St. Cloud State University

theRepository at St. Cloud State

5-2019

Sorry to Bother You - the perception of code-switching among African American males

Joseph Bukowski

Sorry to Bother You: The African American Male Perspective on Codeswitching

by

Joseph Bukowski

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in

English: Teaching English as a Second Language

May, 2019

Thesis Committee:
James Robinson, Chairperson
Michael Schwartz
Christopher Lehman

Abstract

This paper explores the African American male perception of codeswitching between African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard American English (SAE) within varying social, academic, and professional environments. This research is collected through interviews with 10 subjects from varying socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, while attempting to better understand how these perceptions were potentially created and reinforced through social and academic experience; while also attempting connection between these experiences and subject's awareness of the presence of their own codeswitching as adults. This paper classifies subjects into two distinct groups based on socioeconomic and academic upbringing, identifying subjects from dominant culture (Tatum, 2017) as "Homogenous" and those from more ethnically diverse backgrounds as "Diverse" to more easily identify different experiences which could be associated to differentiated upbringings.

Keywords: African-American Vernacular English, AAVE, Ebonics, Standard American English, SAE, codeswitching, dialect, dominant culture

Table of Contents

List of Table

Table Page

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

At its core, language can be broken down simply as a set of regularly structured sounds and patterns with defined meanings associated with these sounds. Though there are obviously several forms of oral languages, the term "dialect" specifically attaches to the assume different variations of these similar sounds and patterns belonging within the same language system (Speicher & McMahon, 1992, p. 383). This leads to the obvious assumption then that dialect, sharing the same linguistic properties of its origin language, could be considered with the same regard for its capability of producing the goals, needs, thoughts, or emotions of its producer. However, it is within these forms of various dialects and language variants which negative connotations or perspectives begin to attach themselves. Thus, contributing to stereotypes furthering labels and misrepresentation of speaker intelligence, motivation, and intention.

Regarding the English language, or moreover American English specifically, these variants can be labeled as "street talk", "ghetto slang", or "hillbilly speak"; often perpetuating a further negative connotation supporting ideas suggesting producers of these dialects are inferior to that of those who cast judgment. The perpetuation of these false narratives can create borders to specific educational and personal achievement, while embedding negative thoughts towards the linguistic form within the origin community as well. Understanding this concept, as both linguistic researchers and instructors serving as gatekeepers of the English Language, we must ask ourselves: What effects can this sort of labeling or linguistic hierarchy have on both perception of self, as well as the perception of native language usage on a speaker of this dialect? Moreover, what impact can these stereotypes have on the language or dialect itself?

The African American English Vernacular (AAVE) has always been of interest to me, for these same considerations. As a young white student growing up in small-town Wisconsin, the negative perceptions of AAVE were fully displayed by teachers and other peers throughout the community. A key to succeeding not just in academia, but in life, was to master Standard American English. There was no exception to the matter, and those who did not were simply judged as uneducated or disinterested in bettering themselves. For example, the use of double-negatives was considered lazy by instructors, and the few African American students in our town were pigeonholed as underachievers.

After growing into adulthood and enriching my life away from the narrow minds of small-town Wisconsin, my life began to fill with a greater multicultural presence of several variations of dialect, including African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Through continued experiences and conversations, I began to better understand the linguistic value within differing cultures. As my own comprehension of various language and dialectal forms increased, so did a genuine curiosity regarding the usage of AAVE within the black community. I noticed several instances in which black colleagues would seemingly codeswitch between implementations of both African American Vernacular English and Standard American English, notably based on their personal comfort level with the surroundings and audience. As a student, researcher, and educator or the English language, I became increasingly interested in understanding why this codeswitching within English dialects occurred cross-culturally. Yes, there is a time and place for proper dialect usage versus slag, such as in an office or classroom; however, these settings represent only a small portion of the codeswitching internally and externally I personally witnessed within the black community. Restating that all languages are

theoretically created equal; is there an apprehension or negative connotation built into the native usage of African American English in the United States? It is the collection of these memories, conversations, and questions which have inspired the research included in this document. Simply put, it is the goal of this document to better understand if the exposure to (and reinforcement of) these negative stereotypes at a young age has impacted African American's comfort level with the language itself. Furthermore, this research has been conducted to discuss if this potential linguistic discrimination causes African American males to understand the developed skill of codeswitching as a requirement rather than a choice in the realm of social acceptance and success in the United States.

Problem Statement

It is my belief that racial tension is engrained in the United States. This tension is fueled by misinformation, misrepresentation, and a lack of comprehension of other cultural needs for representation and expression. Though there are several various cultures and forms of dialect within the United States, an echoing stereotype persists stating that we are all similar as "Americans." In making that assumption, I believe we lose sight of the various cultural intricacies that must be understood and supported on an intercultural level.

This research intends to examine dialect codeswitching and its place in the dynamic of interracial communication outwardly from the African American male community. Furthermore, this research aims to discover if the black community considers these efforts successful in cultural preservation or representation of African American English dialect as a class of prestige.

I am convinced the African American males are linguistically oppressed due to negative stereotypes and underserving of instructors or mentors within academia. Furthermore, it is my

theory that these negative associations with African American Vernacular English create the perception of codeswitching between African American English and Standard American English as a requirement for entry into what could be considered a demonstration of a successful life as an American adult. To truly grasp and understand this idea, research was conducted into the history of African American origins, as well as its and development through time. In developing this comprehension, further research into the historic usage of the language aided in confirming the distinct linguistic differences between African American English and what is considered Standard American English. Finally, identifying these linguistic and cultural differences through literature review will help to add reader context in the discussion of linguistic inequality and methods of linguistic oppression.

Research Question

How do African-American males (professionals?) use "black voice" and "white voice" in their social, educational, and professional lives?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Keepin' it real: Personalizing school experiences for diverse learners to create

harmony. In an interesting parallel study representing a significantly different side of the

teacher-student spectrum than Gilmore's study (1985), Katz (1997) found a classroom culture

which embraced the individual cultures of marginalized students. Her study of teachers in the

San Francisco and Washington, D.C. elementary school systems showed increased successful

outcomes through appreciation and empathy. Whereas teachers in Gilmore's study considered

"Steppin'" perverse and symbolic of sexual connotation; studies such as Katz (1997) and Garner

(1983) suggest the importance of ritual to communicate identity while celebrating the

interconnectedness of the black community.

Katz (1997) goes on to note that though curriculum can serve as a great starting point for,

it alone is not enough to build a more empathetic and aware classroom. Honest and genuine

teacher interaction and involvement must also be present. Katz uses examples of Black History

Month and Cinco De Mayo being listed on the school calendar or celebrated functions of

curriculum not only creating a culturally celebratory environment, but also one which can

empower teachers to interact with and become more familiar with other cultures (p. 497).

Outside of caring and showing concern for students, Katz also reported on "Brokers" as a

means to directly communicate with students who may be struggling. Rainbow Elementary

provides these brokers in the form of a young black male, and a young Latina female who serve

in connecting with students on interpersonal levels which connect to their interpersonal need for

cultural and linguistic authenticity (p. 502).

Katz concludes while offering the consideration that though the forms of support provided by Buena Vista and Rainbow Elementary schools are not always easy for teachers, students, or parents, there is a general feeling amongst all which suggests empowerment through the promising avenues is having positive effects on student performance and educational integration (pp. 509-510).

Grammatical variation and divergence in vernacular Black English. The idea of divergence in language characteristics over time is not something which should be considered new phenomenon; however, the described concept of language assimilation over time, especially regarding African American English, could be linked to similar interactions and perceptions of teachers and community peers. Whereas Gilmore's (1985) research suggested educators act as gatekeepers of further academic opportunity based on personal perception of student attitude; it could be conceivable student usage of African American English would deteriorate as they mature due to the installation of ideas suggesting it is an inappropriate language. Rickford's expansion of a 1987 study in "grammatical variation and divergence in Vernacular Black English" (1992) looks further into this possibility while citing statistics cultivated from interviews of African Americans from significantly different age demographics.

Rickford compared the usage of 60-key African American English components between sample groups ranging from age demographics of "Teenager" (age 14,15), "Mid Age" (age 38,42) and "Old Folk" (age 88,76) (p. 179). Those six key components "invariant be", the absence of "is/are", absence of attributive possessive -s, third singular, present tense -s, and the pural-s and past tense markings (p. 178), when compared to age demographic usage show a wide variety in disparity between groups.

Most notably of these differences, categories pertaining to absences of positive "-s" and the words "is/are" showed excessive usage for the Teenage group (averages of 85.5% and 70%) which dropped dramatically for the Old Folk group (averages of 17% and 6.5%), respectively. Even more interestingly, what could be considered the most well-known component of Black English, the invariant habitual "be" was counted at 196 occurrences during interviews of the Teenage subjects, with only one instance of usage for both Mid-Age and Old Folk subjects respectively (Table 1.1, p. 178).

These results being known, Rickford's (1992) study provide direct evidence highlighting primary components of African American English have been altered (or muted) to the point of veritable non-existence. This further implies a shift through the potential influence of outside factors such as social pressure to conform or speak in a "correct" form of English. This article and its included research were valuable finds in aiding towards confirmation that my original thoughts pertaining to Black English usage were indeed valid. While being paired with literature reviews in this thesis containing examples of black language or cultural identifiers being suppressed within elementary education, the consideration could be made suggesting suppression of African American English at a young age directly impacts the language usage of adults within the black community.

Gimme room: School resistance, attitude and access to literacy. "*Gimme Room":
School Resistance, Attitude, and Access to Literacy* further exemplify the perception of the introduction of African American culture into the classroom. Gilmore's (1985) research spanning three years in a low to moderate income school system highlights teacher and community perception of student "attitude" in the classroom, while suggesting the potential lasting effects

these perceptions could have on the students. As it pertains to the conducted research, those students who were deemed to have a "bad attitude" where not permitted into a special education initiative known as "The Academics Plus Program" (p. 112). The conversation surrounding teacher perception of "attitude" and how it pertains to academic advancement became a valued discussion point lending itself to the advance of this thesis research. Actions tied historically to culturally significant communications and portrayals of song and dance were viewed with negative connotation; despite showing a linguistic competence which was noticeably overlooked.

Gilmore's (1985) research identifies two specific components which play a part in how the "attitude" of students are judged. African American boys are judged by the perception behind what Gilmore considers "stylized sulking"; whereas female students are looked down on for what is known as "Stepping." Both of these activities within the black community can be attributed to historic evidence of African American slaves using the acts of sulking and group dance and song (also known as stepping) as a means of expressing themselves. Gilmore confirms this in his article while establishing both forms as "cultural variation of expression and communication" (p. 122).

In summation, the art of sulking is a stylized approach to resistance through silence. In response to being reprimanded for acting out, students often sulk or pout in response to nonverbally address their displeasure and uncomfortable nature to the occurrence. Interestingly, these interactions received significant consideration at the perception of the teacher. Gilmore (1985) notes this through noted examples such as "Acceptable" and "Unacceptable" silences (p. 116) which include nonverbal cues an instructor defines as resistance, defiance, or acceptance. Gilmore notes the conflict of these interactions being equally related to a student feeling fear of

losing face in front of peers while also responding to instructor prescribed validation of emotional reaction. Gilmore points to this explaining an instance in which a teacher's response to a disruptive student suggests and attempt to "instruct all students of the correct emotional response" (p. 115).

More closely related to the topic of linguistic comprehension, "Stepping" involves rhythmic chants sung in unison while performing the dance moves corresponding to the letter being spelled. The example given in this research revolves around the spelling through song of the word "Mississippi." All girls dance together while spelling the word, upon one girl asking for the floor through shouting "Gimme Room," she performs the dance while using the letters of Mississippi to produce the first lyric of each line in the song. Despite Gilmore's (1985) research suggesting stepping as something which was an active part of young girls' daily life in the community; stepping is reported by teachers to be "lewd", "fresh", "inappropriate for school", "disrespectful", and simply "too sexual" (p. 119). This due to the nature in which the dance moves are performed and the unnatural movements of the body during the dance. Despite the labels of sexual appropriateness, stepping can also be viewed as a social inclusion vehicle as noted through students forming various groups with leadership hierarchy while competing against other neighborhood clubs. Some of these groups within the community are even sponsored by local youth programs or church groups. This consideration brought me to the point of most interest in reading Gilmore's article. One which follows the theme of my research while aiding me in refining the questions I wish to ask, and the information I wish to gain.

"Gimme Room" highlights the actions demonstrated by children which have been long proven as practices of communication, more narrowly "black" communication. Whereas children

cannot link the rationale of slaves "stepping" or singing in code as to not alert their masters; their

practice of chants and group dancing still is representation of not only cultural identity, but

linguistic comprehension. Students who partake in these chants are showing the ability to rhyme

or produce narrative statement within patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication. The

production of statements and beginning signs of African American English mastery are also

components displayed through the act of stepping. Instead of embracing these positive markers

while using them to encourage language development, teachers described in this article withhold

students from the additional educational opportunities of the Academics Plus Program, simply

for what teachers have constructed as a "bad attitude."

This article is important in further researching the idea suggesting even at a young age

black culture, more specifically usage of black language, is viewed in negative light by those

charged with the equal education and language development of students. Despite rationale and

research supporting African American English Vernacular as its own fully capable dialect, the

perception of gatekeepers empowered as teachers, instructors, and community leaders can often

subjugate students toward prescribing to speaking in "correct" forms of communication which

lend themselves to Standard American English, or simply "speaking and acting white". The

research will show this sort of required cultural submission through linguistic oppression is not

something specifically connected to African Americans. Various other cultural groups have

experienced similar suppression of their own language and linguistic values and properties;

furthering what we know as an incorrect stigma associating languages other than the standard

with lesser forms of economic and educational success.

The African American elements in American English. One point which can often be overlooked while understanding the roots of African American English, is the fact that its origin was not within the United States. Dalby (1972) links African American English back to the western coast of Africa due to trade expeditions between European and African countries. Whereas several African cultures had their own unique and specific linguistic systems (Akan, Mandingo, etc.), Dalby suggests English comprehension allowed African traders to codeswitch as a means of protection from the less linguistically diverse European counterparts (p. 170). Even before the times of the African–American slave trades, European English comprehension was vital to the success and preservation of African culture and society. Dalby suggests this sort of linguistic comprehension of African Americans historically points to the idea that intercultural communication has primarily fallen onto the shoulders of blacks (p. 170).

The understanding of a West African melting pot of linguistic parity and protection should be noted as the potential starting point of what came to be known as African American English. Dalby supports this by referencing the potential dual heritage (p. 171) of American English due to both Europeans and Africans bringing their own English forms to the New World (p. 171). Interestingly, this information can point to similar efforts of cultural and linguistic protection through codeswitching over generations.

Throughout history, codeswitching has remained an integral function of African American cultural preservation. In Dalby's word "The Black Americans have always had a legitimate reason for concealing information from white people" (Dalby, 1972, p. 174). During the generation of slavery, those speaking in mother tongue would be beaten, lashed, or otherwise punished; thus, African slaves developed code within the English language as keep their masters

oblivious to true intention, thoughts and emotions. Once these words were identified or decoded, they were immediately dropped from the vernacular.

In fast forwarding to future generations, similar gatekeeping and codeswitching can be identified in modern day African American English. Terms like *Homie* (friend), *Bet,* (agreement), *Hip* (aware), or *Jive* (dance), all move through the African American English vernacular and have been dropped since popularization by mainstream (white) society.

The language of soul. Brown's contribution to *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in urban Black America* (Kochman, 1977) lend credence to the previously discussed references of Dalby. The Chapter "The Language of Soul" (Brown, 1977) reinforces the facts that black slaves spoke in code to hide meanings of escape through metaphoric song, while also quickly discarding black language which has been picked up by the white community (p. 135). Where the generational gap begins to be noticed is that where black slaves hid meaning through codeswitching and dropping of identified terms, contemporary blacks protect word meaning for reasons dealing more with emotional authenticity of the usage. White pronunciation of soulful words or sounds of black vernacular would focus on accuracy of phonetic, rather than embracing the "spoken soul" of the given word's presentation.

Brown goes on to relate these feelings of soulful linguistic embrace to the word "Nigger," and the difference of its soulful counterpart "Nigga." A word which is synonymous with hatred, bigotry, and oppression. One so guarded and wrought with judgment, I admit to it being difficult to simply write into this research paper. Brown provides this as the most extreme example of the reinforcement soullessness within verbal production can provide. When not phonetically pounced upon, the word is used within the black community while referring to one who has

embraced the rich history of soul, personal style, and celebration of being black (p. 134). When used locally and with soul, the word can empower or reinforce a bond; yet through pronunciation and tone it can also oppress and belittle while further driving greater distance between the dual heritage of African American and European American English vernaculars.

   "I won't learn from you"*.* In his series of essays, Herbert Kohl's "*I Won't Learn from You*" (1994) offers insight into language learners' decision to "not-learn" for a variety of reasons. Kohl suggests several social or interpersonal conflicts which can play a part in a student making the decision to refuse education. One of these instances, Kohl suggests an education system which could be considered "molded in a hostile society" (p. 11). This notion directly supports the previously discussed thoughts of Dr. Tatum regarding African American students feeling forced to decide between self-identity and group value versus learning from white instructors. Both articles referenced in this literature identify the challenges of identifying African American youth face as they grow and develop. This is reaffirmed by Kohl suggestion "to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes major loss of self" (p. 16).

   It was Kohl's belief that "not-learning" is an "intellectual and social challenge" (p. 10) which requires a significant amount of work to reject or avoid even the most well-intentioned teaching strategies. He even admits to regrets the effects of making use of this strategy had in his own life growing up in a Jewish family. This caused a "loss of culture" (p. 13) which still to this day creates a rift between the author and his culture.

   Furthermore, purposely "not-learning" can create additional difficulties for teachers and institutions alike as it can challenge current educational development strategies and systems;

which Kohl notes can consciously or subconsciously label a student as a "major threat to the entire system" (p. 21).

Kohl elaborates further on this notion by describing an intelligent and well-spoken black student named Akmir, who openly challenged classroom discussion and readings as being painted with a brush of black inferiority. Kohl even lends validation through comments suggesting "Akmir's not learning to speak or think in the racist way of his teachers was, for him, a healthy response to racism" (p. 32). Despite the fact Kohl connected with Akmir by changing his approach to classroom discuss and reading requirement, Akmir still faced scrutiny and difficulty from previous educators. "His diploma was withheld because his teachers felt he didn't show adequate "citizenship" in way of being a part of society" (p. 38). This roadblock would go on to prevent Akmir's access to a teaching position at City College. The rejection and fear of being labeled as a "draft dodger" caused a downward spiral which lead to a heroin overdose, and ultimately his death.

Through these experiences and student interactions, Kohl admits to becoming more aware of how literature or discussion can be overtly or latently racist; and to "unlearning racist and sexist language habits and trading them in for language of inclusion" (p. 34). This admission eludes to another key point Kohl discusses in his work; that of being able to truly identify the difference between "not-learning" and failing.

Whereas Kohl's work paints a picture of students choosing to not-learn for several reasons such as solidarity (p. 11); it also expresses the importance of the ability to identify potential mismatches between "what a learner wants to do and is able to do." This sort of failure, especially for a young learner who is also discovering themselves and searching for an identity,

can affect motivation towards continuing to learn or bring about feelings of inferiority or inadequacy.

Given Kohl's discussion of the pitfalls true failure in not comprehending can have on a student, it could be considered a potential gateway into a stance of "not-learning." Much as previous literature discussed has indicated, there is an obvious importance young learners place in their search for identity through social, cultural, and academic spaces. This is an important acknowledgment for this research, as it adds credibility to the consideration of a potential divide between learners and educators in way of language education and performance.

Dissin' the standard: Ebonics as guerilla warfare at Capital High. In reading "_Dissin' "the Standard": Ebonics as Guerilla warfare at Capital High_" (Fordham 1999), I found the initial thread which built credence to my initial interest regarding the concept of the codeswitching between African American English and what is considered Standard American English within the African American Community. Grounded in research and interviews conducted over 2 years at Washington, D.C.'s Capital High School, Fordham's study demonstrated rationale supporting a counter position to my own beginning at a significantly younger demographic. Whereas my initial thoughts regarding the usage codeswitching between AAE and SAE during adulthood could be keys to understanding the role of gatekeeping within the black community; Fordham points toward the young black students' potential need to protect their identity or their black identity, while using AAE as a way to reject SAE and the perceived racial inequality included within. (p. 273)

Fordham points to Standard American English requirements of the Washington, D.C. school system as unintentionally fostering dissonance between black students and their

instructors; thus creating a feeling within black students that to be viewed as intelligent they must "act white" (p. 280). This concept and the perception of its execution being guided by other white men, further solidifies the interpersonal need for cultural representation within the black student. Simply put, if the perception is "For you to think I'm smart, I have to speak like a white person–then I'll do everything I can to NOT." Fordham goes on to echo beliefs suggesting resentment in the concept of "acting white" being deeply rooted in black history. A black person acting white can be viewed disparagingly to the black community by removing their identity in lieu of perceived power associated with sounding "white" (p. 278).

Despite the abolishment of slavery in 1865, several occurrences in American history would point to many vehicles used to further subject African Americans to oppression. The common thought is that oppression was solely through tangible forms of discrimination such as Jim Crow laws or lack of union representation; however, those who have studied this race divide found even language selection played a factor in further dehumanizing and perpetuating false narratives of ignorance and inferiority. In summation, people who did not effectively share the same dialect as the affluent brokers of success in society, were associated with social and academic ineptitude (Holt, 1972). This left African Americans oppressed via stigma which reinforced the racist beliefs of generations past.

Fordham uses this understanding in building logic to suggest African American students refuse to demonstrate mastery of Standard American English as an act of defiance; furthering this sentiment by suggesting avoidance of coursework or assignments they deem as trying to indoctrinate them into a white way of life. This gives students a sense of empowerment by allowing them to control their usage of Standard American English. Even if just borrowed during

school hours, the general thesis of this idea is that SAE and its associated oppressions will not further perpetuate itself within this generation of black student.

Though the research presented in Fordham's article paints a different picture of the relationship between the young black community and Standard American English; it does add further consideration into my own research in understanding the perception of AAE usage within for adults in the black community, and their community discourse both internally and externally. In concluding this article, I understand that to truly paint an accurate picture in which to understand my potential subjects' thoughts towards African American English I must make consideration for the perception of Standard American English as well.

Crossing the line: Case studies of identity development in first generation college women. Though the research conducted by Wentworth and Peterson (2001) specifically discusses identity development of "adult women of working-class background" (p. 10); justifications given in this research can directly tie back to multiple themes of identify development and Dr. Tatum's discussion of dominant/subordinate social classes (2017, p. 12). Much as Tatum suggested, though the subjects of Wentworth's study were considered 'subordinate' given their respective gender and social statuses, all could also be considered part of a dominant class given their status as white women. Wentworth supports this consideration through acknowledging social class is only one component of various hierarchy classifications (p. 19).

Though Wentworth's research focused on issues of social class, the discussion of identity development is also an important theme when considering research pertaining to African American male perception of African American Vernacular English. Whereas AAVE could be a

native dialect in some black communities; personal and cultural identity based on what is reported back through media and social interaction, could directly impact the perception of language usage. Succinctly put, a child's journey of self-awareness and personal development is influenced by considerations of their community, this would include personal thoughts on the appropriateness of their own dialectal choices.

African-American perspective on Black English vernacular. In discussing African American English, especially as a white male, I believe there remains a duty to add authenticity of this research, by further examining the current state of AAE within the black community. Speicher and McMahon's (1992) research provided this in spades, by adding perspective of "BEV" (Black English Vernacular) through interviews which solicited information pertaining directly to subject comprehension. Simply put, Speicher not only wanted to identify if black people could identify traits of African American English, but if the potential attitudes surrounding it (p. 403).

Most interesting in this article was the suggestion that portions of interviewed black subjects did not celebrate the creativity, origins, or artistic qualities of BEV (p. 403). In summation, Speicher's research suggests the possibility that the black community feels judgement or "screening" (p. 402) when communicating interracially. The most important caveat in this suggestion is that all subjects interviewed in this study were part of language community within higher education. This implies a certain level of educational attainment which may have already survived an educational climate subconsciously disconnecting the black community from African American English.

Though Speicher suggests all languages are created equal and should be treated as such, she also accepts the consideration that they are not. The difficulty for me in this reading is that while accepting this, she did interview subjects which already had passed through the educational system and were academically developed. Given my research and analysis of other studies, it could be considered that the subject responses containing a more extreme apathy towards BEV were in fact either codeswitching themselves or had genuinely had become disenfranchised with the suggestion that African American English can provide empowerment through attaching to the aforementioned soul and linguistic freedom for individualized expression.

The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. The concept of "a correct way to speak" is an idea which can be debated to no seeming end. Regardless of cultural or socioeconomic background or upbringing, it would seem virtually all with interest in the discussion have an opinion. Delpit (1988) contributes to this discussion through association of language and education with power and political structure in what she considers "the culture of power" (p. 282). Delpit tackles this idea by outlining five key components of power within a classroom; before transitioning into how these areas impact both instruction and perception of language.

In summation, all diagnosed rules could feed into the same stigmatization described in previously referenced literature. Who has the power to decide what is normal, or how intelligent another is? Who holds the power of prescribing reading materials or lesson plans? There is a realization that this material or its accompanying instruction is primarily managed through the Caucasian perspective. These suggestions tie directly into Delpit's fifth premise which

summarizes that people without power can identify its presence more so than those who actually have it (p. 283). This notion bares importance, tying directly to a thematic connection in this research. If white people control the direction of English instruction and the relative impact of its importance, the "right or wrong way to communicate" takes a more factual demeanor in the eyes of language learners.

Delpit (1988) supports this concept through comparison of interactions with learners between black mentors, adults or teachers and their white counterparts. These examples relate directness of requests, or commands, to the nature in which they are received or executed (pp. 283-285). Black students interviewed reported a more enriching learning environment when instructors were more direct and assertive, because their "authority was earned" (p. 290). This idea ties directly back to Delpit's original suggestion of power. Students were less receptive to educational practices in which an instructor employed more vague or suggestive language. This sort of control mechanism seemed to contradict student thoughts towards power, tying directly into the student questioning the teacher's motivation and true knowledge of the subject material (p. 290). Succinctly put, if you are the teacher then you should teach with an authority that is being given by a student who recognizes the structure of power as it has been presented to them.

Delpit (1988) goes on discussing power as it pertains specifically to her five tenants; while offering the observation that only failure can result from any suggestion that the style in which a student talks or writes being irrelevant (p. 292). The author goes on to discuss the importance of creating awareness for both the value of a language learner's natural communication coding style, and the actuality of authority and control in the United States educational system (p. 293). This described scenario is expounded on through analysis of a

Native Alaskan instructor explaining various language coding to students as having "picnics" versus "formal dinners"; a simile which I had onto this point never considered. One of the prescribed styles is considered an easier and more enriching representative of true self, whereas the latter is considered useful in required settings.

Enacting an educational process of language development centered around such a perception can aid student development as academic English learners, while still honoring the importance and significance of their native cultural code. Furthermore, this sort of implementation could provide grounds for the preservation of a language style through supporting its place in the world.

Regardless of personal belief, this article serves valuable in review for this research as it helps to better define both where the suggested difficulties between AAVE and SAE and their instruction could arise in academic settings; while also demonstrating how creating space for cultural dialects or languages can begin to balance the power (or lack thereof) given to either.

An important first step in researching scenarios in which a young African American male may find divergence between African American Vernacular English and the potential effects of these differences is to better understand the potential experiences of black males while developing into adults. This includes their perception of self as well as their perception of the world around them. Regardless of race, gender, or other defining human characteristics, it could be considered that we believe we are who we are because of what the world we surround ourselves with tells us. Experiencing significant bias based on race or social class, especially at an age of internal growth and development, can augment both our self and global perceptions. The following review of literature confirms developing young African Americans experience

significantly more bias than their white counterparts; while also signaling an inability in addressing or empathizing with these challenging scenarios as an unintentional means of strengthening their grip on young African American development.

Dr. Beverly Tatum (2017) supports this notion while likening racism to a "moving walk way at an airport" (p. 11), suggesting that despite a passive presence on the belt, society and racism still move in the same direction. As a white male conducting this research, this was an important metaphor to consider in reading Tatum's work covering the development of African Americans from adolescence to adulthood; especially in attempting to synthesize Dr. Tatum's work which argues perception of self is defined through reflection and portrayal by media, news, teachers, and other influencers. Tatum would argue that though all races, religions, genders, and sexual orientations face this sort of classism thereby creating a dominant/subordinate structure, African Americans are naturally forced into a sub-category of pre-identification. In summary, societally speaking white people, regardless of other class defining traits, do not have to address the fact they are "white," whereas African Americans do.

Tatum would argue the effects of the dominant/subordinate class direction by explaining dominant classes considered as much due to the ease of accessibility to insight into its culture. For example, any American would have a significantly easier time locating mass media such as TV shows, movies, or news about white families, relationships, and people. Inherently regardless of other classes in which they could align (male/female, Christian/Jewish) white people and their traits could be considered the dominant culture. Furthermore, they are not affected by situations of subordinate classes. Tatum argues this sort of dynamic creates onus to preserve or enrich its own community for members of the subordinate class. At a young age this sort of division, latent

or intentional, can cause challenges on social, academic, and personal fronts as African American children struggle with self-identification.

In her third chapter Tatum (2017) points to adolescent African Americans coming to the realization their skin is different, and what those conversations look like with fellow students, peers, and adults. Dr. Tatum points out race constancy doesn't develop in a black child until approximately ages 6-7, thus until then the dominant culture has impacted youth to the point some express wanting to be white (p. 43).

Entering into a larger social populace of high schools, a developing African American's are still processing this race differential. While struggling to do it alone peer groups are found and can provide a pillar in understanding (logical or illogical thoughts) and more importantly, finding acceptance. In doing so, young learners take on the beliefs and tones of the group. As base class association (dominant/subordinate) is the central theme all students are struggling with, African-American students become more in tune with the thoughts and suggestion of those they surround themselves with. This can often time lead to underperformance in education or academia due to a student's fear of "acting white" in front of a peer group that provides them support structure while processing their feelings. Simply put, black students feel they risk being ostracized from a social group that welcomes them by associating with identifiers such as classroom activity and achievement commonly linked to white students through reinforcement of dominant culture.

A general inability to provide constructive solutions or truly empathize with struggles black students encounter, creates a significant barrier between these students and their previous social pillars (such as white friends or mentors). As Tatum states "When feelings, rational or

irrational are invalidated, most people disengage" (p. 59). This stresses the importance of establishing a positive peer group which can reinforce both the discovery of cultural identity and academic success.

In conclusion, Dr. Tatum's work highlights the importance of developing a true comprehension of the developing African American student's struggle with identity. Though this could seem a daunting challenge for any teacher or institution, creating an environment which enables self-discovery without the negative associations of dominant/subordinate culture can play a direct role in unlocking academic performance and personal growth. One way in which directive could be furthered, is through removing the concept that one dialect version of English is superior to another.

Language in the inner city: Studies in Black English vernacular. William Labov's (1975) research into the linguistic foundations and properties of Black English Vernacular lays considerable groundwork for not only the differences between BEV and Standard American English, but also provides insight into what could culturally be considered early studies and theories of the linguistic differences as a whole. Despite being published almost 50 years ago, Labov's research was immensely helpful in identifying specific physical traits of the dialect which aid in comparing and contrasting it between what is widely considered its 'standard' counterpart. Through identifying these components, significant resemblance can be found between the language usage demonstrated by gangs such as the Jets, Cobras, and Thunderbirds in Labov's study, to usage of today's African Americans.

Due to the nature of this thesis research, it is of further interest to note the studies and recommendations of "Deficit Theory" (Jensen, 1969) referenced in Labov's text which pointed

to linguistic behavior being a sign of genetic inferiority (p. 202). These sort of racially motivated generalizations, though backed by research and data of the times, could provide a possible link between the negative stereotypes of BEV/AAE in society being researched in this study. These sorts of findings could also point to the suppression and labeling of black language as a means of further supporting what Labov considers the "caste system of American society" (p. 204).

Traits such as the removal of "L" or "R" sounds in demonstrate both similarities and differences of the linguistic properties between both Standard American English and African American English. Labov points to this by comparing the R-lessness of AAE to the Bostonian "Yawkee" accent. In summation Labov note that both vernaculars employ AAE employs this glided R sound, however AAE usage does so much more consistently compared to its Northeastern counterpart which only creates the sound when not followed by a vowel (p. 13) Another trait identified by Labov considered the simplification or weakening of final consonant clusters, which can be heard in oral presentation of the words like "Poor–Poh" or "Guest–Guess" (pp. 16-18). Personally, I was reminded of the term "Axe–Ask" which has been a point of contention in several conversations I have shared while in the Midwest.

Though Jensen's research would argue these terms as examples of deficiency (Jensen, 1969), a sort of linguistic empowerment could also be argued. In contemporary art, songs like "Po' Folks" (Anthony, 2002) exemplify the weakening of final constant clusters while demonstrating linguistic freedom of bouncing between BEV and SAE.

Labov refutes Jensen's claims about inferior intelligence through a series of interviews conducted with various African American subjects of varying age, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds. The subjects, namely a child "Leon," a teenage gang member named

"Larry," and a college educated man named "Charles" (pp. 206-220) show varying grasps and usages of the BEV and SAE dialects. Whereas young Leon answers questions in a way which could be seen as providing answers which would keep him out of trouble, college-educated Charles covers illogical responses through repetition and restatement of his position in a collected and well-spoken dialogue. Interestingly, and a fair representation as to the importance of this research, 15-year-old Larry shows significant mastery of English by alternating between BEV and SAE in a discourse which is easy to follow in both conversational and dialogue (pp. 214-218).

What can be taken from Labov's research in these interviews is that mastery of Standard American English, as well as other factors such as appearance and temperance of language can create a false representation of someone's intelligence. The teenage gang member interviewed by Labov was direct and blunt, but his logic in explanation of a topic was much more coherent and showed a significantly more consistent grasp of the subject matter; whereas the older, more educated, and well-groomed counterpart was given more intellectual credit before even speaking. Labov even acknowledges this directly, stating:

> These two conversations are shown as models in which our preconceived notions of intelligence are weighted heavily by our interpersonal thoughts on the orator. Charles is well groomed 'likeable and attractive' with more tempered and moderate language, so it could be considered he is educated and well spoken. However, his logic is masked through over statements padding or repeating of the main argument. (p. 218)

In taking educational level and socio-economic status out of the equation in this research and simply noting the ages of the subjects, we see a black child who is afraid of getting in trouble

by providing the wrong answers to a white authority figure, a black teenager who is coming to grips with their fluency and identity while trying to display interpersonal comfortability and intelligence to the same, and finally an older man trying to use Standard American English as a means of attempting to appear educated on subject to a potential peer. This trajectory exemplifies the concepts being researched in this thesis. I concluded Labov's work even more interested in the consideration that between childhood and adulthood, African Americans may experience effects which alter their perception of Black English Vernacular/African American English as an effective means of communication and adequately displaying their intellectual worth. It would seem as if Jensen's claims of intellectual inferiority (1969) where not tied to race, but into systematic reinforcement of negative perception and stereotypes.

In summation, this literature review exhibits and reflects on research with the designation of better understanding the historic usage of African American Vernacular English as well as social factors which has impacted its perception amongst native speakers, or altered its growth and development. It is through development of this theoretical framework, that we can begin to compare researched literature to the thoughts and opinions of those interviewed for this study. Undertaking any cultural study as an outsider can require an amount of reflective or open analysis, allowing for considerations that existing power structures can meet (and potentially clash with) cultural need for identity and representation. These sorts of power struggles of language and cultural value are demonstrated while detailing what sort of challenges African American males can face in their search for educational and cultural equality. Employing research which validates cultural markers and needs helps to gain perspective before conducting of interviews; while providing more insight into why potential answers exist.

Literature reviewed for this research document also further examines the impact

perception of power can have on young black males as they age through puberty; and the

challenges presented intentionally (or unintentionally) through a social system geared towards

dominant culture. As a counter to this position, additional literature was reviewed which

demonstrated the antithesis of this notion; by integrating AAVE into classroom, black students

actually became more invested into coursework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Participants

Participants of this research will be comprised of African American males with a split within various age demographics. Target age demographic will consist African American males with ages ranging between the 20-32 and 32-55 demographic.

Data Collection

Description of data collection instruments. Data collection instruments will include audio recording devices (DAT Recorder) and audio/video recording devices. During interview sessions, the researcher will employ use of writing material for notetaking and timestamping in order to more easily recall specific information pertinent to the research study.

Subject interviews will be conducted using included Interview Structure Guide to maintain questions stay targeted toward specific domains of academic experience and language perception.

Procedures

During the initial interview, subjects will be asked about their experiences with usage of African American English in both social and academic climates. Information will also be solicited from subjects in an attempt to identify when they began to notice differences between African American English and Standard American English, and what sort of support was provided to reinforce any implied negative perceptions regarding the usage of African American English. Audio information from interview sessions will be collected, interpreted and analyzed utilizing Spradley's outlined process of analyzing and uncovering potential domains and thematic connection (1979).

Analysis Plan

Collected data will be analyzed through interpretation of recorded responses while specifically attempting to identify connections, correlations, or potential themes between established (primary) domains centered on the educational experience, personal thoughts on standard American English, and personal thoughts on codeswitching between African American English and Standard American English. These individual domains will be further investigated through a line of questioning which focuses on specific occurrences of both language use and subject perception of said usage. Though these aforementioned domains serve as a structure for drawing of connected themes, both the interview and coding process will allow for potential uncovering of additional domain or thematic connections.

Revision was made in analysis coding to allow for categorization and classification of childhood background. This was done as through the interview process, an apparent theme emerged pertaining to the potential effects integration or segregation have on perception of codeswitching. Subjects were asked to describe their childhood dynamic including school system, socioeconomic environment, and diversity of their community. These discussions lead to the need of establishing whether interview subjects could be considered as coming from two very distinctly different upbringings.

Interviewees categorized as "Homogenous" are defined as those in which the subjects reported growing up in environments which were predominantly white, with limited engagement of varying socioeconomic climate. Simply put these subjects could be considered as developing within a more "affluent" structure, with limited experience to true cultural or

economic diversity. They are considered "Homogenous", as their experiences relate directly back to the dominant culture as defined by Tatum (2017).

Classification terminology of "Diverse" is used to associate interview subjects with their recollections of childhood in a more diverse socioeconomic and cultural setting. This label is given to subjects who grew up attending public schools with a wide variety of cultures and races; those who's social constructs did not match the student-teacher dynamic of academia. All profile information of interviewed test subjects is detailed in the chart below.

Table 1

Subject Profile Chart

Subject	Pseudonym	Age	Job	Education	Classification
1	LaKeith	37	Real Estate Director	M.A.	Homogenous
2	Jermaine	25	Sales Rep – Call Center (CC)	B.A.	Diverse
3	Omari	28	Market Development Rep – (CC)	B.S.	Homogenous
4	Terry	33	Real Estate Agent	H.S. Diploma	Diverse
5	Michael	35	Sales Rep – (CC)	B.A.	Diverse
6	Danny	42	Owner – retail store	M.B.A.	Diverse
7	Steven	30	Account Manager – (CC)	B.S.	Homogenous
8	David	27	Market Development Rep – (CC)	B.S.	Diverse
9	Forest	34	Store clerk - retail	H.S Diploma	Diverse
10	Patton	35	Sales Rep – (CC)	M.A.	Homogenous

Chapter 4: Results

How do African-American males (professionals?) use "black voice" and "white voice" in their social, educational, and professional lives?

Out of the 10 subjects interviewed for this research, all elaborated upon thoughts of style and code switching by sharing experiences which referenced a varying need of inclusion of self or others in a variety of settings. These summaries, as well as specific quotes and highlights of interview sessions, provide insight into the African American male perspective regarding African American English Vernacular usage by both African Americans and White Americans in academic, professional, and social environments.

Overall View of Languages
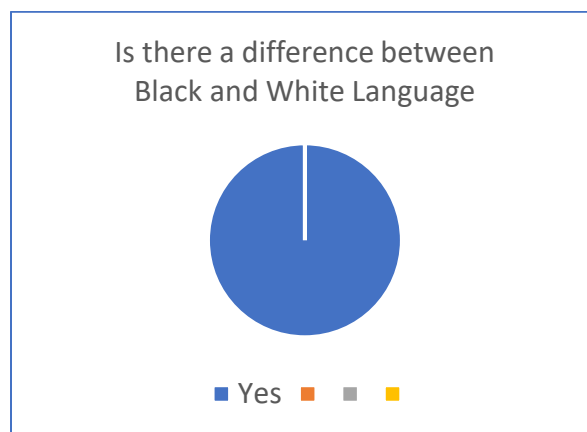
Figure 1. Is there a difference between black and white language?

Similarities existed throughout all 10 of the interviewed research subjects in their opinion of the existence of switching between African American Vernacular English and Standard American English within their lives. All 10 subjects reported understanding there was a way in which black people speak which is different from the way white people speak and admitted to seeing no difference between specific terms of "white voice" or black voice" , only recognizing a

difference between terms such as African American English Vernacular, Black English, Standard

American English, and White English. To all subjects interviewed these terms were

interchangeable as representation of the language but were not representative of the terms "black

voice" or "white voice." The predominant theme amongst all interviewed was that black

language included more a soulful (or relational) representation of language which connected to

cultural value or experience; whereas white language was perceived as primarily as transactional,

or for direction or specific communication such as completing a task. Amongst the 10, all

associated Standard American English as a sort of Business Language which was either devoid

of a need for cultural relevance, or had cultural relevance based on progressive needs of cultures

who were attempting to assimilate. "Michael" (Subject #2) went on record as stating his belief

that so many people study English to learn it for business, that Standard American English loses

its cultural value (line 3).

1   "To me, I think there's a way white people speak, but it's just "Standard English", and
2   that is what is considered proper. That's why so many different countries have learn
3   "English" programs. It's about business and development to me, Standard English isn't
4   really about culture or history."
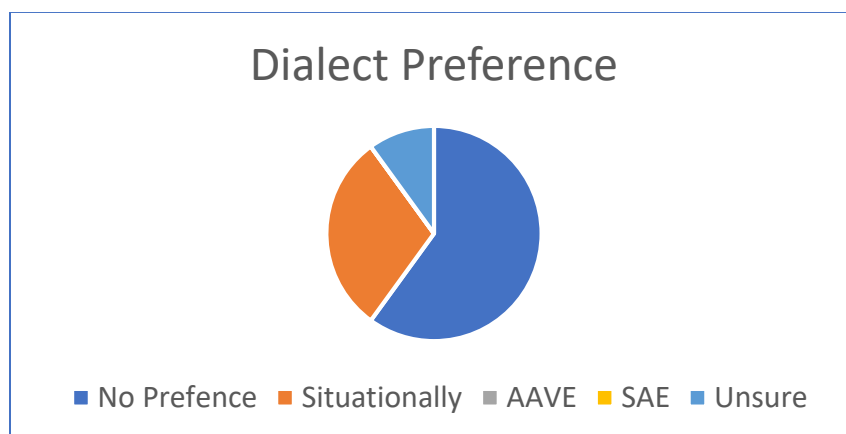
Figure 2. Dialect preference.

Even those subjects who would state they themselves had no true preference in a style of language usage regardless of the scenario, or suggested they never considered that they spoke differently than anyone else regardless of race, all identified unique holistic traits of the two referenced languages and their identifiers.

5   *"I think that there is way African Americans talk in their day to day conversations, it*
6   *tends to be more inferences and culturally based meaning the references drawn are from*
7   *cultural things that African Americans understand more and there isn't really a sound to*
8   *me." "LaKeith" (Subject #1)*

White People Style Switching to AAVE

Social Setting	Professional Setting
Inauthentic	Inappropriate
Appropriating	Condescending
False	Unnecessary

Figure 3. Interviewed subjects (collective) responses to white people using AAVE.

One area in which all subjects reported opinion, regardless of setting, pertained to the use of AAVE by white people. Regardless of socioeconomic status, cultural community upbringing, or academic experience, all interviewed research subjects expressed opinions which spoke to the user's authenticity, thoughts of appropriation, or both.

The use of AAVE by white people in a business setting was described by subjects using terms such as "unnecessary", "fake", "unauthentic", or "condescending". One subject described a time in which a direct supervisor used AAVE as a method of "connecting" with African-American employees as a way to "relate" to them and inspire motivation. This interaction, outlined below left "Patton" (Subject #10), a successful call center sales representative, feeling disenfranchised with the supervisor and their own position in the company. These results were

echoed in the realm of academia. Of the 7 subjects who reported instances of white authority

figures using AAVE in academic environments, all expressed feelings of confusion or

disenfranchisement with the figure's attempt to connect on a personal level. These attempts were

generally viewed as unauthentic as the attempts seemed to appear from nowhere and were not

sustained long enough to build credibility or authenticity.

9   *Patton: "A good example would be like, once I closed this big deal and hit my monthly*
10   *metrics. Now, keep in mind I'm the only black guy on my specific sales team. We having*
11   *our monthly recap meeting, and boss is like (sarcastically imitates white voice): "Well*
12   *(redacted), hit his number and so you know 'dat check is gone be ballin'!" I'm just sitting*
13   *there like, man I don't even talk like that in the office (laughs). Here you are doing it in*
14   *front of a bunch of white coworkers because I'm here. It's like unintentionally singling*
15   *me out for being black when you celebrating that I'm good at my job? Like hey, he did it*
16   *–and he's even BLACK!.. Then to everybody else, he be like (sarcastically imitates white*
17   *voice) "Gentlemen, Great job hitting your monthly metrics."*
18   *Interviewer: "How did that make you feel?"*
19   *P: "I mean, for real?" C'mon (chuckles sarcastically) I spent enough time around white*
20   *people growing up or my life to know when its real or fake. Shit like that is*
21   *condescending, but you just deal with it. Whatever man, I'm still getting paid and he ain't*
22   *mad about making money either, you know? So we good. It's just unnecessary."*

Further elaboration helped to better outline the majority of those interviewed and their

standpoint of theoretical restrictions or credit is given towards white people codeswitching.

"Patton" clarified his position further, when I asked whether he would have better received the

interaction with his boss in a different environment.

23   *"No, I don't think so because I didn't know him like that. The first and longest standing*
24   *instance I know of this guy is that he's a sales manager who grew up in a nice*
25   *neighborhood with a nice college and stuff. You know? And that was supported with how*
26   *he talked to me in general business sense. That's the archetype I have of the guy. So even*
27   *if we're out getting a beer, I feel like I'm still expecting him to talk like his self, or at least*
28   *what I know of who he is."*

The theme of authenticity was predominant in discussion regarding white people's usage of AAVE in social settings. All 10 subjects interviewed noted the importance of speaker authenticity. As one interviewee noted:

29 *"..black language can't be borrowed. If it is a dialect someone is going to use, it has to be*
30 *for a reason. Like they grew up with it, or they're a part of an authentic black community*
31 *who uses it. Like if you got a lot of black friends, you start speaking like them over time,*
32 *you don't just show up spitting slang."* "Lakeith" (Subject #1).

Even those subjects who professed to have grown up in a white community echoed this sentiment; referencing the importance of authenticity in the white use of AAVE and its ability to connect in a deeper way within a social group.

33 *"I'd like to think people speak how they are going to speak, because that's what I do or*
34 *how I handle communication. But honestly, it's easy to identify those who are getting out*
35 *of their comfort zone with their words. I never got it, man. Are you trying to fool me? Are*
36 *you not comfortable with yourself or just not comfortable around me and my people?*
37 *Why you tryin' so hard?"* "Omari" (Subject #3).

Interestingly, a common theme on the idea of white people using AAVE also emerged from interviews of those classified as growing up in diverse cultural settings while experiencing a sense of being "told" the right way to speak was not to use AAVE. This sentiment was expressed succinctly by "Forest" in a statement in which he wondered why white people would try to use AAVE in any environment, especially if it were not authentic. This line of questioning was supported by experiences with white educators which perpetuated the notion of Standard American English as the most accurate and appropriate form of communication. His statements, which are further elaborated on in the Discussion section, reflect the statements of Delpit (1988) which summarize the tenants of power in pedagogy, acknowledging that whereas whites are

most commonly in charge of academic decisions, materials, and direction; thus, the race retains

most general power over multicultural students entering the educational system.

Language in Social Areas

Several similarities existed in the response of interviewed research subjects in the realm

of using AAVE and SAE within social settings. Seven of the 10 subjects reported finding the use

of AAVE within a social environment comprised of other African Americans to be substantially

more enriching. Those interviewed used terms such as "honest", "authentic", and "real" in

describing the use of AAVE with other African-Americans. This is demonstrated and

exemplified especially in interviews with "David" (Subject #8) and "Jermaine" when discussing

experiences of using different codes in social settings.

38   *"Honestly, I can't say I notice any sort of codeswitch or whatever when I'm in a social*
39   *setting. For real I think it just happens when I'm around friends or family.. my "people"*
40   *you know.. Not even just "my black people", but like people who been knowing me for a*
41   *while. Like it feels "real" so to speak.. I don't know. Maybe that's the point of what you*
42   *getting at? Like, I don't feel anyway about it, but I do feel certain ways or notice when I*
43   *feel like I have to talk white or proper at work or in public." "David" (Subject #8)*

44   *"It's kinda like what I said about when you callin' someone for work and you get*
45   *comfortable and don't have to be all proper. Sometimes it's good to just take it out and*
46   *put the thought of having to speak a certain way, or even be aware of it, and just put it on*
47   *the shelf, you know? Like decompress or just be authentic in where I'm at. Out with my*
48   *homies catchin a game, or even just home with my fam, you know? It's like, real time, but*
49   *I don't think I'm even aware of it at the time, like.. I don't think about it, but being asked*
50   *that question, yeah man, I probably appreciate it more than I really think about."*
51   *"Jermaine" (Subject #2)*

Two of the remaining subjects suggested they felt no difference in their use of language

and could not report on known code or style switching. This information will be referenced

further in the discussion section; as it is of interest to note these reporting subjects were also

those who reported being from communities classified as "Homogenous" (predominantly white).

Interestingly, these thoughts felt more on par with considerations of Wentworth and Patterson (2001) who, in summary, suggested the subjects of their study admitted to enduring similar struggles, but were unable to see subtle benefits they were afforded over their counterparts due to socioeconomic and racial influence. This concept will be elaborated on more completely in the discussion section; but succinctly explained here, the indications of feeling relatively oblivious can point to a lack of awareness of the various power or entitlement provided by growing up in a pre-dominantly white community.

The remaining outlier reported a direct need of confirming the social dialect used before fully contributing to conversations. Summarizing this statement, the subject found it best to gauge a social group before contributing, unless it was a pre-existing or familiar social circle. This subject, "Steven" (subject #7) was also from a community classified for this research as "Homogenous".

53   *"I know I said oh well language is just language and its about being able to be*
54   *communicate with people; but if I'm being honest 'witchya I guess I do at least analyze*
55   *the room when I'm somewhere new or with new people. Like, more if it's black people I'll*
56   *let them talk first.. But I guess the way I view that is that we speak different to different*
57   *groups, right. Teachers talk different to students, friends talk different to coworkers.*
58   *People watch their words in front of new people. (pause) I'm saying I ain't gonna walk in*
59   *and be all like 'sup nigga' whaz good, you know? But if I'm with my friends, cuttin' up or*
60   *whatever, then yeah, that filter comes off because it's all love." "Steven" (subject #7)*

Language in Academia

Diverse	Homogenous
Proper	Correctly
Like a white person	Like an adult
Right way to speak to authority figures	Polite
Prove I'm smart	Just the way you speak

Figure 4. Traits and phrases describing language correctness.

Differentiation of opinion occurred primarily through the connection of socioeconomic background in childhood upbringing and experience in academia. Four of the subjects who took part in the research project did not recognize their answers as making a conscious choice to code or style switch. These same subjects directly identified as growing up in predominantly white upper-class communities (Homogenous), and thus never admitting to knowing a difference between "black voice" and "white voice" through their upbringing or in academia. Summation of their thoughts could be considered as "never having thought of making a decision to switch the way they spoke in various surroundings". Despite this theme and corresponding statements, all four of the interviewed subjects hailing from pre-dominantly white (Homogenous) communities used the statement "knew there was a right way to talk." This notion was thematically consistent with the thoughts of the six remaining subjects which reported growing up in mixed or black communities of varying socioeconomic status; however, it did so with less reported conflict and confrontation. In attempting to unpack more of "the right way to talk" from subjects of the "Homogenous" classification, I was able to uncover that many of these thoughts or stories were geared towards thoughts on manners or politeness, not actual grammatical rules or vernacular usage. Examples of these scenarios are expressed in the interview highlights below.

61   *Lakieth: "I wouldn't say I had to consciously think about it or anything like that, like*
62   *jumping into speaking proper or not because things were always "proper", you know? I*
63   *learned how to speak just like, the same way any other kids did in my classes."*
64   *Interviewer: "but to clarify, they were predominantly white, correct?"*
65   *L: "Oh yeah, I mean like I said, I grew up in the suburbs… One of maybe 3 black*
66   *families in my school… So you just talked the way people talked, and knew better than*
67   *speaking any different."*
68   *I: "Well, I'd like to expand on that. Can you elaborate on "knew better"? Knew better*
69   *than what?"*
      L: "I mean, yeah I would talk with other kids and talk like kids talk, but I wasn't out there
      cursing in front of teachers, or not saying please and thank you, or using "Ms. or Mr. or
      Principal".. stuff like that."
      I: "So when you use a phrase like "I knew better", you're referring more towards a use
      of politeness?"
      L: "For sure, that'd probably be a good way to put it, yeah. Like, all people say please
      and thank you, don't matter if you're a black kid or a white kid."

The remaining 6 subjects interviewed all reported scenarios in which a conscious effort

was made to "speak correctly" throughout their childhood and experiences in academia.

However, unlike those from the Homogenous classification, interview subjects from "Diverse"

classification shared stories focusing more towards speaking or sounding like a white person.

These subjects, from less affluent areas, all attended public schools of large diverse student

bodies. Classification or categorization of this group would be considered "Diverse" based on

explained methodology, as they faced a much larger and diverse intercultural and socioeconomic

environment.

Diverse	Homogenous
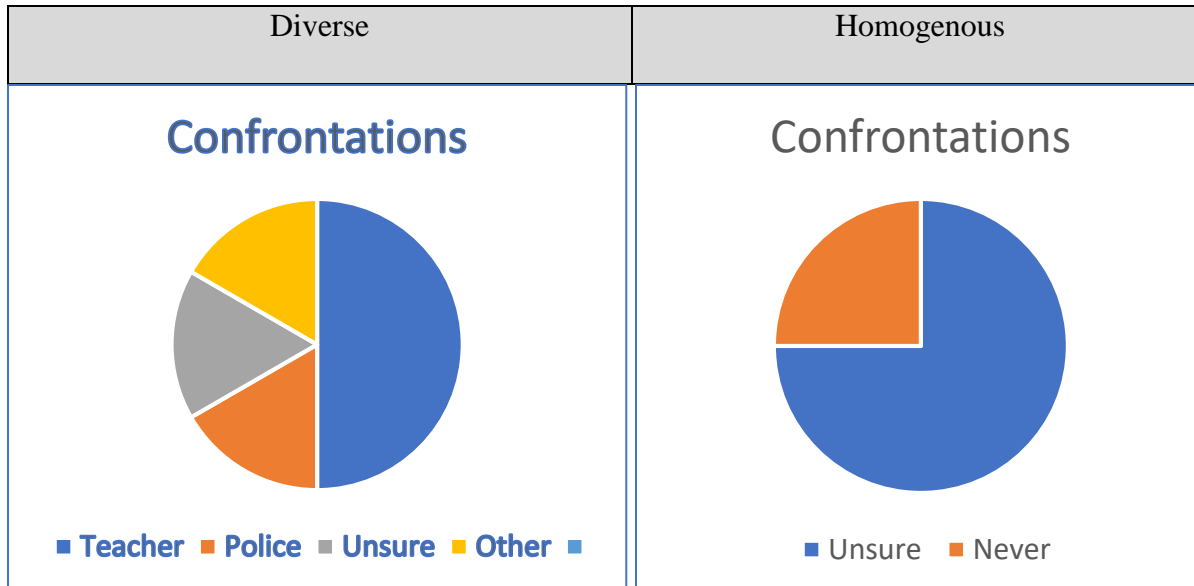
Figure 5. Direct reportable recollection of confrontations regarding language.

Not considering extent of academic accomplishment for these 6 subjects from "Diverse" grouping, all shared a belief there was in fact a "right way to speak" due to instances including interaction with adults and authority figures specifically "white" authority figures such as teachers, coaches, police officers, and mentors. This sentiment is elaborated in the discussion below with "Forest" (Subject #9).

77   *Forest: "Man there was this one time, and I don't even know why it sticks with me so*
78   *long, you know? I just remember havin' this teacher in like middle school 7th-8th grade*
79   *something like that, ... and I don't even remember how it got on or what not, but it was*
80   *about saying 'ain't got none."*
81   *Interviewer: "Like a double negative?"*
82   *F: "Yep, we were in class and it was like one of the first days, I had never even had the*
83   *guy before. I just heard "Oh that ole white guy, (redacted) he an asshole" and blah blah*
84   *blah."*
85   *I: "I don't mean to jump in here, because I definitely want to hear this sorry, but out of*
86   *curiosity who was calling (redacted) an asshole? Like, other kids in your class? Other*
87   *black kids? White kids?"*
88   *F: "I mean, most of my talk was within my social group, so it was us black kids. Unless*
89   *you could ball. He was a coach and the joke was like "Yo, (redacted) think the only good*
90   *little nigga is one with a jump shot. Which looking back was dumb, we we're like 12 or*

91   *something?"*
92   *I: "got it got it, okay, so back to this double negative thing."*
93   *F: "Right, right, so I think I answered a question about topics for this project. He asked*
94   *me direct and said: I ain't got no idea. He just straight clowned on me for what felt like*
95   *forever. He's like up there, in front of the class being all like "If you AIN'T got NO idea,*
96   *then you OBVIOUSLY got SOME ideas; so let's hear 'em. And all the class is like,*
97   *snickering and shit, but he just went on and on with it like he wanted to embarrass me.*
98   *Then I'm like, trying to bring it back and was like "I be trying" and he just chuckled like*
99   *it was a joke. Over emphasizing the use of "be" like, saying "Well if you ain't got no*
100   *ideas, you best "BE" starting to find one."*
101   *I: "Were you embarrassed?"*
102   *F: "Was that the point?"*
103   *I: "No, I'm sorry, let me rephrase. If you could go back to that moment and try to*
104   *remember the thoughts or feelings of it, for YOU as a kid. How you would describe it or*
105   *what words would you use?"*
106   *F: "Small, stupid.. Yeah, that's how I'd put it. Like he wasn't going to teach TO me he*
107   *wanted to teach ABOVE me, cause like in that moment, that's where the other kids were.*
108   *Now that I'm older and past it, it's like, I was just talking. I wasn't trying to be hard or*
109   *anything. That's just how I talk."*
110   *I: To who? Parents? Other kids?*
111   *F: Really at that point, anyone probably. I mean talking to my mom or on the bus, with*
112   *my friends playing video games or what not. It always felt like that was fine and not like*
113   *people didn't know what I was saying. Maybe that's why I remember it, because it was*
114   *like the first time I was told, like, straight up by a teacher or anybody - "yo the way you*
115   *talk is fucked up."*

Some of the subjects reported direct confrontation as a defining moment in which conscious thought was put into employing Standard American English, whereas others mentioned declining grades and threats of being withheld from social programs such as school sponsored sports and academic programs. These sentiments and experiences matched almost directly those scenarios Gilmore (1985) discussed of students being withheld from social programs partially due to their linguistic performance and which English style they demonstrated.

These discussions and themes also directly cross-referenced scenarios and research discussed by both Kohl (1994) and Fordham (1999) which highlighted students making a

conscious effort to not learn because of interactions with instructors and explained how students

could be withheld from academic or social benefit due to their language usage. This sort of

scenario "Forest" explained is also validated several times in Tatum (2017) through her

discussion of subordination versus domination, as well as the notion "When feelings, rational or

irrational are invalidated, most people disengage" (p. 59). "Forest" explains the overall

perception of the teacher in question within his peer group and would go on to express

disengaging after this incident.

116	*"I prolly didn't wanna learn from him, because he didn't wanna to teach me. I mean, I*
117	*was a kid, know what I mean? I prolly shut down in his classes more than I shoulda, but*
118	*it wasn't like I was a no good student or what not. I made it through and did what I had*
119	*to.. That kinda became my deal I guess. If I met a white teacher or something that was*
120	*'hard' or I heard they didn't like blacks, I just shut up, tried to speak like they spoke, and*
121	*did my work, you know. Yessir Nossir, but it got me through. I just became second nature,*
122	*like, it's easier to just accept they is how you heard, and stay protected from any*
123	*negativity by just talking 'proper' as they want you to.. I got my diploma, I got a couple*
124	*jobs. I'm making ends for me and my life." – "Forest" (Subject #9)*

The more Forest explained his side of the interaction and the lasting effects it had; it

became more and more apparent that these scenarios were infrequent because, in Forest's mind,

they had to be. When in the presence of those he considered authority figures with a stereotype

of being racist (confirmed or supposed), Forest focused on speaking less, and using what he

thought "they" would consider proper English (SAE). In doing so, this created less conflict and

made him feel safer, like less of a target for racism, in his school. Literature as far back as Delpit

(1988) describes this scenario in talking of power structures and views. Directly related here, we

see one of her tenants of power in play which summarizes that those without power can identify

who controls it, much more than those who actually DO have the power (p. 283).

The interesting parallel, which will be expounded on in the discussion section, is that all

10 of the subjects interviewed expressed agreement of both thoughts of a "right way to talk" and

noted differences between AAVE and SAE; yet all who identified as being from "white"

communities claimed to not see a difference in the way they spoke regardless of setting while

considering the "right way" to be relating only to politeness and etiquette. A topic that was

elaborated on by "Steven" (Subject #7), who was also from predominantly white (Homogenous)

classification.

125   *Steven: "I can't remember a specific situation where I like, felt that I was in trouble for*
126   *talking black or using African English; but I mean, I was kinda coached that way. Like, I*
127   *played sports and had a coach who would always tell me "it's more important that*
128   *people see the athlete and the student, not the color you tryna be," and I never really*
129   *thought that meant "don't talk black" but like, parts of that were about how you talked to*
130   *people.. teammates, coaches, other team… you know?"*
131   *Interviewer: "Interesting, was he a black guy or a white guy?"*
132   *Steven: "He was black. From the same community too if I remember right."*
133   *I: Looking back now, as an adult, does that statement mean the same thing that you may*
134   *have thought it did at the time?*
135   *S: "I think so, maybe more like, refined? I guess.. What I'm saying is like, I don't need to*
136   *prove my blackness through words, and I don't really need people to placate me… think I*
137   *need to hear them speak black to get me to relate to them. African English isn't a default*
138   *to me, but I can't sit here and be like, Standard English is. I think it comes and goes*
139   *based on scenario, and that's made me develop my own type of way to communicate."*
140   *I: "Sounds like you're saying you have developed your own language…"*
141   *S: (chuckles) "Naw man, I guess I'm saying that I don't consider the way I talk to be a*
142   *specific culture identifier as a black man… and so I don't think other people need to think*
143   *that way about how I talk either."*

This sort of language style wasn't displayed for self-preservation, it was seemingly just

done because it was expected. "Steven" did not associate his coach's directions as playing into

belief of a correct way to speak in a white community; rather he believed it was specifically

relating to the traits of being a quality athlete, teammate, and student. Through my discussion

with Steven, it could be considered that this sort of mantra has impacted his overall view of

communication style and perception of self. Contrary to these statements, their interviews would lead to acknowledging this same difference between black and white voice in discussion of social interactions both interracially and otherwise.

Language in Professional Environments

Professional environments were the area which caused the greatest amount of disparity between responses of interviewed subjects. The thoughts, observations, and described scenarios hinged greatly on the type of work being done. Of the 10 subjects interviewed, 5 held positions which could be considered "directly customer facing" including telecommunicated or face to face sales environments, 2 held managerial positions, and 1 worked in real estate. Whereas the subject, "Terry" (Subject #4) suggested he was often engaged through various networking and referral practices thus admitted to generally working with more African-American clients than white clients. He also mentioned feeling much more comfortable in using AAVE or just being comfortable with whichever dialect chosen because clients already had a pre-existing awareness of them and their career achievements due to previously described recommendations.

Those subjects working in call center sales environments reported a much different feeling of language or dialectal choices. This notion was explained best by "Jermaine" (Subject #2) who stated:

144   *"The first thing that people hear or know of me or my company is my voice… So I have to*
145   *think about it before even dialing the number, you know? If I'm calling Mr. X, I need to*
146   *have an idea of who Mr. X is and who he may be more interested in buying from,*
147   *especially if I'm like, calling into Indiana or a small town in Kentucky."* "Jermaine"
148   (Subject #2)

This sentiment was echoed by all of those with experience in call centers, regardless of academic achievement, cultural orientation, or community upbringing. When initial engagement

with someone in a professional environment is done without a support structure of referral or

existing awareness; subjects were more inclined to speak in a professional manner which fell in

line with the usage of Standard American English. Simply put, they made the choice to do so as a

strategy which they believed lead to more success. This could go either direction, as subjects also

admitted to switching to AAVE when calling into communities considered to be much more

urban, or if the contact's name considered "black". "Jermaine" continued:

149   *"If I'm calling and I look at a contact and it's a "Lequon" or like "Tanisha" or*
150   *something, I can probably drop the show. It's easier to connect. Then I'm all about*
151   *helping them to relax and cutting it up… I mean, it's not like I'm the token white voice on*
152   *the line. Man, I tell you it'd surprise you to know how many black people hate it a little*
153   *less when a black telemarketer call. (laughs) it's like, shit I know that feeling too. I*
154   *answer the phone like, aw shit that's just my brotha just doin' his job." – "Jermaine"*
150   *(Subject #2)*

Conversations like this demonstrate the power which comes with independent choice of

style or codeswitching for professional gain. Though switching between dialects is a tool and a

talent which can be refined and developed; the subjects also show a certain protection of the

language's authenticity. Whereas it felt inappropriate for some to be spoken to in AAVE by

white peers or supervisors professionally, switching between AAVE and SAE was a tool that

could be used while building a successful career. The excerpt of my interview with "Terry"

(Subject #4) expounds on this notion.

156   *Terry: "I think, my experiences in as a Realtor has definitely taught me things about how*
157   *I use black or white language, or how other people use it on me. I get a lot of clients*
158   *through referral, a lot of black clients because, well, that's who I just happened to build a*
159   *network through… and a lot of those referral business comes to me and they be saying*
160   *"hey, so and so felt super comfortable with you and told us to look your way.."*
161   *Interviewer: "Why would you think that is?"*
162   *T: "Honestly? I think it's because some home buyers can get overwhelmed. Especially*
163   *African American home buyers because of all the stereotypes you know? The thought we*
164   *can't get a loan, or pay bills.. or that our houses won't sell.. and that can make this*

165   *ocean of white realtors just look like sharks. Maybe they think they're not going to get*
166   *shown good homes or if they're selling a home that it's going to sit because it'll be*
167   *tougher to sell.*
168   *I: "Ok, so how does language help you with that?"*
169   *T: "Because my clients, predominantly black, can trust me because I'm authentic. At the*
170   *same point, I have a very polished and articulate dialogue I use when I speak with other*
171   *realtors or represent my clients, especially to white folk. (chuckles) For real I think I sell*
172   *more homes to black people because they know I can talk that "white talk", and my bosses*
173   *love me because I can "talk black" and get that business, so it's coming and going."*

The comfort level described by both "Terry" and "Jermaine" is description echoed

through experiences shared by all subjects which were classified as "Diverse" due to a

socioeconomically diverse upbringing. From building relationships with the goal of hitting

metrics or establishing a network of contacts in a challenging market, to simply feeling

comfortable in a place of work during a difficult day; there would appear to be positive reasons

behind codeswitching while using AAVE as a black person in a professional setting. The opinion

expressed in the interview highlighted below, relates back to research of Katz (1997) and Garner

(1983) which both express the importance of ritual and speech pattern to communicate while

celebrating cultural identity.

174   *Danny: "There was a time I worked at this greasy breakfast spot, right? And like,*
175   *literally every weekend we be getting slammed by all the old folks comin' out of church.*
176   *Which is fine, you know, get them they food and whatever, but let's be honest, lot of white*
177   *families. So when the rare black family came in, and I'm runnin' all crazy like "yes sir,*
178   *right away, I'll get you those pancakes." it was good to see a well-dressed black man out*
179   *with his family and be able to serve them. Like a change of pace. They stop me at some*
180   *point and be like "how you doin' my brotha, see you puttin' in that work, keep grindin'*
181   *young blood.." Like, respectin me doin this job and hustlin'. felt good.. I mean it didn't*
182   *happen a lot.. felt real or true though – and that's what I remember bout it."*
183   *I:"Did other customers (other white customers) ever compliment your work?"*
184   *D: "Yeah, brotha I was fast and good at my job. But when it came from a white guy it felt*
185   *more mechanic or arbitrary. Like "oh you guys are so busy, must be making good tips"*
186   *or "everything was great, thank you" or "you're good at your job".*
187   *I: How are those statements different?*
188   *D: I think because one is relating to me and my hustle, feeling like I know I ain't trying to*

189 *be here forever and I'm doing the best I can now to succeed… and the other just feels like*
190 *something you say to someone. I'm good at my job? Thanks. I mean, it's serving*
191 *pancakes bro, it ain't hard."*
192 *I: Right, so it felt impersonal or canned"*
193 *D: Yeah, that's a good way to put that. Like… you know when you walk by a person and*
194 *you like just say "how you doing?" then walk by. You don't really want to know, you just*
195 *say it to be pleasant. I'd get bunches of compliments sure, just like you get bunches of*
196 *"have a good night", but it was the ones that related to me that I appreciated more.*
197 *I: Just out of curiosity here, but, in your estimations, could a white family say that to*
198 *you? What if a white guy said "I see you grindin' young blood."*
199 *D: You know what (pauses for reflection) No actually. It wouldn't mean the same unless I*
200 *knew them. If it was just some 60 year old white dude, I'd be like 'what?' you know? You*
201 *don't expect that person to talk that way so it's different.*
202 *I: If they did, let's just say it happened. What's the first word that would come to your*
203 *mind (presently) to describe that interaction?*
204 *D: Condescending. Like, sorry man, enjoy your pancakes but gratuity in cash is a better*
205 *gesture, you know?"*

Interestingly, "Danny", who has moved on from restaurant life and now owns his own

retail store after earning an M.B.A., would go on to explain a scenario in which he did not

appreciate the use of African American English. That when it is delivered in a form that can be

considered overly aggressive.

206 *Danny: "I guess I don't notice when I'm fine with it, right? Feels normal, but I do notice*
207 *it when its coming off more aggressive.. or like they putting on a show in my store."*
208 *Interviewer: "How do you define aggressive in retail environment?"*
209 *D: "People that don't know me, or even those who do.. I mean, my shop is in (redacted)*
210 *so we've got a lot of gentrification of an area of (redacted) that's becoming whiter,*
211 *generally speaking. But we still got that halfway house, you know… and we right by the*
212 *bus and train, so it can get… raw at times."*
213 *I: "Okay, so you're saying your store can be diverse at times?"*
214 *D: "Right, that's good. So like, if a guy comes in and I have a store of white patrons just*
215 *getting off of work, they don't need to hear a guy spouting the 'n' word or associate me*
216 *with it, even in a friendly way. You know, come in and walk up to the counter with thick*
217 *black language… I feel like it separates me from my clientele."*
218 *I: "Great, so you think it's a tool or strategy of sort? What kind of tool or device would*
219 *you say it is, and why use it?"*
220 *D: "I think, it the wrong context it be like, using language to present. Like this isn't*
221 *actual language, and we don't actually talk to each other like this… So you doin' that is*
222 *just for yourself to show you think you have power over the room… and maybe like by*

223 *referring to me and trying to bring me into that dialogue, you're trying to present that*
224 *power as if me and you both got it…"*
225 *I: "And in that scenario you don't want to acknowledge that power move?"*
226 *D: "No, not at all.. I'm like brutha you got the wrong one. (laughs). I just people to come*
227 *in, feel comfortable, and purchase stuff you know? You start making white people feel*
228 *like they can't come in, ain't no different than makin' blacks feel the same.*
229 *I: "What if it's all black people in the shop?"*
230 *D: I don't think that changes. I mean yeah, be you. Talk to me like you would, cut it up*
231 *with me for a bit. It's all good you know, but still ain't gotta be aggressive or force others*
232 *to hear your choice to be speaking that way. Yeah, it's great to see brothers out living in*
233 *my community doing good, but ain't no need for a show, especially if we all respect*
234 *eachother as equal."*
235 *I: "So am I right to say you think that sort of show or usage of black language is*
236 *disrespectful? If so why would you suggest that?*
237 *D: "Yeah, I think so. Talking black to me is about culture and respect to me as it is a way*
238 *to speak. So like, it doesn't have to be thrown around to the point it sounds like a parody*
239 *of itself.. We've done well to preserve our culture in the (redacted) community. Stuff like*
240 *that is counter-productive.. also it's like, I see you brother. See me, and respect me just*
241 *like that."*

"Danny" brings up an interesting point which will be referenced further in the discussion

section, but it ties into the previously reviewed literature suggesting the attempt of brokering for

linguistic and cultural authenticity discussed by (Katz, 1997). Furthermore, this demonstrates an

appreciation of African American Vernacular English as a cultural marker; one of which this

subject agrees is a useful identifier of the soul and importance behind a language, confirming the

statements and research of both Brown (1977) and Speicher and McMahon (1992).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The consideration of all responses of interviewed subjects demonstrates thematic consistency exists which allows room for elaboration and further discussion. These primary connections serve as the foundation in which to better understand the African American male perspective of codeswitching between AAVE and SAE as a whole. Thematic conclusions were drawn based on consistency in the understanding of the two unique dialects as communication forms. Connection was also found in reports of socioeconomic experiences and background, overall perception of white people using AAVE directly to African Americans, and the perceived need to codeswitch based on familiarity or status.

Furthermore, it attempts to better understand the original research question being: How do African American males use codeswitching in educational, social, and professional settings. In attempting this research while unpacking the time spent with these 10 research subjects, the challenge of addressing that specific question would become more and more evident. As the research data would indicate, driving interview questions were directed more towards specific situations; but responses were based more on interpersonal feeling, memory, and perception. Through time spent learning of the specific plights and opinions of the research subjects, more prevalent themes began to show themselves while demonstrating the impact had on these individuals.

Speaking personally, I went into this research topic while trying to answer the question of "how"; which I now feel can only be best understood through analysis of the underlying question. Simply put, my question of "how" turned into "why". Through coding these interviews and attempting to draw thematic correlation, I now believe the "why" questions control the

"how" questions of codeswitching. This is done through coloring the usage with hues slanted and skewed by perceptions which were created and fostered through cultural experiences developed within their respectively differentiated communities. The reaction to interactions about AAVE and SAE language, and developed perceptions appear to be responsible for a large part of how the interview subjects use codeswitching as adults. In other words, the results discussed suggests the causality of how codeswitching is currently used can be found in how language usage was addressed with the subjects through a composite of social and academic experiences The biggest differentiating factor was not "how" black males use codeswitching in professional, social, and educational lives – but are they actually able to identify and articulate why they codeswitch, or the significance it may or may not have.

To better comprehend this notion, the need to learn more about these specific situations became paramount. Meeting with the research subjects over time, I could not help but unpack their experiences compared to the literature I had reviewed. Without even identifying the sources, or sometimes even expressing knowledge of a potential theme, answers would fit directly into the considerations outlined in the literature review. Themes like the cultural importance of black language (Dalby, 1972; Tatum, 2017) resonated in the responses provided.

As highlighted in the research section of this thesis, interviewed subjects' given opinions regarding unique traits of African American Vernacular English were consistent. Subjects shared opinions describing AAVE as a language of "culture" or "soul" which Brown (1977) supported in his research generations ago. Furthermore, Brown summarized the perspective suggesting black's viewed white people focused on phonetic accuracy in their attempts of using black language, often missing the true soul of the word's usage and origin. This idea is also

supported by interviewed subjects who admitted to viewing SAE as a "business language" meant for communication of idea or need, not cultural connection. As a language teacher, I admit to being intrigued by these responses, especially that of "Michael" regarding the matter.

Perception of AAVE and SAE

As a language teacher completing my M.A degree and preparing to teach foreign students, I am aware of the false pretenses that surround language educators on an international level. I have also witnessed these linguistic stereotypes manifest themselves through employment opportunities under the guise of what international companies may consider "native" English. I never considered the idea that the instruction being demanded (or given) in such a large scale could have sustaining impact on the both the perception of English development, or the language as a form of communication. Nor did I consider the idea that any sort of evolution of English language could happen due to the influence of non-native speakers. Simply put, the stereotypes and perceptions behind international consideration of "native" English could in fact further stigmatize English against its various dialects. Meanwhile, the exact antithesis of this scenario has been a long-known part of African American Vernacular English and its evolution. As far back as Dalby (1972), the notion of other languages influencing AAVE was based on the perseverance of black culture and safety. African traders would codeswitch to keep European settlers from understanding true intent, and slaves would encode words to their own meaning as to discuss potential escape plans or situations they did not want their owners to become aware of. When this word began to become recognized, it was dropped from the vocabulary, as Dalby noted "Black Americans have always had a legitimate reason for concealing information from white people." (p. 174). This could even be considered in popular culture, as we've seen words

such as "dope" (good) "Jive" (dance) virtually vanish shortly after the generation the terms were

appropriated in began pushing them to the mainstream. Giving Dalby's words their due while

comparing them to my thoughts on the potential influences on SAE, it could be considered that

AAVE is both maintained and evolved by its own culture.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Effects on Language Usage

One notable area of interest pertained directly to the perception around a perceived

requirement to switch dialects as students or young learners. To best understand the differing

perspectives and consider how said opinions could have manifested, credence must be given to

the roles socioeconomic status and educational background played. Of the 10 subjects

interviewed 4 described childhood as growing up in more affluent neighborhoods, being one of

very few black children in the neighborhood and attending what could be considered upper-class

(Homogenous) school systems. The remaining research subjects all reported growing up in

culturally diverse (Diverse) communities and school systems which were stated as lower on the

socioeconomic ladder.

These four subjects interviewed which identified growing up in white neighborhoods all

shared a similar opinion which leads to contradictory answers in follow up questions. Simply

put, all summarized that they did not believe they "had" to codeswitch between African

American English and Standard American English, because there was effectually no right or

wrong way to communicate; importance relied on the ability to manufacture and distribute

language in a code which could be understood. These beliefs were reinforced through

explanations in which language usage was instructed in ways that did not include conflict or

result in direct self-evaluations. While analyzing these testimonials, I could not help but consider

their correlation to Wenworth and Patterson's (2001) study on female college students with varying degrees of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Summarizing their findings, the research indicated that despite similar situations which could be considered "desperate", white females had recalled moments where they "caught a lucky break". They often had situations where they could work out lease arrangements or didn't have to go through thorough background checks for apartments, for example. Yes, there were different factors which lowered their status or social power level such as socioeconomic background, their gender, sexuality, being a single mother; but what counted in their favor was that they were white. This concept of power in society both as a whole and in academia specifically, was also considered in other discussed works by Tatum (2017) and Delpit (1988). This made me consider the notion that the segregation of socioeconomic factors while developing in an affluent social structure could feasibly cause a level of obliviousness to certain scenarios of codeswitching. Going back to Tatum's methodology in diagnosing power, this level of socioeconomic status during development (black male–Homogenous v. black male–Diverse) could have blinded some of the subjects to the subtle opportunities they were afforded; namely the opportunity to develop thoughts on language usage without fear of peril or reprisal. As a researcher, I cannot help but connect these dots while understanding them as important markers as to why the interviewed black males from "Homogenous" classified backgrounds largely struggled to express their complete thoughts and feelings on codeswitching; but still knew they felt something.

This was expressed in later portions of interviews, where the same 4 subjects admitted to feeling different in scenarios which were more culturally diverse or they were surrounded by peers of similar race. These statements can be summarized as leaving the subjects feeling at ease

or more enriched by the surroundings or the conversations. As a college student who is also an instructor, one that has held professional positions before, I can understand and appreciate the idea that it does feel 'easier' to talk to people in my social structure or peer group, who know me as me – not as an educator or colleague. But this notion could be drilled into further if considering racial, cultural, or linguistic context. I could not help but connect the social classifications and academic experience to subjects being able to identify the specific reasons as to why they felt more at ease speaking in AAVE.

Perceived Importance of AAVE in Socioeconomically Diverse Communities

This scenario was referenced by everyone interviewed, but those from communities considered "Diverse" were able to more fully explain why they felt this way. Based on data collected, a correlation could be made to a lack of a mentor confronting them about their language usage. More consideration or credence could be given to Tatum (2017) and the notion that black constancy does not develop in African-Americans until the age of 6 or 7, and thus the dominant culture has affected the child – considerably to the point they want to be white. Now, I'm not suggesting this is the case entirely, however this could be another factor supporting why all four subjects classified into "Homogenous" grouping struggled to explain why it felt easier to connect using AAVE in an all-black environment. Further correlation could be associated with Tatum's (2017) statements on subordinate/dominant culture that exists in young adult education social structures, when children first begin to discover who they are and compare it to the world around them. This includes taking on the opinions (logical or illogical) of the group they identify themselves with. In "Homogenous" communities, it should be noted that all subjects did not have a peer group which could be considered culturally diverse while they developed into maturity.

Their interactions and experiences had were based on largely white peer groups with largely white teachers.

This sort of social grouping and power dynamic paints a starkly different picture as to that expressed by the interviewed subjects which were of classified in "Diverse". These students shared stories of direct confrontations with instructors and peer groups and support structures that were largely African American. They were more influenced by an African American culture that was embraced in social contexts, as well as the thoughts and opinions of their identified peer group. When needing support after difficulties or confrontations such as described in the research, these students found support in other black students who were often dealing with (or had dealt with) similar struggles.

Why these summations are important is because they directly oppose prior considerations of value in using AAVE as a cultural connection point. Restating this succinctly, all four subjects believed in the importance of AAVE as a cultural language but stated they did not agree on the existence of a 'right or wrong' way to communicate. When questioned further on this discrepancy, those same 4 subjects stated varying accounts of not feeling pressured to codeswitch in educational– because as one subject stated: "they knew better" (subject #1). This was a stark difference from the viewpoints and experiences shared in interviews of their research counterparts from lower income and more diverse communities.

The discussion and noted differences here can be linked directly back to Delpit (1988) and considerations of the five tenants of power within pedagogy. Namely, the concept that those who have power in academia (white people as being the primary source of instruction, direction, and instructional material) indicate and reinforce the direction or appropriateness of language,

intentionally or otherwise (p. 282). Delpit reinforces this concept, summarizing that those most able to view power structures are those who do not have any. (p. 283). Considering Delpit's views and how they relate to the interviewed subject responses on this matter, correlation can be found regarding subjects' feeling of empowerment based on socioeconomic background and its related academic experience, the perception of power and how it is viewed by young learners, and the impact of personal perception of vernacular value. Simply put, based on interview data collected and researched material consideration could be made that a student is more apt to recognize power if they come from an environment which they feel they have none. The more affluent students recognized the power of instructors and "knew better" than to speak incorrectly; but they conceivably found it less impactful because they were viewing the experiences from more empowered positions than their less affluent counterparts.

 "Diverse" student descriptions of these same occurrences were much more direct and specific. If certain peripheral information was forgotten in the years since the events occurred, memories still focused on feelings, statements, or parts of the interaction which have impacted not only the student's thoughts on language, but also how it is used and who uses it.

Perception of White People using AAVE

Considering reviewed literature and the discussion created through analyzing thematic consistency amongst researched subjects, results would indicate the perception of power as a significant factor in the African American male's perception of white people's usage of AAVE. Whereas "Diverse" subjects were more vocal in their descriptions of the codeswitching using adjectives such as "condescending" or "unauthentic", those from communities classified as "Homogenous" used descriptors such as "unnecessary". Homogenous students grew up being

told more-or-less that speaking white was the key to success. These same students, as adults, struggle more so with white people using AAVE because it was the confrontational influence of white instructors and mentors which shaped this perception. If it's so wrong to talk like a black person, then why is my white colleague or boss doing so?

Restrictions and Limitations

The most obvious limitation of this research study must be considered the sheer number of subjects interviewed. Though the 10 interviewed subjects paint an accurate picture of their experiences as individuals developing perception of language usage in diverse settings; it cannot be considered a complete representation of the entire African American position on the matter.

Furthermore, this research is limited in scope of employed positions held as it focuses more towards interactional employment of various sales positions. This step was done intentionally to focus more on positions which required specific skills of language and communication. Further consideration could be made as to the perception of language usage within other career fields, as well as developed perceptions in more refined socioeconomic classifications.

Another limitation could be found in the varying environments in which interviews were conducted. As some interviews were conducted via online conferences, the extenuating circumstances of the interviewee's environment could have determined the amount of focus towards questions, or the general interest in partaking in the interview at any given moment. Though this could have been remedied through dedicating one uniform meeting environment to conduct all interviews; that step was not feasible due to proximity and time restrictions of both the interview candidates and the researcher.

Limitation must be stated as the educational accomplishments of these research subjects falls far removed from traditional statistics of African American educational achievement percentages. This could cause differentiation in responses based on educational experience and collegiate completion, which suggests this research represents a smaller sample of the demographic.

Finally, limitations must be considered in the answers provided by interviewed subjects and the correlated subsequent results for multiple reasons. Firstly, I am willing to except the consideration that my status as a white male may have skewed answers provided by research subjects. As there is a level of gatekeeping or protection of language perception that has been discussed in this research; it is only fair to consider this sort of action lead to the providing of potentially limited or augmented responses. Secondly, research could be hindered by the fact that, regardless of socioeconomic scope, not all subjects were able to provide insight when prompted by interview questions. These sorts of omissions could play a part in the connection of thematic relevance among answers provided, thus further skewing both the data collected and subsequent thematic analysis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through researching the above literature, coding hours of interview data, and finding thematic correlation, it can be concluded that early influences of socioeconomic status, race, and power in social and academic settings can directly influence the perception adult African American males have pertaining to usage of African American Vernacular English and its usage; as well as influence their thoughts regarding codeswitching between AAVE and Standard American English.

Interviewed subjects leant thematic relevance to the notion that codeswitching in professional environments can have both positive and negative effects, situationally speaking. Interviewed subjects with relevant thought on the matter discussed occurrences where using AAVE or codeswitching to SAE helped them to win business or build professional relationships. Though not all of the subjects could actually express direct instances in which this happened, virtually all could identify or associate with the feelings they caused. Whereas using SAE would help build professional relatability; AAVE discourse, when used appropriately in a way that was socially and interpersonally aware, helped the employee to better relate black professionals to their black clients through cultural connection.

In educational settings, the amount of codeswitching or rationale behind its usage relied heavily on interaction with mentors, fear of repercussions in academic or social life, and socioeconomic background. Again, in this instance it would seem as though effect or reprisal lead to decisions as to when codeswitching was needed. Regardless of socioeconomic (Diverse or Homogenous) status, there was a need for approval through speaking in whatever way was deemed correct. Though this was largely portrayed as speaking in SAE, it was perceived based

on several factors ranging from "correct" or "academic" to talking "like a white person"; and was a requirement to develop into a successful student or community member. Whether directly or indirectly, the choices of these students to employ codeswitching strategies was based largely on the extenuating circumstances and interpersonal decision to either relate to a community or peer group, or to succeed in a way that was prescribed. The creation of this sort of mentality could have last effects which demonstrate themselves in language production choices of African American males, continuing into adulthood and professional careers

As expressed earlier in the discussion, social usage of AAVE seemed to resonate with all subjects interviewed. Some could explain them wholeheartedly, while others struggled to eloquently provide insight into their thoughts on the topic. Within social structures which would be considered culturally relevant (hanging out socially with other black people), the usage of AAVE was a natural communication pattern which tied back to shared cultural experiences. The black males interviewed primarily viewed codeswitching to SAE in this environment as more of an inclusionary tactic meant to welcome other cultures into community conversation; almost as a means of gatekeeping and creating a space for all to take part. The amount of codeswitching fluctuates based on awareness of the outside parties, and their connection to the group as a whole.

This study has furthered my understanding of African American Vernacular English and how it has developed and impacted society. I conclude this research with a greater consciousness of how perceptions of dialect and language can form while having a significant and lasting impact and influence on how language users codeswitch. Though true comprehension and conclusion rests in the expansion of the study to a much larger scale; I do believe this thesis lays

the groundwork for greater awareness of how our interactions and perceptions of language, as educators, can influence our students and colleagues of other cultures and races. The same who's lives we aim to enrich with knowledge and empower with the ability to impact positive change on the world.

References

Anthony, K. R. (2001). Poâ€™ Folks [Recorded by Track Boyz]. Performed by Nappy

    Roots. On *Watermelon, Chicken, and Gritz*. Atlanta, Georgia: Atlantic Records.

Brown, C. (1977). The language of soul. In T. Kochman (Ed.), *Rappin' and stylin' out:*

    Communication in urban black America (pp. 134-139). Urbana, IL: University of

    Illinois Press.

Dalby, D. (1972). The African American elements in American English. In T. Kochman

    (Ed.), *Rappin' and stylin' out: Communication in urban black America* (pp. 170-186).

    Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Preess

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's

    children. *Harvard Educational Review*, *58*(3), 280-299. doi:10.17763/haer.58.3.

    c43481778r528qw4

    Fordham, S. (1999). Dissin' "the standard": Ebonics as guerrilla warfare at Capital High.

    Anthropology & Education Quarterly,30(3), 272-293.

Fordham, S. (1999). Dissin' "the standard": Ebonics as guerrilla warfare at Capital High.

    Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 30(3), 272-293.

Garner, T. (1983). Playing the dozens: Folklore as strategies for living. *Quarterly Journal of*

    Speech, *69*(1), 47-57. doi:10.1080/00335638309383634

Gilmore, P. (1985). "Gimme room": School resistance, attitude, and access to literacy. *Journal of*

    Education, *167*(1), 111-128. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748516700108

Holt, G. S. (1972). "Inversion" in black communication. In T. Kochman (Ed.), Rappin' and

    stylin' out: Communication in urban black America (pp. 152-159). Urbana: University of

    Illinois Press.

Jensen, A. R. (1969). How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement? *Harvard*

    Educational Review, Reprint Series, 2.

Katz, A. (1997). Keepin' it real: Personalizing school experiences for diverse learners to create

    harmony and minimize interethnic conflict. *The Journal of Negro Education, 68*(4), 496-

    510. doi:10.2307/2668150

Kochman, T. (Ed.). (1977). *Rappin' and stylin' out: Communication in urban black America.*

    Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Kohl, H. R. (1994). *I won't learn from you: And other thoughts on creative maladjustment*.

    Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Labov, W. (1975). *Language in the Inner city: Studies in the black English vernacular*.

    Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rickford, J. R. (1992). Grammatical variation and divergence in vernacular black English.

    Internal and External Factors in Syntactic Change, pp. 175-193.

    doi:10.1515/9783110886047.175

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group–Thomson

    Learning.

Speicher, B., & McMahon, S. M. (1992). Some African-American perspectives on Black

    English vernacular. *Language in Society, 21*(3), 383-407.

Wentworth, P., & Peterson, B. (2001). Crossing the line: Case studies of identity development

in first generation college women. *Journal of Adult Development*, *8*(1), 9-21.

Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.