NEGOTIATING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: POLITICS OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

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This work addresses the politics of speech and language communication with respect to Africans in the Diaspora in Jamaica and in the United States of America. Language hegemony is an expression of the power and control sustained by means of institutions such as schools. Depending on their linguistic choices or situational language use, post colonials experience ambivalence, conflict, and suspicion within as well as outside their primary language communities. The issue of language and dialect use should be addressed as one of equity and social justice, as part of striving to make the world a better place for all people.

NEGOTIATING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: THE POLITICS OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY/ (BLACK ENGLISHES)

"The men of Gilead said to him, Are you an Ephraiminite? If he said, No, They said to him, Then say Shibboleth; and he said Sibboleth: for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slew him...." Judges 12:6.

SPEECH REFLECTS THE SOCIAL RELATIONS IN A SOCIETY

The quote above describing the Biblical account of the battle between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites illustrates how pronunciation of one word, changed by the omission of the "h," sound served to identify escaping Ephraimites who claimed to be Gileadites in order to escape death. The Ephraimites' speech revealed their identity, and forty-two thousand of them were killed in this battle. Despite the date and context of this example, speech and language are still used as tools to identify, demarcate, and at times to dominate and oppress those without power in various societies.

How we speak and the languages we use serve to distinguish among nationalities, social classes and groups, educational levels, and to some degree, age and gender. History, culture, geography and other environmental factors, as well as personal experiences, all influence what we say and how we say it. Speech reflects social relations in a society, and social relations, in turn, shape/affect/determine how people speak as well as how they respond to various forms and patterns of speech. The languages or dialects spoken by the dominant groups in a given society will be that of those accorded power and prestige.

Burling (1973, p. 27) reviews the source of a language's status and prestige in the following:

> In a society like ours it may be inevitable that the language of those with money, education, and high social status comes to be regarded as the best. These are the people who often set the standards.... But if by some magic our class system were suddenly overturned, new forms of speech would surely acquire prestige. If, for instance, those who held positions of power and respect regularly used double negatives, while the humble members of the lower classes never did so, we can be confident that double negatives would soon begin to sound elegant, simply because elegant people used them.

Lukia Koliussi (2004, p.107) observes: "Language is the most important means of human interaction and social survival. By understanding, inferring, and relaying meaning, we creatively negotiate, construct, reconstruct, and define the norms and rules by which we live and the identities we either are 'assigned' by society or choose to take in certain situations." How does the exercise of power to construct and define these societal norms affect students of African descent and what roles do educators and schooling play in maintaining the linguistic status quo? My goal in this article is to encourage educators and others to examine the links between attitudes towards speech and language of students of African descent and social justice. In addition to my graduate training in communication and my experience as a communications consultant, I have researched Black linguistics extensively in order to write the course: "Black Speech and Language Communication Behaviors," which has been approved and is now being offered at this university. However, in this article, my experiences as student, elementary school

teacher, student teacher supervisor and professor in three cultural contexts are scaffolded around and used to illuminate research perspectives on the politics of black speech and language communication.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION: MAINTAINING THE LINGUISTIC STATUS QUO

Often during their formative formal and informal learning experiences students become socialized to society's norms or designations/classifications of 'good" and 'bad' English. While most would agree that speech and language communication in the classroom go beyond drumming the mechanics of grammar and language use into students, scant attention is given to making visible "the power of language to construct subjectivity and social reality [which] makes it a site of both ideological and political struggle" (Macedo et. al. 2003, p. 48). Part of the ideological and political struggle mentioned above is the reality that many students whose first and whose home languages differ from their society's standard are viewed by schools as users of illicit speech. The latter is particularly true in postcolonial societies where formerly enslaved or dominated populations' speech and languages reflect their histories of oppression.

The Roles of Education and Schooling in Maintaining the Linguistic Status Quo: Schools as Sites of Struggle and Contestation

Terry Meier states: "It is difficult to talk about Black Language/Ebonics in a meaningful way without simultaneously talking about racism" (1998, p. 120). It is therefore important that teachers are aware of the role of schools as more than sites of knowledge transmission. Macedo et. al. (2000, p. 40) identify:

> Schools as sites of struggle and contestation that reproduce the dominant culture and ideology, as well as what is perceived as legitimate language/knowledge, make use of their institutional power to either affirm or deny a learner's language, and thus his or her lived experiences and culture. Additionally, schools are not simply static institutions that mirror the social order or reproduce the dominant ideology. They are active agents in the very construction of the social order and the dominant ideology.

Failure to acknowledge support for Ebonics from organizations such as the American Linguistics Association, the American Association for Applied Linguistics and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages is a casualty in the ideological war over speech and language in American society (Rickford and Rickford, 2000, p. 175; Perry and Delpit, 1998, p. 160). Rickford and Rickford note that Congress approved a $1 million grant to research techniques "for tapping the linguistic and cultural resources of black students in order to enhance their school performance" (2000, p. 175). Despite information to the contrary,

> Myths and misconceptions about language and negative attitudes towards language diversity are fostered in the school and perpetuated in the general populace by the public school experience (Pooley, 1974). Schools and teachers are seen as guardians of the national tongue. Condemned as immoral, ignorant, and inferior are all those who depart from the idealized norm of standard English which, as Pooley's research (1969) so powerfully demonstrates, teachers themselves preach but do not practice….Research on sociolinguistics in the education process has been most fruitful and convincing in uncovering underlying attitudes about language….In the educational context, negative

> linguistic attitudes are reflected in the institutional policies and practices that become educationally dysfunctional for Black English-speaking children. Research on language attitudes consistently indicates that teachers believe Black English-speaking youngsters are nonverbal and possess limited vocabularies. They are perceived to be slow learners or uneducable; their speech is unsystematic and needs constant correction and improvement (Smitherman, 140-141).

Farley (2005, pp. 376-377) attributes labeling black children as "slow" or "illiterate" because of their use of Black English to “Educators' misconceptions.” He states: “Other researchers have found that teachers expected lower achievement, intelligence, and reading success from students who used Black English. This misperception is often compounded in white or middle class environments where the norm is Standard English because Black children feel inhibited and become withdrawn." Dandy (1991, pp. 8-9) corroborates the findings above and provides results from both Shuy's survey of teachers' attitudes about the language of "disadvantaged" children and findings from Cunningham’s study of 189 teachers from four geographic regions.

Shuy recommends "content courses to help teachers solve language differences/problems in their classrooms.” Dandy relates both Shuy and Cunningham's similar findings: “Teachers need to be adequately trained to understand the dialects of the children they teach, to recognize meaning equivalence, to learn how systematic various dialects can be, so that they can develop sensitivity toward communicating with the language/dialect different child… teachers must learn the acceptance of Black dialect as a complex grammatical system...it is the responsibility of teacher training institutions to see to it that they [teachers] are taught" (1991, p. 6).

My personal and professional experiences make issues of speech and language especially urgent and compelling. Our efforts to develop a just society must include critical examination of our attitudes towards speech and language, as well as commitment to addressing linguistic barriers to academic achievement. Certainly this issue is also important for speakers of other languages and dialects, but in my current work as a professor of African American Studies, my focus is on the speech of those of us who comprise the African Diaspora.

Some of my earliest memories of speech and language issues are of my schooling in Jamaica. I remember a classroom with no walls, just the zinc roof to shelter us from the elements. We seven year olds intensely, loudly, and emphatically repeated in typical singsong fashion recitations such as: "Hannibal crossed the Alps! Hannibal crossed the Alps! Thousands of elephants Hannibal had, when Hannibal crossed the Alps! Thousands of elephants stumbled and died, when Hannibal crossed the Alps…!" I've forgotten the other verses over the years now, but I remember that subsequent verses discuss the demise of the elephants as they fell off the mountain to their deaths. We were taught to stress the appropriate sounds as precisely as clients in speech consults would be coached to do.

After earning a master's degree in communications, I worked with experienced and highly skilled speech pathologists and other communication specialists developing exercises and other training materials to help corporate employees "professionalize" their speech and code switch between various languages, dialects, and Standard English. It was in the middle of this work that I remembered my childhood recitations and noticed how the focus was on sounds particularly suited for Jamaican speech. Typical speakers of the Jamaican language would remove the "H" from" Hannibal but place it before the "A" in Alps. Thus, "Anibal" crossed the "Halps." The "th" in thousands would be reduced to "t," resulting in, “tousands.”

Although we recited this and other now forgotten exercises with great exuberance, no one bothered to tell us that the purpose of this exercise was to help standardize our speech. Clearly, rote learning was *de rigueur* in the Jamaica of the 1950s. Although I have benefited from this training, I still have serious misgivings about the null curriculum and the colonial education I experienced.

Speech became more complicated as I grew into the pre-teen years. I now lived in Kingston with my very prim and proper godmother, Mrs. Lawson, who only used the Jamaican language in rare moments when jesting. She, like some other Jamaicans, affected a British sounding accent, although she had never visited Great Britain. Mrs. Lawson would hit the "t" in "viT-a-min" with profound force, and, by today's speech standards, made quite a spectacle of herself, when pronouncing the simplest word. When the professor of the professional speech-writing course which I took as part of my master's degree in communication at the University of Illinois hinted at "affected speech," I knew its origin.

SPEECH PATHOLOGY?: PRIVILEGING THE SPEECH OF THE POWERFUL IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Linguistic Hegemony in the African Diaspora

I moved to Bermuda just in time to begin high school and discovered--through interacting with my classmates--that many Bermudians esteemed Americans highly, but had little regard for Jamaicans. There were two foreigners in our school, one was an American boy; I, of course, was the Jamaican. One can imagine beginning the challenging high school years in an environment where Jamaicans were sometimes derisively addressed as "West Indians" or referred to as "Chigger foots." Most of my Bermudian classmates fervently believed they had no accent. To them their speech was the norm, while mine was the nonstandard deviation.

My mother who lived in Bermuda for over 30 years shared the following example of a speech event with Bermudian friends which illustrates our linguistic differences. "I said spell rat," said mama to five year old Judy. Judy looked puzzled and quizzically repeated, "rat?" "Rat?' while looking inquiringly at her grandmother, Aunt Inez, for help. Aunt Inez responded, "Judy, she said spell "Raaaat," "oh raaaaaaaaaat" said Judy as she now quickly spelled the word. In Bermudian speech, "eggs" become "eeeeeeeeeegs." This was definitely a speech pattern I did not want to emulate.

At fifteen years old, upon the urging of my closest Bermudian classmates the Santucci twins, Norma and Naomi, we left Bermuda for a boarding school in Mandeville, Jamaica. The twins left to attend school in England soon after we arrived, while I remained for four years to complete two years of high school and two years of college. In addition to the many Jamaicans, there were students from the Bahamas, Bermuda, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Argentina and other nationalities some of whom attended our school only to learn English. Before long I achieved the distinction of being contemptuously referred to as: "Jamaican foreigner" by some contentious Jamaican classmates. They were annoyed because to them, I did not sound like a Jamaican. My pronunciation was definitely not Bermudian, though. I do not remember when, but some time after I began high school in Bermuda, I had changed my speech--not to sound like the Bermudians, but not exactly with a Jamaican lilt either.

As an undergraduate at DePaul University majoring in Communication/English, I was puzzled as to why some professors circled or highlighted words on my otherwise excellent

papers. The work was demanding, and I am certain that I would not have graduated magna cum laude had I not discovered the reason, because none of my professors offered any explanations. Furthermore, like some students, early in my academic journey I was too intimidated to question instructors' markings. When I discovered the reason for their notations, I began writing "color" instead of "colour," "tire" instead of "tyre" and so on. I was also penalized for separating words British style, but I had no idea these differences even existed. Was I supposed to know this information before coming to college, I wondered? Later, I puzzled over whether instructors had attributed my language differences to cultural difference or to deficits, and I also wondered if they themselves were aware of these linguistic differences.

At home, I was suspect to my son and my husband when I spoke Jamaican language with my mother. My explanations of how Spanish speaking or other bilinguals or bidialectals speak their natal languages or dialects at home and Standard English at work, failed to stop the looks that seemed to say, "hypocrite!" There was tremendous conflict because choosing to speak Standard English is often taken by some inside our speech communities as rejection of our common language and culture and simultaneously preference of the macroculture.

Throughout most of my life, I have both accepted and rejected the prevailing view that our Jamaican language or any African Diasporan mode of speech was substandard or "bad English," and that Standard English was the measure of intellect and achievement. I knew Standard English, but I felt uncomfortable and unnatural conversing with my 100-year-old Jamaican grandfather and other older Jamaican relatives in any other dialect than the Jamaican Language. This ambivalence became shame when I had to select one dialect when the audience consisted of both Americans and Jamaicans, for example.

The latter underlines the role of language in relationships. Relationships are created and sustained by language which is part of a particular culture. When Papa, my grandfather, and I spoke the same language we enjoyed fellowship encased in and marked by a familiarity unmediated by different grammatical structure and pronunciation dictated by others outside of our society. We were also able to preserve the ties that link us. Yet, there is always the concern that others are still thinking "hypocrite!"

I did not encounter empowering information on language hegemony and equality for some time. It was ultimately links between the experiences from my speech communication consulting practice--particularly with African American clients--my doctoral research, and my own journey on the road to speech and language wholeness that has led me to oppose linguistic domination.

The answer to my desperate prayer for employment to help finance my doctoral studies resulted in work as a part-time speech communications consultant. The communications-consulting firm held a training contract with a large Midwestern corporation with a diverse workforce, and I learned as much as I taught this clientele. I enjoyed working one-on-one with African Americans, Ukrainian, Mexican American, Guatemalan, Egyptian, Anglo-Americans, Chinese, as well as clients from other ethnic groups. My dissertation study examined features of the formal and informal education of African American clients who were learning to attain fluency in Standard English in this workplace-training program. I learned that our experiences with language were similar in many ways.

As the trainer in this, program I had to face my own issues with speech and language and those of the clients as well. Delivering the training was rewarding and fulfilling, and the personal interactions were stimulating. Part of the dynamics of my work was continuous tension between being accepting of speech diversity, yet acknowledging that power relations in society constrain

our communication choices and demand knowledge of and facility with the language of power. Under unequal power relations, our speech identifies us as the 'other,' and allows us to be distinguished for unequal treatment/discrimination, or ridicule. It would be helpful to examine how individuals respond to pressures to conform to dominant societal speech patterns, ranges of responses to new speech communities, why some decide to change their speech while others do not, and the extent of change. It is rarely in the interest of those who exercise political and economic power and control access to society's resources to fight for linguistic equity. Addressing these issues in the curriculum could be both illuminating and transformational.

MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS, DIS AND MIS-INFORMATION ABOUT AFRICAN DIASPORAN SPEECH

Just as hazardous as using one's speech as a basis for discrimination, are misinformation and the disinformation about the speech and language use of people in the African Diaspora. When I taught a multicultural education course for preservice teachers, a student of Irish descent--who was a speech pathology major-- remarked that African Americans speak the way they do simply because they want to be contrary. I responded by questioning how African Americans in disparate locations, unknown to one another, emerged speaking a similar dialect. The student had no explanation for her claim. I ended my discussion thinking, how powerful blacks must be to achieve a feat such as speaking a similar language in different parts of the nation without having met one another. A number of these students became indignant at my suggestion that they learn Spanish. The most vociferous student in this class informed me that no one "catered" to her parents when they emigrated from Europe, and therefore, she would not cater to Hispanics.

These and the other experiences that I will relate convinced me that students' attitudes and exposure to language difference should concern us as responsible educators in a multiethnic society. It is critical that students learn that people do not speak particular dialects and languages simply because of their skin color, and that power and privilege are imbricated in how we value the language of various social groups. The link between language hegemony and students' behaviors is apparent, in that students' actions seem to infer that learning the language of a subordinated group ascribes power to that group which simultaneously diminishes the dominant group's stature.

The language use I observed while supervising student teachers during their periods of instruction in an all African American elementary school on Chicago's south side is another example which gave me the impetus to address black speech and language early in my academic career. Some of these preservice teachers did not use Standard English while they were instructing the students. A student teacher of Polish descent addressed the children using language such as, "gimme them books." The student teachers of African descent were unaware that they were using Black English.

These student teachers were unconscious of their language choices, and both the elementary school and the university had made no special provisions to help students achieve proficiency in Standard English. This elementary school's speech pathologist believed it was futile for the children in that south side African American community to learn Standard English because using Standard English would make little difference to their futures. Tchudi and Mitchell (1989, p. 255) agree:

> It is important to realize, as James Sledd has suggested, that teaching standard English by whatever method will not automatically open new doors to children.

> Often the lack of standard English is merely used as an excuse for rejecting people on racial, ethnic, or other grounds. Further, language is learned in response to needs felt by the language user. Unless students recognize a real opportunity to participate in a standard English community, they will not willingly learn its dialect.

While the above is valid, I agree with those who believe knowledge of Standard English removes its absence from being one more potential obstacle to the survival and advancement of those who can least afford these hindrances (Stokes In Alvarez & Kilker, 1986; Delpit, 1988). Rickford and Rickford (2000, p. 9) concur that African Americans must master Standard English. But they also believe that "Ebonics, African American Vernacular English, Black English, Spoken Soul or whatever you want to call the informal variety spoken by many black people plays an essential, valuable role in our lives and in the life of the larger society to which we all belong."

In his article in which he considers whether a human rights approach to language planning and policy promotes educational equity for diverse student populations Tove Skutnabb-Kangas contends:

> Children should learn new languages, including the dominant languages that most minority children obviously want and need to learn, in addition to their own languages. Formal education that is subtractive, that is, that teaches children (something of) a dominant language at the cost of their first language, is genocidal and turns dominant languages, for instance, English, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, or Hausa, into killer languages. Educational LHRs, [language human rights] which guarantee additive language learning, are needed to prevent linguistic genocide and for linguistic diversity to be maintained on earth. (In Ricento, 2002, p. 181).

UNDERSTANDING THE DOMINATION AND CONTROL OF SUBJUGATED LANGUAGES

Linguistic Prejudice: Disguised Race, Class or Ethnic Prejudice

Why is there so much contestation and intrigue over Black English? In discussing the ideology of language Winford (2003, p. 35) makes the point that "Linguistic prejudice, as we all know, is simply race or class or ethnic prejudice in a subtle guise. A socially realistic linguistics simply acknowledges that fact. Until we persuade the general public, the teachers, the politicians, and the policy makers of that fact, languages like AAVE will continue to be languages that dare not speak their names." The latter has already been stated by others such as educator Nona Stokes. Stokes (In Alvarez & Kilker, 1986) believes: "the majority of white America does not accept Black English, but not because of the language itself...because of the people who speak it, which is racism."

Dandy (1991, p. 41) explains that: "Being black is a social stigma in this country, so the sounds and structures of the people who use the language are also considered by some as inferior. Some forms are more highly stigmatized than others." As a way to justify keeping African Americans subservient, their language, as well as other features of their culture, have been socially constructed as inferior, when as a means of communication it works just as well as

any other language system.

According to Winford (2003, p. 35, 56), " Linguistic domination simultaneously entails cultural supremacy. Those who are able to gain control over meanings and conventions of discourse are also able to promote their views of the world, their norms, their values and ultimately their interests. Those who are denied the right to use their language in all forms of social life are hindered in expressing themselves, in shaping reality, in drawing attention to their needs, and in commanding support from others." Issues of power are clearly imbricated in whose language is deemed valuable in a society.

Recognition of the Validity of Black Speech and Language Communication

Black speech and language have been recognized as valid systems of communication for some time (Stewart, 1969; Hecht, 1993; Perry and Delpit, 1998; Van Keulen, et. al.; 1998; Berger, 1991). Speech pathologist and vocal coach Mary Berger (1991, p. xi) lists linguists such as Lorenzo D. Turner, William A. Stewart and J. L. Dillard "whose exhaustive scholarly research on Black English...demonstrates that Black English is as systematic and rule-governed in its pronunciation and grammar as Standard English."

Berger describes Standard English as "the most widely accepted and socially prestigious English dialect; it is used professionally and academically; [but] “is no better or worse linguistically than any other rule-governed English dialect (p. xiii)." According to Winford, "It is evident to all linguists that AAVE and other varieties of New World Black English are legitimate, rule-governed systems of communication--true manifestations of the human faculty of language. But it is equally clear that they are subject to extreme forms of linguistic prejudice, rooted in ideologies and belief systems, which have no basis in linguistic fact, or arise from one-sided interpretation of the facts” (2003, p. 22).

There are similarities between the use of the Jamaican language used mainly by the largely poor black majority in Jamaica and the use of Black English by African Americans. Knowledge and research on black speech and language that could enlighten and move us beyond deficit and even difference perspectives are being investigated. Unfortunately, the information is rarely discussed or disseminated. Brunious (1998, p. 177) reports that:

> Recent work in descriptive linguistics has found links that associate the development of various Black English dialects to West African languages. Black English dialects, with historical resemblances to Caribbean and West African varieties of English (Dillard, 1972) have a form and structure of their own. Linguist Carmen Tolhurst (1996) contends that Black English includes unique vocabulary elements, various phonological features that systematically replace certain English consonants, and a different, more fully developed verbal system with tense and aspect features that are not found in Standard English dialects. If we subscribe to the "deficit" theory of language, which dialect would be deemed deficient on these terms? First, it must be noted that these differences are part of a systematic pattern in Black English, and secondly, that they have correspondences in other languages commonly considered "full" languages--e.g., Japanese, Spanish, etc.

William Stewart's (1969) discussion of the relationship between language use and educational achievements of many African American students should cause concern and also

could inform students such as those who enrolled in the multicultural education course I mentioned earlier. Stewart observes:

> That the Negro speech of a given region and social class may differ from the white speech of even the same region and a comparable social class is now understood to be the result, not of physiological or mental differences between Negroes and whites, but rather of the interrelationship between language history and American social structure....once this is understood it should become apparent that language differences, as opposed to language deficits, may well account for most of the chronic difficulty which so many lower class Negro children have with standard English in the classroom and, later, on the job (1969, p. 167).

In Stewart's "once this is understood," mentioned above lies the rub, because without information, understanding cannot occur. Linguistic domination of African Diasporic speech is rarely addressed with any rigor; however; there is vigor in reporting sensational stories such as the Oakland School Board debate, but no rigorous efforts to share the facts underlying these linguistic issues.

THE SILENCE OF THE SCHOOLS: IGNORING THE CHALLENGES WHILE PENALIZING OUR SPEECH

Many African American students, like the preservice teachers mentioned earlier, for example, are not receiving the help with Standard English they need in school, and consequently their academic achievement and careers are affected. Few instructors have the time or the preparation to address these matters, and others do not care to perform what is considered remedial instruction. I do know firsthand how difficult this job is for instructors. However, we must address the issue as a societal obligation by viewing the appropriate assistance for these students as part of the debt America owes the descendants of its former slaves. Rather than an exclusive focus on recruiting students universities refer to as "quality students," money and other resources must be allocated to train those students that want and need higher education.

It would be helpful if the students themselves were made aware of how their speech is perceived and evaluated by others in society. I recall a student in a mixture of exasperation, doubt, and defiance questioning the existence and definition of Black English in a manner that revealed his disbelief that there was any such thing. His conversation ended abruptly, however, when a number of his classmates indicated to him that he was indeed speaking Black English. A client I interviewed for my dissertation study discussed her perceptions of how the Chicago Public Schools handled her language training:

> I didn't know it was a black thing and a standard thing. I thought I was speaking Standard English. I didn't know I was lacking in my speech until someone pointed it out. I don't know how other people feel, but if you point it out to me I want to correct it. I won't know unless someone points something out. I didn't know I was speaking black dialect. I thought I was speaking pretty good finding out that I can't even say the word `ask' right. I'm sayin' `axe' and nobody ever told me. Nobody pointed out the difference between the two until look, I'm almost 40 years old.... If you see someone tryin' to better themselves wouldn't you try to help, and especially if that person's putting forth an effort improving wouldn't you try to help that person kinda motivate that person?

Another of my study's participants added, "They have not educated the children correctly. The only way that a black professional--and they're up talking professionally is because they found out. Someone told them or they heard themselves and they were able to improve themselves, and you can tell, or they went to a school where this is taught correctly where it was not a segregated school. If it was an all-black school, no."

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: INTERNALIZING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK ENGLISH

Self image is a casualty of society's negative perceptions of Black English. I remember the ambivalence of clients who tried to master code switching from Black English to Standard English, while simultaneously trying to deal with the baggage that their community's speech had been judged deficient. No matter how often I addressed the myth that my client Janet did not speak Black English because of her "lazy tongue," from time to time, she continued slapping her mouth as a reprimand to her "lazy tongue" when she "slipped" into Black English. Similar beliefs, which denigrate the value of our languages throughout the Diaspora, illustrate the effectiveness of the ideology that has shaped our views of language in our society. Getting both African Americans and African Jamaicans to accept the ideology of their inferiority has worked well as some of us refer to our "bad hair" and our "bad English."

Loretta Brunious (1998, p. 177) locates Janet's belief in "the misguided deficit theory of language [which] shames children who speak Black English, and when children are deemed to be "linguistically deficient," it is not a far jump for them to perceive themselves as inferior, inadequate, and powerless. Children who are shamed about their language soon become ashamed of themselves." Tchudi and Mitchell's (1989, p. 255) analysis also links language oppression and self esteem: "Predators can and do use dialect differences to exploit and oppress, because ordinary people can be made to doubt their own value and to accept subservience if they can be made to despise the speech of their fathers."

Speech and language are the means through which we come to know the world and ourselves; and rejection of an individual's speech is perceived as rejection of the person himself/herself. Faith Linton addresses this issue in the *Jamaica Gleaner*: "My language is an important part of my identity. Human beings need to be affirmed in every area and aspect of their personal identity, be it in their racial characteristics, family and social background, religious beliefs or their language. When you denigrate my language, you denigrate me. When you describe my way of speaking as a non-language it suggests that I am a non-person, not quite in the same category as those who speak 'properly' "(Linton, 2004).

Some of the African American women I interviewed for my dissertation on their use of Black English revealed their paradoxical position brought on by their need to learn and use Standard English to survive economically and gain acceptance at work. Yet, there is underlying resentment that having to use Standard English means acceptance of inequality in American society. Yvette believes subconscious resentment to learning Standard English might actually result in unconscious resistance to learning Standard English. The latter is largely because of the disrespect associated with our own language, and also because of what learning Standard English says about our position in this society. There is frequent interplay and tension between these two positions, which I understand and share. Within the corporation my clients often did not get as much practice as they could speaking standard dialect because inside their work units, away from

customer contact, they often speak Black English among themselves. "Perhaps factors such as linguistic and cultural resistance play a greater role in the acquisition of standard English than the mere ability to link sound and symbol" (Macedo et. al., p. 86, 2003).

STANDARD ENGLISH AND EMPLOYMENT FOR SPEAKERS OF BLACK SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

An important problematic of the linguistic status quo is that the failure to teach speakers of Black English Standard English affects their employment opportunities. J. L. Dillard (1972) indicates that the "failure to provide adequate information about Black English is a major hindrance to the educational system, although research into Afro American language patterns was not initiated to resolve educational problems" (In Brunious, 1998, p. 177). Babich (1987, p. 92) maintains that “students are penalized or rewarded according to the dialect in which they communicate."

Mitchell Duneier, author of *Slim's Table* interviewed a black female resident of the Chicago Housing Authority who wanted to leave the projects and pursue the American dream, but she was reportedly hindered by her inadequate command of standard English. Andrea invested in post high-school education at Robert Morris Business College, but despite her efforts to acquire training, she failed to pass the test to become a word processor when she applied at KMZ where she now works. Instead, she was hired for a clerical position that requires limited grammatical and spelling skills. Duneier notes that:

> Without a command of Standard English, workers like Andrea Ellington have diminishing job prospects in the deindustrialized working world. While it is true that Black English is a suitable language for certain purposes and carries a great deal of standing in many places, in legal documents it carries no standing. And in all of those offices where success depends on the production of written material, it has no standing either (1994, p. 12).

Duneier (1994) ties the issue of the use of Black English to the school achievement and job performance of African Americans. He remarks that Andrea's "greatest difficulty came from interpreting spoken English, a process that often hinders school performance for children who do not speak Standard English" (p. 12). An interesting observation Duneier makes is that even black women at KMZ who mastered Standard English and corporate culture did not advance much in their jobs and did not feel sufficiently challenged by their work. He mentions that these conditions create disaffected workers.

The issues mentioned above are also applicable and relevant to the Jamaican language scene. The Bible Society of the West Indies' (BSWI) launch of the "Krismos Stori,"--Scriptures in the Jamaican language--has sparked the contentious controversy that erupts frequently over speech and language in Jamaica. Just as with Black English, discussions on the validity and the use of the Jamaican language, referred to as patois, seem to ignore the reality that the language is the first and primary means of communication of most of the population, and is universally understood by all Jamaicans. Conversations about our conceptions of what our language represents to us, why we feel as we do about the language and its use, and how we can enhance equal facility in standard English are rare.

In his speech on education before the Jamaican Parliament in October 2003, Jamaican prime minister, P. J. Patterson remarked that "the ability to speak English in today's world is one

of our competitive advantages in terms of communication and economic development." Patterson also addressed the pervasiveness of the Jamaican Language: "I think we have to face the fact that the teaching of English language at every level now has to be approached as if you are teaching a foreign language. In the daily exchanges on the radio, on television, English is the exception rather than the rule." Stewart similarly concluded in 1969 that "the learning of Standard English by speakers of Negro dialect is more like foreign language learning than it is like first language learning" (p. 168).

TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF BLACK ENGLISH: REVISITING THE DEBATE

Jamaica's Prime Minister describes a position that was unpopular to many Black Americans in the 60s, but which could improve the mastery of Standard English and may result in better standardized test scores. Duneier (1994, p. 12) reviews the 1960s debate on teaching African-American students Standard English.

> In the 1960s, when some linguists suggested that a quasi-foreign language approach might be needed to teach black children Standard English, there was so much resistance that experiments to test this idea never went far. It was offensive to many blacks to be told that they spoke a foreign language. Twenty years later, the problems have worsened, and we still don't know whether that approach would work. Perhaps the failure to teach English grammar explicitly--the way a foreign language like Spanish is taught--most hurts those whose grammar is most different. `Whether or not Standard English is taught to African-Americans in the same way it is taught to Spanish speakers, we need a more efficient approach that makes speakers of Black English more fluent in Standard English,' says Solikoko Mufwene, a linguist at the University of Chicago.

Tchudi and Mitchell offer the opposing view (1989, p. 255). They believe:

> Obligatory bi-dialectalism for minorities is only another mode of exploitation, another way of making blacks behave as whites would like them to. It is unnecessary for communication, since the ability to understand other dialects is easily attained....In the immediate present, the time and money now wasted on bi-dialectalism should be spent on teaching the children of the minorities to read....the direct attack on minority language, the attempt to compel bi-dialectalism, should be abandoned for an attempt to open the minds and enhance the lives of the poor and ignorant. At the same time, every attempt should be made to teach the majority to understand the life and language of the oppressed. Linguistic change is the effect and not the cause of social change. If the majority can rid itself of its prejudices, and if the minorities can get or be given an education, differences between dialects are unlikely to hurt anybody very much.

The authors are advocates of social justice, and the truth of the above is inescapable; however, the link between facility in standard English, literacy, and achievement on standardized tests means that for African American students, bilingualism or bidialectalism must be offered as an immediate survival mechanism because students cannot wait until we have a just and equitable society to prepare themselves for the demands of the workplace.

Faith Linton (2004) of the BSWI problematizes the misconception that:

> Jamaicans must eventually choose between Creole and Standard English. This idea stems from the assumption that societies must necessarily be monolingual. It is presumed that there is limited linguistic space, and that any additional space taken up by Creole represents a corresponding loss of space by English. But there are countless communities in the world where people speak two or more languages. Why can't Jamaica become one of them?...The Jamaican language situation does not present us with a choice. The reality of the situation demands that we accept its inherent potential for bilingualism, and that we move purposefully in the direction of making our Creole-speaking children truly bilingual, equally fluent in Creole and in Standard English.

Linton (2004) mentions another factor applicable to the education of both Jamaicans and Americans of African descent. She notes that :

> Jamaican schools have, unfortunately, not been following sound linguistic principles, especially at the earliest level of schooling. The early stages of education ought to be carried out in the child's Mother tongue. This is not a recent idea. Fifty-two years ago, in 1951, a statement out of UNESCO declared: 'It is an axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his Mother tongue... he learns more quickly through it...' Above all, the child must learn to read, first, in the Mother tongue. That is the only way to achieve reading with meaning. Once the child has learnt to read (not just call words), that skill can, at the appropriate time, be transferred quickly and easily to any other language. As the Kenyan Professor of linguistics, Dr. Aloo Osotsi Mojola, said when he visited Jamaica last September, "If Jamaicans learn to read in the Mother-tongue (Patois) it will be easier for them to learn English."

Schiffman (2003) concurs with the above: “Pedagogically, we know that children need to develop their literacy by linking it to their mother-tongue skills….”(p. 112).

Dandy (1991) explains that banning a child's community speech from the classroom "can have a negative effect on classroom interaction because it reduces the spontaneity of a student's responses. Exciting circumstances, those heavily laden with emotion, often trigger the use of a more familiar comfortable way of talking.” She maintains that "Standard English must be taught, for it is the accepted language of the dominant culture of the United States and it is expected in political and economic arenas. However, if children are corrected every time they open their mouths, they will become extremely self-conscious and reluctant to speak. Teachers need to listen to dialect renderings so that they can understand what the children are doing with the language” (1991, p. 5). Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari (2003) concur that "all those teachers who consider themselves agents of change and who struggle to create a more democratic culture need a thorough understanding of the role of Standard English--even when minority students must acquire it in order to capture its dominance and recreate it as a counter-hegemonic force. Their struggle needs to highlight how Standard English is used "as a weapon to silence and censor" (p. 43).

I agree with the researchers above and believe that it is critical to teach African American children Standard English while affirming and encouraging their use of their own language. At the same time, however, we must not ignore the oppression of linguistic biases that cripple the

lives of many in our society.

Notwithstanding the critical importance of bi-dialectalism, we are reminded by Barrington Chevannes' (2000, p. 180-181) discussion of linguistic inequality in the Caribbean that bidialectalism is not enough. Chevannes reveals another feature of the linguistic discrimination in his surmising that Creole speakers who are also fluent in European languages should be considered bilingual: "However, linguists speak not of bilingualism but of code switching...." Chevannes argues that code switching indicates inequality, because, "if the languages are equal, then it matters little which is used, when. I know of no island of the region where the Creole has equal status." He goes on to explain that the persistence of the language is evidence of its value."

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR BLACK SPEECH AND LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION

Addressing Linguistic Inequality in the Academy

My concern about the needs of future teachers and other students to receive credible information on black speech and language communication led me to address linguistic diversity in my diversity classes. I use the video "American Tongues," which leads the viewer across the linguistic landscape of America. I have added examination questions that require students to translate Black English to Standard English or the reverse. Many students seemed unconvinced by information explaining the role of history, culture and politics in shaping speech and language, however. Even the African American students, who comprised less than one percent of the population, in my classes believed that only the ignorant and unintelligent speak Black English.

Concern about these issues urged me to propose the course: "Black Speech and Language Communication Behaviors" in 2002. This course is a vehicle to engage the contentious, compelling issues around speech in the African Diaspora. The course's goals are to inform students of the discourse, history, research on Black English, discuss the politics of language, and allow students to conduct their own research. Some of the learning experiences include simulating speech consultations in the corporate environment, role playing and reporting on responses to their situational uses of black English, writing a policy on Black speech and language for a school district or another organization, and having their speech analyzed, among other assignments. Some students have opted to prepare videotaped projects which I can use in instructing future classes. Part of my goal in developing this course is to provide a forum for discussion and change by engaging students and others in the university community in reflections and conversations about language and power.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

While arguments against learning Standard English have appeal, it is important that some members of our communities do not decide the issue for all. Individuals in the African American community and in Jamaica need the opportunity to decide what is in their own best interests. Various forms of community speech must be encouraged and affirmed but speakers should have the choice to learn Standard English and become bidialectal.

Babich (1987, p. 94) suggests that we encourage children to expand their "repertoire of dialects." Children also should be encouraged to separate dialects from an evaluation of the personal or cultural traits of people who speak them. He explains that "getting an appreciation for the variety of backgrounds and capacities of people surrounding us is a notable goal, but no surefire techniques have been developed to accomplish the objective." Burling's (1973) remarks are still true: "For many years to come...the realities of our discriminatory society will persuade many older children that they must learn to speak standard English, and when a young person decides for himself that he wants to gain proficiency in the prestige dialect, our schools owe him all the help they can give him" (p. 140). Burling suggests bidialectal teachers and a concentration on grammar as opposed to pronunciation in teaching Standard English.

The politics of speech and language and language oppression are issues of equity and social justice. At times I take a list or a map of former colonies in the African Diaspora to class as a visual to question why the people, those in the Caribbean, for example, are all considered to be speaking "bad English." I often ponder, though, how we humans can use communication, which is something so intrinsic to human beings, and yet, which is so extrinsic to the value of an individual to ostracize and penalize others. Striving to make the world a better place to live for all people should be prominent in addressing issues surrounding language and dialect use. After teaching “Black Speech and Language Communication Behaviors” twice, I see the need for widening the discussion in our society and plan to write about some of the work my students have produced. Hopefully this course will offer students and me the opportunity to open doorways of understanding to linguistic differences and the dynamics of power and language use.

Use of the language required in the corporate culture in order to earn a living is not synonymous with disregard for the political significance behind the language issue. Under girding issues of use of Black English and Standard English are power relations reflecting peoples' positions to economic and political power which cannot be ignored. Inequities resulting from valuing Standard English and denigrating Black English, Jamaican Language or other forms of African Diasporic speech should be exposed and addressed, not minimized by focusing on our efforts to survive by learning and using the dominant dialect. Rickford and Rickford (2000, p. 9) agree that African Americans must master Standard English and add: "But we also believe that Ebonics, African American Vernacular English, Black English, Spoken Soul or whatever you want to call the informal variety spoken by many black people plays an essential, valuable role in our lives and in the life of the larger society to which we all belong."

EMBRACING OUR SPEECH, AFFIRMING OUR IDENTITY

Clearly, denial of our speech identity robs us of diverse modes of expressions, and fails to honor who we are and to accord the value and respect due to our particular forms of human expression. The latter is an attempt at erasure of people's distinctiveness that strikes a blow at their humanity. Without our language forms the dynamism, the verve would be missing and we would be separated by unfamiliar sounds and words that fail to embrace us with the oneness we feel when we both speak the same dynamic speech. There is something wonderful about being yourself and honoring the positive traditions of your culture. Having to be someone else to be accepted signifies rejection and speech and identity are bundled/knotted together.

Finally, fervent advocacy is needed to inform as well as to engender change on this issue. In order to achieve change it is imperative that, first, the harmful internal and external

stigmatizing of the speech of the African Diaspora must end. Secondly, we the speakers of languages and dialects deemed inferior must examine how and why we view our speech and language as we do. Thirdly, we must offer our students the tools they need to be competent in Standard English. Finally, we must advocate for linguistic equality among all communication systems and teach students why we have different languages. Conversation with at least one former college administrator revealed that some institutions of higher learning believe that whether to teach speakers of black English Standard English or not, or even how to do so is a controversial potentially inflammatory issue, and therefore the subject is ignored. Consequently, students are being ineffectively prepared for their lives in a stratified society.

The following example prepares me for the times I hear my mother tell of how cousin Byron tried to "learn" her to ride a bicycle." Although my sensibilities alert me that in other environments this construction would attract negative attention. I understand her and everyone else around us does as well. I focus on enjoying the reminiscences, seeing the images described and celebrate our history preserved in such constructions:

"The toad, having finished his breakfast, picked up a stout stick and swung it vigorously, belaboring imaginary animals. "I'll learn 'em to steam my house!" he cried. I'll learn em. I'll learn em."

Don't say 'learn 'em," Toad" said the Rat, greatly shocked. "It's not good English."

"What are you always nagging at Toad for?" inquired the Badger rather peevishly. "What's the matter with his English? It's the same what I use myself, and if it's good enough for me, it ought to be good enough for you!"

"I'm very sorry," said the Rat humbly. "I only think it ought to be 'teach em,' not learn 'em."

But we don't want to teach 'em," replied the Badger. "We want to learn 'em--learn 'em learn em! And what's more, we're going to do it, too"(Tchudi & Mitchell, 1989, p. 267).

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