


5-2023

WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL? EXAMINING THE ROLE OF HEGEMONY THROUGHOUT U.S. HISTORY IN INFLUENCING MULTILINGUAL DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES WITHIN ACADEMIC POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

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INFLUENCING MULTILINGUAL DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES WITHIN
ACADEMIC POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

A Thesis

Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English & Writing Studies:
Pedagogy

by
Katie Olivia Wallen

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

The discriminatory systems that multidialectal and multilingual users experience in the United States have historically influenced how educators and policymakers approach the construction of academic policies and curricula. These hegemonic systems shape and inform linguistic attitudes that have continually imparted prejudice against non-White language users, resulting in a gap of inclusivity for diverse student populations. Research aiming to address this gap has traditionally approached linguistic discrimination by specifically examining the use of dialects or non-English languages in the classroom rather than the underlying systems that affect both multidialectal and multilingual users similarly. Through the lens of policy and social construct analysis, this article addresses how historical hegemonic constructs influence language standards in the classroom in an effort to create reflexive practices and encourage dialogue amongst professionals who work in the education sector to improve measures of inclusivity in academic policy and curricula.

Keywords: linguistic discrimination, multidialectal, multilingual, academic policy, Critical Language Awareness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my thesis committee members, Drs. Jasmine Lee and Alexandra Cavallaro, for your guidance and mentorship throughout the development of this project. Your kindness and words of encouragement helped to keep me afloat throughout this process. Additionally, words cannot express my gratitude to the faculty and staff in the English department at California State University, San Bernardino. My life, and this thesis, would have gone in a very different direction without you all. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me find my passion in this world, and for supporting me during the journey.

I also want to thank my parents, Karen A. Parrish and Randall L. Parrish, for their relentless support and infinite wisdom. Even as a child, you believed I could do and be anything I wanted to be. And most importantly, you always reminded me to be kind, compassionate, and thoughtful in my actions. These are markers I always strive to achieve within my research and within my life. I love you “this big a-much”!

I could not have undertaken this journey without my life partner, Karl D. Wallen III, who has continuously instilled confidence in my work as a scholar. Thank you for your incredible amount of patience and tenderness with me as I sprouted the confidence needed to blossom for this very long journey which included numerous detours along the way. You really know the way to my heart:

bringing me snacks and coffee while I sit at my computer feverishly drafting this manuscript for hours, and hours, and hours on end.

I would also like to thank my sweet friend Filimon Fregoso, whose friendship has been a grounding and comforting staple in my life. You are always a ray of sunshine in my day. Your passion and enthusiasm for your education and for life are inspiring! I appreciate the depths of our late-night conversations in the CSUSB parking lot in front of University Hall as we philosophize about what it means to be human and to create meaning from human experiences.

Lastly, I would like to thank my former community college professor, Michael Slusser, from San Bernardino Valley College, for believing in me before I believed in myself. Your encouragement helped plant the initial seed that started this entire journey. Thank you.

DEDICATION

To the communities, past and present, who have been told that your language or dialect is improper, loud, unintelligent. If you have ever been stereotyped because of your dialect or language, this is for you.

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JOURNAL ARTICLE:
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Introduction

“I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize.” -*bell hooks*

It might be time to rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance. Although the closing verse of the Pledge of Allegiance asserts indivisibility, with “liberty and justice for all,” no declaration has ever rung so hollow. Written three decades after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863¹, the pledge was penned during a tense transitional period in history when formerly enslaved Black people were met with immense resistance from the White community. Despite slavery becoming federally illegal, Black people were denied equal rights that White citizens got to enjoy. In 1896, the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruled that it was constitutional for “equal but separate accommodations for white and colored races.” This ruling ushered in the Jim Crow laws era which lasted until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, resulting in the Civil Rights Acts of 1964.

¹ The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs signifies that the Pledge of Allegiance was written to “affirm the values and freedom that the American flag represents” in 1892. (<https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/pledge.pdf>)

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, determining that racial segregation within public academic institutions was unconstitutional, finding it in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment (Ramsey, n.d.). This ruling became an imminent threat for Southerners, where White supremacy was “constructed upon destructive stereotypes of black intellectual inferiority” (Ramsey, n.d.). Southern school districts responded by delaying desegregation through manipulative grade-per-year plans, closing Black schools, and laying off Black teachers which resulted in the federal government withholding funding until southern states cooperated (Ramsey, n.d.). Despite the poor reciprocation of *Brown v. Board of Education* in the South, the ruling brought forth substantial changes that laid the groundwork for favorable equitable education rights. However, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ community members, women, and low-income individuals continue to face discrimination in the classroom from the resulting White, patriarchal, cisgender ideologies that the academic system and its institutions have been erected from. As I write this thesis in 2023, for example, students of Chinese-American descent face retaliation over the Coronavirus pandemic (Wormer, 2020); Critical Race Theory is being scrutinized and met with legislative bills that ban its use in the classroom (Shawchuk, 2021); and Florida recently passed a series of bills that ban books in the classroom that include LGBTQ+ experiences and/or contain discussions of racial discrimination (Luneau, 2022).

At times, the depths of discrimination that minority and underrepresented students face may not be explicitly obvious. In this article, I examine an implicit avenue of systemic intolerance within the education system that often gets little attention: linguistic discrimination. Specifically, I examine the indirect, but powerful, impact that federal and state legislation have on language and dialect use in academia. I further investigate how language attitudes and the hegemonic ideologies that shape them are reinforced or resisted in the classroom and how students use these viewpoints to navigate and perceive the world. Most of the research encompassing academic policy and language investigates English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and bilingual education standards. While I acknowledge the importance of this research, it is largely outside of the scope of this paper. Instead, I am interested in policy and social construct analysis and the influence these systems have on multidialectal and multilingual users in academic spaces. Through this framework, I create a space for reflection and dialogue regarding the minimally researched intersectionality of multidialectal and multilingual discrimination within higher education. My research addresses the perpetuation of hegemonic linguistic practices that are implicitly – or in some cases explicitly – reproduced in accordance with societal expectations and ‘norms’. In doing so, I encourage scholars and policymakers to reflect on their own personal and professional practices under these discriminatory constructs and invite community dialogue to address this inequity in our educational systems. While the introspective work

that is necessary for the creation of more inclusive policies and curricula may be potentially uncomfortable, we must consider how our roles as educators and policymakers influence student lives both inside and outside of the classroom. It is imperative that we recognize the importance of progress and not perfection in seeking changes in a society whose hegemonic roots are buried deep beneath what may be inherently visible. As I will outline later, tackling linguistic discrimination in the classroom as a community effort has shown to have a positive outcome on multilingual student needs. I emphasize the importance of creating policies and curricula that encompass the needs of these students, as discriminatory constructs in education, language use, and segregation are all deeply intertwined.

Throughout this article, I use the term 'linguistic discrimination' as an embodiment of the hegemonic language values that surround multidialectalism and multilingualism. Understandably, language and dialect are often researched and analyzed as separate entities, but I address the overarching linguistic discrimination that exists in communication forms that take shape outside of Standard American English. These are languages and dialects that are often considered unorthodox in some aspect within the United States. I approach communication in this manner because both languages and dialects are interconnected with identity, culture, and ideologies, and are ultimately a distinction of belonging within particular discourse communities.

Since systems of linguistic discrimination are perpetuated through historical repetition, I begin my argument with a recounting of the hegemonic history of language in the United States before investigating how federal and California state legislation shapes academic policies that influence language and dialect in the classroom.

The Hegemonic History of Language in America

“Speak English; This is America”

American English may be the *de facto* language of the land, but the United States does not have an official language. Despite this fact, America has been plagued by hegemonic linguistic practices that have systematically influenced language attitudes as early as the colonization of Native Americans. Language hegemony has been used as a tool to censor, diminish, and intimidate non-White mainstream cultures and ideologies and is a practice that continually threatens to socially, politically, and economically marginalize communities that exist outside of the White mainstream population. A common thread that binds these hegemonic practices is the perception that a threat is present that goes against American culture and ideologies. This narrative, whether implicitly stated or not, is driven to retain the dominant group in their position of power. The genocide of the Native Americans began a long string of hegemonic constructs that would guide modern discriminatory linguistic practices.

On December 18, 1620, the *Mayflower* arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts, carrying settlers that would establish the first English colony in

America. When these colonizers encountered the Native Americans who already called America home, communication proved to be challenging since they did not share a common language. They reverted to “gestures and body language” to exchange information (National Park Service, n.d.). Just a few years later in 1622 and leading up to the late 19th century, a succession of wars broke out between the Native Americans and colonizers, commonly referred to as the “Indian Wars,” to gain control over the land (History, 2010). These wars ended with the tragic genocide of the Native American people, in which “tens of thousands” of lives were lost across both parties, and the Native American population and culture suffered severely as a result (History, 2010). The remaining native peoples were forced to assimilate with the implementation of the Indian Civilization Act Fund and Peace Policy of 1869, which laid the groundwork to strip Native Americans of their culture with the policy to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” (American Indian Resource Center, n.d.). Between the late 18th and mid-19th century, over 60,000 Native American children were forcibly removed from their homes to enter boarding schools run by the federal government where they were physically and sexually punished for not speaking English and upholding American values (American Indian Resource Center, n.d.).

Assimilation phenomena stemming from xenophobic ideologies were not isolated to the Native Americans. Shortly after declaring war on Germany during World War I, the United States created legislation that restricted or barred the use of foreign languages in an effort to force allegiance to the United States

through the strict use of English (Baron, 2014). Despite America being immensely diverse at this point in history due to mass immigration over the previous several decades (History, 2009), immigrants were expected to assimilate into American values, culture, and language if they wished to be regarded as 'loyal' citizens. This sentiment was a driving factor during World War II's wrongful incarceration of Japanese Americans. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 which called for the relocation of 122,000 Japanese Americans – 70,000 of whom were American citizens – to internment camps around the United States in response to public fears of national safety (National Archives, n.d.). Despite there being no evidence that anyone of Japanese descent living on American soil had committed acts of espionage (Lee, 2017, p. 2), these camps functioned as both isolation centers and assimilation sites for Japanese Americans. Educational classes were held, but lessons were only taught in English and encompassed "reading, math, English, spelling, geography, and history" (Foster, 2015, p. 381). These classes were taught through "tenets of nationalism and patriotism," and the material was presented with an intentionally favorable bias toward American history (p. 382).

The genocide of Native Americans, the restricting and banning of foreign languages across the United States during World War I, and the wrongful incarceration of Japanese Americans were all results of paranoia, xenophobia, and the desire for a hegemonic White, English-speaking nation.

What Does It Mean to Be “American”?

Americans are one of the most diverse groups of people in the world, and the population is rapidly becoming more ethnically and racially diverse (Jensen et al., 2021). By as early as 1924, Kallen concluded that America was a “nation of nationalities” due to its highly diverse population which was shaped over several generations of mass immigration (as cited by Waltzer, 2004, p. 636). Waltzer (2004) contends that because of this history, Americans have a unique positionality: “Americans are allowed to remember who they were [prior to coming to America] and to insist, also, on *what else they are*” (p. 636). Waltzer conveys that Americans are afforded the unique opportunity to reject their ancestors' customs, convictions, family names, neighborhoods, and lifestyles, making Americans an “anonymous” people in terms of nativism (pp. 634, 637). Philip Gleason (1980), historian and professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame states that:

To be or to become an American, a person did not have to be of any particular national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background. All he had to do was commit himself to the political ideology centered on the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism. Thus the universalist ideological character of American nationality meant that it was open to anyone who willed to become an American. (p. 32)

Despite the national identity being one of fluidity, the pluralistic nature of Americans is often harshly rejected by mainstream hegemonic ideologies. The United States is no stranger to imposing resistance and censorship against non-dominant social classes, and historically have been particularly discriminatory toward multidialectal and multilingual communities. Further, the ideal notion of what it means to be an American by this definition becomes slippery, abstract, and thus realistically unattainable. In turn, this lends to unfair expectations of hypothetical standards and opens the floodgates for discrimination against those who do not adhere to these standards, when in practice, there is no definitive measurement of being an American.

Language Shaped by Legislation

Despite how impersonal or distant legislation may feel, it is a product of our democratic system; that is to say, our laws are created by the officials who have been elected to office by the voting public. This is a critical piece of information in understanding how systemic ideologies continue to perpetuate within society. The discriminatory laws and practices against non-dominant communities throughout history form linguistic attitudes which shape how we think about these particular groups. Influence in a democracy is bidirectional in that laws are written and passed by our elected officials which then influence societal standards and expectations. These standards and expectations trickle into academic policies and curricula which then reinforce ideologies that get

reflected back into society. In short, discriminatory practices – particularly those set in federal or state statutes – become cemented as normalcy.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was an enormous turning point that pushed back against such discriminatory ‘norms’ and demanded for more equitable rights for marginalized American citizens. It protects against discrimination “based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in public schools and institutions of higher education” at the federal level. This Act was met with a considerable amount of resistance upon its establishment. However, it set the motion for additional like-minded legislation to be made. The Equitable Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 was subsequently passed which requires state agencies and school districts to intervene when the educational needs of English Language Learners (ELL) are not being met and allow for the investigation of complaints to be carried out (Department of Justice, 2022). A few years later in 1979, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan heard a case against Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School for violating Section 1703(f) of Title 20 of the United States Code which declares that “No State shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin” (473 F. Supp. 1371 (1979)). The school was found to have violated several U.S. Codes and civil rights of eleven Black students that were being discriminated against for using their home dialect of “Black English” and were not given the appropriate tools to overcome the language barrier in the classroom (473 F. Supp. 1371 (1979)). These anti-discrimination codes were

implemented with The Equal Educational Opportunities Act which developed out of the Civil Rights Act (Department of Justice, 2022). Although the federal government is not obligated to provide the right to an education (Brennan-Gac, 2014), several landmark cases have been heard at the federal court level as a result of the Civil Rights Act.

With the states being at the helm of academic legislation, America has become a “hodge-podge quilt of different rights, access, and quality standards” that varies depending on location (Brennan-Gac). Further, not all states consider education to be a fundamental right -- in fact, many do not (Brennan-Gac). As a California-based scholar, I am particularly interested in the connections between federal and California legislation and their effects on student language within California’s higher learning institutions.

Prior to the federal enactment of the Civil Rights Act, California had a compilation of its own Jim Crow laws that affected rights to education. Before 1880, it was illegal for non-White children to attend public school (*Tape v. Hurley*, 1885). This changed in 1885 when the Supreme Court of California heard the landmark case *Tape v. Hurley* which investigated whether children of Chinese descent who were born and lived in the city and county of San Francisco should be afforded admission into the California public school system. With a recent amendment to the language within the Political Code that guided similar cases in the past, the court ruled that it was unlawful to deny any child, regardless of race or nationality, the right to an education. This marked an important transitional

period in California civil liberty laws, where individuals of Chinese descent previously faced incessant discrimination following the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882).

California state laws around this time also permitted the discrimination of “Negroes, Mongolians, and Indians” by preventing them from entering public schools (Montoya, 2001). Although the Latinx community was not explicitly mentioned within the Education Code of California, “they were by far the most segregated group in California public education” by the 1920s (Montoya, 2001). Linguistic discrimination became an inherent extension of the discriminatory racial and cultural practices at the time. As the federal and state courts began to pass laws to protect non-White children from being denied the right to attend public schools, the negative connotations surrounding non-White languages followed them into academic spaces. Dr. Beatriz Arias (2007), an Associate Professor in the Division of Curriculum and Instruction at Arizona State University, cites the federal ruling of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) as the only piece of federal legislation that has addressed the issue surrounding the lack of quality and equity of Limited English Proficient (LEP) curricula (p. 3). While the ruling sparked educational reforms around the country, these reforms came in the shape of bilingual instruction which segregated LEP and English Language Learner (ELL) students from native speakers of English, ultimately making the acquisition of English for these students even more challenging (Arias, 2007, pp. 3-5).

In 1998, California introduced Proposition 227 to the ballot in an attempt to dismantle these bilingual programs in favor of an immersive monolingual English environment. Upon its passing, LEP students were taught in English-only classrooms by instructors who were monolingual English speakers. The California Department of Education conducted a five-year evaluation in 2022 of the performance of Proposition 227 and deduced that “students across all language classifications in all grades have experienced performance gains on the Standardized Testing and Reporting Program,” but also noted that there was a decrease in the performance gap between LEP and “English Only” students across most subject areas and that there was little statistical evidence that student performance could be linked to the model of instruction. Standardized testing has been used as a prejudice tool for assimilation and continues to set up BIPOC and multilingual students for failure (Knoester & Au, 2014; Nettles, 2019; Uysal, 2022). In 2016, California residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of Proposition 58 which revoked the restrictive measures implemented by Proposition 227 and gave public schools the power to decide how to teach their LEP students. While this is a move in the right direction, research has overwhelmingly shown that access to multilingual education offers students a plethora of benefits, which will be explored in-depth within the “Implications of Standard American-Only Classrooms” section.

Society, Language, and Power in Education

Standard English and Linguistic Attitudes in the Classroom

Despite the multiplicity of identities being bountiful within student populations (and, recall, that classrooms are only growing more diverse), the plurality of students is all too commonly suppressed in academic settings. Suppression breeds oppression. Students are expected to intrinsically master and adopt Standard American English (henceforth SAE) when in an academic or professional setting despite never explicitly being taught. To acquire SAE, students are reprimanded when speaking and writing in the languages and dialects that they are the most comfortable and familiar with, which is often what is being used at home. SAE asks students to shed the backgrounds and cultures encompassed within their language to adopt a sterile form of expression and a sterile identity of self. Yet strangely, this model of language is commonly considered to be the gold standard of formality and appropriacy by the public. This sentiment has stemmed from historically marginalizing non-White identities and rejecting the acknowledgment of being a “nation of nationalities” (Kallen, 1924 as cited by Waltzer, 2004, p. 636).

In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, investigators found that 70% of the American public considers the ability to speak English a ‘very important’ trait in being considered ‘truly American’ (Stokes, 2017a). Yet only 32% of participants consider being born in America to be a ‘very important’ factor of American identity, and only 45% found sharing national customs and traditions

to be of importance when constructing national identity (Stokes, 2017b).

Therefore, the ability, or inability, to speak English is overwhelmingly considered to be the most important marker of what it means to be an American. And yet only 22% of the public ranked proficiency in the English language to be 'somewhat important' in constructing an American identity (Stokes, 2017a).

The American public isn't alone in regarding English as the pathway to success in the United States. In *The dominant school language narrative: Unpacking English teachers' language ideologies*, Metz & Knight (2021) studies high school English teachers' language beliefs based on speaker characteristics, societal perceptions of language, language use in school, and what role educators have in teaching language. They revealed that teachers simultaneously hold hegemonic and counter-hegemonic language ideologies (p. e242). Within the context of schooling, the participants articulate a hegemonic linguistic view that "uphold[s] the status quo with all the existing social, racial, and linguistic hierarchies and inequalities" (p. e242). Additionally, the teachers also promote counter-hegemonic beliefs within their own personal role as an educator (p. e242). This complex intersectionality of language attitudes stems from the beliefs that all languages and dialects are valid, but that students also need to master SAE in order to be successful in their academic and professional careers (p. e247). When the teachers were asked if 'Standard English is the correct form of English', 63% (twenty-seven teachers) explicitly disagreed, while 37% (ten teachers) agreed; yet all participants correlated the idea of *correctness* within

academic and professional settings, and of student success, with Standard English use – including participants who did not cite SAE as being ‘the correct form’ of English (pp. e246-e247).

This is not an uncommon stance amongst academics and policymakers. In their book *English Standards in Higher Education: From Entry to Exit*, language policy specialists Arkoudis et al. (2012) grapple with the globalization of higher education and the significance of achieving English proficiency:

In many ways, the elevation of English as the international language in higher education has ensured that the ability to master its complexities has become a marker of success. Inequalities are exacerbated when some people are not only able to gain an education, but are also able to learn sufficient English to gain access to opportunities for social mobility, while others are unable to gain more than rudimentary schooling. (p. 4)

There are several facets of this statement that require critical reflection. If the acquisition of English is a marker of success within academia, what does ‘mastery’ entail, and how are institutions measuring it? Further, are these avenues of measurement reflective of holistic language use outside of the classroom, or do they determine proficiency in the ability to pass standardized testing? In many instances, the number of students achieving a passing rate on standardized testing correlates with the level of funding received either at the federal and/or state level as seen with the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). As highlighted previously, standardized

testing overwhelmingly gatekeeps BIPOC students in particular (Knoester & Au, 2014; Nettles, 2019; Uysal, 2022).

Another common misconception that Arkoudis et al. (2012) emphasize is the assumption that 'mastering' English (whatever exactly that means) equates to a guarantee of upward social mobility. While the ability to communicate in another language unquestionably provides students with additional opportunities, it is not a black-and-white construct where students who are proficient in English are guaranteed said opportunities, or further, success. A plethora of factors may prevent students from being able to access opportunities that provide some level of social mobility afforded through speaking English. Additionally, language does not simply encompass a string of coherent words. Successful communication requires an understanding of societal and discourse community norms. Speakers and writers must be familiar with genres, figures of speech, how to use their lexicon appropriately, be able to pick up on body language, signs, tonal shifts, and so on. Language is not black-and-white; it is slippery and ever-evolving. 'Mastery' of a language is attained when interlocutors can exchange ideas and meaning successfully, which very often looks different in an academic setting than in an organic linguistic environment. Murray (2016) illustrates that policies addressing language use in academia are influenced on behalf of particular political and commercial agendas – the same systems that the academic institutions themselves operate upon (p. 35). Thus, even scholars, policymakers, and institutions with the best intentions may implicitly preserve these inequitable

structures when intentional reflexive practices are not present. What recourse, then, do equity-minded educators have?

Pioneering the Democratic Education Approach

In the 1970s, Paulo Freire made waves in the academic community by challenging the traditional educator-centered approaches to teaching by shifting the focus to students as active contributors in the learning process. This was the inception of the democratic education movement that aims to empower students and meet their educational needs – a system that is still being expanded on modernly. In his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2014) vehemently disputes the common “banking” approach to teaching where students are viewed as empty receptacles, ready to be filled with knowledge from their all-knowing instructors (pp. 71-72). Instead, Freire argues that students should not be viewed as inferior and passive actors in acquiring their own knowledge, but rather as co-creators alongside those who teach them (pp. 48, 72). He emphasizes the importance of the knowledge and perspectives that students bring into the classroom, effectively removing educators from the assumed position of superiority over their students (chapter 1, chapter 2). Freire views education as a democratic tool that enables students to become liberated and empowered to challenge the societal structures that form oppression and inequity (chapter 1). This educational philosophy, known as “critical pedagogy,” has been incredibly influential within the pedagogical field. Two decades later in

1990, Freire collaborated with educator Myles Horton to publish *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Extending the conversation on his previous work surrounding democratic education and critical pedagogy, Freire emphasizes that educators “[have] the duty of not being neutral,” as neutrality fails to confront the oppressive narratives of the dominant group (p. 122). Societally dominant groups shape narratives that are favorable for their particular interests and ideologies, which, when repeated, become the authority that silences non-dominant narratives (LSA Inclusive Teaching, n.d.). In the case of the United States, these systems have overwhelmingly been built, and influenced, by White, cisgender, patriarchal ideologies.

bell hooks, a social activist and academic whose works address race, feminism, and class, found inspiration in Freire’s oppressed/oppressor concept and the idea of education as an avenue to liberation and freedom. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), hooks confronts Standard English as a tool to oppress, stating:

[Standard English] is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all of those diverse, native communities we will never hear, the speech of the Gullah, Yiddish, and so many other unremembered tongues. . . I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize. (p. 168)

hooks mourns the loss of not only language, but of culture, identity, and experiences that reside within language as a result of the colonization of peoples who were constrained to speaking only the language of their conqueror; of their oppressor (pp. 168-169). hooks also emphasizes that the acquisition of the oppressor's language can be a form of resistance by sharing a language to reclaim power through "a means to create the political solidarity necessary to resist" (pp. 169-170). When hooks asked a class of ethnically diverse students why Standard English is only utilized in the classroom, they admitted that they did not know it was possible to utilize language outside of Standard English in their academic work (pp. 171-172).

Implications of Standard American English-Only Classrooms

I have highlighted the hegemonic history of language in the United States, grappled with the idea of what it means to be an American, analyzed how federal and California state legislation has shaped language use and attitudes, explored the intersectionality of society, language, and power in academia, and examined the role of Standard American English and linguistic attitudes within the classroom. These constructs have forced multilingual and multidialectal students to interact with and navigate discriminatory systems that have dire consequences not only on their own identities but also on how others view them.

April Baker-Bell, an associate professor of English and African American Studies at Michigan State University, wrote *Linguistic justice: Black language,*

literacy, identity, and pedagogy in 2020 which addresses White linguistic supremacy and its role in shaping anti-Black linguistic racism. She examines how Black students navigate the intersectionality of their racial and linguistic identities by describing her own experiences as a Black scholar and the experiences of her Black students. Baker-Bell emphasizes the importance of this intersectionality by explaining that “people’s language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences” (p. 2). Language provides a lens to view the world. It allows us to construct experiences as members of discourse communities which shape the way in which we approach and interact with the world and how we formulate meaning within those interactions. The way in which we create meaning lends to our identities; how do we view ourselves and how do we wish to be perceived by others? Early in Baker-Bell’s teaching career, she learned that many of her Black students “resisted the standard language ideology because they felt it reflected white linguistic and cultural norms, and some of them were not interested in imitating a culture they did not consider themselves to be a part of” (p. 5). While Black students are expected to adhere to the standard language ideology of SAE (or “White Mainstream English” as Baker-Bell coins it) in the classroom despite not regarding themselves as members of the discourse community, Black language – and simultaneously Black student experiences – are repudiated in academia. As Baker-Bell establishes, Black language is considered to be “a symbol of linguistic and intellectual inferiority” (p. 14) despite the fact that “linguistic science does not recognize any language or dialect as inherently

superior or inferior or any other” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 33, as cited by Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 15). And yet, White mainstream culture ‘borrows’ (read: steals) linguistic features of Black language and culture to capitalize on it; “white America loves to hate, yet loves to take” (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 14). Society is telling Black students that their language is not ‘appropriate’ for the classroom, but appropriate enough to capitalize off of.

In her 1998 book entitled *bell hooks’ engaged pedagogy: A transgressive education for critical consciousness*, Namulundah Florence talks about the compliance of mainstream ideologies in non-White communities and how it can reinforce White hegemonic constructs. She asserts that education can be used as a tool for empowerment to strive towards a societal system that acknowledges and respects the intersectionality of citizens. The book specifically focuses on integrating bell hooks’ social and educational theory to understand how BIPOC students are affected by these hegemonic constructs. On the effects of non-White student experiences in the classroom, Florence states:

Students from marginalized cultures find their primary cultural values and traditions inadequately represented and/or denied [in the classroom]. The subordination of one group’s cultural traits and characteristics has significant impact in marginalized students’ experiences of schools and/or incorporation of official curricula. In a White supremacist society, White people’s values, traditions, and practices are ingrained in the social

policies and norms serving as basic criteria for social and economic mobility (p. 11)

Thus, these hegemonic ideologies are being continually perpetuated through policies and curricula that are presented within the classroom in an effort to sustain White ideologies, which are then reinforced as societal 'norms'. Many of the scholars quoted throughout this paper extend on Freire's critical pedagogy approach to education, which cites academia as the ideal place for the liberation and empowerment of oppressed communities (*Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 2014, chapter 2). Encouraging reflexivity at all levels in the educational sphere – students, educators, administrators, and policymakers – provides an opportunity for dialogue and action against these hegemonic systems that hinder the social and economic mobility that Florence cites.

Given that “decades of research of linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology establish that all language varieties are systemic, patterned, grammatically valid, and capable of conveying complex thinking,” (Duranti, 2009; Wolfram & Schilling, 2015, as cited by Metz, 2018, p. 1457) students of all backgrounds unquestionably bring important and unique experiences and perspectives into the classroom. But how do educators transition from historically engrained SAE-centered pedagogy to something that is more inclusive and reflective of the classrooms they teach in? Metz (2018) suggests that teachers should move away from the traditional “error correction” approach of SAE and focus instead on tasks that center around Critical

Language Awareness and Critical Language Pedagogy, which establishes “culturally and linguistically responsive teachers” that “validat[e] and [sustain] students’ home dialects while helping students add Standardized and discipline-specific Englishes to their linguistic repertoires” (p. 1457). Metz (2018) stresses the importance of valuing student knowledge and urges educators to approach language misconceptions through a descriptivist lens where organic language use is valued (pp. 1478-1479). This approach creates reflexivity around the intersectionality of language and identities and challenges the notion of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ language (p. 1480).

Additionally, multilingual and multidialectal approaches to education have proven to be immensely beneficial over monolingual programs (Kirss et al., 2021, p. 1). In 2021, Kirss et al. analyzed the effectiveness of multilingual schools by extensively combing through existing data and compiling a literature review. They considered the conceptual frameworks of each study that looked at the macro, meso, and micro levels of processes that affect multilingual education. They found that “exemplary multilingual schools were characterized by a clear multilingual language policy focus of the school” and that multilingualism was considered to be “a valuable resource” at these institutions, but language development did not take precedence over “academic or social development” (Kirss et al., 2021, p. 7). Each school considered the linguistic needs of the surrounding community when formulating its multilingual programs and addressed the unique needs of the students by monitoring the success rates of

these programs and made adjustments as needed (p. 7). Overall, multilingual students demonstrated superior attentional control, working memory, metalinguistic awareness, metacognitive awareness, abstract reasoning and creative divergent thinking, and problem-solving than their monolingual peers (Adesope et al., 2010, pp. 208-210). Further, multilingual students bring novel ideas and perspectives into the classroom which creates an enriching learning environment for all students.

While the overwhelming benefits of multilingual classrooms are abundant, I recognize that it is not feasible or realistic to expect society to shift toward inclusive academic policies and curricula overnight, particularly with the exclusionary history of non-Whites in this country. As groups continue to profit from these monolingual and hegemonic systems, implementing more inclusive policies and changing unfavorable linguistic attitudes will take time. The use of SAE and SAE-driven structures is still prominent in many aspects of our lives. After all, the systems of the United States were built from White constructs and systems that continue to be pervasive despite our growing diverse population. Thus, as Metz (2018) mentioned, students will benefit most from feeling supported in using their home dialect in the classroom while simultaneously being taught how to code-switch to Standard American English to equip them with navigating SAE spaces. Teaching students how and when to codeswitch adds to, as Metz (2018) calls it, a student's "linguistic repertoire," and prepares them for realistic interactions within the world (p. 1457). Most importantly,

educators need to make a conscious effort to help change the language attitudes surrounding non-SAE dialects. According to Young (2010), educators have the duty to teach “code meshing” by instructing on the functions of language through cultural perspectives and to “understand, listen, and write in multiple dialects simultaneously” (pp.112-114).

Extending the Conversation

While the existing research surrounding linguistic discrimination in the United States primarily addresses dialects and languages separately, scholars and policymakers should incorporate them both simultaneously when discussing academic curriculum and policy inclusivity. Non-dominant language (English dialects outside of SAE and non-English languages) has been historically criticized and deprecated as a result of the preservation of White hegemonic societal values. These values have shaped – and continue to shape – the systems that perpetuate these ideologies. Scholars, policymakers, and academic institutions need to practice reflexivity in an effort to identify inequities within their own communities and consider how discriminatory practices have shaped societal ‘norms’ and how our own practices continue to perpetuate these narratives.

Individuals working in the academic sector should become familiar with their respective local and state laws and legislation to understand how they shape educational practices and policies in their area. When I initially set out to

write this thesis, I was particularly interested in investigating how policies affected language use in the classroom in the richly diverse Inland Empire region of Southern California. However, I found little to no data suggesting how non-dominant languages and dialects are addressed in this area whether at the K-12 level or higher education. When a gap or lack of data exists, the needs of the individuals within these communities go unheard and unacknowledged. With studies emphasizing the success of multialectal and multilingual classrooms being attributed to their needs being met through community efforts, the acquisition of this data is of critical importance.

Freire argued that education is a liberatory and empowering practice that allows students to construct critical consciousness. Students can transcend and challenge the confines that society has put them in. This should give educators and policymakers pause – continuously and often – to reflect on their role(s) in their students' endeavors in pursuing an education. Education is not simply a means to an end for either student or instructor. It is not a promise of social and economic mobility or simply a paycheck. It is the co-creation of knowledge, community building, empowerment, liberation, leadership, exposure to diverse ideas and people, and so much more. Classroom experiences help shape students and how they see themselves and the world around them. Teaching goes beyond the classroom. Policymakers and scholars should regularly practice reflexivity to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the students they are

serving. As the needs of students change over time, so should policies and curricula.

As we reimagine our pedagogies and policies, it is important that we remember that Standard American English is overvalued, both in the classroom and as a “common sense” phenomenon. Students from all backgrounds codeswitch to display their association within discourse communities. SAE is not an intrinsically authentic linguistic construct. It rigidly exists in the confines of idealistic ‘proper’ White academic writing and is no more superior to any other dialect of English. In the studies conducted by Stokes (2017a, 2017b), 70% of Americans identified the ability to speak English as a ‘very important’ marker of being considered American. English dialect markers were not included in the study for the participants to determine which dialect made a speaker ‘American’. Further studies regarding English dialects and their associated level of Americanness could be useful in understanding language attitudes and the use of SAE in the classroom.

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