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Other People's English

Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and
African American Literacy

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Another important difference between language alternation and dialect alternation comes from differences in attitudes toward other languages compared to attitudes toward different dialects. Because of prescriptive language ideology, undervalued dialects are often viewed as inherently inappropriate in mainstream, public settings. If we hear someone speaking Chinese in a government office, we recognize that it is a different language with its own set of grammatical rules. However, when we hear a job candidate for a Fortune 500 company speaking an undervalued dialect, such as African American English, a common reaction is to assume that he or she simply doesn't speak English properly.

Of course, speakers of undervalued varieties speak properly; they just follow a different set of rules compared to Standard English. But what makes this even more pernicious is that, given that English is a language with multiple dialects, rules of the various dialects will sometimes be hard to distinguish, even when speakers are engaged in situational code-switching. Therefore, a user of African American English who uses Standard English in a different setting may in that setting still be heard and received as an African American English speaker. So, the view of undervalued Englishes as "wrong" (or even "inappropriate") means that those speakers who come from backgrounds that use varieties other than the standard, even when they are attempting to use the standard, are often subjected to negative stereotypes associated with their native language variety.


Questions concerning alternations between different language varieties have been central in attempts to develop better approaches to teaching language and literacy. There have been numerous proposals involving methods for teaching children who don't speak Standard English. These proposals vary in terms of how they interpret and incorporate the findings of research in linguistics. In my next chapter, we will look at some of these proposals. Because every classroom is unique, knowing about different approaches can provide teachers with a range of possible pedagogies that might be useful in a given situation. In general, these approaches focus on resolving two specific problems: teaching the grammar of Standard English and challenging language prejudice that leads children to feel unwelcome in the school environment and later as adults in society.

What Are Your Thoughts?

List as many different dialects of English as you can think of off the top of your head. Then, beside each dialect, write assumptions or thoughts (dare we even say biases?) you have for each dialect. Discuss in groups why certain dialects are paired with certain stereotypes.

Be Yourself Somewhere Else

What's Wrong with Keeping Undervalued English out of the Classroom?

 **Concern:** Is there a "right" way to teach language in the classroom, and shouldn't all students know Standard English?

 **This Chapter Offers:**

- Evidence of language bias toward minority students.
- Methods for teaching language (reading and writing) in the classroom.
- An analysis of language misconceptions common in language education research.

If a barrier exists because of the language used by the children in this case, it exists not because the teachers and students cannot understand each other, but because in the process of attempting to teach the students how to speak Standard English the students are made somehow to feel inferior and are thereby turned off from the learning process.

—Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District (1979)

Given the central role of language variation in the expression of individual identity, attempts to banish undervalued Englishes from the classroom place restrictions on students' ability to use the forms of language that serve to convey emotions, attitudes, and relationships to other speakers. Because prescriptive language ideology generally treats undervalued varieties as "wrong" on one hand or "inappropriate" in a certain context on the other, children who speak undervalued Englishes may feel as if school assumes they are "wrong" even when their answer is actually correct. 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. Of course, as Young, Canagarajah, and other proponents of code-meshing advocate, students need access to Standard English. The question is how to teach it. Teachers certainly can and should present the English language as already comprised of multiple dialects and therefore Standard English as informed by and compatible with those dialects.

In a long-term study that followed students' language use from 1st grade through graduation from high school, Janneke Van Hofwegen and Walt Wolfram found that the use of African American English drops steadily from 1st to 4th grade and then rises dramatically between 6th and 8th grades (2010). This may explain an unaccounted-for variable in the success that Wheeler and Swords report when teaching code-switching to their target group of students in the third to sixth grade. Their students' success may have been connected to the expected drop in use of the dialect that Van Hofwegen and Wolfram describe. However, given that Wheeler and Swords's students are likely to increase their use of African American English around sixth grade to eighth grade raises the question of whether their code-switching lessons would be as successful. One of the studies discussed in this book suggests that code-switching lessons at the sixth grade level presents trouble for African American students. Erin McCrossan Cassar (2008), as discussed by Young in the Introduction and Chapter 5, reports that her class of sixth grade African American students reported a decrease in positive self-image after she implemented code-switching. These and other important possibilities regarding race and African Americans' perceptions of themselves in relation to code-switching are explored in later chapters by Young. For now, it is important to note that the rise in use of African American English among adolescents is not surprising because this period marks the age in which children begin to assert their individual identities and start to recognize forms of discrimination.

It has been found, for example, that while only 30% of 7-year-old children recognize a relationship between stereotyped beliefs and discrimination, 90% of 10-year-olds recognize this relationship (Bigler, Spears Brown, & Markell, 2001). In her research on language and gender in early adolescence, Penelope Eckert (1996) found that this period of early adolescence is also marked by a sudden increase in linguistic forms associated with gender. Eckert argues that this change in speech patterns occurs because early adolescence is the age when children enter the "heterosexual marketplace" and begin to show concern about how they are seen by children of the opposite sex. The fact that the use of undervalued English rises during adolescence suggests that there may be a relationship between teacher language attitudes and the tendency for students to drop out of school. Negative attitudes toward undervalued English might have a greater impact on students during this age when language variation comes to play a central role in the formation of individual identity.

In a 1979 court case often called the "Black English trial" (*Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District*), parents of African American children sued the Ann Arbor (Michigan) school district because

they felt that the school was failing to educate African American students, believing that the teachers did not take the students' home language into account. Based on expert testimony from a number of linguists and educators, the judge ruled in favor of the parents. In his decision on the case, the judge argued that the biggest problem in the school district was the teachers' negative attitudes toward the language spoken by their minority students. The judge did not order the school district to incorporate African American English into the classroom, but rather required the teachers to take additional classes to learn the grammar of the language that their students spoke. More than 30 years later, the problem of teacher attitudes continues to cause problems in the education of minority children.

It has long been recognized that teacher attitudes toward the language(s) of their students is a critical determiner of academic success. Rickford (1999) discusses an intriguing study in which Williams (1976) found that teachers rated children who spoke undervalued English as less promising and less effective students. In order to determine the degree to which this attitude was related to racial

Linguistic Background: Excerpt from the Judge C. W. Joiner's Decision in the Ann Arbor "Black English Trial"

Research indicates that the black dialect or vernacular used at home by black students in general makes it more difficult for such children to learn to read for three reasons:

1. There is a lack of parental or other home support for developing reading skills in Standard English, including the absence of persons in the home who read, enjoy it and profit from it.
2. Students experience difficulty in hearing and making certain sounds used discriminatively in Standard English, but not distinguished in the home language system.
3. The unconscious but evident attitude of teachers toward the home language causes a psychological barrier to learning by the student.

[T]he evidence suggests that no matter how well intentioned the teachers are, they are not likely to be successful in overcoming the language barrier caused by their failure to take into account the home language system, unless they are helped by the defendant to recognize the existence of the language system used by the children in their home community and to use that knowledge as a way of helping the children to learn to read Standard English. (*Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District*, 1979)

prejudice rather than linguistic prejudice, Williams also played teachers videos of different students that had been altered so that the soundtrack played the voice of other students. Thus, teachers might see a White child, but hear the voice of a Mexican American child and vice versa.

In this experiment, Williams found that African American and Mexican American children were rated as poorer speakers of Standard English even though the voice the teachers heard was actually a White student who was a monodialectal speaker of Standard English. These experiments confirmed that teachers judged students on the basis of the language they spoke, but also demonstrated that racial prejudice tainted teachers' abilities to hear Standard English. Even if a minority child is speaking pure Standard English, it is arguably likely that teacher will "hear" that child speaking undervalued English simply because the child is not White. This suggests that even if we were able to teach all children to communicate in Standard English, the result would not prevent minority children from being faced with language prejudice. Thus changing language ideologies that have a negative impact on minority children needs to be a basic, fundamental, inherent component of language education.

Of course, Williams found this sort of prejudice among teachers because negative language attitudes are pervasive throughout society. Even if we protect students from language prejudice while they are in school, they will be confronted with such prejudice throughout the rest of their lives. It is important to recognize that knowledge of Standard English cannot solve all of the problems created by a language ideology that extends well beyond the classroom. Thus teaching Standard English must be combined with education in language awareness that addresses forms of language prejudice.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH

In the following sections, we will look briefly at different approaches to teaching children who speak undervalued varieties of English. Many of these approaches build on research in bilingual education, where a wide range of pedagogies and educational goals has been discussed. One distinction from bilingual education that is important for understanding the code-meshing approach is the distinction between *additive bilingual education* and *transitional bilingual education*. Transitional bilingual education attempts to replace the home language with the dominant language (English) while additive bilingual education attempts to teach competence in both the home language and the dominant language.

In a transitional approach, the home language may be used but only to a limited extent. For example, students' native languages might be used to teach English and perhaps to cover some basic material in early grades (to ensure that children don't miss the content of classes taught in a language the children don't yet understand). Transitional bilingual education attempts to move to English quickly,

without developing literacy skills in the home language. One negative result of transitional approaches is that children who are native speakers of another language never learn to use that language in contexts beyond the home. Thus a child who comes to school speaking Chinese would never learn to read and write in Chinese and would never learn a standardized variety of Chinese. Of course, this wastes an incredibly valuable resource as fluent speakers of Chinese are shifted to English quickly and are unable to use Chinese across multiple contexts. In contrast, if their abilities in the home language were fostered and supported in school, native speakers of numerous languages could make important contributions in international business, government, and education. Instead, transitional approaches attempt to push children to function as monolingual English speakers.

In additive bilingual education, the goal is to teach children a second language in childhood (when children are predisposed to acquire language without much effort). The goal of additive approaches is the opposite of transitional approaches in that the additive method attempts to develop children into fluent bilinguals who can use both languages across a wide range of written and spoken contexts. Current proponents of code-switching place the approach in the additive domain, since, as they explain, they are helping students add another dialect to their language repertoire. However, when attention is given to the home dialect in the code-switching approach, it is to point out differences between the home language and Standard English in order to shift children toward being speakers of the standard variety. Advanced knowledge of African American English, for instance, is not studied or expected. Advocates of code-switching, such as Wheeler and Swords (2006), feel that young speakers of African American English know all they need to about the dialect by 3rd grade. They write, "No, we are not teaching children the language of the home—they already know it. We are teaching them Standard English" (p. 161). Thus Wheeler's and Swords's code-switching approach aligns more with the transitional approach than an additive approach, since teachers are unlikely to argue that students who come to school speaking Standard English need no further English instruction than what they learn from home.

On the other hand, an additive approach to multidialectal education, such as code-meshing, would have benefits similar to those offered by additive bilingual education. If students are familiar with (and comfortable using) a wide range of English varieties, as well as being able to integrate other habits into their regular speech, they will be better prepared to interact with individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, without having to completely give up their dialects. In a global economy, where the range of English varieties is quite vast, it would make sense to give students the tools to understand their own and other varieties and use them effectively. This recognition is not new. In fact, it was forcefully stated in 1974 in the original "Students' Right to Their own Language" policy document, which stated that the national English teachers organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and College Communication and Composition would "promote classroom practices to expose students to the variety of dialects

that occur in our multi-regional, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society, so that they too will understand the nature of American English and come to respect all its dialects" (NCTE Resolution #74.2, 1974, quoted in Smitherman, 1995, 23).

There is a great deal of research and debate about various approaches to teaching Standard English. The following sections introduce some of these different approaches. Some of these approaches overlap with one another and the list is not exhaustive. The discussion that follows is intended to provide a sense of the various methods that have been proposed rather than giving a detailed discussion of each method. There are a number of resources available in libraries and online that can give more background on any of these approaches.

Interruption Method

Before the 1970s, the traditional approach to teaching Standard English was the interruption method. In this approach (if one can call it such), students are interrupted whenever they use undervalued English and given the "correct" (Standard English) form of whatever they have said. In written work, undervalued forms are marked in red ink (typically with no explanation). Although it is clear that this method fails both in teaching Standard English and in addressing language attitudes, it is still commonly used. Students confronted with inexplicable red marks may have no idea why their language is "wrong" and repeated corrections only serve to make children feel inferior because of their native language. As linguists began to study undervalued varieties and recognized that they are regular and rule-governed like any other forms of language, it became clear that the interruption method was an unreasonable approach from virtually every angle.

African American Artful Approach

This approach, discussed by Rickford (1999), emerges from an early study of reading scores in predominantly African American schools in Oakland, California. Ann McCormick Piestrup (1973) found a correlation between knowledge of Standard English and reading scores, a finding that has since been replicated numerous times. This is not surprising since literacy skills are tested in Standard English. We would expect higher scores from children who are more familiar with the language in which they are tested. However, Piestrup also found that reading skills were higher for students who used what Piestrup called the "Black artful approach," which involved using language familiar to students in order to build on their knowledge of African American English. Teachers using this method "used rhythmic play in instruction and encouraged students to participate by listening to their responses . . . attended to vocabulary differences and seemed to prevent structural conflict by teaching children to listen to Standard English sound distinctions. Children taught with this approach participated enthusiastically with the teacher in learning to read" (Piestrup, quoted in Rickford, 1999, p. 336). The

Linguistic Tip: Some Web Resources on Undervalued Varieties of English

- Center for Applied Linguistics links on African American English: <http://www.cal.org/topics/dialects/aae/resources.html> A collection of websites with information on African American English. There is also a bibliography on various topics related to dialects in education: <http://www.cal.org/topics/dialects/aae/bibliography/index.html>
- Center for the Study of African American Language: <http://www.umass.edu/csaal/index.html> This research center (at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst) focuses on the applications of research on language use in African American communities. The center also sponsors summer programs for both teachers and undergraduate students.
- English Around the World: <http://eleaston.com/world-eng.html> A set of links about the different varieties of English spoken in different parts of the world.
- IDEA: (International Dialects of English Archive) <http://web.ku.edu/~idea/index.htm> This website is intended for actors wanting to learn various English accents. It includes sound files and transcriptions. Although there isn't much information about grammar or education, it has lots of examples demonstrating the range of English as used around the world.
- John Rickford: <http://www.johnrickford.com/> Rickford is a professor of linguistics at Stanford University. His website includes a number of papers on the "Ebonics issue" that include extensive discussion of language education for children who speak African American English.
- North Carolina Life and Language Project: <http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/ncllp/> This website includes lots of information about the various dialects of North Carolina and information about a wide range of programs to teach language/dialect awareness.
- West Virginia Dialect Project: <http://dialects.english.wvu.edu/> This is a dialect awareness project in West Virginia that includes information about Appalachian English and educational programs.
- William Labov: <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/home.html> Labov is a professor of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. His website includes papers on his research concerning teaching reading to speakers of different dialects.
- Do You Speak American?: <http://www.pbs.org/speak/> This website accompanies the PBS program *Do You Speak American?* which discusses variation in American English. It contains a number of resources on dialectal variation.

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African American artful approach does not involve much change in curriculum, but simply involves a shift in teacher attitudes toward undervalued English and acknowledgment of students' home language. In other words, the teachers in Piestrup's study were able to improve reading scores just by allowing the students' home language to be used in the classroom. This strongly suggests that a shift in language attitudes alone can make an important difference in children's acquisition of Standard English.

The Linguistically Informed Approach

This approach builds on research conducted by William Labov (1995, 2003) on distinctions between dialectal differences and reading errors. Based on long-term research on the grammar of African American English, the linguistically informed approach emphasizes that learning a second dialect and learning to read involve different cognitive processes. In particular, this approach considers different rules for pronunciation in Standard English and undervalued varieties. All dialects have different rules that govern where different sounds may occur. For example, in Standard English, the /ng/ sound may occur at the end of a word (*ring, wrong, sang*), but never occurs at the beginning of a word. In many dialects of English clusters of two consonants at the end of a word are generally prohibited by the grammar. Thus a word like *desk* would be pronounced as *des*. Labov found that teachers often assume children are making reading errors when the children actually understand what they are reading but produce the sounds of what they read according to the rules of their native dialect. For example, the /th/ sound at the end of words like *Ruth, birth, and tooth* generally corresponds to an /f/ sound in African American English. Thus the name *Ruth Smith* would be pronounced as *Ruf Smif*. This is a regular process in African American English. If a student reads *Ruth* so that it sounds like *roof*, the child has not made a reading error. Rather, the child is following the regular rules of the grammar they know (which doesn't allow the /th/ sound at the end of a word). Consider the following example:

Text: His teeth are as sharp as the edge of my knife.

Reading: His teef are as sharp as the edge of my knee. (Labov & Baker, 2010)

Here, the fact that the child reads *teef* rather than *teeth* would not be a reading error. However, the fact that the child reads *knife* as *knee* would be a reading error because the /f/ sound regularly occurs at the end of words in undervalued English. This is important because a failure to account for differences in dialects may result in cases where the student is treated as though he or she has problems reading even in cases where the student is not making any mistakes in reading. However, this approach tends to focus on pronunciation rather than grammar; therefore, it may be more useful in teaching basic literacy skills than in teaching Standard English grammar.

Teaching Tip: Pronunciation

Each of the following pairs of words reflects a difference in pronunciation between dialects of English. For each pair, there are dialects where the two words sound different and dialects where the two words are homophones (i.e., they sound alike). Which of the pairs sound the same to you? In cases where the two sound the same to you, how might the words be said by speakers who distinguish between the two words?

pool/pull	reef/wreath	mint/meant	saw/sore	whine/wine
hairy/Harry	coal/cold	tow/tore	taught/tot	tell/tail

Contrastive Analysis

This approach involves explicitly teaching the grammatical differences between Standard English and undervalued varieties. A number of studies have demonstrated positive results from using some form of contrastive analysis (these include Cummings, 1997; Parker & Crist, 1995; Taylor, 1989). Programs using contrastive analysis vary in the degree to which undervalued variety is used in the classroom. In the "code-switching" approach (Wheeler & Swords, 2006), contrastive analysis is used primarily to remove undervalued speech from the classroom. Students are told that their "home language" is reserved for "informal" contexts and is "inappropriate" for the classroom. Rather than building on children's natural ability to vary their language use within and across contexts, the code-switching approach attempts to eradicate variation from children's speech and writing by restricting the range of forms that are deemed "appropriate" in different contexts. In this way, it is similar to transitional approaches to bilingual education. Although explicit instruction in dialectal differences in grammar is clearly useful, the code-switching approach runs the risk of reproducing negative language attitudes by simply replacing ideas of "correctness" with "appropriateness." It is unclear as to whether this subtle distinction is sufficient to ensure that school doesn't become an environment where students feel that the language that they use to express their identity is not welcome.

Dialect Readers

Dialect readers, which introduce reading in an undervalued dialect, have been used in a variety of other countries since the 1950s (Rickford, 1999). Because learning to read and learning Standard English each requires unique cognitive skills, dialect

readers attempt to teach literacy skills first by having students learn to read in their native (undervalued) dialect. As Standard English is taught, the texts students read begin to transition toward Standard English. In some cases, students may read the same text written in different ways in order to help students recognize specific differences between dialects. In one important study involving students at different schools, Simpkins and Simpkins (1981) found that the use of dialect readers produced better results than traditional methods for teaching reading. Although dialect readers have great potential, they have not been widely accepted largely due to negative attitudes about undervalued English (and prescriptive ideologies that hold that undervalued English has no place in the classroom).

Dialect Awareness Programs

There are a variety of dialect awareness programs that involve a combination of dialect readers and contrastive analysis to teach children about language variation in addition to teaching the grammar of Standard English. One of the most successful programs of this sort is the Academic English Mastery Program, led by Noma LeMoine in the Los Angeles School District (Green, 2011; Hollie, 2001). This program has been in operation for over 20 years and includes readings in four different undervalued varieties: Native American English, African American English, Mexican American English, and Hawaiian English. Programs that include multiple varieties in the classroom seem to have better success because they are less likely to reproduce the forms of language prejudice that result from placing African American English in opposition to Standard English. The success of such programs also seems to result from the fact that undervalued varieties are included in the curriculum in ways other than “corrective” measures meant to transition students to Standard English. They also have the advantage of increasing student knowledge of a range of English varieties, providing them with the tools needed to communicate across a wider range of social contexts.

The DIRECT Model

The DIRECT model (Green, 2011) emphasizes that African American English is rule-based in order to avoid cases in which students are “corrected” for following the grammatical rules of their native language. The acronym DIRECT serves as a guide for how teachers may approach teaching Standard English without denigrating the native language of their students:

The DIRECT model

Define African American English

Identify systems, patterns, and use of African American English

Recognize and respect African American English as rule-governed

Educate by presenting classroom English correspondences to African American English

Create an environment that supports the difference

Transition to awareness of two varieties and additional use of classroom English

(Green, 2011, p. 223)

As Green argues “respecting and recognizing African American English as rule-governed does not suggest that the variety should be thought of as supplanting Mainstream American English. It does, however, require acknowledgment that it is a separate system, and that it is illogical to see children who speak it as breaking rules of Mainstream American English when their target is African American English” (2011, 226). Like the Academic English Mastery Program, the DIRECT model involves both teaching Standard English grammar and the creation of a supportive environment that attempts to avoid the problems created by language prejudice.

Code-Meshing

The code-meshing approach (Canagarajah, 2006; Young, 2004, Young & Martinez, 2011) takes the positive results of programs that include undervalued varieties in the classroom (through dialect readers) and extends them to teaching literacy skills by allowing students to write in their native language variety. Although the code-meshing approach may sometimes include explicit instruction in grammatical differences, with emphasis on grammaticality, pragmatics, and semantics (Canagarajah, 2009, 2011a; Young, 2009), it aims to do so by urging students to exploit and blend those differences, and without creating the unwelcoming environment that sometimes results from transitional approaches like code-switching (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). By extending the range of grammatical forms that students may use to express themselves, code-meshing recognizes the importance of *both* standard and undervalued varieties in contexts beyond the classroom. Among other notable sources, this approach has been suggested recently in the article “‘You Need Some Laugh Bones!’ Leveraging AAL in a High School English Classroom” (2013), published in the *Journal of Literacy Research*. In it, English education researcher Amy Vetter observed a teacher who created enormous potential for literacy learning among her students by valuing African American English in her classroom. So that teacher can take this potential further, Vetter recommends:

As Christensen (2009) argued, it is not enough to “tell students to use their home language” (p. 209); instead, students would benefit from teachers who use student languages as “critical resources in learning” (Paris, 2009, p. 444). The teaching of writing,

then, might focus more on how to read and write in multiple dialects simultaneously (i.e., code-meshing) and from various cultural perspectives, rather than on how to write in a scripted format. (Young, 2010b, p. 199)

CONCEPTUALIZING STANDARD AND UNDERVALUED VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

This section discusses some common misconceptions concerning undervalued English that are relevant to issues of literacy education. In particular, this section addresses the ways in which these familiar perceptions are problematic for speakers of undervalued varieties and yet may be inadvertently fueled by the current code-switching approach to language education (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). For instance, in the code-switching approach, it is assumed that dialects are discrete and distinct systems that can easily be restricted to specific social contexts. Programs that focus on contrastive analysis more than language attitudes also assume that a transition to Standard English is a guarantee to economic success. Of course, all students have a right to learn Standard English, and access to Standard English contributes to success beyond the classroom. However, treating Standard English as the only possible key to success reinforces negative language attitudes and contributes to the creation of an alienating academic environment.

The focus on transitioning to Standard English also ignores the important social functions that undervalued dialects serve in the communities where they are spoken. In raising these issues, I do not mean to suggest that teaching comparative grammaticality should be abandoned. The problems do not simply result from teaching contrastive analysis, but result from a one-sided approach that ultimately reproduces the sorts of language prejudice that are harmful to students who speak undervalued varieties of English. Some of the more successful programs in dialect awareness (such as that in the Los Angeles School District) involve exposing students to more than one undervalued variety. By incorporating multiple varieties of English in the classroom, these programs avoid the problem of reproducing negative stereotypes that are created when teachers assume that it is the “home language” of the students that is restricting their academic success. The code-meshing approach fosters positive attitudes toward undervalued varieties and emphasizes the development of language skills that extend beyond the acquisition of Standard English grammar. By recognizing the important role of undervalued varieties in communities where they are spoken, the code-meshing approach attempts to provide students not only with the grammar of a broad understanding of Standard English, but also with knowledge required to respect and interact with individuals from a broader range of language backgrounds.

Dialect Uniformity

As noted in the first chapter in this section, all languages include variation and grammars of both Standard English, and African American English vary widely across regions, social groups, and individuals (see Lippi-Green, 2012). Forms that might be considered “standard” in one region may be viewed as “undervalued” in another region. Speakers of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds may have radically different views of what might be considered “Standard” English. This is true not only for varieties of American English, but holds for varieties of English worldwide.

Although it has often been assumed that African American English does not have regional dialects, recent research in linguistics has demonstrated that African American English varies widely across communities (e.g., Wolfram, 2007; Yaeger-Dror & Thomas, 2010). It is also clear that young children are aware of language variation before they enter school and are able to adapt their language use to a wide range of social contexts (Green, 2011; Wyatt, 2001). As noted in the previous chapter, this variation is the primary way in which people (including children) convey the most basic aspects of their individual identity, including displays of emotions, attitudes toward topics of conversation, and relationships with other people. Approaches that treat children as monolithic speakers of a uniform, invariable “home language” fail to recognize the fact that language variation is crucial for social interaction. Restricting this variation restricts children’s ability to express their individual identity, fostering an environment where students may feel that they will be criticized and corrected simply because of who they are.

Separate but Equal

The overwhelming majority of grammatical forms in undervalued varieties of American English show overlap with Standard English in terms of syntax. Within the code-switching approach, this grammatical overlap is largely ignored and emphasis is shifted to the points of difference between the two varieties. This exaggerates the difference between Black and White languages in the same manner that we exaggerate the differences between Black and White people (Young, 2004). Translating African American English into Standard English is based on the assumption that the two cannot coexist despite the large amount of overlap in their grammars (Green, 2011). The code-switching approach reduces the complexity of language variation across social contexts to a false opposition, assuming that the social domains for language use can be segregated into binary oppositions (home/school, formal/informal, appropriate/inappropriate). Of course, there are ways of marking degrees of formality within all dialects. Segregating the dialects into “formal” and “informal” varieties ignores the many ways of producing formal speech in African American English in addition to informal uses of Standard English (Green, 2011).

Treating the grammars of different varieties of English as discrete and distinct systems fails to account for the ways in which the grammars of dialects interact and overlap with one another. One example of the difficulties in trying to segregate dialects is different patterns of subject-auxiliary inversion. In Standard English, a sentence can be marked as a yes/no question either through a final rising intonation (*You're reading that?*) or by inverting the subject noun phrase and an auxiliary verb (*Are you reading that?*). This inversion also occurs with questions of the sort linguists call *wh-questions*, or questions introduced with "question words" such as *what*, *which*, *when*, *where*, or *how* (*What are you reading?*). However, in Standard English *wh-questions* without inversion are ungrammatical (**What you are reading?*). When a question is embedded into a larger sentence in Standard English, inversion does not occur (*I wonder what she is reading*).

Although all varieties of English seem to use this type of subject-auxiliary inversion, they differ in two distinct ways: (1) whether or not inversion is allowed in specific types of sentences (syntactic environments) and (2) whether or not inversion is associated with a specific meaning not found in other varieties (see Barrett, 2008). Thus all varieties have the same rule, but they apply the rule in different ways to convey different meanings. Let's compare a few varieties of English to see how the rules of their grammars differ in terms of applying the rule of subject-auxiliary inversion. The pattern described above (for Standard English) can be summarized as:

Main Clause Yes/No Questions: Inversion required unless rising intonation marks the sentence as a question. (Example: *Are you working?*)

Main Clause Wh-questions: Inversion is required. (Example: *Where are you working?*)

Embedded Wh-questions: Inversion is prohibited. (Example: *I wonder where she is working*/**I wonder where is she working*.)

In some varieties, these patterns may vary without being associated with a different meaning. Examples include South Asian Englishes (like Indian English) and Chicano English. In Indian English, for example, inversion is optional in main clauses so that sentences like *What you are reading?* or *What I should do?* are grammatical when they occur with rising intonation (Gargesh, 2006; Mesthrie, 2006). Thus, in Indian English, the pattern we find with yes/no questions in standard American English extends to *wh-questions*. In contrast, Chicano English does not allow inversion in main clause *wh-questions* (Galindo, 1990; Fought, 1997), so that a sentence like (**)What you are reading?* would be ungrammatical. However, Chicano English allows inversion in embedded *wh-questions* (*I wonder where is she working*). In Chicano English, this pattern seems to have developed from the influence of Spanish (where inversion in embedded questions is grammatical). However, just as with Indian English main clause questions, inversion in embedded clauses is not associated with any difference in meaning. In both of these cases,

patterns of inversion differ from those found in Standard American English without changing the meaning of the sentences. Thus the grammars aren't entirely separable because they contain the same rules. These three dialects simply differ in terms of when inversion is acceptable (and when it is ungrammatical).

In other dialects of English, inversion may be associated with a difference in meaning. This is the case with my native variety of English ("Ozark English" from northern Arkansas). The patterns of inversion in Ozark English are the same as in Chicano English: Inversion is required with main clause *wh-questions*, while embedded *wh-questions* are grammatical both with and without inversion. However, unlike in Chicano English, patterns of inversion in embedded *wh-questions* in Ozark English are associated with differences in meaning. Consider the following two sentences: *I wonder where she is working?* (no inversion) and *I wonder where is she working?* (inversion). In Ozark English, inversion in an embedded question indicates that the speaker doesn't know if the assumption in the embedded question is true or not. Thus *I wonder where is she working?* means that the speaker is not actually sure that she is working. If I heard this sentence (*I wonder where is she working?*), it would be clear to me that the speaker is suggesting that she might not be working at all (but if she is, the speaker wonders where). In contrast, the sentence without inversion (*I wonder where she is working?*) suggests that she is definitely working (the speaker just doesn't know where). This difference in meaning is quite subtle and is not easily conveyed in Standard American English. This pattern is not unique to Ozark English as this distinction in meaning is also found in Appalachian English, Irish English, Scottish English, and in some varieties of African American English (see Filppula, 2000; Green, 2002; Henry, 1995). In some varieties of African American English that allow inversion in embedded clauses, this difference in meaning may also be expressed in main clause *wh-questions*. In these varieties of AAE, a question like *Where was she working?* means that the speaker isn't sure as to whether or not she actually was working. In contrast, *Where she was working?* means that the speaker knows she was working, but doesn't know where. This distinction in meaning in main clause *wh-questions* does not occur in other varieties of English. Thus it is not sufficient to tell a student that inversion in embedded *wh-clauses* is "wrong" or "inappropriate" without any explanation concerning the differences in meaning that accompany the different patterns of inversion in these dialects. Because these differences in grammar are associated with differences in meaning, eliminating undervalued inversion from children's speech leaves them with no option for expressing the subtle distinctions in meaning that are a basic part of the language they use every day.

As we see with these different patterns of subject-auxiliary inversion, differences between dialects can be quite complicated and may involve both differences in form (whether or not inversion occurs) and differences in meaning (associated with different patterns of inversion). Educational programs that present dialectal variation in purely oppositional terms fail to account for the complex ways in which the grammars of different Englishes overlap and differ from one another.

The power of alternative grammars - requires a knowledge of dialects

Linguistic Tip: Patterns of Inversion in Some Dialects of English

Cross-dialectal variation in patterns of subject-auxiliary inversion:

[Note: All dialects contain internal variation. Thus these patterns do not hold for all speakers of the dialects listed and may vary across regions or social groups.]

Dialect	Inversion in main clause yes/no questions	Inversion in main clause wh-questions	Inversion in embedded questions	Inversion involves a difference in meaning
Standard English	optional	required	prohibited	No
Indian English	optional	optional	optional	No
Chicano English	optional	required	optional	No
Irish English	optional	required	optional	Yes
Appalachian English	optional	required	optional	Yes
African American English	optional	optional	optional	Yes

Language of Wider Communication

Several years ago, I worked as a volunteer in a soup kitchen in Chicago. Most of the nuns who operated the soup kitchen were from India and spoke Indian English. One day, the health inspector came to visit while the nun in charge of maintaining records was out on an errand. The health inspector needed to see a certification document, but the nun left in charge did not know where it had been stored and had no way of contacting the nun who knew where the records were. The health inspector spoke African American English, which was not a familiar dialect for the nuns. Because I was a linguist, the nuns asked me to help them understand what the health inspector was trying to say. The health inspector had no experience communicating with speakers of Indian English and also had trouble understanding what the nuns were trying to say. In the end, I stood between the nun in charge

and the health inspector and translated for each of them. After about 10 minutes, the nun began laughing and said, "You are translating from English to English!" Although everyone involved was a native English speaker, differences in grammar and pronunciation made it difficult for communication to proceed without someone working as a translator. In this particular instance, my knowledge of Standard English was not particularly useful. I was only able to translate because I had studied other dialects and had experiences dealing with speakers of both Indian English and African American English. As globalization continues and people who speak radically different varieties of English come together more and more frequently, this type of dialect contact is becoming more and more common.

Pedagogical approaches intended to transition students to become speakers of Standard English typically assume that Standard English is the "language of wider communication." Although it is certainly true that there are contexts in which the grammatical function of Standard English is indispensable, there are also contexts in which knowledge of other dialects is critical for "wider" communication to occur. For example, the development of global varieties of international English often draws on forms from African American English as young people build their English in tandem with their interests in aspects of African American culture such as hip-hop music (Ibrahim, 2003). Studies of English as a Second Language (ESL) suggest that some English learners from around the world often aspire to learn African American English rather than Standard English. I often encounter people in other countries who have learned Standard English in school, but want to know and understand the forms of African American English they hear in music and films. Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim discusses his experiences of teaching English to African immigrants. His students found their instruction in Standard English frustrating because it did not allow them to integrate into African American communities where Standard English was not the primary dialect. Knowing that Black people would expect them to speak African American English, Ibrahim's students asked for special instruction in an undervalued English so that they would be better able to communicate within their (predominantly African American) communities. Approaches that attempt to remove undervalued English from the speech of students fail to account for the fact that undervalued varieties have important functions in minority communities and being able to use an undervalued English successfully may be critical in the interactions that students encounter outside of school but also within academic contexts.

Given the rise of global Englishes, Standard American English is definitely not the language of *wider* communication. Speakers of various local varieties of English around the world (e.g., Indian English, Nigerian English, Singapore English, and so on) communicate across international boundaries using emergent forms of English that are quite distinct from Standard American. With the rise of digital media and new technologies allowing for interactions beyond international borders, the ability to communicate across dialects has become a critical skill. Of the approaches discussed here, the code-meshing approach

focuses on preparing students for using language as global citizens who are able to interact and accommodate speakers of these “new” varieties of Englishes. While the code-switching approach reduces the range of language forms in a student’s speech and writing, the code-meshing approach prepares students for communication on a global scale.

Standard English as the Key to Economic Success

It is often assumed that African American English is restricted to poor, working-class communities and that learning Standard English may provide financial rewards. For example, Delpit (1995) argues that Standard English is the “language of economic success” (p. 68). Sociolinguistic research suggests that middle-class African Americans who have achieved economic success regularly use African American English in public settings (e.g., Nguyen, 2006; Weldon, 2004). The code-switching approach assumes that control of Standard English will open doors for poor minority children and afford them economic opportunity. However, research on the social psychology of language has found that linguistic prejudice is largely based on social prejudice and is independent from actual linguistic structures. As noted earlier, there are a number of experiments in which White listeners are told that they are listening to a minority speaker even though they are actually listening to a White speaker of Standard English (Fought, 2006; Kang & Rubin, 2009). These studies have found that the listeners “hear” undervalued English in these cases (even though the same voice will be judged as “Standard” when the listener believes the speaker to be White). Acquisition of Standard English cannot eradicate prejudiced views of an individual’s speech or writing because negative evaluations of the language of African Americans are not based on the actual form of their speech. By reproducing negative evaluations of African American English as “inappropriate” or “ineffective” in public settings, the code-switching approach reproduces the forms of prejudice that prevent economic success for minorities. However, Kang and Rubin found that individuals who had studied linguistics or had participated in language awareness programs were less likely to “hear” minority native speakers as having a non-native accent. The sorts of cross-dialectal language awareness promoted by the code-meshing approach can thus help offset forms of language prejudice that affect minorities even when they speak Standard English.

Language Transition

It is often assumed that moving from being a speaker of African American English to becoming a speaker of Standard English is straightforward and unproblematic. Black professionals are not modern-day Pygmalions, brought to professional life through the acquisitions of Standard English, but may be better described as Black

Sisyphuses who are constantly trying to prove that they are efficient speakers of Standard English. The negative evaluations of African American language reproduced in the code-switching literature exposes the language of African Americans to extreme scrutiny and evaluation. Because Whites are assumed to be the prototypical speakers of Standard English, their language is never subjected to this sort of scrutiny. This causes many African Americans to be overly self-conscious about their language use, producing the emotional and psychological trauma that those who resist Standard English are trying to avoid. By trying to eradicate nonstandard forms from public speech and writing, the code-switching approach produces (and even encourages) the sort of psychological trauma that comes from having to constantly monitor one’s language in the face of public scrutiny (Urciuoli, 1996). Although the code-switching approach claims to avoid negative attitudes by using terms like *inappropriate* and *informal* rather than *wrong* or *incorrect*, the end result does not seem to be very different. Given the close relationship between language and identity, terms like *inappropriate* simply reinforce the view that expressions of African American identity are unwelcome in public settings that are dominated by Whites (Hill, 1998).

Pushing for a transition to Standard English also ignores the importance of undervalued varieties in local communities. Because undervalued varieties are the strongest marker of social identity, transitioning to Standard English subjects children to potential criticisms of “wanting to be White” or failing to be proud of their ethnic identity. It is important to bear in mind that children face pressure to use undervalued English outside of the school. By fostering the ability to communicate effectively in multiple dialects, by integrating standard forms with undervalued English outside of school and undervalued English within formal, academic settings, the code-meshing approach provides students with the tools they need both within and outside the school environment.

CONCLUSION: LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Disrespect for a person’s dialect is disrespect for that person. Language variation is the basic way in which we create and express our social identities. Attempts to eradicate language variation from the classroom are destined to alienate students by making them feel that their identity is inappropriate for the school environment. It is important to recognize that *all* forms of language contain variation and that *all* forms of language are regular rule-based systems. Teaching Standard English in ways that exclude undervalued dialects from the formal aspects of school curricula and testing is destined to make children feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in academic environments. By fostering the use of multiple varieties of English, the code-meshing approach can be beneficial to students both in teaching self-respect and in fostering the ability to communicate across a wider range of social contexts.

key point! How do we address this?

**What Are Your Thoughts?:
Shirley and the Valentine Card**

Consider the following excerpts from two versions of "Shirley and the Valentine Card," a text used as part of a dialect reader program (Reed, 1973). Students begin with the first version in undervalued English and then move to the second version as they learn Standard English grammar. The two versions of the texts are meant to help students compare differences between the two dialects. What features of each dialect do you notice in the two texts?

It a girl name Shirley Jones live in Washington. 'Most everybody on her street like her, 'cause she a nice girl. And all the children Shirley be with in school like her, too. Shirley treat all of them just like they was her sister and brother, but most of all she like one boy name Charles. Shirley, she be knowing Charles 'cause all two of them in the same grade, and he in her class. But Shirley keep away from Charles most of the time, 'cause she start to liking him so much she be scared of him. And that make it seem to Charles like she don't pay him no mind. So Charles, he don't hardly say nothing to her neither.

There's a girl named Shirley Jones who lives in Washington. Almost everyone on her street likes her, because she's a nice girl. And all of the children Shirley goes to school with like her too. Shirley treats all of them as though they were her sisters and brothers, but she likes one boy named Charles best of all. Shirley knows Charles, because both of them are in the same grade, and he's in her class. But Shirley stays away from Charles most of the time, because she started to like him so much that she is scared of him. And that makes it seem to Charles as if she doesn't pay him any attention. So Charles hardly says anything to her either.

PART II

Code-Meshing or Code-Switching?

Vershawn Ashanti Young