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Journal of Literacy Research
43(4) 430–468
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DOI: 10.1177/1086296X11424200
http://jlr.sagepub.com

Learning About Language Through Inquiry-Based Discussion: Three Bidialectal High School Students' Talk About Dialect Variation, Identity, and Power

James S. Chisholm[1] and Amanda J. Godley[2]

Abstract

The field of literacy studies has seen decades of calls for scholarship and instruction that address issues of dialect diversity, identity, and power but few empirical studies that document students' engagement in classroom activities designed to address these issues. The goal of this article is to describe how three bidialectal African American high school students learned about language variation, identity, and power through their participation in a small-group, inquiry-based discussion. The authors' description analyzes both the learning opportunities and limitations provided by the design of the inquiry-based discussion and also the content learning about the English language that was evidenced by the students' talk. The findings suggest that inquiry-based discussions, when driven by carefully worded questions, can lead to robust student learning about language variation and can engage students in authentic disciplinary problem posing.

Keywords

dialect, inquiry-based instruction, African American students, sociolinguistic, discussion

The study of the English language has held a peculiar position in literacy instruction and scholarship for some time. Although the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)/International Reading Association (IRA, 1996) standards, the Common Core

[1]Morehead State University, Morehead, KY, USA
[2]University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:
James S. Chisholm, Department of English, Morehead State University, Morehead, KY 40351
Email: j.chisholm@moreheadstate.edu

State Standards (2010), and most individual state standards for English language arts (ELA) include goals for student learning about the history of and variation within the English language, both research and practice in teaching about the English language appear severely underdeveloped in comparison to research and practice in teaching reading and writing. Though the field of literacy studies has seen decades of calls for scholarship, curriculum, and instruction that address dialect diversity and the relationship between language and power in the United States (Alim, 2005; Brown, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Wolfram, Adger, & Christian, 1999), few empirical studies exist that document students' engagement in classroom activities designed to address these issues (May & Sleeter, 2010). The goal of this article is to respond to these calls by describing what and how a group of high school students learned about language variation, identity, and power through their participation in a small-group, inquiry-based discussion. Our description analyzes both the learning opportunities and limitations provided by the design of the inquiry-based discussion activity and also the content learning about the English language that was evidenced by the students' talk.

The students in our study were 11th graders in a regular-track English class in a predominantly African American high school and community located on the fringes of a Rust Belt city in the United States. All three students self-identified as African American and were *bidialectal*, that is, speakers of two dialects: Standard English (SE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). We follow scholars such as Banks (2007), Ball and Lardner (2005), Hill (2009), and Lanehart (2007) in using the term *AAVE* to describe the distinct dialect of English spoken in many African American communities. Although most linguists view AAVE as one of many legitimate varieties of English (Lanehart, 2007), some scholars argue that AAVE should be considered a language rather than a dialect given the strong connections between its grammatical and phonological patterns and those of West African languages (Smith, 2001). Some scholars (Alim & Baugh, 2007; Kirkland, 2010; Paris, 2009) use the terms *African American Language* or *Black Language* rather than AAVE to emphasize the historical and linguistic African roots of the dialect; its equal, not subordinate, relationship to SE; and its deep connection to African American culture. Other scholars use all three terms interchangeably (Norment, 2005). In this article, we use the term AAVE because it is the most widely used term in sociolinguistic and educational research to describe the variety of language often spoken by and associated with African Americans. We also align ourselves with Lanehart, who argues that working toward helping AAVE-speaking students succeed in school is more important than debating whether AAVE is a language or a dialect.

In this study, we were particularly interested in analyzing how the students discussed the two dialects they spoke since research has demonstrated significant differences between widespread perceptions and scientific studies of AAVE and bidialectalism. AAVE is a dialect that is often erroneously viewed as ungrammatical and illogical by mainstream U.S. society (Milroy, 2001; Wassink & Curzan, 2004) and by teachers

(Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001). Furthermore, teachers often view bidialectal students as less intelligent and capable than students who only speak SE (Blake & Cutler, 2003). However, sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that AAVE is a logical, rule-governed dialect that includes both grammatical features and nuances of expression not found in SE (Wolfram et al., 1999) and has strong ties to African American culture and identities (Alim & Baugh, 2007). Furthermore, literacy scholars have found that both explicitly acknowledging the value and features of AAVE and building on bidialectal students' knowledge of AAVE enhance students' literacy learning opportunities (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Hill, 2009; C. D. Lee, 2006).

The research question that guided our study was the following: How does students' engagement in an inquiry-based discussion about language variation, identity, and power support their sociolinguistic content learning? To answer this question, we examined the students' discussion for evidence that they understood and could apply three foundational principles in *sociolinguistics* (the study of language use and social interaction) related to language variation, identity, and power. These principles relate to grammaticality, contextual variation, and ideology.

First, sociolinguistic research and theory has demonstrated that all languages have various dialects and these dialects are equally logical and grammatical (Labov, 1972; Wolfram et al., 1999). We studied the students' discussion for evidence that students viewed all dialects of English, including AAVE, as valid and valuable.

Second, sociolinguistic research has documented the ways in which language use varies in different contexts and communities, creating different types of interpersonal relationships and reflecting different identities (Heath, 1983; Milroy, 2001; Rampton, 2005; Wolfram et al., 1999). Such variation is viewed as a natural characteristic of every language.

Third, sociolinguists have documented how people form strong negative and positive judgments based on the way others speak (Heath, 1983; Norment, 2005; Rampton, 2005; Wolfram et al., 1999). Negative judgments about the dialects used by subordinate groups in society, such as AAVE, and positive judgments about the dialects used by groups with societal power, such as SE, both extend from and reinforce racism and other societal power structures. Oftentimes such judgments are based on *language ideologies*, or widespread, often unconscious assumptions about the nature of language and how it should be used.

We examined the students' discussion for evidence of learning about these three research-based, sociolinguistic principles because they represent the kind of sociolinguistic content knowledge about the English language that would enhance students' literacy learning and that is reflected in NCTE/IRA, Common Core, and most state standards for ELA.

We define sociolinguistic content learning in this study both as understanding sociolinguistic perspectives on language variation, identity, and power and as demonstrating that understanding by making claims, using evidence, and engaging in an open-ended

discussion about language as sociolinguists would. In this way, we align ourselves with disciplinary, practice-based theories of learning, such as those supported by Engle and Conant's (2002) research. Such theories of learning examine how students' organization, evaluation, and construction of knowledge become more aligned with the discipline they are studying, such as history, biology, or sociolinguistics. Given current scholarship demonstrating that to be successful in a global, multimodal economy and culture, students must carefully consider subtle differences in language use for a greater variety of audiences and purposes (Canagarajah, 2006; Luke, 2004), we believe that students' abilities to organize, evaluate, and construct sociolinguistic knowledge is an important goal for ELA in the 21st century.

Studies of Language Instruction in English Language Arts Classes

Goals for language instruction in ELA classes typically fall into two broad categories: learning about grammar and rhetoric at the sentence level and learning about issues of language variety, dialects, stereotypes, and identity at the societal level. The latter goals, which reflect the focus of our study, are strongly emphasized in NCTE/IRA (1996) professional standards, in the Common Core State Standards (2010), and in most state standards for ELA. For example, NCTE/IRA Standard 4 states, "Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with different audiences for a variety of purposes" (para. 6), and Standard 9 suggests that ELA instruction help "students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles" (para. 11). Similarly, the Common Core State Standards (2010) expect students to "apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts" (p. 54) and to compare formal and informal *registers*, or varieties of language used for different purposes and settings. In the state in which we conducted our research, state standards for 11th grade ELA include the goal that students will be able to "analyze when differences in language are a source of negative or positive stereotypes among groups." Thus, learning about language diversity, identity, and prejudices within ELA classrooms is a goal that is shared by literacy and linguistics researchers, professional organizations, and educational policymakers alike.

The small body of empirical research on teaching about dialects, stereotypes, identity, and power suggests that the following three related and often combined instructional approaches may increase students' content knowledge about language variation: (a) teaching explicitly about widespread dialects in the United States or within students' communities, (b) holding student-centered discussions about the relationship among language, power, and language ideologies, and (c) asking students to research language use in their own lives. We discuss each of these three approaches briefly below.

Explicit Teaching About Dialects in the United States and in Students' Communities

As early as 1983, Heath described ELA instruction that focused students' attention on the variety of dialects and registers found within their own communities. Heath's study described how students explored the variety of ways in which information about farming was conveyed in their community and the value of each of these "ways with words" (p. 317). Explicit teaching about dialects, such as the instruction that Heath described, frames effective language use as dependent on social context and audience and may help students develop a repertoire of language resources appropriate for distinct audiences and purposes (Gee, 2007; Luke, 2004; Wolfram et al., 1999). This instructional framework builds on sociolinguistic scholarship that has demonstrated that every language variety has equal status from a linguistic point of view (Wolfram et al., 1999). It also offers an ethnographically grounded alternative to conventional ELA instruction, which typically promotes the misperception that there is only one "right" way to use language, an instructional approach that has been shown to be harmful to students' literacy learning, particularly for students who do not speak SE at home (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006).

More recently, the North Carolina Language and Life Project (NCSU Linguistics Program, 2010), based on the work of Wolfram and his colleagues (1999), presents a North Carolina–based language curriculum called *Voices of North Carolina* (NCSU Linguistics Program, 2010) that has been implemented in various North Carolina school districts and has been shown to lead to productive student learning about the sociolinguistic and grammatical patterns of multiple dialects found in North Carolina and the geographic, cultural, and racial identities reflected through these dialects. In a study of more than 100 mostly White high school students who identified as SE-only speakers and participated in the *Voices of North Carolina* curriculum, language attitude surveys given to students before and after the implementation of the curriculum demonstrated a statistically significant increase in students' content knowledge about dialects and language variation (Reaser, 2006). Similarly, Godley and Minnici (2008) described bidialectal, African American high school students' participation in a week-long instructional unit on dialects of American English in which students discussed dialects and language prejudices in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (H. Lee, 1960), viewed and discussed a documentary film about dialects and language prejudices in the United States (Alvarez & Kolker, 1987), and discussed language variation and identity in their own community. Through a close discourse analysis of classroom talk during the unit, interviews with students, and administering Reaser's (2006) survey instrument before and after the instructional unit, Godley and Minnici documented increases in students' content knowledge about dialects and a decrease in students' language prejudices.

Brown (2008) designed and studied the implementation of a high school language study curriculum that compared the features of SE and *vernacular*, or nonstandard,

dialects and the contexts in which these dialects were used. His curriculum also included activities that contrasted different registers, particularly formal and informal ones. Brown's study documented that this approach led to gains in bidialectal African American students' content knowledge about various dialects and registers of English and how language varies by setting and purpose. Similarly, Sweetland (2006) described an increase in bidialectal, African American elementary school students' positive views of African American English when they engaged in children's-literature-based lessons that framed AAVE as one of many rich, patterned dialects of English. All of the studies of explicit instruction about dialects described above demonstrated strong student engagement in class discussions and activities. These instructional approaches also reflect an ideological stance about the naturalness of dialect variation, though not all reflect that stance explicitly.

Student-Centered Discussions of Language, Power, and Language Ideologies

Current scholarship on language variation and dialect study in ELA classes also calls for explicitly teaching students to critically analyze widespread assumptions about dialects, particularly vernacular dialects, and their relation to social power structures (Alim, 2005; Delpit, 1988; Janks, 1999). Instructional approaches that encourage students to critique widespread assumptions about language, or *language ideologies*, are often described as *critical language awareness* or *critical language pedagogy* (Alim, 2005; Godley & Minnici, 2008; Janks, 1999). In their study of a seventh grade, predominantly African American ELA classroom, Bloome et al. (2005) demonstrated how the students and their African American teacher problematized language ideologies concerning dialects and race through their analysis of a poem. In doing so, the classroom talk focused on students' prior knowledge about language variation and shifted the location of knowledge from the teacher and poem to the students, themselves. Through their micro-level discourse analysis, Bloome et al. demonstrated how the class discussion led to substantial learning about dialects, identity, and power.

Fecho (2004) and Godley and Minnici (2008) similarly described how assignments and discussions that explicitly ask students to question widespread assumptions about language, race and identity, such as "What happens when an African American speaks only Standard English?" (Fecho, 2004, p. 56), led to productive student learning about the complex relationships among dialects, identity, and power. Other, related studies have described how discussions of language, identity, and power can lead to positive changes in teachers' belief systems about language. Ball and Muhammad (2003) and Okawa (2003) described university courses for preservice teachers that included critical discussions of language and power. These studies suggest that teachers and students often do not question linguistically erroneous yet publicly taken-for-granted beliefs about language and dialects unless language instruction explicitly guides them to do so.

Students' Researching Their Own Language Use

Many language and literacy scholars have also called for language instruction that invites students to research their own language use (Bloome et al., 2005; Brown, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Fecho, 2004). Focusing language instruction on students' own linguistic experiences has been shown to lead to substantial changes in students' content knowledge about dialects (Fecho, 2004; Godley & Minnici, 2008) and to rich student-centered discussions (Bloome et al., 2005; Godley & Minnici, 2008). Furthermore, Brown (2008) found that classroom activities that focused on the particular features of the dialects the students in his study spoke were more likely to lead to discussions of language and power than activities focused on language ideologies, which often stagnated in broad, unproductive discussions about hypothetical people and situations. Bergman's (2009) blog offers multimedia examples of her high school students' research on their own language use and the learning potential of such research assignments.

All three types of language instruction described above have been shown to increase students' content knowledge about the grammaticality and social uses of dialects, the natural variation of dialects found within any language, and the relationships among dialects, identity, and power. These approaches to language study are often used concurrently and converge in their goal to reveal and critique dominant relations between language and power, to create a dialogic classroom environment, and to leverage students' existing knowledge and uses of language for literacy learning. Within the small body of empirical research on these promising methods of language instruction, however, only two studies (Bloome et al., 2005; Brown, 2008) have analyzed the relationship between patterns of classroom discourse and students' sociolinguistic content learning, and none specifically examined the learning opportunities provided by inquiry-based discussions about dialects. Our reasons for viewing inquiry-based discussion as a promising instructional mode for language and dialect study are described below.

Inquiry-Based and Problem-Posing Instruction

Inquiry-based instruction (IBI) offers an especially appropriate approach to learning about language variation, identity, and power since IBI can provide students with opportunities to learn about current issues in sociolinguistics through sharing and debating multiple perspectives on and personal experiences with language. We use the term *inquiry* to refer to "the process of justifying beliefs through reasoning, conjecturing, evaluating evidence, and considering counter-arguments" (Wells, 1999, p. 89) through collaboration with others. Recently, researchers in the field of literacy have demonstrated that inquiry-based classroom discussions strongly support students' learning of disciplinary practices and content in ELA (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Nystrand, 2006). The positive learning effects of classroom discussions have been associated with improvements in students' understanding of literary texts (Applebee et al., 2003), improved reading comprehension (Nystrand, 2006), increased self-regulation

(Berry & Englert, 2005; McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006), enhanced writing performance (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 1998; Reznitskaya et al., 2001), and the increased capacity to critically examine the sociostructural forces affecting students' everyday lives (Martínez-Roldán, 2003).

Although this body of research on IBI in ELA classrooms has included studies of students' reading, writing, academic dispositions, and out-of-school literacy practices, scholars have not examined the instructional influence of inquiry-based discussions on students' understanding of language and sociolinguistic content. Given that IBI has been shown to positively influence students' learning in other areas of ELA—as well as other disciplines such as mathematics and science (Forman, Larreamendy-Joerns, Stein, & Brown, 1998; Scott, Mortimer, & Aguiar, 2006)—and since it encourages students to reason from their own ideas and experiences as well as disciplinary knowledge, it presents a promising approach to learning about sociolinguistic content.

Although there seems to be a general consensus among IBI researchers about the characteristics of a quality inquiry-based classroom discussion, important differences remain in terms of the kinds of instruction that constitute "best practices" in IBI (e.g., how students might construct a collective argument most effectively, and how to define the broader goals that IBI may achieve, such as learning disciplinary practices or engaging in critical literacy). We align our study with a particular branch of IBI: inquiry aimed at engaging students in authentic, disciplinary problems and issues to develop students' critical perspectives on the problem under discussion.

Keefer, Zeitz, and Resnick (2000) distinguished the goals of various types of discussions by describing the following four types of discussions that characterized the classroom talk of the students in their study: (a) critical discussion, (b) explanatory inquiry, (c) eristic discussion (defensive exchanges among students who valued winning an argument over understanding a conflict), and (d) consensus dialogue. The researchers argued for the superior instructional affordances of critical discussions in which students "obtain a clearer understanding of the topic through the understanding and accommodation of participants' divergent but informed viewpoints" (Keefer et al., 2000, p. 59). Understanding, in this sense, referred to the participants' ability to obtain knowledge about other participants' viewpoints as well as to acquire disciplinary knowledge of the issue presented as the topic of discussion. Keefer et al. found that discussions that were critical (i.e., discussions in which students marshaled evidence to mount various claims and counterclaims) demonstrated more robust literacy learning than discussions in which students worked toward consensus-building, argued for the sake of arguing, or refrained from co-constructed interpretations of the text.

Other scholars of IBI present similar goals for inquiry as disciplinary learning and democratic dialogue (e.g., Engle & Conant, 2002; Freire, 1970; McTighe, Seif, & Wiggins, 2004; Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008). We refer to this branch of IBI as *problem-posing instruction*, which we define as a pedagogical approach that engages students in "real" questions and dilemmas of the discipline they are learning (Engle & Conant, 2002) by "exploring essential questions" (McTighe et al., 2004, p. 26) through authentic discussion practices that require students to connect their own experiences

and prior knowledge with new discipline-specific content knowledge (Tharp, Estrada, & Yamauchi, 2000).

Drawing from this scholarship on IBI, the present study seeks to identify how students' engagement in an inquiry-based discussion about current issues in sociolinguistics—such as how speakers make decisions about when to code-switch between dialects in response to audience expectations and language attitudes—led to disciplinary learning about language variation, identity, and power.

Method

School and Research Context

This study was part of a larger, design-based study of inquiry-based grammar and language instruction. Design-based research views educational interventions, the contexts in which they take place, and the outcomes of such interventions as inseparable (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003). In design-based studies, educational interventions are refined and improved through multiple iterations and through examining how the intervention works in specific contexts. In this study, we worked with four ELA teachers to design and study students' responses to new kinds of grammar and language instruction. Many of the curricular units and lessons we developed, such as the one described in this article, were refined through multiple iterations as we studied students' responses to each unit or lesson. We also studied the ways in which the context of the school and of each teacher's classroom shaped how the curricular interventions were enacted and how students responded.

The 2-year study took place at a small public high school located at the edge of a Rust Belt city of 300,000 residents. The high school, which we call Greensburg High School, enrolled approximately 360 students in Grades 9 to 12, 99% of whom were African American and 99% of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. The authors, both White and speakers of SE but not AAVE, analyzed audio recordings of classroom talk, field notes, and students' writing for features of AAVE and SE. We concluded that most, if not all, of the students in the school were bidialectal, using both AAVE and SE in speaking and/or writing. A close examination of students' writing demonstrated their consistent use of SE grammatical features, and field notes and transcripts demonstrated that in almost every turn at talk, students used grammatical and rhetorical features of AAVE as well as features of SE. Although we (James and Amanda) are neither African American nor speakers of AAVE, we have studied sociolinguistics, the relationship between language and literacy, and AAVE and other dialects of English. Furthermore, one of us (Amanda) had published several other qualitative studies on bidialectal African American students' engagement in language and grammar instruction (Godley et al., 2007; Godley & Minnici, 2008).

Our beliefs about language are drawn primarily from research in literacy and linguistics and align with the sociolinguistic concepts that are embedded in national and professional standards for instruction in ELA. Furthermore, the three students at the

center of our study, Rich, Denisha, and Ivanna, had interacted with Amanda numerous times and established a rapport with her before she observed their small-group discussion and conducted interviews. Amanda had been observing the students' English class approximately 2 days per week since the beginning of the school year and had spent 3 days per week in Denisha and Rich's 10th grade English class for the entire previous school year. Ivanna was new to Greensburg High School and thus may not have been as comfortable with Amanda, an issue that we return to when we analyze her interview.

During the study, Amanda collaborated with the four ELA teachers at Greensburg High School to formatively assess students' knowledge and use of academic SE and vernacular dialects and to design appropriate, inquiry-based grammar and language instruction. One strand of the inquiry-based grammar and language instruction codesigned by the ELA teachers and Amanda was a 3- to 4-day instructional unit about dialects, identity, and power. During the first year of the larger study, the 11th grade teacher, Mrs. Allen, implemented the unit in her classes. The unit was then collaboratively revised and implemented again during the second year of the study by three teachers: the 9th grade ELA teacher, the 10th grade ELA teacher, and Mrs. Allen. Audio recordings, field notes, and student work were collected during the implementations of the unit in all of the teachers' classrooms. However, we chose to focus our study of students' inquiry-based learning about language on data from one small-group discussion that took place in Mrs. Allen's 11th grade class during the second year of the study because, like other researchers of inquiry-based learning (Engle & Conant, 2002; Keefer et al., 2000; Wells, 1993), we found that the fewer number of participants in the small-group discussion afforded us better opportunities to track individual students' argumentative moves and learning and to analyze the group's collaborative inquiry. Because the teachers and the students in our study had never been given the opportunity to discuss issues of dialects, identity, and power in an academic setting before the study, whole-class discussions in all the teachers' classrooms were characterized by the energetic participation of most of the students (numbering approximately 12 to 20 per class), and thus by simultaneous conversations and discussions that moved quickly between different issues and examples within the broader topic of language diversity. In contrast, the small-group discussions introduced during Mrs. Allen's implementation of the unit in the second year of the study were distinguished by more focused and sustained discussions of a single issue of language diversity and more student-to-student talk. Amanda observed and audio-recorded two of these small-group discussions; however, one discussion was excluded from the study because of the poor quality of the audio recording. James, who was a graduate student researcher for the study at the time, collected other data in Mrs. Allen's class and in other classes at Greensburg High School and took the lead on data analysis in this study.

Description of the Teacher, Students, and Instructional Unit

Mrs. Allen was a relatively new teacher, in her fourth year of teaching. She was White and had grown up in a poor, rural community in Iowa. Although she did not live in

the community in which her students lived, Mrs. Allen's life experiences seemed to parallel her students' struggles with poverty, use of vernacular dialects, and attempts to become the first people in their families to attend college.

The small group that is the focus of this study was composed of three students: Ivanna, Rich, and Denisha. All three students were African American and lived in close proximity to the school. Their discussion occurred on the last day of a 3-day instructional unit on language variation, identity, and power (see Appendix A for an overview of the unit) and a day after students had viewed and discussed *American Tongues* (Alvarez & Kolker, 1987), a documentary film about dialect diversity and language attitudes in the United States. On the last day of the unit, students were broken into groups of three or four and asked to discuss five questions related to language variation, identity, and power that were written by Mrs. Allen (see Appendix A for the questions). Students discussed these questions in small groups for 30 minutes and then as a whole class for 15 minutes.

Data Sources

Two data sources informed our analysis of the small-group discussion: (a) transcribed audio recordings and field notes from the discussion itself, which took place in October and was observed by Amanda, and (b) Amanda's interviews with Ivanna and Rich, two of the three participants in the discussion, at the end of the school year in May. The third student participant, Denisha, left the school shortly after the discussion took place and thus was unable to be interviewed. The interviews followed a loose protocol; Amanda shared the transcript of the small-group discussion with Ivanna and Rich, asking for clarification and elaboration on particular turns at talk through questions such as, "Could you say more about what you meant by this?" Ivanna and Rich were also asked why they thought Mrs. Allen taught the unit. The interviews took place at the end of the school year rather than immediately after the discussion because the interviews were designed to gather student perceptions on multiple inquiry-based grammar and language lessons that had occurred throughout the school year, not just the discussion that is the focus of this article. Because much of the interview focused on revisiting particular parts of the transcript of the discussion rather than relying on students' memories of the discussion, we do not believe the length of time between the discussion and the interviews compromises the reliability of the interview data.

Data Analysis

Data for the small-group discussion were examined in two ways to analyze both aspects of disciplinary content learning: the structural characteristics and the sociolinguistic content of students' collaborative talk. Our analytical method was influenced by Bloome et al.'s (2005) warning that "[a] convincing argument about what is happening and the meaning it has in and through a classroom event cannot be made through analysis of [discourse] structure alone" (p. 55). First, the transcript of the

discussion was segmented into *argument moves*, including claims, subclaims, evidence, counterclaims, and probes, to analyze students' collective argumentation. As we demonstrate later, this collective argumentation became more complex and accountable to sociolinguistic content knowledge as the inquiry-based discussion progressed. Second, the content of the students' argument moves was coded for alignment with current discipline-specific knowledge in sociolinguistics and for the level of specificity students used to make claims or provide evidence. Although we recognized that students might have had interpersonal reasons for not being specific in their comments, such as assuming that other bidialectal students would understand their perspective or avoiding making others feel uncomfortable, previous discussions led by Mrs. Allen about literature, discussions about language variation held earlier in the unit, and a number of the discussion questions asked students to explain or give specific examples of their claims. Furthermore, two of the students, Denisha and Ivanna, explicitly disagreed with each other at least at one point during the discussion. Thus, we assumed that students were generally comfortable discussing these topics with each other and were aware that being specific in their claims and evidence was highly valued in their English class, in general, and in this discussion, specifically. We therefore tracked (a) the frequency and distribution of argument moves and (b) the level of disciplinary alignment and specificity of students' claims and evidence as the students' collective argumentation developed over time.

Collective argumentation. We analyzed the quality of students' collective argumentation by drawing on C. D. Lee's (2006) coding system for inquiry discussions, which used Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation. Data were segmented into students' (a) claims, (b) subclaims, (c) uses of evidence in support of a claim, (d) counterclaims, and (e) probes (e.g., for clarification or elaboration purposes). We eliminated the distinction between evidence and warrants in our coding scheme since we found that the students in this study sometimes used these argument moves interchangeably. Further complicating our ability to extract warrants from students' discourse was the difficulty we encountered distinguishing evidence and warrants. In many instances, students' claims based on logical reasoning within the discipline of sociolinguistics, what some might call warrants, seemed to provide as strong evidence as empirical examples, as was the case when Ivanna challenged Denisha to reconsider her claim that Denisha spoke the same way in all situations (see Appendix B for transcript conventions):

> So, you talk a certain way for job interviews, but I mean, come on, I mean come on. You're going to [change it up] just a little bit. 'Cause I'm still the same, but I'm not gonna be "Well Yeah." You know what I mean? 'Cause that's not me, but . . . [you] talk for jobs and with your friends you talk a certain way.

In the excerpt above, Ivanna both incorporates evidence from a real-life example in which code-switching might take place and "explicates why certain grounds are relevant for the claim in contention . . . which entitle us to draw conclusions from accepted givens" (Forman et al., 1998, p. 532). In other words, Ivanna's response functioned to

provide both evidence to support her claim that "you're going to [change it up] just a little bit," as well as a logical line of reasoning within the discipline of sociolinguistics: People use language in different ways and for different purposes all the time.

To help us to understand and analyze the overall structure and quality of students' collective argumentation, we followed other literacy scholars' methods for studying inquiry discussions (Keefer et al., 2000; C. D. Lee, 2006) by creating a graphical representation of the argument moves for each of the discussion questions that students talked about (see Figures 1–5 below). This analysis helped us to determine the diversity of claims asserted by students and the overall quality of the discussion.

Sociolinguistic content learning. To operationalize students' content learning, we coded for sociolinguistic content knowledge, identifying each claim or piece of evidence as an utterance about the aforementioned features of learning: (a) language variation, (b) identity, and (c) power. All task-relevant utterances dealt with at least one of these concepts. Some student utterances incorporated aspects of more than one sociolinguistic topic, as in the following point made by Denisha: "Everybody don't want to hear that slang. And that stuff, that's not bein' you. What you're sayin'. That's stuff you develop from your environment." Denisha's response that "everybody don't want to hear that slang" was coded for the sociolinguistic topic of language variation. We coded Denisha's next utterance, "that's not bein' you," for the sociolinguistic topic of identity, and her final utterance in the example above, "That's stuff you develop from your environment," as both identity and language variation since both topics were implicated equally; one varies one's language in response to an environment, and one's environment shapes how one varies one's language (see Table 1 for additional examples of our coding of these sociolinguistic topics during this discussion).

Next, we identified the extent to which each claim and evidence for it aligned with foundational principles in sociolinguistics related to language variation, identity, and power (e.g., the grammaticality of dialects, the contextual variation inherent in language use, and the language ideologies that form the basis on which speakers are judged). We identified students' ideas as low, medium, or high in alignment with sociolinguistic content knowledge (see Table 1 for examples). Low-alignment utterances contradicted current sociolinguistic knowledge, medium-alignment utterances aligned with current sociolinguistic content knowledge in a superficial way, and finally high-alignment utterances reproduced the "real" issues and dilemmas in current sociolinguistics. For example, we coded Denisha's claim above as an utterance that was high in alignment with disciplinary content knowledge since sociolinguists posit, as Denisha did, that people stigmatize the use of slang in professional contexts and that home and peer environments shape people's use of various dialects and registers (Heath, 1983; Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003).

We also used the labels of low, medium, and high to describe the level of specificity of students' claims and evidence (see Table 1 for examples). Utterances that included generalizations about issues of power, identity, or language variation were coded as low; utterances that identified a context in which students confronted issues of power, identity, or language variation were coded as medium; and utterances that included

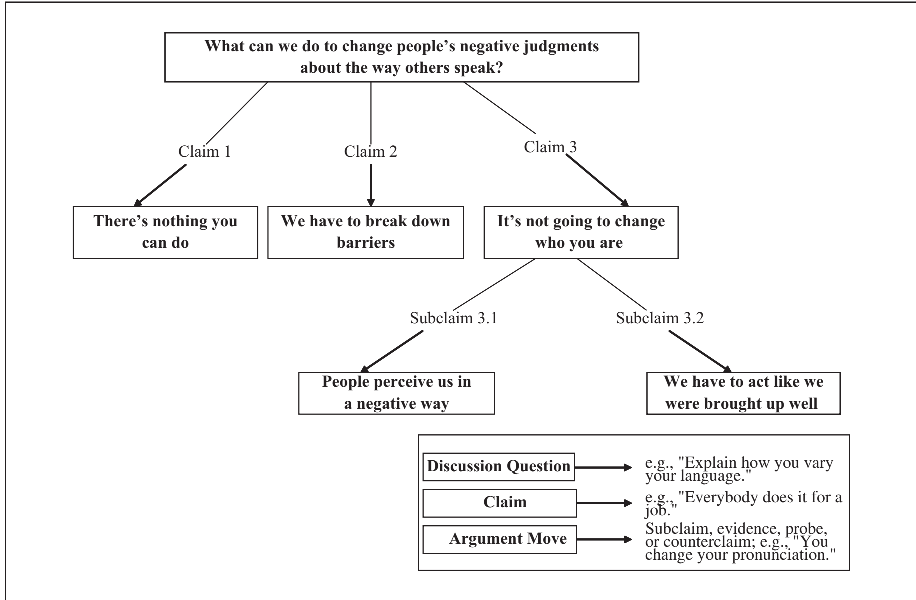

Figure 1. Collective argumentation for Question 1

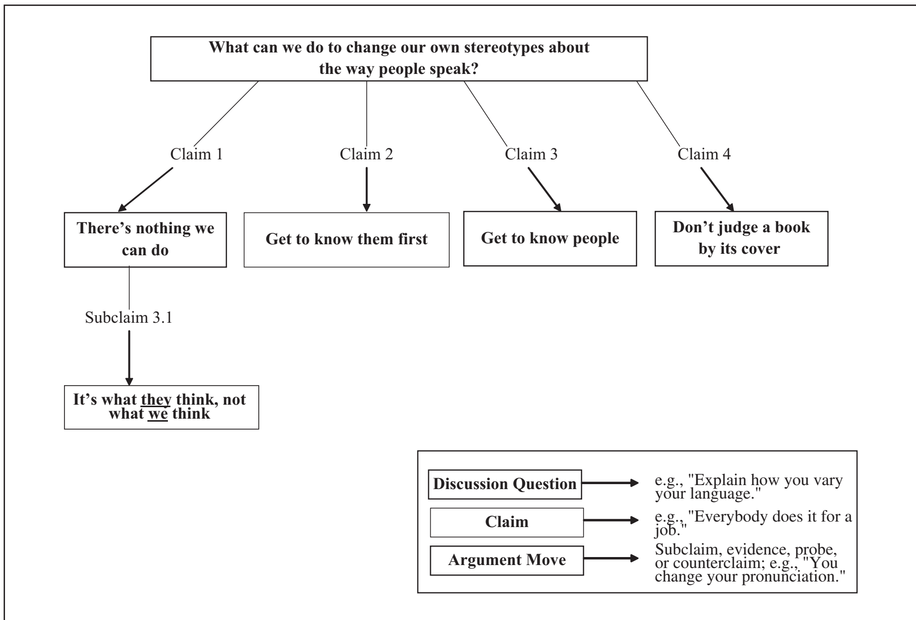

Figure 2. Collective argumentation for Question 2

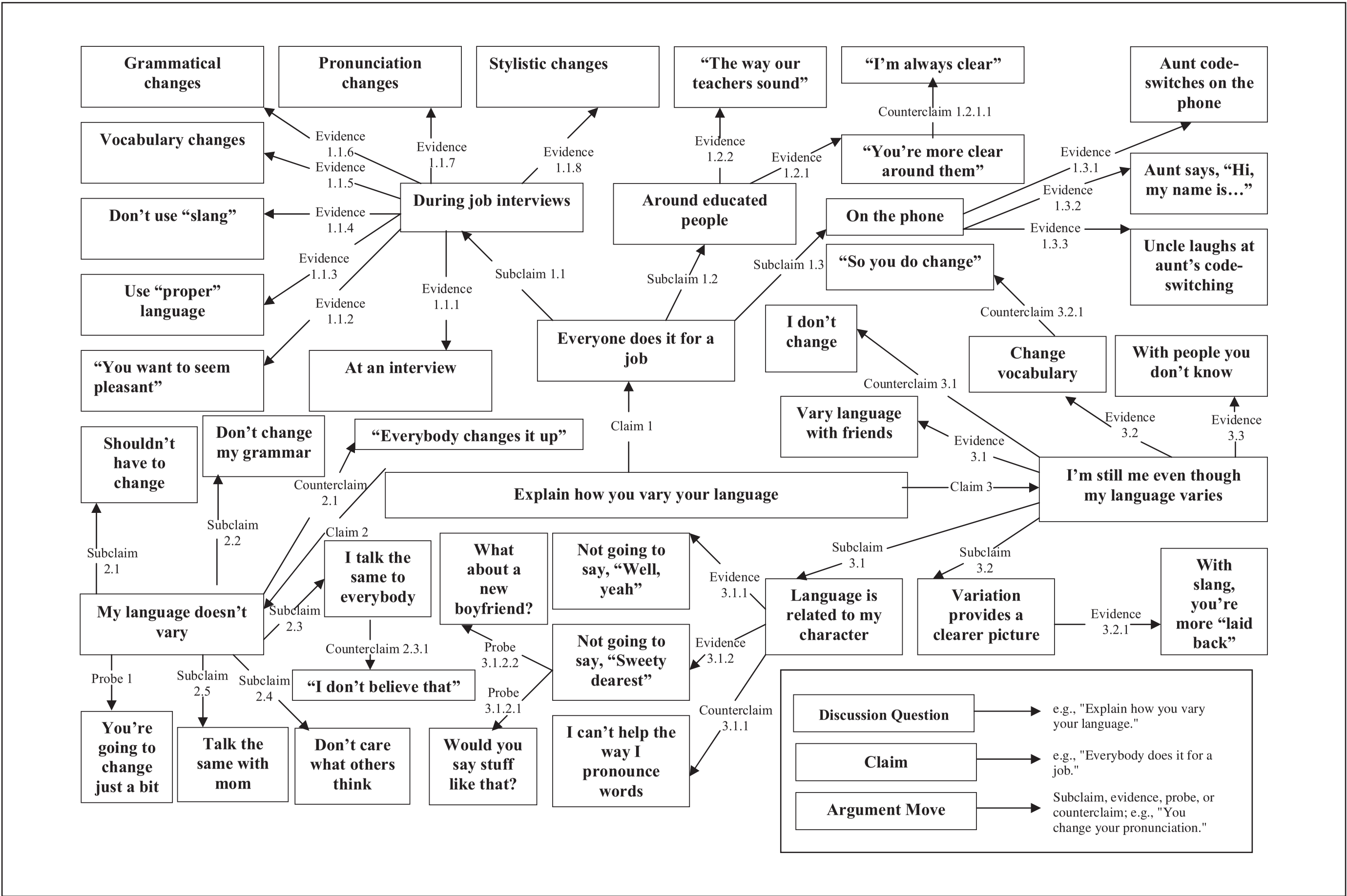

Figure 3. Collective argumentation for Question 3

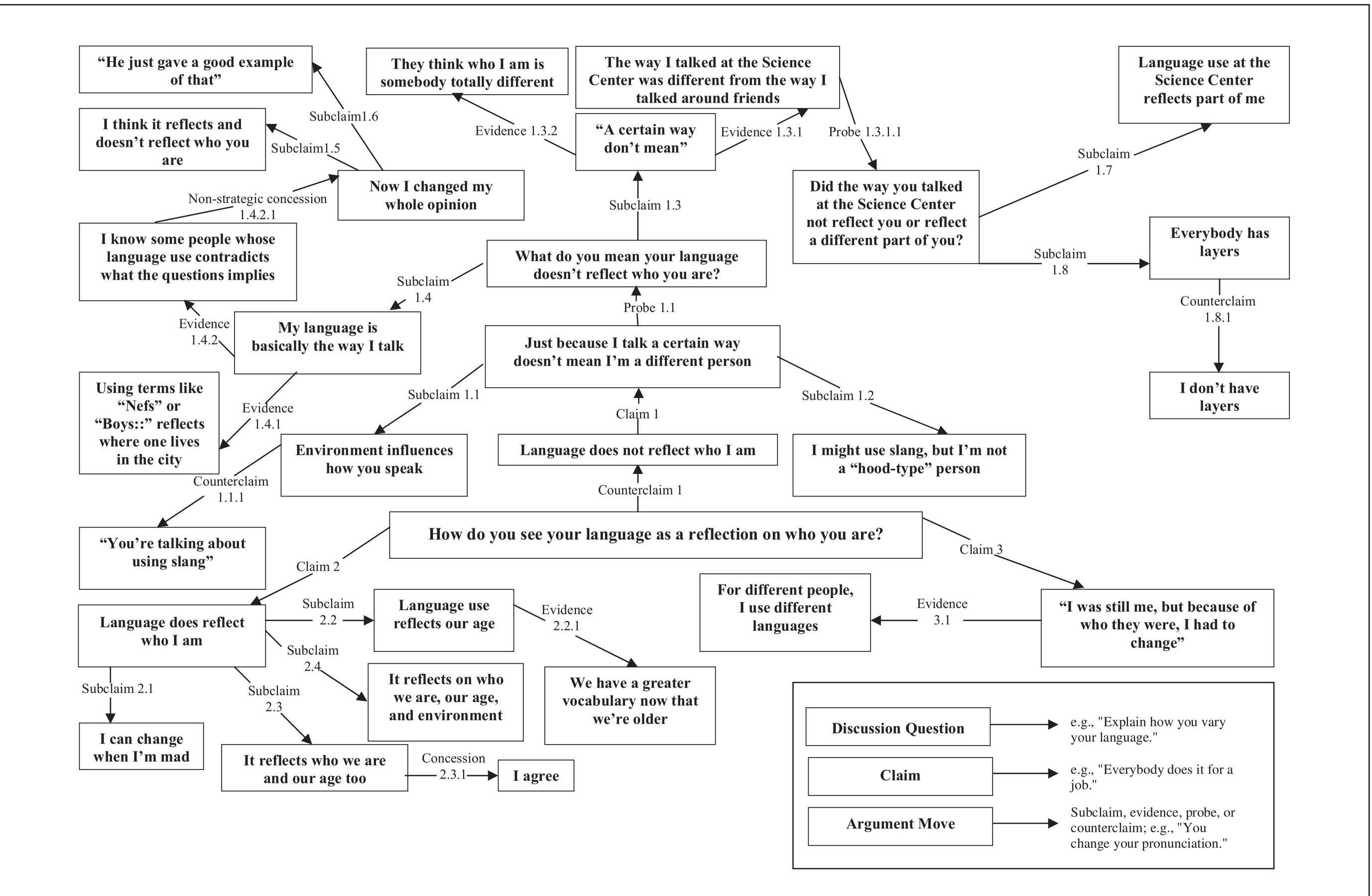

Figure 4. Collective argumentation for Question 4

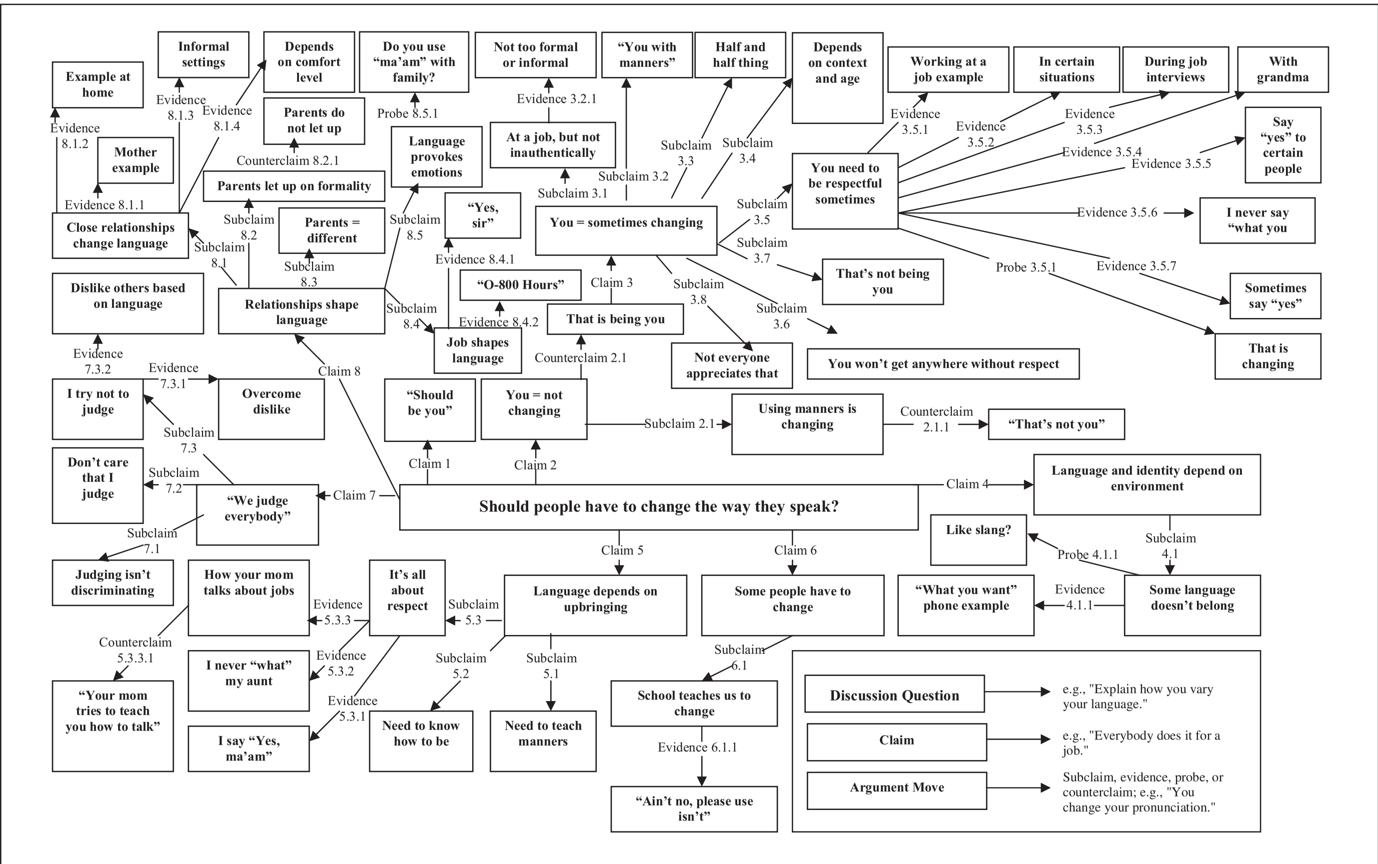

Figure 5. Collective argumentation for Question 5

Table 1. Coding Examples for Sociolinguistic Content, Specificity, and Alignment

Response	Sociolinguistic content	Specificity	Alignment
"I don't change my grammar."	Language variation	Low	Low
"The only time I change what I'm sayin'. I'll change my vocabulary. I don't change the way like . . ."	Language variation	Medium	Medium
"Oh, no me neither. I say 'yes' to my aunt. I never 'what' my aunt or 'huh.' I say 'yes.'"	Language variation, power, identity	High	High
"I don't think my language reflects who I am."	Identity	Low	Low

Sociolinguistic content codes included language variation, identity, and power. The specificity and disciplinary alignment of students' responses were coded low, medium, or high.

detailed examples of students confronting issues of language variation, identity, or power were coded as high. For example, the following utterance was coded as a claim about identity that was high in alignment with sociolinguistics and medium in specificity: "But you talk how you talk because of your environment that you were raised in." The claim was coded as medium in specificity because it posited a specific influence on people's language use ("your environment") but did not describe a specific environment or specific language features that were used in that environment.

Initial stages of data analysis were completed by James and then revisited by both the authors collaboratively. In the first iteration of coding, James coded the discussion transcript for the overall structure of its argument by coding for argument moves, such as claims and subclaims. In the second iteration of coding, James and Amanda collaboratively reviewed the initial coding and developed the disciplinary alignment and specificity codes for the second phase of coding focused on disciplinary learning, that is, sociolinguistic content knowledge. In the third iteration of coding, we collaboratively coded students' argument moves for alignment with disciplinary content knowledge and level of specificity. Codes that described students' collective argumentation were combined in graphical representations for each discussion question. In addition to reproducing the transcript data, the graphical representations provided an efficient and holistic depiction of the quality and structure of the argument that was developed in response to each question (see Figures 1–5 above).

Findings

Our analysis yielded three major findings: (a) The content of students' collective argumentation was aligned with current perspectives in the discipline, suggesting that IBI is a fruitful instructional mode for content learning about language, (b) the students'

deliberations of the discussion questions led to more specific and nuanced understandings of the relationship between language variation and identity and demonstrated their engagement in and contributions to "real" current debates in sociolinguistics (Engle & Conant, 2002), but (c) the students' discussion only touched on the language ideologies and power structures that shaped their own code-switching practices and the linguistic expectations they faced in academic and professional contexts. Below, we provide examples and discuss each finding in turn.

Quality of Discussion

Drawing on the research studies included in our review of the literature, we defined the quality of students' problem-posing discussion in terms of the range of perspectives that were asserted during the collective argumentation (Keefer et al., 2000), the extent to which students aligned their discussion with authentic issues in the academic discipline of sociolinguistics (Engle & Conant, 2002), and the extent to which students held each other accountable for their talk in terms of providing specific explanations and reasons for the claims that they were collectively constructing (Michaels et al., 2008). Overall, we found that the students' small-group discussion included multiple perspectives and claims about language, power, and identity, with the diversity of perspectives increasing as the discussion progressed. Although the entire small-group discussion focused on authentic issues in sociolinguistics, such as whether people should be expected to code-switch between dialects, the alignment of students' claims with disciplinary content knowledge and the specificity of students' claims and evidence increased as the discussion developed. We present our analysis of the quality of the discussion in chronological sequence; in other words, we first discuss Mrs. Allen's introduction to the small-group discussion task, then students' discussion of each question in order. This organization highlights the students' increasing alignment with sociolinguistic content knowledge and specificity as the discussion progressed.

Introduction to the small-group discussion. Previous research on IBI has demonstrated that teachers' framing of inquiry-based tasks influences the quality of student discussions (Forman et al., 1998; Scott et al., 2006). In our study, the students had had little experience participating in inquiry-based discussions before their 11th grade English class. The teacher, Mrs. Allen, began the class by providing the following guidelines for the small-group discussion:

> I want you to disagree with each other today. I don't want you to argue; I want you to have a healthy debate. So in your group, I'd like you to have a discussion with a healthy debate in it. These questions will hopefully spark those debatable points.

In this prologue to students' small-group discussions, Mrs. Allen suggested that multiple perspectives ("disagreeing with each other") would contribute to an effective discussion and that an effective discussion would include providing logical reasons for the claims that students could make such as would be included in a debate. In this short

Table 2. The Level of Specificity of Students' Claims and Evidence in Response to Each Discussion Question

	Q1 (n = 5)		Q2 (n = 5)		Q3 (n = 38)		Q4 (n = 24)		Q5 (n = 54)	
Specificity	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
High	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	10.5	3	12.5	14	25.9
Medium	3	60.0	0	0.0	14	36.8	11	45.8	16	29.6
Low	2	40.0	5	100.0	20	52.6	10	41.7	24	44.4

The n in each column refers to the total number of claims, subclaims, and pieces of evidence communicated by all students in response to the discussion question.

Table 3. The Level of Alignment of Students' Claims and Evidence With Sociolinguistic Content Knowledge in Response to Each Discussion Question

	Q1 (n = 5)		Q2 (n = 5)		Q3 (n = 38)		Q4 (n = 24)		Q5 (n = 58)	
Alignment	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
High	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	26.3	20	83.3	19	35.2
Medium	5	100.0	0	0.0	20	52.6	2	8.3	33	61.1
Low	0	0.0	5	100.0	8	21.1	2	8.3	2	3.7

The n in each column refers to the total number of claims, subclaims, and pieces of evidence communicated by all students in response to the discussion question.

explanation of productive discussions, Mrs. Allen made a distinction between a "healthy" debate and nonconstructive "arguing." She also represented the discussion questions as having no right answer since she referred to them as sparking "debatable points." This framing of the task, we believe, contributed to the quality of discussion we observed.

Discussion Questions 1 and 2: "What can we do to change people's negative judgments about the way others speak?" and "What can we do to change our own stereotypes about the way people speak?". Rich, Ivanna, and Denisha did not immediately begin a high-quality inquiry-based discussion. Their deliberation of the first two discussion questions was short and reflected few differing perspectives. Across these two discussion questions, students made seven claims that were supported by three subclaims (see Figures 1 and 2). Figures 1 and 2 present, in visual form, the students' argument moves, the content of the students' talk, and the ways in which the students' argument was constructed collectively for each question.

In their responses to the first two discussion questions, students did not provide evidence, counterclaims, or probes to increase the variety of viewpoints represented or specificity of claims and evidence. Students' claims focused primarily on the topic of power and language but were almost always low in specificity and were never highly aligned with sociolinguistic perspectives on language (see Tables 2 and 3). The cliché

"don't judge a book by its cover" was the consensus solution to the first question that asked students to consider how they might change their own stereotypes about the ways that people speak. As Brown (2008) found, we noted that broad discussion questions that encouraged hypothetical answers were not conducive to robust learning of sociolinguistic content.

Discussion Question 3: "Explain how you vary your language for different people/situations. Provide three examples of changes in accent, pronunciation, vocabulary (including slang), or grammar that you use in different situations.". The third discussion question functioned as a pivotal moment during the discussion when the content and structure of students' discussion changed from promoting a few, generalized, unsupported claims to expressing and supporting multiple claims with a greater variety of argument moves and explicitly reconsidering earlier argument positions (Keefer et al., 2000; Knoeller, 2004; Walton & Krabbe, 1995; see Figure 3).

The following example illustrates how Ivanna and Denisha engaged in a debate about whether or not "everyone," including Denisha, code-switched regularly. In this example, the students express mutually exclusive points of view, then challenge each other with counterclaims, evidence, and warrants. This exchange leads Denisha to change her point of view.

Ivanna: I ain't gonna lie. Everybody change it up a little bit. No, everybody do. You might not notice that you do, but you do.

Denisha: I don't. The only time I change what I'm sayin'—I'll change my vocabulary. I don't change the way like . . .

Ivanna: Yeah.

Denisha: I don't change my grammar. I would say vocabulary. When I'm trying to. In front of people I don't know. Like my aunt's friends or my uncle's friends, I change my vocabulary.

Ivanna: So you do change, you know? (See Appendix B for transcription conventions.)

In this short exchange, Ivanna actively engages Denisha to consider an alternative perspective on her own language use. Ivanna makes the claim that everyone code-switches, which Denisha rejects with the counterclaim that she, personally, never code-switches. Perhaps unwittingly, Denisha then admits to varying her use of vocabulary on occasion. Ivanna calls attention to the fact that vocabulary choices are part of one's language use and thus constitute Denisha's code-switching. Denisha's participation in the discussion from this point forward became more closely aligned with discipline-specific content knowledge by acknowledging her own code-switching, and incorporated more specific claims and pieces of evidence to support those claims.

In general, the content of students' discussion of Question 3 was more specific and more closely aligned with sociolinguistic content knowledge than was their discussion of Questions 1 and 2. This increase in specificity and content knowledge seemed to be related to the increase in the quality of discussion, as measured by the number and

Table 4. The Number and Frequency of Students' Use of Argument Moves in Response to Each Discussion Question

	Q1 (n = 5)		Q2 (n = 5)		Q3 (n = 43)		Q4 (n = 29)		Q5 (n = 58)	
Move	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Claim	3	60.0	4	80.0	3	7.0	3	10.3	8	13.8
Subclaim	2	40.0	1	20.0	10	23.3	12	41.4	21	36.2
Evidence	0	0.0	0	0.0	19	44.2	6	20.7	21	36.2
Counterclaim	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	14.0	3	10.3	4	6.8
Probe	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	7.0	2	6.9	4	6.8
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	4.7	3	10.3	0	0.0

The n in each column refers to the total number of students' argument moves in response to the discussion question.

range of argument moves (e.g., claims, subclaims, evidence, counterclaims). As Table 2 illustrates, during the discussion of Question 3, 11% of Denisha, Ivanna and Rich's claims, subclaims, counterclaims, and evidence were coded as highly specific and 37% were coded as medium specific, whereas in the discussion of Questions 1 and 2, 30% of claims were medium specific, whereas the remaining 70% were coded as low specificity. Considerable increases in disciplinary alignment were also seen in the students' response to Question 3 (see Table 3). Of the claims and evidence shared by the students, 26% were coded as highly aligned with the discipline of sociolinguistics and 53% of claims and evidence were coded as medium-level disciplinary alignment. In contrast, the students expressed no claims or evidence highly aligned with sociolinguistic knowledge for Questions 1 and 2, with 50% of claims and evidence coded as medium-level disciplinary alignment and 50% coded as low.

As Table 4 and Figure 3 demonstrate, this increase in the quality of the content of the students' talk paralleled an increase in the number and range of argument moves that addressed the three sociolinguistic topics under focus in this study (language variation, identity, and power). For the first time during this small-group discussion, students provided evidence for their claims (19 times), voiced counterclaims, and probed each other for additional explanation or evidence. In addition, students actively listened to and considered each other's divergent viewpoints. In the excerpt above, Ivanna's understanding of Denisha's perspective contributed to Denisha's nonstrategic concession (Keefer et al., 2000) that she had been code-switching and to Denisha's apparent greater understanding of the sociolinguistic principles that constituted the learning goals of this discussion. In addition, at the end of these students' deliberation about Question 3, when students were wrapping up a discussion of whether language use reflects "who a person is," Ivanna noted, "Okay, so then, I'm [funny] 'cause now I feel like I changed my whole opinion. I think both ways. I think that sometimes it reflects like, I mean, but then sometimes it don't, and he just gave a good example of

that." Ivanna's final comment demonstrates her active consideration of Rich and Denisha's perspectives, her willingness to change her position based on those perspectives, and her understanding of the value of examples, or evidence, in the consideration of divergent claims. As we elaborate in our discussion section, the specific wording of Question 3 seemed to encourage students to become more engaged in the discussion, consider multiple perspectives, voice more specific and disciplinary-aligned claims and evidence, and rethink and revise their points of view—all characteristics of high-quality inquiry-based discussions (Hadjioannou, 2007; Keefer et al., 2000; Knoeller, 2004).

Discussion Questions 4 and 5: "How do you see your language as a reflection on who you are?" and "Should people have to change the way they speak? Is it fair? Or is it a reasonable expectation? Explain.". As students deliberated their responses to Questions 4 and Question 5, the quality of discussion increased by all measures. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate the increased quantity of argument moves in the students' responses to Questions 4 and 5, and the increased complexity of the collective argumentation. Students considered and reconsidered previous claims as new evidence was shared, allowing the collective argumentation to take on a recursive quality. For example, during the discussion of Question 5, Denisha took up a claim that Rich had made during the discussion of Question 4. Rich had claimed that the term "boys::" is a characteristic term of a local neighborhood dialect; Denisha repeated this claim to assert that using this term in a formal setting such as a job interview would demonstrate a lack of "manners." This recursive aspect of the group's discussion contributed to the richness of the collective argumentation. In addition, students' counterclaims often encouraged other students to share new evidence, leading to new lines of argumentation, such as when students debated what it means to "really be you" in response to Question 5, presented below.

In their responses to Questions 4 and 5, students also voiced more specific claims and pieces of evidence, and the content of students' claims and evidence became progressively more aligned with current perspectives in sociolinguistics. Almost 22% of students' claims and evidence in response to Questions 4 and 5 were coded as highly specific, with 35% coded as medium specific and 44% as low. Although the percentage of low-specificity claims and evidence remained fairly constant throughout the 30-minute group discussion, there was a steady increase in the percentage of high-specificity evidence that students provided and a steady increase in the number of examples students shared to support their claims. Furthermore, taken together, students' responses to Questions 4 and 5 demonstrate a large increase in the disciplinary alignment of students' claims and evidence, suggesting that in this portion of the discussion, students increased their expertise in sociolinguistic content and academic argumentation in a short period of time.

In the following excerpt, we provide an example of the high quality of students' collective argumentation in response to Question 5. All three students participated in this exchange, used specific claims and evidence to construct an argument, elicited ideas aligned with sociolinguistic content knowledge, listened to and articulated multiple perspectives, and persuaded and were persuaded by their classmates to change their minds.

Ivanna: That's kinda like a good question. You could really get like into this question. I feel as though you should be you. But then—
Denisha: Should be you with manners.
Rich: That's not being you.
Ivanna: Yeah. So, that's not being you.
Denisha: It is being you
Rich: If you don't use it then—
Ivanna: Yeah. Then it's not you. I mean, it's not [your personality].
Rich: [xxx] I say "yes (ma'am)." Not all the time.
Ivanna: Oh, no, me neither. I say "yes" to my aunt. I never "what" my aunt or "huh." I say "yes."
Denisha: If you talkin' about manners like (could you xx).
Ivanna: Excuse me? Please and thank you? Stuff like that?
Denisha: No. Those are different. Then there's like you're not gonna get good at a job if you're like "Boys::, I want to work here." Like, give me a job 'cause that's what I'm [with]. Use manners. Know what I'm sayin'. Use manners. Don't go in there like that. Everybody don't want to hear that. And that stuff, that's not bein' you. What you're sayin'. That's stuff you develop from your environment. You know what I'm sayin'. Stuff like that.
Ivanna: So, basically it's like half and half. Isn't, no. [*In a teacherly voice*] "Ain't is not a word. Please use isn't." It's a half and half thing. Because I do sometimes feel that you should use it. (See Appendix B for transcript conventions.)

This excerpt from the transcript demonstrates what Johnson and Johnson (2009) called "the instructional power of conflict" (p. 37). They claim that controversy in classroom discussions should be encouraged rather than avoided since it can promote creative and new ways of thinking about disciplinary issues and dilemmas. Students in the above excerpt worked through their different understandings of what "being you" entails, and how "being you" relates to language variation. In contrast to Rich and Ivanna's initial agreement that "being you with manners" is not really "being you," Denisha counters that speaking "with manners" *is* "being you." Rich then proposes that the link between speaking formally and identity is based on whether one regularly uses formal language, which seems to lead him to realize that he does use formal language (such as "ma'am") on occasion and to reconsider his initial position. This example, in turn, seems to prompt Ivanna to reevaluate *her* position based on her personal experiences speaking formally to her aunt. The students then collectively clarify what they mean by speaking with "manners." Ivanna's notion of manners ("please and thank you") aligns more closely with the sociolinguistic concept of register, whereas Denisha's counter to Ivanna ("No. Those are different.") aligns more closely with an understanding of dialect, since it references "boys::," a term from the students' neighborhood-based dialect, as evidence of "bad manners" that no one wants to hear in a job interview. The excerpt ends with evidence that Ivanna, and potentially the other students, are thinking about language variation and identity in new ways. Ivanna concludes, "it's

like half and half," suggesting that she now thinks that more formal and Standard registers and dialects are, at times, reflections of her identity, especially when she uses formal language because she *chooses* to, or "feels you should use it."

By all measures, the 30-minute group discussion that students engaged in reflected high-quality inquiry-based learning and robust learning about sociolinguistics. In the 30-minute discussion, students made 21 claims, 46 subclaims, 13 counterclaims, and 9 probes and provided 46 pieces of evidence. More than half of all students' claims were medium or high in terms of specificity. Highly specific claims only co-occurred with medium or high disciplinary-alignment claims. That is, when students were very specific in their claims and evidence, the content of their talk reflected, partially or completely, current sociolinguistic perspectives. These findings suggest that the discussion questions that promoted highly specific, personally relevant, and experience-driven student responses (such as Questions 3–5) led to richer engagement with sociolinguistic content knowledge than more general, hypothetical discussion questions (such as Questions 1 and 2; see Brown, 2008, for a similar finding). The discussion also included multiple instances of the students considering new perspectives and thinking about language variation in new ways.

Evidence of student learning from interviews. The interviews with Ivanna and Rich, conducted several months after their small-group discussion, suggested that these two students understood the sociolinguistic principles that were reflected in the learning goals of the unit. When Amanda asked Ivanna why she thought Mrs. Allen wanted her students to consider issues of language, identity, and power, Ivanna responded,

> I think she hears slang on a daily basis and she wants us to realize that you do get judged not even just like us but even her, too like just in general that you do get judged based on the way you speak and that, pretty much that you do get judged and that's it—we all get judged and it's letting you know that—like that there are times and places to be you but in order to be I think successful, you do need to know how to speak and people take more I think of a liking to you if you do know how to speak and if you are professional.

Ivanna's response to this question recalls one of Mrs. Allen's anecdotes about her own code-switching practices at church in which Mrs. Allen's husband accused her of uncharacteristically "talking proper" with the pastor. In her response, Ivanna demonstrated (a) sociolinguistic content knowledge (people change the way they use language in different situations, people judge others based on the way they speak, and language is related to identity), (b) the ability to articulate and explore the relationships among language, identity, and power, and (c) the development of criteria for making choices about language use. Amanda's interview with Rich elicited a similar response. Rich noted,

> I think it was very important because mostly like everybody talks a different way, and to talk you communicate, and you really need to communicate with

people, 'cause if you don't have communication I don't know how you're gonna talk to anybody. So, you need to know how certain people communicate, like, if that's like—it's like learning a different language.

Rich's response similarly reflected his understanding of dialect variation and the relationship between language variation and social interaction.

Complicating Language Variation and Identity: "They Don't Even Know Who I Am". As evidenced in our analysis of the quality of the students' discussion, a theme that ran through the discussion was the connection between language variation and identity. Through their collective argumentation about this topic, students demonstrated their exploration of "essential questions" (McTighe et al., 2004, p. 26) in sociolinguistics and their reasoning about their own ideas and experiences (Tharp et al., 2000), both characteristics of high-quality inquiry. Current sociolinguistic and literacy research on adolescents has demonstrated that links between language variation and identity are not as straightforward and unidimensional as had been presumed (Kirkland, 2010; Rampton, 2005). For instance, in Kirkland's (2010) study of language use in an urban ELA classroom, a student named Maya wrote, "[I]n order to explain who I am, I have to use what people call Ebonics, but Ebonics alone don't explain me" (p. 301). Similarly, Rich, Ivanna, and Denisha complicated and questioned the link between language variation and identity in their responses to Question 4. In the following excerpt, the students responded to Question 4 by debating whether or not their language was a reflection of their identity and how their language use was shaped by the people around them.

Rich: I don't think my language reflects who I am. I might talk a certain way, but I'm not a different person.
Denisha: I know.
Ivanna: But you talk how we talk because of your environment that you were raised in. If you were raised, you know what I mean.
Rich: You're talking about usin' slang. I might use slang, but I'm not gonna be a hood-type person (xxx).
Ivanna: A gangster.
Rich: I do my business, I do my job. (xxx) have a job.
Ivanna: Is that the question?
Rich: Yeah. It says, "How do you see your language as a reflection of who you are?"
Denisha: I think my language is a reflection of who I am.

In this passage, Rich, Ivanna, and Denisha debate different understandings of language variation and identity. Rich began by asserting that his language use does not reflect who he is, but Ivanna and Denisha both probe and counter Rich's assertion. Ivanna argues that Rich's language use is a reflection of who he is since the "environment"

he was raised in leads him to talk like Denisha and her. Though Rich concedes that he speaks "slang," a term students often used for AAVE, he maintains that he may use slang but is not a "hood-type person." This exchange leads to the presentation of another point of view introduced by Denisha: My language *is* a reflection of who I am. In this passage, students use both evidence from personal experience and logical reasoning to question the relationship between language and identity. We view this characteristic of the discussion as evidence that the inquiry-based discussion contributed to valuable learning about language and identity. However, the students also expressed their belief that slang, or AAVE, was "hood-like," "gangster," and in opposition to "doing one's job." We view these claims as problematic in that they did not critically examine stereotypes about AAVE and the people who speak it, a point we return to in the next section.

Later in the discussion, Rich shared a specific personal experience that further enriched the students' deliberations about the connections between language and identity and that questioned stereotypes about African Americans and their language use.

Rich: I used to have a job at the Science Center. And I knew somebody there. We was all cool and everything. The way I talk around them is different from the way I talk around my friends.

Ivanna: Here.

Rich: Here. I will talk to 'em, but they just think I'm somebody who's totally different. They don't even know who I am. They just think who I am at work is different from who I really am. My language, that's basically about the way I talk. (xxx). So like people could think (people from) Greensburg they can say like "boys::" and they could be from a whole 'nother hood. So when she starts sayin' Nefs, I could think she's from Hilltop, but she (could be from) Larson.

Amanda: Do you think, chances are, she would be more likely to be from Hilltop if she used that?

Rich: Could be or couldn't be.

Denisha: Chances are.

Rich: I know a couple of people born and raised up on Hilltop who say boys:: and everything is boys:: . . . So I don't agree with it [Amanda's question].

Ivanna: Okay, so then, I'm (funny) 'cause now I feel like I changed my whole opinion. I think both ways. I think that sometimes it reflects like who you are, I mean, but then sometimes it don't, and he just gave a good example of that.

In this excerpt, Rich expresses frustration with his coworkers, who assumed that "SE" was not the way he "really talked" or who he "really" was. As the discussion develops, students identify and call into question what they see as a widely held belief that AAVE is the sole English dialect spoken by African Americans and that their speech is invariant across contexts. Ultimately, students complicate their initial concepts of identity by justifying their beliefs through reasoning and evaluating evidence from

their experiences. As Rich articulates the connections between language and identity by drawing on specific experiences at his job and his knowledge of local dialect variation, Ivanna reconsiders her initial position that language always reflects her identity and credits Rich for persuading her, through his use of evidence, to change her mind. As Ivanna expresses at the end of the discussion above (and like Maya in Kirkland's [2010] study), one's language use can reflect one's identity, but language does not determine wholly "who one is." In this excerpt, as in the previous one, the students' discussion supports research on the learning opportunities that are created when students have opportunities to verbalize their interpretations and share various, conflicting interpretations with each other (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

In his interview with Amanda, Rich further reflected on the multifaceted relationship between language and identity in his life:

> I guess back then I thought that language didn't reflect who I am, 'cause when I say—I am a person where you can't just judge me how the way I talk because I might be someone totally different, 'cause I've known a lot of street stuff and everything like that, but I'm also intelligent, and I know a lot of things; I've been to a lot of things, too. So it was like first I might—somebody might see me somewhere on the streets and when I'm talkin' to my friends a certain way, like, that doesn't mean who—who I really am 'cause I be on—havin' a job and on the fence and everything, (xxx), it don't reflect who I am 'cause I talk different ways to talk—to communicate with different people. That's how I do it.

Rich's explanation of the relationship between language and identity evidences his engagement in ongoing disciplinary discussions about the relationship between code-switching and identity (Kiesling, 2001; Rampton, 2005). In what might be seen as a development of his earlier contention that speaking with manners "isn't being you," Rich rejects the notion that "who he is" is reflected by any one of the ways in which he speaks and affirms, rather, his identity as a "book smart" *and* "street smart" person who leverages language differently with different people and for different purposes. Throughout Rich's reasoning, his experiences at work, school, and with friends provided the evidence he drew on to co-construct arguments about language variation, identity, and stereotypes. Ultimately, Rich's claims about his own code-switching were aligned with sociolinguistic principles and with perspectives on language variation that have been shown to support bidialectal students' development of academic language and literacy (Delpit, 1988; Sweetland, 2006).

The students' refusal to simplify their linguistic identities calls to mind other researchers' work on productive-inquiry-based discussions (e.g., Hadjioannou, 2007; Keefer et al., 2000) that have measured the success of student-led discussions not by the final consensus of the participants, but by the students' engagement in multiple perspectives. In the case of Rich, Ivanna, and Denisha, the students complicated the relationship between language and identity through their analysis of how code-switching informed "who they really are." At the end of the discussion, students had not resolved

the question of whether "who you are" is connected to or independent from language, environment, and the way one was raised, but their lack of resolution and consensus seems to point to their engagement in a productive learning experience.

Code-Switching, Language Ideologies, and Power. By the end of the discussion, all three students demonstrated their sociolinguistic understanding of language variation and code-switching by describing their own code-switching practices in particular contexts. However, the students' discussion included few critical examinations of the language ideologies and power structures that shaped what dialects and registers were considered appropriate for different contexts. Instead, students seemed to agree and accept that AAVE and other vernacular dialects would be considered "rude," "hood-like," and unprofessional. During Amanda's interview with Rich, Rich contrasted how he talked "on the streets" and to his friends with his knowledge and intelligence. And when Denisha argued that no one wants to hear slang or elements of the students' local dialect in a job interview, no one questioned why interviewers would judge job applicants negatively if they said "boys::" or "ain't."

At moments during the 30-minute discussion, students noted that their families expected them to use more formal registers with elders. But at other times during the discussion, students noted that pressures to code-switch, particularly into appropriate language for professional and academic situations, came from societal forces outside of their community. In the following excerpt, the students discuss the people in their lives who set expectations for code-switching and share their own expectations for others' language use in particular settings.

Rich: But when I got into school and all that, they taught me, that changed the way I was supposed to talk.

Denisha: Your mom is not going, you're not be [xxx] say well "go to your job interview."

Ivanna: But when you're little, if you notice, your mom do try to teach you like [xxx]

Denisha: [Teach manners] and manners will move you on to where you need to be. Respect.

Ivanna: When you grow up, then you know the right way to be. That's how I was. Okay, so. What we writing? So, in some cases. Basically, 'cause like. Well, what about you?

Rich: I put some people have to change the way they're speaking [xxx]

Ivanna: I think so—

Denisha: But I don't think that type of language should be in the professional world.

Ivanna: What, like slang and stuff?

Denisha: I wish somebody would answer the phone and like "What you:: want?" when I call in like can I, uh. I don't want them to say "What you want?"

Ivanna: We do, though. We judge everybody. You don't even realize. We judge everybody.
Denisha: I know I judge everybody. I don't care.
Ivanna: I try not to but.
Denisha: I don't discriminate against them. I judge.

In this excerpt, students identified teachers and parents who "taught them" where, when, how, why, and with whom they should code-switch. Denisha then identified "the professional world" as just such a place in which "that type of language" is not appropriate and imagines a situation on the telephone in which "that type of language" is used. Denisha later notes how she would judge someone who used "that type of language."

The exchange above presents multiple moments when students could have questioned why particular language varieties were viewed as "having manners" or why they themselves "judged everybody" based on their language use. But this kind of critical language awareness (Janks, 1999), an essential aspect of language instruction in ELA (Alim, 2005; Delpit, 1988; Godley & Minnici, 2008) was not realized. Although students were able to articulate and explore the relationship between language variation and identity through discussion, and acknowledge their own use of and attitudes toward code-switching, the students did not call into question who or what determines what counts as an "appropriate" use of language.

Discussion

Our analysis of the content and argument moves of Rich, Ivanna, and Denisha's inquiry-based discussion suggests that the students accomplished the learning goals of this unit by engaging in a high-quality, co-constructed collective argumentation through an inquiry-based discussion of language variation, identity, and power (Wells, 1999). Students provided evidence to support their claims, considered multiple perspectives on the issue at hand, and constructed more complex claims and understandings as the discussion progressed. The topic of the discussion—the relationships among language variation, identity, and power—was well suited to an inquiry-based, problem-posing discussion because, like interpretations of literature, it has no definitive answer, not even among sociolinguists. The small-group inquiry-based discussion provided opportunities for students to collaboratively question dominant beliefs about language use and sociolinguistic content knowledge and to articulate their understandings of language variation, identity, and stereotypes through democratic dialogue. We argue that inquiry facilitated students' achieving these learning goals in the following ways.

First, the collective, logical reasoning process constructed through the students' discussion allowed students to transform beliefs into claims backed by evidence. This transformation was revealed as students resolved the seemingly mutually exclusive claims, "everyone code-switches for a job" and "my language doesn't vary" with the tensioned claim, "I'm still me even though my language varies" (see Figure 3). Claims

were supported by evidence from students' personal experiences, and throughout the discussion students promoted the elaboration of claims and evidence with counter-claims, such as "So you do change [the way you use language]" and "I can't help the way I pronounce words."

Finally, students' sociolinguistic content learning was supported by IBI through their evaluation of evidence. Students' discussion of Questions 4 and 5 elicited the most counterclaims and probes and elicited almost all of the high disciplinary alignment and high specificity claims and pieces of evidence during the small-group discussion (see Tables 2–4). As one of our reviewers noted, students may have needed some time to allow the discussion to build momentum. Although we can appreciate how this could be the case generally, the immediate shift in the quality of students' collective argumentation occurred after Amanda prompted Ivanna, Rich, and Denisha to provide specific examples as they addressed discussion Question 3. This suggests that the specificity in the wording of the later questions increased the quality of the students' discussion as Ivanna, Rich, and Denisha became more adept at determining which evidence contributed to a line of reasoning that was accountable to knowledge, the discipline, and the learning community (Michaels et al., 2008).

However, our analysis also revealed several ways in which the learning potential of the students' discussion was limited by the design of the task they were given. As previously discussed, discussion Questions 1 and 2 were too broad and hypothetical to lead to specific claims and robust learning of sociolinguistic content. In addition, Amanda had to probe students multiple times to be more specific in their responses to Question 3, making comments such as, "Before you go on, that question asks you to give three examples." Thus, although students were able to engage in other productive aspects of the inquiry discussion on their own, they needed guidance to reach the level of specificity of claims and evidence that led to strong sociolinguistic content learning.

In addition, we noted a number of times during the discussion, such as when students were talking about manners, when the students seemed to conflate the sociolinguistic concepts of register, slang, and dialect. Conflating these terms seemed to hinder disciplinary content learning about language variation, identity, and power since it obscured the differences between race-based stereotypes grounded in the grammatical patterns found within vernacular dialects and widespread conventions of formality. Our findings support Brown's (2008) recommendation that language instruction needs to introduce and distinguish between the concepts of dialects and registers if it aims both to increase students' metalinguistic awareness of the dialects and the grammatical patterns they themselves use and also to foster critical discussions of prejudices against AAVE and those who speak it.

Finally, and perhaps most significant, we found that although the students recognized their own prejudices and admitted to judging people who used vernacular and informal language in professional contexts, they did not seriously question language ideologies that posit AAVE as inferior to other dialects of English. The gravity of this omission became clear to us when we analyzed data from Amanda's interview with Ivanna. After being presented with the transcript of her group discussion, Ivanna

immediately focused on grammatical features of AAVE in her speech, both questioning the transcript's accuracy and noting that the language sounded "crazy."

> Amanda: Okay so let's—let's keep going. So the next question is explain how you vary your language for different people and situations. Provide three examples of changes in accent, pronunciation, vocabulary including slang or grammar. And you said, "Everybody do it for a job, you know what I mean?"
> Ivanna: I couldn't have said that. That doesn't—that does not sound like me.
> Amanda: Okay.
> Ivanna: I mean, maybe there's some words that's left out or something, but this is sounding real crazy to me, like it's—it does not make sense. I probably said, "Everybody does it for a job or something."
> Amanda: Okay.

Later in the interview, Ivanna referred to the features of AAVE in her transcribed speech as "awful" and "horrible." We were surprised that after viewing a film that emphasized the history and value of AAVE and after two days of discussion in which the equal value of all dialects was stressed, Ivanna would express such a strongly negative response to the representation of her as an AAVE speaker. It is possible that because Amanda is a White SE speaker, Ivanna assumed that Amanda held negative views of AAVE and did not want Amanda to view her as "hood-like" or unintelligent. In any case, our findings suggest that inquiry-based discussions about language variation would be more productive if they explicitly asked students to deconstruct issues of power as they relate to both how students judge others' language use and also how students themselves perceive being judged because of their language use. Questions such as "Who determines what counts as 'proper' or 'slang' in a given situation?" and opportunities to explore student comments such as "I don't discriminate against them. I judge. I judge everybody" might provide richer opportunities for students to question language ideologies. This recommendation aligns with Brown's (2006) call for sequencing language instruction for bidialectal students from tasks that focus on students' exploration of their own language use to more macro-level issues about societal relationships among language variation, identity, and power.

Conclusion

Our study demonstrates how an inquiry-based discussion can provide bidialectal students with opportunities to engage in the kind of language study that is called for in literacy scholarship and in state and national standards for ELA. One conclusion of our article, then, is that language study within ELA classes should incorporate problem-posing discussions about language variation to leverage students' existing experiences for disciplinary content learning. Discussions such as the one we studied have the potential to introduce sociolinguistic perspectives on language variation that have been shown to support academic literacy learning and to provide needed academic legitimacy

for code-switching, especially since research has demonstrated how teachers' critiques of code-switching and vernacular dialects are harmful to bidialectal students' literacy learning (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Godley et al., 2006).

The views on language variation and identity that emerged during Ivanna, Rich, and Denisha's discussion indicated a more complex relationship between adolescents' identity and language use than has previously been acknowledged by educators. The students did not fully or primarily identify as speakers of AAVE. Based on this finding, we recommend that teachers and researchers be cautious about assuming that students identify wholly with one dialect, especially the vernacular dialect spoken in their communities. Given the fluid nature of students' linguistic identities demonstrated in this study and elsewhere (Kirkland, 2010; Rampton, 2005), we would like to see language instruction that includes Canagarajah's (2006, p. 598) notion of "code-meshing." Unlike code-switching, code-meshing recognizes the ways in which more than one dialect can be and is integrated for rhetorical effect. Code-meshing also recognizes the increasingly globalized and multilingual contexts in which we work and learn. Finally, we recognize that the quality of the inquiry-based discussion presented in this article was likely influenced by the metalinguistic awareness Denisha, Ivanna, and Rich had developed as bidialectal speakers. Further research on similar inquiry-based language instruction with other student populations, such as students who are White, who are bilingual, or who identify as SE-only speakers, could shed more light on how to engage diverse students in meaningful learning about language and how to begin to change the erroneous language attitudes widely held in the United States.

Appendix A

Overview of the Three-Day Unit on Language Variation, Identity, and Power

Day	Topic and activities	Learning goals
Day 1	• Whole-class discussion of students' experiences with language variation. Discussion questions:	• To introduce sociolinguistic concepts of *dialect*, *accent*, *grammar*, *vocabulary*, and *slang*.
	1. Have you ever been somewhere where you noticed that people spoke differently from you? 2. What did you notice that was different? 3. How did you react to this difference in speech? 4. How did the other people react to the way *you* spoke?	• To share personal examples of how people change the way they use language in different situations, how people judge others based on the way they speak, and how language is related to identity.

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

Day	Topic and activities	Learning goals
Day 2	• View and discuss *American Tongues*.	• To raise awareness of the plurality of dialects spoken in the United States. • To raise awareness of how people judge others based on the way they speak, and how language is related to identity.
Day 3	• Small-group discussion of *American Tongues* and related issues	• To articulate and explore the relationships among language, identity, and power in students' own lives.
	• Discussion questions:	• To help students develop tools to make choices about language use.
	1. What can we do to change people's negative judgments about the way others speak? 2. What can we do to change our own stereotypes about the way people speak? 3. Explain how you vary your language for different people/situations. Provide three examples of changes in accent, pronunciation, vocabulary (including slang), or grammar that you use in different situations. 4. *American Tongues* shows how closely *language* and *identity* (how we view ourselves) are related. How do you see your language as a reflection on who you are? In other words, what does your dialect say about your age, your culture, your neighborhood? 5. Some people resent the fact that they feel they must change the way they speak in order to be successful in certain situations. Should people have to change the way they speak? Is it fair? Or is it a reasonable expectation? Explain.	
	• Whole-class discussion based on small-group discussions.	

Appendix B

Transcript Key

(xxx)	inaudible speech
(words)	guess at speech
[words]	overlapping speech
= words =	immediately connected speech
WORDS	speech increases in volume
Wo::rds	syllables extended in speech
words	emphasized speech
words	researchers' comments for clarification

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Mrs. Allen for her collaboration and excellent teaching during this study. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Richard Donato, Ellice Forman, and Amanda Thein for their support and feedback on this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This study was funded by a National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship awarded to the second author.

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Bios

James S. Chisholm is an assistant professor of English education at Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky. His research focuses on inquiry-based discussions of language and literature in high school English classrooms.

Amanda J. Godley is an associate professor of English education and language, literacy, and culture at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She studies critical, problem-posing language and grammar instruction in high school English classrooms. Her research has been funded by an American Educational Research Association Research Grant and a National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship and has appeared in journals such as *Educational Researcher*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, and *Urban Education*.