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Code-Switching

Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms

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2 Moving from Correction to Contrast: Code-Switching in Diverse Classrooms

Twenty squirmy second graders wiggle on the autumn red carpet as Mrs. Swords takes a seat in the comfy rocking chair before them. It's reading time and the children can choose whichever book they wish to hear that day. "Flossie and the Fox!" "Flossie and the Fox!" the children call. Since Mrs. Swords brought Flossie to class, the children haven't been able to get enough of it. Never before have they experienced a story in which characters speak like they and their mom and dad and friends do at home. By the third time the children heard the story, they broke into a choral response at one particular point: "Shucks! You aine no fox. You a rabbit, all the time trying to fool me."

But the fox walks a different verbal path. In reply, he tells Flossie, "Me! A rabbit! He shouted. 'I have you know that my reputation precedes me. I am the third generation of foxes who have outsmarted and outrun Mr. J. W. McCutchin's fine hunting dogs. . . . Rabbit indeed! I am a fox, and you will act accordingly.'"

Soon the children *knew* the book. They absorbed fox-speak and Flossie-speak.

Now Mrs. Swords invites the children to role-play. "Who would like to talk like a fox today?" Hands shoot up all over the passel of second graders. "OK, Devon, you be the fox. And who wants to talk like Flossie?" Mrs. Swords inquires.

In her blue belted pants, with neatly tucked white shirt, Heather jumps up and down, "Me, I do! I do."

"All right, Heather, you play Flossie."

Back and forth, back and forth, Devon and Heather play.

Children in the class keep tabs. They have already learned that language comes in different varieties or styles and that language comes in different degrees of formality, just like our clothing. The children

have already made felt boards and cutouts showing informal and formal clothing and have talked about when we dress informally and when we dress formally. And the children have taken the next steps. They have already looked at and discovered patterns in language—the patterns of informal language and the patterns of formal-speak. They have been primed.

Heather, stretching her linguistic abilities, banters with Devon. "My two cats be lyin' in de sun."

Wait a minute.

The class quickly checks the language chart on the classroom wall. Their chart shows how we signal plurality in both informal and formal English. Heather has stumbled. She has used the formal English pattern (*two cats*—in which plurality is shown by an *-s* on the noun) when she was supposed to be following the informal pattern (*two cat*—in which plurality is shown by the context or number words).

Mike hollers out, "Heather, wait a *minute!* That's not how Flossie would say it! You did fox-speak! Flossie would say 'My two *cat* be lyin' in de sun.'"

Heather stops. Hands on hips, she considers the wall chart. Mike is right! She regroups and recoups. "My two *cat* be lyin' in de sun!" Heather and Devon are back in their roles. Only one more minute till they swap sides.

In this way, the children practice choosing the forms of language appropriate to the time, place, setting, and communicative purpose. They code-switch between the language of the home and the language of the school.

Sometimes in writing a story, in order to develop a character, children choose the language of nurture, the language they learned on their grandma's knee. Other times, formal times, as when the children write up their research on the relative lengths of dinosaur teeth for their math storyboards, they know they'll choose the language of the professional world because they know that other teachers, the principal, and school visitors will see their work.

Throughout their classroom experiences, children learn to masterfully choose their language to fit the setting. And they do so with joy, verve, and command.

—Rebecca S. Wheeler

Excerpted from Brock Haussamen, with Amy Benjamin, Martha Kolln, and Rebecca Wheeler, *Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers*, Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003. Reprinted with permission.

The children in Swords's class seem to hear a different tune when it comes to language. They live inside a confidence and know-how about what they're saying when. Freed of the bonds of "correct and incorrect," the children know which variety is Standard English and which is the vernacular, and they navigate the linguistic trail as sure-footed as mountain goats.

What's the secret of Swords's classroom? What does she know about language? What do the children know? In other words, how do these new language ways play out in the daily language arts classroom? This chapter offers teachers answers to these questions.

The Correctionist Lens

Before exploring how to move to a new language arts, let's look again at business as usual in the integrated language arts (ILA) classroom.

Student: Mrs. Swords, why you be teachin' math in the afternoon?

Mrs. Swords: Why do I WHAT?

Student: Why you be teachin' math in the afternoon?

Mrs. Swords: Why do I what?

Student: Why you be teachin' math in the afternoon?

Mrs. Swords: We don't say, "Why you be teaching math in the afternoon?" We say, "Why are you teaching math in the afternoon?"

Student: Oh, OK.

But the next day the child would begin again, "Mrs. Swords, why we be havin' math in the afternoon?" And Swords would reply, "Why do we WHAT?" The exchange was always the same. She would attempt to "correct" the child's verb "error," but it was clear that no learning was taking place.

Rachel Swords, one of the authors of this book, began her career in an urban elementary school six years ago by correcting every sentence she deemed incorrect. As time went on, however, she noticed that her students were asking significantly fewer questions. She would call for questions and her students would begin: "Mrs. Swords, why you be . . . is you? Ain't you? Never mind." The students knew she was going to correct them. They tried to ask the question in the form the school system wanted, but they didn't know how. Rather than risk the embarrassment of being corrected in front of the class, students became silent.

Once Swords realized why the questions had stopped, she tried another, more passive approach. She would repeat a student's question in mainstream American English (*Why do I teach math after lunch?*) and then answer it, also in the same language variety. While this method didn't embarrass the children or hinder their questioning, their language did not change. Even though Swords consistently corrected their speech and writing, her students still did not learn the Standard English forms.

Swords and, we'd dare say, most teachers, take the same approach to student writing as in the following examples.

1. The dog name is Bear.
2. I have two cat.
3. Last year, he watch all the shows.

Seeing *I have two cat* and *The dog name is Bear*, Swords thought the children were struggling, having problems with these basic grammatical structures. In response, she tried to show students the "right" way to indicate plurality, possession, and tense, to teach them the way it "should be." So she red-penned the paper, "correcting" the "error."

Teachers envision a single "right way" to construct a sentence (Birch, 2001). The correctionist model diagnoses (or rather, misdiagnoses) the child's home speech as "poor English" or "bad grammar," finding that the child "does not know how to show plurality, possession, and tense," or the child "has problems" with these. A correctionist approach sees the student as having "left off" the plural marker, the apostrophe -s, and -ed. Teachers offer remedies: "That's not how you do it! That's not right! This is how you should do plural, possessive, tense."

When a teacher tells a vernacular-speaking child that he or she "shouldn't say it like that" or that "the right way" to show possession, plurality, past time, etc., is the Standard English way, the teacher effectively seeks to repress, stamp out, or eradicate student language that differs from the standard written target (Gilyard, 1991; McWhorter, 1998). This approach tries to subtract home language from the child's linguistic toolbox (Gilyard, 1991; McWhorter, 1998; Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

Swords's experience and approach is a common one. Concern with the vernacular dialects our children bring to school has been long-standing; Heath (1983) expressed it this way:

In the late 1960s, school desegregation in the southern United States became a legislative mandate and a fact of daily life. Academic questions about how children talk when they come to school and what educators should know and do about oral and written lan-

guage were echoed in practical pleas of teachers who asked: "What do I do in my classroom on Monday morning?" (p. 1)

Now, almost forty years later, teachers remain concerned: Christenbury (2000) has observed that "[o]ne of the most controversial—and difficult—issues for English teachers is their responsibility to students who speak what is considered 'nonstandard' English, English that violates the usage rules we often mistakenly call 'grammar'" (p. 202).

Christenbury's comment, subtle and revealing, sets the stage for the central concern of our work. English teachers routinely equate Standard English with "grammar," as if other language varieties and styles lack grammar, the systematic and rule-governed backbone of language. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What Linguistics Tells Us

When teachers talk about language as "correct" and "incorrect" (or "proper" and "improper," "good" and "bad," etc.), they implicitly assume that the only real and grammatical language is Standard English. Often, teachers believe that students' home language is nothing but degraded, inferior, failing attempts at hitting the Standard English target. But this simply is not true. Christenbury (2000) aptly observes that "telling or teaching students that their language is wrong or bad is not only damaging, but false" (p. 203). Doing so presupposes that only one language form is "correct" in structure and that that form is "good" in all contexts. Martin Joos (1967) explains why this is not true as he talks about "the five styles of English usage":

It is still our custom unhesitatingly and unthinkingly to demand that the clocks of language all be set to Central Standard time. . . . But English, like national languages in general, has five clocks. And the times that they tell are not simply earlier and later; they differ sidewise, too, and in several directions. Naturally. A community has a complex structure, with variously differing needs and occasions. How could it scrape along with only one pattern of English usage? (pp. 4–5)

In "scraping along" with only one English, we lose a profound resource, the language fluency children bring with them to school, fluency in the home language vernacular.

In this book, we show that when children come to school speaking a language variety different from Standard English, we can use the systematic structure of that language as a potent resource in teaching Standard English. Indeed, research shows that approaches that use the

vernacular to teach the Standard are more effective than those that don't (see Chapter 4; Rickford, 1999a, 1999b).

To build on children's language strengths, we need to take a number of cognitive leaps. We have described the first—recognizing what we are assuming about children's language; namely, we often believe that children's home speech is broken and ungrammatical. Next, we ask teachers to let go of those assumptions, to *cease believing*, for a moment, that the children are making errors. For only then will teachers open sufficiently to be able to perceive *pattern* in student language. Only then will a whole new approach to language arts open up to them.

Method in the "Madness"

Let's begin by looking at two common language patterns often diagnosed as "broken" or "bad" grammar: AAE possession (*My dog name is Bear*) and habitual *be* (*He be happy*). By looking at these examples, we begin the linguistically informed process of recognizing pattern where convention diagnoses error. Recognizing the pattern in child language will suggest a powerful alternative for the language arts classroom.

The Grammar of Possession in African American English

Drawn from the writing of three urban third graders on the Virginia peninsula, examples 4a–c are representative of language patterns of a broad range of speakers, K–16¹ and beyond (Green, 2002; Rickford, 1999a, 1999b; Taylor, 1991; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999).

4. a. We have sweets on the weekend at mom house.
- b. My goldfish name is Scaley.
- c. Christopher family moved to Spain.

Teachers, parents, and administrators alike describe the sentences in 4a–c as "error filled," finding that the child has "left off" the apostrophe *s* and "should be" producing the "correct" counterparts in 5.

5. a. We have sweets on the weekend at mom's house.
- b. My goldfish's name is Scaley.
- c. Christopher's family moved to Spain.

Yet linguistic research across four decades demonstrates that students who express themselves as in sentences 4a–c *do know* possession. How can that be?

Let's expand the data we just presented in order to discover the grammatical patterns at hand.

6. a. I go to Justin house.
- b. My mom old jeep is low on gas.
- c. The dog name is Bear.
- d. Christopher family move to Spain.
- e. Michael birthday is in March.
- f. My goldfish name is Scaley.

Instead of assuming that students are making errors, let's assume they are following a common pattern (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Using the Scientific Method in Language Arts

But if we think that students might be following a pattern, we'll need to collect enough samples of student language to be able to accurately figure out what the pattern is. That's why we call student writing "data"—because it is a set of sentences (data) that we will study to figure out what pattern happens again and again. When we figure out what pattern recurs, we will describe what we see, and that becomes a hypothesis we will check against other data.

Here are the steps to a linguistically informed approach to student writing:

- Collect data.
- Examine the data.
- Seek the pattern.
- Describe the pattern.
- Test your description of the pattern.
- Refine your description of the pattern.

If we can find a pattern, we may have found a grammatical rule.

The technique we are using with language data should sound familiar—it is the scientific method, applied to discovery of language structure. In code-switching, we use the scientific method to help us describe the structure of students' language, both written and spoken. As such, this approach takes grammar out of the realm of drill-and-kill, or memorization, and locates it squarely in the quadrant of critical, analytic thinking. It is even possible to use this style of language discovery and analysis to satisfy statewide standards for science that require that children apply the scientific method. Yes, even in the third-grade classroom. Swords has done so.

Returning to the data, just about any English speaker readily understands that these sentences convey possessive meaning: *Mom has a*

house, The goldfish has a name, and Christopher has a family. The question, then, is how these sentences carry possessive meaning, in and of themselves. Or, given that we know these sentences signal possession, what arrangement of words (i.e., what structural pattern) happens in each and every one? That pattern will be the possessive rule in this language variety.

When Swords posed this question to her third graders, they found the answer to be obvious: "Why, Mrs. Swords, they sit side by side! *Mom* is next to *house* and *goldfish* is next to *name*." In this fashion, the children easily (and independently) named the grammatical rule for possession in AAE. At Swords's prompting, the children got more specific. They decided that each sentence shows the pattern of *owner + owned*.²

Let's summarize the children's process; it's an approach we follow throughout this book. When Swords gave her students a set of sentences (data), they scanned them, looking for what all the sentences had in common (of course, Swords led them through this process at the outset). Then, finding a pattern, the children articulated the regularity, stating it as a rule. In this way, students discovered the grammatical rule of possession in AAE. In technical terms, we say that in AAE, possession is signaled by adjacency, the trait of one word sitting next to another (Smitherman, 2000). In this book, we go with the more user-friendly description, *owner + owned*.

True to the scientific method, Swords then led her students to test their hypothesis to make sure it really covers all the examples. Here's how we run a scientific check with our examples. We begin with sentence 6a and check whether the owner occurs before the thing owned. Yes, *Justin* is indeed the owner and comes before *house*, the thing owned. Similarly, in 6b, *mom* is indeed the owner and comes before the thing owned, *jeep*. We proceed down our collection of data, verifying that our hypothesis captures all the facts. Then we check our hypothesis against any new data that come along, revising it as appropriate to capture the new language data.

We have now confirmed our hypothesis: in this language variety, we signal possession by *owner + owned*, or as they say in New Orleans, "alongside nouns."³ In this way, we have discovered and named the grammar pattern the children are following.

Thus, sentences such as *My goldfish name is Scaley* do not lack grammar. The speakers have not "left off" the apostrophe -s; they are not making errors or failing to show possession. Instead, they have very precisely and successfully shown possession by following the systematic grammatical patterns of their language of nurture. This grammatical pattern simply stands in contrast to the pattern for possession in Standard English.

We can begin to represent the teacher's and students' understanding in a graphic organizer called a code-switching or contrastive analysis chart, as in Figure 2.1. Clearly, the chart is incomplete at this point. We haven't yet translated the informal English into formal English. We save the specific techniques of translation for the applied sections of this book. In the meantime, we want to give you a visual way to represent the understanding that AAE and Standard English use different patterns to show possession. Swords and other teachers put charts such as this one (with both columns completed) up on classroom walls to help students during editing.

Possessive Patterns	
Informal English	Formal English
Taylor <u>cat</u> is black.	
The <u>boy coat</u> is torn.	
A <u>giraffe neck</u> is long.	
Did you see the <u>teacher pen</u> ?	
	Pattern
owner + owned	

Figure 2.1. Contrastive analysis chart for informal v. formal English possessive patterns.

The Grammar of Habitual be in African American English

We now move to another common example of student home language that crops up in the school setting. Let's look at a student's use of *be* as in *She be at home*:

7. "Bobby, what does your mother do every day?"
"She *be* at home!" Bobby said.
"You mean, she is at home," the teacher corrected.
"No, she ain't," Bobby said, "'cause she took my grandmother to the hospital this morning."

"You know what I meant," the teacher said. "You are not supposed to say 'She *be* at home.' You are to say, 'She *is* at home.'"

"Why you trying to make me lie?" Bobby said. "She ain't at home." (LeMoine, 1999, pp. 1-2)

The child draws a strong contrast between the forms of *be* in 8 versus 9.

8. She *be* at home.
9. She *is* at home.

When the teacher tells Bobby that he ought to say *She is at home*, the child denies it twice and then becomes agitated, wondering why the teacher is "trying to make [him] lie." Clearly, for the child, *She is at home* is not a translation of *She be at home*.

In Bobby's language system, *She is at home* would mean his mother was at home *at that very moment*. But Bobby knew that wasn't true. He wanted to convey a different meaning. He wanted to signal that it was "her habit to be home on a day-to-day basis" (LeMoine, 1999, p. 2). To do so, he naturally chose to use the form of *be* that conveys habitual meaning in AAE. Linguists call this form "habitual *be*." Not knowing the grammar of AAE, the teacher not only utterly derails the conversation but makes no progress in helping Bobby learn the patterns of Standard English.

Baugh (1999) comments on habitual *be*, offering two examples, *He be standin on the corner*; *He be talking when the preacher be talking*:

From a linguistic point of view, this use of *be* performs grammatical work. In African American vernacular these sentences convey habitual activities. By contrast, the standard form *is* will be used instead of *be* to convey momentary actions. The difference between *He be happy* and *he is happy* is that the latter conveys a momentary state while the former refers to a state of perpetual happiness. (p. 6)

Baugh continues, talking about the perplexity the child who speaks African American English may experience in the classroom:

Imagine the confusion confronting a black child in school who is trying to use Standard English to convey a habitual state or event. Under such circumstances it would be difficult for the child not to use his or her native grammar. *Be* provides a grammatical tool that is unavailable to speakers of standard English. In addition to all that AAVE shares with other dialects of English, it has unique grammatical forms that serve important communicative functions; it is far from being an impoverished dialect. (p. 6)

Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms

Linguistics shows us that if you want to teach Standard English to speakers of other dialects, start by contrasting the home grammar with the school grammar, or SE. This way, instead of seeking to correct or eradicate home speech styles, we add language varieties to the child's linguistic toolbox, bringing a pluralistic vantage to language in the classroom (Gilyard, 1991; McWhorter, 1998). Such an approach allows us to maintain the language of the student's home community (see the Conference on College Composition and Communication's *Students' Right to Their Own Language* [1974]) while adding the linguistic tools needed for success in our broader society—the tools of mainstream American English. In doing so, we can work with students to help them switch between their different language styles—to code-switch, that is—choosing the language variety appropriate to the specific time, place, audience, and communicative purpose.

When we say that our goal is to help children both learn Standard English and honor the language and culture of the home community, we implicitly situate ourselves within the broader literacy movement in the United States. "Literacy" is no simple idea. Instead, we can identify a range of approaches in the United States today. Literacy scholars cluster into groups based on how they answer a constellation of questions. Scholars differ, for example, on what they mean by literacy and what they consider to be the language or languages of literacy. They take positions on whether we should or shouldn't teach Standard English. They ask whether we should teach only Standard English or whether we ought to draw on diverse language varieties from the natural language landscape. Scholars query what materials we should use in assessing literacy: do we count literacy as fluency only in the works of White middle-class European culture, or do we recognize a broader literacy base—all different kinds of writing and reading from diverse cultures of peoples of color and peoples of non-Western nationalities? Finally, literacy scholars and practitioners disagree about what it means for an African American to learn to speak the Standard dialect and work with cultural readings and writings of mainstream American culture.

We've described the usual classroom response in which teachers lament the "error-ridden" writing of their African American students. We've recognized this red-pen approach to be correctionist or eradicationist of student home language. Such approaches to student language constitute the meat and potatoes of traditional language arts.

Similar sentiment is powerfully expressed by well-known personalities who in turn influence and reflect how the American public under-

stands student language. In 2004, for example, Bill Cosby, a prominent African American entertainer, became the poster child for popular views of language. According to an AP wire report, in "his remarks in May at a commemoration of the [50th] anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision, Cosby denounced the grammar of some Black people" (May 20, 2004). Like Jesse Jackson before him, Cosby embodies the correctionist viewpoint, which seeks to eradicate home language. He assumes that all speakers (and all teachers) should excise, extract, repress, and supplant home language with "good grammar." He takes this not only as a truth, but The Truth.

Teachers also traditionally hold that the language of literacy is Standard English and that the materials students must command come mainly from White middle-class culture: "In the popular view, there is no choice of dialect at all in educational settings. In fact, Standard English and education imply each other" in this view (Adger, 1998, p. 152). The traditional approach expects Standard English to supplant or replace the vernacular language of the home and that students will fully assimilate to the norms of the dominant culture. This approach is also presumed by daily oral language exercises and by grammar and writing texts.

Yet other prominent African Americans would beg to differ with Cosby and Jackson and such traditional assumptions about English. African American university educators such as Geneva Smitherman and Denise Troutman praise the linguistic dexterity children show as they write rap or jump rope lyrics, or engage elaborately in the language sport of playing the dozens or signifying (Smitherman, 1977; Troutman, 1999). Far from deriding the language of the African American home, Smitherman and Troutman and other African American educators and linguists (Baugh, Perry, Delpit, Lanehart, Richardson, Rickford, etc.) recognize and affirm the robust dynamism of African American students' language.

These educators offer tangible ways to honor and draw on the rich language knowledge African American children already have from their home culture as the children carve a path to Standard English mastery (Delpit, 1995; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Smitherman, 2000). Each testifies to the impressive power of students' home linguistic culture. Theresa Perry recalls the power of the way "rhythm, rhyme, metaphor, repetition are and were used by Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. William Borders, and African-American preachers all over this country." She cites "Toni Morrison's use of the call and response sequence in her award winning novel, *Beloved*" (Perry & Delpit, 1998, p. 12).

In her groundbreaking *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Smitherman similarly tells of the intricate ways African Americans verbally interact at home and in the community using "black modes of discourse." These modes are made up of "verbal strategies, rhetorical devices, and folk expressive rituals," part of the "'rich inheritance' of the African background" (1977, p. 103). Through examples from songs, sacred and secular, to church sermons in which the congregants interject their responses, affirming the preacher's word, to community banter in barber- and beauty shops (pp. 104-5), to humorous put-downs between friends where verbal acuity and wit are highly prized (pp. 118-19), Smitherman recounts the fast-moving, complex subtleties of African Americans' verbal engagement and repartee (see also Troutman [1999] for a vivid description of African American women's rhetorical devices and styles).

Thus, contrary to traditional assumptions, African American children do not arrive at school "linguistically impoverished." Instead, they arrive positively adept at intricate verbal exchange.

But the ways in which many African American children are pros at language are not recognized or valued by schools. Poignantly, Delpit (1995) wonders how many teachers would "relate [the rap songs and linguistic weavings on the playground] to language fluency" (p. 17). So Black children find themselves in a quandary in the schools. Highly verbal in their communities, they are seen by the school system they're required to attend as nonverbal or lacking English, even when that school system is itself predominantly African American.

Attitudes toward Standard English

Among the nontraditionalists, the next fork in the literacy road comes with practitioners' attitude toward Standard English. In *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, Delpit (1995) talks about parents wanting to ensure that "the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" (p. 29). Delpit's focus is on African American students learning the skills necessary "to harmonize with the rest of the world" (p. 18), and she defines *skills* as "useful and usable knowledge which contributes to a student's ability to communicate effectively in standard, generally acceptable literary forms" (pp. 18-19).

By implication, Delpit suggests that the language forms students need to command are those of Standard English. She recounts the frustrations of African American parents who find that the liberal "process"

writing approach to literacy does their children a disservice. While the process approach seeks to foster fluency, Delpit, like Smitherman and Troutman, tells us that African American kids have plenty of fluency in the home language, citing the "verbal creativity and fluency that black kids express every day on the playgrounds of America as they devise new insults, new rope-jumping chants and new cheers" (1995, p. 17). Delpit recognizes the potent language talents African American children possess outside the schoolhouse doors. Inside school, she seeks to steer classroom work toward meaningful engagement leading to skill in the Standard code. Indeed, she sees literacy in Standard English as but one aspect of the "culture of power," which she urges teachers to explicitly teach minority students (pp. 21-47).

Similarly, Smitherman asserts that "[a]ll students need to know this language [Standard English, or the language of wider communication] if they are going to participate fully in the global world of the twenty-first century" (2000, p. 161). (But see below, as Smitherman complicates the matter considerably—and rightly so—in discussing "multiliteracies.")

Thus, Delpit and Smitherman don't see Standard English as Grammar with a capital G or as "good" language, but instead as one key to the lock of participation in wider society. Perry goes even further. She equates learning to read, write, and speak the Standard code with freedom itself, citing the historic African American commitment to "freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom" (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p. 17). Paraphrasing Malcolm X, Perry says, "Read and write yourself into freedom! Read and write to assert your identity as human! Read and write yourself into history! Read and write as an act of resistance . . . so you can lead your people well in the struggle for liberation!" (p. 19).

Like Delpit, Smitherman, and Perry, John Rickford also affirms the importance of fostering Standard English mastery among African American students. A scholar of far-reaching academic achievement in technical linguistics, Rickford also works prolifically in language and education. During the Ebonics controversy of 1997, Rickford was one of the informed voices who helped unbind the media's misperceptions about what the Oakland, California, school board had sought to achieve with their African American students. His Web site (www.stanford.edu/~rickford) continues as a resource to anyone wanting an accessible, non-technical, but scientifically accurate treatment of issues of language and literacy in education and the African American community (see also Rickford, 1996, n.d.).

Rickford points the way to success with African American students. Indeed, throughout his educational writing, he (and his collaborators)

describe a range of research-based approaches from linguistics that have been shown to succeed in teaching Standard English to African American students (Rickford 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Rickford & A. E. Rickford, 1995; Rickford & R. J. Rickford, 2000). He outlines successful approaches used over the past three decades, including (1) a linguistically informed approach to teaching reading, (2) contrastive analysis, and (3) dialect readers that "introduce . . . reading in the vernacular, [and] then switch . . . to the standard" (Rickford, 1999a, pp. 338–44; Rickford, Sweetland, & Rickford, 2004; Redd & Webb, 2005).

Practitioners such as teacher Carrie Secret and linguist John Baugh show us how to use African American language styles to help African American children learn Standard English. Talking about the Standard English Proficiency program (SEP) of Oakland, California, Secret (1998) describes how central language and culture are to the success of children's learning: "If you don't respect the children's culture, you negate their very essence" (p. 80). In describing how the SEP program "uses culture to enhance reading achievement," Secret draws on "nine cultural aspects that permeate African-American life: spirituality, resilience, emotional vitality, musicality and rhythm, humanism, communalism, orality and verbal expressiveness, personal style and uniqueness, and realness" (pp. 80–81). She reiterates that her "mission was and continues to be: embrace and respect . . . the home language of many of our students, and use strategies that will move them to a competency level in [Standard] English. We never had, nor do we now have, any intention of teaching the home language to students. They come to us speaking the language" (p. 81).

Baugh, in his probing work *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational Malpractice* (1999), also offers ways to make literacy studies culturally relevant for African American students. He found that "although . . . children wanted to become educated, they didn't want to 'act white.'" (p. 32). Baugh noted that motivation is a key element in students' ability to gain literacy skills, and that "many inner-city students are, frankly, bored by traditional reading materials." In response to children's needs, he developed the "Lyric Shuffle Games," "a series of games that can introduce and reinforce literacy through highly motivational exercises incorporating popular lyric music" (p. 32). In Lyric Shuffle, students select lyrics as reading material. Baugh noted that contrary to popular expectation, many African American musicians use Standard English in their lyrics, so students can study the Standard forms through this medium. Students transcribe the lyrics, make word lists, and use flash cards, rearranging the words to form "new sentences, new po-

ems or lyrics, or an original short story (p. 35). They do a Sentence Shuffle, a Poet Shuffle, a Song Shuffle, a Grammar Roulette, and Story Shuffle, integrating reading and writing in ways that tap into students' core interests (Baugh, 1981).

In sum, traditional English teachers and many linguists are united in affirming the importance of students learning the codes of power. The key difference lies in how each group conceives of the learning enterprise.

Other scholars, however, make quite clear their opinion that teaching Standard English is a form of hegemonic repression in which the White supremacist establishment continues to dominate and demean African American language and culture. Linguist Elaine Richardson (2003), for example, speaks of an "ideology of White supremacist and capitalistic-based literacy practices" that "reproduce stratified education and a stratified society," an approach that "attempts to erase [African Americans], culturally, word by word" (pp. 8–9). She and others she cites (e.g., Macedo, 1994) call on us to recognize that when we teach the "academic essay," we are not teaching "'neutral skills' needed to succeed in the corporate educational system," but instead are foisting on African Americans a "culturally biased education . . . [that] trains them to sever ties with Black communities and cultural activities" (Richardson, 2003, p. 9).

In partial remedy, Richardson (2003) has articulated an African American curriculum for her college students. She believes that "[l]iteracy acquisition is not a set of skills to be mastered. It is a looking inward into one's own thought and cultural/language patterns and history, while looking outward into the world's, seeking to intervene in one's own context" (p. 116). In doing so, students "deserve an education that locates them within their history and encourages them to define their futures" (p. 117). Richardson sees "African American Vernacular English as a discourse, not simply a set of grammatical features to be eradicated from speech and writing" (p. 115), but more broadly, she argues that "African American rhetorical and discursive practices [ought to be] the center of the curriculum" (p. 120). Thus, she offers an intricate, culturally relevant curriculum for African American students.

Finally, scholars increasingly interrogate the very notion of literacy itself. They are clear that there is no single literacy, no single way of handling a single written code. In his foreword to Smitherman and Villanueva's *Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice*, Suresh Canagarajah explains that we are surrounded by "multiple versions of English" and that all "of us are required to navigate different discourses in everyday domains, such as the mass media, communica-

tion, and work. These fluid social and communicative environments have motivated some educators to speak of a basic need for multiliteracies to be functional in today's world" (2003, pp. ix-x). He invokes the complex skills required to be literate on the Internet (e.g., "multiple modalities of communication (sound, speech, video, and photographs, in addition to writing) and multiple symbol systems (icons, images, color and charts, in addition to words) but also multiple registers, discourses and languages" (p. x). Most forcefully, Canagarajah asserts that "teaching literacy in a single language (English) or a single dialect of that language ('Standard English') fails to equip our students for real world needs" (p. x).

Also recognizing multiliteracies is Rebecca Rogers (2003), who reports that the family she studied (the Treaders) are "extremely proficient with the literacies of their daily lives" (p. 144). Drawing a contrast between "neighborhood proficiencies with language and literacy" (p. xiv) and "schooled literacy," she suggests that "inner city residents who are labeled as 'illiterate' are in fact using highly complex linguistic and social resources," resources "that are neither called upon nor recognized within institutional contexts" (p. xiv). Rogers recounts that the mother in the Treader family "negotiated a petition for traffic conditions" and was able to "read strategically, and [think] critically" (p. 3). The daughter "critically read the newspaper" (p. 3) and generally "demonstrated many of the same proficiencies with literacy as her mother" (p. 144). Yet, Rogers notes, the mother, who had an eighth-grade education, was assessed as reading at a fourth-grade level. The daughter was put into special education, labeled by the school as "low literate" with serious language disabilities. Rogers suggests that a "more equitable schooling would . . . [recognize] these literacies in the school and the classroom" (p. 156).

Now, having gotten a bird's eye view of how to move from correction to contrast in the language arts classroom, having glimpsed how to apply the scientific method in analyzing your students' language, and having touched on the complex terrain of literacy studies, it's time for us to move on—time to explore some basic insights from linguistics that will help you in the language arts classroom.

Notes

1. These patterns are not restricted to the language of young children, as is seen in the following examples of the same grammatical pattern drawn from eighth graders and community college students:

- a. I don't understand my little sister work. (eighth grader)
- b. Ellen Goodman essay tell all about violence. (community college)
- c. There is a link between violence on TV and violence in children behavior. (community college)

2. To say that -'s signals possession oversimplifies the facts. For example, *Anne Rice's book* could mean that Anne Rice owns the book, but it also could refer to the book Anne Rice wrote. Here, -'s signals association but not ownership. Thus, -'s signals a broader range of meaning than just possession (e.g., *the city's improvement, in a month's time, today's session, for simplicity's sake*).

3. This analysis too oversimplifies the facts, although not irrecoverably. For example, *floor lamp* and *coffee table* are phrases containing nouns sitting side by side, but these do not convey possession. Instead, they convey meanings such as "a lamp for the floor" or "a table intended or used for serving food or beverages such as coffee." If students bring up such examples during class discussion, the teacher should be pleased, not concerned. A bit of sure-footedness and use of the scientific method will come to the rescue. Actually, the solution is implicit in our fuller description of possession in AAE. The nouns refer to *owner + owned*. On confronting such examples, the teacher might praise the student for good and clear thinking. She might say something like this:

Teacher: That's a great example! You're absolutely right, *Mom jeep* and *coffee table* do seem to follow the same sort of pattern. Each has two nouns sitting side by side—*mom* and *jeep*, *coffee* and *table*. Do you think that *coffee table* has possessive meaning like *Mom jeep* does?

Students: No . . . it don't.

Teacher: I agree with you. So what's the difference between the two? How do we know that *Mom jeep* is possessive but *floor lamp* or *coffee table* is not?

From this point, the students are likely to realize and voice that Mom owns the jeep but that the coffee clearly does not own the table. Again, ownership is a simplification of what's going on with the genitive marker (apostrophe -'s in Standard English), but it is a fairly good approximation for elementary and middle school students. So when the students figure out that "possession = owner + owned" (or *possessor + possessed*) in AAE, the teacher can take that as the latest hypothesis about the AAE grammar for possession. She then will check—"Yes, we can rule out *coffee table* because coffee does not own a table." She can ask the children for other examples to check. Perhaps they'll come up with examples

such as *telephone pole* or, if children are studying American history at the time, they might think of *wagon train*. In each instance, the teacher should lead the students through checking their hypothesis—that in AAE, we signal possession by “owner + owned” and so none of these examples fits the pattern. They’re not possessive in AAE, and the class has confirmed that their hypothesis for the grammar rule of possession covers all the data they’ve come across or thought up so far. In this way, the teacher turns a potentially awkward moment into a grammar discovery.
