# Classroom Conversations:
## African-American English in On-Task Class Activities

Zora Gilbert | Dietrich Senior Honors Thesis, Spring 2016

Classroom Conversations: African-American English in On-Task Class Activities

Most high school teachers and students agree that Standard American English (SAE), or "formal" English, is the expected language of the classroom (Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007); however, many students do not use exclusively SAE while engaged in class discussions. In this study, I examine when and how African American high school students in Pittsburgh use African American English (AAE) during focused, on task discussions in the classroom. I show that a teacher's role in a conversation affects how students use language, and that as teachers involve themselves more in a conversation or position themselves as an authority relative to their students, their students use less AAE. I also show that students' stances relative to various aspects of the classroom affect what varieties of language they use, and that students may be using features of AAE as a resource to communicate more than just the answer to a question.

## *Introduction*

Since the 1960s, educators and linguists (not to mention students and their parents) have been locked in debate about how to treat "non-standard" dialects in the U.S. K-12 classroom. In particular, stakeholders (educators, parents, researchers, policy makers, etc.) argue about whether, and to what extent, varieties other than mainstream, standard English should be allowed in class. While this affects all students, it has a particularly powerful effect on those who speak dialects that are stigmatized in the dominant American language ideology, or by the prevailing values that Americans ascribe to different forms of language in the US. In the case of African American students, the debate directly influences how they are treated in the classroom and, depending on that treatment, may compound the negative effects of other institutional prejudices. While some educators argue that stigmatized varieties of English are "lesser," linguistically, and never benefit their speakers in the long run, research shows that students use their entire linguistic repertoire in systematic ways (Labov, 1972; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006; Bailey, 2000; Morgan, 2002; Snell, 2013). Students may even use stigmatized features of English during *on-task* class discussions, even though Standard American English (SAE) is the expectation in most American classrooms (Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007; Godley & Esher, 2012; Kirkland & Jackson, 2008). However, their patterns of use may be different than those apparent in informal settings, as the structure of the academic environment affects both the roles that students can take on and the standard flow of conversation. In the following pages, I

investigate how and when African-American students use features of African American English (AAE) while discussing classroom topics. I show that a teacher's role in a conversation affects how students use language, and that students' stances relative to various aspects of the classroom also affect what varieties of language they use.

Knowing when and how students use stigmatized features in the classroom is useful for educators and researchers alike. Regardless of their language ideology, knowing when and why students use AAE in classroom activities enables teachers to make more informed decisions about whether or not—and how—to address students' speech. Teachers can also gain a deeper understanding of why students speak or are silent: people only have a limited repertoire of linguistic features that they can use (Snell, 2013), and if they are less comfortable using an environment's "proper" features than using a stigmatized dialect they may be discouraged from participating (Padak, 1989). Finally, understanding how students use language in *on-task* discussions contributes to our understanding of students' classroom identities and the linguistic effects of pedagogical practice.

*AAE in School*

Over time, there have been waves of conflict regarding AAE (or Ebonics, Black English Vernacular, or any of the other names that the linguistic system has been called). Each wave of conflict leaves researchers, policymakers, and educators in a different place regarding academic and societal conceptions of AAE, and while research suggests that AAE is a systematic dialect that needs to be understood, tolerated, or even integrated into the classroom, educational practice has a way to go before it catches up. Even so, public thinking has come a long way since the 1960s, when the predominant opinion of researchers was that speakers of AAE were "cognitively deficient" and needed remedial teaching (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966). Over time, prevailing theory has shifted to seeing AAE as instead an internally consistent linguistic system of its own, and research shows that its speakers have skills that should be *built* upon as they learn (Padak, 1981; Rickford, 1999; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006) rather than being torn down.

In 1966, after schools had been officially desegregated but before integration efforts had entered full swing, Bereiter and Engelmann published *Teaching*

*Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool*. In this book, they described African American students as deficient, using the students' language and speech habits as evidence. The absence of the copula ("my hair ø wet," as opposed to "my hair *is* wet"), as well as other distinctive features of AAE, were all symptoms of African American students' *inability* to learn "proper" English, and the predominant ideology at the time was that AAE was not a dialect but a deficiency; accordingly, it was treated as such in the classroom and disproportionate numbers of African American children were relegated to special education classes.

Not long after, researchers began to refute the deficiency hypothesis. In the early 1970s, William Labov argued that AAE was a linguistic system different from—but not lesser than—SAE. The copula wasn't *missing*, it was simply not required; common errors that African American students made in reading (for example, not pronouncing *–ed* in some past-tense verbs) were caused by systematic differences in pronunciation and a disconnect between the way the students spoke and the way they were taught to read, rather than because they were cognitively unable to grasp the relevant concept. Meanwhile, other researchers began to take a closer look at the methodology that earlier research had used. Nancy Padak (1981), in a review of literature about African American English at the time, noted critically that most early research on African American Students in the classroom had been conducted by white researchers. These researchers found that they had a remarkable amount of trouble getting African American students to speak, and concluded that the students *couldn't.* Padak proposed that perhaps instead of some internal factor being at fault—i.e., cognitive disability or some widespread language processing issue—the kids simply didn't want to speak up in front of the type of person who constantly "corrected" their speech or admonished them for speaking "wrong." As the tide of research changed, so did policy: in 1974, the National Council of Teachers of English drafted and put forth a resolution affirming "students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity or style" (*College Composition and Communication,* 1974). In 1979, the Ann Arbor Decision (*Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*) decreed that teachers

had a responsibility to identify students who spoke AAE and use knowledge about the dialect to teach the students who spoke it.

Unfortunately, pedagogical practice in conventional school systems has not caught up to the research. Attempts to create widespread curriculum that builds constructively upon AAE have been stopped in their tracks, mostly by the fear that if children are taught using AAE they will not learn SAE fully (Rickford, 1999). In 1981, 540 students were taught to read using *Bridge* readers, which displayed passages, each with a similar message, that were written on a continuum from most similar to spoken AAE to most similar to academic written English. African American students who studied using the readers learned much more quickly than African American students taught with conventional curriculum, and they displayed higher learning gains than expected from the average white student with a conventional curriculum (Simpkins & Simpkins, 1981 in Rickford, 1999). Unfortunately, due to backlash at the thought of AAE in an educational text, the publisher discontinued the readers. Similarly, widespread backlash after the Oakland Unified School District classified Ebonics as an African language in 1996 ultimately resulted in the school board restricting funding for bilingual education to languages not derived from or related to English (Rickford, 1999). This resolution essentially barred programs meant to teach linguistically-aware reading curriculum to speakers of AAE from the resources they needed to operate.

Today, most sociolinguists take it for granted that AAE is a linguistic system in its own right (though some disagree about whether it is a dialect of English or a language in and of itself) and nondiscrimination policies are the norm rather than the exception. However, a lasting reactivity towards including AAE in official curriculum means that the topic is taboo in most classrooms—especially during classwork—and most of the current work on AAE in the classroom is focused on identity construction (Bailey, 2000; Ellwood, 2008), or language ideology (Godley, et al., 2007; Godley & Esher, 2012; Kirkland & Jackson, 2008) rather than on how students use features of AAE to learn.

For example, in his research on how Dominican American high school students in New Jersey constructed their identities, Benjamin Bailey (2000) documented the students' out-of-class or off-task speech and drew connections between how students used their repertoire of linguistic features and how they self-identified as Dominicans,

Americans, and as Spanish speakers. Bailey found that all the students tied Spanish fairly strictly to their identities: students used Spanish more often if they self-identified strongly with their Dominican heritage, and in some cases the style of Spanish that the students used differed based on how long their families had lived in the United States. However, the students' identities were not one-dimensional and their speech patterns reflected that: how much a student used Spanish, what type of Spanish they used, and how they used English as well all depended on a complex slew of other identity factors, including how recently their parents had immigrated and the students' gender.

Constance Ellwood (2008) also studied how students use language to construct their identity in the classroom, looking at how students assumed classroom roles by using (or not using) foreign languages in an English classroom. Ellwood views departures from the expected language of the classroom as acts of *resistance*, while staying on task and using the classroom's preferred language are acts of *alignment*. If students follow the norms of the classroom and align with them, they fit into the *good student role*; if they resist they may be taking on the *bad student* role and signaling disagreement with the task at hand or rebelling against the expected language.

Both Ellwood and Bailey's studies take place in academic environments, but they do not focus their research on academic *tasks*, where the dynamics of language and identity may be different. Students in American classrooms are aware of the linguistic expectations teachers have of them (Godley & Escher, 2012), and they have at least some command over the language they use. While their choice of linguistic features may not be *conscious*, it is not without purpose, and deviating from the privileged language of the classroom may have uses in the classroom that it does not have in a less-institutionally-structured environment. Student identities are also much more complicated than a simple good student/bad student spectrum, and a student's position on just that spectrum may change dramatically based on the topic, the teacher, or the format of the task at hand.

In research that concerns on-task language, most studies have focused on the teacher or researchers' perspectives, or the learning outcomes of different ways of teaching SAE. For example, Wheeler, Swords, and Carpenter (2004) studied how often elementary school students used features of AAE over the course of a year when teachers used different techniques to teach them about dialect variation. They found that teaching

AAE as a linguistic system along with SAE allowed students to become aware of the differences between the dialects and thus more able to choose to use features of SAE during classroom activities. Similarly, Godley et al. (2007) studied a high school English class as it did a daily sentence correction drill in which students were expected to "correct" a sentence (which often contained "errors" that were perfectly acceptable in AAE or other dialects of English). Unlike teaching AAE as a system, the daily correction activity did not lead to any improvement in students' grasp of SAE grammar. In both studies, despite their different teaching methods, SAE is treated as the implicit goal of the instructional techniques.

While it is understandable that teachers place a high importance on their students learning SAE, the fact that so many interventions' successes are measured by its acquisition is telling and restrictive. There is an implicit valuing of Standard American English in American schools and many related studies, which lends itself to a systematic *devaluing* of other dialects. What's more, students—of all language backgrounds—are aware of the values around language in classrooms (Godley & Escher, 2012), and all too often echo the ideology they are surrounded by (Godley et al., 2007, Kirkland & Jackson, 2008). However, students only have comfortable access to so many linguistic features, depending on their backgrounds, and when they are less comfortable speaking in the valued dialect they often simply choose not to speak (Padak, 1981) instead of taking the risk of speaking wrong.

If so many studies and environments implicitly value SAE over AAE, there may be an upper limit on how comfortable students can feel when interacting with teachers and researchers. In order to help students get the most out of class—and to make the classroom a space where they are as comfortable as possible participating—we must first assess the environment that students currently exist in and how they behave in it. If teachers learn more about the environments that students are already comfortable speaking in, they may be able to make more informed decisions about whether or not— and how—to address students' speech. If teachers respond to how their students actually behave in on-task discussions, as opposed to how they believe that students *should* behave, they may have more success creating classrooms that are welcoming to linguistically diverse students without sacrificing teaching the language skills that

students need to succeed in adulthood. Towards this end, I ask: how do African American students speak when they are doing on-task work in class? If they use features of African American English in their classroom speech, when do they use them? In which environments, and when talking about which topics?

## *Data & Method*

In order to answer these questions, I analyzed audio recordings from two classrooms in the midst of a three-day dialect unit. These recordings were collected by Dr. Amanda Godley, who also created the dialect unit and participated in some discussions, and who graciously allowed me to use her data for the purposes of this study. One recording is approximately 20 minutes long and takes place during a whole-class, student-led discussion; the other takes place during two discussions over the course of a whole, 50-minute class period. I have split this recording into two parts, as the first 30 minutes consist of student-only small-group discussion and the last 15 are teacher-led.

During the first two days of the dialect unit, the students learned terminology that would help them talk about linguistic diversity (words like "accent," "dialect," "vocabulary," "grammar", etc.) and watched the entirety of a documentary called *American Tongues. American Tongues* explores the huge variety of accents and dialects that exist in the United States, touching on concepts such as sources of variation (i.e. sounds and words) and stereotyping. After finishing the documentary on the second day, the classes discussed the video as a group, with the students leading the discussion. The 20-minute recording I analyze is one class's discussion of the video. On the third day, students gathered into small groups and discussed a list of questions in a more general sense, applying them to their own lives as well as to the video. After half an hour, the groups rejoined and the teacher directed the class through the sheet of questions.

Using notes by Dr. Godley, I transcribed the recordings so as to capture their content and syntax. Due to time constraints, I did not try to capture details of pronunciation or prosody. I then separated my transcription out such that each line contained only one utterance, as defined in Polyani, Culi, Van Den Berg, Thione, and Ahn (2004). This means that, for the most part, each finite clause constituted its own utterance (though there are exceptions to this rule). Finally, I excluded any utterance that

consisted of only one word from my calculations, as most single-word utterances consisted solely of "yes," "no," "okay," or other such short reactions, and do not differ significantly between SAE and AAE.

After transcribing, I noted each utterance that contained one or more feature of AAE, referring to Rickford's list of features in *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implications* (1999). I did not treat these utterances as "code-switches," but rather viewed them as instances of students using parts of their linguistic repertoires that are commonly associated with AAE as Snell (2013) does in her study of schoolchildren in north-east England. In other words, I conceptualized students as having a bank of linguistic resources that they could draw from in any situation, where certain resources are often grouped *with* certain dialects but are not isolated or restricted *to* those dialects.

The students in both classes were almost entirely African American. In the classroom that included the small debate, the teacher was African American; in the class that included the teacher-led discussion, the teacher was white; in the small-group work the teacher was not immediately present but a white researcher (Dr. Godley) contributed to the conversation.

## *Findings*

I expected to find that African American students *do* use features of AAE in the classroom, and I expected that they would use fewer features in the presence of teachers and researchers (and still fewer if the teacher or researcher near them were white). I also expected that students would use more features of African American English when they did not agree with classroom policies or concepts, as using a dialect that does not align with the one expected for the classroom is an easy way to signal resistance (as in Ellwood, 2008).

I found that students do indeed use features of AAE in the classroom, and that they use those features more or less frequently depending on their environment. However, the sheer presence or absence of the teacher does not seem to be as important to how students speak as the *format* of the discussion, and the students in the recordings

were much more likely to use features of AAE when they primarily spoke to *each other* than when they spoke to (or performed for) the teacher.

Unlike in my pilot study concerning AAE in classrooms, there was no categorical presence or absence of features of AAE depending on the *teacher's* presence in a conversation. Students continued to use features of AAE even if the teacher addressed them directly. However, the format of the discussion and the teacher's stated purpose in that discussion, as well as the students' own stances within the conversation and related to the issues, did affect how the students behaved.

*Discussion Format*

Each of my three recordings took place during a different type of discussion. In one class, the students took part in what the teacher called a "circle discussion." In the circle discussion, students arranged themselves in two concentric circles and faced towards the center of the circles, with the students on the inside having speaking priority. Halfway through the discussion, the students switched (with those on the inside now sitting on the outside, and vice versa). The teacher did not participate in the debate, though she did sit with the students to guide them through the discussion topics. In the first section of the other class, the students did work in small groups of three. The teacher was not immediately present, though a researcher was and did contribute to the conversation. In the last fifteen minutes, the entire class reconvened to discuss the questions as a group. The teacher presided over this discussion, asking questions of the class as a whole and calling on specific students to respond.

The adults held very different roles in each of these discussions. In the circle discussion, the teacher positioned herself as a *removed facilitator*. She did not contribute her own opinions or perspectives to the discussion, but she did ask questions and attempt to draw more detailed explanations out of students. In the group work, the researcher

| | Total Utterances | Teacher Utterances | Teacher Participation | % AAE in Student Speech |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Circle Discussion | 275 | 88 | 29% | 11% |
| Group Work | 526 | 72 | 14% | 12% |
| Teacher-Led | 212 | 68 | 32% | 8% |

*Fig. 1: Teacher participation and student use of AAE*

positioned herself as a sort of *guiding peer*. Though she sometimes offered personal anecdotes and provided clarifying interpretations of the questions, she did not guide the students through them and did not ask for more detailed explanations if the students did not provide them on their own. Finally, in the teacher-led discussion the teacher was just that: the *leader*. She took charge of the pacing of the discussion, and she decided who could contribute and when.

Students ranged from using features of AAE in 8% to 12% (Fig. 1) of their total utterances, depending on how involved their teacher was in their discussion. When the teacher was the most involved (in other words, when she was filling the *leader* role and explicitly running the discussion), only 8% of student utterances contained features of AAE; when the teacher or adult was less involved (in this case, when the researcher was filling the *guiding peer* role or the teacher positioned herself as a *removed facilitator*), at least 11% of student utterances contained features of AAE. In the following sections, I illustrate how the adult in each discussion positioned herself, both through statement and through action, and how students used language in return.

*Circle Discussion.* In the circle discussion, students sat in concentric circles and faced each other in order to discuss a preset list of questions. In the following excerpt, the teacher (CG) lays out some of the instructions for the exercise and clearly states her goal for her participation. I have bolded lines where she lays out her role, and the role she wants her students to take.

*Excerpt 1:*

| 1 | CG | If you are sitting behind someone, |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | | I want you to pay special attention to what they are saying. |
| 3 | | And take notes, **if there is someone says something you want to refute.** |
| 4 | | What do I mean by refute? |
| 5 | Courtney | Not agree. |
| 6 | CG | Yes, not agree or to challenge. |
| 7 | | After 10 minutes, we're going to change. |
| 8 | | The outer circle is coming into the inner circle. |
| 9 | | I want someone to sense the leadership role and to take over my role. |
| 10 | | **It is my goal not to say anything whatsoever.** |

In the Excerpt 1, CG has finished herding the students into their new seats and is sitting among them in the inner circle. She wraps up her explanation of the roles within the discussion, and encourages the students to refute each other's points (line 3). She also states, quite clearly, that her own goal is to "not say anything whatsoever" (line 10).

CG's early encouragement explicitly sets up that the students are going to be talking to each other, rather than to her. They do not have to explain their points to her as the teacher, but rather propose and defend them to their classmates. She further removes herself in lines 9 and 10, asking another student to take over leading the class so she does not have to speak—and thus so that the discussion can be even more focused on the students, rather than on her.

All that said, CG's speech still accounts for a full 29% of the total utterances during the discussion (tied with the most talkative student, Cory). Within a minute of the discussion beginning, she begins to interject in order to guide the discussion and keep her students on-topic. However, she at no point volunteers her own opinions or passes judgment regarding the *correctness* of her students' opinions. She also never calls on students, only interrupting the flow of conversation when students have begun to talk over each other or drown out less determined contributors. In the following examples, CG manages the classroom without dominating the discussion itself, giving students space to speak how they're comfortable.

| Speaker | Total Utterances | Participation | Utterances with AAE | Percent AAE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CG (teacher) | 79 | 29% | 0 | 0% |
| Cory | 79 | 29% | 9 | 11% |
| Charles | 46 | 17% | 4 | 9% |
| Theo | 29 | 11% | 6 | 21% |
| Fiona | 21 | 8% | 0 | 0% |
| Benicia | 6 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| Roy | 4 | 1% | 1 | 25% |
| Barry | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| Devan | 2 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| Student | 9 | 3% | 2 | 22% |
| ALL STUDENTS | 196 | 72% | 22 | 11% |
| TOTAL | 275 | 100% | 22 | 8% |

*Fig 2: Participation and AAE during the circle discussion*

*Excerpt 2*

| 1 | Theo | He didn't want his kids to interact with Caucasians. |
| 2 | Cory | I coulda sworn I talked (in the) first place. |
| 3 | CG | **Yeah, let Cory say something.** |
| 4 | Theo | (unint) |
| 5 | Cory | I know, but I wasn't asking for your patience. |
| 6 | Cory | But uh, uh, um, |
| 7 | 2 students | ooh. |

In Excerpt 2 (line 3, bolded), CG interjects in order to give Cory a chance to speak but does not otherwise contribute to the discussion. She asserts her presence as a moderator but not as a participant, instead giving Cory the floor. In Excerpts 3 and 4 (below) CG guides the discussion but does not offer her own opinions or even give feedback on individual students' contributions. I have bolded utterances where students use features of AAE.

*Excerpt 3*

| 1 | CG | Alright, question: |
| 2 | CG | What you were able to do was you were able to point specifically to a situation, |
| 3 | CG | but can you describe, then his attitude? |
| 4 | CG | How would you- |
| 5 | CG | If you had to give it a descriptive term, how would you describe that attitude? |
| 6 | Theo | Real deal. |
| 7 | CG | A real deal? |
| 8 | CG | Okay, what does real deal mean? |
| 9 | CG | I need a translation. |
| 10 | Male | break it down, dude, please |
| 11 | CG | break it down. |
| 12 | CG | So what attitude does that speak to? |
| 13 | Theo | Real strong, |
| 14 | Theo | like stand up for yourself, like, |
| 15 | Student | **He just don't care,** |
| 16 | Student | he's not going to tell you |

*Excerpt 4*

| 1 | CG | Let me ask you one more question from this particular bullet. |
| 2 | CG | Why do you automatically- |
| 3 | CG | or DO you automatically judge people? |
| 4 | Cory | I don't. |

| 5 | Cory | **I try not to because I don't want nobody to judge me by how I speak,** |
| 6 | Cory | **so if I'm not judging you I feel you keep your mind up out mine, that's all (unint).** |
| 7 | CG | Anyone else feel the same way or differently? |
| 8 | Theo | I feel exactly different. |

In Excerpt 3, CG would like the students to give a more in-depth answer to the question she has posed. She asks more specific questions (lines 2 – 5), and when Theo answers with "real deal" (line 6), she asks him to expand the connotation-rich term in his own words. CG never evaluates Theo's response positively or negatively, instead simply probing for a more detailed answer. Students around the classroom chime in (lines 10 and 15 – 16), supplementing Theo's explanation. Similarly, in Excerpt 4 CG pulls the class back to a question that she feels they have not yet answered. Cory answers immediately (lines 5 and 6), using features of AAE in both lines, and CG asks for agreement or dissent without offering any of her own (line 7). In each of these excerpts, students use features of AAE (Excerpt 3, line 15; Excerpt 4, lines 5 and 6) and sentence constructions that do not fit with what most would consider "formal" American English (Excerpt 3, lines 6, 10, and 13; Excerpt 4, lines 5, 6, and 8). This suggests that students are comfortable speaking in their own words during the circle discussion, and that they are not focusing on aligning their behavior with common classroom language ideology at the expense of the discussion at hand.

In the beginning of the discussion CG sets up the exercise as a way for *students* to discuss the questions and concepts of the unit amongst themselves, albeit in a structured way. She also explicitly removes herself from the discussion—or at least, announces her intention to remove herself. Though she still speaks frequently, the fact that she has given her students explicit permission to speak to each other instead of to her is vital, as it means they do not have to perform primarily for her during the circle discussion. Because they can focus on each other, they may be more comfortable straying from the expected language of the school (SAE) and using more features of AAE.

*Group Work.*       In the other classroom, during the group work section, students worked together in groups of three to answer a similar set of questions to those addressed

in the circle discussion.  Dr. Godley (AG), the researcher who collected the recordings, sat with the group, listening to their conversation and sometimes adding her thoughts, or helping the students interpret the questions. Though the recording did not begin until all the groups were settled and had begun their discussion (and thus I cannot know how the researcher introduced herself), her behavior is consistent throughout the half-hour long discussion. The following excerpts are typical of her interactions with the students:

*Excerpt 5:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | AG | That's kind of interesting what you guys were saying about home training. |
| 2 | AG | So, it's like when you're little kids, your parents try to get you to talk a little more formally, respectfully. |
| 3 | AG | Then when you get older, they know you know that, |
| 4 | AG | so they let you loosen up a little bit or something. |
| 5 | Isa | No. |
| 6 | Isa | I don't think it's about that. |
| 7 | Isa | I think it's the relationship on how tight ya'll are. |
| 8 | Isa | Cuz, like, everybody's kids are cool with their parents. |

In Excerpt 5, AG interprets what the students have said so far in order to try to help them synthesize their ideas. She isn't making a judgment about its correctness, but rather pulling the idea out in order to draw more attention to it. In this case, she is suggesting the idea that children's parents essentially train them to speak respectfully when they're young, but then place less importance on "respectful" speech when their children are older and they know they're capable of using more formal language. However, Isa disagrees, arguing that parents loosen up because they get more comfortable with their children.

In this excerpt, AG doesn't offer an *answer* to the question, but rather an interpretation of what the students have been saying. She leaves herself open to be corrected, and does not argue her point after Isa has taken control of the discussion again. This allows the students to stay in command of the discussion and respond to one another, rather than simply answering AG's questions.

In Excerpt 6, AG does pose questions to the students. However, she removes herself from the question and encourages the students to come up with the answers amongst themselves.

| Speaker | Total Utterances | Participation | Utterances with AAE | Percent AAE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Isa | 199 | 38% | 24 | 12% |
| Damila | 195 | 37% | 26 | 13% |
| AG (researcher) | 72 | 14% | 0 | 0% |
| Ricky | 58 | 11% | 2 | 3% |
| MA (teacher) | 2 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| ALL STUDENTS | 452 | 86% | 52 | 12% |
| TOTAL | 526 | 100% | 52 | 10% |

*Fig 3: Participation and AAE during group work*

*Excerpt 6:*

| 1 | AG | Before you go on, that question asks you to give three examples. |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Damila | I know. |
| 3 | Damila | That's what I'm about to do. |
| 4 | Isa | (…) job interviews (…). |
| 5 | AG | Well, examples of exact things you say. |
| 6 | Isa | Okay. |
| 7 | Isa | Examples of [(…)] |
| 8 | AG | [So, for instance…] |
| 9 | Damila | To who? (…)? |
| 10 | Isa | I mean, for a job interview, you wanna seem pleasant, like, |
| 11 | Isa | you know what I mean like, |
| 12 | Isa | nice person to be in that work environment like. |
| 13 | Damila | That's cute. |

In Excerpt 6, AG reminds the students of an aspect of the question that they had almost skipped. Her language distances herself from the exercise: though she is likely the one who wrote the question, she refers to it as "that question" (as opposed to "my question"), and says that the question is asking the *students* ("you") to give examples rather than including herself in the group (she does not say "we"). After AG asks the question, Isa catches on and begins to guide the discussion again.

AG does not just distance herself from the conversation through her statements: she also simply speaks less often than either of the teachers. She speaks far less than two of the students in the group (Damila and Isa), producing just 14% (Fig. 3) of the total utterances (to Damila and Isa's 38% and 37%, respectively). This is also only slightly

more than the third member of the group, Ricky, who produced 11% of the total utterances.

AG allows the students to control the discussion for the entire 30 minutes that it lasts. At no point does she claim that the students need to be clearer for *her*, instead making sure that they touch on each point that the question asks them to. She also carefully listens to their points and attempts to summarize them using students' own words. In her summaries, as in this section's first excerpt, she responds to students' objections. Finally, she simply doesn't speak very much (compared to the other adults in the room). Each of these moves keeps the focus on the students as the main participants in the discussion, allowing them to address each other directly instead of performing for her.

*Teacher-led Discussion.* In the final 15 minutes of the second recording, the class reconvened and held a short, teacher-led discussion. During this discussion, the teacher (MA) posed questions and called on students to answer them, responding to each answer in turn. While she never stated any "correct" answers, she did affirm many students' responses with the phrase "yeah, right." The standard form of the discussion follows the IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) format, in which the teacher asks a question (or otherwise initiates an interaction), a student responds, and the teacher gives brief feedback before moving on to another question or topic (Johnstone, 2007). The following excerpt provides an example, and I have bolded the first line in each step of the interaction.

*Excerpt 7:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | MA | Yeah, okay. |
| 2 | MA | We're going to start with number two. |
| 3 | MA | **So, what can we do to change our own stereotypes?** |
| 4 | MA | Like, in other words, the way we react to other people about the way people speak. |
| 5 | MA | Alana and then Felice. |
| 6 | Alana | **The way I see it is,** |
| 7 | Alana | you can't really talk about somebody until you really get to know them, |
| 8 | Alana | so, you know what I'm sayin, |
| 9 | Alana | don't judge a book by its cover. |

10   Alana   (…)
11   Alana   "I don't like the way he talk"
12   Alana   you know.
13   Alana   You have to sit down with that person and get to know (…) say
14   Alana   "I really like this person."
15   Alana   (…)
16   MA      **Yeah, right.**
17   MA      Don't judge a book by its cover.
18   MA      Felice.

To begin, MA reads off the question (initiation, lines 3 – 4). She then chooses a student (or a couple of students) whose hands are raised and calls on them to speak (line 5). She allows the first student to give their answer (response, lines 6 – 15), affirms it (feedback, line 16) and perhaps summarizes when they are done (line 17), and then moves on to the next student (line 18). In this way, MA maintains control of the discussion and stays the focus of the class: unlike in CG's class or during the group work

| Speaker | Total Utterances | Participation | Utterances With AAE | Percent AAE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MA | 68 | 32% | 1 | 1% |
| Quinn | 27 | 13% | 1 | 4% |
| Eva | 21 | 10% | 3 | 14% |
| Female | 15 | 7% | 1 | 7% |
| Alana | 16 | 8% | 1 | 6% |
| Damila | 14 | 7% | 0 | 0% |
| Ricky | 13 | 6% | 2 | 15% |
| Isa | 7 | 3% | 1 | 14% |
| Felice | 8 | 4% | 3 | 38% |
| Kareem | 4 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| Virgil | 4 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| Kade | 3 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| Male | 3 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| Larissa | 3 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| Emmett | 2 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| Student | 3 | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| AG | 1 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| ALL STUDENTS | 143 | 67% | 12 | 8% |
| TOTAL | 212 | 100% | 13 | 6% |

*Fig 4: Participation and AAE during the teacher-led discussion*

just prior, the students are speaking directly to their teacher and performing for her specifically. They are less free to interact with each other and toss ideas around, and thus may feel more pressure to conform to the classroom's dominant language ideology.

In the teacher-led discussion, students use features of AAE in only 8% (Fig. 1) of their total utterances (compared to 10% and 11% in the other classroom formats). MA is the most talkative person in the classroom, with 32% of the total utterances in the discussion originating from her, and her most talkative student (Quinn) produces only 13% of the session's utterances (Fig. 4). MA dominates the discussion both in its format, which allows her to choose participants and evaluate their contributions, but also in that she simply talks more than twice as often as any one student. MA's constant presence in the conversation, as well as her power to approve or disapprove student contributions, means that the classroom's standard language ideology (in other words, the expectation of SAE) is extremely present during the conversation.

Though the recordings cover three distinct environments (a whole-class circle discussion, a three person small group work session, and a whole-class teacher-led discussion), there is a clear division between the times in which students spoke mainly to each other (during the circle discussion and the group work) and when they were performing for their teacher (the teacher-led discussion). When speaking primarily to each other—even within a teacher's presence—students used features of AAE more often. This may be because the teacher acts as a symbol of the school's language ideology: students know that the dominant dialect in schools is SAE (Godley et al., 2007), and if they are talking to a teacher they are constantly reminded of it and may feel pressure to align their speech with what is expected of them. However, if they are talking to their peers that pressure is lessened, and they may use more of their full repertoire of linguistic resources in their discussion.

*Stances*

How the *students* positioned themselves in their discussion was also related to how much they used of features of AAE. Students took stances relative to the topic of the classroom discussion as well as relative to specific events within the classroom. When

taking stances relative to the discussion, students often both stated their beliefs and used language in a way that backed their statements up, as is the case with Cory and Fiona (Excerpt 8, below). When taking stances—mostly resistant ones—relative to classroom events, students used features of AAE in order to react not only to the immediate discussion but also to the general ideology of the classroom. Finally, students sometimes prioritized their stances differently within the discussion: for some students, indicating their preferred role in the classroom was more important than their take on the discussion.

*Relative to the Discussion.*     Both classrooms took part in the same dialect unit and discussed similar questions. In the circle discussion classroom, the discussion took place between the entire class; in the other classroom, the bulk of the discussion happened during group work. The questions had to do with the opinions the people in *American Tongues* (which the classes watched at the beginning of the unit) held about language, as well as whether the students themselves judged people based on language and what they could do about their own and other people's prejudices. Students in each class had strong opinions about these questions, and debated the point with each other well. Depending on their stance, the students also used language differently.

In Excerpt 8, I conduct an in-depth look at one case of disagreement. The discussion is primarily between Cory and Fiona during the circle discussion, and has to do with how people interpret and judge based on dialect and whether speakers of African American English should change their speech to avoid judgment.

*Excerpt 8:*

| 1 | CG | What would you like to add Fiona? |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Fiona | Well, just, um, when people perceive us as black people, |
| 3 | Fiona | like just because, |
| 4 | Fiona | it's just even about the skin. |
| 5 | Fiona | You know like, cause a lot of black people limit themselves to Black Language |
| 6 | Fiona | and white people could you know- |
| 7 | Fiona | you know, judge us because we limit ourselves to Black Language instead of doing both, |
| 8 | Fiona | so that like, |
| 9 | Fiona | I'm thinking like, |
| 10 | Fiona | Some people don't know how to transition and think oh, because I'm black I'm allowed to say this or whatever, |

| 11 | Fiona | but that's not always accepted in the real world. |
| 12 | Fiona | And then you're going to have to sit there and realize that not everybody's going to understand you when you're talking like that. |
| 13 | Fiona | And then (everybody around the nation), |
| 14 | Fiona | everyone speaks one language, |
| 15 | Fiona | we just speak it differently, |
| 16 | Fiona | so like if you just speak it normally they probably wouldn't understand you… |
| 17 | CG | Alright, that's a good point. |
| 18 | CG | Would anybody like to build upon what she said? |
| 19 | CG | Okay let- let's hear from the inner circle first. |
| 20 | Cory | My inner circle Barry don't got nothing to speak about. |
| 21 | CG | Alright, what would you like to say? |
| 22 | Cory | Alright. |
| 23 | Cory | What you said, transitioning. |
| 24 | Cory | Some people feel like there is no need to transition. |
| 25 | Cory | Some people feel that I'm gonna talk the way I'm going to talk, |
| 26 | Cory | if you don't understand it or like it, then you can go kick rocks. |
| 27 | Cory | That's how some people feel. |
| 28 | Fiona | But that's why they think we're ignorant! |
| 29 | Fiona | They think we're stupid because that's all we sit there and-. |
| 30 | Male | Well that's because we're not willing to change-. |
| 31 | CG | Benicia- Benicia- Benicia has something to say |

In Excerpt 8, CG has just asked what prejudices are connected to AAE (which the class, and *American Tongues*, calls "Black English" or "Black Language"). Fiona argues that many people have negative associations with AAE and are prejudiced against its speakers, though she uses language that puts the onus on speakers of AAE. For example, she says that people "limit [themselves] to Black Language" (lines 5 and 7) and that they will have to "realize that not everybody's going to understand" (line 12). Meanwhile, Cory emphasizes the fact that people might choose to speak the way they do regardless of the stigma against it (lines 23-26). Though it is tempting, it would be far too broad of a stroke to say that Fiona is "anti-AAE" and Cory is "pro-AAE." However, both students clearly align themselves with opposite sides of the debate: this is Fiona's only substantial contribution to the conversation, but Cory is the class's most talkative student and frequently argues for language variation and the benefits of fitting one's speech to the environment—or at the very least of *choosing* not to. In fact, in an earlier interaction

Cory explores the use of slang in the black community and ends his speech with "Black is power, baby, let's get it" (Excerpt 9, lines 17 – 18, below). Meanwhile, while not necessarily against the idea of AAE itself, Fiona is clearly frustrated by what she feels is avoidable judgment—though she puts the onus to avoid that judgment on the people who are being judged, rather than those doing the judging.

*Excerpt 9*

| 1 | Student | no, no. |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Student | We got more slang to our talking. |
| 3 | Student | Like when you're going out for a job, |
| 4 | Student | you're not gonna talk like that, |
| 5 | Student | you understand? |
| 6 | Cory | Like they use more Standard English than us. |
| 7 | Cory | We choose to use more slang because we all get it. |
| 8 | Cory | They gotta use more SE because they don't get it. |
| 9 | Cory | We have our own style. |
| 10 | | *[Unint.]* |
| 11 | Cory | We choose to use more- more slang because we all get it. |
| 12 | Cory | They gotta use more standard English because they don't get it. |
| 13 | Cory | We have our own style. |
| 14 | Female | Black is power |
| 15 | Cory | Exactly, black is power, baby. |
| 16 | Female | (unint) |
| 17 | Cory | Black is power, baby, |
| 18 | Cory | let's get it. |

Another student, Isa, takes a similar stance to Cory in the group work portion of the other class. Isa's group spends most of their half-hour discussion talking about whether or not people change their speech based on context or who they're speaking to, and Isa believes firmly that people *do* change their speech. Her own speech is distinctly varied: she uses features of AAE in chunks, usually when she is describing ways that her family members change how they speak or when she is addressing a classmate directly and trying to persuade them. In the following excerpts, I have bolded utterances that contain features of AAE.

*Excerpt 10:*

| 1 | Damila | [I always think] I'm clear so. |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Damila | I always think that I'm comin' out the way I'm supposed to. |
| 3 | Isa | **My aunt be doing that she /be like,/** |

| 4  | Damila | /I can't help the way I pronounce words./ |
| 5  | Isa    | **/"Hi, how/ you doin'."** |
| 6  | Isa    | "My name is dah deh dah." |
| 7  | Isa    | **It be so funny how she turns it on how natural she speaks clear and stuff like that.** |
| 8  | Isa    | Yeah. |
| 9  | Isa    | **She be like** |
| 10 | Isa    | **"hi how ya doin'."** |
| 11 | Isa    | Yes: |
| 12 | Isa    | **My u:ncle laughin' and I be crackin up.** |

*Excerpt 11:*

| 1  | Damila | I don't understand why I have to (…) |
| 2  | Damila | I don't care. |
| 3  | Damila | I don't care what people think of me. |
| 4  | Damila | I don't at all. |
| 5  | Damila | I don't. |
| 6  | Isa    | [Me too] |
| 7  | Isa    | **I ain't gonna lie.** |
| 8  | Isa    | **Everybody change it a little bit.** |
| 9  | Isa    | **No, everybody do.** |
| 10 | Isa    | You might not notice that you do, |
| 11 | Isa    | but you do. |
| 12 | Damila | I ain't. |
| 13 | Damila | The only time I change what I'm sayin'. |
| 14 | Damila | **The only time I'll change is when other kids there.** |

In Excerpt 10, Isa is giving examples to support her claim that people change how they speak, while Damila is arguing that she always speaks the same way. Isa frequently uses habitual *be* (which does not appear in SAE) to describe how her aunt "turns on" her formal voice when introducing herself. When reporting her aunt's speech, she does not use the copula (e.g., "how *are* you doing?"), which SAE requires. In Excerpt 11, Isa directly addresses Damila and argues for her side. In each case, Isa is modifying her speech to fit her task: when giving her example, she uses language in the way that she likely does with her family, and when addressing Damila she speaks as she would to a friend or peer (as opposed to a teacher or classroom authority figure).

Cory, Fiona, and Isa's stances line up remarkably well with how much they use features of AAE in their speech. Cory, who appears to prioritize pride in identity and

linguistic autonomy, uses features of AAE in 9 of his 79 utterances (about 11%, Fig. 2). Meanwhile Fiona, who appears to prioritize avoiding judgment and combatting stereotypes through modifying one's own behavior, didn't utter a single line that contained features of AAE in any of her 21 utterances. Fiona believes that people should align their behavior with the expected and valued language ideology—SAE, in school and in many, though not all, public situations—and she does just that. Cory, however, does not feel as restricted by dominant language ideologies, though he acknowledges that sometimes it's more beneficial to align with them (in job interviews or the workplace, for example). In the other class, Isa uses features of AAE in 23 of her 199 utterances (about 12%, Fig. 3). She changes the features she uses to suit the people she is talking to or about, emphasizing her point that people change how they speak based on context. All three students speak in a way that aligns with their stance relative to the debate.

*Relative to the classroom.*      Students also take stances relative to the classroom environment as a whole, beyond just the discussion happening within it. This can take the form of an immediate reaction to a decree from a teacher or discomfort with a topic, or it can reflect a student's desire to be (or to not be) in class at all. Students use features of different dialects, aligning or distancing themselves from the predominant classroom language, in order to project these stances.

When disagreeing with a classroom decision, one of the most salient and emphatic ways of signaling stance in a classroom context is for students to use a statement that has *negative concord*. *Negative concord* means that there is more than one negative word in a sentence, but the sentence is still perceived (and used) as a negation. For example, the sentence "there *ain't nothing* here" has negative concord (*ain't* and *nothing* are both negative), while the sentence "there *ain't anything* here" does not (*ain't* is the only negative word in the sentence). In the following two examples, Cory and Damila use negative concord to resist not just their immediate situation but also, implicitly, the classroom environment as a whole. In the following excerpts, I have bolded examples of negative concord.

*Excerpt 12:*

| 1 | Fiona | And then (everybody around the nation), |
|---|-------|------------------------------------------|
| 2 | Fiona | everyone speaks one language, |
| 3 | Fiona | we just speak it differently, |
| 4 | Fiona | so like if you just speak it normally they probably wouldn't understand you… |
| 5 | CG | Alright, that's a good point. |
| 6 | CG | Would anybody like to build upon what she said? |
| 7 | CG | Okay let- let's hear from the inner circle first. |
| 8 | Cory | **My inner circle buddy don't got nothing to speak about.** |
| 9 | CG | Alright, what would you like to say? |

In Excerpt 12, which is in fact part of the conversation between Cory and Fiona that I laid out in Excerpt 8, Cory is in the outer circle and Fiona is in the inner one. Cory wants to reply to Fiona's claims, but by the rule of the circle discussion, students in the inner circle have priority to speak. CG, the teacher, attempts to uphold the rules of the discussion by asking for the input of the inner circle directly; however, she has no takers and in line 8 Cory, frustrated, says that his inner circle counterpart "*don't* got *nothing* to speak about."

In terms of content, this statement serves to inform the teacher that Cory believes that his peers don't have anything to say and imply that thus Cory himself should be able to speak. However, by using negative concord in the statement, Cory does two things: first, he emphasizes his denial by using two negatively marked words (*don't* and *nothing)* instead of the one that he would have been limited to in SAE; second, he resists the authority of the teacher and of the classroom by using features that are not acceptable within the privileged dialect (SAE). In resisting the language ideology of the classroom, he also resists the rule that would keep him out of the discussion in dialect as well as simply in statement.

*Excerpt 13:*

| 1 | Damila | Just be respectful. |
|---|--------|---------------------|
| 2 | Damila | Everybody don't wanna hear all that all the time. |
| 3 | Isa | Yeah. |
| 4 | Damila | **I don't wanna talk about this no more.** |
| 5 | AG | I think what you're talking about though – |
| 6 | AG | just being respectful – |
| 7 | AG | really is changing your language for different people. |

In another classroom and in Excerpt 13, Damila uses negative concord to a similar effect, though she is not reacting to a specific decree by the teacher. Instead, she is resisting a discussion that she has frequently deemed inapplicable to her life and, through the use of features that are unacceptable in the school's dominant language ideology, reinforcing the idea that she is not interested in participating in school activities.

While Damila's statement in Excerpt 13 is in reaction to a specific topic, she also consistently attempts to project a *bad student* role (Ellwood, 2008) and signal her lack of interest in the class (despite also frequently contributing to the discussion). She signals her disinterest both by stating it outright and by departing from the expected language of the classroom. In the following excerpt, I have bolded utterances in which Damila projects her stance.

*Excerpt 14:*

| 1 | Damila | It's not gonna change who you are, |
|---|--------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 | Damila | but (…) obviously (…). |
| 3 | Damila | **Ya'll not listening to me.** |
| 4 | Damila | I'm just talkin' for the heck of it. |
| 5 | Damila | People perceive us in, like, a negative way. |
| 6 | Damila | And so they don't. |
| 7 | Damila | You know. |
| 8 | Damila | I mean. |
| 9 | Damila | We gotta act like we have some training and were brought up well and stuff. |
| 10 | Isa | That's good. |
| 11 | Isa | Write that down. |
| 12 | Damila | (…). |
| 13 | Damila | **I'm not in a school mood today.** |
| 14 | Damila | Excuse my behavior. |
| 15 | Damila | I don't feel like it. |

In Excerpt 14, Damila balances contributing to the conversation with her disinterest—or at least, her desire to seem disinterested—in being in school. In line 13, she outright states her stance relative to the classroom: she isn't in a school mood, and does not want to be there. Earlier in the excerpt, however, Damila is readily adding to the discussion. When she perceives that her classmates are not paying perfect attention to her (line 3), she reacts petulantly, chiding them for not listening to her. By departing from the

expected language of the classroom in line 3, she distances herself from the classroom even while participating in the relevant activity.

Later on, Damila also resists participating in the discussion at all, arguing that it does not apply to her. In Excerpt 15, I have bolded utterances where speakers use features of AAE.

*Excerpt 15:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Isa | **Everybody do it for a job.** |
| 2 | Isa | You know what I mean? |
| 3 | Isa | Get an interview. |
| 4 | Isa | For a job. |
| 5 | Isa | For to work. |
| 6 | Isa | Job interview. |
| 7 | Damila | Job interviews. |
| 8 | Damila | (…). |
| 9 | Damila | I don't know. |
| 10 | Damila | **I don't got three different ways.** |
| 11 | Isa | I talk. |
| 12 | Isa | I talk. |
| 13 | Isa | You talk a certain-. |
| 14 | Isa | Okay. |
| 15 | Isa | So, you talk a certain way for job interviews, |
| 16 | Isa | but come on, I mean come on now. |
| 17 | Isa | You're going to just a little bit. |
| 18 | Isa | Cuz I'm still the same. |
| 19 | Isa | I'm not gonna be-. |
| 20 | Isa | Well Yeah. |
| 21 | Isa | You know what I mean. |
| 22 | Isa | Cuz that's not me, but-. |
| 23 | Damila | talk for jobs and with friends you talk a certain way. |
| 24 | Damila | **I talk the s:ame way with ya'll that I talk with my mom.** |
| 25 | Isa | Oh, I don't. (laughter) |
| 26 | Damila | Job interviews, friends. |
| 27 | Isa | And educated people like cuz you want to sound educated like. |
| 28 | Damila | I mean, I'm me. |

In Excerpt 15, Damila practically refuses to engage in the discussion. Each time Isa attempts to pass the conversation off to her, Damila denies that she speaks differently with different groups of people and does so in utterances that contain features of AAE

(lines 10 and 24). Damila is resisting the class discussion not only by denying its premise, but also by refusing to adhere to the preferred language of the classroom.

Both Damila and Cory use features of AAE—a language that is often rejected in the classroom—to instead reject the classroom itself. However, Cory is only resisting a specific move by the teacher, while Damila consistently resists the classroom activity as a whole. These acts of resistance are on different scales, and I will show in the next section that they also interact with the stances that students take in different ways.

*Interaction with Classroom Roles.*    Students' identities are complicated, and sometimes the stances they aligned with in the discussion—and the language they used to project them—did not mesh perfectly with the roles they took up in the classroom. In the second classroom, Damila and Isa both used features of African American English frequently in their speech (13% of Damila's utterances contained features of AAE while 12% of Isa's did), but the two girls had almost opposite stances both relative to the discussion and relative to the classroom. During their group discussion, Isa contributed to the discussion readily and kept the group on task by reading out the questions as they moved along (fitting Ellwood's (2008) *good student* role) while Damila resisted the premise of the discussion and openly stated that she did not want to be there (fitting Ellwood's (2008) *bad student* role). Similarly, Isa believed that everyone changes their speech depending on context; Damila was adamant that she did not.

The *good student* role that Ellwood describes is multifaceted: good students do try to participate in the class work and keep their peers on task, but they also frequently align with the expected language of the classroom. Meanwhile, a clear marker of Ellwood's *bad student* role is a resistance to not only classwork, but also the classroom language. Looking at Damila and Isa under only these terms, both might be considered *bad students*; however, Isa's engagement clearly suggests that this is not so.

Due to the topic of the discussion (dialect variation) and the environment that the researcher, AG, created during the group discussion, it may be the case that the classroom language ideology was less salient during the discussion than it is during most normal class times. If this is the case, Isa would perhaps have felt more free to speak however she felt comfortable, focusing on her position in the debate more than the role she wanted

to embody in the classroom. For Damila, however, the fact that she was in class at all was the most salient part of her experience in the discussion, and thus she projected resistance by resisting the language ideology she knew was present in the classroom most of the time. Though they used features of AAE with very similar frequencies, Isa and Damila were focused on very different aspects of the conversation and prioritized different parts of their identity during the discussion.

In both larger discussions and small interactions, students use their language to signal their stances on issues as varied as a the proper response to stereotyping and judgment (Fiona and Cory), whether or not they vary their speech (Damila and Isa), classroom rules (Cory and CG) and even their presence in the classroom at all (Damila). In some cases, stances are clear: Fiona felt strongly that people should avoid judgment and align their speech with the dominant language to increase the chances of being understood while Cory advocated for individual speakers' agency in their own choices, and both practiced what they preached. Similarly, when they addressed the adults in their groups using negative concord, Cory and Damila's stances towards the class environment were clear. In other cases, behavior regarding stances on different issues may make it more difficult to tell why individuals are speaking as they are: in Damila and Isa's discussion, both students used features of AAE with similar frequency (in 13% and 12% of their total utterances, respectively), but they had vastly different positions within the discussion. Damila was not excited to be in class and was adamant that she did not change her speech based on environment, and thus may have been resisting the classroom's dominant language ideology in order to portray her stance regarding her presence in the classroom at all. Isa, however, was very engaged in the classwork—but, like Cory, she believed firmly that people did vary their language based on situation and was interested in figuring out the reasons why. Thus, due to her own more descriptivist stance and the student-focused environment that AG created, Isa too used features of AAE frequently. Each student in the two classrooms had a different goal, and each used language in ways that aligned with that goal.

*Discussion*

While discussing language variation as part of a three-day dialect variation unit, how students spoke was heavily affected not only by their own stances in the classroom, but also by how the teachers positioned themselves in the discussion. Students used features of AAE most often when they were in control of the discussion, as well as when they aligned themselves *with* stances that argued for people's right to linguistic autonomy or *against* the classroom as a whole. Of course, there may be other factors that contribute to students' use of AAE in the classroom: demographic factors such as their background, home life, or gender, or environmental factors such as the race of the teacher, to name a few. However, the point remains: students *do* use features of AAE frequently when having productive, on-topic discussions in the classroom, and, as we saw with Cory and Isa, using the stigmatized dialect does not at all mean that the students are less likely to contribute constructively (as long as the classroom environment allows for it). In fact, having the freedom to use whatever linguistic resources they have access to may actually be beneficial for students: by using features that index a variety of dialects, students are easily able to convey more information than just the content of their words. They are able to indicate their stance beyond simply stating it, and they are able to convey how they feel about how the class is being run (if teachers are willing to look for the information).

If students are using their dialect in productive ways during class activities that are not primarily focused on teaching SAE, teachers must make a decision: do they want to enforce the expected language of the classroom, or do they want to encourage the discussion and address SAE separately? Given prior research, we have reason to believe that pursuing the first option—enforcing "correct" language at all times in the classroom, as is expected now (Godley & Escher, 2012)—is actually harmful to students. As Padak (1981) noted, when students enter into a classroom with the expectation of being corrected they are naturally less likely to speak up; in fact, when put in a situation where the teacher has (and frequently demonstrates) the authority to judge a student's speech correct or incorrect, students also learn very little (Godley et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2004). On the other hand, if teachers treat students' current language skills as something to be built upon and teach privileged dialects explicitly, students who speak dialects or languages other than SAE often *exceed* the learning expectations for their native SAE

speaking peers (Rickford, 1999). Restricting a dialect in the classroom removes a resource from students' linguistic and academic toolboxes—one that could make succeeding and engaging in the classroom much easier for some students, if they are allowed to use it.

In fact, we can expand the idea of the linguistic toolbox beyond just grammar and vocabulary. Many African American students struggle with writing not just because AAE differs from the expected classroom language in structure, but also because there are systematic differences in storytelling conventions (Richardson, 2002; Rickford, 1999, Morgan, 2002). By creating an environment that encourages these skills as well as teaching students more academically privileged ways of communication, educators can build upon the skills that students already bring to the classroom. Furthermore, teaching diverse ways of storytelling or constructing a narrative will help students understand that the skills they bring to school from home or from their neighborhoods *are* skills. If teachers are explicit about differences in storytelling conventions, students can also begin to understand *why* they struggle with academic writing—not just *that* they struggle with it—and feel more capable of working through the challenges (Bain, 2004; Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010).

However, in order to teach well, we need to understand how and when students naturally use different types of language. Language is everywhere in schools, and may be a barrier for students in math and science as well as in the liberal arts. Furthermore, the discussions analyzed in this paper concerned how students used language themselves, and due to the odd, meta nature of the topic students may have approached their language differently than they would have in a situation where they were not constantly thinking about their own speech. So, how do students use features of stigmatized dialects—AAE or otherwise—in non-language-based tasks? For example, is there benefit to allowing students to use AAE when doing science or math work, or even teaching those subjects with AAE in mind? The Articulab at Carnegie Mellon, run by Justine Cassell, has begun to ask these questions of younger students, doing sociolinguistic studies by examining how young students interact with a virtual peer (Finkelstein, Vaughn, Yarzebinski, & Cassell, 2013).

Beyond studying how students use language, how can we create pedagogies that take all of this information—how students use AAE, the differences between AAE and SAE in vocab, grammar, *and* discourse structure, the national language ideology—into account? How can we go about getting them into schools in a way that actually works— ways that aren't intimidating to parents or educators who are worried that introducing AAE into the school environment will make it impossible for student speakers to succeed?

In the current educational climate, school is extremely difficult for many African American students, especially those who enter schools without a strong grasp of SAE. To level the playing field between them and their SAE-speaking peers, we need to think critically not only about how to teach them to succeed, but also our very assumptions about what we consider success, and what we consider knowledge worth having.

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