

Dismantling anti-black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: Toward an anti-racist black language pedagogy

April Baker-Bell

To cite this article: April Baker-Bell (2020) Dismantling anti-black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: Toward an anti-racist black language pedagogy, Theory Into Practice, 59:1, 8-21, DOI: [10.1080/00405841.2019.1665415](https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665415)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665415>



Accepted author version posted online: 09 Oct 2019.
Published online: 14 Nov 2019.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 2483



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 1 [View citing articles](#)



Dismantling anti-black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: Toward an anti-racist black language pedagogy

April Baker-Bell 

Department of English, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

ABSTRACT

In this article, the author historicizes the argument about Black Language in the classroom to contextualize the contemporary linguistic inequities that Black students experience in English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Next, the author describes *anti-black linguistic racism* and interrogates the notion of academic language. Following this, the author provides an ethnographic snapshot that shows how Black students in a ninth grade English Language Arts (ELA) class perceptions of Black Language reflected internalized anti-black linguistic racism. The author offers *Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy* as an approach that English Language Arts teachers can implement in an effort to dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and white cultural and linguistic hegemony in their classrooms using Angie Thomas' (2017) novel *The Hate U Give*. The author concludes with thoughts about how an Anti-Racist Black Language pedagogy can help ELA students develop useful critical capacities.

In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue – in short to understand their own linguistic history, which is certainly more important for them than the study of French Phonetics or Historical Spanish Grammar.
– Carter G. Woodson (1933), *The mis-education of the Negro*

It is terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently damaging.. This is a really cruel fallout with racism.
– Toni Morrison, in Rickford & Rickford's *Spoken Soul*, 2000

We have kids in the inner cities who are verbal geniuses, but we call them deficient in school and attempt to eradicate a part of their identity.
– Geneva Smitherman, in Dinwiddie-Boyd (1996)

and the linguistic injustice toward Black students continues.

I open with the above excerpts to historicize the argument to which this article contributes. By viewing the issues addressed in this article through a historical lens, we are able to see that little has changed over the last 85 years regarding the language education of Black students. That is, sociolinguists and language scholars have for decades described the harm an uncritical language

CONTACT April Baker-Bell  adbell@msu.edu  Department of English, African American and African Studies, Michigan State University, Wells Hall, Room C-648 619 Red Cedar Rd., East Lansing, MI 48824.

© 2019 The College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University

education has on Black students' racial and linguistic identities and called for new approaches. *Anti-black linguistic racism* refers to the linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization that Black Language (BL) speakers¹ endure when using their language in schools and in everyday life. It includes teachers' silencing, correcting, and policing students when they communicate in BL. It is the belief that there is something inherently wrong with BL; therefore, it should be eradicated. It is denying Black students the right to use their native language as a linguistic resource during their language and literacy learning. It is requiring that Black students reject their language and culture to acquire White Mainstream English² (WME), and it is also insisting that Black students code-switch to avoid discrimination. Although some language scholars and teachers would argue that code-switching does not perpetuate anti-black linguistic racism because it validates, affirms, and respects BL in the process of teaching Black students "academic language," I contend that any approach that does not interrogate why students of color are required to code-switch and only acknowledges their native tongues as a bridge to learn WME perpetuates linguistic racism and upholds white linguistic and cultural hegemony (Baker-Bell, 2017, *forthcoming*). This article will show that Black students continue to endure anti-black linguistic racism when using BL in the context of school.

The relationship between academic language, white mainstream English, and whiteness

The concept of academic language was developed in the mid 1970s by researchers and educators to make a distinction between language that is used in school and language that is used outside of school (Gottlieb & Slavitt-Ernst, 2014). Academic language – also called academic English, the language of school, the language of power, or communicating in academic settings – is described as a register that contains lexical, grammatical, and interpersonal skills specific to school that all students must master to be successful (Gottlieb & Slavitt-Ernst, 2014). I have argued elsewhere that if language scholars and educators are truly interested in linguistic justice for linguistically and racially diverse students, we have to question whose linguistic and cultural norms are privileged by labels like "academic language" (Baker-Bell, 2017). Alim and Smitherman (2012) contend that uncritical language scholars and teachers fail to acknowledge certain inconvenient truths about how language and communicative norms and standards in our society reflect WME and white ways of speaking. Labels like "academic language" go unquestioned, but "the fact that White people consider themselves the 'standard' by which 'Others' are measured – has real and tangible effects on the lives of People of Color" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 171).

It is also important to consider the historical moment in which the notion of academic language came into existence. This label was developed during the mid 1970s following social movements that insisted on "the creation of educational policies to redress the academic exclusion inflicted upon Blacks, Browns, women and other historically marginalized groups" (Smitherman, Villanueva, & Canagarajah, 2003, p. 11). In terms of language education, the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s forced American schools and colleges to take a stand on how to address the language habits that students from a wide variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds bring with them to the classroom (SRTOL, 1974). Though the struggle for equal language rights brought about some positive change like the Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution³ and the Ann Arbor Black English case⁴, it has also given birth to alternate, more subtle approaches to linguistic discrimination (Lippi-Green, 2012,

p. 67). With this in mind, we cannot ignore the fact that the label “academic English” was developed in spite of a historical moment that demanded Black linguistic emancipation.

Alim and Smitherman (2012) explain that “academic language” is a proxy for WME, and it reveals a covert racist practice that maintains a racial and linguistic hierarchy in schools (p. 171). For instance, while WME-speaking students come to school already prepared because their linguistic and cultural practices are deemed “academic,” most linguistically and racially diverse students begin at a disadvantage because their language and culture do not reflect the dominant white culture that counts as academic.

Black language and anti-black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms

In general, BL has not mattered in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, which is ironic since *language arts* indicate that our ELA classrooms should focus on the arts of language. And if Black Language ain’t artful, then tell me what is? Furthermore, given decades of research on the Black speech community and BL once being the most studied and written about language in the world (Gilyard, 2005), one would assume that Black students’ language practices would have been embraced as a resource for educational innovation in classrooms. However, critical language scholars in English Education have consistently argued that ELA teachers must shift their pedagogies and practices to better support the rich linguistic resources that Black students, and other linguistically and racially diverse students, bring with them to classrooms (Baker-Bell, 2013, 2017; Ball & Lardner, 2005; Haddix, 2015; Johnson, Jackson, Stovall, & Bazile, 2017; Kinloch, 2010; Kirkland & Jackson, 2008; Kynard, 2007; Lee, 1995, 2017; Martinez, 2017; Paris, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2005). Yet, many classrooms continue to be informed by anti-black, deficit theories, and monolingual ideologies that view BL as a barrier to Black students’ literacy education (Baker-Bell, forthcoming, 2013; Richardson, 2004).

The only thing worse than Black students’ experiencing anti-black linguistic racism in classrooms is when they internalize it. When Black students’ language practices are suppressed in classrooms or they begin to absorb messages that imply that BL is deficient, wrong, and unintelligent, this could cause them to internalize anti-blackness and develop negative attitudes about their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities and about themselves (Baker-Bell, 2013, forthcoming). As with internalized racism, students who absorb negative ideologies about their native language may develop a sense of linguistic inferiority and “lose confidence in the learning process, their own abilities, their educators, and school in general” (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014, p. 33). This was evidenced in the 1979 Black English Case where a Federal District Court found that teachers’ treatment of BL as inferior inhibited Black students from learning (Turner & Ives, 2013). Unfortunately, there is little in the scholarly literature that accounts for the ways in which Black students experience anti-blackness in and through their language education or how to work against it through classroom learning. I work to address both of these longstanding dilemmas and notable discontinuities in the remainder of this article.

From critical language pedagogy to Black Language Pedagogy

In the first iteration of my language pedagogy work, I was concerned by the number of Black students I worked with who held negative attitudes toward Black Language and

displayed feelings of linguistic and cultural shame (Baker-Bell, 2013, 2017). I identified this as an issue of language attitudes, and I attempted to address it through attitudinal work. Thus, I began working closely with teachers and Black students to explore a curricular innovation that could interrupt BL-speaking students' unfavorable attitudes toward their own language. More specifically, I developed *Critical Language Pedagogy* (CLP) as a: (1) framework for understanding the relationship between dominant language ideologies, negative language attitudes, identity, and student learning, and (2) a consciousness-raising approach that provided a critical and cultural understanding of BL in an effort to foster positive language attitudes among Black students. Findings from my 2013 study where I implemented the CLP showed that it was useful in getting Black students to critically interrogate dominant notions of language and develop a critical and cultural understanding of the historical, cultural, and political underpinnings of BL (Baker-Bell, 2013).

However, as I continued to use this approach, I realized that Black students were in need of an approach that explicitly named and richly captured the type of linguistic oppression that is uniquely experienced and endured by BL-speakers. While the CLP that I had developed was useful in fostering an awareness of how language is tied to identity, language, and power and helping Black students see BL as valuable, the approach did not help the students name or make sense of their experiences with anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony. In the sections that follow, I offer an ethnographic snapshot that shows how Black students' perceptions of Black Language reflected internalized anti-black linguistic racism, and I outline an approach that I refer to as *Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy*, which illustrates how ELA teachers can work to dismantle anti-black linguistic racism in their classrooms.

Background

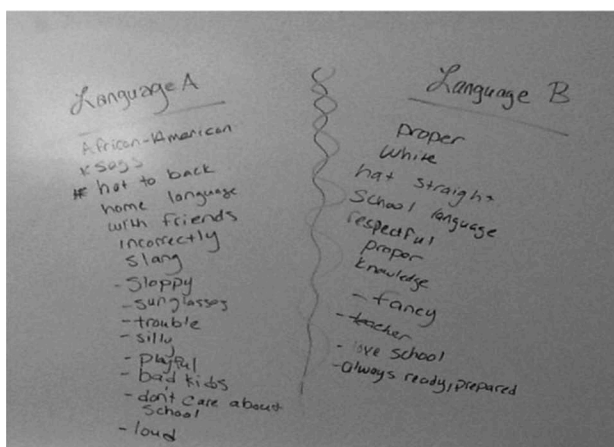
The following discussion took place in a ninth grade all-girls ELA class located in Detroit, Michigan. All of the students in the class identified as Black or African American and communicated in BL. In the snapshot below, the students were responding to an activity (see Table 1) that I designed with 2 goals in mind: to initiate a conversation about the relationship between language and identity, specifically as it pertains to BL and WME and understand the students' perceptions of both languages. The activity required students to: (1) read 2 language samples⁵, (2) draw an image, cartoon, or character that reflects each language sample, and (3) write a paragraph that expressed their thoughts about both languages and the speakers of those languages. At that time, the students were not aware that language sample A represented features of Black Language and language sample B reflected features of WME. After the students completed the activity, I invited them to participate in a group dialogue about their responses. I describe their responses to the activity in the snapshot below.

Snapshot

During the group dialogue, I noticed that many of the students' drawings, comments, and perspectives reinscribed a linguistic and racial hierarchy that positioned Black Language and blackness as inferior and White Mainstream English and whiteness as superior, thus,

Table 1. Activity.

Language A:	Language B:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People be thinkin teenagers don't know nothin'. • we be talking about current events all the time in our history class. • Yesterday we was conversating with Mr. B. about the war.it was deep. • The teachers at South High is cool. • But Ms. Nicks do be trippin' sometimes. Like that time she got really mad because Rob called her a dime piece • Ms. Nicks better quit trippin' or imma drop her class like it's hot. • My cousin think the students at South High are all mean and stuff. • The students ain't as bad as she think though. • I told her she wrong about that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teenagers know more than people think they do. • We discuss current events in our history class on a regular basis. • Yesterday, we were having a conversation with our taecher about the war.it was a rich conversation • The teachers at South high school are cool • However, my cousin thinks the students at South high are disrespectful. • I informed her that she was mistaken. Not all of the students are disrespectful.

Table 2. Dry eraser board of student responses.

reinforcing whiteness and anti-blackness (see Table 2). For instance, “smart” and “good,” became synonymous with white linguistic and cultural norms, yet the students conflated words and images such as “disrespectful,” “thug,” “ghetto,” “bad,” “trouble,” “skips school,” and “gets bad grades” with Black linguistic and cultural norms. As difficult as it was for me to listen to Black students reinforce antiblackness and anti-black linguistic racism, their perspectives are to be expected according to hooks’ (1992) who argued that Black people are socialized within a white supremacist society, white supremacist educational system, and racist mass media that teach us to internalize racism by convincing us that our lives (culture, language, literacies histories, experiences, etc.) are simple and unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection (hooks, 1992, pp. 1–2). This often leads to Black people unconsciously and sometimes consciously constructing images of ourselves through the lens of white supremacy (hooks, 1992, pp. 1–2). The students’ responses “capture how antiblackness constructs Black subjects, and positions them in and against law, policy, and everyday (civic) life” (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 417).

Hence, it is not that Black students inherently believe that their language, culture, and race are deficient or that Black people are intellectually and morally inferior; their responses more accurately reflect an anti-black language education that conditioned them to despise themselves and regard their linguistic resources as insignificant. This suggests that Black students need more than a traditional language education that teaches them to uncritically acquire academic language, which ultimately teaches them to accept dominant narratives that help maintain “traditions of white privilege and Black oppression” (Richardson, 2004, p. 160).

Toward an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy

The students’ responses to the aforementioned activity begs for a language pedagogy that works to dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and students’ internalization of it. I believe such pedagogy is what Black scholars like Carter G. Woodson, Toni Morrison, Geneva Smitherman, Elaine Richardson, Carmen Kynard, and so many others have continuously called for. In particular, what I refer to as *Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy* builds on Richardson’s (2004) call for an African American-centered approach, which seeks to:

explicate the production of African American knowledge or epistemology in order that we may develop appropriate language and literacy pedagogies to accelerate the literacy education of Black (and all) students ... in this way, then, African American centered education seeks to accelerate the learning of students of African descent by conscientizing them to their language, learning, and literacy traditions that are relevant to them, exploiting this knowledge in their acquisition of other discourses. (pp. 160–161)

This suggests that an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy should involve consciousness-raising work that arms Black students with space to make sense of, name, investigate, and dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony. An African-centered approach rejects the belief that the same language (WME) and language education that have been used to oppress Black students can empower them. In other words, “the master’s tools [language] will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2007, p. 1).

In their argument for BlackCrit⁶ in education, Dumas and Ross (2016) argued that “only critical theorization of blackness confronts the specificity of anti-blackness, as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself” (p. 416). As far as language education, this framework suggests that only a language pedagogy that centers blackness can dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony. Race denial and respectability language pedagogies that teach students to silence the Black parts of their language in favor of an academic language that has particular affinities to WME has not accelerated Black students’ language and literacy development (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Kirkland & Jackson, 2008) In fact, these approaches are dangerous and harmful to Black students as they teach them to be ignorant of anti-black linguistic racism and bow down to it rather than work to dismantle it. Not only are these approaches violent toward Black students, they also perpetuate racial and linguistic inequity in schools. Therefore, I offer an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy as an approach that supports and accelerates Black students’ language and literacy education.

Literature as a vehicle for Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy

Literature is a “conduit for ... diverse forms of expression and language variation” (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014, p. 73) and provides rich opportunities for language learning. Indeed, language scholars have found that including BL structures in the study of literature can improve students’ literary analysis skills and help them more effectively engage with language variation that is evident in literary texts (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014; Lee, 1995). Yet, little is available in the scholarly literature regarding how literature can be a vehicle to work toward linguistic and racial justice. In particular, how can African American literature be used as a vehicle to “heighten [students’] consciousness of language in the face of fixed, monotonous linguistic label?” (Kinloch, 2005, p. 89). In the next section, I include a model that helps secondary ELA teachers imagine how they might implement an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy in their middle or high school classrooms using Angie Thomas’ novel, *The Hate U Give*. *The Hate U Give*, like other African American literary texts, provides a rich foundation to explore how language and race informs identity and experience. For instance, in *The Hate U Give*, there are several instances where the protagonist Starr – a Black teenager who attends a predominantly white high school (Williamson) but lives in a predominately Black community (Garden Heights) – describes how she navigates and negotiates her Black identity in a white space that expects her to perform whiteness, especially through her language use. Albeit fictional, Thomas’ depiction of Starr accurately captures the cultural conflict, labor, and exhaustion that many Black Language-speakers endure when code-switching; that is, they are continuously monitoring and policing their linguistic expressions and working through the linguistic double consciousness they experience as a result of having to alienate their cultural ways of being and knowing, their community, and their blackness in favor of a white middle class identity. African American young adult novels like *The Hate U Give* provides Black youth with an opportunity to see their racial and linguistic realities reflected in literature.

In the section that follows, I offer seven lessons that communicate one of many ways of approaching an anti-racist black language pedagogy via literature. Each lesson contains three sections that lay out important information about each lesson: (1) a description that explains the theme of each lesson, (2) a list of potential activities that can be used to engage the students in the theme of the lesson, and (3) supplemental resources that can be read or viewed to provide students with foundational information about the theme. The lessons build off of one another but do not necessarily have to be followed in the order that I list them in below. I also want to note that these activities were designed with Black Language-speaking students in mind; however, the lessons are

flexible and can be altered to speak to non-Black Language speaking students as well. As a final note, I want to add that the lessons that follow are not intended to be a prescriptive approach to an Anti-Racist Black Language pedagogy; instead, these are ideas that can be implemented, altered, or used as inspiration to help teachers think through how to use literature in the pursuit of linguistic and racial justice.

Moving forward

As illustrated in Table 3 above, an Anti-Racist Black Language moves ELA teachers beyond reinforcing a traditional language education that is narrowly focused on getting Black students to acquire academic language or WME. Instead, this pedagogical innovation

Table 3. Description of Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy using the hate U give.

Lessons:	Experiences and Activities	Suggested Supplemental Resources to Support Lesson
<p><i>Lesson 1: Black Language & Identity</i></p>	<p><i>In this lesson, students examine the intersection of language, culture, and identity within the Black community.</i></p> <p>Ideas: Have students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● explore the identity of the characters in The Hate U Give through language. ● examine how BL reflected the Black characters' ways of knowing, interpreting, and surviving in the world. ● examine the relationship between BL and Black culture in The Hate U Give. ● examine the tensions Starr experienced with language and race throughout the novel. ● write a linguistic memoir that examines their linguistic identities and experiences with language and race. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● From Ghetto Lady to Critical Linguist from the book 'Talkin' that Talk: The Language of Black America' by Geneva Smitherman (1977) ● <i>Reclaiming My Language: The (Mis)education of Wonderful by Wonderful Faison (2014): http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/author/moarhai420/</i> ● <i>Three ways to speak English by Jamila Lyiscott et al. (2014): https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english</i>
<p><i>Lesson 2: Language, History, and Culture</i></p>	<p>In this lesson, students will participate in a language study that examines the historical, cultural, and political underpinnings of BL.</p> <p>Ideas: Have students examine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the difference between a pidgin and creole. ● dialectologists and creolist's perspectives on the history and development of Black language. ● language planning during enslavement. ● coded slave spirituals. ● how literacy was controlled and enslaved Africans were denied access to literacy by law. ● the history of BL in relation to the issues around language Thomas takes up in The Hate U Give. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Underground Railroad: Coded Spirituals. https://www.pbs.org/video/underground-railroad-william-still-story-coded-spirituals/[Kmm0010] (2008), Linguistic Profiling, African American English Origin, Gullah: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPGx1lcFdLQ ● Use and misuse speech diagnostics for African American students, by John Baugh (2015).
<p><i>Lesson 3: Study of Black Language</i></p>	<p>In this lesson, students will examine the structural and discourse features of BL.</p> <p>Ideas: Have students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● examine linguists' perspectives about the standard language ideology ● explore Black grammatical structure (semantics, semantics, phonology, etc.) ● explore Black discourse/rhetorical features (signifying, semantic inversion, call & response, etc.) ● analyze how features of BL are represented in <i>The Hate U Give</i>. ● conduct a rhetorical analysis to investigate Thomas' choices for using Black Language at various moments and with various characters throughout the novel. ● do an ethnographic study of how language is used in their linguistic communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Standard Language Myth from the book English with an Accent by Rosina Lippi-Green ● Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English by Rickford and Rickford (2000) ● Signifying, narrativizing, and repetition: Radical approaches to theorizing African American Language by Bonnie Williams-Farrier (2016) ● Change the Game from the book Articulate while Black by Samy Alim & Geneva Smitherman

(Continued)



Table 3. (Continued).

Lessons:	Experiences and Activities	Suggested Supplemental Resources to Support Lesson
<p><i>Lesson 4: Language & Power</i></p>	<p>In this lesson, students will investigate the intersection of language and power:</p> <p>Ideas: Have students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● examine who decides whose language gets to be considered academic language, standard, official, normal, appropriate, etc., ● examine systems that perpetuate linguistic oppression (linguistic hegemony, standard language ideology, etc.) ● Interrogate who is privileged and who is marginalized by the notion of “standard” English. ● examine the relationship between language and power in <i>The Hate U Give</i>. ● interrogate the concept of code-switching (investigate the “code” that needs to be switched). ● examine Starr’s experiences and tensions with code-switching in <i>The Hate U Give</i>. ● investigate how language has been used to profile and discriminate against BL-speakers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Other People’s English Code-meshing, Code-switching for African American literacy by Vershawn Ashanti Young et al. ● “I Never Really Knew the History Behind African American Language.” By April Baker-Bell (2013)
<p><i>Lesson 5: Language & Racial Positioning in Society</i></p>	<p>In this lesson, students examine the intersections between language and race. They will also be provided with opportunities to investigate the relationship between language and anti-blackness as one way of understanding linguistic racism.</p> <p>Ideas: Have students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● examine the presence of white linguistic hegemony in <i>The Hate U Give</i> and how Starr navigated and negotiated it. ● examine the definition of anti-black linguistic racism and investigate how its presence was reflected in <i>The Hate U Give</i>. ● examine how anti-black linguistic racism is perpetuated through systems of power (schools, housing, law, etc.) ● examine their own experiences with anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony. ● examine how BL is culturally appropriated, co-opted, and commodified by white mainstream culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I Can Switch my Language, but I Can’t Switch My Skin.” by April Baker-Bell (2017) ● Linguistic Profiling: An ABC News Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwoLp59dDhs ● Language and linguistics on trial: Hearing Rachel Jeantel and other vernacular speakers in the courtroom and beyond

Lesson 6: Language, Agency, & Action

In this lesson, students will develop agency, take a critical stance, and make political choices that support them in employing Black language for the purposes of various sorts of freedom, including dismantling anti-black linguistic racism.

Ideas: Have students:

- perform a rhetorical analysis of how Black writers and speakers have used BL powerfully for various sorts of freedom (creative writers/speakers, academic writers/speakers, activists, etc.).
- explore and practice using BL powerfully and rhetorically
- organize teach-ins, PSA, write books that promote awareness of BL and anti-black linguistic racism.
- create language policies that protect and preserve BL and BL-speakers within their communities, schools, and the world.

- StayWoke: The language and literacies of #BlackLivesMatter movement by Elaine Richardson and Alice Ragland (2018)
- Students' right to their own language resolution statement

Lesson 7: Developing a Language of Solidarity

In this lesson, students will develop a critical linguistic awareness and interrogate how of how other linguistically and racially diverse communities experience racial and linguistic violence and are impacted and are affected by linguistic racism.

- read linguistic narratives by non-Black writers who are impacted by linguistic racism.
- learn how historically communities of color have experienced division and opposition that have negatively impacted communities of color as a whole.
- develop an understanding of linguistic and cultural sharing.

- Imagining a language of solidarity for Black and Latinx youth in English language arts classrooms by Danny Martinez.
- "They're in my culture, they speak the same way": African American language in multiethnic high schools by Django Paris.
- Mother tongue by Amy Tan (1990)
- How to tame a wild tongue by Gloria Anzaldua (1987) from her book Borderlands.



reclaims and builds upon the ideas and recommendations that have been put forth by pioneers in the Black Language research tradition. In the pursuit of linguistic, racial, and educational justice for Black students, the Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy that I outline above intentionally and unapologetically centers the linguistic, cultural, racial, intellectual, and self-confidence needs of Black students. In so doing, Black students have an opportunity to learn language, learn through language, and learn about language (Halliday, 1993) at the same time as working toward dismantling anti-black linguistic racism.

This pedagogical innovation also provides space for other linguistically marginalized students of color and white students to develop useful critical capacities regarding anti-Black linguistic racism as well as the historical, cultural, political, racial, grammatical, and rhetorical underpinnings of Black Language. Beyond Black Language, an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy offers all students a critical linguistic awareness and windows into broader conversations about the intersections between language and identity, language and power, language and history, linguistic racism, and white linguistic and cultural hegemony. For other linguistically and racially diverse students, an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy could be used to facilitate what Martinez (2017) referred to as a language of solidarity, which is a framework that helps linguistically and racially diverse students develop a broader understanding of linguistic racism, linguistic violence, and how white linguistic and cultural hegemony negatively impacts communities of color. These critical capacities are just as important – if not more important – for white students as they are for linguistically and racially diverse students, as it is often white students’ ignorance of language varieties other than their own combined with their lack of awareness about whiteness that contributes to them perpetuating anti-black linguistic racism. Finally, before ELA teachers can implement an Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy in their classroom, they have to interrogate their own views of Black Language and the ways in which they perpetuate anti-black linguistic racism in their classrooms (Baker-Bell, 2017).

Notes

1. Smitherman (2006) describes Black Language as “a style of speaking English words with Black Flava—with African semantic, grammatical, pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns. [Black Language] comes out of the experience of US slave descendants. This shared experience has resulted in common language practices in the Black community. The roots of African American speech lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, that was created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class” (p. 3). Other terms for Black Language include African American Language (AAL), African American English (AAE), Ebonics, Spoken Word, etc.
2. I use the term White Mainstream English (WME) following Alim and Smitherman (2012) in place of standard English to emphasize how standard English gets racialized as white and legitimizes white, male, upper middle-class, mainstream ways of speaking English.
3. See Conference on College Composition and Communication SRTOL resolution .
4. A federal judge ruled that the Ann Arbor school district failed to take the social, economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of 15 Black students into account while attempting to teach them to read in “standard English.” See *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al., v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, 1979, for more.
5. The samples included under language A were patterns that I heard students at Leadership Academy use during the observation phase of the study.

6. According to Dumas and Ross, “BlackCrit in education promises to help us more incisively analyze how social and education policy are informed by antiblackness, and serve as forms of anti-Black violence, and following from this, how these policies facilitate and legitimize Black suffering in the everyday life of schools” (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 419).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

April Baker-Bell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0131-7267>

References

- Alim, H. S., & Smitherman, G. (2012). *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the US*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands Lafrontera*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute.
- Baker-Bell, A. (2013). “I never really knew the history behind African American language”: Critical language pedagogy in an advanced placement English language arts class. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46, 355–370. doi:10.1080/10665684.2013.806848
- Baker-Bell, A. (2017). I can switch my language, but I can’t switch my skin: What teachers must understand about linguistic racism. In E. Moore, A. Michael Jr., & M. W. Penick-Parks (Eds.), *The guide for white women who teach black boys* (pp. 97–107). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Baker-Bell, A. (forthcoming, February). *Linguistic justice: Black, language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. New York & Urbana, IL: Routledge & National Council of Teachers of English.
- Ball, A. F., & Lardner, T. (2005). *African American literacies unleashed: Vernacular English and the composition classroom*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Baugh, J. (2015). Use and misuse of speech diagnostics for African American students. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 9, 291–307. doi:10.1080/19313152.2015.1082416
- Charity Hudley, M., & Mallinson, C. (2014). *We do language. English language variation in the secondary English classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). (1974). *Students’ right to their own language position statement*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/CCCC/NewSRTOL.pdf>
- Dinwiddie-Boyd, E. (1996). *In our own words: A treasury of quotations from the African-American community*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Dumas, M., & Ross. (2016). “Be real Black for me”: Imagining blackcrit in education. *Urban Education*, 51, 415–442. doi:10.1177/0042085916628611
- Faison, W. (2014, October 16). *Reclaiming my language: The (mis)education of wonderful*. [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/author/moarhai420/>
- Gilyard, K. (2005). Foreword. In A. Ball & T. Lardner (Eds.), *African American literacies unleashed: Vernacular English and the composition classroom* (pp. xiii–xiv). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gottlieb, M., & Slavit-Ernst, G. (2014). *Academic language in diverse classrooms: Definitions and contexts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Haddix, M. (2015). *Cultivating racial and linguistic diversity in literacy teacher education: Teachers like me*. New York, NY: Routledge & National Council of Teachers of English.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 5, 93–116. doi:10.1016/0898-5898(93)90026-7
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

- Johnson, L. L., Jackson, J., Stovall, D., & Baszile, D. T. (2017). "Loving Blackness to Death": (Re) Imagining ELA classrooms in a time of racial chaos. *English Journal*, 106(4), 60–66.
- Kinloch, V. (2005). Revisiting the promise of students' right to their own language: Pedagogical strategies. *College Composition and Communication*, 57, 83–113.
- Kinloch, V. (2010). To not be a traitor of Black English: Youth perceptions of language rights in an urban context. *Teachers College Record*, 112, 103–141.
- Kirkland, D. E., & Jackson, A. (2008). Beyond the silence: Instructional approaches and students' attitudes. In J. Scott, D. Y. Straker, & L. Katz (Eds.), *Affirming students' right to their own language: Bridging educational policies and language/language arts teaching practices* (pp. 160–180). Urbana, IL: NCTE/LEA.
- [Kmm0010]. (2008, April 27). *Linguistic profiling. African American English origin, Gullah*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPGx1icFdLQ>
- Kynard, C. (2007). "I want to be African": In search of a Black radical tradition/African-American-Vernacularized Paradigm for "students' right to their own language," critical literacy, and class politics. *College English*, 69, 360–390.
- Lee, A. (2017). Why "correcting" African American speakers is counterproductive. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 32, 27–33. doi:10.9707/2168-149X.2162
- Lee, C. (1995). A culturally based cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching African American high school students skills in literacy interpretation. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 608–630. doi:10.2307/748192
- Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lorde, A. (2007). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.
- Lyiscott, J. [TEDSalon NY2014] (2014, February). *Three ways to speak English*. [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english?language=en
- Martinez, D. (2017). Imagining a language of solidarity for Black and Latinx youth in English language arts classrooms. *English Education*, 49, 179–196.
- Paris, D. (2009). They're in my culture, they speak the same way: African American language in multiethnic high schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79, 428–448. doi:10.17763/haer.79.3.64j4678647mj7g35
- [Public Broadcasting Service]. (2012, February 5). *Coded spirituals*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/video/underground-railroad-william-still-story-coded-spirituals/>
- Richardson, E. (2004). Coming from the heart: African American students, literacy stories, and rhetorical education. In E. Richardson & R. Jackson (Eds.), *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 155–169). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Richardson, E., & Ragland, A. (2018). #StayWoke: The language and literacies of #BlackLivesMatter movement. *Community Literacy Journal*, 12, 27–56. doi:10.1353/clj.2018.0003
- Rickford, J. R., & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2005). Spoken soul. The language of Black imagination and reality. *The Educational Forum*, 70, 37–46. doi:10.1080/00131720508984870
- Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Smitherman, G. (2006). *Word from the mother: Language and African Americans*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smitherman, G., Villanueva, V., & Canagarajah, S. (2003). *Language diversity in the classroom: From intention to practice* (1st ed.). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Tan, A. (1990). Mother tongue. *The Threepenny Review*, 43, 7–8.
- Thomas, A. (2017). *The hate u give*. New York, NY: Balzer & Bray.
- Turner, K. C. N., & Ives, D. (2013). Social justice approaches to African American language and literacy practices: Guest editors' introduction. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46, 285–299. doi:10.1080/10665684.2013.808892
- Williams-Farrier, B. (2016). Signifying, narrativizing, and repetition: Radical approaches to theorizing African American language. *Meridians*, 15, 218–242. doi:10.2979/meridians.15.1.12

- Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Washington, DC: Traffic Output Publication.
- Young, V., Barrett, R., Young-Rivera, Y., & Lovejoy, K. B. (2014). *Other people's English: Code-meshing, code-switching, and African American literacy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Additional Resources

1. Baker-Bell, A. (forthcoming; February 2020). *Linguistic Justice: Black, Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. New York & Urbana, IL: Routledge & National Council of Teachers of English.

In *Linguistic Justice*, I expand on the ideas presented in this article. In particular, I reveal how Black Language-speakers navigate and negotiate anti-black linguistic racism in their classrooms. In particular, I illustrate how traditional approaches to language education do not account for the emotional harm or consequences these approaches have on Black students' sense of self and identity. The book also shows how the *anti-racist black language pedagogy* impacted Black Language-speakers' language attitudes and linguistic identities.

2. Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). (2016). *CCCC Statement on Ebonics*. Retrieved from <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/ebonics>

In 2016, the Conference on College Composition and Communication revised their 1998 statement on Ebonics to reflect the organizations continual commitment to the language rights of Black Language speakers. The statement provides a brief historical walk into the issues concerning the mistreatment of Black Language in schools and it provides an overview of the way forward. The statement concludes with a list of resources that supports practitioners and researchers.

3. Lyiscott, J. [TEDSalon NY2014] (2014, February). *Three Ways to Speak English*. [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english?language=en

Three Ways to Speak English is a beautiful spoken-word poem written and performed by Jamila Lyiscott. In the poem, Lyiscott pays homage to Ebonics and Black Multilingualism at the same time of underscoring the historical, cultural, and political underpinnings of Black Language.