

# TEACHING ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF STANDARDS IN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

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*The authors report on an interdisciplinary project between a social worker and a linguist, both professors at an undergraduate liberal arts college. Their work together aims to raise student and teacher awareness of the privileges society assigns to users of Standard American English (SAE) and the limitations faced by users of non-standard forms. Their collaboration includes journal entries from students working through their own feelings about viewing language diversity as an asset to society, as well as feedback from other teachers about their roles in upholding language standards as gatekeepers of education. By placing language differences in the context of diversity issues and uncovering the power afforded the users of the "right" language, the authors work towards an ultimate change in practice.*

*Language prejudices seem more resistant to change than other kinds of prejudice.*  
(Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999, p. 30)

## Introduction

This is our story of a growing collaboration and awareness of language use in the classroom. The authors of this paper come from two different disciplines: social work and linguistics. RS is an experienced teacher of diversity, having taught diversity classes in social work programs for almost 15 years. She designed and continues to teach a course entitled *Valuing Difference*, an introductory overview course about diversity and resulting power relationships that she has taught in both graduate and undergraduate settings. RS was aware that she neglected language as a component of her curriculum in wider discussions about issues of diversity. This was made more apparent to her from a "Group Power and Privilege Wheel for the United States" (Hyde, 2000) included in her materials for the course (see Appendix A). RS would regularly cover themes related to gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, etc., but because she felt uninformed about the issues of linguistic differences, she would routinely omit the discussion of language from analysis. She avoided that discussion largely

because the discourse about language variation was neglected in her own social work education about issues of difference.

As a result, she contacted SB, who teaches and researches issues of social attitudes towards dialects and accents and asked her to be a guest speaker in the diversity class. The initial reactions from students in the class that night were surprising and thought-provoking. As a consequence of the exchange, we decided to pursue an interdisciplinary collaboration that has continued for the last several years.

In order to get our concepts across in one three-hour class session embedded half way into a sweeping fourteen-week course about diversity, our focus has, by necessity, been broad. This means that we speak both about native and nonnative English speakers, often collapse accent (pronunciation) and dialect (grammar forms, word choice, discourse markers, etc.), and talk thematically about language in general, largely not distinguishing between written and spoken forms.

In addition, we use "standard" to refer to syntactic, morphological, semantic, and phonological variations in language that are linguistically unmarked, in that society accepts them as the norm. This is in contrast to the



term “grammatical,” which means that the structure of a sentence conforms to the syntactic rules of a person’s dialect. Our view is that all language is essentially grammatical, but only some forms are standard.

Our work together with our students has made us better aware, as teachers, of our own attitudes towards language.

### **What We Bring to the Work**

Social workers’ person-in-environment perspective makes them well aware of the impact of various forms of discrimination on persons who face that discrimination. And the profession is doing an increasingly better job of educating new professionals to focus on understanding and dismantling the multifaceted dynamics of privilege from which such discrimination springs. Guided by professional values that emphasize the primacy of social justice, diversity, and the worth and dignity of every individual, social workers often grapple with systems of thought and institutional practice that create and perpetuate barriers to equity at all levels (micro, mezzo, macro) of practice.

Additionally, social work training and practice focuses on the necessity of bringing experts together to discuss issues. We, a social worker and a linguist, have discovered that interdisciplinary collaboration related to diversity training is invaluable. In the process of teaching together, we each brought knowledge from our respective disciplines that helped us gain insight and the courage to challenge standard practice in education. RS was aware of language as an area of societal difference that was valuable to explore but lacked the specific knowledge base that provides some of the expertise to do so; SB, while conversant in the linguistic views of dialect differences, still demanded SAE on exams and student papers. As we worked together and with our students, we deliberately challenged ourselves to hear the mixed message we were sending to our

classes: SAE is a societal construct and not better than other dialects, and yet we demand mastery of SAE from you.

Linguists believe that the form of a language considered correct and grammatical is merely the standardized dialect that has been elevated by society through formal education; in other words, it is the power dialect. For English, the Standard American English (SAE) form used in schools, on television, and in print is only one of many dialects that exist. It is privileged in the United States not for being more effective at communication but for its identification with a class of people (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). The reasons go back centuries and involve solidifying rules of grammar to keep English from, supposedly, the brink of chaos, as literacy rates increased. Scholars were concerned that, as the masses learned to read and write, there would be a contamination of the language (Watt, 1999).

Societies in general accept the existence of a standard language form as natural. Both those who have command of the power dialect and those who use non-standard forms contribute in different ways to the reinforcement of a standard as the best and most correct language form. In addition, all languages have dialects that form a hierarchy of social acceptance, with the “top” dialect labeled interchangeably “standard,” “correct,” and “grammatical” by society (Romaine, 2000).

People who use the standard dialect rarely think of themselves as privileged; rather, they see themselves as best. And those who speak non-standard forms become reverential of the standard as well. Many non-standard speakers have the goal of assimilating into the norm. Lippi-Green (1997) speaks of the Standard Language Ideology (SLI), a process whereby the dominant group convinces the subordinate groups to internalize the message that they are “sub” by virtue of their language form. They themselves start to desire a change, and they start to police their own

language use. Voices that do not fit the standard become marginalized, muted, and assimilated. Those who conform are held up as role models, showing the rest of us what to strive for; those who fail to conform are punished in social and financial ways.

So, what might have been an opportunity to accept a variety of language forms is lost in this process. The goal of assimilated groups tends to be an obliteration of home language forms rather than a striving towards bilingualism or bidialectalism, and mainstream institutions support that process (Romaine, 2000).

Disenfranchised groups are always faced with a double burden of conforming to a standard while deciding whether they will hold onto their home culture. While some progress has been made in our society's acceptance of biculturalism, the acceptance of language differences seems more difficult for people.

Who is the voice of resistance to the view that not all language forms are equal? Linguists, experts in language, are ironically generally not considered the experts. When the maintenance of the status quo favoring the franchised is the real objective, and the lay person would consider him or herself a language expert simply by being a language user, the mechanisms are in place to dismiss linguists, those who have devoted their careers to studying language. Judges do not turn to linguists in court cases about language discrimination (Lippi-Green, 1997). School systems and governments struggling with issues of bilingual education do not turn to them despite the fact that professionals in the field have been studying these issues for over 50 years (Romaine, 2000). In this case, a social worker did ask a linguist for help.

### **What We Did: Speaking with our Students**

We started our work together simply by speaking with our students. We now regularly co-teach a unit on language in the *Valuing*

*Difference* course. Mirroring our own process, we challenge the students to question the standards of language use in which they have been brought up, and we analyze patterns to their reactions. We capture the students' responses in journal entries and language sensitivity surveys every semester (quoted below in italics.)

Linguistic research has shown that people's attitudes about language forms can be very subjective. For example, some rather startling studies have shown that a listener's attitudes about a speaker are not necessarily tied to how well he or she can comprehend the speaker. In some cultures, non-standard grammar is tolerated more than in other cultures. When listeners are asked to judge traits of a speaker, such as reliability, honesty and even height based solely on speech, people are willing to do so, revealing patterns about social standards and the rewards of sounding standard (Behrens & Neeman, 2004). As a first step, helping listeners become aware of unconscious prejudices provides intellectual tools for combating those prejudices.

The initial reaction from many students when they are asked to reconsider the values they place on particular forms of English tends to involve a worst-case scenario: students fear that a loss of a standard language, or even the questioning of it, will lead to a total breakdown in communication.

*I believe that there needs to be a standard way of talking (SAE) to avoid chaos and disorder. I believe everything should have a standard...so there are less misunderstandings, less struggle to communicate.*

Or, they reiterate and reinforce the messages that they have assimilated:

*I want to speak correctly and write correctly. I feel there is great value in certain aspects of writing and reading Standard American English...I would want to be corrected so I can speak properly.*

Some non-SAE speakers describe their worries about their own dialects.

*Grammar makes me very self-conscious when I talk. I don't want people to think I am uneducated when I speak.*

This worry may cause them to feel overly self-conscious, to be reluctant to speak, or to be discounted when they do. We are highly concerned that this means those students become voiceless in the classroom and in the world at large. Our concern continues to fuel our efforts to counter the forces that allow for this voicelessness.

Students begin to struggle with our message as we continue to discuss the issues that emerge:

*I am a little confused at this point. I do think it's important to be able to communicate with people but I also maintain that we should not compromise the English language in America. I used to think I spoke SAE and I do in some cases but my Long Island accent sometimes dominates.*

Another early response from students is concern for the quality of their own education and success. They express worry that their ability to learn will be seriously impaired if they are not taught the standard and teachers do not reinforce a standard. If teachers "lower" the standard, students won't learn. Students fear that they will be at a disadvantage. If students attend colleges that

accept non-standard speakers and/or those colleges do not adhere to SAE, students believe those colleges are worth less. They articulate fears that if the standard is not maintained, they themselves risk being marginalized.

The pressure on us as teachers to conform to standard practice at this point in the lesson is a palpable dynamic in the classroom as students are, in effect, suggesting that to seriously entertain some of the ideas we are raising with them may put them in danger. Our own bias towards SAE comes to the surface here, for as teachers we do privilege the SAE users and penalize non-standard forms. In addition, we are both SAE speakers who were raised middle class, granting us access to the language valued by schools and teachers as we entered that first classroom in our early years. For us, we did not personally experience a bias against our home language; we experienced deeply ingrained privilege, although we could not name it at the time. Our own subsequent experiences as teachers, in discussions together, and in reading made us painfully and acutely aware that not all students have such immediate access to the language of the classroom due to larger structural social, economic, and political inequities.

As one might expect, the discussions in the classroom quickly become highly personalized as students struggle to maintain the standards they have internalized.

*I hoped we would have spoken about grammar because I know that's a problem to me and other college students. I know some professors must think I am dumb because of my poor grammar and I wish I could correct my problem.*

*I do not think that there should be a right or wrong, but there is a line that should be made, when involved in education. I had a*

*professor here who spoke very poor SAE and wrote it even worse. It would take half of my test time to decode the questions he was asking. This was quite frustrating because that language barrier existed and my grade was on the line. I did realize that I was being somewhat selfish, with wanting one right language. In Disneyland, I would roll my eyes when the park started making Spanish announcements as well as English.*

*It is difficult, however, to hear "improper grammar" and not label it as "un-educated."*

*...If it (SAE) determines success, why not learn it.*



We were not surprised by our students' struggles because they mirrored comparable struggles experienced by those who become increasingly reflective about how power relations are socially structured. It is helpful to our argument and us at this point in the class discussion to posit a more inclusive approach to valuing language forms, and to introduce some basic content about language. Here is a critical point in the class session where information from SB's discipline is invaluable. Students are aware of a good vs. bad dichotomy to language forms, but students are new to the idea that there is no intrinsic, communicative advantage, no linguistic difference among dialects. The idea that the differences are socially derived requires a cognitive shift, and such a shift requires facts and ways of thinking that we ourselves were never exposed to as students. In order to facilitate that shift in our students' thinking, we emphasize social, political, and historic processes that elevated one dialect over the other (Watt, 1999).

The location of the classroom discussion about language issues is purposefully placed about halfway into the diversity curricula

because the linchpin for students' understanding of the linguistic issues we raise relies on the comparisons that can be made across common social themes that emerge in discussion of other aspects of diversity, such as "internalized oppression," "labeling," "name calling," or "stereotyping." The result of these comparisons is that reactions reflecting some intellectual movement start to evolve over the course of this section of the discussion. Students who have already thought about "white privilege," for example, more comfortably recognize how SAE might be unfairly valued in relation to other dialects (McIntosh, 1988). Students who already speak the privileged dialect (the standard) express some guilt about having an edge they did not even know they had. When we question the standard, they begin to acknowledge that recognizing that their language privilege is socially constructed and "unearned" detracts from their ability to feel superior.

*Tonight I have realized that I am advantaged in another area of my life that I haven't thoughtfully considered before, my language.*

*I was raised speaking SAE and didn't realize that dialect was such an issue...I was not aware that the dialect which I have been raised on is actually the one people strive to attain.*

*I found myself, during the class, coming to terms with being an SAE speaker....definitely being made aware of the privileges I have because I can speak a certain language a certain way.*

Those students who are of a non-standard English background, however, become validated in their linguistic diversity and entertain the idea, some for the first time, that they do not need to see language forms

in terms of right/wrong and good/bad. And they feel free to tell their stories. Some students are freed from dichotomous thinking.

*Just because someone doesn't speak correctly, doesn't mean they're wrong. They are just not using Standard American English.*

*Too many people often 'judge books by their covers' ...to be proud that my accent shows who I am and where I am from.*

*I feel more justified in holding onto my Southern accent, because it represents where I'm from and a culture I love.*

*I mix up words because of Italian grammatical form. People make fun of me. Plus, everyday I get picked on because of my accent. Thank God I'm not the only one...I'm still insecure about the way I speak. I know I always will be. It's very sad to think about...But again, I'm very comforted by the fact that I'm not alone. Plus! I love it that Standard American English isn't as perfect as everyone makes it out to be! That's great!*

With increasing insight, students with non-SAE language forms start to express some positive connection to their own dialects.

We find a lighter moment in the course when we "pull apart" the irregularities and exceptions to SAE that students had to learn in elementary school. The very irregular verb "To Be," the inflection system on pronouns (he, him, his, himself); these are some of the *Bete Noirs* that students are proud to have mastered or are ashamed of stumbling over still. Yet, English dialects that smooth out these irregularities (e.g., I be, you be, he be; his, hers, yours, mines) are considered less worthy by society. We have found that providing

examples of the arbitrariness and fragility of the standard helps undermine the unchallenged acceptance of SAE.

At this point during the lesson, usually about two hours into a three-hour meeting, it becomes disingenuous to continue discussion without acknowledging explicitly to the students that we, in our roles as teachers, are replicating processes that we have just exposed as problematic. It is a thorny pedagogical moment because we acknowledge to students that we evaluate student performance on the ability to write, read, and speak in SAE. We have, ourselves, been the recipients of those benefits afforded the SAE user. Our own privileged dialect was necessary, although not a guarantee, for our acceptance to college, graduate school, and employment in higher education. Throughout our work together, we are faced over and over again with the incongruities between what we raise as problematic and the practices we engage in regularly as college teachers that replicate linguistic hierarchy. Indeed, this article is written in SAE.

We use this almost contradictory part of our message to talk about how difficult it is to alter institutionalized practice and to invite students to join us in problem solving because we do not have simple answers. To raise questions about accepted practice without offering easy alternative solutions unsettles students and is intellectually unsettling for us as well. But the questions must be raised, and raising them does change an institutional practice that resists such examination. Students understand, even though there are no simple solutions, that they are part of a revolutionary process of re-consideration. Students become excited about understanding things in a new way, but it's easy to lose ground, for this change in thinking requires a great deal of practice and on-going reflection supported by the second half of the course curriculum.

Of course, some students continue to resist our questioning of the status quo.

Changing meta-cognitive constructs is a continual challenge. For example, students frequently express concern over popular public figures (sports heroes, pop culture/music figures) who serve as poor linguistic role models for audiences. These folks are considered to be “uneducated” if they can’t speak “properly.” If heroes do not command a standard dialect, they are perceived to be doing their fans a disservice. The implication, once again, is that, as “role models” teachers must not do students this disservice.

We consider ourselves heard when students articulate their struggles to explore and integrate the implications and new possibilities that arise from their new knowledge.

*Another thing that I have never thought about...that non-Southerners think that I sound uneducated. Now, as I enter the workplace or any professional environment, I will try to force “standard dialect” out of my southern mouth.*

*All this is just a more foreign concept than more concrete issues for me, like race & gender. But then that’s a mentality for people in the privileged group.*

*I don’t know exactly what to say about this right now, but I do feel as though I have been changed for the better because of it (the discussion).*

*I’m not sure what to think right now.... I can see that even if one doesn’t speak in Standard American English, the meaning isn’t lost. This realization makes me want to stop stressing over my papers and write less formally because SAE is only what I have been falsely told as correct. SAE*

*doesn’t seem like it should matter to me anymore.*

*I can understand the idea that without a standard form of language, there is the possibility of there being a loss of some understanding. At the same time, I feel that accents and languages should be embraced and celebrated; they are part of who you are.*

*If everyone sounded the same, the world would be a very dull place.*

While it takes repeated discussions to fully process the issues we raise in our co-teaching, RS notices differences during group dynamics in subsequent class sessions within the same semester. The increased empathy demonstrated by students proficient in SAE for those who are not improves group solidarity. Also, students proficient in SAE demonstrate more patience and report that they assume increasing responsibility for listening to “accented” speech. This is evident in classroom behaviors that include nonverbal posturing and more frequent questions that prolong exchanges. Some students who report that they struggle with SAE also report that they benefit from knowing that others in the class recognize and understand their struggles. They participate with greater frequency than before, trusting that their peers will not discriminate against them. Some spontaneously report that this is the first class in which they feel that others are listening to and understand them. These have been powerful moments in the classroom, more than once bringing students to tears. Understanding issues of power dynamics related to language use facilitates communication in the classroom.

In addition, those who are less facile with SAE are more willing to participate in discussions because they understand that,



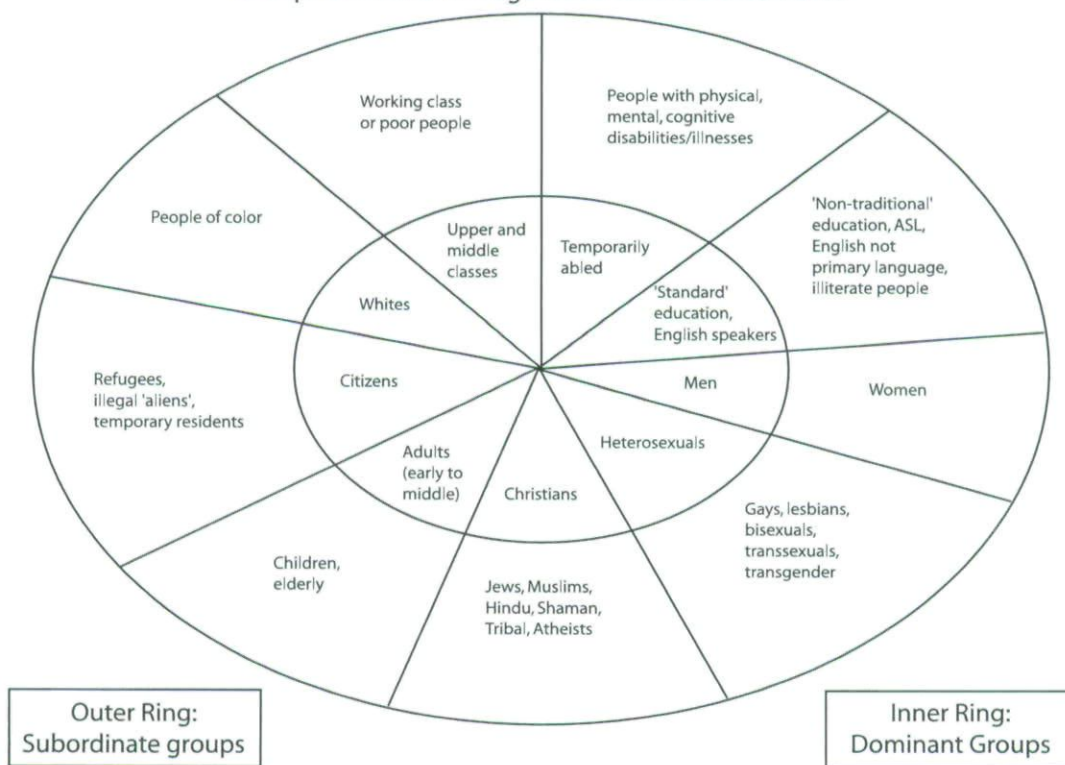
although their own forms of language may not be favored by some, those forms are not “wrong.” They sometimes express that their future efforts to master SAE will be a response to a new understanding of how SAE can be of use to them, given power relations as they are currently socially structured. Students come to see their efforts to adapt to an unfamiliar language form as a deliberate choice to make for the purposes of socioeconomic advancement, rather than an automatic response motivated by social pressure that makes them doubt their own intrinsic self worth.

### What We Did Next: Speaking with Other Teachers

After several semesters of dialogue with students, we were eager to engage teachers in the same sort of discussion, so we began to present our work at conferences that focused on pedagogy. In those settings we anticipated, naively we now realize, less opposition to the ideas we were exploring; in

fact, we noticed a similar if not higher level of resistance than that which we received from our students. We speculate that this may be related to a number of factors. We realized at our first conference that after years of thinking about language diversity, we had acquired a level of sophistication with the material that surpassed the level of reflection in the audience about this particular subject. We had already grappled in a very deep way with the distinct position that teachers hold in replicating the standard we challenge. It is asking a lot to expect that people in authority reflect on the processes that secure their own status. That, coupled with the aforementioned intellectual vulnerability resulting from such self-examination, makes the process of unraveling privilege a difficult task. While we have, over time, used our experiences, readings, and discussions to think in new ways, it should not have surprised us that our peers would hold fast to their beliefs in the power of SAE, especially at the very start of such a

Group Power and Privilege Wheel for the United States



Hyde, C.A. (2000)



conversation, with an aspect of diversity that is often neglected in discussions.

In addition, given that teachers have historically tended and still tend to be middle-class women, their social positions lend themselves to compliance with social norms to better fit in and advance their own status. Labov (1990) has shown that middle class people in general, and women in particular, tend to hypercorrect in language, a trend whereby a standard form is overused, such as I vs. me (in...between you and I) or whom vs. who (in...I know whom was elected). Labov posits that an awareness of the importance of using the standard form, along with an uncertainty about how to use it, makes for this phenomenon. It may be that teachers are the least likely to question the privilege of the standard given the legitimacy it provides them.

Some of our peers, in discussion with us, told stories of their own efforts to change their language, to obliterate regional and/or class accents. One woman was proud that she no longer sounded like "a fishmonger from the Bronx." Another pointed out that she went through the work of learning SAE, irregularities and all, and she felt she didn't need to make allowances for those that do not do that work. As with our students, these teachers held to terms such as correct/incorrect and grammatical/ungrammatical in discussing SAE and non-standard forms.

In a parallel process with our students, one attitude we noticed in speaking with teachers was that they felt a valuing of non-standard language would be detrimental to their students. They would fail as educators if they did not continue to instill "correct" language forms in their students, their own worst-case scenarios. This worry was expressed by our students and still troubles us. Having bought into the message of "right" versus "wrong," teachers seek to do "right" by their students, and with this mindset they

are unable to see their simultaneous role as social gatekeepers.

For RS and SB, we were able to lessen this fear after years of doing the work in that we can now more clearly see our dual role and all its contradictions. A gift of collaboration is that when one forgets, the other reminds. Still, accusations of anti-intellectualism do sting. Of greater concern to us are the occasional assertions that we may be reinforcing habits of mind and practice that actually specifically disservice those who are socially disenfranchised in the area of language SAE proficiency by our questioning rather than reinforcing the standard. Another gift of collaboration is that merged experiences help us each continue to see a larger and more complex picture of what we do and what we advocate that features inclusion.

Ultimately, if teachers entertain the notions we discuss regarding the underlying context of preference for one form of English over another, and if they gain some insight about the problems we raise, they too have to struggle with what to do about their own positions and practices. The same is true, of course, with all aspects of diversity (e.g., gender, class, race, age, sexual orientation, ability).

### **How We Changed/Suggestions for the Classroom**

Our teaching continues to evolve over the course of our work together. In its simplest form, our struggles involve constant re-examination in our own teaching of our biases and assumptions about language behavior, our preconceived notions of correct and incorrect language use, and our reactions to certain accents and dialects. We try to guard against a dichotomous way of thinking in which language standards are pitted against an anything-goes exaggeration. Our perceptions need to take into account both the realities of the academic and financial rewards of being a user of SAE in our current social structure,

and the numerous benefits of treating “other” language users with respect. This means that we honestly do not expect teachers to allow non-SAE writing on all exams and papers, nor do we expect accent biases to disappear.

At present, using SAE is conforming to the linguistic demands of our society. Using SAE conveys that power to the speaker. Teaching from this point of view means that we are not prescriptively replicating SAE as the standard; we are enlightening students to the social reasons that make the adaptation of SAE by non-standard users advantageous for them. This reframing helps non-SAE users to understand the importance of SAE’s acquisition in a new light and removes the social stigma from the home language. And for those who are SAE proficient, the discussions we encourage help to raise awareness about the costs of unearned privilege both to themselves and to others. We hope this means that those of us with such unearned privilege begin to recognize and increasingly challenge dynamics that replicate such privilege. We hear from students that they feel as if they act more purposefully in their daily lives in the ways in which they positively regard and support others after we have explored issues related to SAE together.

As of late, we have begun to end the class session with some reflections about the possible social costs of marginalizing those who do not speak SAE. We have, for example, discussed how an increasingly conservative form of nationalism has recently found expression in a revitalized reification of SAE. We have raised concerns about the use of SAE as a powerful means to circumscribe the rights of new immigrants and the resources available to them. More recently, we have discussed how the use of SAE as a gate-keeping mechanism for graduate education, in social work for example, may impact the range and quality of services ultimately available to clients. Each of these examples helps students move from a personalized

perspective about the issues related to SAE into questioning the larger implications of using SAE as a gold standard of achievement and reward.

So, over time, our work has felt less awkward in the classroom with practice in handling the material together. We have recognized thematic progression of learning in the process of teaching the material and the scope of our classroom discussions have broadened, as has our intentional broadening of audience and scope of influence.

As a result of our collaboration, we have made the following changes in our own teaching and general practices. We present these guidelines for teachers and students who want to re-examine their own attitudes and practices when it comes to standard and non-standard language forms.

1. We regularly integrate discussions of language use into our course curricula and explain, with some nuance, the significance of SAE and the contexts in which it operates to our students.

2. We encourage our students, and remind ourselves, to listen differently, more astutely with the benefit of a working knowledge about SAE. We recognize and raise language issues as issues of difference, normally left out of discourse about diversity, in many forums.

3. We are determined to use the field of linguistics as a resource to us on language matters. Our work together suggests that the theoretical and practice aspects of both social work and linguistics can be enhanced through an interdisciplinary collaboration between these two disciplines as well. Linguistics has a lot to say to all educators.

4. We strive to change the focus of our evaluation of students, both as writers and speakers, to focus more on content and analytic capability, less on form, and to expand the ways in general students can express themselves in class and through assignments.

In other words, we want to value different forms of language use for different contexts. Informal writing has a place in the classroom, in brainstorming sessions, or in first drafts, so that students can think through issues without the pressures of spelling and standard grammar rules looming over them (Elbow & Belanoff, 1995).

5. We also want to distinguish between written and spoken English. Class discussions and group work are instances where students should be able to think-aloud with some spontaneity and confidence as they express their thoughts about course work. Those who feel they aren't "articulate" or "grammatical" enough tend to remain quiet and thus lose their voice in the class. The class, in turn, loses the full range of thoughts, opinions, and voices in the room. Class discussions are conversations, and many of us use many non-standard elements in spontaneous talk.

6. We have also expanded our thinking about how to place some emphasis on students' visual literacy, a necessary skill set that often takes a back seat to oral and written performance. In free-write exercises, students may illustrate their point with pictures instead of words. For example, students can incorporate photography and video into their assignments, and collaborations with visual artists are recommended.

7. We remind ourselves that society changes very slowly. SAE is still the power dialect, and control of it is still part of achieving success in many areas of life. But we encourage the use of more accurately descriptive labels when discussing language: *non-standard* is less defeating than *wrong*. *Standard* is more accurate than *grammatical*, for all speakers use syntax that conforms to the rules of their own dialect; in other words, we all are grammatical at the linguistic level.

8. As with any other area of diversity study where systems of advantage are in operation, we actively support re-examination of those systems and related efforts to

dismantle them and/or to redistribute power more equally (e.g., hiring practices, graduate school admission policies, group dynamics, access to legal and medical care).

### Conclusion

We believe that increased understanding must ultimately result in evolving practice, both individually and collectively. On an immediate and practical level, we will continue to teach sections of the diversity course together, to collect data from students via journals and language sensitivity surveys, and to speak to our peers. We recognize that providing information and raising awareness are important functions in and of themselves, and our commitment to continue to do this in the area of language is strong.

In the larger sense, we believe that increased understanding must ultimately result in a change in formal practice guidelines. We hope to continue to raise awareness of the privileging of the power dialect. Our work suggests that interdisciplinary discussions about language should be regularly included in those efforts both in the classroom and in the field as they have much to contribute to sensitizing all those who participate in those discussions to forms and processes of discrimination embedded in the unexamined replication of SAE.

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### Appendix A

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## Suggested Readings/Videos

- Alvarez, L. & Kolker, A., producers/directors. 1986. *American Tongues*. Video. A production of The Center for New American Media, New York
- Crystal, D. (2004). *The Stories of English*. Woodstock: Overlook Press.
- MacNeil, R. (2005). *Do You Speak American?* Video. PBS. MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, Inc.
- Macedo, D., Dendrinos, B., & Gounari P. (2003). *The Hegemony of English*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Tatum, B. (1997). *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* New York: Harper Collins.

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## (Footnote)

We would like to acknowledge the influence of the work of Beverly Tatum on race, ethnicity, and privilege on our ability to track evolving themes in classroom discussions of issues related to SAE and privilege. See suggested readings.

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