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Language, identity, & social equity: educational responses to dialect hegemony

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ABSTRACT

For educators committed to promoting social equity, the question of how to address dialect hegemony is increasingly important. While linguists have long accepted the concept of dialect equality, educators have struggled with the issue, sparking a history of controversy and debate underscoring larger social issues of diversity and equity. For decades, educators have struggled with the most fundamental questions of when, how, and towards what purpose to address linguistic diversity. Drawing from the literature, debates, and practices in the U.S., this article examines the evolution of educational responses to the interrelated issues of disrespect for stigmatised dialects, expectations for Standard English in academic and professional settings, and students' developing sense of self and authentic voice. Different pedagogies for addressing linguist diversity are reviewed and compared, including code-switching, literary analysis, and code-meshing. These pedagogies build on each other and are moving in the direction of greater alignment, with important considerations for educators who seek to broaden their understanding of linguistic diversity as part of an overarching commitment to equity and social justice.

KEYWORDS

Dialect equality; dialect diversity; code-switching; literary analysis; code-meshing

The freedom to use one's mother tongue or, conversely, the requirement to learn a new dialect in order to be accepted and respected in certain settings, plays an integral role in social equity. In any given country, there is an accepted dialect that grants access to educational and professional opportunities – and there are many disrespected dialects, the use of which inhibits speakers from full participation and respect in many social contexts. This issue is not merely about the need to learn a new grammar or vocabulary; it involves issues of identity, respect, and belonging (Young et al., 2018). In a diverse and increasingly interconnected world, issues around language hegemony become increasingly important. Although this article draws primarily on U.S. examples and its most visible debates around Standard Written English (SWE) and African American English (AAE), the challenges it poses are applicable to every country where one dialect is designated as proper and all others treated as 'incorrect.' Language hegemony is visible even in the naming of dialects, for example, the 'Queen's English' or 'Standard German' (or even High German/'Hochdeutsch') compared to, say, the Cockney or Saxon dialects.

And, although much of the debates in the literature refer to compulsory youth education, these issues are relevant and necessary for scholarly discussions and pedagogical planning in adult education, as well. The education of adults happens in an extremely wide array of situations, but we offer two by way of example. First, as the world becomes ever more mobile, we will continue to

see a need for the education of migrants and refugees (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2021), in the form of language instruction, required ‘integration’ courses, continuing education for vocational recognition, and so forth. Second, are the many offerings specifically designed for low-income, marginalised, or otherwise disadvantaged adults, such as remedial education (e.g. GED preparation in the U.S.), targeted vocational training, financial literacy and other life skill training, prison education, and of course, language instruction. In all these educational situations, issues of power relations, respect, and mutual recognition are increasingly understood as essential to creating environments where learners feel recognised and therefore more likely to persist and succeed (Hoggan & Browning, 2019; West et al., 2013). The educator’s attitude towards and pedagogies regarding dialects and non-dominant language use will in large part determine the extent to which they enact common adult education ideals, such as honouring the background and uniqueness of adult learners.

Traditionally, educators have unreflectively insisted on teaching the dominant dialect. In the U.S., this has been (and is still often) done using the red-pen method of teaching ‘correct’ English, common in any environment where learners are required to submit writing assignments. The teacher, armed with a red pen, marks all deviations from Standard Written English (SWE). Any evidence of dialect other than SWE, especially an historically stigmatised dialect such as African American English (AAE) or Appalachian English, is an error to be corrected.

Over the past several decades, educators – many influenced by linguistics scholars and their views of dialect equality – have increasingly questioned both the method and purpose of this traditional practice. Yet applying the relatively uncomplicated linguistic principle of dialect equality to education has been far from simple. Questions of how to treat linguistic diversity in the classroom, how to both acknowledge and problematise the privileged role of SWE, and how to improve the literacy skills of all students have vexed schools, teachers, and parents alike. Whole communities have become embroiled in controversy over how – and even whether – to teach SWE.

Today, while there is still no single and widely agreed upon instructional paradigm poised to replace the red-pen approach, there is increasing agreement about the path forward. Educational methods such as code-switching, literary analysis of diverse texts, and code-meshing share a rejection of the dialect-as-error approach and a movement towards instruction that acknowledges, respects, and embraces the language’s many dialects and speakers. At the same time, the ongoing debate around the execution, goals, and purposes of these methods highlights the deeper issues of power and prejudice that educators—and society as whole—continue to grapple with.

This article provides a brief history of the debate around linguistic diversity in the U.S., and reviews three approaches – code-switching, literary analysis, and code-meshing – that have been proposed in response. We first outline the origins, pedagogy, and critiques of these methods. Finally, we discuss the common ground they share, along with what that commonality offers as guidance for current instruction and direction for further exploration by scholars and educators. Although much of the research and theory around this topic emerged from learning environments in the U.S., the implications and applications are important in contexts of adult and lifelong education regardless of the country.

Historical background in the U.S

Linguists have long asserted that all dialects are equal; from a linguistic point of view, no dialect is superior to another. The internal logic of each, the rules of syntax and style that govern it, are valid and appropriate for that dialect (Burling, 1973; Labov, 1970; Wolfram et al., 1999). This means that the hierarchy of dialects, where some are valued and others are stigmatised, is not a reflection of any intrinsic properties, but rather of the power and privilege of the users. In other words, there is nothing – linguistically speaking – that makes SWE better than any other dialect of English. The fact

that SWE has higher value in most academic and professional settings is a reflection of the social status that speakers of that dialect have historically held (Elbow, 1999; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Sledd, 1996).

Educators, on the other hand, have traditionally come from a dominant language viewpoint, as expressed through the red-pen approach. Through this lens, only SWE is correct, and all other dialects broken or degraded (Godley & Minnici, 2008). In many ways, this viewpoint was built into the system, since SWE has long been the sole expectation in the professional world for which the educational system prepared students. In the 1970s and 80s, linguistic scholars (Delpit, 1988; Labov, 1970; Smitherman, 1977) directly connected the linguistic theories of dialect equality to education, drawing a clear line between the stigmatisation of certain dialects and the corresponding lack of opportunity for students who speak them. These linguists pointed out that not only are dialect-driven patterns treated as errors, but all too often, educators see children who speak AAE as slower, less intelligent, and thus less able to learn SWE, perpetuating an ongoing cycle of negative expectations. Delpit (1988) described this as a ‘culture of power,’ where SWE is one of the necessary tools for entry, and access is often limited to only those who already speak the dialect.

The National Council of Teachers of English responded in 1974 with the ‘Resolution on Students’ Right to their Own Language.’ This document affirmed both students’ right ‘to their own language – to the dialect that expresses their family and community identity’ and teachers’ responsibility ‘to provide the opportunity for students to learn the conventions of what has been called written edited American English’ (National Council of Teachers of English, 1974). In reflecting on this landmark document, Smitherman credits linguistic scholars for calling on all teachers to recognise, encourage, and nurture dialect diversity, rather than eradicating it through *red pen* instructional methods (Smitherman, 1995, p. 23). She also noted the importance of providing instruction in SWE to speakers of dialect as a gateway to ‘the commercial world, the arts, science, and the professions’ (Smitherman, 2006, p. 12). This tension – between respecting diverse dialects and acknowledging issues of access granted by SWE – is the key feature of scholarly discussion around the issue of dialect equality.

Despite the 1974 Resolution, classroom practices and mindsets were slow to change. In the 1979 *King v. Ann Arbor* decision, a federal court ruled that the Ann Arbor school system failed to provide equal educational opportunity to African American students by categorising their dialect as a learning disability, rather than a language difference. The school district was mandated to train teachers in the legitimacy of AAE and to provide instruction that respects that dialect as a bridge to learning Standard English. The decision sparked controversy and confusion at the time – some people mistakenly believed that teachers would be forced to learn and then teach in AAE – but today it is widely recognised as ‘the first legal recognition that dialect status could be linked to academic achievement’ (Craig, 2016, p. 9).

In 1996, the Oakland, California School district made the decision to address these ideas directly by providing instruction in AAE to validate the dialect within school and assist speakers in learning Standard English. The resulting uproar, known as the Oakland Eubonics debate, made national headlines and unfortunately served to ‘deepen the rift between those valuing language diversity and those looking to use a dominant language as a means of promoting cultural assimilation’ (Coxwell-Teague & Lunsford, 2014, p. xviii). But it also gave rise to several new ideas and approaches for challenging both the method and purpose of traditional red-pen instruction.

Code-switching

Method and results

Against this backdrop, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, scholars (Adger et al., 1999; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wheeler & Swords, 2004) continued to seek successful (and less controversial) classroom strategies for respecting the validity of diverse dialects while using students’

'home language as a scaffold to standard school literacy' (Hill, 2009, p. 212). A few years after the Oakland debate, linguist Rebecca Wheeler and teacher Rachel Swords proposed repurposing a method borrowed from second language acquisition using contrastive analysis and a specific application of code-switching.

Code-switching is not, in itself, a new idea. Everyone code-switches, that is, changes communication style depending upon the context and audience. When used by linguists, the term refers broadly to the 'practical use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same context' (Myers-Scotton & Ury, 1977, p. 5). These alternations can be multidirectional and fluid, affecting individual words, whole sentences, or paragraphs. However, as applied by Wheeler and Swords and other educators, the term took on a narrower meaning of word-by-word, one-directional language substitutions from dialect to SWE. Used in this way, the term becomes closer to what linguistics call 'code-shifting,' i.e. moving from one language variety to another over the course of one's lifetime (Young et al., 2018, p. 31).

Wheeler and Swords argued that code-switching instruction gives educators the tools to show respect for diverse dialects while simultaneously delivering specific guidance in how to use SWE. As opposed to the red-pen, correctionist approach, this approach was designed to give speakers of AAE and other dialects point-by-point instruction on when and what to 'switch' to go from their home dialect to SWE. To accomplish this, Wheeler and Swords proposed a framework of informal vs. formal usage, where dialect is appropriate for home, social, or other informal settings, and SWE for school, work, and other formal settings. Once students understand when to use their home or school dialects, they are ready for instruction in the specific differences between the two. To accomplish this, Wheeler and Swords recommended that teachers facilitate the discovery of specific patterns of dialect and contrast them with the corresponding form of SWE in a chart.

For example, a chart could show that in AAE, the verb 'to be' is variant ('she is') when the state of being is transient, and invariant ('she be') when habitual. Thus, in AAE, the verb 'to be' can convey that someone is busy at this moment ('she is busy') or that they are always and habitually busy ('she be busy'). This nuance does not exist in SWE, where both would be written as 'she is busy.' Students, armed with these charts, can recognise patterns and know what to switch to go from their familiar dialect to SWE (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

Measured by year-end standardised tests, Wheeler and Swords reported 'stunning turnarounds in student achievement using these linguistically informed strategies' (Wheeler & Thomas, 2013, p. 374). In just one year of using this contrastive analysis and code-switching technique, Swords' African American students raised their test scores by 30%, closing a previously persistent achievement gap. Others, including Fogel and Ehri (2000) demonstrated similar results: students learning through traditional correctionist approaches showed no improvement, whereas students taught using contrastive analysis nearly *doubled* their score on a relevant section of a standardised test (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). In addition, the method proved successful at educating teachers themselves, many of whom were previously unaware that dialect variations were not simply errors to SWE. By analysing the rules, structure, and syntax of different dialects and comparing them to SWE, teachers indirectly gained a better understanding of diverse linguistic varieties and their speakers.

Reactions and critiques

Although many linguists and educators (Hollie, 2012; LeMoine, 1999; Sweetland, 2006) contributed to the development of code-switching and contrastive analysis curricula as a way to respect linguistic diversity and improve access to Wheeler and Swords (2004, 2006) work was arguably the most influential. Their straightforward, deliberately apolitical approach successfully sidestepped many of the controversies that derailed efforts like the Oakland initiative; their emphasis on moving students towards SWE and improving test scores gained the support of schools and parents. Yet, despite those successes, code-switching instruction has garnered strong criticism and raised significant questions around privilege, power, and identity.

For proponents, code-switching's contrastive analysis method is 'the most promising educational approach to date' for addressing the Black-White test score gap (Craig, 2016, p. i). These educators and scholars argue that the method effectively neutralises the red-pen approach and eliminates dialect-as-error thinking by reframing dialect as a valid language variety appropriate for informal, non-school situations. This reframing, they argue, avoids judgement and shaming of dialect speakers while giving them the tools to quickly and effectively switch to SWE as needed. Failure to convey this skill can severely limit students' success in higher education and their professional careers (Hoggan & Browning, 2019, pp. 36–37). Some, such as Meira Levinson, consider this a form of civic education, necessary to give disadvantaged students the tools to engage with and change dominant power structures (Levinson, 2012).

Building on Wheeler and Swords, researchers have also used contrastive code-switching and the framework of formal/informal to teach what and when to switch from AAE to SWE (Craig, 2016; Washington et al., 2014). Craig, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, developed a code-switching curriculum ToggleTalk®, which has shown success at helping young AAE-speaking students to become 'bi-dialectal, shifting or "toggling" back and forth between the two dialects for school and non-school purposes' (Craig, 2016, p. xiii).

At the same time, this approach has also sparked significant debate. For critics, this style of code-switching instruction is well-intentioned but fails to address questions of identity, self-expression, and self-esteem that students receiving this instruction experience. Young et al. argue that 'although code-switching emanates from well-intentioned educators and is pervasively accepted . . . as an educational strategy it forces African Americans to view their language, culture and identity as antithetical to the U.S. mainstream' (Young et al., 2018, p. 9). In fact, Cassar (2008) found that while students who received code-switching instruction demonstrated an increase in their acquisition of SWE, they simultaneously demonstrated 'more negative attitudes about themselves and their language use' (p. 16).

Critics have identified three key problematic aspects of the type of code-switching curriculum described by Wheeler and Swords. First, the framework of formal vs. informal is not value-neutral and instead perpetuates (albeit in a more subtle fashion than the traditional correct vs. incorrect framework) the stereotype that dialect is essentially slang, devoid of true communication value, and appropriate only for situations away from school or work (Baker-Bell, 2017; Williams-Farrier, 2017). This framework also ignores the reality that, for dialect speakers, many formal situations, such as church, weddings, or public speaking, are held entirely in dialect. Labelling these as uniformly informal casts dialect speakers' home lives, families, and cultures in a negative light.

The second key issue is that this instruction is one directional only, away from dialect and towards SWE, again subtly reinforcing the idea that dialect is a problem and undermining the message that *everyone* code-switches. This is especially true when code-switching is only being asked of African American and other dialect speakers. For those students, the underlying message may be that their authentic voice holds no rhetorical value and should be minimised rather than nurtured and developed (Young et al., 2018).

The third critique is that this method avoids questioning the social, political, and power structures that privilege one dialect of English, forcing certain people in our society to code-switch for increased academic, social, and professional opportunities. For these scholars, the reality that code-switching alone will not erase the enormous barriers to success that many from marginalised communities face has to be addressed as part of the curriculum (Godley & Minnici, 2008; Young et al., 2018). In other words, it is not enough to discuss only when and how; the reasons why (or why not) to code-switch should also be part of the discussion. As expressed by Martinez (2010), 'I reject pedagogical approaches that seek to leverage students' everyday language practices without problematising the racial, class, and linguistic hierarchies within which officially sanctioned "academic literacy" is constructed and privileged' (Martinez, 2010, p. 145).

As we look towards the future of instructional approaches for linguistically diverse learning environments, code-switching offers important insights on how to help students understand dialectal differences, along with when and how to employ different varieties. We have seen this approach be helpful in, for instance, a career preparation program in the U.S. designed for low-income adults (Hoggan & Browning, 2019). Consistent with the benefits and the critiques described above, this training program sought to respect students' dialects while also explicitly teaching them how and when to switch to the dialect most likely to be expected to them in the office environments where they hoped to work. With high completion rates, job placement rates, and student satisfaction, this program demonstrates at least some utility in the code-switching approach.

It is essential, however, that we acknowledge the crucial question of students' reaction to and internalising of the underlying messages of this approach and the need to situate this instruction within the larger social issues of race, power, and privilege – even while acknowledging that access to and instruction in SWE is helpful, arguably necessary, to expand students' opportunities for personal and professional success. For these reasons, we believe that two additional methods—literary analysis of diverse texts and code-meshing—offer important insights for educators who wish to leverage and expand on the successes of code-switching instruction while at the same time addressing the concerns raised by critics of the method.

Literary analysis

Method and results

Like code-switching, literary analysis is not a new idea or educational technique. In fact, it has been a standard in many English classrooms for decades. Familiar assignments include discussion of different authors' work, with analysis of their overall rhetorical style, including use of metaphor, dialogue, exposition, lyricism, or humour. Such lessons are designed to give students better insight into how language works and inspiration as they develop their own writing skills. Although most adult education contexts do not normally engage in literary analysis, per se, they can, sometimes do, and arguably *should* teach and promote various forms of critical analysis, and therefore may be informed by these practices.

Historically, these English classroom lessons favoured literature written in SWE as the model of good, correct writing for students to follow. However, over the past decade, scholars have also seen this method as an opportunity to explore dialect differences through the analysis of diverse literature (Baker-Bell, 2020; Devereaux, 2014; Hill & Fink, 2013; Williams-Farrier, 2017). This allows for a richer, more nuanced discussion of language than code-switching alone, by prompting students to engage more meaningfully with language variation (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 14). While some of these scholars see literary analysis as an adjunct to code-switching instruction, others are expressly searching for alternatives. As Williams-Farrier puts it, 'research on . . . the problems of code-switching inspired me to explore new comparative rhetorical approaches to African American Language and literacy instruction' (2017, p. 234).

For those who see literary analysis as an adjunct to code-switching, diverse texts can provide additional dimensions and contexts (Devereaux & Wheeler, 2012; Hill & Fink, 2013). For example, teachers can draw on novels like *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* to demonstrate how the authors switch between SWE and AAE at different moments to reflect differences of speaker, audience, and situation. Comparative analysis of these mentor texts can allow the class to explore not just the mechanics of when and what to code-switch between the two dialects, but also the reasons, context, and effects of switching. In this way, 'students also learn to critically question language, power, society, and identity on the path to deeper engagement in dialectally diverse literature' (Devereaux & Wheeler, 2012, p. 98).

Other scholars see a literature-inspired approach as a direct rebuttal to the narrower focus of code-switching and its potentially negative effects on students' self-esteem (Baker-Bell, 2020; Williams-Farrier, 2017). Baker-Bell calls her approach an 'anti-racist black language pedagogy via literature,' using works such as the young adult novel, *The Hate U Give* as a conduit to 'dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and students' internalisation of it' (2020, p. 13–14). She offers this novel as an example of her approach because the protagonist switches between dialects as she navigates the worlds of school and home, giving African American students an opportunity to see the realities of their own lives and language use reflected in literature. Although focused primarily on the specific needs of African American students, this approach is designed to offer 'all students a critical linguistic awareness and windows into broader conversations' about language, identity, and power (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 18).

The analysis of diverse texts can also be an opportunity to highlight the strengths of different dialectal styles or language traditions. For example, a teacher could use a text from Toni Morrison or a speech by Martin Luther King to demonstrate how those authors were influenced by the African American oral tradition to effectively employ rhetorical features such as repetition, alliteration, or parallelism. Through an exploration of diverse authors, students can discover a variety of rhetorical skills which can be used by 'writers from every racial/ethnic background to improve their "persuasive writing style"' (Ampadu, 2004, p. 137). In contrast to code-switching's 'either/or' view of dialect, this approach takes an 'and' view, where knowledge and understanding of different dialects can help build a better reader and writer in SWE. By reframing dialect as an asset that can be adroitly managed rather than a challenge to be suppressed or overcome, 'students' rhetorical skills are enhanced and their language attitudes ... are positively transformed' (Williams-Farrier, 2017, p. 2).

Reactions and critiques

Literary analysis has long been a mainstay of language arts and writing instruction. However, it is difficult to say if this approach is also an effective method for addressing the specific needs of diverse dialect speakers. Indeed, the goals of some of these pedagogies – to develop students' linguistic awareness; deepen their understanding of language, power, and identity; nurture an effective writing voice; and build on the skills inherent in different dialects to strengthen SWE – are so wide-ranging and ambitious as to defy easy assessment. Therefore, it is not surprising that relatively little research exists to quantify the success of these approaches. In contrast, the goals of code-switching instruction—to improve students' use of SWE as measured by standardised test scores—are clearer and more easily demonstrated.

But for some proponents, the primary advantage of this approach is the very breadth of goals and scope (Ampadu, 2004; Baker-Bell, 2020; Williams-Farrier, 2017). As opposed to code-switching's more narrow focus on moving students away from dialect towards SWE for academic and other 'formal' settings, these curricula aim to build on and broaden all students' understanding and awareness of language, asserting that everyone benefits 'when we encourage diversity and explore the culturally rich linguistic strengths of ALL students' (Williams-Farrier, 2017, p. 255). This wider perspective is also intended to mitigate the potentially negative effects of code-switching on students' perceptions of themselves, their language or culture. By demonstrating that diverse texts are worthy of legitimate scholarly analysis and incorporating literature that reflects students' lived experiences with language and the intersecting issues of race, class, and privilege, these approaches highlight the positive contributions of dialect and dialect speakers to our ever-evolving language and culture.

Perhaps the best argument in favour of a diverse literature-based approach comes from the background statement which accompanied the landmark 'Resolution on Students' Right to their Own Language.' This statement explicitly rejected simplistic contrasts of dialects and called for deeper analysis of language and how a student's skills in one dialect could be leveraged to improve

their skills in SWE. ‘Tapes, drills and other instructional materials which do nothing more than contrast surface features . . . do not offer real options’ (National Council of Teachers of English, 1974, p. 15). In contrast, the statement encouraged teachers to look for texts that show ‘both the literary and linguistic artistry’ (p. 15) of diverse dialects. Doing so has the potential to expand the discussion beyond sentence-level differences of dialect to an exploration of linguistic purpose, self-expression, and rhetorical effectiveness. Finally, it is especially important for adults from diverse backgrounds to see themselves represented in the classroom texts, including in linguistic diversity, as it is empowering and contributes to internalised images and beliefs that they belong and can succeed in the learning environment (Hoggan & Browning, 2019).

Code-meshing

Method and results

Unlike either code-switching or literary analysis, code-meshing is not a pre-existing educational method or even a pre-existing word. Instead, it is a term initially put forward by Vershawn Ashanti Young (2011) to differentiate his approach from the type of code-switching instruction exemplified by Wheeler and Swords. As discussed earlier, critics of code-switching instruction identify three key areas of concern: the formal vs. informal framework, the one-directional shift towards SWE, and a lack of critical discussion around power, identity, and culture embedded in language. For critics, these inherent characteristics of code-switching instruction create a view of dialectal difference that is separatist and subtractive in nature, one that tells students to compartmentalise their language uses and strip evidence of dialect from their academic or professional writing. By contrast, code-meshing, both as a word and a pedagogical approach, is designed to create a merged, integrated, and additive mindset, one which encourages students to use all their linguistic skills concurrently and ‘fosters the blending of vernacular languages and dialects of English in speaking and writing’ (Young et al., 2018, p. xv). From a purely linguistic point of view, this process could still be called ‘code-switching,’ ‘but since so many teachers be jackin up code switching with they “speak this way at school and a different way at home,” we need a new term’ (Young, 2011, p. 67).

In practice, code-meshing pedagogies can draw upon many of the same methods previously discussed, including contrastive analysis of different dialects’ grammatical systems and literary analysis of diverse authors’ rhetorical styles. The key difference is the purpose of the instruction and the goal for students’ writing. Rather than *telling* students what and when to switch, code-meshing seeks to give students the tools to make their own well-reasoned rhetorical decisions so they can ‘exercise identity and agency within their language use’ (Lee & Handsfield, 2018, p. 161). In this way, the approach is complex and demanding of students, requiring them to ‘master the dominant varieties of English’ to the extent that they can then learn to make strategic choices about ‘how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways’ (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 598).

Empowering students to make these decisions means giving them ‘as many language tools as possible’ (Greenfield, 2011, p. 58). This includes specific instruction in the mechanics of SWE, since the understanding and use of SWE in academic writing cannot simply be ignored (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 38). But it also means a broader inquiry into language itself and how different linguistic styles are used, perceived, and understood from varying cultural perspectives. For example, lessons can include the writing of literacy autobiographies where students reflect on their own experiences with language, identity, and belonging. Students can also explore how the same content may be written very differently depending on the audience, context, and purposes, or analyse how other writers effectively negotiate adherence to or deviations from SWE. In short, the goal is to help students ‘develop a critical consciousness of the effects of their choices at an individual and institutional level,’ including an understanding of how norms and expectations affect readers’ perceptions (Greenfield, 2011, p. 58).

With this emphasis on individual agency and self-expression, code-meshing is, of the three approaches discussed in this article, the most concerned with the development of students' personal writing voice, one that the student can authentically deploy in a variety of contexts. According to Young (2011), instructional methods like code-switching, with their emphasis on dialect separation, force many students to focus on suppressing or hiding their dialect at the expense of writing expressively and effectively. This suppression results in writing that is ineffective in either dialect or SWE and is instead a 'stilted middle-brow discourse' disassociated from the writer's true voice or experience (p. 65). By allowing students to draw upon their own dialectal traditions more freely, code-meshing is designed to help students fully realise their communication objectives with 'art, effect, voice and style' (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 415).

Writer's voice may seem unimportant in academic or professional writing; traditionally, many may think of these as 'relatively impersonal – if not objective or neutral – and therefore voiceless' (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, p. 236). Yet, scholars have demonstrated that a personal voice, one which weaves naturally between dialect and SWE, can be both appropriate and effective in a variety of settings, including business, politics, and academics (Campbell, 2005; Smitherman, 1995; Young, 2011). In fact, Smitherman (1995) found that when teachers graded thousands of papers for a national writing exam, the papers that 'demonstrated "Black Expressive Discourse Style" correlated with *higher* (not lower) scores' (Young et al., 2018, p. 7). This is consistent with other scholars, including Villanueva (2006), who assert that students of colour often find their professional or academic writing voice in the narrative traditions of their cultural heritage.

Reactions and critiques

Code-meshing is arguably the most ambitious of the methods discussed here, seeking to achieve all the positives of code-switching and literary analysis, while also empowering students from all dialectal backgrounds to become stronger, more effective and authentic writers. For some critics, this ambition is both unrealistic and impractical. The risks, they say, for students who do not fully conform to SWE are too high – and not comparable to the privileged position of scholars who have already demonstrated mastery of SWE in other writings (Gevers, 2018; Kubota, 2016). In addition, critics point to the inherent difficulty of assessing and critiquing code-meshed texts, especially for teachers who may not have the knowledge or support to parse multiple dialects or language varieties. Relying simply on a teacher's "gut feeling" or "informed opinion" that a student's use of code-meshing is not rhetorically effective . . . begs the questions of whether [they] are the ideal judges of rhetorical effectiveness' (Schreiber & Watson, 2018, p. 96). This environment, critics argue, has the potential to render code-meshing more performative than authentic, where the search for unusual, unexpected language turns into 'linguistic tourism' (Matsuda, 2014, p. 482). Lastly, some students may prefer not to code-mesh; instead, they may well choose to prioritise meeting academic and professional expectations for SWE over 'projecting a particular identity in (or pushing against standards through) their writing' (Schreiber & Watson, 2018, p. 96).

Proponents, on the other hand, point to the ever-evolving nature of language and how digital communications, pop culture, and globalisation all combine to cause an increased intermixing of language and dialects. Rather than a perk of the privileged few who have already demonstrated their mastery of SWE, code-meshing is open to all, and empowers students to work from within the system using SWE to challenge the linguistic status quo and the power structures it represents.

In addition, as dialects of English are more alike than different, code-meshing is more natural for students than a forced separation of dialect. According to Young, students can grasp code-meshing more intuitively because it reflects the way people already speak and write. Thus, code-meshing is a 'more reality based and practical approach than the traditional encouragement of code-switching, [with] the limiting expectation that students should learn multiple varieties of English and learn how to employ them discriminately' (Lee, 2014, p. 317). This is important because even when dialect speakers *want* to fully suppress their original dialect and shift entirely to SWE, their first

dialect will often break through. The lasting influence of original dialect on lifelong speaking and writing patterns is simply one of the ‘linguistic facts of life’ (Lippi-Green, 1997). This means that that ‘asking students to cleanly switch from one English variety to another is not uniformly possible’ (Young et al., 2018, p. 5). Instead, code-meshing instruction seeks to show students how to purposefully and successfully do what many are unconsciously already doing when speaking and writing.

Finally, advocates point to their fundamental commitment to educate and empower students to make well-informed rhetorical choices. The point, they assert, is not to force everyone to code-mesh or to ignore norms and standards in a linguistic free-for-all. There are times and places where any deviation from SWE will be perceived as error and could cause stigmatisation for the writer. But rather than telling students what to do in those situations, code-meshing seeks to show them how to navigate expectations and negotiate language for themselves, with a full understanding of the risks and benefits of creatively circumventing ‘the rules.’ This in turn reframes the assessment process. Instead of focusing primarily on grading the writing produced, educators can shift their focus to the writing process itself, with the ultimate goal of increasing students’ metacognitive awareness of language and the effects of their language choices. In this way, teaching and assessing, like the act of writing itself, become a negotiation to ‘find the right balance between authorial intentions and community expectations, writers’ voices and reader uptake, writerly designs and audience collaboration’ (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 64). Within this negotiation, some students may choose to write exclusively in SWE; others may choose to incorporate their own dialect in ways large or small. But for all choices, there should be rhetorical or communicative intent and an understanding of how that intent is interpreted by readers.

By giving students these tools, code-meshing seeks to directly confront one of the chief criticisms of code-switching instruction—that code-switching unintentionally marginalises and separates speakers of dialects, ignoring the emotional and psychological costs of switching to SWE. For many African Americans, the type of compartmentalised code-switching advocated by Wheeler and Swords is deeply emotional and difficult, provoking ‘conflict not only intrapersonally . . . but interpersonally, with other African Americans’ (Young et al., 2018, p. 3). Fear of ‘acting White’ or losing a central core of identity and culture can cause some students to resist this type of instruction all together. What’s more, all of this conflict is in the service of avoiding prejudice and discrimination based on language use – prejudice that all too often people of colour will continue to experience regardless of their language use. The promise that SWE is racially neutral, providing equal opportunity to all, is a myth, one that disregards the racial realities many students face each day (Greenfield, 2011; Young, 2011).

Code-meshing, by contrast, seeks to empower students to integrate all their various forms of English and navigate language on their own terms. Instead of continuously switching between separate and compartmentalised verbal identities, students can operate from one cohesive place, making their own decisions regarding SWE and dialect according to rhetorical purpose, context, and goals. By equipping students to use SWE while also granting the freedom to question its place of privilege, this method ‘interrogates notions of which languages are “correct” or “appropriate” . . . and broadens how to approach writing for linguistically diverse students’ (Lee & Handsfield, 2018, p. 159).

Conclusion

Linguists, and their views of dialect equality, have had a fundamental and lasting impact on education’s views of diverse dialects. Based on their influence, educators have – over the past several decades – increasingly sought ways to respect and embrace the linguistic value of dialects while acknowledging and examining expectations for SWE. Wheeler and Swords’ code-switching, as the first of these curricula to gain wide, mainstream acceptance, was influential in opening

classroom doors and minds to the idea of dialect equality and encouraging teachers to set aside the red-pen method. Their contrastive analysis approach continues to offer educators a structure for examining grammatical differences.

At the same time, code-switching's framing of formal vs. informal, the one-way push to SWE and the lack of critical inquiry into language, power, and identity is limiting and problematic. Additional methods – including literary analysis of diverse authors and code-meshing – build upon code-switching's foundation while expanding its focus and addressing many of those limitations. We especially appreciate literary analysis' focus on the literary and rhetorical value of multiple dialects and code-meshing's focus on empowerment, individual agency, and voice. That said, there is still much to discuss about diverse dialects in the classroom, and these pedagogies are not the last word. Many more are developing, including translanguaging, multilingualism, and plurilingualism. While important differences exist, these approaches share an overall commitment to engaging in a deeper understanding of language itself, building on students' own language skills, and inviting critical discussion of power, culture, and identity.

As we look towards the future, we want to acknowledge two considerations affecting diverse language use in adult education classrooms. First is the fact that English is increasingly the *lingue franca* across the globe, and thus used in diverse ways. In preparing for their academic and professional futures, native English speakers will benefit from greater facility with a multitude of dialects and varieties of English, including African American, Spanglish, and others. Such fluidity between dialect variations may well be more important than strict adherence to SWE in a globally interconnected world.

The second consideration is that educators also need support and guidance in understanding dialectal differences. Often in the U.S., for example, White instructors are teaching diverse students, and/or diverse students are in majority White classrooms. The issues of race, power, identity, and belonging in these situations cannot be ignored. Instructional methods where White teachers tell Black students about their own language, or when and how to switch that language to avoid discrimination, are inherently problematic and divisive. Therefore, the critical questions of who is teaching and who is learning, along with what is written and for whom, all need to be part of future educational approaches. Above all, we need to look for ways to respect language differences while also using common elements of English (or any given language) to find greater connection.

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