will not produce oppositional argument” (296), which is the case with the data I present here.

In this paper, I follow Preston (1994) and analyze the transcript using Schiffrin’s (1985) model of argument. She describes two types of argument, *rhetorical* and *oppositional*. In rhetorical arguments “a speaker presents a monologue supporting a disputable position”, and in oppositional arguments “one or more speakers support openly disputed positions” (37). These categories roughly correspond with van Eemeren et al.’s (2002) *nonmixed* and *mixed differences of opinion*. The argument presented by Preston was oppositional; the one I present here is rhetorical. Certain foci, as described by Schiffrin (1987) are similar. Arguments contain *positions*, *dispute*, and *support*. *Positions* are assertions that reveal not only ideas but also moral claims to the way the world is or the way it should be. They are sometimes spoken “soapbox style” in which the speaker seems to address a larger audience than just who is in the room. Hedges and intensifiers are sometimes used. Positions can be *disputed* through opposition to an idea, the stance of the speaker, or moral implications; or *supported* through logic, evidence, or speech acts such as explanation or justification (18–19). In the following analysis I pattern the labels after those of Preston (1994): POS (position), DIS (dispute) and SUP (support). The moves are also numbered.

The reason for this article is not to focus on the topic that participants discussed (African American English) but rather to replicate Preston’s method. I had over 50 pages of transcript to work with, and the portion of the conversation I chose to analyze had a similar topic (AAE) but different rhetorical structure (rhetorical as opposed to oppositional argument). With a similar topic we can concentrate on the structure and meaning of the discourse, although a discussion of the topic itself is inevitable since this is content-oriented analysis. In a future article I will choose an excerpt with a different topic but a similar rhetorical structure to the conversation in Preston’s 1994 article. The sociolinguistic interview that produced the data I analyze here was open-ended and did not have a specific focus. AAE happened to be mentioned by the participants and also happened to be the focus of Preston’s article. The topic should not distract readers from the reason for the article, which is enacting Preston’s method: applying Schiffrin’s analysis to folk-linguistic data. In my data gathering I did not ask about AAE nor was that my focus. The participants mentioned it without any prompting on my part.

2. Methods

The researcher's role in this conversation differs from Preston's fieldworker in that I tried to elicit specific features from the participants, while the participants themselves were not as interested in talking about features as they were in talking about social and educational issues. There was no overt dispute going on, and all participants seemed to agree and engaged in constructing meaning together rather than refuting and conceding points. Unlike Preston's (1994) participants, these participants did not dispute that a Black variety of English exists. But they had a difficult time defining it and giving examples of what they perceived. The researcher cajoled them, trying to get her information (i.e., specifics, features), but the folk persisted in their analysis of education or of speech mirroring education.

The data were collected as part of a focus-group conversation functioning as a folk-linguistic interview. The conversation took place in a private home in Marblehead, Massachusetts during a family gathering in November, 2001. Participants were given broad linguistics topics to discuss, and the interviewer attempted minimal involvement, although participants were prompted for specific examples and to reflect on their feelings and attitudes toward the issues discussed. The conversation touched on a broad range of topics from regionalism to the speech of politicians, but the focus here is on comments on AAE, as that topic was also the focus of Preston's (1994) analysis. Unlike in Preston's research, this topic was not initiated by the researcher, but by the participants themselves. Another difference from Preston's research design is that the researcher is a native English speaker and the participants are all White, rather than African American participants and a non-native interviewer, as in Preston's research.

The analysis of data followed Preston's (1994) scheme of analysis described above. I also used several of Schiffrin's (1985) categories, such as use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, intensifiers, words that imply opposites, and the personal beliefs of the speaker. Schiffrin presented these features as indicators of the discourse properties of rhetorical argument, so as I analyzed the data I looked for such things as the location of the position at boundary markers of the discourse, semantic indicators, discourse markers, devices of orientation, and representations of belief. I present the monologues in ethnopoetic notation (Tedlock, 1983) for ease of interpretation.

2.1. Participants

B, the researcher, age 33, doctoral student in Rhetoric and Linguistics, daughter of A and D.

S, female, age 65, retired, BA degree. Cousin of A. Lives in Rye, New Hampshire, with her husband H.

H, male, age 65–70, retired executive, BA degree, S's husband.

D, male, age 57, works in a warehouse as a "traffic manager", graduate student in English, A's husband. Had coursework in linguistics as an undergrad. Massachusetts native, although born and partially educated in Florida.

A, female, age 55, hospital administrator, MA degree, lives in own house in Marblehead, Massachusetts, with husband, identifies as a "Marbleheader".

E, female, age 49, clerical worker in a health care company, lives in Ipswich, Massachusetts, with husband (not present at interview) and two boys, identifies as a "Lynner".¹ Niece of A and D.

3. Results

3.1. First excerpt

I begin my analysis with H's first speech. In order to view H's separate propositions clearly, I break it down to content lines in a somewhat modified ethnopoetic notation (Tedlock, 1983). Ethnopoetic notation allows the researcher to group words into meaningful chunks that can be more easily analyzed, in this case, using Schiffrin's argument framework. I have eliminated backchannels and attempts to take the floor by D.

1H: I believe there's another very interesting marker.

Ah, when you think of the Black community, um,
if you, ah, have (3s) a Black businessman who speaks the way
that we would expect a business person,
educated business person to speak,

4 versus those who are less (2s)

I wouldn't say less educated—
but the way their speech patterns were taught to them,
and it, it then becomes what we are accustomed to hearing from that part of society.
It is a look down on them.

7 And I think that one—

my personal opinion is
that one of the best things that could happen to show education, ah,
is for the Blacks to stop that kind of lingo.

¹ Lynn is a city in Massachusetts with a bad reputation. The popular rhyme goes: "Lynn, Lynn, the city of sin/ You never come out the way you went in". Several other participants, including the researcher, have lived in Lynn (A, B, and D) but do not identify with it.

- 11 When they get outside of their own little ring.
 Because it doesn't work outside the ring,
 and too many of them are, are educated
 but I don't know where they were taught the language.
 Because they take their, ah, ethnic surroundings with them,
 instead of leaving it behind relative to speech patterns.
- 16 And I think that has a tendency for people, um,
 maybe there's already a bias,
- 17 too much bias in the world for color,
 but that doesn't help it.
 When they don't speak the language correctly.
- 18 They're in the United States.
 They've gone through the same educational system,
 but they stick with the, with the lingo.

Here H's argument can be broken down by his opinions and assertions of fact. And can be further broken down, as [Schiffirin \(1985\)](#) explains, by coordinating conjunctions (*and, but*) and subordinating conjunctions (*because, when, if*). H also uses words that imply opposites such as *versus* and *instead*. I have broken down the lines so these items appear in the beginning of a line. Let us first take H's beliefs. Schiffirin writes that beliefs stand in a unique position in rhetorical argument because they cannot be verified except by the speaker's report. Only the speaker knows his own beliefs, and "because beliefs are the speaker's informational property, the speaker's right to maintain them cannot be denied, but because they are unavailable for proof, neither can others' rights to doubt their validity be denied" (1985: 40). Schiffirin goes on to say that, for this reason, beliefs are often justified "through evidence or explanation, even when they have not been explicitly challenged or questioned". Participant H states two beliefs in this monolog: (1) that Blacks should "stop that kind of lingo", which he justifies by stating it will "show education"; and (2) that there is "too much bias for color" in the world and this bias is exacerbated when "they don't speak the language correctly". [Schiffirin \(1990\)](#) explains that opinions "allow speakers to shield themselves from the truthfulness of the facts by focusing on their own stance toward what is being said" (245). When H says "my personal opinion", he stresses not only that these are not facts and they cannot be challenged, but also, in this case, increases his commitment to the statement at hand, and emphasizes his "claim ... to sincerity" ([Schiffirin, 1990](#): 245).

Conjunctions can further break down an argument by position and support. [Schiffirin \(1985\)](#) concludes that coordinating conjunctions often indicate positions, while subordinating conjunctions often indicate support. For instance, H begins a position with "and too many of them are, are educated", so this is a fact (rather than his opinion) that they are educated. He continues with another coordinating conjunction, "but I don't know where they were taught the language", implying there was something wrong with this education, and his support for this point is introduced with a subordinating conjunction: "Because they take their, ah, ethnic surroundings with them", implying that "taking their ethnic surroundings with them" is evidence that their education was somehow lacking, since he cannot deny that the education took place. He repeats this argument with similar forms when he says, "They're in the United States. They've gone through the same educational system, but they stick with the, with the lingo". In this case, his position is strengthened by using no conjunctions in the first two statements at all. They are pure assertions.

[Schiffirin \(1985\)](#) also talks about the boundaries of the argument and how the main point will be repeated at several points. The core of H's argument is that Blacks should "stop that kind of lingo", which will result in less bias. This claim is repeated in the negative, through the use of "instead of leaving it behind" and "but they stick with the lingo". These statements imply that the dialect *should be* "left behind" (but it is not); and that speakers *should not* "stick with the lingo" (but they do). H opens his argument by demonstrating the model of "a Black businessman who speaks the way we would expect a business person ... to speak" (presumably Standard English).² His evidence that all Black people should learn and know the standard variety include the facts that Blacks live in the United States and have attended the "same educational system". H does not investigate the possibility that, perhaps, Black people may have the knowledge and capacity to speak Standard English, but they may not have the desire to do so.

[Schiffirin \(1985\)](#) claims that speakers will use intensifiers at those places in their utterances where the content may be most apt to be disputed, and that speakers will strengthen their utterances by comparing them to alternative beliefs. H uses intensifiers in three places: 7–8 "the best things", 11 "their own little ring", and 17 "too much bias". His main point, of course, is disputable: That it will "show education" for "Blacks to stop that kind of lingo". This is related to his utterance that there is "too much bias in the world for color". He seems to be claiming that the use of Standard English by Black people will eliminate some, if not all, prejudice against them. His use of these intensifiers shows that at some level he knows that this position can be disputed; that perhaps racism against Black people cannot be overcome simply by changing speech patterns. The use of "their own little ring" seems to belittle Black culture; showing that this cultural context is "little" (small and insignificant: "That part of society" and "ethnic surroundings") as opposed to the "larger" culture, the mainstream society, where educated businessmen speak Standard English.

Here are the core moves of H's argument, expressed using the categorical analysis from [Preston \(1994\)](#) and [Schiffirin \(1985, 1987\)](#) in which POS is a position, and SUP is support. Since this is a rhetorical argument there is no dispute (DIS):

- POS1 Black people speak differently, but they don't have to do so.
 POS2 Educated people should speak the language "correctly".
 POS3 Uneducated people who speak with a dialect are looked down upon.
 POS4 People should not speak their dialects outside their home or in-groups.
 SUP1 Dialects are not appropriate to use outside the home or beyond the in-group.

² Informants never used the term *Standard English* but instead referred to "proper English" or "correct English" by which they most likely were referring to Standard English. [Hill \(2008\)](#) explains the "ideology of Standard" that holds "to speak the correct and prestigious form will bring social and economic benefits, so it is important, as well as possible and desirable, for people to learn to speak this way" (35).

SUP2 People who use dialects are educated but perhaps that education was somehow lacking.

SUP3 Part of that education should have been on appropriateness of when and where to use dialects.

POS5 Bias for color is intensified by the use of non-standard dialects.

POS6 Black people are Americans and educated in America; therefore, they should speak Standard English as they were supposedly educated to do.

H does not know why they (Black people) “stick with the lingo” and so he has no explanation for this observation. These arguments are not disputed by the other participants. D seems to agree in 10D (see Appendix) that bias and prejudice against Black people will go away if they would just speak Standard English.

3.2. *Second excerpt*

In this excerpt, S is reflecting on her attitudes and reaction toward college educated Black athletes, a topic that H had introduced a few turns before.

49S: They go to college

and they get an education;

why are they speaking that way?

My first reaction is they /nɛv ^ / took an academic subject.

They just, they got, they got them to play football, they didn't, you know, these guys couldn't have gone to an English class and speak the way they're speaking.

Because they are speaking grammatically incorrect

and they're using terminology, some of it, that is foreign to me.

But I just feel they never went to class, you know.

So I immediately ((laughing)) have a, a prejudice toward them.

Not that they're black, green, or blue.

I just think, “What a shame”.

Here, [laughing] they had an opportunity for education

and they didn't take it.

Her first two statements are statements of fact: “They go to college and they get an education”. But then she asks a rhetorical question: “why are they speaking that way?” The fact that they went to college cannot be denied, but perhaps the fact that they “got an education” is debatable. She considers that perhaps the schools did not plan on allowing these athletes to “get an education” because they “just got them to play football”. She then offers evidence that they could not have gone to class because of the way that they speak. There is an implication, never stated, that the colleges do not put as much emphasis on athletes going to class because athletics have priority. She ends by concluding that they “had an opportunity for an education and they didn't take it”. Here, she puts the responsibility or the blame back on the students. Perhaps the schools “just got them to play football”, but they could have taken advantage of the opportunity and gone to class. She also assumes that proper speaking is something that would be taught in a college English class, although as a college English teacher I teach my students how to write, and I assume they get instruction on speaking in their speech classes.

Here are her arguments and support:

POS1: A college education should include instruction in proper speaking.

POS2: College graduates should speak proper English as evidence of their educational achievements.

POS3: Some college-educated Black athletes do not speak Standard English in TV interviews.

POS4: Therefore, they must not have gone to class.

SUP/POS4: If they had gone to class, they would have learned to speak grammatically correct English.

POS5: The speaker is prejudiced against people who had an opportunity for education and did not take it.

POS6: Perhaps the colleges are exploiting athletes, or perhaps the athletes do not care about education.

It is interesting that sports and education play such a part in these discussions (I discuss the connection to sports below). Niedzielski and Preston's (Black) participants also linked education to status, and one (White) participant echoed S's words almost exactly: “If you have a chance to get more education than someone else. Th- then you should use it. –And I think that it's a waste if you ... don't” (2003: 149).

From these discussions, we can extrapolate some of the folk's beliefs about language and dialects.

Social and distributional facts about language variety:

1. Prejudice against Black people will be eliminated if they speak Standard English.
2. Non-standard dialects may be appropriate to use in the home or in-group context, but should not be used in the larger society.

Facts about variety acquisition and use:

1. The educational system teaches students to speak proper English, but the system either fails Black students or the students resist instruction.
2. Educated people should speak Standard English to display their education publicly.
3. Vernacular varieties are acquired in home and “ethnic” contexts, while standard varieties are taught in the “educational system”.

4. Discussion

My participants' apparent and stated beliefs about variety acquisition and use are quite close to Preston's participants'. It appears that both groups of participants believe that vernacular varieties will be acquired by those living in a certain context, as H put it, "the way their speech patterns were taught to them". According to his data, Preston formulated that his participants held the following belief: "Persons who move to a new cultural environment are strongly motivated to accommodate to that environment" (1994: 306). My participants also felt that this was important, specifically the importance of "leaving behind" one's "ethnic surroundings" according to participant H. Participant D seems to disapprove if Black people "bring the ghetto with them" into a wider society. Both of these participants disapprove of the stigmatized home dialect being spoken in the wider society.

D, H, and, to an extent, S, seem to think that dialects and varieties can be picked up or left off at will, which is almost opposite to the attitude of Preston's (1994) participants that "one may not use language of a certain sort 'at will'" (306). This is related to the complexity of environmental influence. Preston's participants seem to believe that environment will influence usage, in that "AAVE just seems to come out when one is in the right environment" (302). If this is true, then Standard English, as well, should "just come out" when one is in the right environment; this is what my participants would like to see happen and they are upset when it does not.

My participants presented *rhetorical arguments* as opposed to Preston's participants who produced *oppositional arguments* (Schiffirin, 1985). Preston's participants debated the existence of an African American dialect of English, while my participants certainly believe that this variety exists, although they appear not to approve of it. They call it a "lingo" and a "ghetto accent", while the researcher, similar to the fieldworker in Preston's data (1994: 286), calls it "Black English". Unlike Preston's participants, who believed that "Language variation is not as distinct as it once was" (305), the participants in this study believe that language variation is very real and varieties are quite distinct. Preston's participants claimed that dialects exist in out-of-the-way places like the South, and although my participants did not specify a geographical location (although the researcher mentioned that the variety of AAE may share some [prosodic] features with Southern dialects), they posited more of a social location for dialects ("the ring" and the "ghetto").

The *ring* is an interesting lexical choice, as S and H discuss athletes as people who should be educated and should speak English "correctly". Of course the word *ring* is polysemous and here refers to a social circle rather than a boxing ring, but it is relevant that H chose this lexical item, as opposed to *group* or *society*, since it evokes participation in sports. Both Preston's and my participants linked sports, specifically basketball, and non-standard dialects. For instance, one of Preston's participants claimed that, if he played basketball, he would have "access" to the "current language that's going DOWN" (presumably AAE forms). Participant H in my study gave the example of basketball players as educated people who persist in using non-standard dialects. Participation in sports is often stereotypically seen as a lucrative career choice for African-Americans, and participation in college athletics is also seen as a stereotypical way for African-Americans to get an education. In fact, the stereotype is so strong that many Black college students report that it is often assumed that they are there on a scholarship to play sports. It is not a requirement for the game of basketball to speak Standard English. It makes more sense that a businessman would be expected to speak Standard English, and it appears that H cannot even wrap his mind around the idea of a businessman not speaking it.

It seems for S and H the fact that professional athletes went to college is reason enough to expect them to speak Standard English. They seem to think that Standard English is taught in college, or should be, and that college graduates should speak Standard English. This is illustrated when *aks* is offered as a lexical item (or phonological form) that indexes AAE, and H comments, "College graduates" (43H), seemingly derisive or uncomprehending of why a college graduate might make use of the lexical item (or pronunciation) *aks*. The implication is that college graduates should know Standard English. Therefore, if a college graduate speaks using non-standard dialect forms, then either he or she is just being contrary, knowingly ignoring the norms; or perhaps his or her education was inadequate; or he or she was lazy, did not study, or did not attend class and somehow graduated without the qualification of standard speech.

It was difficult for me to elicit many particular AAE forms from my White participants. I managed to elicit the lexical items *man*, *dig*, *aks*, *girlfriend*, *ain't*, and *y'all*, as well as the phonological and prosodic features of drawing out words. Preston's fieldworker also had trouble eliciting specific forms from his African-American participants, but he did manage to elicit the items *man*, *girl*, *bro*, and *jive turkey*, as well as such phrases as "What's happening?" and "What's going down?" This difficulty is not surprising, as "non-linguists' understanding of AAVE focus on slang and folk speech, and...folk linguistic awareness in general focuses on the word" (Preston, 1994: 300). Niedzielski and Preston (2003) also noted, "respondents are not particularly rich (or accurate) in their characterizations of AAVE" (137). However stereotypical these forms may be (see Lippi-Green, 2012 for a discussion of *aks* and others), the race of the participants did not seem to affect or influence their ability or inability to provide specific features. Also participants in both studies (both Black and White) seemed to agree that AAE was neither proper nor appropriate.

5. Conclusion

Preston's (1994) participants debated the existence of AAE and whether or not they (the participants) spoke it. His participant D denied a knowledge of AAE because of his home, work and church associations and lack of participation in activities such as sports. My participants acknowledged its existence and linked it to education, with an interesting and complicated argument. My participants agreed that AAE was not appropriate to use in the larger society; therefore, if Blacks are educated, they should not speak AAE outside the home area or in-group. However, educated Blacks sometimes do speak AAE in public forums (i.e., speaking to the press after a basketball game). Therefore, my participants were perplexed. Like Niedzielski and Preston's (2003) European-American participants, "they cannot understand why AAVE (or other nonstandard varieties) persists" (133). My participants attempted to make sense of this by claiming that these Black athletes "never went to class" (S) or "I don't know where they were taught the language" (H), implying that there was something wrong with the education they received. My participants rationalized that responsibility must lie either in the individual or in the system, but seem to not know where to put the blame. H lays it out when he explains, "They're college graduates and they come from certain colleges to play, from which they have played National League Football or National Basketball Association Basketball, and they've come through colleges. (3s) ((mimics)) *Man, they don't sound like they did*". My participants, like Niedzielski and Preston's (2003), do not consider the reasons why non-standard varieties might persist, such as "solidarity, comfort, honesty and a host of other values associated with the smaller speech community" (133).

As a researcher, I cajoled and browbeat my subjects in an effort to elicit specific features. Because this is not a strength of the folk, in future studies, I will step aside and allow participants to discuss their positions. In future discussions I will use this framework to analyze oppositional arguments if the data reveal elements that participants are in disagreement about. Folk linguistics is a rich tapestry, and more studies such as this one and Preston's (1994) should be conducted with a spectrum of participants in order that linguists can understand both the form and the content of people's beliefs about language. Preston (1994) claimed that the study of language attitudes without taking into account the beliefs of the folk is a dangerous enterprise that may "distort the folk reality or only tell a partial truth or, worse" become a "study of theatrically exaggerated speech caricatures" (328). The study of folk linguistics needs to be taken up on a wider scale, and this study is just an example of the discourse analytic techniques that can be employed to investigate the many facets of folk belief about language.

Appendix A. Transcription conventions

When discussing linguistic features and other issues, I use the terms of the participants, unless a gloss is needed in the interest of clarity. Regular spelling is used unless a dialect feature is salient, in which case I attempt to use a modified orthography based on the accepted values for the Roman alphabet in English to represent it, and when this is impossible, I use IPA phonemic transcription. The use of Roman characters to represent English pronunciation is supported by the work of Jefferson (2004). Conventional orthography and punctuation are also used in the transcripts with the exception of equals signs (=) for latching (a turn that follows the previous utterance with no perceivable gap) and single brackets preceding both utterances ([]) in vertical alignment for simultaneous speech. A long dash (—) is used to indicate an utterance that was cut off grammatically either by the speaker or by interruption. Noticeably lengthened vowels are indicated by a colon (:) following the vowel. Words referred to as words, reported speech and mimicry are in *italics*. Non-verbal behavior and explanations are in double parentheses ((())). Pauses of more than one second are indicated in parenthesis ((2s)). Conventions are loosely based on "Close Vertical Transcription" by Gilewicz and Thonus (2004). Unrelated side conversations picked up by the recorder were not transcribed.

Appendix B. Transcript

[The interview has been going on for some time. The researcher asks if everyone has said everything they wanted to say. The researcher has not mentioned AAE nor attempted to elicit any comments on it.]

1H: There's another, very, I personally, I believe there's another very interesting marker.³

2 Ah, when you think of the Black community, um, if you, ah, have (3s) a Black
3 businessman who speaks the way that we would expect a business person,
4 educated business person to speak, versus those who are less (2s) I wouldn't say
5 less educated—but the way their speech patterns were taught to them, and it, it
6 then becomes what we are accustomed to hearing from that part of society. It is a
7 look down on them. And I think that one—my personal opinion is that one of the
8 best things that could happen to show education, ah, is for the Blacks to stop that
9 kind of lingo. =

10D: = Mmm

11H: When they get outside of their own little ring. Because it doesn't work outside the
12 ring, and too many of them are, are educated but I don't know where they were
13 taught the language. Because they take their, ah, ethnic surroundings with them,
14 instead of leaving it behind relative to speech patterns.

15D: You know I =

16H: = And I think that has a tendency for people, um, maybe there's already
17 a bias, too much bias in the world for color, but that doesn't help it. When they
18 don't speak the language correctly. They're in the United States. They've gone
19 through the same educational system, but they stick with the, with the lingo.

20D: Bring the ghetto with 'em =

21H: = *You know man?*

22D: Yeah

23H: And I think it's too bad, because it's a marker that's unnecessary.

24D: You know what I find, H, when I'm speaking to a Black man who's speaking an, an
25 upper level of English, it isn't long before I forget he's Black.⁴

26H: Absolutely.

27D: His skin color disappears.

28H: Absolutely. Yup. The marker is gone.

29B: Can you guys please – I hate to be so specific – can you please give specific
30 examples of what you're talking about because, you know, for my paper. Gimme
31 a specific example of what constitutes a Black English? How do you know
32 someone's speaking Black English?

³ The researcher had previously used the word *marker* to indicate a feature that indexed or stood out as a typical construction of a given dialect or identity.

⁴ Wise (2009) discussed the implications of such a statement, the subtext of which is "that it's a good thing the white person doesn't think of them as black" because of possible adverse consequences (p. 86–87).

- 33D: It–
- 34B: What would be a typical marker that would make you think that?
- 35D: Well, just interspersing the word *man*. ((mimics)) *You know man, dig.*
- 36H: Take the–
- 37D: Using words like *dig*.
- 38H: Take the White basketball players speaking afterwards versus the basketball players
39 speaking afterwards to the press [about sports activity, you'll see it. [You'll hear it
- 40D: [the mumbo jumbo [Mmmm
- 41H: fast. It's, it's that lingo, that–
- 42S: B wants to know what that lingo [is. ((laughing))
- 43B: [Specifics! ((laughing)) I want specific examples!
- 44 Otherwise, it's not gonna help me.
- 45D: It's a, it's a slur–
- 46B: No, 'cause I wanna know, what I wanna know is people's perceptions. What do you
47 perceive? Sure, you hear people speaking like that. But what do you pick up on?
- 48H: My–[I would
- 49B: [What do you perceive? =
- 50H: = What I pick up on is that they're college graduates
51 and they come from certain colleges to play, from which they have played
52 National League Football or National Basketball Association Basketball, and
53 they've come through colleges. (3s) [mimics] *Man, they don't sound like they did.*
- 54B: Are we getting to the music of the speech? The [intonation?
- 55D: [The music of the speech.
56 Intonation, yeah. That [is a good part of it.
- 57H: [And proper use of the language. It's the language, and, ah,
58 it's that ethnic.
- 59B: But you know, that's, I guess what linguists are looking for, we all KNOW when
60 we hear something, but we don't—how do we know what it is that we're picking
61 up on?
- 62D: [Yeah, that's a specific
- 63B: [That's my question.
- 64D: It's hard.
- 65B: Like the Boston accent, you told me it's the r's. It's, it's, ah [the g, the -ing.
- 66D: [It's well known,
67 everybody talks about it.
- 68B: What makes you know that someone is speaking Black English? How do you, you
69 know, what do you hear that? You say, you say they put *man* in, or *dude*.
- 70A: *Aks*. They say *aks* instead of *ask*.
- 71D: *Aks*.
- 72B: Good. That's *ask*.
- 73H: College [Graduates. Right.
- 74A: [Aks.
- 75B: Yup. OK. You've got a feature, now you've got a feature, but how does that make
76 you feel about the person? And does it change your attitude [or does it change
77D: [of course well of
- 78B: your behavior toward the person? Yeah. How?
- 79D: course.
- 80A: It makes, I have to now move into another mode of thinking to translate what
81 they're saying. When I hear *aks* I think of an implement that can, that can chop
82 down a tree. Or do harm to someone. I have to translate that so that it's a question.
[a short conversation about Hispanic-accented English and the lexical item *girlfriend* has been eliminated]
- 83S: They go to college and they get an education; why are they speaking that way? My
84 first reaction is they never [pronounced /nɛv ^ /] took an academic subject. They
85 just, they got, them to play football, they didn't, you know, these guys couldn't
86 have gone to an English class and speak the way they're speaking. Because they
87 are speaking grammatically incorrect and they're using terminology, some of it,
88 that is foreign to me. But I just feel they never went to class, you know. So I
89 immediately ((laughing)) have a, a prejudice toward them. Not that they're black,
90 green, or blue. I just think, "What a shame". Here, ((laughing)) they had an
91 opportunity for education and they didn't take it. [But it does
- 92B: [Did you know that in some
93 Black colleges they allow dialect in the classroom and celebrate it? Just
94 something to think about. But um =
- 95S: = And I know that. =
- 96B: = When you say grammar,
97 how do you know that someone is speaking Black English? What grammatical

- 98 things do they do that makes you know that they're speaking? So you know it's
 99 not some sort of other dialect?
 100S: Just when they're using the English language improperly. They say *ain't* and they
 101 kind of =
 102D: = slang terms.
 103S: Slang terms, and
 104B: It's hard to come up with specifics, isn't it?
 105D: It is.
 106S: It—it is. It really is. A feeling. Because I'm not going to remember what they said,
 107 but I know what they said didn't set well with me.
 108D: What it is, is they draw out words.
 109E: They could have said something better and gotten their point across.
 110S: Exactly, exactly.
 111B: That's what's so interesting for linguists. Linguists will just pick out a feature that
 112 they're gonna use to study. But I'm tryin' a say, what features do PEOPLE
 113 notice? How do they notice features?
 114D: They draw out words. They'll elongate words, they'll elongate wo::rd.
 115B: OK.
 116D: They'll let it sing.
 117B: Isn't that more Southern?
 118D: It is, and I think that the Black ghetto accent that we're talking about has its roots
 119 in the South.
 120S: There's a drawl to it.
 121B: OK, OK.
 122D: They use *y'all*.

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