

The Right (Write) Start: African American Language and the Discourse of Sounding Right

ANNE HAAS DYSON

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

GENEVA SMITHERMAN

Michigan State University

Background: *Both academic research and educational policy have focused on the diverse language resources of young schoolchildren. African American Language (AAL) in particular has a rich history of scholarship that both documents its historical evolution and sociolinguistic complexity and reveals the persistent lack of knowledge about AAL in our schools and the continuing negative stereotypes about its speakers. Currently, federal funds for early schooling target the literacy learning of low-income children, who are disproportionately children of color; these programs, though, assume, as a literacy “basic,” a singular correct way of using language. The stage is set, then, for communicative disconnects between teachers and children during literacy instruction.*

Purpose: *In early literacy studies, such communicative disconnects between teachers and children have been discussed primarily in relation to reading. Our focus is on teacher-student interactions about children’s writing, that is, about their efforts to make a voice visible on paper. Writing is a rich context for studying how AAL figures into early literacy teaching and learning. Teachers urge children to listen to how their words sound in order to compose their message. But what sounds “right” to young children will vary for developmental, situational, and, as emphasized herein, sociocultural reasons. We illustrate how, in the course of teacher-student interaction, young children’s major resources for learning to write—their very voices—may become a source of problems.*

Research Design: *The article draws on data collected in an ethnographic project on child writing in a test-monitored and basics-focused elementary school in a midsized urban school*

district. Most of the school's children were from low-income homes of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One important pedagogical site for teaching basic literacy skills in the observed first grade was teacher-led editing conferences, in which the classroom teacher focused on written conventions, including standardized usage. These conferences (and all afternoon activities) were documented over the course of an academic year primarily through observation accompanied by audiotaping and collection of children's products. This article features the writing experiences of one focal child, Tionna.

Recommendations: *We conclude with a consideration of the goals of language arts programs in contemporary times. Certainly, assisting children in extending their communicative repertoire to include the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) is a worthy curricular goal for the school years. At the same time, we question U.S. monolingualism and monodialectalism in a multilingual world demanding communicative flexibility.*

Out in the hall, during reading group with the student teacher (Ms. Hache), 6-year-old Tionna has been up to mischief, verbal and otherwise—being “bad,” to use her own label; she was finding places to go (the “Women’s”), interesting words to report (from the wall of the “Women’s”), and, in general, topics other than those Ms. Hache had in mind. Now, back in the classroom, Tionna writes about this “bad” business in the context of a popular child-initiated topic: why my teacher Mrs. Kay is “the best.” (Sometimes, but not today, Ms. Hache gets to be “the best” too.)

In her piece, Tionna assumes an in-charge voice, explaining how Mrs. Kay herself takes charge. Then she meets with Ms. Hache to do her “fix-its” (her editing). As we listen in, they are working on the first part of Tionna’s extended text:¹

Ms. H.: (reading Tionna’s text) “Mrs. Kay is the best teacher. She is nice”—oh! Nice try [on *nisse*].

Tionna: OH LORD. (exasperated, since “nice try” to her means “wrong”)

Ms. H.: Close. You have the first two letters. Any idea what other letter might make the *s* sound? (Tionna says “C.”) Good job.

(Ms. H. continues reading) “She is nice but if you be bad”—let’s listen to how that sounds. Do you think that sounds right? “But if you be bad”?

Tionna: (says nothing)

Ms. H: Can you say that a different way maybe?

Tionna: (says nothing)

Ms. H: “If you” (hopeful pause)

Tionna: (says nothing)

Ms. H: “If you” (another hopeful pause). What about “If you are bad”?

Tionna: What? (i.e., What about it?)

And now, once again, this time through no deliberate action on Tionna’s part, she and Ms. Hache are at a communicative impasse.

“What do you want to say?” “Does that sound right?” “How could you say that better?”—these are classic questions in the teaching of writing. From the earliest school years on, teachers, like Tionna’s, rely on “saying” and “listening.”

This pedagogical directive to listen to how one’s words sound is not at all unreasonable. Written language *is* language, a cultural extension of speech. And, like all speech, it is a way of giving voice, of taking a turn, in a communicative situation (Bakhtin, 1981). And yet, there is potential tension between the diverse sociocultural and linguistic resources of our school population and an official emphasis on “a better” way with words—for what sounds “right” to young children will vary for developmental, sociocultural, and situational reasons.

And this brings us to that communicative disconnect between Tionna, a speaker of African American Language (AAL), and Ms. Hache, who was attuned to a “standardized” English.² The phrase “If you be bad” *is* an AAL grammatical pattern and, no doubt, sounds right to Tionna. Such disconnects are not new problems in the teaching of young children (“OH LORD,” to quote Tionna). But in early literacy studies, they have been primarily discussed in relation to reading, not writing (e.g., Allington, 1983; Labov, 1995; Piestrup, 1973). Moreover, these disconnects are newly dramatized against the backdrop of the current political context of education, in which schools with federally funded reading programs, like Tionna’s, are under increased pressure to focus on “the basics.” In writing, these include conventions for organizing and encoding language, among them capitalization, punctuation, and, emphasized herein, grammatical usage.

In this article, we illustrate how children’s voices *are* their major

pedagogical resource for learning to write and are also potentially construed as a major pedagogical problem. To do so, we draw on data from an ethnographic study of children learning to write in Tionna's urban school. We chose Tionna as our major guide into the intricacies of speech and writing because she was a particularly talkative AAL speaker and the most prolific writer in Mrs. Kay's first-grade class. As Tionna's speech becomes visible on paper, we will serve as docents of a sort, guides who ask you to notice certain features of the instructional goings-on. Anne will attend relatively more to the social and compositional unfolding of Tionna's writing acts, and Dr. G. to the sociolinguistic features that complicate and enrich the textual goings-on. Ultimately, we aim to contribute to efforts toward (1) professional education programs that support teacher knowledge about developmental, situational, and cultural aspects of language variation and, particularly relevant herein, AAL and how that variation figures into learning to write; (2) pedagogical action attuned to young children's authorial intentions and challenges (e.g., getting their messages on paper) and, conversely, awareness of the pedagogical limits of correction in and of itself for widening a young child's sociolinguistic repertoire; and (3) curricula that normalize and contextualize language variation, whatever the communicative mode, oral or written; without such curricular efforts, children may indeed learn that aesthetically and rhetorically there *is* only one "better" way with words. Is this what we as educators want?

Too often, professional development programs provide teachers with, at best, a list of AAL features. These idealized features may not be recognizable when the nonnative speaker encounters them in the real world of social interaction and language use. Educators need real-world language interaction scenarios so that they can see how such lists play out and create conflict and confusion for young children entering into literacy. Herein, we provide just such scenarios.

Before we venture further into speech and writing complexities with Tionna, we provide a brief policy context describing the language values (i.e., the ideology) undergirding curricular guidelines for local federally supported schools; we also offer a sociohistorical perspective on AAL and the schools. Then, after a description of the project data set from which the examples come, we will be ready to call Tionna once again center stage.

ON STANDARDS, BASICS, AND YOUNG CHILDREN

As Tionna waits in the wings for her call, we bring on, for a brief moment, a much better known child and, unlike Tionna, a fictional one. This

young child has a vital presence in the popular realm of commercial books for children. She is Junie B. Jones, the 6-year-old star of a book series for the 5–8 crowd, a favorite of Tionna's.

Listen to Junie B.'s language in the next scene. Junie B., portrayed as middle class and White, has been having difficulty thinking of what to be for career day. She is sitting on the bus, chatting with other kindergartners, making up a job in which she could engage in all manner of appealing actions:

Except for I just couldn't think of anything [i.e., any real job that fit the description]. And so my face got very reddish and hotfish. . .

"See? Told ja!" said that mean Jim. "There is no such job! Told ja! Told ja! Told ja!"

After that I sat down very quiet. And I stared out the window... I got off the bus at my corner. Then I runned to my house speedy quick. (Park, 1993, pp. 28–30)

Luckily, Junie B., like her "bestest" friends Lucille and Grace, came up with a costume, as did mean Jim, who got on the bus the next morning wearing a bathrobe as a "kung fu karate guy":

"Jim is a kung fu karate guy," I said to Grace. "Except for he just got out of the bathtub." Then me and her laughed and laughed. (p. 50)

Junie B. has been designed to speak in ways that mark her as a charming child. Outside the institution of school, common features of young English-speaking children's language have long been used as symbols, not of failing to measure up, but of innocence and naïveté by popular literature and greeting card companies. There tend to be no worries about those errors because the expectation is that children will become proper-speaking adults, like Junie B.'s parents. And yet, if she attended Tionna's "at-risk" school, Junie B.—despite her huge commercial success and her place on the *New York Times* bestseller lists—would fail to meet basic standards, as we explain.

THE PROPRIETY OF A "PROPER" POLICY FOR THE "AT-RISK"

The purpose of current federally approved curricular materials and

testing requirements is to increase the achievement scores of low-income children, who are disproportionately children of color.³ These “at risk” children are viewed as needing a tight, direct focus on the basics (cf. Ladson-Billings, 2005), as has been the case since the beginnings of intense interest in children’s literacy during the War on Poverty (e.g., Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966).

This emphasis calls attention to the surface of language, that is, to how a proper written voice should look and sound (cf. Collins, 1996). In Tionna’s urban district, curricular guidebooks declare that kindergartners should master “grammar” basics, like orally using “the correct form” of irregular verbs like *go*, *have*, and *do* and of using verbs that agree with their nouns and the right pronouns in compounds (e.g., “somebody and I are going go somewhere,” not “me and somebody”). First graders should write all these forms with correct capitalization and punctuation. They should display these skills by fluently writing three coherent sentences. The timely mastery of such skills is monitored through the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Thus, unlike Junie B. Jones, the “at-risk” young child has no “pretty errors” (Steedman, 1982, p. 65) and no developmental charms as a child speaker. Language features portrayed in the psycholinguistic literature as “typical” of those learning English as a first or second language (e.g., regularizing irregular patterns), not to mention those that might be deemed vernacular variations, or even informal registers (e.g., “Me and Ruthie...”), are simply errors to be corrected. In this article, we feature AAL grammatical usage “errors” corrected in Tionna’s writing conferences.

For reasons both theoretical and pragmatic, “standardized” grammatical usage seems problematic as a foundational basic for learning to write. Children’s language use is indeed guided by a sense of what sounds right, but that sense does not come from a grammar textbook (cf. Bakhtin, 1981). It comes from their sensitivity to how voices should sound in varied kinds of communicative situations with different purposes and participants (i.e., “genres”; Bakhtin, 1986). This sensitivity to how *to be* is on display in child play, when children demonstrate their communicative flexibility, sounding like all manner of familiar others—mothers, teachers, preachers, fast food workers, boyfriends and girlfriends, hip-hop stars, radio DJs, and on and on (Dyson, 2003; Garvey, 1990).

Moreover, to find their way into writing, children depend on the familiar and typified voices of their everyday lives—the voices of families, friends, media figures, and teachers. These voices literally reverberate in their own as the children orally articulate what they are going to say and monitor its encoding on the page. Thus, as Tionna and her teachers will illustrate, a curricular and pedagogical knowledge of young children’s

languages is important in identifying and helping young children meet the challenges they experience in figuring out how to make a voice visible on paper.

Certainly assisting children in extending their communicative repertoire to include the Language of Wider Communication (LWC; Smitherman, 1979) is a worthy curricular goal for the school years. But mastering the so-called proper way is not a precursor to learning to write. In fact, there is no evidence that explicitly correcting young children's language in and of itself is effective, even if one's goal is in fact to eliminate grammatical features from a young child's repertoire (Lindfors, 1987). Conversely, there is evidence that children who speak nondominant vernaculars (including AAL) become bidialectal (or bilingual, in the case of AAL speakers) through interacting in diverse social situations with others who control varied ways with words, and through opportunities to exercise agency over language choices (Clark, 2003; Wyatt, 2001; Youssef, 1993).

Such communicative flexibility would seem important in a world that is not standardized, a world in which daily life is increasingly negotiated by the style shifters, the code switchers, the multilingual composers (Hornberger, 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). But, as the case of Junie B. already suggested, there is more than linguistic research and pedagogic logic involved in how schools respond to young children; there is also ideology and politics.

AAL AND THE SCHOOLS: LINGUISTIC PUSH-PULL REVISITED

It is said that those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it. It is instructive, then, to review historical attitudes and thinking about language that characterized the educational journey of AAL speakers. Further, it is imperative that we review the operation of this language ideology both in and outside of school because larger social, cultural, and community forces impact teachers and students.

In his 1933 assessment of the educational journey of African slave descendants since Emancipation, historian and educator Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1933/1969) soundly attacked the school curriculum for its exclusion of the historical and cultural experiences of Blacks and other people of color. Woodson also lamented the fact that in language study, students had been taught to scoff at and despise Black speech rather than to understand its linguistic history. Three decades later, in an assessment of the civil rights struggle for racial and educational equality, Professor Gordon C. Green (1963), who had taught at historically Black Dillard University, contended that Blacks had to overcome only one last "barrier

to integration.” They needed to “destroy this last chain . . . the Negro dialect” (p. 81). These two scholars of the past symbolize the linguistic ambivalence about AAL—the linguistic push-pull—that lingers in 21st-century schools and society.

Many linguists have noted the postmodern adoption (“crossover”) of AAL not only by White mainstream America but also across the globe (e.g., Alim, 2004; Green, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2006; Spears, 1998). Nobel Prize writer Toni Morrison celebrates “the language . . . the thing that Black people love so much. . . . Its function is like a preacher’s: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language” (quoted in LeClair, 1981). At the same time, there are those in the contemporary world who do not celebrate AAL. Examples include the negative comments of Dr. Bill Cosby (who holds an earned doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts), which were widely reported in the media (e.g., Cosby, 2004), and commentary from less well-known persons who work with Black youth, such as a journalist-writing coach whose complaints are her students’ “broken English” and the fact that in their writing style, they “spill their imagination onto the page, not attending to . . . punctuation” (Pratt, 2004).

Linguistic push-pull persists because language is not mere words, but words that reflect, remind, and recall culture, identity, peoplehood, and social history. The centuries-old negative perceptions and stereotypes of African Americans yet prevail. And although AAL has crossed over, African American people have not. Not only does social and economic inequality persist (e.g., Feagin, 2001; Walters, 2003) but also educational inequality—despite more than half a century since the 1954 *Brown* Supreme Court decision that was supposed to usher in educational equity for Black youth (e.g., Orfield, 2004). Reflecting on the *King* (“Black English”) court case of 1977–1979,⁴ on the 1996 Ebonics controversy,⁵ and on the continuing societal and educational concern about AAL, linguist Orlando Taylor put it this way:

Language is a reflection of a people. For example, French culture is perceived as high quality, its cuisine is considered to be great, its fashions are considered to be avant-garde. So if a person speaks with a French accent, it’s perceived to be very positive because the people are perceived positively. But if a group is considered to be ignorant, primitive, backward, ill-informed, then their language is given similar attributes. The problem is that African American people and Black people around the world are

perceived by dominant societies to be inferior, and so their language is perceived in a similar way. (quoted in Hamilton, 2005, p. 35)

This language ideology is the backdrop against which educational policy and classroom practice designed to address AAL have operated in the past and continue to operate today. In the immediate aftermath of *Brown*, one goal of such policy and practice was to completely eradicate AAL from Black students' communicative repertoire (e.g., Golden, 1960) and replace it with the mid-20th-century LWC. However, after the late 1960s and early 1970s research of linguists (e.g., Fasold, 1972; Labov, Cohen, Robbins, & Lewis, 1968) demonstrated that AAL was highly systematic and followed linguistic rules, the educational goal of many schools turned to bidialectalism (i.e., teach AAL-speaking students the LWC while allowing them to retain AAL). Since the 1990s, and particularly in private and African-centered schools, the goal has been multilingualism (e.g., Lee, 1992; Watson & Smitherman, 1996). This goal is a critical advancement in the language and literacy education of AAL-speaking students because it goes beyond command of English varieties to include competence in language(s) other than English—Swahili and Spanish, to cite two common language offerings. Further, the linguistic distinctiveness of AAL, in comparison with other English varieties, strongly suggests consideration of it as a language, not simply a dialect (see, e.g., Alim & Baugh, 2007; Fasold, 2001; Perry & Delpit, 1998a; Smitherman, 2000). Thus, AAL-speaking students in such schools emerge at least trilingual—that is, with competence in AAL, LWC, and Swahili (or Spanish).

The linguistic goal notwithstanding, there are two major areas that impact the success of language education for AAL speakers: (1) the continuing linkage of AAL with perceptions and attitudes about African Americans (whether explicitly articulated or not), and (2) teacher knowledge, or lack of such, about AAL, its history, and its linguistic and socio-cultural patterns.⁶ Language education programs for AAL-speaking children must focus on these two crucial areas, otherwise future generations of AAL youth will be doomed to illiteracy. To illustrate how AAL-speaking children's language resources can be transformed into language problems, we enter into Tionna's classroom, led by her hardworking teacher, Mrs. Kay.

ENTERING TIONNA'S CLASS: THE DATA SET

Tionna was a participant in an ethnographic project on child writing in an elementary school in a mid-sized urban school district. Most of the

school's children, like Tionna herself, were from low-income homes, but their heritages were diverse—among them, African American, Mexican, White, and American Indian. The project probes the tensions between societal diversity and educational homogeneity; in so doing, it focuses on how children's voices, steeped in everyday vernaculars and genres, entered into the public of a test-monitored urban classroom. That classroom, a first grade, was guided by the “nice” Mrs. Kay, a skillful and experienced teacher, and her young student teacher, Mrs. Hache.

Mrs. Kay, who is White, had spent her entire teaching career of over 20 years at this school site. She had taught through many curricular upheavals but, throughout it all, continued to sing, read, tell stories, and laugh with her children. She had participated in the district's professional in-services on writing workshop pedagogy (i.e., on children drafting and editing their own texts), and she had attended the district meetings on mandated textbook-based lessons. During the daily writing, or “journal,” time, Mrs. Kay worked conscientiously to help children meet grade-level expectations and to perform well on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), required only of K–2 students in state schools with federally supported literacy programs.

One important pedagogical site for teaching basic skills was teacher-led editing conferences; these conferences centered on written conventions, including standardized usage, all tested on the ITBS. The conferences could be spontaneous affairs, initiated by Mrs. Kay as she circulated while the children wrote at their desks. Other conferences were more formal and conducted at her work table, where Mrs. Kay met with a few children each day as they finished their writing. These conferences, and indeed all afternoon activities (including social studies lessons, reading groups, recess times, and the final activity of the day, the journal time), were documented through researcher observation (accompanied by audiotaping), informal interviews, and product collection.

In studying the data for the kind of “fix-its”—or textual errors—that Mrs. Kay, Ms. Hache, and the children attended to, Anne noted that only the teachers attended to grammatical usage in children's texts and, moreover, that that attention almost always rendered children silent (see Dyson, 2006). Tionna's data set was particularly striking. She had become, in both Mrs. Kay's and Anne's judgment, the best writer in the class in terms of fluency and vividness (e.g., inclusion of dialogue and narrative detail); in the last half of the year, Tionna's texts averaged 52 words, almost twice the class average. Mrs. Kay thought Tionna became an unusually strong writer precisely because “there's lots of talk in her home.” And yet, that talk, which was crafted as dialogue in her texts by the end of the year, was also a source of fix-its, fix-its linked to her cultural

membership in an African American family and community.

To understand this source of both linguistic strength and pedagogical disconnection, Anne sought the assistance of Dr. G. We join in discussing the data samples below, selected because they illustrate clearly the precarious and paradoxical position of everyday voices in learning to write. Those samples will, we hope, be generative of professional concern about how young children's voices should and do figure into the language arts curriculum.

TIONNA AND THE DISCOURSE OF RIGHT WRITING

Writing time in young children's classrooms tends to be a talkative affair. That talk serves varied functions. Among the most relevant in the examples to come are its interactional function, as children talk with each other about what they are—and are not—going to “say” in their papers (among many other topics); the self-regulatory function, as children orally monitor their words as their “saying” takes visual shape on paper; the directive and instructional functions, as teachers (and sometimes peers) direct children's attention to textual problems in what they have said; and, finally, performative functions, as the visual graphics are once again infused with the human voice when children have their “say” by sharing their texts with others. As function and audience shift, children's texts are situated in different kinds of conversations in which different kinds of standards—and different ways of saying—are at play, as we illustrate in the next section.

THE BIG PRESENT: FROM DISCURSIVE REJOINDER TO SPELLING CHALLENGE TO GRAMMATICAL ERROR

In this first example, Tionna was trying to meet a peer standard, so to speak, which involved having the “biggest” something related to Christmas. And the present her mommy got her—“i's BI::G!”, she told her tablemates. However, as Tionna worked to spell that contraction, and then to interact about it with her teacher, the standard—and indeed, the spelling challenge—was transformed. In the data sample below, Tionna is listening to her own voice as she writes “it's big.”

Tionna's Writing

and
is

Accompanying Talk

“and it” (to herself, planning)
“and, and”
“it's” (pronounced [Is])
“and it's” (rereading, again saying [Is])

“what’s” and “that’s.” Thus, “what’s” becomes “whass” and “that’s” becomes “thass” (or “dass,” following another AAL phonological rule in which voiced *th* can be replaced by voiced *d*).

In AAL, there are actually three “its,” all pronounced the same way: as [Is], not [Iz]. However, in the LWC in the United States, there are only two “its.”

Check it:

- (1) A 7-year-old at a car wash, observing several people lining up to take advantage of the offer of a free car wash for their birthday: “I’s a whole lotta people birfday today.” This existential “it’s” doesn’t occur in LWC, which uses “there is” or “there are” in existential contexts.⁷
- 2) Tionna’s “i’s BI: : :G!”
- 3) A 6-year-old reading aloud from a story: “The lil bird hurt i’s lil wing.”

Given these three forms of “its,” pronounced [Is], AAL-speaking kids learning to write have to learn not only when to use the apostrophe in “its” but also when to use “there is” and “there are.”

The “big present” example illustrates the reliance of young children and their teachers on the sounds of speech, a reliance that makes sociolinguistic complexity an integral aspect of teaching and learning to write. Using her speech as a major resource, Tionna presented a textual problem to Mrs. Kay. If Tionna was having a problem, though, it was not the grammatical problem of a missing word (and thus faulty sentence structure); rather, it was the spelling problem posed by a contraction. However, the effect of Mrs. Kay’s negative and erroneous feedback—there is no “missing word”—is that Tionna did not receive instruction on “it is” and “it’s” as alternate forms of written LWC. In fact, the very next day, Tionna again spelled the contraction of “it’s” as *is*.

The “present” example featured phonological variations; the next, a return to “being good,” features syntactic ones.

TREATS AND THE ECONOMICS OF BEING GOOD: FROM EXPLAINING THE ROPES TO GETTING TANGLED IN “BE’S

As detailed in the opening vignette, on this late January day, Tionna was intensely involved in explaining how Mrs. Kay kept order in the room (perhaps for the benefit of Ms. Hache, whom the children regarded as “not a real teacher”). After noting the rules governing the good behavior

treat, Tionna had gone on to write about the “homework chret [treat],” which Mrs. Kay gave to children who turned in all their homework on Friday (the “rite day” for turning in homework). As she explains in the last part of her full written text below, a child who is absent on Friday but turns the homework in on Monday is, sadly, out of luck; Monday is not treat day:

Mss. Kay is the best
 techer she is nisse [nice] but
 if you be bad she will
 Put your name on the
 bord[.] if you git your name on the bord 3 tims
 You will loos the
 good behavior treet[.]
 that will be bad[.] you
 will be sad[.] you haf
 to serve waut [what] you
 do [.] if you don't bee there
 you will loos the
 honwork chret [treat.]
 she will not giv you
 a honwork chrete if
 you don't bring it on
 the rite day

And, as she had done to “if you be bad,” Ms. Hache also corrected Tionna’s “if you don’t bee there” to “If you aren’t there.”

Although Tionna’s spellings reflected her pronunciation and included common spelling errors of young children (e.g., *ch* for *tr*), her grammatical patterns were consistent with the rules of AAL. In AAL, “be” and “bees” are used to describe events that occur habitually and cannot be translated simply as “is” or “are” because “is” and “are” lack the nuance of iterativity. By contrast, sentences without a form of “be” (referred to as “zero copula”) describe events or realities that are taking place or are true at the moment, or realities that simply exist, without conveying any suggestion of recurrence. Compare “They coffee cold,” meaning, “The coffee is cold right now,” with “They coffee be cold,” meaning “The coffee is cold on a regular basis.” The complex nuance of AAL “be” is nicely demonstrated in this brief exchange between two *sistas* in the beauty shop:

Barbara: Whoa! But I thought Betty was yo friend. [She is referring to an incident where Betty didn't speak to Shirley.]

Shirley: Yeah, she be my friend, all right.

In this exchange, one would expect Shirley to have used zero copula, that is, to have said, "Yeah, she my friend, all right," because this is the kind of reality that does not recur. Her statement is explained when she responds to the quizzical look on Barbara's face with these words: "When she want something." Thus, Shirley is using AAL "be" to convey the meaning that "Betty is my friend whenever she wants something from me."

When Tionna writes "be" and "don't be," she is using AAL "be" to convey the nuance of iterativity. Although Tionna's "be's" are not in the classic mold of habitual "be," it seems clear that her "be's" trump the conditional "if" in her statements. In other words, Tionna wants her reader to know that the misbehavior of her peers—"if you be bad"—is not only a possible but a likely and regular occurrence, as is the punishment for "being bad." Further, she wants the reader to know that every Friday is the day for the homework treats, that is, it's a recurring reality. But if a classmate fails to show up on any given Friday, he or she loses out on the treat; that too is a recurring reality. In short, Tionna is explaining how things work in Mrs. Kay's classroom, and they work this way habitually, again and again, time after time. In this context, then, the teacher's "correction" is *incorrect*; it fails to capture the complex meaning that Tionna was trying to convey.

A SAMPLING: FROM A POTPURRI OF ERRORS TO RULE-GOVERNED VARIATIONS

We have discussed in detail two vignettes from Tionna's data set; in each, we framed Tionna's text as a mediator of her social agenda, as containing "errors" within the "grammar" objectives informing instruction, and as rule-governed patterns within AAL. Before we turn to potential consequences of, and alternatives to, a traditional "basics" perspective, we offer here a brief sampling of other kinds of "errors" in Tionna's texts that are also evidence of her AAL resources.

To begin, consider the last line of the following text:

*On Sunday I rod my bike wisth my find [friend]
we had to herre uP
so we can go to her*

*house bekus it was
raneing **we wus riding***

That “we wus riding” continues Tionna’s consistency in using AAL grammatical rules. Linguistic outsiders have been known to say that all you need to do to “talk Black” is just omit all your verbs. Although it is true that “is” and “are” can be omitted (i.e., following the zero copula rule), the past tense forms of “to be” are not omitted. “Was” and “were” are used to indicate past action and realities. Tionna is true to the game, no doubt.

The next samples are drawn from a text featuring Tionna’s dog:

***Me and my friend
and her little sister**
we walls my dog and
the **dogs name prinses**
and she likes to play
with efereyone shes fun*

“Me and my friend and her little sister we walls my dog,” an example of pronominal apposition, represents yet another example of Tionna’s linguistic competence in AAL. Those who claim that the English language is “going to the dogs” rail against such “double subject” constructions. However, a case can be made for the use of pronominal apposition for emphasis. Here is an opportunity to teach Tionna how to capture that emphasis in writing (in this case, with commas and a hyphen), thus, “Me, my friend, her little sister—we [all] walk my dog.”

“[A]nd the dogs name Prinses” reflects Tionna’s use of zero copula in a classic equative clause structure (i.e., in LWC, “dogs name is Prinses”). Interestingly, here she includes the possessive “s,” which is not obligatory in AAL (and which, after all, is redundant) because AAL possession may be indicated by juxtaposition and context. Tionna thus demonstrates her developing command of LWC; on the other hand, there is still that missing apostrophe.

Finally, consider Tionna’s evaluative punch, so to speak, in the following text:

*Today me and Ellie went
down to the floor [of the gym]
we wer picking
with our boys that we like because
when we wer practiceing the songz*

rag [*Rags, the name of a song*]
he was Ating a fool [*acting a fool*].

“Ating a fool” recalls Tionna’s “OH LORD” (an idiom conveying exasperation and/or annoyance from the conversation we quoted at the beginning of this article). “Acting a fool” conveys description and disapproval of someone’s disruptive behavior, a kind of social acting out that is unwarranted. Characteristic of Tionna’s developing verbal dexterity, both in oral and written modes, she employs such iconic AAL idioms and expressive metaphors that are rooted in African American cultural experience. It is very grown-up talk for a 6-year-old. Clearly, Tionna has been listening to adult conversation in her surroundings and is incorporating these linguistic jewels into her own language resource kit. (In the closing section of our article, we highlight another such idiom, one used by Tionna’s friend, Mandisa: “dippin’ in the Kool-Aid and don’t even know what flavor it is.”)

THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIERARCHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE: FROM WISHES TO FIX-ITS

In the vignettes and textual productions presented, Tionna’s examples illustrated a young child working to manipulate symbolic media to have her “say.” But the very form of that saying could become simply wrong, given the hierarchical conception of language undergirding current curricula for the “at risk”; that is, the ruling conception of language is that there is a fixed, as opposed to a situated, proper way of speaking and writing.

This conception of language as it played out in identifying “fix-its” did not affect only the appreciation of, and instructional response to, a child’s writing. As Sims (1976) documented decades ago, even if young children do not themselves use certain vernacular features regarded as standard, they may have receptive control over them and build up expectations for reading them in books. This seemed to be the case for Tionna.

At the end of the first-grade year, Anne asked Tionna and other closely observed children to read Clifton’s (1992) *Three Wishes*, written to capture AAL. Tionna asked Anne to read the book to her; she became very involved in the story, commenting often on what had or would happen. In the book, Lena, a child out walking with her friend Victor, found a penny with her birthday year—a lucky penny! “Is there a penny with June 5th [her birthday] on it?” Tionna had asked when Lena found her penny. And when the book was over, she asked, “Got any more stories?”

In fact, when Anne came for a follow-up visit a year later, Tionna asked

for the *Wishes* book by name, which Anne indeed had in her tote. But this time, not only did Tionna read the book herself, but she also initially responded to it quite differently. Below is a sampling of the book's first four pages of text, Tionna's reading, and any commentary, by Tionna at the time (indicated by a T) or by us in retrospect:

| Text | Tionna's Reading | Commentary |
|---|---|--|
| <i>First wish was....</i> | "First wish was—" | "She shoulda put, "My first wish. . . ." (T) |
| <i>Victor say...</i> | "Victor says—say" | Tionna self-corrects. This time, she does not comment on the third-person singular variation, but that will change. |
| <i>"Look like some money," I say...</i> | "Look like—it looks like some money,' I say..." | Now Tionna corrects for an initial subject and for third-person singular. She is no longer correcting her reading; she is correcting the writing, which she explicitly says below: |
| <i>Victor say</i> | "Victor say—" | "Victor <i>says</i> ,' it's supposed to be." (T) |
| <i>"What you gonna wish?"</i> | "What will— What you gonna wish?" | When Tionna self corrects, she changes her intonation so that the written question sounds right. |

Soon Tionna was concentrating once again on the story. But, when the story was over, Anne asked her if she thought Lucille Clifton was a good writer. "Kind of," she said, "but some words need to be fixed. Like it says, *'bout* and it's supposed to be *about*."

Clifton wrote a pretty good story, but she isn't saying it right. This is what Tionna seemed to have learned from school. Tionna did not yet have the words for making sense of the book and of her own reading actions in any discourse other than a hierarchical one about fix-its. And yet the characters in *Wishes* spoke AAL, just like Tionna did, and indeed, like most of her close friends and family.

Still, Tionna's very reading of the book—her ability to switch between "she say" and "she says," her deliberate changing of intonation and rhythm when moving to "What you gonna wish?" from "What will you wish?"—suggests an implicit understanding of oh so many complexities

about speaking/writing relationships in a sociolinguistically diverse society. Her reading suggested that sociolinguistic flexibility—code-switching and mixing—was becoming part of her communicative repertoire. She was expanding and adapting her resources for social, rhetorical, or aesthetic demands, as she understood them, just like she (and her classmates) had long been doing in play (for examples, see Genishi & Dyson, *in press*). There is the possibility of a different pedagogical story for Tionna, and for children generally, a story about communicative flexibility, not rigid propriety. And for this potential story, Tionna again offers material for reflection.

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION: FROM “RIGHT WRITING” TO FLEXIBLE COMMUNICATING

The alternative pedagogical story suggested above takes communicative flexibility, not mastering “right writing,” as its goal. The foundation for this flexibility is found in children’s talk and in their play. In this new story, children would not be asked to filter others’ voices through a “proper” and fine-grained filter. Rather, through reading diverse literature, through talk, and through dramatic play, they would be encouraged to keep their ears wide open to the diversity of voices around them.

And this, in fact, is what Tionna did, and it may be one reason that she was both a superb young writer and one whose ways with words could be deemed problematic. As Mrs. Kay herself had noted, Tionna’s writing became more elaborate in part because she literally appropriated other people’s voices. She wrote about what her dad or her grandma said; she replayed the words of her classmates, her close friends, her aunts and cousins, and even her teachers. For example, in one of her writing pieces, Tionna wrote about a cousin who: “all ways copy cat me and **I say** aret [aren’t] you tier [tired] of copycating me **she say** no am [I’m] not that is my favord [favorite] so plese stop asking [asking] me mame [ma’am] I get tier of that[,] calling me mame so I will call her mame.”

The assertive back and forth of Tionna’s written dialogue, her explicit feelings and conversational present tense (“she say” and “I say”), contrast with the more descriptive, syntactically complex, and formal prose of her texts based on her teacher’s talk. For example, “Yesterday Mrs. K wint to the doctor she had to leav for the rest of the after non because **she said** her son Kelly had a bump on his arm **she said** they had to remove it.” Moreover, the fact that she, like all class members, never wrote “ain’t” suggests some sense of language features marked generally as “unofficial” and nonacademic.

The sensitivity to voices Tionna displayed in her texts suggested that

she was learning, in fact, about how to sound “right.” She may not have mastered “the correct” way of speaking and writing at 6, but surely she was alert to the varied situated voices of her daily life. Her ability to manipulate language given different social relations—this seems what is truly basic.

COMMUNICATION RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN A MULTILINGUAL WORLD

You start dippin’ and dappin’ and you don’t know what’s happenin’. You dippin’ in the Kool-Aid and don’t even know what flavor it is. . . . ’Cause y’all got to stop—You guys got to stop dippin’ and dappin’ and you guys *do not know* what’s happenin’.
(Tionna’s friend Mandisa, age 6)

Mandisa draws on the popular AAL saying (in abbreviated form, “all up in the Kool-Aid and don’t even know the flavor”) to describe someone, lacking in knowledge of a situation, who nevertheless butts in, interfering in the mix. All of us who are professionals involved in the development and training of teachers, including heads of pre- and in-service teacher education programs, must know “what’s happenin’” in the linguistic world of, and the literacy challenges for, young AAL-speaking children such as Tionna. Otherwise we will be just “dippin’ and dappin’” in the mix, without a clue as to the “flavor” of the Kool-Aid.

We need an informed pedagogy and curriculum grounded in knowledge and understanding of AAL (and other languages and English varieties). We must be attuned to how these linguistic forms function in children’s progress toward oral and written literacy. Recall, for example, Tionna’s and Mrs. Kay’s miscommunication struggle with Tionna’s pronunciation of “it’s” as “i’s” and the fact that Tionna never did receive instructional feedback on the uses of the apostrophe in her writing. After the massive research on and numerous descriptions of AAL, both in and out of the classroom, over the past four decades; after the 1977–1979 *King v. Ann Arbor* federal court case that focused national and international attention on Black children’s language in the elementary school classroom and Judge Joiner’s ruling mandating that teachers take the children’s “Black English” into “account” in the teaching of literacy (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.); after the December 1996 (and beyond) Ebonics controversy, created by the Oakland (California) School District’s Resolution to use Ebonics to teach its students LWC, resulting in a U.S. Senate hearing and focusing national and international attention on the teaching of language and literacy skills to AAL-

speaking children—after all this rich, agonizing history, today in 2009, Black children’s acquisition of literacy continues to be hampered by inadequate knowledge of their teachers. That is mind-boggling if not inconceivable!

Over the past decades, the development of “World Englishes” has added an additional dimension of complexity to the quest for literacy not only by AAL-speaking children, but all children, including those whose first language is the LWC. As English has expanded into a global lingua franca, other nations are remaking English in their own image, no longer yielding to the standardized language norms and conventions of “native speakers.” Their speech community is no longer just American or British communities, but millions of speakers of English around the world who have developed their own varieties of English. According to British linguist David Graddol, reporting in 1999, there were 668 million speakers of English as either a second or an additional language, compared with 433 million speakers of English only (or as a first language). The number continues to grow. These 668 million speakers have developed skills in language accommodation, wherein they readily negotiate communication with speakers of English varieties different from their own. By contrast, U.S. English monodialectal speakers lack such skills, which can negatively impact their success in interacting with World English speakers (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006). If we are to prepare students for life and communication beyond school, our pedagogy and instructional strategies must reflect knowledge of communication in the multilingual world of the 21st-century global village. Tionna, with her sociolinguistic dexterity, seemed to have the “basic” foundation for expanding her communicative repertoire in such a world.

Today’s and tomorrow’s students not only need to have skills in communications involving English varieties other than their own, but they also need to have knowledge and command of languages other than English. Instead of “English Only,” they need “English Plus.” Thus, the monolingualism and monodialectalism of No Child Left Behind is exactly the *wrong* educational philosophy (Katz, 2004), this brainchild of educational leaders dippin’ and dappin’, all up in the Kool-Aid and don’t even know the flavor.

We need a national, official policy of bi/multilingualism, not just for Blacks, or Latinos, or Asians, but for *all* students going through school in the United States. Spanish should definitely be high on the list of languages that students would select from because it has the distinct advantage of large numbers of readily available speakers whom non-Hispanic students could practice with and learn from. In the world beyond the United States, multilingualism is not only the policy but also the practice.

For example, throughout Africa, most people, regardless of educational level, speak at least one language other than their “mother tongue,” and many everyday Africans speak three or more languages. Newly democratic South Africa has multilingualism enshrined in its constitution—11 official languages (English, Afrikaans, and nine indigenous African languages), as well as sign language. The European Union’s commitment, including that of the United Kingdom, is to a multilingual and multicultural Europe.

School bi/multilingualism instruction should be not just in morphemes and phonemes, not just in the use of language as a “mere” tool of communication. Rather, the language(s) should be taught with a broad stroke, that is, including the culture, history, values, experiences, and sociopolitical realities of the speakers of the language(s). Education in and about language diversity should start early on, in preschool, and should include community campaigns to promote language/dialect awareness and promote acceptance and celebration of language diversity (e.g., Wolfram, 2004). Given the linguistic push-pull that continues to surround AAL, bi/multilingualism instruction should give high priority to AAL—its systematic properties, its history, and the relationship between AAL and African American life and culture. The study should reflect an African Diasporic perspective, which would open up avenues of self-exploration and discovery for *all* students.

The curricula efforts that we propose here would teach children that there are several “better” ways with words. These efforts would provide students like Tionna and her peers with the right (write) start.

Acknowledgements

The project discussed herein benefited from the much-appreciated support of the Spencer Foundation. The findings and opinions expressed are, of course, our own. Dyson thanks her terrific research assistants, Yaman Fan and Tandra Jackson.

Notes

1. Transcript conventions include the following: Parentheses enclosing text contain notes, usually about contextual and nonverbal information (e.g., reading, starts writing). Brackets may contain explanatory information inserted into quotations or written texts. Brackets are also used to provide phonetic information (e.g., the transcription “i’s” is pronounced [Is]). A capitalized word or phrase indicates increased volume. Colons inserted into a word indicate that the preceding sound was elongated (e.g., “Bi::g!”). Conventional punctuation marks are used to mark ends of utterances or sentences, usually indicated by slight pauses on the audiotape.

2. The distinction between a “standard” language and the historical, political, and ideological process of “standardization” is discussed by Milroy and Milroy (1999), Taavitsainen, Melchers, and Pahta (1999), and Wolfram, Adger, and Christian (1999). Through this process, societal gatekeepers work to suppress the inherent variability of language by authorizing uniformity.

3. See <http://www.NoChildLeftBehind.org>.

4. The formal name of the case was *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*. For details and analyses of this historic court case, see *The Ann Arbor Decision: Memorandum Opinion and Order & the Educational Plan* (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.), Bailey (1983), and Smitherman (1981).

5. For more on the Ebonics controversy, see *Ebonics: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, of the Senate Committee on Appropriations* (1997) and Baugh (2000), Perry and Delpit (1998b), and Ramirez, Wiley, de Klerk, Lee, and Wright (2005).

6. For a full discussion of pedagogical and social issues and various language instruction programs that have been tried over the years, see Rickford (1999).

7. Existential constructions are used to indicate that something exists. “It,” as well as “It’s,” may be used (e.g., “Is it any more banana pudding?”). The past tense may also be used in such constructions (e.g., “It was a lot of food there”). Lisa Green (2002) provided an excellent discussion of various existential constructions in AAL, accompanied by numerous examples from real-world speakers.

References

- Alim, H. S. (2004). Hip hop nation language. In E. Finegan & J. R. Rickford (Eds.), *Language in the USA: Themes for the twenty-first century* (pp. 387–409). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Alim, H. S., & Baugh, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Black language, education, and social change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Allington, R. (1983). Teacher interruption behaviors during primary grade oral reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 371–377.
- Center for Applied Linguistics. (n.d.). *The Ann Arbor Decision: Memorandum Opinion and Order & the Educational Plan*. Arlington, VA: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED273140)
- Bailey, R. W. (1983). Education and the law: The *King* case in Ann Arbor. In J. W. Chambers, Jr. (Ed.), *Black English: Educational equity and the law* (pp. 1–28). Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. Bakhtin* (pp. 254–422). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Baugh, J. (2000). *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bereiter, C., & Engelmann, S. (1966). *Teaching disadvantaged children in the preschool*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). The place of World Englishes in composition: Pluralization continued. *College Composition and Communication*, 57, 586–619.
- Clark, E. V. (2003). *First language acquisition*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Clifton, L. (1992). *Three wishes*. New York: Doubleday.
- Collins, J. (1996). Socialization to text: Structure and contradiction in school literacy. In M. Silverstein & G. Urban (Eds.), *Natural histories of discourse* (pp. 203–228). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cosby, B. (2004). *Dr. Bill Cosby speaks at the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court Decision, May 22, 2004*. Reprinted in *The Black Scholar*, 34(4), 2–5.
- Dyson, A. H. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dyson, A. H. (2006). On saying it right (write): “Fix-its” in the foundations of learning to write. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 41, 8–44.
- Ebonics: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, of the Senate Committee on Appropriation*. (1997). 105th Congress, 1st Session.
- Fasold, R. (1972). *Tense marking in Black English: A linguistic and social analysis*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Fasold, R. (2001). Ebonics need not be English. In J. E. Alatis & A. Tan (Eds.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics* (pp. 262–280). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Feagin, J. R. (2001). *Racist America: Roots, current realities, and future reparations*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Garvey, C. (1990). *Play* (enlarged ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Genishi, C., & Dyson, A. Haas. (in press). *Children, language, and literacy: Diverse learners in diverse times*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Golden, R. I. (1960). *Improving patterns of language usage*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Graddol, D. (1999). The decline of the native speaker. *AILA Review*, 13, 57–68.
- Green, G. C. (1963). Negro dialect: The last barrier to integration. *Journal of Negro Education*, 32, 81–83.
- Green, L. J. (2002). *African American English: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamilton, K. (2005, April 15). The dialect dilemma. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, pp. 34–36.
- Hornberger, N. (2000). Multilingual literacies, literacy practices, and the continua of biliteracy. In M. Martin-Jones & K. Jones (Eds.), *Multilingual literacies* (pp. 353–368). Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Katz, S. R. (2004). Does NCLB leave the U.S. behind in bilingual teacher education? *English Education*, 36, 141–152.
- Labov, W. (1995). Can reading failure be reversed? A linguistic approach to the question. In V. L. Gadsen & D. A. Wagner (Eds.), *Literacy among African American youth: Issues in learning, teaching, and schooling* (pp. 39–68). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Labov, W., Cohen, P., Robbins, C., & Lewis, J. (1968). *A study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican speakers in New York City* (Final Report, U.S. Office of Education, No. 3288).
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Reading, writing, and race: Literacy practices of teachers in diverse classrooms. In T. McCarty (Ed.), *Language, literacy and power in schooling* (pp. 133–150). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- LeClair, T. (1981, March 21). A conversation with Toni Morrison: “The language must not sweat.” *The New Republic*, pp. 25–29.

- Lee, C. D. (1992). Profile of an independent Black institution: African-centered education at work. *Journal of Negro Education*, 61, 160–177.
- Lindfors, J. (1987). *Children's language and learning* (2nd. ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Martin-Jones, M., & Jones, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Multilingual literacies*. Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (1999). *Authority in language: Investigating Standard English* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Orfield, G. (2004). A discussion on race and resegregation. *Southern Journal of Teaching and Education*, 1(1). Retrieved November 4, 2007, from http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/media/2004/index.html
- Park, B. (1993). *Junie B. Jones and her big fat mouth*. New York: Random House.
- Perry, T., & Delpit, L. (1998a). Holding on to a language of our own: An interview with linguist John Rickford. In T. Perry & L. Delpit (Eds.), *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African American children* (pp. 59–65). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Perry, T., & Delpit, L. (Eds.). (1998b). *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African American children*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Piestrup, A. (1973). *Black dialect interference and accommodation of reading instruction in first grade*. Berkeley: University of California, Language-Behavior Research Laboratory.
- Pratt, C. (2004, June 20). A test for Farwell Middle School. *Detroit Free Press*, p. 1F.
- Ramirez, J. D., Wiley, T. G., de Klerk, G., Lee, E., & Wright, W. (Eds.). (2005). *Ebonics: The urban education debate* (2nd ed.). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Rickford, J. (1999). Language diversity and academic achievement in the education of African American students: An overview of the issues. In C. T. Adger, D. Christian, & O. Taylor (Eds.), *Making the connection: Language and academic achievement among African American students* (pp. 1-30). McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Rickford, J. R., & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English*. New York: Wiley.
- Sims, R. (1976). What we know about dialects and reading. In P. D. Allen & D. J. Watson (Eds.), *Findings of research in miscue analysis: Classroom implications* (pp. 128–131). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Smitherman, G. (1979). Toward educational linguistics for the First World. *College English*, 41, 202–211.
- Smitherman, G. (1981). "What Go Round Come Round": *King* in perspective. *Harvard Educational Review*, 51, 40–56.
- Smitherman, G. (2000). *Talkin that talk: Language, culture, and education in African America*. New York: Routledge.
- Smitherman, G. (2006). *Word from the mother: Language and African Americans*. New York: Routledge.
- Spears, A. K. (1998). African American Language use: Ideology and so-called obscenity. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African American English: Structure history and use* (pp. 226–250). London: Routledge.
- Steedman, C. (1982). *The tidy house: Little girls writing*. London: Virago Press.
- Taavitsainen, I., Melchers, G., & Pahta, P. (1999). *Writing in nonstandard English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Walters, R.W. (2003). *White Nationalism, Black interests: Conservative public policy and the Black community*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Watson, C., & Smitherman, G. (1996). *Educating African American males: Detroit's Malcolm X Academy solution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Wolfram, W. (2004). Dialect awareness in community perspective. In M. C. Bender (Ed.), *Linguistic diversity in the South: Changing codes, practices and ideologies* (pp. 15–36). Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Wolfram, W., Adger, C. T., & Christian, D. (1999). *Dialects in schools and communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Woodson, C. G. (1969). *Miseducation of the Negro*. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers. (Original work published 1933)
- Wyatt, T. A. (2001). The role of family, community, and school in children's acquisition and maintenance of African American English. In S. L. Lanehart (Ed.), *Sociocultural and historical contexts of African American English* (pp. 261–280). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Youssef, V. (1993). Children's linguistic choice: Audience design and societal norms. *Language in Society*, 22, 257–274.

ANNE HAAS DYSON is currently a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She studies the childhood cultures and literacy learning of young schoolchildren. Among her recent publications are *The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write: Popular Literacies in Childhood and School Cultures* (Teachers College Press, 2003) and *On the Case: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, with Celia Genishi (Teachers College Press, 2005).

GENEVA SMITHERMAN is University Distinguished Professor of English and director of the African American Language and Literacy Program at Michigan State University. Her research interests are African American language and culture, South African language planning policy, and writing assessment. Publications include the classic *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977), and *Word From the Mother: Language and African Americans* (Routledge, 2006).