

Critical Language Awareness in the United States: Revisiting Issues and Revising Pedagogies in a Resegregated Society

by H. Samy Alim

As scholars examine the successes and failures of more than 50 years of court-ordered desegregation since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and 25 years of language education of Black youth since *Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, this article revisits the key issues involved in those cases and urges educators and sociolinguists to work together to revise pedagogies. After reviewing what scholars have contributed, the author suggests the need for critical language awareness programs in the United States as one important way in which we can revise our pedagogies, not only to take the students' language into account but also to account for the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical phenomena that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still-segregated society.

Entered the language and literacy battlefield in the *thick* of the Oakland "Ebonics controversy," which eerily revisited many of the same racial and cultural stereotypes raised by "The Black English Case" in Ann Arbor (*Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*) nearly two decades earlier. While the media and public dis-

course attacked Black Language (BL) and Black people for so-called "deficiencies," a generation of young Hip Hop Headz (including me) spent hours crafting linguistic skillz and pushin the boundaries of the English language in *rhyme ciphers, battles, and freestyles*. Wasn't no way in the world you could get me to see BL as deficient!

"Me and You, We Gon Work It Out": The Need for Critical, Interdisciplinary Dialogue Between Educators and Sociolinguists

Having been in the communities and classrooms where BL was spoken, I saw ways to develop language pedagogy for speakers of BL by putting the full scope of language and literacy knowledge "to work for the people," as one of my professors always used to say, and I attempted to become equally knowledgeable in sociolinguistic theory and methodology and educational policy and practice. Incorporating sociolinguistic theory and methodology with educational concerns requires dialogue, which in some ways has been underdeveloped between these two fields because linguists may sometimes be perceived as "intellectual snobs" who are afraid of getting their hands dirty in the complex world of classrooms, while educators are sometimes perceived as "advocates," not intellectuals, whose research is either "too teachery" or "too touchy-feely."

Recent works (e.g., Adger, Temple, & Taylor, 1999; Lanehart, 2002) have demonstrated interdisciplinary scholarship, and Lanehart's (forthcoming) most recent work exemplifies the willingness of some sociolinguists to become involved in education research, as she urges the field to put aside old debates about the historical

origins of BL and focus more of its energy on the urgent, pressing educational needs of today's classrooms. I have written this article in this spirit of dialogue—or as Bay Area rapper Jubwa of Soul Plantation says in a critical rap about racial politics in America, "Me and you, we gon work it out!"

"The Doe Flow Where the White Man Go": Language and Racial Politics in U.S. Education

As scholars concerned with educational issues, the year 2004 gave us pause to re-examine the successes and failures of 50 years of court-ordered desegregation since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954). This landmark civil rights decision, which many refer to as "the single most honored opinion in the Supreme Court's corpus" (Balkin, 2001), effectively overruled *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which required separate but equal facilities for Blacks and Whites. In the years of struggle leading up to the case, many Blacks and their supporters, knowing that "the doe flow where the White man go" (i.e., White facilities were usually better funded and better resourced by local and state governments than Black ones), argued that the doctrine of "separate but equal" was inherently unequal and that de jure segregation helped to reinforce the ideology of White supremacy.

The year 2004 was cause for a double pause for scholars of educational linguistics who were also revisiting 25 years of language and racial politics since the Black English Case (*Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*). Just as AERA chose *Brown* as the primary sub-theme for its annual conference, NWAV (New Ways of Analyzing Variation), the annual conference

The Research News and Comment section publishes commentary and analyses on trends, policies, utilization, and controversies in educational research. Like the articles and reviews in the Features and Book Review sections of *ER*, this material does not necessarily reflect the views of AERA nor is it endorsed by the organization.

for quantitative sociolinguists) chose *King* as its primary conference theme. *King* was a federal Court case on behalf of fifteen Black, economically oppressed children residing in a low-income housing project on Green Road in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The plaintiffs argued that the school board had not taken the social, economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students into account in the effort to teach them how to read in “standard English” (Smitherman, 1981). Thus, they argued, the students did not have access to equal educational opportunities, also a primary concern for *Brown*. While school desegregation rulings have sometimes mentioned the effects of “language,” and while language education rulings have sometimes mentioned the effects of “desegregation,” both types of case lie right at the nexus of language and racial politics in U.S. education. As Judge Joiner ruled:

This case is a judicial investigation of a school’s response to language, a language used in informal and casual oral communication among many blacks but a language that is not accepted as an appropriate means of communication among people in their professional roles in society. . . . The problem posed by this case is one which the evidence indicates has been compounded by efforts on the part of society to fully integrate blacks into the mainstream of society by relying solely on simplistic devices such as scatter housing and busing of students. . . . Some evidence suggests that the teachers in the schools which are “ideally” integrated such as *King* do not succeed as well with minority black students in teaching language arts as did many of the teachers of black children before integration. The problem, of course, is multidimensional, but the language of the home environment may be one of the dimensions. It is a problem that every thoughtful citizen has pondered, and that school boards, school administrators and teachers are trying to solve. (Judge Charles W. Joiner’s “Memorandum Opinion and Order” in *Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, decided July 12, 1979)

These two cases (*Brown* and *King*) have often been discussed separately in the scholarly literature, but a joint discussion of the cases should prove useful in improving access to equal educational opportunities for linguistically profiled and marginalized students.

This article seizes the current moment in U.S. educational history to call for a critical interdisciplinary dialogue between educators and sociolinguists. Given the its timely nature (in commemoration of *Brown* and *King*),¹ I focus on how language and literacy scholars have attempted to address the linguistic consequences of the African slave trade (Baugh, 2000a). These linguistic consequences, as we most recently witnessed in the heated Ebonics controversy of Oakland, California (where the Oakland School Board called for teachers to respect the legitimacy and richness of BL while teaching “standard English”), remain causes of concern in American public discourse. By revisiting the central issues facing scholars who study the language and literacy practices of Black Americans, we can review what has been tried and call for what needs to be done. I conclude by urging educators and sociolinguists to revise pedagogies in what has become a resegregated society (Orfield & Yun 1999).

Desegregation and Divergence: *Brown* and *King* in a Resegregated America

Seven months after the *King* decision, linguist Geneva Smitherman, with the institutional support of the Center for Black Studies at Wayne State University, hosted a national invitational symposium to discuss the effects of the case on the future education of Black youth. Speaking before an audience of more than “300 high powered professionals” from educational, linguistic, psychological, and legal backgrounds (Smitherman, 1981, p. 23), Dr. Annamarie Gillespie-Hayes of the Training Institute for Desegregated Education captured the urgency that Black Americans felt about obtaining equal access to educational opportunities: “Twenty-five years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, the desegregation of schools ‘with all deliberate speed’ has resulted in more deliberation than speed in the dismantling of dual school systems. The crucial word for Black people in the *Brown* mandate was “speed,” while the Southern school boards accentuated ‘deliberation.’” (Gillespie-Hayes, 1981, p. 259). Witnessing the massive White American resistance to court-ordered desegregation, Gillespie-Hayes and others chose to focus on an educational program that privileged *content over configuration*. Whether they knew it or not, the greatest

irony of the *Brown* decision would be that students at the turn of the century would once again be separated by race in U.S. schools, only this time the segregation would be due to a complex array of social, economic, and legal issues (Frankenberg & Lee, 2002).

The resegregation of American society—not just of Blacks and Whites, but of all communities from each other, particularly Blacks and Latinos—has resulted in a situation where most Black and Brown children in the United States attend racially segregated schools (de facto segregation is in full effect in almost every major urban area). As noted by Balkin (2001), the increasing resegregation of U.S. cities is strongly correlated with poverty levels: “Although only 5 percent of segregated white schools are in areas of concentrated poverty, over 80 percent of black and Latino schools are” (p. 6). Turner Middle School in Southwest Philadelphia was 99.4% Black, with the majority of students living below the poverty line in the late 1990s when I worked there. I have also taught in California schools where not a single White student attended. Teachers throughout the United States can testify to the presence of de facto segregation, as there has been a gradual relaxing of the need to comply with court-ordered desegregation since the 1970s (Prince, forthcoming; also see Balkin’s discussion of *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell*, 1991; *Freeman v. Pitts*, 1992; and *Missouri v. Jenkins*, 1995).

What might (re)segregation have to do with language education? In the context of a resegregated society, sociolinguists (Labov & Harris, 1986) argued that Black and White speakers of English were not participating in the same processes of linguistic change. If true, this meant that rather than Black and White dialects of English converging, they were actually diverging. In the press, this had immediate and “newsworthy” social implications, as Americans in the post-Civil Rights Era had come to see themselves as a nation of citizens devoted to equal opportunity for all. So, whereas the Kerner Commission (the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder) feared the development of “two separate societies, one Black, the other White,” some sociolinguists feared the development of two separate languages, one Black, the other White (see the debate

among top sociolinguists in Fasold's 1987 special issue of *American Speech*). This would mean that the language of some Blacks in resegregated America would be growing farther and farther away from the "language of schooling," possibly halting Black American educational progress.

In the *King* decision, Judge Joiner explicitly makes the connection between language barriers and segregation. *King* represents the first test of applicability of 1703(f), the language provision of the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunity Act, to speakers of BL (Smitherman, 1981, 2000). The critical clause reads:

No state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by—

.....

(f) the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs. (20 U.S.C. 1703[f])

In his "Memorandum Opinion and Order" (1979), Judge Joiner sought to go beyond *Brown's* use of social science research: "The court believes that research results . . . are better received as evidence in the case, on the record and subject to cross-examination, than simply by reading the reports and giving consideration to what appears in those reports as was done in *Brown v. Board of Education*." It is clear from the ruling that Judge Joiner relied heavily on the research results of educational psychologists and linguists. He ruled:

The evidence clearly suggests that no matter how well intentioned the teachers are, they are not likely to be successful in overcoming the language barrier caused by their failure to take into account the home language system, unless they are helped by the defendant to recognize the existence of the language system used by the children in their home community and to use that knowledge as a way of helping the children to read standard English.

The failure of the defendant Board to provide leadership and help for its teachers in learning about the existence of "black English" as a home and community language for many black students and to suggest to those same teachers ways and means of using that knowledge in

teaching the black children code switching skills in connection with reading standard English *is not rational in light of existing knowledge on the subject* [emphasis added].

Sociolinguistic testimony that dually attributed the continued existence of BL to external, social factors (such as the historical and enduring isolation of Blacks from "mainstream" America and its institutions) and internal, community factors (such as the recognition of BL as an important cultural symbol of Black ethnic identity and group solidarity) influenced Judge Joiner's decision, which is critical to my arguments in this article.

Before *King*, several desegregation cases mentioned the distinctiveness of BL (Bailey, 1981). The year that attorneys Gabe Kaimowitz and Kenneth Lewis filed the federal *King* case in Ann Arbor (on July 28, 1977), the famous Detroit desegregation case was decided not too far away. That case, *Bradley v. Milliken*, recognized the external, social factors that help to maintain BL: "Children who have been thus educationally and culturally set apart from the larger community will inevitably acquire habits of speech, conduct, and attitudes reflecting their cultural isolation. They are likely to acquire speech habits, for example, which vary from the environment in which they must ultimately function and compete, if they are to enter and be a part of that community." Recognizing a longstanding truism about speech—that language is the property of the community, not solely the individual—the Judge continued: "This is not peculiar to race; in this setting, it can affect children who, as a group, are isolated by force of law from the mainstream" (433 U.S. 287). Not only was the court recognizing these factors in the maintenance of BL, they also suggested that any such isolated linguistic group—be they Spanish-dominant Mexicans in some Los Angeles communities or Arabic-dominant Palestinians in some northern New Jersey communities—"must be treated directly by special training at the hands of teachers prepared for the task" (433 U.S. 287; see also Bailey, 1981 for a thorough legal analysis).

In the aftermath of the *King* decision, in which Judge Joiner deemed as irrational the failure of the school board to use existing knowledge to teach language arts, and

the Oakland Ebonics controversy (Baugh 2000a; J. Rickford & R. Rickford 2000), in which the majority of the American public deemed statements like the *judge's* to be irrational, it seems like "what go around come around"—and around and around. The cycle of hysteria that surrounds the right of Black students to their own language begs two important questions for scholars: "What are the rational ways by which teachers can take BL into account when teaching Black students?" and "What is the state of 'existing knowledge' on the subject?" After we revisit what scholars have contributed, I suggest an important way in which we can revise our pedagogies, not only to take the students' language into account but also to account for the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical phenomena that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still-segregated society.

Respect da Dialect: Sociolinguistic Approaches to Language and Literacy Development

Some sociolinguists have been concerned with the educational implications of language research for quite some time, even becoming vocal advocates in times of educational "crisis" for students who speak languages other than the dominant norm. Before considering the studies that address BL and literacy development, it is important to note that linguists have been heavily involved in the vast array of language issues in schools since the 1960s. Their involvement includes early attempts to use linguistic knowledge to teach reading (Fries, 1962) and more recent efforts to produce research in support of bilingual education and policy, which has come under increasingly vehement attack in the last decade, coinciding with the dramatic rise of the Latino population in many areas of the United States (Crawford, 1992; Krashen, 1996; Stanford Working Group, 1993; Valdes, 2001; Zentella, 1997). Sociolinguists have also supported bidialectal programs for native Hawaiians and speakers of "Hawaiian Creole English" (Benham & Heck, 1998) and called for the support and development of academic language and biliteracy in social contexts (Enright-Villalva, 2003; Hornberger, 1989). More directly, some have provided evidence, legal

testimonies, and policy recommendations in the firestorms surrounding BL in schools (Baugh, 1998, 2000a; J. Rickford & R. Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1981, 2000).

Since the Oakland *Ebonics* controversy, John Rickford has continually revised and made available to the public (see www.stanford.edu/~rickford) his synthesis of sociolinguistic approaches to “working with vernacular varieties of English in schools” (see J. Rickford, 2000). In trying to answer the question that was on the mind of concerned teachers of Black students—How might the vernacular of African American children be taken into account in efforts to help them do better in schools?—John Rickford (2003) outlined four major sociolinguistic efforts towards that end: (a) the linguistically informed approach, (b) contrastive analysis, (c) dialect readers, and (d) dialect awareness programs.

The “linguistically informed approach” is characterized primarily by William Labov’s work on reading failure, from his early explorations of the topic (1967) to his current, expansive research agenda to develop “Individualized Reading Programs” (2001; Labov & Baker, 2003) in elementary schools in Philadelphia and California (with Bettina Baker, John and Angela Rickford, John Baugh, and others). Labov begins with one fundamental premise: Teachers should distinguish between mistakes in reading and differences in pronunciation. For instance, if a Black child reads, “I missed my chance” as “I miss my chance,” teachers should not view this as a decoding error, but rather as an utterance that is consistent with the pronunciation patterns of BL. It is not clear whether teachers are, in fact, failing Black students for these types of “errors.” Nor is it clear how such awareness on the part of teachers will help develop a more responsive reading pedagogy, particularly in areas of comprehension (see A. Rickford, 1999). However, a thorough analysis of the kinds of possible decoding errors that Black students *do* make, and efforts to produce Individualized Reading Programs can only be helpful. We now know more about Black children’s decoding skills than we have in the past, and that is certainly promising.

The “contrastive analysis” approach can be used to distinguish the differences between “standard English” and BL. John Rickford (2003) reports that this approach

has been used successfully by Taylor (1989) in Chicago, by Parker and Crist (1995) in Tennessee and Chicago, and by Harris-Wright (1999) in DeKalb County, Georgia. A vivid example of the potential success of this approach in teaching “standard English” writing skills is noted in the work of Taylor (1989), who showed that students taught by this method had a 91.7% decrease in their use of third-person singular without the final *s* (a well-studied feature of BL), while those taught by more traditional means only had an 11% decrease. Contrastive analysis, along with other strategies from second language acquisition methodology, has also been used in the comprehensive Academic English Mastery Program in the Los Angeles Unified School District, which serves more than fifty schools, thousands of teachers, and tens of thousands of students (LeMoine & Hollie, forthcoming).

“Dialect readers” introduce reading in the home and community language of the students and then later make the switch to “standard English.” This approach has sparked heated debate here in the United States. Despite research that demonstrated that the well-known dialect reader program, “Bridge” (Simpkins & Simpkins, 1981), advanced the reading abilities of Black students, the publishers of the program discontinued the product because of community outrage against the use of BL in schools. This incident underscores the need for community education on BL. More reading gains like these could be lost as a result of misunderstandings between school administrators and local communities. Black students achieved 6.2 months of reading gain in a 4-month period, while a control group taught by traditional methods actually lost ground in that same period.

The final approach is the “dialect awareness” approach spearheaded by Walt Wolfram and his colleagues at North Carolina State University (Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999). Dialect awareness programs seek to infuse the fundamental principles of linguistic variation into school curricula. The program excites students about the inherent variability of language and meets standards proposed by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, indicating that students should “develop

an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles” (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, p. 3). One of the most exciting aspects of dialect awareness programs is that they encourage students to become ethnographers and collect their own speech data from their local communities. Although the educational effectiveness of these programs is not truly tried and tested (most attempts are short-term, making it difficult to measure student progress), teachers interested in developing language and other skills (e.g., data analysis, oral history projects) view this approach positively. Dialect awareness programs represent one potential way to reduce dialect discrimination in schools and society.

Disrupting the “Natural” Sociolinguistic Order of Things: The New Literacy Studies and Critical Language Awareness

The sociolinguistic approaches described above have one fundamental similarity with the New Literacy Studies (see Hull & Schultz, 2002)—both groups of scholars are working to provide evidence that will disprove the notion that the language and literacy practices of students from linguistically marginalized groups are “deficient.” Labov (1972) made this statement early on:

The view of the black speech community which we obtain from our work in the ghetto areas is precisely the opposite from that reported by Deutsch or by Bereiter and Engelmann. We see a child bathed in verbal stimulation from morning to night. We see many speech events which depend upon the competitive exhibition of verbal skills—sounding, singing, toasts, rifting, louding—a whole range of activities in which the individual gains status through his use of language. . . . We see no connection between verbal skill in the speech events characteristic of the street culture and success in the schoolroom. (pp. 212–213)

Many scholars have used another sociolinguistic framework, the ethnography of communication, to drive home the main message that students on the margins of school success often possess “different, not deficient” language and literacy practices

in their home communities. This “mismatch,” they argue, is one cause of schools’ failure to reach these pupils. Most notable in this area is Heath’s (1983) classic, decade-long study of how families from Black and White working-class communities socialized their children into different “ways with words,” or varying language and literacy practices, some of which were closer to school norms than others. Subsequently, scholars have taken on research agendas that aim to “bridge” the out-of-school language and literacy practices of Black students with classroom practice (Ball, 2000; Dyson, 2003; Foster, 2001; Lee, 1993), while others have examined the inventive and innovative language and literacy events of Black youth involved in Hip Hop Culture (Alim, 2004a, 2004b), spoken word poetry (Fisher, 2003), and other verbal activities (Mahiri & Sutton, 1996; Richardson, 2003).

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars, such as Gee (1996) and Street (1993), position themselves at the crossroads of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and critical linguistics. Like linguistic anthropologists, the NLS view literacy—in fact, *literacies*—as situated within the social and cultural practices that are constitutive of everyday life (Hull & Schultz, 2002). Exploring what Ball and Freedman (2004) refer to as “new literacies for new times,” the NLS pull away from the generally noncritical American sociolinguistic tradition by drawing from contemporary social and cultural theorists, such as Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Derrida, Foucault, Heidegger, and Gramsci, among others and thus more closely align with the British tradition of Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 1995). Critical Language Awareness views educational institutions as designed to teach citizens about the current sociolinguistic order of things, without challenging that order, which is based largely on the ideology of the dominating group and their desire to maintain social control. This view of education interrogates the dominating discourse on language and literacy and foregrounds, as in the NLS, the examination and interconnectedness of identities, ideologies, histories/herstories, and the hierarchical nature of power relations between groups. Research in this area attempts to make the *invisible visible* by

examining the ways in which well-meaning educators attempt to silence diverse languages in White public space by inculcating speakers of heterogeneous language varieties into what are, at their core, White ways of speaking and seeing the world, that is, the norms of White, middle-class, heterosexist males (Alim, 2004c). Importantly, a critical approach is not concerned with the study of decontextualized language but rather with the analysis of “opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 1995).

Although American sociolinguistic research certainly has been helpful in providing detailed descriptions of language variation and change, this is where it stops (Lippi-Green, 1997). By viewing the role of language in society through a noncritical lens, the tradition can actually harm linguistically profiled and marginalized students. Most American suggestions about pedagogy on language attitudes and awareness tend to discuss linguistic stigmatization in terms of *individual* prejudices rather than discrimination that is part and parcel of the *sociostructural fabric of society* and serves the needs of those who currently benefit the most from what is portrayed as the “natural” sociolinguistic order of things. Fairclough (1989, pp. 7–8) argues that the job of sociolinguists should be to do more than ask, “What language varieties are stigmatized?” Rather, we should be asking, “How—in terms of the development of social relationships to power—was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being? How is it sustained? And how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?”

Research conducted by the Linguistic Profiling Project (LPP) at Stanford University (Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh, 1999; Baugh, 2000b, 2003) attempts to apply findings of studies on language-based discrimination to educational practice by working with Black, Chicano, and Pacific Islander youth in a diverse working-class city in northern California to develop a Freireian critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) on language. That pedagogy aims to educate linguistically profiled and marginalized students about how language is used and, importantly, how language can be used against them (Alim, 2004d). Ques-

tions central to the project are: “How can language be used to maintain, reinforce, and perpetuate existing power relations?” And, conversely, “How can language be used to resist, redefine and possibly reverse these relations?” This approach engages in the process of consciousness-raising, that is, the process of actively becoming aware of one’s own position in the world and what to do about it (as in the Women’s Liberation movement or the Black and Chicano Liberation struggles). By learning about the full scope of their language use (through conducting ethnographic and sociolinguistic analyses of their own communicative behavior) and how language can actually be used against them (through *linguistic profiling* and other means; see Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003), students become more conscious of their communicative behavior and the ways by which they can transform the conditions under which they live. The LPP moves far beyond the traditional sociolinguistic and educational approaches that bear the slogans “respect for diversity,” “certain language varieties are appropriate in certain situations and not others,” and “all languages are equal,” that continually default in the elevation of the “standard language” over all other varieties—or, as Smitherman observed (1977) in a play on the Orwellian notion of inequality—that give students the message that “all languages are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

“It’s Not a Game No Mo!”: Arming Linguistically Profiled and Marginalized Students

LPP students know what’s up. Check out what one seventh-grade Black female said about her own language use in an interview:

Student: People think I talk too ghetto. They be like, “Yo English is toe [tore] up!”

Interviewer: Why do they say that, though?!

Student: Cuz I say things like, “I ain’t gon. . . .” like, “I ain’t gon do it,” or I won’t say “eating,” I’ll say “ea’in.”

The student is well aware of the fact that she uses a variable feature of BL that has yet to be fully described in the literature: the reduced (glottalized) consonant in “ea’in.” She is also keenly aware of this variable’s social standing—“too ghetto”—as a marker of BL. Results such as these

show that this agenda cannot be too narrowly defined by struggle between racial or ethnic groups, but must also be prepared to deal with the many class contradictions that exist within groups. We can frame our discussions in terms of “discrimination,” “racism,” and “stereotyping,” which most schools are now discussing openly.

As we continue our critical interdisciplinary dialogue on education on the anniversaries of *Brown* and *King*, rather than *harming* linguistically profiled and marginalized students, our goal should be *arming* them with the silent weapons needed for the quiet, discursive wars that are waged daily against their language and person. We must revise our pedagogies to confront what Sledd (1996) referred to as “the harsh ways of the world we live in.” Our pedagogies should not pretend that racism does not exist in the form of linguistic discrimination. Nor should they pretend that linguistic profiling does not directly affect the personal and family lives of our students who speak marginalized languages (be they Whites from remote regions in North Kakalaka [Carolina], Puerto Ricans from the Bronx *barrios*, or Blacks from the 504 in New Aw’lins). As one of my eighth-grade Chicana students wrote: “My dad felt that he lost his job because he could not speak English good. He was always on time and always worked hard, but his boss never paid attention to him. He would get angry at him when he couldn’t say what he wanted to say.”

We must confront these matters of language discrimination in schools and society. Like Judge Joiner’s ruling 25 years ago, these matters point to contradictions that lie at the nexus of language and racial politics in the United States today:

The plaintiffs have attempted to put before this court one of the most important and pervasive problems facing modern urban America—the problem of why “Johnnie Can’t Read” when Johnnie is Black and comes from a scatter, low-income housing unit, set down in an upper-middle class area of one of America’s most liberal and forward-looking cities.

Critical language awareness programs are now being tried in the United States context in an effort to help students read not just the *word* but also the *world*. These efforts are being made because we can’t keep frontin in times like these. Like the Bad

Boy who stormed the stage at a *Vibe Magazine* Hip Hop industry seminar once put it, “It’s not a game no mo!” Educators, sociolinguists, all “thoughtful citizens,” me and you, we gon work it out.

NOTE

¹ The author was invited to write this article in honor of the 50th anniversary of the landmark civil rights decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), and the 25th anniversary of *Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board* (1979), popularly known as the Black English case.

REFERENCES

Adger, C. T., Christian, D., & Taylor, O. (Eds.). (1999). *Making the connection: Language and academic achievement among African American students*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics; McHenry, IL: Delta Systems.

Alim, H. S. (2004a). *You know my steez: An ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of style-shifting in a Black American speech community* (Publications of the American Dialect Society, No. 89). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Alim, H. S. (2004b). Hip Hop Nation Language. In E. Finegan & J. Rickford (Eds.), *Language in the USA: Perspectives for the 21st century*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Alim, H. S. (2004c). Hearing what’s not said and missing what is: Black language in White public space. In C. B. Paulston & S. Keisling (Eds.), *Discourse and intercultural communication: The essential readings*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Alim, H. S. (2004d). *Combat, consciousness, and the cultural politics of communication: Reversing the dominating discourse on language by empowering linguistically profiled and marginalized groups*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, Boston, MA.

Alim, H. S. (in press). *Hip Hop Linguistics: Black language and the hip hop cultural movement*. New York: Routledge.

Bailey, R. W. (1981). Education and the law: The *King* case in Ann Arbor. In G. Smitherman (Ed.), *Black English and the education of Black children and youth: Proceedings of the national invitational symposium on the King decision* (pp. 94–129). Detroit: Wayne State University, Center for Black Studies.

Balkin, J. M. (Ed.) (2001). *What Brown v. Board of Education should have said: The nation’s top legal experts rewrite America’s landmark civil rights decision*. New York: New York University Press.

Ball, A. F. (2000). Empowering pedagogies that enhance the learning of multicultural students. *Teachers College Record*, 102(6), 1006–1034.

Ball, A. F., & Freedman, S. W. (Eds.). (2004). *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Baugh, J. (1998). Linguistics, education, and the law: Educational reform for African-American language minority students. In S. S. Mufwene, J. R. Rickford, G. Bailey, & J. Baugh (Eds.), *African-American English: Structure, history and use*. London: Routledge.

Baugh, J. (2000a). *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baugh, J. (2000b). Racial identification by speech. *American Speech*, 75(4), 362–364.

Baugh, J. (2003). Linguistic profiling. In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. F. Ball, & A. K. Spears (Eds.), *Black linguistics: Language, politics and society in Africa and the Americas*. London: Routledge.

Benham, M. K. P., & Heck, R. H. (Eds.). (1998). *Culture and educational policy in Hawai’i: The silencing of Native voices*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bertrand, M., & Mullainathan, S. (2003). *Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination* (NBER Working Paper No. 9873). Available from Social Science Research Network, at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9873.pdf>

Bradley v. Milliken, 433 U.S. 267 (1977).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Crawford, J. (Ed.). 1992. *Language loyalties: A sourcebook on the Official English controversy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dyson, A. H. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Enright-Villalva, K. (2003). “Something that people can do”: *The hidden literacies of Latino and Anglo youth around academic writing*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.

Fasold, R. W. (1987). Are Black and White vernaculars diverging? *American Speech*, 62, 3–5.

Fisher, M. (2003). Open mics and open minds: Spoke word poetry in African Diaspora participatory literacy communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 73(3), 362–389.

- Foster, M. (2001). Pay Leon, pay Leon, pay Leon, paleontologist: Using call-and-response to facilitate language mastery and literacy acquisition among African American students. In S. Lanehart (Ed.), *Sociocultural and historical contexts of African American English* (pp. 281–298). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Frankenberg, E., & Lee, C. (2002). *Race in American public schools: Rapidly resegregating school districts*. Report published by the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University. Available at www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/deseg/reseg_schools02.php
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fries, C. C. (1962). *Linguistics and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Falmer.
- Gillespie-Hayes, A. (1981). More deliberation than speed: The educational quest. In G. Smitherman (Ed.), *Black English and the education of Black children and youth: Proceedings of the national invitational symposium on the King decision*. Detroit: Wayne State University, Center for Black Studies.
- Harris-Wright, K. (1999). Enhancing bidialectalism in urban African American students. In C. T. Adger, D. Christian, & O. Taylor (Eds.), *Making the connection: Language and academic achievement among African American students* (pp. 53–59). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics; McHenry, IL: Delta Systems.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hornberger, N. (1989). Continua of biliteracy. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 271–296.
- Hull, G., & Schultz, K. (Eds.). (2002). *School's out! Bridging out-of-school literacies with classroom practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Krashen, S. (1996). *Under attack: The case against bilingual education*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.
- Labov, W. (1967). Some sources of reading problems for speakers of the Black English Vernacular. In A. Frazier (Ed.), *New directions in elementary English* (pp. 140–167). Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, W. (2001). Applying our knowledge of African American English to the problem of raising reading levels in inner city schools. In S. Lanehart (Ed.), *Sociocultural and historical contexts of African American English* (pp. 299–317). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Labov, W., & Baker, B. (2003). *What is a reading error?* Available at first author's website: <http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/>
- Labov, W., & Harris, W. A. (1986). De facto segregation of Black and White vernaculars. In D. Sankoff (Ed.), *Diversity and diachrony* (pp. 1–24). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lanehart, S. (2002). *Sista, speak! Black women kinfolk talk about language and literacy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lanehart, S. (in press). If our children are our future, why are we stuck in the past? Beyond the Anglicists and the Creolists. In H. S. Alim & J. Baugh (Eds.), *Black Language, education, and social change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lee, C. D. (1993). *Signifying as a scaffold for literary interpretation: The pedagogical implications of an African American discourse genre*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- LeMoine, N., & Hollie, S. (in press). The Academic English Mastery Program. In H. S. Alim & J. Baugh (Eds.), *Black Language, education, and social change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge.
- Mahiri, J., & Sutton, S. S. (1996). Writing for their lives: The non-school literacy of California's urban African American youth. *Journal of Negro Education*, 65, 164–180.
- Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board, Civil Action No. 7-71861, 473 F. Supp. 1371 (1979).
- National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association. (1996). *Standards for the English language arts*. Newark, DE: Author.
- Orfield, G., & Yun, J. (1999). *Resegregation in American schools*. Report published by the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University. Available at www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/deseg/reseg_schools99.php#fullreport
- Parker, H., & Crist, C. (1995). *Teaching minorities to play the corporate language game*. Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.
- Prince, D. A. (in press). Structuring access to learning opportunities in American high schools. Unpublished dissertation, School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- Purnell, T., Idsardi, W., & Baugh, J. (1999). Perceptual and phonetic experiments on American English dialect identification. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 18(1), 10–30.
- Richardson, E. (2003). *African American literacies*. New York: Routledge.
- Rickford, A. M. (1999). *I can fly: Teaching narratives and reading comprehension to African American and other ethnic minority students*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Rickford, J. (2000). Using the vernacular to teach the standard. In J. D. Ramirez, T. G. Wiley, G. de Klerk, & E. Lee (Eds.), *Ebonics in the urban education debate*. Long Beach, CA: Center for Language Minority Education and Research.
- Rickford, J. (2003). *Sociolinguistic approaches to working with vernacular varieties in schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.
- Rickford, J., & Rickford, R. (2000). *Spoken soul*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Simpkins, G. A., & Simpkins, C. (1981). Cross-cultural approach to curriculum development. In G. Smitherman (Ed.), *Black English and the education of Black children and youth: Proceedings of the national invitational symposium on the King decision*, (pp. 221–40). Detroit: Center for Black Studies, Wayne State University.
- Sledd, J. (1996). Grammar for social awareness in a time of class warfare. *English Journal*, 85(7), 59–63.
- Smitherman, G. (1986). *Talkin and testifyin: The language of Black America* (rev. ed.). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. (Original work published in 1977 by Houghton Mifflin, Boston)
- Smitherman, G. (2000). *Talkin that talk: Language, culture, and education in African America*. New York: Routledge.
- Smitherman, G. (Ed.). (1981). *Black English and the education of black children and youth: Proceedings of the National Invitational Symposium on the King Decision*. Detroit: Wayne State University, Center for Black Studies.
- Stanford Working Group. (1993, June). *Stanford Working Group on Federal Education Programs for Limited-English Proficient Students: A Blueprint for the Second Generation* [Working paper]. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Street, B. (1993). *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, H. (1989). *Standard English, Black English, and bidialectalism*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Valdes, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Wodak, R. (1995). Critical linguistics and critical discourse. In J. Verschueren, J. Ostman, & J. Blommaert (Eds.), *Handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 204–210). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Wolfram, W., Adger, C. T., & Christian, D. (1999). *Dialects in schools and communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Zentella, A. C. (1997). *Growing up bilingual: Puerto Rican children in New York*. London: Blackwell.

AUTHOR

H. SAMY ALIM is a visiting scholar in Anthropology and African American Studies (2005–2006) at the University of California, Los Angeles, and an Assistant Professor at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education. He can be contacted at UCLA, Department of Anthropology, 341 Haines Hall, Box 951553, 375 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553; h.samy.alim@gmail.com. His areas of

specialization include Black language, literacy and literature, ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies of Hip Hop Culture and Hip Hop Nation Language, and the street language and verbal art of Egyptian youth in Cairo.

Manuscript received February 22, 2004

First revision received September 28, 2004

Second revision received May 31, 2005

Accepted July 30, 2005

AERA Journals Continue to Move to OJS

The move to electronic submissions through OJS (Open Journal Systems) has been completed for three journals and one section of a fourth. Please note that all manuscript submissions for the following two journals must now be made at these operational OJS sites:

American Educational Research Journal
Section on Social and Institutional Analysis:
<http://ojs.aera.net/journals/aerj-sia>

Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
<http://ojs.aera.net/eepe>

In addition, the following OJS sites will be fully operational in the coming weeks. Please visit these sites for further information:

Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics:
<http://ojs.aera.net/journals/jeps>

Review of Educational Research:
<http://ojs.aera.net/journals/rer>

Instructions and help are provided at all OJS sites to assist authors in uploading their files. Further questions relating to the use of the system should be directed to the academic editors of each journal. Technical support questions may be directed to ojs@aera.net.