14 Variation, versatility, and Contrastive Analysis in the classroom[1]

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Introduction

A fundamental principle of variation theory, from its inception more than forty years ago, is that linguistic variation is the norm rather than the exception in human language use. Indeed, it was the weakness of the standard tools for analyzing such variation in *linguistics* (free variation and categorical conditioning), pitted against the strength and ubiquity of variation in *language*, that led to the development of modern sociolinguistics, with its concepts of inherent variability, quantitative and variable rule analysis, attentiveness to the social and stylistic dimensions of language use, and so on.[2]

In American and other schools around the world, however, teachers have often sought to *limit* the linguistic variation of their students, deeming non-standard or vernacular varieties unacceptable for classroom (sometimes even playground) use, and eschewing literary materials or pedagogical approaches that refer to or use such varieties. The motivation for this is understandable: teachers and parents alike usually want to ensure that students acquire the standard variety associated with academic success and upward socioeconomic mobility. But the approach is ironic since some of the most successful authors and poets – Chinua Achebe, Robert Burns, James Joyce, V. S. Naipaul, Raja Rao, and Alice Walker, to name half a dozen who write in English – draw creatively on both their standard and vernacular varieties. Moreover, the experimental evidence we have on this point (see below) suggests that outlawing or ignoring the vernacular is LESS effective at helping students acquire the standard variety than recognizing it and studying its similarities to and differences from the standard via Contrastive Analysis (CA) and other methods.

In this paper, we suggest that instead of linguistic uniformity, teachers seek to develop linguistic *versatility* in their students, and we propose they do so through a revised Contrastive Analysis approach that builds creatively on literature and

music rather than the boring drills associated with CA in earlier times. The word *versatile* is defined as "capable of doing many things competently" (*American heritage dictionary of the English language* 2000:1912). Linguistic versatility, as we conceive it, is the applied counterpart of the orderly linguistic variation whose structure and meaning are studied by sociolinguists and variationists. To some extent, we want students and teachers to become variationists themselves, discovering anew the systematic patterning in variable language data, as students in Baltimore and Ocracoke did in the language awareness classroom exercises discussed by Wolfram, Adger, and Christian (1999). But we also want them to value linguistic versatility as an asset – one exemplified by the best writers and singers and rappers and comedians and preachers and pray-ers and actors and actresses from their own and other communities – and one that they should develop and learn to deploy strategically in their own speech and writing. While most of our examples will be drawn from the African American and Caribbean communities and literatures we know best, the approach can be adopted more widely, especially where mainstream and vernacular varieties are in contact.

Why should variationists care about classrooms?

In response to the question some might ask, about why variationists should be concerned about classrooms anyway, the answer is that we have an ethical responsibility to give back something to the people "whose data fuel out theories and descriptions" and careers (Rickford 1997:186). Unlike linguists working in some other subfields, variationists generally base their analyses on corpora of recorded speech from real people in real communities, and the time and cooperation they extend to us creates what Labov calls the "Principle of the Debt Incurred":

(1) An investigator who has obtained linguistic data from members of a speech community has an obligation to use the knowledge based on that data for the benefit of the community, when it has need of it. (1982:173)

Walt Wolfram, the sociolinguist to whom this volume is dedicated, is one of the best exemplars of this principle, having shared the fruits of his sociolinguistic research on local varieties in North Carolina and elsewhere with community members through accessible books, videos, and library displays (e.g. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997, Wolfram, Dannenberg, Knick, and Oxendine 2002, and the videos *The Ocracoke brogue* and *Indian by birth*), and through lifelong contributions to the study of African American and other vernaculars in education (e.g. Wolfram 1969, Wolfram and Adger, 1993, Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999).

In the case of African American and Caribbean speakers – so often the focus of variationist study – community needs are particularly acute in the classroom. Le Page (1968) first urged language specialists to help train teachers to use Contrastive Analysis and other linguistically informed methods in Caribbean schools after reviewing evidence that only 10.7% to 23.1% of the students in Barbados,

Table 14.1 *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) average reading scores for White and Black students in national public schools, grades 4 and 8 for 2002, 2003, 2005*

	White	Black	Gap
2002 (grade 4)	227.08 (0.334)	197.81 (0.555)	29.27
2003 (grade 4)	227.10 (0.245)	197.25 (0.426)	29.85
2005 (grade 4)	227.64 (0.19)	198.89 (0.337)	28.75
2002 (grade 8)	271.06 (0.473)	244.41 (0.760)	26.65
2003 (grade 8)	270.44 (0.225)	243.6 (0.507)	26.84
2005 (grade 8)	269.42 (0.172)	242.03 (0.441)	27.39

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses indicate standard errors.

Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad who took the English Language General Certificate of Education exam in 1962 had passed it. Craig (1999) reported similarly negative results. Within the US, the persistent Black–White achievement gap in the language arts and other subjects continues to be a source of great concern to educators and policymakers alike (Singham 2003). Recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, shown in Table 14.1,[3] indicate that reading achievement scores for Black students in public schools nationwide lag behind those of White students by about 29 points at grade 4 and about 27 points at grade 8. Similar results obtain for writing; for instance, NAEP data for writing show that White eighth graders scored an average of 159.25 in 2002, while Black eighth graders scored 24.91 points less (134.31).

Contrastive Analysis

Given the long-standing belief and recent evidence (Charity, Scarborough, and Griffin 2003) that vernacular speaking students who are more competent in Standard English (SE) do better on measures of reading and writing, educators and sociolinguists interested in improving the proficiency of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Caribbean English Creole (CEC) speakers in SE have long advocated that teachers employ a version of Contrastive Analysis. Contrastive Analysis, initially developed five decades ago (Lado 1957) involves a comparison of the speaker's native language and target language to draw the attention of students and teachers to areas in which their systems differ, and to predict and help students avoid errors in the acquisition of the target language resulting from interference or transfer.

In the case of inner-city African American speakers, Contrastive Analysis involves comparisons between AAVE and SE, and a series of exercises to help

[3] Source: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress data for each year, as made available at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde [last accessed 4 June 2007].

them recognize the differences and translate from AAVE to SE (Feigenbaum 1970). The massive handbook of the Standard English Program (SEP handbook, n.d.) in California, written by Orlando Taylor and others in the early 1980s to facilitate "proficiency in Standard English for Speakers of Black English," and reportedly used in 300 schools, including Oakland, was built around Contrastive Analysis, as the following quotation emphasizes:

(2) The approaches used in this study are drills which are variations of the contrastive analysis and the comparative analysis [techniques] in teaching Black children to use Standard English. . . . By comparing the Standard English structure to be taught and the equivalent or close nonstandard structure, the student can see how they differ. Many students have partial knowledge of Standard English; that is, they can recognize and produce it but without accurate control. . . . For many students, this sorting out is the beginning of a series of steps from passive recognition to active production.

The extract from the SEP handbook in Table 14.2 illustrates a sample lesson on possessive -*s*, pursuing its objective of teaching the contrast between "nonstandard" (AAVE) and "standard" (SE) through discrimination, identification, and translation drills.

The older but less well known "TalkAcross" program, designed by Crowell, Kolbar, Stewart, and Johnson (1974), is similar, featuring Contrastive Analysis between "Black English" (BE) and Standard English (SE) in a teacher's manual and activity book. As the authors note:

(3) This . . . mixture of similarities and differences can create complex problems for both student and teacher when the student is a speaker of BE and the teacher a speaker of SE only. The student knows that what he speaks is different from SE, but he doesn't know how to articulate these differences. The teacher only hears mistakes, without being able to place the structures used by the student in a consistent framework. Both student and teacher need to learn something about the grammar – the system – of the other's dialect. And the best way to learn this is by **contrasting** the other's dialect with his own.   (Crowell *et al.* 1974:3)

The most recent exemplar of the Contrastive Analysis approach is Wheeler and Swords (2006). In this book, a sociolinguist and an elementary school teacher team up to develop a series of lessons to help students switch from Informal to Formal English – essentially AAVE to SE. One contrast with earlier work and one similarity with our own and more recent work (e.g. Sweetland 2006) is that the authors advocate less use of drills and they also make more use of literature:

(4) Once you have located stories that contain the grammatical patterns most often used by your students, you can use the literature to enhance your lessons in contrastive analysis. When you are using a work of literature to emphasize a specific pattern, highlight this pattern by writing examples from the book on chart paper and discussing them before reading the story aloud.   (Wheeler and Swords 2006:146)

Table 14.2 *Extracts from a Contrastive Analysis exercise in the Proficiency in Standard English for Speakers of Black Language handbook (SEP, n.d.)*

Instructional Focus: Possessives (Morpheme /s/ with nouns)
Objective: Given structured drill and practice contrasting the use of possessive nouns, the students will be able to differentiate between standard and nonstandard usage and to formulate sentences using the standard form in response to statements or questions. . . .

1. In order to assess the students' ability in auditory discrimination, the teacher will lead the students in the following drill. Students will respond by displaying a <u>same</u> or <u>different</u> response card.

DISCRIMINATION DRILL

Teacher Stimulus	Student Response
This is Joe car	
This is Joe's car	Different
[Other examples] . . .	

2. Teacher will explain and model the standard form and have students repeat several examples, giving additional help where needed.
3. Teacher will lead the students in the following drill. Students will respond by displaying standard or nonstandard response cards.

IDENTIFICATION DRILL

Teacher Stimulus	Student Response
Mary brother is little	Nonstandard . . .
Tom's truck is red	Standard
[Other examples] . . .	

4. To check for understanding, the teacher will call on individual students to respond to questions and statements similar to those in the following drill. Students will respond in complete sentences using the standard form . . .

TRANSLATION DRILL

Teacher Stimulus	Student Response
Jesse truck is red	Jesses's truck is red . . .
Brian mother is ill	Brian's mother is ill . . .

There are several advantages to using Contrastive Analysis to help vernacular speakers acquire the standard variety, including the fact that it appears to have worked everywhere it was tried and evaluated, at least more so than alternative approaches that ignore or disparage the vernacular. For instance, in a study conducted at Aurora University (Taylor 1990), African American students from Chicago inner-city areas were divided into two groups. The experimental group was taught the differences between Black English and Standard English through Contrastive Analysis. The control group was taught composition through conventional techniques, with no specific reference to the vernacular. After eleven weeks, Taylor's experimental group showed a dramatic DECREASE (−59%) in the use of ten targeted Black English features in their Standard English writing,

Table 14.3 *Mean scores and gains for experimental and control writing groups, Los Angeles Unified School District (Source: Maddahian and Sandamela 2000)*

GROUP TEST	Mean pre-test score	Mean post-test score	GAIN
Experimental writing	10.80	13.30	2.5
Control writing	9.06	10.74	1.68

Table 14.4 *Reading composite scores for bidialectal and control groups, DeKalb County, Georgia, on Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Source: Rickford 2002; see also Harris-Wright 1999)*

Group	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Bidialectal post-test	42.39	41.16	34.26
Bidialectal pre-test	39.71	38.48	30.37
GAIN by bidialectal students	+2.68	+2.68	+3.89
Control post-test	40.65	43.15	49.00
Control pre-test	41.02	41.15	49.05
GAIN by control students	−0.37	+2.0	−0.05

while the control group showed a slight INCREASE (+8.5%) in their use of such features.

Data from two other programs are shown in Tables 14.3 and 14.4. Table 14.3 shows data from the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP) in the Los Angeles Unified School District (formerly the "Language Development Program for African American Children" – see LeMoine and LAUSD 1999).[4] Students in the experimental group – the one that explicitly compares and contrasts African American language and mainstream American English – show greater gains on writing tests taken in 1998–99 than students in the control group. Similar results obtain for the reading and language components of the SAT-9 test.[5] Of course, it should be added that Contrastive Analysis is a central but not the only element in this program. Similar to this are results from Kelli Harris-Wright's bidialectal/Contrastive Analysis program in DeKalb County, Georgia, shown in Table 14.4. Note that the students in the bidialectal group, who were taught using Contrastive Analysis, made *bigger relative reading composite gains*

[4] The AEMP involves more than Contrastive Analysis, including language experience approaches, whole language, and an Afrocentric curriculum. But at the heart of it is respect for student's home language and comparison of African American language and Standard American English structures. For more information, see LeMoine (2001).

[5] For instance, at the 109th Street school, African American students in the experimental AEMP (n = 12) had mean scores of 21 and 24 on the reading and language components of the SAT-9, while a comparison group of African American students who were not in the AEMP (n = 104) had lower mean scores, of 16 and 20 respectively.

Table 14.5 *Mean performance of Northeastern African American third and fourth graders on sentence "correction" from AAVE to SE tests as a function of training condition (Source: Fogel and Ehri 2000:221)*

Training condition	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
ESP	4.17	6.52	2.35
ES	3.69	3.43	−0.26
E	3.48	3.72	0.24

NOTES: ESP = Exposure to SE text; Strategy Instruction in SE rules, and Practice in converting AAVE to SE [essentially Contrastive Analysis]; ES = Exposure to SE text, plus Strategy Instruction in SE rules; E = Exposure to SE text only.

every year than students in the control group, who did not receive Contrastive Analysis.[6]

Similar to this is a report by Fogel and Ehri who describe experiments with eighty-nine third and fourth grade African American students in two Northeastern schools where the writing achievement levels were low. The children selected for the study used AAVE features in their writing. They were trained to use SE through one of the following three techniques (2000:212): "(1) exposure to SE features in stories [E]; (2) story exposure plus explanation of SE rules [ES]; and (3) story exposure, SE rule instruction and guided practice transforming sentences from BEV to SE features [ESP]." Although the authors do not refer to the third method as Contrastive Analysis, it is clear from their description that ESP is essentially Contrastive Analysis. And from the results in Table 14.5, it is equally clear that ESP/Contrastive Analysis is far more effective than the other methods in helping students translate AAVE syntax into SE, as measured by the gain between pre-tests and post-tests (2000:222): "Tukey pair-wise comparisons showed that students in the ESP condition made significantly greater gains from pretest to posttest ($p \leq .001$) than students in the ES and E conditions, which did not differ from each other ($p \geq .05$)."

The most recent experimental work on the effectiveness of Contrastive Analysis is that of Sweetland (2006). As Tables 14.6a and 14.6b show, fourth to sixth graders in Cincinnati, Ohio, who were taught by the "Sociolinguistic Approach" (which includes Contrastive Analysis as a central component) performed better than students in the Writing Process and No Treatment approaches, which were not

Table 14.6a *Mean scores of students taught by different approaches for ten weeks, on a test of their ability to revise written vernacular text toward Standard English in elementary schools in Cincinnati, Ohio (Source: Sweetland 2006:197–8)*

Approach	Score
Sociolinguistic approach (CA)	68.9%
Writing process (No CA)	64.4%
No treatment (No CA or WP)	60.4%

Table 14.6b *Mean evaluations of elementary students' writing (by outside raters) on a "Conventions" trait rubric, in Cincinnati, Ohio (Source: Sweetland 2006:223)*

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	SIG?($p<$)
Sociolinguistic approach	2.79	3.09	0.30	YES .00001
Writing process	3.03	3.11	[0.08]	NO 37
No treatment	2.68	2.88	0.20	Yes .016

exposed to Contrastive Analysis, on tests involving revisions from the vernacular to the standard and adherence to English writing conventions.[7]

Despite this body of experimental evidence in its favor, traditional Contrastive Analysis programs do have weaknesses too. There are repeated critiques of its association with behaviorism and structuralism, and of its empirical weakness as a predictive model of learner's errors (see Wardhaugh 1970, Bialystok and Hakuta 1994). These may have been exaggerated (see Thomas 2002) and there is good reason to believe that the resilient utility of Contrastive Analysis in the classroom may have been under-estimated (Danesi and DiPietro 1991), especially for second *dialect* learning and teaching (Kenji Hakuta, personal communication).

But another difficulty is that Contrastive Analysis exercises often involve translation only from the vernacular to the standard, not in both directions. Recall the example of possessive -s from the SEP handbook (Table 14.2). This undermines proponents' claims about the integrity and validity of the vernacular, and it runs counter to the underlying ideology of bidialectalism. Traditional Contrastive Analysis is also too dependent on boring ("drill and kill") pattern practice

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[6] Students in the bidialectal group generally had lower absolute scores (particularly in the 1996–97 year) than students in the control group, although it is striking that the bidialectal group was able to surpass the control group in their post-test performance in 1995.

[7] According to Sweetland (2006:197–8), none of the adjacent score differences (68.9% vs. 64.4%, 64.4% vs 60.4%) was statistically significant, as measured by a pairwise *t*-test, but the difference between the mean score of the Sociolinguistic Approach (68.9%) and that of the No Treatment approach (60.4%) was statistically significant ($p \leq 0.04$). It should be added that Sweetland's training exercises also made creative use of literature – indeed we would recommend her lesson plans as a model to those contemplating CA in the vernacular speaking classroom.

exercises, and it focuses too narrowly and myopically on language forms, as though effective and successful language use involves nothing more than pronouncing the first consonant in *them* with a voiced *th* rather than a *d*, and having an *-s* on the end of your third person present tense verb (*He walks*, not *He walk*).

Updating Contrastive Analysis through the use of literature and music

A fundamental goal of the updated Contrastive Analysis we advocate is the development of linguistic *versatility*, so it could just as well be called the *Versatility Approach*, to emphasize what is new and to put some distance between us and the behaviorist orientations and drill-and-kill methods associated with Contrastive Analysis. Although the versatility approach we advocate would focus on switching from vernacular to mainstream English and vice versa, it could also include the versatility of using other languages (Spanish, Swahili),[8] and variant words, rhyme schemes, poetic forms, and narrative styles, allowing it to mesh smoothly with existing English and language arts curricula. As far as possible, the samples of writing or song that we use with students should be accompanied by brief bios of their exemplars and their accomplishments, and their own accounts of their experiences (sometimes struggles) with vernacular and mainstream usage. By this means we hope to increase the ability of students to identify with and take pride in these models (their forebears) and their linguistic versatility. The idea is to have a program that affirms and builds up students, rather than putting them down, as the cycle of one-way vernacular to standard correction in traditional Contrastive Analysis appears to do.

We'll discuss several examples, beginning with African American writers and singers and then turning to examples from the Caribbean, which could be used there as well as in US schools (e.g. in New York or Chicago – cf. Fischer 1992, Irish 1995, Nero 2006) with AAVE and Creole speakers.

US examples, featuring African American writers and singers

In relation to the use of AAVE in the classroom, we already have some evidence that African American adolescents struggling through language and identity issues in the critical late elementary and middle school years view the acknowledgment of their own language as an important element in their education and cognitive growth. As the quotations below show, African American middle schoolers in East Palo, California, enjoy and value the use of AAVE in narrative texts:

[8] Roberta Flack's breathtaking rendition of "Angelitos Negros" on her *First Take* album (1969) could be used to demonstrate the versatility of a distinguished African American balladeer in Spanish and English.

(5) "I like it because dialect makes the story more interesting,"
"it puts excitement in it," and "helps the story by making it enjoyable."
"I like it because it helps the story sound like real people are talking."
"I like it because it is like I am in the story. It helps the story a lot because it makes the story younik [unique] in its own way; people have to hear there own way of talking."
"I like the dialect because it was my kind of talk. I enjoy reading dialect stories and also I think it help the story."
"I like the dialect because it puts a lot of feelings in it (= the story)."
"I like it because it gives people who aren't that culture and know nothing about it a chance to see how other people are."   (Rickford 1999:135–6)

Although we could draw examples equally from poetry or prose (see Holton 1984, Rickford and Rickford 2000:22–38, Green 2002:164–99), we'll represent the use of AAVE in literature in this paper from poetry alone. The presence of rhyme in the poetry, already a pervasive part of Black vernacular culture (see Lee 2002) would complement the emphasis on phonemic awareness (see Adams, Foorman, Lurdberg, and Beeler 1998) in the modern curriculum, especially in the lower grades.

We'll begin with James Weldon Johnson, whose life spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He is known to many African Americans as the co-creator of the "Black national anthem" – "Lift every voice and sing." We will first consider his poem, "Sence you went away." Written in 1900, it was rendered, as he would put it, in "Negro dialect":

(6) *Sence you went away* (James Weldon Johnson)
Seems lak to me de stars don't shine so bright,
Seems lak to me de sun done loss his light,
Seems lak to me der's nothin' goin' right,
      Sence you went away.
Seems lak to me de sky ain't half so blue,   5
Seems lak to me dat ev'thing wants you,
Seems lak to me I don't know what to do,
      Sence you went away.
Seems lak to me dat ev'ything is wrong,
Seems lak to me de day's jes twice as long,   10
Seems lak to me de bird's forgot his song,
      Sence you went away.
Seems lak to me I jes can't he'p but sigh,
Seems lak to me ma th'oat keeps gittin' dry,
Seems lak to me a tear stays in my eye,   15
      Sence you went away.

Except for *done* (line 2), and *ain't* (line 5), the dialect is represented almost entirely through *phonology* – the monophthongization of *lak* "like," the word-final alveolar instead of velar nasals in *nothin'*, *goin'*, and *gittin'*, the simplification of postvocalic same-voice clusters (*loss*, line 2, *jes*, line 10) but their retention

in mixed voice clusters (*went*, line 4), and so on. Students, in analyzing Weldon's depiction of dialect phonology, might notice (or be led to notice) that it is VARIABLE. Sometimes the variation is governed by neat linguistic constraints – for instance, voiced *th* or "edh" is always represented as *d*, as in *de sun* (line 2), or *der's* (line 3), but voiceless *th* or "theta" is NEVER represented as *t*, for instance *nothin* (line 3) and *th'oat* (line 14). One finds this pattern in other writers (like Dunbar). And it has an analog in the synchronic reality of vernacular speech reported in Labov, Cohen, Robbins, and Lewis (1968:94–5) and McGuire (2002), who note that interdental fricative realizations of voiceless *th* (theta) are far more common than interdental fricative realizations of voiced *th* (edh), both in Harlem and in Ohio. Indeed, Green (2002:119) suggests that word-initial *th* is never simplified in the African American vernacular.

The poem's rhyme scheme – aaab – is also worth noting. The absence of a rhyme in the final line reinforces the contrast between it and the ten-syllable iambic pentameter structure of the first three lines in each verse; the reduced length (five syllables) of the final line mirrors the reduced circumstances of the poet's life since his loved one's departure.

Johnson's Standard English poem, "The glory of the day was in her face" (see (7) below), is written in iambic pentameter throughout, and follows a different rhyme scheme (abab, cdcd, etc.). A teacher could use it to demonstrate the poet's linguistic versatility, and perhaps he/she could ask students to attempt to render it in the vernacular, much as we might have them translate "Sence you went away" into SE or even deeper vernacular.

> (7) *The glory of the day was in her face* (James Weldon Johnson)
> The glory of the day was in her face,
> The beauty of the night was in her eyes.
> And over all her loveliness, the grace
> Of Morning blushing in the early skies.
>
> And in her voice, the calling of the dove;   5
> Like music of a sweet, melodious part.
> And in her smile, the breaking light of love;
> And all the gentle virtues in her heart.
>
> And now the glorious day, the beauteous night,
> The birds that signal to their mates at dawn,   10
> To my dull ears, to my tear-blinded sight
> Are one with all the dead, since she is gone.

More interesting, particularly for older students, would be to discuss Johnson's turning away from dialect poetry in later years, and his decision to represent the seven Black folk sermons in *God's trombones* (Johnson 1927) in Standard English rather than dialect because he came to regard the latter as a medium with only two stops, pathos and humor. Another fruitful subject for discussion with students would be the debates he had with his friend Paul Laurence Dunbar about

the use of dialect in poetry, reported in Johnson's (1933) autobiography, *Along this way*.

It would be difficult NOT to discuss Dunbar (1872–1906) in any "versatility" curriculum, not only because "he wrote extensively in both black dialect and standard English," but also because he "is one of the two or three greatest poets in the African American tradition and one of the greatest American poets" (Harper and Walton 2000:72). Here is a brief extract (the first six lines) from "The party":

> (8) *The party* (Paul Laurence Dunbar)
> DEY had a gread big pahty down to Tom's de othah night;
> Was I dah? You bet! I neveh in my life see sich a sight;
> All de folks f'om fou' plantations was invited, an' dey come,
> Dey come troopin' thick ez chillun when dey hyeahs a fife an' drum.
> Evahbody dressed deir fines' – Heish yo' mouf an' git away,   5
> Ain't seen no sich fancy dressin' sence las' quah'tly meetin' day; . . .

We include this extract in part to show that Dunbar followed the same pattern as Johnson did, of representing voiced *th* (edh) as *d*, but voiceless *th* (theta) as *th* (contrast *Dey* and *othah*, line 1). But note also the labiodental realization of theta in line 5 (*mouf*). We could and should draw students' attention to this last feature, inviting them to discover from their own intuitions and from spoken and other written data that labiodental realizations are possible for both theta and edh in word-final positions (*mouf, smoove*), and for edh in medial positions as well (*bruvver*).

The next Dunbar poem we'd like to discuss is "A negro love song," one of Dunbar's best known and most anthologized dialect poems. We reprint the first verse:

> (9) *A negro love song* (Paul Laurence Dunbar)
> Seen my lady home las' night,
> Jump back, honey, jump back.
> Hel' huh han' an' sque'z it tight,
> Jump back, honey, jump back.
> Hyeahd huh sigh a little sigh,   5
> Seen a light gleam f'om huh eye,
> An' a smile go flittin' by –
> Jump back, honey, jump back. . . .

We can't recount here all the features of this poem we would want to draw to the attention of students. But we would want them to note that Dunbar's representation of AAVE phonology is even more extensive than Johnson's (postvocalic *r*-deletion is included, for example: *huh, Hyeahd*, line 5, in addition to most of the phonological features represented in (6) above). At the same time, Dunbar adheres as faithfully as Johnson did to a strict metrical structure (here seven syllables a line, except for the six-syllabled refrain, "Jump back, honey, jump back") and a very regular rhyme scheme (here: ababcccb). The colloquial nature of the refrain comes through remarkably despite the passage of more than a hundred years,

finding its near parallels, as students might note, in modern forms like "You GO, girl!" and "Step back, honey, step back!" The conversational ring of this refrain, like the choice of vernacular for the entire poem, is consonant with the audience – here a young man bragging to his friend or friends about a romantic encounter.

By contrast, the third Dunbar poem we'll discuss, "We wear the mask," is written in Standard English throughout, with lexical items from a relatively exalted register (*guile, myriad subtleties*):

> (10) *We wear the mask* (Paul Laurence Dunbar)
> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes –
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.   5
>
> Why should the world be over-wise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
> Nay, let them only see us while
> We wear the mask.
>
> We smile, but oh great Christ, our cries   10
> To Thee from tortured souls arise.
> We sing, but oh the clay is vile
> Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
> But let the world dream otherwise,
> We wear the mask!   15

Here, in terms of Hymes' (1972a) components of speech, the message content, the scene, the purposes, the audience, and the key are all quite different from their equivalents in "Step Back Honey" – as the poet complains to his brethren and sisteren, and at one point, to God, about the twin faces that Black people have to assume to survive suffering and injustice. Without assuming that serious subjects would always require Standard English (playwright August Wilson and poet Gwendolyn Brooks could be used to demonstrate otherwise), these two poems could lead into a fruitful discussion about appropriate occasions for the deployment of mainstream and vernacular varieties.

The final Dunbar poem that we think should be included in any "Versatility" curriculum would be his authobiographical poem, "The poet":

> (11) *The poet* (Paul Laurence Dunbar)
> He sang of life, serenely sweet,
> With, now and then, a deeper note.
> From some high peak, nigh yet remote,
> He voiced the world's absorbing beat.
> He sang of love when earth was young,
> And Love, itself, was in his lays.   5
> But, ah, the world, it turned to praise
> A jingle in a broken tongue.

This poem should be included as part of a larger discussion of how society's constraints and expectations can hinder one's expressiveness. For in it, the greatest American dialect poet, as many call him, reflects morosely on the fact that the contemporary world (led by influential critic William Dean Howells) recognized and praised ONLY his dialect poetry ("a jingle in a broken tongue") and NOT the Standard English poems in which he sought to address some of his deepest concerns. It was not until much later that SE poems of his like "I know why the caged bird sings" would become standard pieces for African American and other students in elocution contests. Usually, when linguistically versatile African American and Caribbean poets are limited by what publishes and sells, it is their work in the vernacular that is disparaged and discouraged. Dunbar is a striking example of the reverse.

Moving forward in time, let us next consider two songs from the repertoire of the late great Nina Simone (1933–2003). The first one, "To be young, gifted and Black," is in Standard English (e.g. plural -*s*, *is*, and *are* copulas are all "intact," see lines 6, 7, 8, 12):

> (12) *To be young, gifted and Black* (Nina Simone and Weldon Irvine, Jr.)
> To be young, gifted and black,
> Oh what a lovely precious dream
> To be young, gifted and black,
> Open your heart to what I mean.
> In the whole world you know   5
> There's a billion boys and girls
> Who are young, gifted and black,
> And that's a fact!
>
> Young, gifted and black
> We must begin to tell our young   10
> There's a world waiting for you
> This is a quest that's just begun.
>
> When you feel really low
> Yeah, there's a great truth you should know
> When you're young, gifted and black   15
> Your soul's intact.
>
> Young, gifted and black
> How I long to know the truth
> There are times when I look back
> And I am haunted by my youth.   20
>
> Oh but my joy of today
> Is that we can all be proud to say
> To be young, gifted and black
> Is where it's at.

This is a beautifully crafted (and rendered) song, written in 1968–69 in homage to Simone's long-time friend Lorraine Hansberry, whose vernacular-studded play

A *raisin in the sun* ran for 538 performances on Broadway and won accolades and awards when it made its debut in 1959. For maximum effect, the song should be played in the classroom. One could go on to discuss Hansberry's work in turn,[9] or the differences between Simone's soulful rendering of her very Black-affirming and uplifting song, and its subsequent renditions by Donny Hathaway, Dionne Warwick, and reggae stars Bob and Marcia, among others. (See David Nathan's liner notes for her CD *Sugar in my* bowl.)

One could discuss Simone's words, likely to provide needed inspiration to many an African American student, and contrast the style and language of her "Ain't no use" song, also on ***her *Misunderstood* CD. The first two verses are reproduced here:

> (13) *Ain't no use* (Nina Simone)
> Ain't no use, baby,
> I'm leavin' the scene.
> Ain't no use, baby,
> You too doggone mean.
>
> Yes, I'm tired of payin' the dues   5
> Havin' the blues,
> Gettin' bad news,
> Ain't no use, baby. . . .

Among the grammatical features this short extract illustrates are negative concord (*Ain't no use*, line 1) and copula absence, permitted with second person and plural *are* (*You ∅ too doggone mean*, l. 4) but not first person *am*, which contracts instead (*I'm leaving the scene*). In taking students through the contrasts between AAVE and SE via literature and song, rather than a series of lessons and drills, one would have to be sure to keep selecting samples that together span the range of the crucial set of differences so systematically covered in some of the older Contrastive Analysis literature, like Crowell *et al.* (1974).[10]

In the AAVE canon, let us turn to Sonia Sanchez (1934–), still a vital presence on the African American artistic scene. We'll start with two poems in the haiku format (seventeen syllables in three lines: five in the first and final lines, seven in the middle). The first is in Standard English:

> (14) *My father's eyes* (Sonia Sanchez)[11]
> i have looked into
> my father's eyes and seen an
> african sunset.

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[9] See Rickford and Rickford (2000:28) for commentary on some of the vernacular elements in *A raisin in the sun.*

[10] Although Baugh (1999b) does not deal with Contrastive Analysis per se, it does propose creative use of "lyric shuffle" and other games for literacy instruction with African American kids, building on their fondness for rhyme, poetry, and music.

[11] Sanchez' haiku tribute to her father is in Steptoe (1997).

This brief but powerful evocation of her African ancestry illustrates two SE features which AAVE speakers often lack in their SE speech and writing as a result of transfer from their vernacular: possessive *s* (*father's eyes*) and the present perfect (*have looked, [have] seen*). The second haiku evokes the colloquial tongue of the African diaspora domestics with whom she empathizes:

> (15) *Haiku (for domestic workers in the African diaspora)* (Sonia Sanchez)[12]
> i works hard but treated
> bad   man. i'se telling you de
> truth   i full of it.

One linguistic feature of note is the apparent violation of the haiku five-syllable requirement in the first line, which, as written, has six syllables. A likely explanation is that *treated* is to be reduced to one syllable when spoken [*tree'd*], much as *I is* is reduced to *i'se* in the second line, on the pattern of colloquial speech in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The absence of first person *am* in the first line – generally impermissible in AAVE – could also be fruitfully discussed. One might think that this is also absent to meet the five-syllable requirements of the initial line in a haiku; but a more likely explanation is that this is not intended to be AAVE, but the speech of an African diaspora worker in or from the Caribbean, where absence of first person *am* is permitted.[13]

We cannot resist leaving Sistah Sanchez without a taste of the first verse of the following poignant poem:

> (16) *Song no. 3 (for 2nd and 3rd grade sisters)* (Sonia Sanchez)
> cain't nobody tell me any different
> i'm ugly and you know it too
> you just smiling to make me feel better
> but I see how you start when nobody's watching you . . .

Here, in addition to examples of deleted (*you [∅ are] just smiling*) and non-deletable (*i'm ugly*) tokens of the copula, we find a striking example of negative inversion (*cain't nobody*). This could be used to help students discover the restrictions on such inversion in the vernacular (including the fact that the subject NP must be a negative indefinite – see Sells, Rickford, and Wasow [1996]) and to introduce the contrasting system in SE.

Given the popularity of rap and hip hop, and the emergence of book-length studies of it by sociolinguists in recent years (e.g. Alim 2006), it might seem like a natural source of materials for the Contrastive Analysis classroom.[14] But

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[12] This poem and the next one are both in Sanchez (1987:52–3).

[13] The fact that Sanchez has another haiku (two pages earlier – p. 50 – in Sanchez [1987] that refers explicitly to Guyana – "Haiku (walking in the rain in Guyana)" – increases the likelihood that this is the correct analysis.

[14] Two websites of potential interest to readers are the website of the HipHop Educational Literacy Program (www.edlyrics.com/), which includes classroom-useable lyrics from music by Kanye West, 50 cent, Common and Nas, and the Hiphop Lx website of Marcy Morgan's Hiphop Archive at Stanford (http://worldhiphop.net/lx/), which includes Hiphop vocabulary and grammar from various geographic zones in the US.

finding lyrics that illustrate alternation between AAVE and SE while being appropriate in subject matter and language for the classroom can be a challenge. One likely example is the "Where do we go?" track on Talib Kweli's *Quality* album. Except for a single token of *nothin*, the chorus by Res (Shareese Renèe Ballard) is in SE, but the main stanzas by university-educated Talib Kweli contain AAVE phonological and grammatical elements, including zero copula (*they Ø a pearl, they Ø growin, they Ø livin*) and unmarked third singular -*s* (*the sun still – rise*). In discussing this, as with most of our examples, one could ask why the artistes chose to frame their message as they did, how the song would sound if framed more standardly/more vernacularly, and with what effect:[15]

(17) *Where do we go?* (Talib Kweli)
[Chorus: Res – repeat 2X]
Where do we go? What do we say? What do we do?
Nowhere to turn, nowhere to run and there's nothin new
Where do we go for inspiration?
It's like pain is our only inspiration.

[Talib Kweli]
Yea, I see a place where little boys and girls
Are shells in the oceans not knowin they a pearl
No one to hold 'em while they growin
They livin' moment to moment without a care in the whole world
Now, if I could help it I tell it just like it is
And I may say some things that you don't like to hear
I know this: that people lie, people kneel
People die, people heal, people steal, and people shed tears
What's real, blood spills, gun kill, the sun still – rise
Above me, trust me, it must be, morning – time . . .

Caribbean examples, with alternation between creole and Standard English

Turning to the Caribbean, we begin with two poems from Jamaican poet Valerie Bloom (1956–) that are suitable for younger students. Her first poem, "Who dat girl" forms a nice parallel to Sonia Sanchez' "Song no. 3" because it deals similarly with a young Black girl musing about herself and her looks, but with more of the positive note that Sonia begins to sound in her final verse.

(18) *Who dat girl??* (Valerie Bloom, Jamaica)[16]
Who dat wide-eye likkle girl
Staring out at me?
Wid her hair in beads an' braids
An' skin like ebony?

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[15] From Talib Kweli's *Quality* (2002) album; we are grateful to Neale Clunie for this example.
[16] This poem and the next one are from Agard and Nichols (1994), pp. 18 and 14 respectively.

Who dat girl, her eye dem bright   5
Like night-time peeny-wallie?
Wid granny chain dem circle roun'
Her ankle, neck, and knee?

Who dat girl in Mummy's shoes
Waist tie with Dad's hankie?   10
Who dat girl wid teeth like pearl
Who grinning out at me?

Who dat girl/ Who dat girl?
Pretty as poetry?
Who dat girl in de lookin'-glass?   15
Yuh mean dat girl is me?

The poem would allow a teacher and class to talk about distinctive Jamaican phonology (*likkle* for "little", line 1) and lexicon (*peeny-wallie*, line 6, "large click beetle . . . having two luminous spots on its head, often taken to be its eyes . . . [or] firefly" – Cassidy and Le Page [1980:344]; see also Allsopp [1996:435]), as well as syntax (*NP dem* for plural marking, as in *her eye dem*, line 5). One could also note the variation between the creole and English systems in the plural (plural -*s* in line 3 and elsewhere) and possessive (zero marking in *grannyØ chain*, line 7, but possessive -*s* in *Mummy's shoes*, line 9, and *Dad's hankie*, line 10). This poem could be fruitfully turned into more basilectal or deep creole as well as a variety closer to standard English. By contrast, Bloom's Standard English poem "Water everywhere" is one of several by her that could be translated into creole ("Watuh deh pon de ceilin, Watuh deh pon de wall . . ."), with fruitful discussion of the resultant differences in language and voice:

(19) *Water everywhere* (Valerie Bloom)
There's water on the ceiling
And water on the wall.
There's water in the bedroom,
And water in the hall.
There's water on the landing,   5
And water on the stair.
Whenever Daddy takes a bath
There's water everywhere.

Finally, we'll consider the Jamaican poet Dennis Scott (1939–1990), winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and someone who strikes us as deserving of even greater recognition in international poetry circles than he has received to date. We'll begin with his poem "Uncle time," written in mesolectal Jamaican Creole.[17]

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[17] This poem and the next are both from Scott (1973). They can also be found in Burnett (1986) and other anthologies of Caribbean English poetry. Note that the elliptical points in lines 1, 6, and 20 of the "Uncle Time" poem are from the original, and do not represent omitted material, as they do in other extracts in this paper.

(20) *Uncle time* (Dennis Scott)

    Uncle Time is a ole, ole man . . .
    All year long im wash im foot in de sea,
    long lazy years on de wet san'
    an shake de coconut tree dem
    quiet-like wid im sea-win laughter,   5
    scrapin' away de lan' . . .
    Uncle Time is a spider-man, cunnin an cool,
    im tell yu: watch de hill an yu si mi.
    Huhn! Fe yu yiye no quick enough fe si
    how im move like mongoose; man, yu tink im fool?   10

    Me Uncle Time smile black as sorrow;
    im voice is sof as bamboo leaf
    but Laard, me Uncle cruel.
    When im play in de street
    wid yu woman – watch im! By tomorrow   15
    she dry as cane fire, bitter as cassava;
    an when in teach yu son, long after
    yu walk wid stranger, and yu bread is grief.
    Watch how im spin web roun yu house, an creep
    inside; an when im touch yu, weep . . .   20

Scott's poem exemplifies several of the vernacular features we've discussed already, and others, including the AAVE-like use of *a* rather than *an* before vowels (*a ole ole man*, not *an ole ole man*), as discussed by Ash and Myhill (1986). At the same time it includes creole features not found in AAVE, like the use of *im* as third singular subject and possessive (*im tell yu*, line 8, *im voice*, line 12) and the use of post-nominal *dem* as pluralizer (*de coconut tree dem*, line 4). These might themselves be made the focus of a Contrastive Analysis discussion, with SE, AAVE, and creole as foci, but more than anything else a versatility teacher might introduce this poem as an expressive work perfectly in harmony with its culture and environment – from the local island images (*wash im foot in de sea*, line 2, *dry as cane fire*, line 16, and the Anansi-like *spider man* metaphor in line 7) to its exploitation of creole features for poetic effect. Note, in line 1, for instance, how the absence of the final stop in *ole* allows us to prolong the syllable almost interminably, iconically recapitulating the age of Uncle Time (*/ooool ooool maan/*). And note also how the absence of third singular -*s* on the verb *creep* (line 19) facilitates the rhyme and the symbolic linkage with the chilling imperative (*weep*) with which the poem ends. Changing those last lines to Standard English, in this case, would destroy the rhyme and undermine the drama: "Watch how he spins a web around your house, and creep*s*/inside, and when he touches you, weep." This poem sends the message that the vernacular is not a weak alternative to the standard, but, as it is in many everyday contexts, a resource with its own inimitable strengths.

Equally remarkable, but in a quite different way, is Scott's stunning poem "Epitaph." It is as Black and revolutionary as ever, while couched in the most standard of Englishes.

(21) *Epitaph* (Dennis Scott)

    They hanged him on a clement morning, swung
    between the falling sunlight and the women's
    breathing, like a black apostrophe to pain.
    All morning while the children hushed
    their hopscotch joy and the cane kept growing   5
    he hung there sweet and low.
        At least that's how
    they tell it. It was long ago
    and what can we recall of a dead slave or two
    except that when we punctuate our island tale   10
    they swing like sighs across the brutal
    sentences, and anger pauses
    till they pass away.

What we'd want to discuss with students here is not the banalities of traditional CA ("look, the writer used past tense -*ed*"!), but how the poet exploits unusual lexicon and imagery and sound to express the intrusive, painful memories of Black ancestors. Note his ironic use of *clement* ("merciful," although we're more familiar with the noun *clemency* or the adjectival *inclement*, of weather) for a morning that was far from merciful except insofar as it brought relief from oppression to a hanged slave. And note the variation between *hanged* in line 1, the past tense form reserved for the execution sense of *hang*, and *hung* in line 6 (the past tense of *hang* in its more general sense). The poet's reference to the victim as a *black apostrophe to pain* in line 3 mediates both meanings of the word *apostrophe*, as a punctuation mark (the black ink apostrophe between two letters as in *it's* iconically depicting a hanging) and the lesser known use of the word for "the direct address of an absent or imaginary person" (*American heritage dictionary of the English language*, 2000:85). Note too the crucifixion-recalling images of the body "swung between the falling sunlight and the women's breathing" (lines 1–3) and the way the sibilants in lines 12–13 slow us down to pay homage to the slaves who *swing like sighs across the brutal sentences*. From the point of view of a teacher trying to develop linguistic versatility and a conscious reflexivity about language, this poem is hard to beat, the more so because it weaves metalinguistic references into the poem's imagery itself (*punctuate, brutal sentences*). The issue is not just whether one uses a standard or a vernacular variety, but whether, in using either, one can marshall and exploit its resources with power, creativity, effectiveness, and poise. That's what Scott, like many of our greatest writers and singers and wordsmiths, can teach our students, our teachers, and us.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued for the involvement of variationists in the design and implementation of English and language arts curricula as part of the debt we owe to the communities whose language we record and study in developing our theories and careers. The educational needs are especially acute in African American and Caribbean communities, and we have argued that in these and other communities variationists could use a revised, energized variety of Contrastive Analysis that uses literature and music (rather than traditional drills) to help students and teachers alike appreciate and develop linguistic versatility. Versatility, in the sense that we propose, is the applied counterpart of the theoretical and descriptive study of variation in language, and properly applied, it could improve the performance of vernacular speakers in the classroom and on the job front, without the damage to their identities and psyches that current vernacular-eschewing strategies often involve.

While we have drawn the examples in this paper from African America and the Anglophone Caribbean, the versatility approach we advocate can be extended to a wide variety of ethnic groups, dialect and language situations, and grade levels. Almost anywhere that variationists gather their data, they can take the extra step of giving back to the community by becoming familiar with its literature and music and drawing on their understanding of the community's variation in speech to design classroom lessons that teachers and students can use to develop linguistic and expressive versatility.

15   Social-political influences on research practices: examining language acquisition by African American children[1]

IDA J. STOCKMAN

Introduction

Spoken language is a complex human process involving biological, mental, and social sub-systems. It ought not be surprising that language is acquired over time, its social-pragmatic aspects extending across the human life span. Age-dependent patterns of typical language use are important to the professional practices of applied fields such as communication disorders and education. They guide the diagnosis and treatment of communication disorders. They also guide the pedagogical practices, e.g. curricular planning and evaluation of student readiness to participate in school programs. Aside from professional practices, implicit norms of behavior, inclusive of spoken communication, guide the rules of social engagement and participation in the cultural institutions of religion, work, play, and the rituals of daily living. Even the staunchest defenders of nativist views of language acquisition concede that social factors influence language learning. Compromised language development in feral children (Curtiss 1977) is prima facie evidence that human social interaction is critical. However, what has been debatable is whether all social groups learn a language and/or engage in socialization practices that enable their adequate development. A case in point is the native-born group of African Americans in the United States (US), who are the focus of this chapter. It is the second largest racial minority group in this country (2000 Census). Many of its thirty million African American citizens acquire a non-prestige dialect of English as their first language, which is referred to here as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

The perception that African Americans are culturally and linguistically inferior is likely to stem from their social-political history in the US. This history is unique relative to other minority racial groups in two respects. First, African Americans are the only racial group to have been legally enslaved. Social segregation and discrimination in various negative forms have continued even during the 150 years

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[1] Portions of this chapter were included in a lecture, The social-political construction of science: evidence from language research on African American children, which was given at the City University of New York as a W. E. B. Dubois Distinguished Visiting Lecture.