FACTORING AAVE INTO READING ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION

Rebecca Wheeler ■ *Kelly B. Cartwright* ■ *Rachel Swords*

The child reads, "The dog name is Bear." We show how distinguishing dialect influence from reading error increases reading scores for African American children.

Recently, Rachel, an elementary reading teacher and one of the coauthors of this article, looked for additional multicultural reading resources for her elementary students. Among the many books she found was *The Cajun Night Before Christmas*. She began reading silently:

'Twas the night before Christmas
An' all t'ru de house
Dey don't a t'ing pass
Not even a mouse. (Trosclair, 2000)

Before a stanza had passed, she stopped, returning to reread "An' all t'ru de house/Dey don't a t'ing pass..." This was unfamiliar so she puzzled the words out, coming to understand that *an'* stands for *and*, *t'ru* for *through*, *de* for *the*, and so on. Ok, now to practice reading out loud, as she would with her class. Rachel reread the first stanza:

'Twas the night before Christmas
An' all through the house
They don't anything pass
Not even a mouse.

You may notice that Rachel did not voice what was written on the page. Instead of the printed *Dey*, Rachel voiced the Standard English equivalent, *They*, and so on. She voiced the passage through the language variety of her home, Standard English. Indeed, of 19 words of the passage, Standard English influenced the way she voiced five words, for an accuracy score of 14/19, or 73.68%. Notice that in each case of mismatch between the text and Rachel's vocalization, the way she pronounced a word reflected the phonetic and morphosyntactic rules of her home speech variety—Standard English— while preserving meaning. Indeed, to decode such equivalents, Rachel *had to* comprehend the text.

Rebecca Wheeler is a professor at Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia, USA; e-mail rwheeler@cnu.edu.

Kelly B. Cartwright is a professor at Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia, USA; e-mail kewright@cnu.edu.

Rachel Swords is a Title 1 reading and math interventionist at Sanford Elementary School, Newport News, Virginia, USA; e-mail Rachel.Swords@ nn.k12.va.us.

> *"Dialects vary in structure—sound, vocabulary, and grammar; these are precisely the areas in which we should expect dialect influence to affect reading assessment."*

Although the Cajun dialect may seem far removed for most teachers who live outside southern Louisiana, the issue of first dialect influence in reading performance strikes close to home for many of our students. Many of our students come to school speaking African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a stigmatized variety of English, a variety differing in sound, word, and syntactic patterning from the variety expected in academic contexts. So, when these students read Standard English text, we should expect that patterns from their home variety would transfer to their oral readings of text, which can affect assessments of students' reading skill.

Theoretical Framework

As we factor dialect into reading assessment, a cluster of core precepts from linguistics and sociolinguistics is immediately relevant (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; Reaser & Wolfram, 2007):

- All language is structured.
- Language comes in varieties (called dialects or language varieties).
- Language varies by setting.
- Difference is *distinct from* deficiency.

A *dialect* is a "variety of the language associated with a regionally or socially defined group" (Adger et al., 2007, p. 1). That is, if a person speaks a language, then they speak one or more dialects of that language. This means that the variety we call Standard English is itself a dialect of English. And, contrary to popular understanding, "'[d]ialect' does not mean a marginal, archaic, rustic, or degraded mode of speech" (Pullum, 1999, p. 44).

Also known as *language varieties*, dialects vary in structure—sound, vocabulary, and grammar; these are precisely the areas in which we should expect dialect influence to affect reading assessment. For example, a person with a southern accent sounds distinctly different from a person who converses in the cadences of Boston or New York. We know that vocabulary differs from region to region: "some people in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey use the word *hoagie* in reference to the same kind of sandwich that other people call a *sub*—or a *grinder, torpedo, hero, poor boy*, and so forth (Reaser & Wolfram, 2007, p. 3). Similarly, in grammar, we should expect that a speaker from Pennsylvania Dutch country might say *the car needs washed*, whereas people in many other regions would say *the car needs washing* or *the car needs to be washed* (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 88).

The point of reading is comprehension. But to arrive at that goal, students must be able to decode text. And, decoding accuracy is often used to place students in appropriately leveled texts or to select texts for reading assessments (Mesmer, 2007). At times, a student who speaks a dialect other than Standard English may voice a text through the phonetic or morphosyntactic patterns of their community dialect (Labov, 1995) just as Rachel voiced the Cajun text through her own Standard English dialect at the opening of this article. To the degree that students voice equivalent forms from their own dialects—forms that align with the intended meaning of the written text—the students' decoding supports their comprehension.

Reading assessments are designed to assure that students can decode and comprehend Standard English texts, even though many students' home varieties are not Standard English. However, recognizing that dialect may influence oral reading, designers of reading instruments caution that dialect substitutions are distinct from reading errors. For example, the PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) administrator's manual states that "[d]ialect substitutions are NOT counted as errors. It is not an error, for example if a student says 'ax' for 'ask' and you know that the student normally says 'ax' for 'ask' in his or her oral language" (Invernizzi, Meier, & Juel, 2004, p. 21). Similarly, the Developmental Reading

Pause and Ponder

- What features of the local community dialect(s) do you notice in your students' oral reading?
- If you distinguished home speech grammar from reading error, how would your students' reading scores change?
- How might taking dialect into account affect your diagnoses of your students' needs?

> *"Of course, dialects differ not only phonologically, but also morphologically and syntactically."*

Assessment (DRA) *Teacher's Guide* (Beaver & Carter, 2009) indicates that "[w]ords mispronounced due to a speech problem or dialect may be coded but are not counted as errors." Furthermore, directions for the Word Identification subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT) stipulate that "[s]ubjects are not to be penalized for mispronunciations resulting from speech defects, dialects, or regional speech patterns" (p. 24).

Although the developers of these reading assessments clearly intended that dialect influence not count as reading error, teachers need guidance on identifying dialect influence. Of course, dialects differ not only phonologically, but also morphologically and syntactically (e.g., the "regional speech patterns" to which the WRMT manual refers). Accordingly, either phonetic or morphological *or* syntactic features from the students' home dialect might influence students' oral reading of texts.

However, assessment manuals do not explain what counts as dialect features or how dialect can affect decoding. Without specific guidelines and specific knowledge of their students' dialect patterns, including phonological, morphological, and syntactic features, teachers will be unable to factor dialect into reading assessment. In consequence, we risk misassessing students, resulting in inappropriate instructional recommendations, and missing opportunities to promote reading growth.

A Tale of Two Assessments: Student on Grade Level vs. Student Who Is Struggling

Texts varying in reading level are to be matched to students' reading abilities for optimally effective instruction and assessment (McGill-Franzen, 2009; Mesmer, 2007); for students to be placed in a given text level, they typically must decode within a specified range of accuracy. For example, The PALS (Invernizzi et al., 2004) autumn assessment expects a third grader to read a grade 2 passage with 90% accuracy to be considered at instructional level. In the spring, a third grader must read a grade 3 passage with 90% accuracy. PALS directs teachers to place children in a lower level text if their decoding accuracy falls below 90%. Similarly, the directions for the DRA2 (Beaver & Carter, 2009, p. 64) state that if students do not meet a particular accuracy rate (usually 95%) they should "Stop the assessment… [and] reassess with a lower level text."

Of course we want to accurately assess our students' decoding to place them in appropriately leveled texts. But accurate assessment requires that we separate dialect influence from decoding error in Standard English. Additionally, although we know that best practice requires that we use multiple assessments to gauge students' reading processes and progress (Afflerbach, Kim, Crassas, & Cho, 2011), the realities of school schedules and constraints can result in the use of single assessments (e.g., the PALS or DRA2) to place students in texts. We now turn to a vignette that illustrates what happens to assessment when we conflate dialect influence and reading error.

Factoring Dialect Into Reading Assessment: Appropriate Assessment and Intervention

Consider Ashley (all names of teachers, school, and district are pseudonyms), who understands how AAVE patterns influence students' oral reading. In September of his fourth-grade year, Rajid (not a real student, but a composite of students with whom we've worked) was reading at DRA level 38, grade 3, month 8. He received a year of instruction. In April, Ashley administered the DRA2 to evaluate Rajid's reading progress. She began with level 40, an on-grade prompt containing 205 words.

Ashley listened to Rajid read, noting the contrasts between the printed text and his voicing of that text. But another factor came into the picture: Rajid's dialect. Ashley knew that not all "errors" are equal. Some miscues reflect a student's lack of phonics knowledge, but other miscues represent *transfer* of patterns from the student's community dialect into school reading (transfer occurs when phonological, morphological, or syntactic patterns from AAVE influence his voicing of the text). To accurately assess Rajid's reading level and needs, Ashley knew she needed to distinguish reading error from dialect influence.

Ashley recorded 21 miscues on the DRA2. Whereas 16 corresponded to actual reading errors, 5 resulted from *dialect transfer:*

Sound transfers:

- "Woofs" for *wolves*
- "Shard" for *shared*

Grammar transfers:

- "Nose" for *noses*
- "They walk..." for *they walked...*
- "That why..." for *that's why...*

First, Rajid successfully read the word *wolves*. Having seen and comprehended the meaning, he substituted the equivalent spoken form from his dialect, "woofs." According to Adger et al. (2007, p. 189) "before a labial sound such as *f* or *p*, *l* may be lost completely giving 'woof' for *wolf* or 'hep' for *help*." Ashley identified another sound-based dialect influence. In some language varieties, the word "*there* may sound like *thar* and *bear* like *bar*" (Adger et al., 2007, p. 193). While reading *For a long time, humans and dogs shared a common home*, Rajid voiced the word *shared* as "shard," thus embodying the vowel merger Adger and colleagues described.

The grammar of Rajid's home language variety also influenced his oral reading: Voicing the sentence *They have very good noses*, he uttered the equivalent from his dialect: "They have very good nose." The literature amply documents that AAVE may convey the meaning of plurality without using a plural suffix on the noun (Adger et al., 2007; Hudley & Mallinson, 2010; Wheeler & Swords 2006, 2010). Accordingly, Rajid's use of "nose" represents the AAVE equivalent for Standard English *noses.* Moving on, Rajid read out loud "They walk long distances" for the text *They walked long distances.* Again, Ashley knew that Rajid successfully decoded and comprehended the printed verb *walked* because he used the AAVE equivalent—"walk"—where past time is shown through context or common knowledge (Adger et al., 2007; Green, 2002). Finally, Rajid substituted "That why..." for *That's why dogs became man's best friend,* using the common AAVE feature of copula deletion (Smitherman, 1999). In each instance,

Ashley knew Rajid successfully decoded and comprehended these words, voicing the equivalent oral forms in his home dialect.

Factoring dialect into her reading assessment, Ashley determined that Rajid read on grade level with 92.2% accuracy. This assessment enabled Ashley to accurately target subsequent literacy interventions. Rajid did not need instructional focus on phonics— he already had basic decoding skills. He read the words as they sounded in his dialect and was unable to read words that were not in his listening or speaking vocabularies (e.g., *council* and *seized*). Subsequent instruction focused on expanding his conceptual knowledge and vocabulary and on expanding his command of Standard English equivalents using the linguistically informed approaches of contrastive analysis and code-switching, as described later (Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010).

Not Factoring Dialect Into Assessment: Inappropriate Assessment and Intervention

Now, consider an alternate scenario. Mary, another language arts teacher, did not know how to factor dialect into reading assessment. She did not distinguish *dialect influence* from *reading error.* The results were disastrous for Rajid. Like Ashley, Mary administered a level 40 DRA2 in April, identifying 21 errors (including 5 instances of dialect transfer), yielding an accuracy rate of 89.76% (instead of the 92.2% accuracy that resulted when dialect
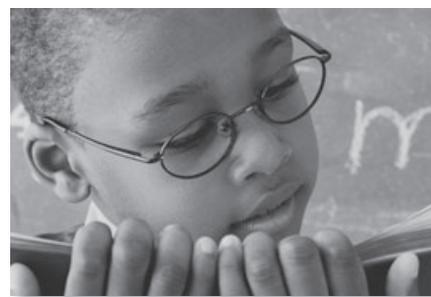
was taken into account). Accordingly, Mary stopped, turning to a level 38 text. On this 227-word text, she identified 23 miscues, with decoding accuracy at 89.8%—again, below the benchmark. She didn't know that four of these represented dialect transfers: past time: "look" for *looked*, "walk" for *walked*, "start" for *started*; and plurality: "sound" for *sounds*.

Had Mary recognized these dialect influences, she would have assessed Rajid at 91.6%, a passing score. Instead, she terminated the test. Next, with levels 40 and 38 apparently too difficult, Mary stepped back to level 34. Here, with 213 possible words, she identified 14 errors for a 93.42% accuracy rate. Mary assessed Rajid as a DRA level 34 reader, grade 3, month 4. According to Mary, not only had Rajid failed to make any reading progress, but he had lost 4 months of reading ability during the school year. Mary found Rajid to be a seriously struggling reader.

Of course, Mary's misassessment of Rajid's instructional level led directly to an inappropriate intervention plan. Rajid had appeared not to read words all the way through, often changing

"Accurate assessment requires that we separate dialect influence from decoding error in Standard English."

> *"Teachers are currently unable to factor dialect into reading assessment."*

the middle of the word or deleting the ending. He also appeared to lack basic word recognition skills. As a result, the instructional plan Mary developed for Rajid focused on phonics, using various programs the school had purchased. He was tracked into a remedial reading group, using below grade level texts.

Thus two very different portraits of Rajid emerged depending on whether dialect was factored into reading assessment. When we distinguish dialect transfer from reading error, we recognize Rajid as an on-grade-level reader. Subsequent instruction can accurately target his reading needs. When his teacher failed to distinguish dialect transfer from reading error, she drew inappropriate conclusions about his reading level, and subsequent interventions did not accurately respond to his actual reading needs.

We argue that dialect must be factored into reading assessment. Building on nearly 50 years of scholarship in linguistics, reading, and speech pathology, this article offers teachers a snapshot of common dialect influences they might expect in the reading of vernacular speaking African American students. We present an intervention—contrastive analysis and code-switching—that helps African American students become metacognitively aware of

the differences between their home language and school language so that they can employ strategies to actively choose the language to fit the setting: school language when that is appropriate, and vernacular, when that is better suited to the setting. And finally, we call on teacher education programs to better prepare future teachers to accurately assess and effectively respond to the reading skills of their vernacular-speaking students.

What Do Teachers Need to Know to Factor Dialect Into Decoding Assessment?

For nearly 50 years, linguists have researched the structure of the language variety called African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The most extensively studied of all U.S. dialects, AAVE has been known by a variety of names reflecting the naming practices of the time (i.e., nonstandard Negro English, Negro dialect, Black English, Ebonics, African American Language, and African American English; Craig & Washington, 1994, 2006; Fasold, 1972; Green, 1963; Green, 2002, 2011; Labov, 1969; Wolfram, 1969). With half a century of research, "we now know more about this dialect than any other form of spoken English" (Labov, 1995, p. 39).

We have learned much about the features likely to appear in the reading and writing of urban African American students who speak AAVE (Fasold 1972; Green, 1963; Green, 2002, 2011; Hudley & Mallinson, 2010; Meier 1999, 2008), and researchers have offered many concrete suggestions on how to factor dialect into literacy instruction (Baratz & Shuy, 1969; Goodman, 1965; Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005; Meier, 2008; Shuy, 1973;

Stewart, 1969; Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010).

A Conundrum

However, reading instruction today faces the same issues so aptly articulated by Labov over 40 years ago. Labov named the central problem: "Teachers are reluctant to believe that there are systematic principles in nonstandard English which differ from those of Standard English" (Labov, 1969, p. 30). Labov continued, "the child's teacher has no systematic knowledge of the nonstandard forms which oppose and contradict standard English" (ibid, p. 30).

Thus we confront a conundrum: Assessment instruments expect teachers to distinguish dialect difference from reading error, and yet teachers still lack systematic knowledge of the dialects spoken by their students. In consequence, teachers are currently unable to factor dialect into reading assessment.

We turn now to some common AAVE features teachers might expect to transfer into the oral reading of their vernacular-speaking students.

Differences in Oral Language Between AAVE and Standard English

The following list provides a few of the most common systematic differences between AAVE and Standard English in sound and grammar.

Common sound contrasts (Adger et al., 2007; Meier, 2008):

- "Ax" for *ask*
- "Dem," "dese," "dat," "dose" for *them, these, that, those*
- "Wif" for *with*
- "Tess" for *test*; "dess" for *desk* and so on

"When we distinguish dialect transfer from reading error, we recognize Rajid as an on-grade-level reader."

Common grammatical contrasts (Green, 2002, 2011; Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010):

- Noun patterns:
  - Possession ("mama jeep" for *mama's jeep*)
  - Plurality ("two dog" vs. *two dogs*)
  - *A* vs. *an* ("an rapper" vs. *a rapper,* "a elephant" vs. *an elephant*)

- Verb patterns:
  - Regular subject–verb agreement ("She walk to the store every day" vs. *she walks...*)
  - Subject–verb agreement with irregular *be* verbs ("We is working" vs. *We are working*)
  - Past time ("Martin Luther King talk about a dream" vs. *MLK talked about a dream*)
  - Past time with irregular *be* verbs ("We was working" vs. *We were working*); "*be* understood" ("she good" vs. *she is good*), and so on.

This list of AAVE grammatical traits likely to influence student reading is brief but illustrative. It is drawn not only from experience with student oral and written language (Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010) but also from a half century of research documenting the linguistic structure of AAVE (Baratz & Shuy, 1969; Green 2011; Fasold, 1972; Labov, 1972; Meier, 2008; Piestrup, 1973; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1999; Wolfram, 1969). As we will see, basic insights from linguistics and an awareness of even these common dialect features will help teachers distinguish dialect influence from decoding error in students' oral reading.

How Should We Teach Standard English to Speakers of Other Dialects?

Let's say that teachers get to the point where they can reliably distinguish reading error from dialect influence. Next, we must ask: "What is an appropriate response to students' use of vernacular varieties in the classroom?" The three major responses identified in 1970 hold true today: (1) eradication, (2) celebration of African American–centered literacies, and (3) bidialectalism (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, pp. ix–xiii). Eradication or the "correctionist" approach deems Standard English to be the superior language variety. In traditional language arts instruction, teachers wield the red pen to correct and ultimately extinguish vernacular features in students' speaking and writing. In contrast, the celebration approach asserts that "[i]nstead of offering standard English to nonstandard speakers, we should not try to change the speech of nonstandard speakers at all. If anything, we should attack the prejudices against nonstandard dialects which Standard English speakers have" (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, p. xi).

The third approach, bidialectalism, affirms students' rights to their own language and adds Standard English to students' linguistic repertoires. "Most linguists will agree that a speaker of any language will make linguistic adjustments [in phonology, grammar, and lexicon] to specific social situations." The bidialectal approach asserts "teachers should help students to make the switch comfortably from one setting to another" (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, p. xi). Bidialectal approaches to teaching Standard English to vernacular speakers often draw on methodology from English as a second language in service of Standard English as a second dialect (SESD; Wilkinson et al., 2011). Specifically, contrastive analysis is used to alert students to the structural differences between a regional or vernacular dialect and Standard English (Calderón, 2006; Reed, 1973; Stewart 1970; Wilkinson et al., 2011). Then, as students become metacognitively aware of the linguistic contrasts, teachers lead them to *code-switch,* to choose their language variety to fit the setting.

We affirm a bidialectal approach to language diversity in the classroom and
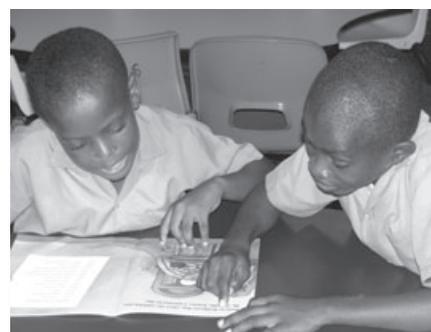
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support the "basic need for *multiliteracies* to be functional in today's world" (Canagarajah, 2003, p. x). We agree with Canagarajah that "we should strive for competence in a repertoire of codes and discourses [and that] [r]ather than simply joining a speech community, we should teach students to shuttle between communities" (Canagarajah, 2003, p. xii). Thus we believe all students have the right both to the language of the home and the codes of power of the school (Delpit, 1995).

Research has demonstrated that greater familiarity with Standard English correlates strongly and positively with reading success (Hudley, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004). Indeed, research supports a "dialect shifting—reading achievement hypothesis, which proposes that AAVE-speaking students who learn to use SAE in literacy tasks will outperform their peers who do not make this linguistic adaptation." In turn, good reading skills provide a foundation for academic success in all content areas (Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009, p. 839). Instruction that enhances oral reading in most students focuses on fluent, expressive reading of text: reading that sounds like talking (see Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Samuels & Farstrup, 2006; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002, for more on reading fluency instruction). For speakers of other dialects, an additional instructional focus is necessary to promote the metacognitive dialect shifting that supports reading achievement (Hudley et al., 2004; Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010).

How to Teach Metacognitive Awareness, Contrastive Analysis, and Code-Switching

Contrastive analysis is the method garnering most scholarly support in the teaching of Standard English to vernacular speaking students (Sweetland,

2006; Wilkinson et al., 2011). Accordingly, next we describe an intervention using the linguistic strategies of contrastive analysis and code-switching. In this approach, we help students become attuned to context—time, place, and setting—to make them metacognitively aware of how we use different dialects in different contexts.

Students begin by exploring how clothing (see Figure 1) and places (see Figure 2) array on a continuum of formality and informality. Students' answers will vary; the point is for students to realize we all vary our styles to fit the setting.

Next we invite students to focus on language, exploring how we vary our greetings by time and place (see Figure 3). Students begin developing metalinguistic awareness, including a "repertoire of codes and discourses" appropriate to distinct contexts.

Figure 1   Comparing Informal and Formal Clothing

Note. Reprinted from Wheeler, R., & Swords, R. (2010). *Code-switching lessons: Grammar strategies for linguistically diverse writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Figure 2   Comparing Formal and Informal Places
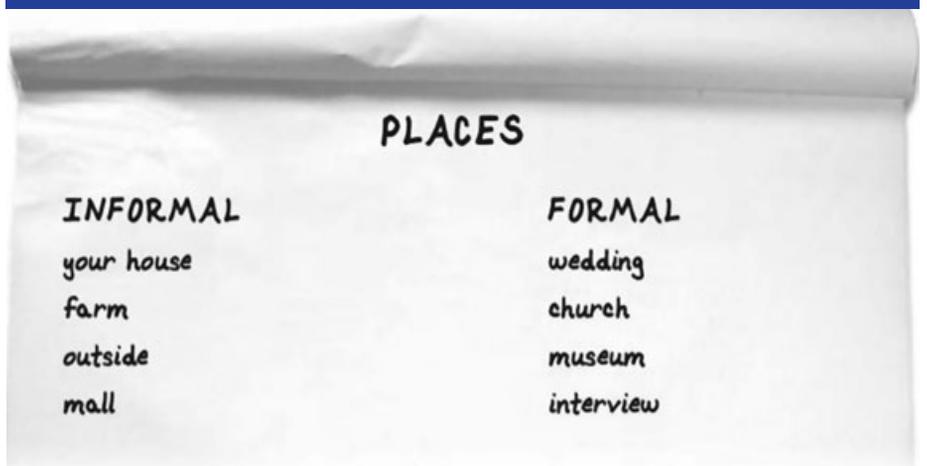
PLACES

INFORMAL	FORMAL
your house	wedding
farm	church
outside	museum
mall	interview

Note. Reprinted from Wheeler, R., & Swords, R. (2010). *Code-switching lessons: Grammar strategies for linguistically diverse writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Once students enhance their contextual awareness, we use contrastive analysis (CA) to teach needed grammar points. Our core tool is a T-Chart. With CA, we compare and contrast the grammar patterns from students' home dialect (left column) with the corresponding Standard English equivalent (right column).

For example, here's how we teach possessive patterns (see Figure 4).

After discussing the meaning of *possession*, we direct students' attention to the T-chart's left column. We read each sentence aloud and then return to the first example: "How do we know that 'my aunt' owns a 'house'? What pattern signals possession?" Even second graders will answer that informal English shows possession with "owner + what is owned," or that the noun (*aunt*) sits right next to the thing owned (*house*). After checking

this hypothesis against the other examples , we then write the pattern for vernacular English beneath the left hand column.

Then students examine the formal side; we ask, "What changed?" Students discover that Standard English shows possession by the pattern "owner + 's + what is owned." (For lessons on top 10 AAVE patterns, including plurality, subject–verb agreement, showing past time, *was/were,* and *is/are,* among others, see Wheeler & Swords, 2006, 2010).

In this way, teachers and students alike discover that vernacular varieties are systematic language systems governed by rules. In this way, we add Standard English to students' linguistic toolboxes.

We further build students' metacognitive awareness by introducing literature offering a variety of dialects. We explicitly teach students to notice and discuss language variation in books such as Joanne Compton and Kenn Compton's *Ashpet,* Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair,* and Patricia McKissack's *Flossie & the Fox.* Students explore how language helps in creating characters and corresponds to specific settings.

We also focus on how language contributes to the author's purpose. Metalinguistic awareness—awareness of one's own language use as fostered in these activities—and the mental flexibility necessary to reflect on and switch between language varieties play a critical role in developing reading skill (Cartwright, 2008, 2009; Nagy, 2007). Further, these abilities are especially important for young readers whose home language differs in significant ways from school language.

With this background of the contrastive differences between the community and school language varieties, we help students make decisions about fitting their language

Figure 3   Comparing Formal and Informal Language
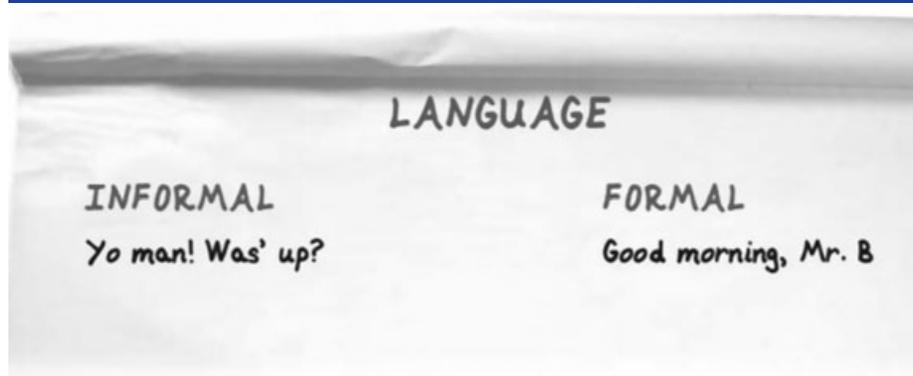
Note. Reprinted from Wheeler, R., & Swords, R. (2010). *Code-switching lessons: Grammar strategies for linguistically diverse writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Figure 4   Showing Possession T-Chart

Note. Reprinted from Wheeler, R., & Swords, R. (2010). *Code-switching lessons: Grammar strategies for linguistically diverse writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

to context—we teach students to code-switch, to choose the language style to fit the setting, the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose. Sometimes students choose Standard English, and sometimes they choose AAVE, as fits the setting.

In our work with contrastive analysis and code-switching, we build on students' existing knowledge to add new knowledge—Standard English equivalents. This understanding is

extremely powerful, allowing students to read both language varieties and make strategic language choices, resulting in improved literacy performance. For more on these techniques, see Wheeler and Swords (2006, 2010). Finally, as we learned earlier from the analyses of Rajid's oral reading, teachers' awareness of students' dialect differences is necessary (a) to accurately assess students' decoding abilities, (b) to appropriately place students within leveled texts, and (c) to develop apt instructional interventions targeting students' specific reading needs.

The Take-Away Message

In sum, AAVE exhibits specific phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures differing from Standard English in predictable ways. Accordingly, as an AAVE-speaking child voices a text, differences between the printed Standard English text and a child's reading may constitute dialect influence, not reading error. In such cases, the child is not making mistakes in Standard English, but is following the patterns of a different dialect. Accordingly, instead of phonics, the appropriate intervention may be metacognitive instruction in contrastive analysis and in literacy strategies that enable children to code-switch between dialects.

This distinction—dialect influence versus reading error—carries profound implications not only for the child's current reading placement, but for his or her longer trajectory in school, and even for his or her later adult life. Children who are erroneously placed in low reading groups will not receive the enriched, challenging reading experiences they deserve (Allington, 1980; Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). Furthermore, if we assess children

as stumbling in phonics when really they are succeeding at reading using their home dialect, we're likely to offer instruction the children do not need and not offer instruction they do. Simply put: Considering dialect can transform reading assessment and intervention.

Note
This article was extensively revised from a shorter piece, which was published in a state-level reading journal. The authors are most grateful for the detailed and thoughtful comments of referees who helped make this article much stronger. Any remaining limitations are our own.

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