



---

Spring 2007

## African-American Language and American Linguistic Cultures: An Analysis of Language Policies in Education

Julia Deák  
*University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Deák, J. (2007). African-American Language and American Linguistic Cultures: An Analysis of Language Policies in Education. 22 (1), Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol22/iss1/6>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol22/iss1/6>  
For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

**African-American Language and American Linguistic Cultures: An Analysis of  
Language Policies in Education**

# African-American Language and American Linguistic Cultures: An Analysis of Language Policies in Education

Julia Deák

*University of Pennsylvania*

This paper aims to analyze explicit and implicit policies pertaining to the use or treatment of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in educational practice using Language Policy and Planning frameworks. Status planning for AAVE and acquisition planning for Standard English (SE) often intersect in this domain, with acquisition planning for SE sometimes resulting in the raising of status for AAVE. The linguistic culture is analyzed through a review of language attitudes literature and analysis of the public reaction to the Oakland Ebonics controversy. The analysis indicates that the public objects to policies which seem to be aiming primarily to raise the status of AAVE, while the public tolerates those that argue for acquisition planning of Standard English in order to raise educational achievement. This holds true even though the latter may do just as much to raise the status of AAVE in schools.

## Introduction

In language policy research, theory can be used to explain the phenomena observed in individual cases, and conversely, the facts of individual cases can push theory to the next level. In this paper, the phenomenon of the Oakland controversy and the lack of controversy over Los Angeles' Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP) are analyzed through the lens of Language Policy and Planning (LPP) theory and are ultimately explained by the respective incongruence and congruence of the associated policy documents with the linguistic culture in the US. LPP theory is also illuminated and pushed by this case, as it shows how a policy that explicitly maintains the status of the standard as language of instruction and promotes its acquisition succeeds in doing so through implicit policy that raises the prestige of the vernacular in schools.

In order to argue these points and provide details on how the Los Angeles AEMP model works, this paper is organized in the following way. First, some background information is given to explain the context

in which this discussion takes place. A historical sketch of AAVE in education is given to familiarize readers with the policies to be analyzed. Also, an explanation of various possible labels for the language variety in question are discussed, as well as the linguistic features which distinguish the variety and are stigmatized to varying degrees in the larger community. Next, the author analyzes education policy documents under two headings based on Cooper's (1989) categories of LPP: acquisition planning for Standard English among AAVE speakers and status planning for AAVE. Siegel's (1999) taxonomy of programs that use vernacular dialects is used to examine the relevant details of policies and programs that have been implemented in order to aid acquisition of SE and literacy among AAVE speakers. This is done in order to categorize the educational practices under discussion. It also illuminates several important details about the programs as revealed in the texts of their policy documents and practices. These details include the programs' stance towards the language varieties and the question of whether or how cultural sensitivity is realized as a component of each program. In the status planning section, previous studies on language attitudes and ideologies towards AAVE are used to determine the variety's status (Cooper 1989, Collins 1999) and the linguistic culture (Schiffman 1996) in which the AAVE policies stand.

The final section draws everything together by analyzing the policies and practices around AAVE in education in terms of how they address acquisition planning goals for SE and status planning goals for AAVE. Their congruence or incongruence with the linguistic culture and the extent to which they are able to implement educationally sound practices suggest how successful or long-lived they might be. This paper is not a program evaluation and cannot actually give new evidence for the success or failure of individual programs, but its conclusions suggest directions for future research and have implications for other contexts in which culturally alienated minority groups are struggling for educational equality.

### Background on AAVE in Education

In the US context, education policy is largely a local matter; there is no national curriculum and little federal oversight of schools. While state governments do impose curriculum or testing requirements, many decisions and initiatives are taken by individual school districts. For this reason, the policies under review here are mostly local ones. In particular, the analysis will focus on the text of several policy documents produced in California between 1980 and 2000. All of the policies can be traced to a 1979 federal district court case in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in which the judge found that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School was providing inadequate educational opportunities to African-

American children because differences in their language were not addressed by the school.

In February 1981, two years after Ann Arbor, the California State Board of Education passed a policy on "Proficiency in Standard English for Speakers of Black Language" (see Appendix 1). The policy aims "to provide equal educational opportunities" to students "who are speakers of Black language" through "oral language development" and other strategies. According to Greg Geeting of the California Department of Education, this policy, which was recently reviewed and retained as an active policy, does not require schools to do anything, but merely provides guidance towards the creation of programs implementing the policy (personal communication, July 21, 2006). In this case, the policy led to the development and implementation of a Standard English Proficiency (SEP) Program by the Oakland Unified School District in September 1981 (Council of the Great City Schools 2006). The Standard English Proficiency Program became a statewide phenomenon with 25 participating school districts (Schnaiberg 1997).

One can already see that the main goal of the above policies is educational justice and opportunity for African-American children, though language instruction is the primary focus of the efforts described. More specifically Standard English, and acquisition planning regarding it, is the focus of these policies. The first truly local policy document which will be analyzed here is the famous 1996 Oakland School Board resolution on Ebonics (see Appendix 2). This document was produced in response to a report by the African-American Task Force in the district which found that students in one school in which the SEP was used were reaching higher levels of achievement than students in other schools. This historical context would indicate that the resolution was aiming to implement the task force's recommendation to expand the program. However, the wording of the document put little emphasis on increasing Standard English acquisition rates or even on boosting achievement among African-American students. Instead, the resolution was focused on AAVE under the label "Ebonics": It put the most emphasis on defining the variety as a language separate from English, recognizing the "unique language stature" of its speakers, possibly using this reasoning as justification for pursuing bilingual education funding, and resolving to respect and "maintain" this language in the schools. In this way, the Oakland Resolution is an overt act of status planning, a declaration publicly bestowing prestige onto a language variety that in the greater linguistic culture had little status or prestige and moving it into the domain of education. This action was met with great public resistance.

In contrast, the second phenomenon under review is the policy, planning, and practices of the Los Angeles Unified School District, which also aim to implement programs that respect children's home language varieties, but which frame the program's goals in terms of a need to raise

academic achievement among African-American students through culturally responsive pedagogy and programs that facilitate "Academic English Mastery." In Los Angeles, status planning is done at a grassroots level through professional development programs, curriculum guidelines, and program advisors who observe and work with the teachers of Standard English Learners (SELs), and not by fiat.

In this way, language planning goals interact with educational objectives. The language planning goals in this context are both status planning and acquisition planning goals, and they can be seen as very different or even contradictory. That is, the status planning goal of expanding and improving AAVE's status, and ending social stigmatization, racism, and classism towards its speakers sometimes clashes with the acquisition planning goal of helping all students master standard or "academic" English and appropriate it for themselves so that they can succeed in school and the workforce. The pattern of public outcry shows that the public is opposed to the first goal, not the second. However, cultural alienation from schooling is a major obstacle to school success in this "involuntary minority" population (Ogbu 1993), and this makes the success of the status objective a necessary condition for the success of the acquisition objective. It is hoped that analysis of this difficult case can not only illuminate the role of educational institutions and policies in changing language attitudes in the larger society, but that it might also shed light on the intricacies of our concept of "language planning and policy," especially the dialectic between written policy documents and the practices they espouse.

#### *Labels*

Before any discussion can begin, an explanation of the labels being used for various language varieties is needed. In a study utilizing open-ended interviews, Speicher and McMahon (1992) found that there was no emic term for the dialect being referred to here as AAVE, though half of the participants said they would call it "slang," while "street talk" and "jive" were also mentioned. One participant said if she and her family and friends were speaking it, "we wouldn't call it anything" (Speicher & McMahon 1992: 389).

The present paper refers primarily to "African American Vernacular English" for several reasons relating to precision. First, we are talking about something spoken by children who are growing up in the United States and not about everyone in the international African diaspora; the alternate term "Ebonics" was originally coined as an umbrella term for all "Black speech sounds" (Smith 1972, as cited in Baugh 2000), and though it may have lost that connotation in more recent use, it remains an imprecise term that defines language in terms of its users as opposed to actual features (Baugh 2000). AAVE, on the other hand, is the term used in most of the recent literature by linguists who collect

data on its features and use. Second, any choice of labels is also seen by some as an alignment with one of two schools of thought regarding the origins or linguistic heritage of the variety. The label "AAVE" identifies the variety as a type of English, and this is seen by some as perpetuating the hegemony of English (DeBose 2005). However, the point which needs to be made is that AAVE speakers speak a rule-governed language variety which is very similar, but not the same as Standard American English in terms of syntax, lexicon, and phonology. In most cases it is mutually intelligible with SE and should be seen as a truly American speech form. The present author believes linguists have successfully shown that while it can claim some African heritage, such as the tense/aspect system (Rickford & Rickford 2000: 153), AAVE has too much in common with other Englishes to be seen as a re-lexified African language (McWhorter 1997; Rickford & Rickford 2000). Finally, we are talking about vernacular forms, mostly stigmatized nonstandard syntax and phonological changes that interfere with reading, which are objectionable in educational contexts precisely because they are seen as non-standard and of an informal register. This is why we call the variety in question AAVE and not African American Language (AAL).

A few subtle notes on "standard" English are also in order. In contrast to the lack of an emic term for AAVE, "hyper-correct National Network English," the language supposedly spoken on national television network news programs, seems to have an emic label called "talking proper" or "proper English" in some African-American communities. Hoover (1978) uses the term "talking proper," following work by Mitchell-Kernan, and the participants in Speicher and McMahon's (1992) study refer repeatedly to "proper English" in their answers to open-ended interview questions. This kind of "hyper-correct" standard language can be a very stigmatized variety when used for intragroup communication among African-Americans, although it seems that it is not the grammar, but the pronunciation, supra-segmental features, and lexis which may have this effect.

Hoover (1978) introduces a variety called "Standard Black English" which, in contrast with AAVE, is viewed as acceptable and unstigmatized in mainstream, formal contexts. Standard Black English is defined as speech "characterized by standard syntax" and sometimes "varying degrees of Black vowel patterns, ethnically marked supra-segmental features, and Black lexical items" (Taylor 1971, as cited in Hoover 1978: 69). This language variety shares some of the properties of AAVE from a linguist's point of view, but from a layman's point of view, it represents a balance between the need for a language to be expressive of culture and identity by containing identifying elements and the need for Blacks to avoid stigmatized features in many situations.



This subtlety among language varieties is the reason why a superordinate term such as "African American Language" (as in DeBose 2005) is not used in place of "AAVE" in this paper. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that AAVE is in no way linguistically inferior to any other variety; it is only social stigma which has kept it in the "vernacular" position.

#### *Synopsis of Linguistic Features*

AAVE is characterized by systematic differences from Standard American English (SE) in the domains of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and style. It shares some features with Southern dialects of American English, but it has persisted in northern cities where it differs dramatically from the varieties spoken by people outside the urban centers. The most commonly noted phonological rules are the absence of a 'th' phoneme, the simplification of final consonant clusters, and simplification of some vowel diphthongs. As far as syntactic differences, linguists who study AAVE mention negative concord, copula deletion in rule-governed circumstances, absence of third person singular marking on verbs, and a tense-aspect system that uses "be" and "been" to express more tenses or aspects than Standard English. Vocabulary items such as "crib" (meaning "house or apartment") and "bad" (meaning "good") are also cited. In terms of pragmatic or macrolinguistic features, AAVE is characterized by speech acts such as "signifyin'" and by genres such as "playing the dozens," preaching in a style that elicits audience participation, etc. (Smitherman 1986).

Although some people's negative attitudes towards non-standard dialects prompt them to equate AAVE with slang or "street talk," Smitherman (1986) points out that AAVE is not the same as slang, which she defines as "forms of speech that are highly transitory and limited to specific subgroups" (52). Scholars estimate that 60%-90% of African-Americans have used some AAVE features at some point in their lives, which may include use of Standard Black English (Kifano & Smith 2005: 89; Smitherman 2005: 49). This means that AAVE features are used by preachers, teachers, parents, and children, as well as the more sensational segments of society who engage in illegal activities and were often associated with AAVE because they were the exclusive focus of early research on the dialect (Smitherman 2005: 57). The Los Angeles Unified School District reports that their research identified 80% of the African-American students in the district as AAVE speakers (or "Limited Standard English Proficient") (Los Angeles Unified School District 2002).

The findings on patterns of use indicate that many or most "AAVE speakers" are bi-dialectal to some degree, or in other words, do not use all AAVE features all the time. All languages have different registers, and style-shifting occurs naturally as speakers encounter different situations, different speakers, etc. As the data on language ideologies shows, African American speakers are aware of these situational differences and think

that different speech varieties are appropriate in each case. In school, the most stigmatized features are syntactic deviations from standard forms and perhaps phonological omissions which can be interpreted as reading errors. Learning to successfully negotiate the range of language varieties means being able to proofread one's writing and monitor one's speech for AAVE features.

#### **Acquisition Planning for Standard English among AAVE Speakers**

Parents, school officials, and the general public agree that children educated in the US must master Standard English if they are to be successful. There are many pedagogical practices that have been tried with the aim of encouraging minority children's mastery of academic language and success in literacy and school. These various practices have different implications for the status of the two varieties in school and for the treatment of children's home cultures in the curriculum and classroom. This section explains the different pedagogical options and analyzes the texts of AAVE policies to determine which practices they espouse.

The first pedagogical choice to be made is whether the vernacular will be allowed in the classroom at all. While parents might be afraid that children will not learn Standard English if they are allowed to use the vernacular some of the time in school, this is not likely to be the case. It is understandable that laymen would think that "time on task" is important, and that the best way to learn SE is to banish all other varieties from classroom use, but research shows that such extreme measures are not necessary (Siegel 1999). In fact, banishing the vernacular is clearly not by itself a sufficient tactic in today's urban school contexts, since children are not successfully being socialized into use of SE under such conditions.

Educators and educational researchers have experimented for many years with using the vernacular to teach the standard. This practice is based on transitional and maintenance bilingual education practice internationally, though in many cases the vernacular language is much more different from the standard or school language than AAVE is from Standard English (Rickford 2005: 30-33). There are many ways and degrees to which the vernacular can be acknowledged or used in pedagogical practice. Siegel (1999) names these approaches "instrumental," "accommodation" (citing Wiley 1996) and "awareness."

The most extreme school language policy would be to give the vernacular an "instrumental" role, that is, to conduct school entirely in the vernacular, use the written vernacular form exclusively (at least at first), and teach all subjects through the vernacular. This is what is done in Malaysia, for example, in a context in which maintenance and status planning for the vernacular is very important and where the vernacular

(in this case Bahasa Malaysia) is mutually unintelligible with the traditional school language of English (David & Govindasamy 2005). No one is suggesting this kind of policy for AAVE, though some reactions to Oakland showed the fear that letting in AAVE even a little bit would lead to this kind of policy.

A less extreme school language policy would be to conduct most of school instruction in the standard – Standard English, in this case – while using written materials in the vernacular for the purpose of teaching children the basics of reading. Many “dialect readers” have been used in the US since widespread research on AAVE began in the 1960s (Rickford & Rickford 1995, Siegel 1999, Smitherman 2005). No dialect readers are promoted by current policies, but it may be that the effectiveness of dialect readers lies in their ability to win back previously alienated students by validating students’ home language as an acceptable variety, or in the fact that dialect readers make “correction” of students’ oral language unnecessary.

This affirmation can be achieved through other routes in the curriculum, for example, by using folktales and “authentic” literature written in the home dialect, talking about the vernacular in an affirming way, or simply banishing oral language “correction.” If a program does this, it may not be necessary to translate reading primers into dialect; students will be sufficiently turned on to school and literature to try reading Standard English texts. Among the LAUSD’s online materials are lists of “authentic literature” books that can be used as materials for contrastive analysis, indicating that part of the culturally sensitive approach is an openness to bringing written forms of the vernacular into the classroom. However, these forms come in as literature or art, perhaps to keep them distinct from academic writing.

In the most accommodating type of classroom, students may also be allowed to speak the vernacular among each other during groupwork, or to speak the vernacular to the teacher without being prompted for translation, if the setting is appropriate. Rickford and Rickford cite classroom observation research that said: “The students in a classroom where natural dialect was permitted seemed more engaged and less intimidated. This setting allowed them to learn without being stigmatized” (Maroney et al. 1994: 10, as cited in Rickford & Rickford 1995: 118). Again, if cultural validation and awareness of the linguistic differences were provided elsewhere in the curriculum, it may be that students would not need to use the vernacular in school in order to feel empowered and avoid stigmatization. Nevertheless, if one accepts AAVE as a valid language of in-group communication, one should, logically, permit its use for informal in-group discussion even in school.

What Siegel (1999) calls the “awareness” approach is a program that acknowledges students’ home language variety and points out its systematic differences from Standard English. This kind of technique could

consist of regular grammar and oral translation exercises, as in the bidialectal program in DeKalb County, Georgia (Harris-Wright 1999), or simply the replacement of traditional correction with contrastive analysis whenever children say or write something in vernacular form, in situations when using the standard would be more appropriate (Perry & Delpit 1998: 80-85). Siegel (1999) does not specify whether an awareness type of program is also necessarily accommodationist. Theoretically, it would be possible to incorporate awareness regardless of whether children are always encouraged or required to use Standard English in school, or if the vernacular is allowed in speech or writing.

Regarding this question of whether to allow students to use the vernacular, many scholars recommend a classroom policy of not correcting students’ production while they are reading (Labov 1995). The idea is that the goal of reading is to be able to understand the written message. As long as students are speaking aloud something that means the same thing as what they are reading, the dropping of a consonant cluster or a verb-inflection morpheme should not be considered a “reading error.” Standard English pronunciation is taught separately from reading, and this means that not all of students’ vernacular utterances are “corrected” or translated. More research is needed on the practices in place in Los Angeles to determine how consistently students are required to translate their language, but the policy positions Standard English as the language of instruction while counteracting cultural alienation from it and from school in other ways.

Styles of teaching that never allow the vernacular to be uttered are known as the “eradication approach,” which is to simply draw attention to AAVE utterances as reading errors or incorrect speech and to train and correct students’ speech in all situations. This seems to be the approach recommended in the California State Board of Education’s current policy, which was originally drafted in 1981. Because of the decentralized nature of classroom instructional practice, the guidance provided by this policy may not translate into actual practice and indeed seems to be contradicted by more local policies. Both Oakland’s and Los Angeles’ stances seem to be for tolerance towards children’s home language varieties, though it is unclear whether “correction” or teaching of standard forms is meant to take place during reading or not. Another difference between awareness programs and the old-fashioned “eradicationist” approach is that in awareness programs, when children are prompted to use standard forms, the request is framed as “Can you say that in Mainstream American English?” as opposed to positioning their speech as “wrong” language that is never acceptable in any circumstance. This distinction in teaching style relates closely to the question of whether teachers have a “difference” or “deficit” perspective of students and the language varieties they use.

In conclusion, culturally relevant pedagogy is necessary, as is input,

understanding of, and practice in SE. One way to make sure students get enough practice in speaking SE is to create discourse conditions in which they are called upon to speak with authority. Adger writes that “students don’t need to be told to learn Standard English – it’s a present need” (2005: 103). However, students also know that Standard English is not the appropriate speech variety for all situations, including some informal social interaction that takes place in school. Therefore, teachers need to respect students’ sociolinguistic knowledge, let them speak vernacular when appropriate, but increase their opportunities to practice SE by creating those discourse conditions that call for it.

Regarding the cultural component, it is not clear if acknowledging the dialect is enough to satisfy students’ affective and identity needs, or if dialect readers are successful in large part precisely because they connect students’ cultural heritage directly to literacy practices (Labov 1995: 53; Perry & Delpit 1998: 80). Research has shown that students persist in using the vernacular not because they received insufficient input or instruction on SE; they master the standard in elementary school but return to the vernacular in adolescence for reasons relating to social identity, or as an act of rebellion that relates to the status assigned to the various dialects and to academic achievement (Fordham 1999). Indeed, Collins writes that the stories from Mike Rose’s adult students in *Lives on the Boundary* demonstrate how “Standard English is available to many only through a complex reworking, struggle, cultural transformation, personal disorientation, and remaking of self” (Collins 1999: 223). More research is needed to determine whether culturally relevant pedagogy at the elementary level can successfully counteract this cultural alienation from Standard or “proper English” and from school, and can help students appropriate the standard for themselves.

### Status Planning for AAVE

As the previous section indicated, the status of different varieties in students’ and teachers’ cultures has an enormous impact on the choice and success of pedagogy. The ideologies underlying these statuses can also stop language policy from being implemented, as happened in the case of the Oakland Resolution. Analysts of that event have tried to better understand the status of AAVE and the linguistic culture surrounding it in order to explain what happened. That literature will be reviewed here in order to broaden the analysis to include policies that have not been protested by the public, such as the Academic English Mastery Program in LA.

The term “status” in Language Policy and Planning is used in different ways. Cooper (1989) defines status in terms of domains of use, while Collins (1999) talks about the symbolic status of languages in terms of prestige. Both of these definitions are related to Schiffman’s

notion of “linguistic culture,” which encompasses the public’s attitudes, ideologies, myths, and beliefs about the worth of different language varieties and their appropriateness for various domains.

### Symbolic Status

Cooper (1989) lists ten functions, based on Stewart’s (1968) typology, for which languages are used in a society. For the purposes of this paper, several of these functions are of interest: group, wider communication, education, and school. AAVE is currently a group language, while SE is used for wider communication inside the country and throughout the world. AAVE is not a language of education since it is not the language of instruction, nor is it acknowledged by most teachers as a language with any acceptable functions, though some programs described here do give it the status of a school language by making it into a school subject of sorts. Of course, this situation does not match what Cooper and Stewart were referring to when they said “school subject”; children are not taught to speak AAVE in school, but they learn about its linguistic properties and history, and given the resistance this practice can face, even this amount of presence in school must be somehow acknowledged in the framework.

“Symbolic status” is a term used by Cooper (1989) for situations in which a language is used by the government as a symbol of the state, as in the case of Hebrew for the Jewish state of Israel. Collins identifies another “symbolic status,” which he describes as a general sort of prestige linked to Bourdieu’s notion of cultural-linguistic capital (1999: 211). We use symbols such as the labels “language,” “dialect,” or “slang” in everyday parlance to denote the value we place on various ways of speaking and the social positions they index. This is what then Secretary of Education Richard Riley may have been referring to when he responded to the Oakland School Board Resolution by saying, “Elevating ‘Black English’ to the status of a language is not the way to raise standards in our schools” (Harris 1996). Though the Secretary may also have been referring to legal status as a foreign language, which would have qualified AAVE speakers for bilingual education funding, in light of the similar comments made by other public figures it seems more likely that he was speaking out against recognizing AAVE as a legitimate language, or a valid way of speaking. This kind of status is readily bestowed on all natural languages by linguists but is only grudgingly granted to “dialects” by governments and indeed by the general public. Collins argues that Oakland failed because it tried to give Ebonics (AAVE) this kind of symbolic status and recognize the cultural capital of its speakers in schools (Collins 1999: 211).

Recognizing that there is cultural capital tied to AAVE is a major step in raising its status in every sense: making people see it as a rule-governed linguistic code, expanding its perceived suitability for use in education, and changing the beliefs that lie in the linguistic culture. Symbolic status is closely tied to people’s attitudes towards dialects and



their speakers, as Baugh (1995) points out. He argues that one reason Hawaiian Pidgin English won recognition as a separate language with speakers needing extra educational support was that courts and government were less biased against native Hawaiians than they are against African-Americans (Baugh 1995). Lippi-Green also suggests that one reason for White Americans' opposition to the elevation of AAVE is an underlying discomfort with the topic of race, the legacy of oppression, and a persistent and differentiated African-American culture whose members have failed, or refused, to assimilate (1997: 178). To give AAVE symbolic status would be to approve of a culture of continued non-assimilation, something assimilated Americans are not willing to do.

Symbolic status is also closely tied to real economic capital, as the recognition of a language variety under a certain definition of language may change speakers' entitlements to earmarked funding under the law. Other non-English languages in the US, such as native Amerindian languages and immigrants' foreign languages, have more status than AAVE in some ways, because US Federal Law actually grants recognized linguistic minorities a number of linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas 2006). Translators are often provided in courts, funding is given for special instruction in school (for either bilingual education or English as a second language instruction), and government documents may be printed in foreign languages in order to insure access of minority groups to activities such as voting, getting a driver's license, etc. It seems that the Oakland resolution's emphasis on portraying Ebonics as a separate language pushed this linguistic human rights angle and was the cause of great uproar. Some opposition was not motivated by concern for the educational well-being of the affected children but rather by a fear of what would happen if AAVE were recognized as a language. Of course, the fact that AAVE shares so much vocabulary and structure with SE and is mutually intelligible with it in general (McWhorter 1997) suggests that these linguistic human rights are a matter of status and symbolism and not a matter of need. Surely AAVE speakers do not need government information to be translated for them; the issue is more that the variation in children's language must be seen as natural and valid by teachers in order to avoid the stigmatization and low expectations that negatively impact educational outcomes.

#### *Linguistic Culture*

Another way to talk about the folk beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies circulating in a community is to identify them as a "linguistic culture" and to analyze the extent to which this culture influences the public's reaction to policies and practices. Two closely related beliefs will be analyzed here: 1) the belief that AAVE is simply "incorrect" speech by unintelligent speakers, and 2) the belief that AAVE is not suitable for, or does not belong in school.

The attitude that vernaculars do not belong in school (Adger 2005: 101)

is a complex one that could either be a conservative attitude towards the perceived status quo or could reflect the idea that school usage or school acknowledgement legitimizes a language, giving it symbolic status.

White attitudes toward any kind of vernacular can range from a lack of understanding about the cultural roles of the vernaculars to decidedly negative attitudes toward their speakers. In a study on teen attitudes, Linn and Piché (1982) used a matched guise technique to show that Standard English speakers were seen as nicer, smarter, and better educated than Black English speakers. They also found that White, middle-class males had the most stereotyping views.

There is also anecdotal evidence that some White speakers actually have visceral reactions upon hearing AAVE, a theory that may explain part of the heatedness of the Oakland debate. One audience member on a televised discussion of the issue on a 1987 episode of *Oprah* said, "You could speak your own language...but don't force someone else to have to *suffer* and listen to it" (emphasis mine) (Lippi-Green 1997: 195).

The section above on acquisition planning suggested that parental and Black community resistance to bringing AAVE into the schools was motivated by lay beliefs regarding the best way to engage in acquisition planning for Standard English. Parents want their children to master Standard English and some of them rely on schools to give their children the opportunity of acquisition. Any attempt to allow AAVE into the school can be seen as a setback to this acquisition planning.

Hoover (1978) found that parents prefer Standard Black English to "Black English Vernacular" (henceforth AAVE) in all domains and channels, especially in school. However, 90% of parents agreed that teachers needed to be aware of AAVE in order to understand and help students. Parents valued AAVE for cultural purposes but also stressed the importance of learning Standard Black English in order to get ahead. Parents who did not themselves control Standard English grammar thought it especially important that their children learn it through schooling. The pattern of language ideologies found by Hoover (1978) is illustrated in Table 1, which shows a plurality of parents preferring taped examples of the vernacular for informal intragroup communication but finding standard grammar important for more formal settings or intergroup communication.

All parties, including Africanists pushing for an expanded set of domains of use for AAVE, seem to agree on the need for Standard English as a Language of Wider Communication (LWC), though Smitherman gets around the possibility of seeming to concede to mainstream American speech by saying that English is fast becoming a global LWC (2005: 59). Given that there seems to be a "compromise dialect" – the Standard Black English in Hoover's study – which is acceptable to all Americans, it is unclear why the cultivation of this dialect is not mentioned or supported in recent public policy. Most recent publications which refer to "Ebonics" emphasize only two possibilities: speaking Standard English or speaking

Table 1  
Frequency of Black parents' preferred language variety in various situations, when played a tape of each language variety.

Speech Act	Interlocutor(s)	Topic	Vernacular Black English	Standard Black English	Super-standard	N
Answering interview questions	Black employer	Job application	5% (4)	80% (60)	15% (11)	75
Answering interview questions	White employer	Job application	4% (3)	77% (58)	15% (11)	75
Informal Party	Black friends	Black proverb or joke	45% (34)	42% (32)	11% (9)	76
Informal Party	White friends	Black proverb or joke	30% (23)	50% (38)	18% (14)	76

Source: data from Hoover (1978: 79)

Ebonics. John Baugh talks about his own experience as a bidialectal speaker who had to maintain two ways of speaking to avoid being accused of “sounding White” (Baugh 2000). One way to extend the awareness programs mentioned above would be to give students the meta-linguistic awareness to think about what features are stigmatized in speech so that they can develop more universally acceptable styles of speaking.

Many writers have pointed out that some of the same prominent African-Americans who denounced Ebonics after the Oakland resolution use some stylistic AAVE features in their speech and occasionally use grammatical features as well. This may be because they have found a way of speaking that avoids “sounding White” but also conforms to standard grammar most of the time. Jesse Jackson, who initially spoke out against the Oakland resolution, is always cited as someone whose style of oratory is readily recognizable as Black. Smitherman quotes the following excerpt from one of his speeches to show that he uses signifying, tonal semantics, and the occasional copula absence: “Pimp, punk, prostitute, preacher, Ph.D. – all the P’s, you still in slavery!” (Smitherman 2005: 53). It is likely that in speaking out against Ebonics, he was not denouncing his own style of speaking, but rather the true vernacular style, characterized by nonstandard grammar, that many find unacceptable in school. Oprah Winfrey, who has been shown to use non-standard intonation and vowel pronunciation with Black guests (Rickford & Rickford 2000: 106), defines Standard English as “having your verbs agree,” and she does not understand why learning that should violate one’s self-image as Black (Lippi-Green 1997: 196). Bill Cosby, who has been a vocal opponent of Black English since the 1970s, also includes the occasional AAVE feature in his comedy routines (Rickford & Rickford 2000: 106).

Black attitudes, though diverse, can be summarized as sometimes anti-slang or anti-“street speech” but usually not against the use of the vernacular in home and community settings. This is especially true of Blacks who actively use AAVE, the majority of whom are not ashamed of their language (Hoover 1978).

#### Analysis of AAVE-in-Education Policies

The attitudes and ideologies listed above make local language-in-education planning difficult. School boards face the following set of facts:

1. The public demands equal educational opportunity and achievement for African-American students.
2. Research has shown that raising the status of the vernacular and the home culture in school reduces students’ alienation from schooling, raises teacher expectations, and facilitates literacy development and acquisition of the standard language.
3. The public resists this research-based plan of action because a) there is a bias towards immersion and “time on task,” b) the vernacular is seen as unworthy of the needed status, c) there is

a fear of separatism by those who would raise its status and perhaps give speakers permission not to assimilate to the standard.

Members of the public want to end discriminatory educational practices, but their own discriminatory attitudes towards language varieties and their speakers prevent their acceptance of policy that uses the rhetoric of linguistic equality. For researchers, it is frustrating to see resistance to proven methods. Yet nothing can be implemented in education without the consent of parents, school boards, governmental funding sources, and teachers, who are also members of the public. The interplay between “overt and covert” (or explicit and implicit) policies – with the latter “residing in the linguistic culture” (Schiffman 1992) – makes this a fascinating case for theorists as well as policymakers. The section below explores these themes through various overt policies, public reaction to them, and the practices the policies aim to implement.

In 1979, a federal district court case brought by parents of under-achieving students in Michigan turned into a trial focused on AAVE. The original intent of the case was simply to sue the school district for providing inadequate educational opportunities for students who had been “improperly placed in learning disability and speech pathology classes” (Smitherman 1998). Judge Charles Joiner came close to doing what John Baugh sees as crucial: creating explicit policy that forbids the use of differences stemming from linguistic and cultural diversity as criteria for inclusion in special education (Baugh 1995: 89). Although some schools may do this as a way to get additional funding, Baugh argues that special education, often characterized by lower expectations for student achievement, was designed for those rare individuals whose pathological physical differences prevent them from achieving at normal levels, not for students who are psychologically normal but culturally divergent from what the school expects (Baugh 1995: 89). It seems that the heart of the Ann Arbor debate was a conflict between “deficit” and “difference” perspectives of the students. Much of the public, including educators and journalists, viewed students’ stigmatized speech patterns and educational difficulties as signs of personal deficits instead of barriers caused by linguistic or cultural difference. The public media-based reaction to Ann Arbor – over 300 articles and editorials which Smitherman characterizes as “a persistent attempt to discredit the plaintiffs’ mothers and to exonerate the school district” (Smitherman 1998: 170) – can be seen as stemming from these deficit views and the negative view of vernaculars which feeds them. The public’s and media’s linguistic culture was incompatible with the “difference” view of linguistic varieties being put forward in the trial.

Judge Joiner’s final verdict required only that the Ann Arbor school board provide teacher training to educate teachers about children’s home language variety. The justification for this ruling rested on section 1703(f) of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, which read that “no state shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by...failure to overcome *language barriers* that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” (emphasis mine) (Baugh 1995: 89). This wording, which could be interpreted as either “languages that act as barriers” or “barriers relating to linguistic code” prevented the need to formulate any explicit policy on whether the children’s speech constituted a separate language from English. In fact, Judge Joiner quietly decided not to include AAVE speakers under Title VII, the provision that entitles *non-native English speakers* to bilingual education funding and services. Hence, the status of AAVE was raised only slightly: It was not designated as a language separate from English, but its rule-governed nature and its importance in education were acknowledged by the courts.

The California State Board of Education’s policy on “Proficiency in Standard English for Speakers of Black Language” was passed in February 1981, as Baugh (2000) writes, in order to prevent lawsuits similar to the Ann Arbor trial. The document stresses the need for equal opportunities, and the last bullet point unequivocally states that this policy “IS NOT: (1) a program for students to be taught to speak Black language; (2) a program for teachers to learn to speak Black language; (3) a program requiring materials in textbooks to be written in Black language” (emphasis in original). Thus, the policy explicitly states that it is not raising the status of AAVE to that of an educational language. In fact, the policy does little if anything to express a difference perspective as opposed to a deficit one. Nevertheless, its passage led to the very program that the African-American Task Force found to be so effective fifteen years later in Oakland.

The Standard English Proficiency (SEP) Program, started by the Oakland Unified School District in September 1981 (Council of the Great City Schools 2006) became a statewide phenomenon with 25 participating school districts (Schnaiberg 1997), including programs in Los Angeles (Baugh 1995: 100). In the preface to *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*, the editors write that it was in response to the African-American task force’s findings of superior performance at the one school with a majority of teachers participating in the SEP program that the Oakland resolution was passed, “requiring all schools in the district to participate in the Standard English Proficiency Program” (Perry & Delpit 1998: xi). If this was the case, then why was there such a severe public reaction to Oakland, but no outcry in 1981 or in the intervening fifteen years?



There is very little information on the SEP program, including no published studies of its effectiveness, though one website claims it was funded by “state categorical grants, federal desegregation funds and federal Title I monies,” and that participating students showed larger gains on the Comprehensive Test for Basic Skills in an evaluation done in the 1995-1996 school year (Council of the Great City Schools 2006).

The media explosion in response to the Oakland Ebonics Resolution came in December of 1996 and continued into the next year. Most analyses of the media outcry say it was biased and was based on misunderstandings of the intentions of the resolution. In fact, the original wording of the resolution does not mention the SEP program. It does include several introductory clauses declaring that Ebonics is a separate language from English, as well as the clause: “imparting instruction to African-American students in their primary language for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language...and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills” (Perry & Delpit 1998: 145). This focus on language, and especially on linguistic minority rights and status, is highly unusual for public documents in the US.

Given the emphasis put on positioning Ebonics as something that needed to be maintained in a bilingual education program, it is not surprising that media reactions were extreme. The wording was too Afro-centric for mainstream Black figures, and there was so little mention of Standard English that people were worried children might not get enough of it under Oakland’s plan.

Given the positioning of Standard English in the linguistic culture as better or at least worth more economically than AAVE, many commentators felt that telling children that AAVE was just as good communicated lowered expectations and would hold them back economically. President Clinton expressed this folk theory when he said Ebonics was “a form of slang” (Harris 1996). Secretary of Education Richard Riley and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, though not indicating low opinions of AAVE, voiced their fears that accepting and valorizing Ebonics, possibly at the exclusion of Standard English, meant lowering achievement standards for these children. Perhaps responding to the wording that Ebonics was “genetically based,” Jackson gave this statement on a television news program: “I understand the attempt to reach out to these children, but this is an unacceptable surrender borderlining on disgrace....It’s teaching down to our children, and it must never happen” (Harris 1996). Ironically, the same newspaper article that quoted the statement above also mentioned the SEP program, though not by name. It referred to it as a “trial program with about 100 teachers” and then said California Governor Pete Wilson “was no more encouraging of Oakland’s experiment than Clinton” and would “fight any attempt by Oakland to get state funding for its Ebonics

program” (Harris 1996). Since the SEP program was already receiving state funds, this is an illuminating example of how much the wording of policies matters. Policy documents enter the public discourse and must be compatible with it. The label “Standard English Proficiency Program” conveys goals that are congruent with the general and linguistic cultures, while the Oakland resolution contained a rhetoric that was incompatible.

There is some indication that changing times and the rise of “English-Only” sentiments in the culture were partially responsible for the strength of the anti-Ebonics reaction to Oakland. Post-Oakland policy has consisted of actual legislation prohibiting the use of dialects of English in bilingual education (Rickford 2005: 18) or dramatically reducing bilingual education altogether. The Unz initiatives, starting in 1998 with Proposition 227 in California and moving on to Arizona, Massachusetts, and Colorado, “essentially dismantled bilingual education” in these states (Rickford 2005: 35).

More extreme, reactionary policies were proposed directly after Oakland, but these were not adopted. For example, Congressman King from New York submitted a resolution to the House of Representatives beginning: “Whereas ‘Ebonics’ is not a legitimate language...” (Ramirez et al. 2005: 135). The proposed Equality in English Instruction Act (SB 205) in California was a lengthy, detailed list of proposed actions, including the dismantling of SEP programs, the prohibition of “nonstandard English instruction” including any training of teachers to “teach that non-standard English is a situationally correct alternative to English in some or all situations” (Ramirez et al. 2005: 142-3). The bill refers to Oakland, though not by name, saying that it intended to expand the SEP program and that by “calling their programs ‘Ebonics,’ these districts are attempting to convince students that poor communication skills are acceptable speech patterns and writing skills, and that these students cannot learn to speak correct English due to social or cultural factors outside their control” (Ramirez et al. 2005: 146).

First it must be noted that this bill refers to AAVE as “poor communication skills,” revealing an uninformed and prejudicial negative characterization of the variety as a linguistically inferior system. However, the sentiment that increasing AAVE’s acceptability in and possibly even out of school is somehow lowering the standards for Black children is one that is echoed by some linguists as well as laymen. McWhorter argues that because AAVE is mutually intelligible and really quite similar to Standard English, it is demeaning to act under the assumption that Black children cannot handle this new linguistic register without extra help (McWhorter 1997).

McWhorter (1997) thinks Oakland goes too far in emphasizing the differentness of AAVE, but he does not criticize the SEP, which he describes as a program that respects AAVE while gently instructing students on how to use SE when appropriate. His view is that cultural alienation,

along with teacher salaries, is a far bigger problem than any linguistic barrier: "It is well documented that underclass African-American children often associate classroom achievement and speaking Standard English with alien 'whiteness'" (McWhorter 1997: 10). In fact, it may be this cultural alienation that makes the tiny linguistic barrier in this situation so problematic, when in other situations such as German-speaking Switzerland, larger dialectal barriers are overcome by students without hardship. Likewise, it may be the cultural component of dialect readers and programs like the SEP that makes them effective for Black students, for one cannot have an AAVE text or even a respectful discussion of AAVE without bringing students' culture into the classroom and thus giving it status through the use of its language.

The policies and practices of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) have taken up this rhetoric of "cultural sensitivity," "cultural responsiveness," etc. to introduce many of the same reforms in more publicly palatable ways. No one objects to programs when they are introduced as pedagogical improvements that will more successfully teach minority children, even when they propose to do this through valorization of the students' home culture or even their home language. When it is seen as an extension of the multicultural education movement, or a celebration of diversity, talking about AAVE in the schools does not seem so extreme.

The pedagogical practices promoted by the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP) in Los Angeles include the reading of authentic literature in minority language varieties and contrastive analysis exercises that position AAVE as a rule-governed and acceptable language for use in some circumstances but not, for the most part, when doing academics. These practices do raise the status of AAVE, at least to that of a school subject. Its prestige or symbolic status is also raised because teachers come to have difference and not deficit views of its speakers and because it is tied to all the greatness of African-American history, literature, and arts through this culturally relevant pedagogy.

Studies of AEMP's effectiveness find that it is successful in increasing the amount of Standard or Academic English used by students on various speaking and writing measures (Maddahian & Sandamela 2000). It also raises language scores on standardized tests ("AEMP informative", 2005). More research would be needed to determine the effects of the AEMP program on the linguistic behavior of students when it comes to maintaining AAVE outside of academic settings. One would guess that because the program portrays AAVE and other minority language varieties in a positive light, as languages rich in culture and worthy of use outside of academic settings, its speakers would continue to use them for in-group communication. Longitudinal studies looking at students' use of the two varieties in high school would also be useful and interesting.

The approach in Los Angeles has been to raise AAVE's status, as detailed above, through grassroots practices and not through overt, de jure policy. The AEMP program and its antecedents have been in place since 1990 or before, and the director of the program reports that it has received no bad press except as part of the general backlash linked to the Oakland controversy (Noma Lemoine, personal communication, November 22, 2006). The overt policies of the LAUSD Board of Education do not focus on language but adopt a strong rhetoric of educational opportunity, raising achievement standards, and using "culturally responsive pedagogy" as a means to this end. A resolution adopted in 2001 is a good representative document: It called for its staff to create "policies and procedures" to address educational inequities (see Appendix 3). Even the "blueprints" and "action plans" which are drawn up in response to these resolutions have little mention of minority language varieties. In particular, they do not specifically mention raising the status of the languages as a goal, and mentions of specific pedagogical practices such as contrastive analysis and minority language literature are few and far between. Instead, the documents typically refer to professional development to help teachers develop "culturally relevant" practices, leaving the details of these practices for written documents that only the teachers and their trainers need to see (such as Los Angeles Unified School District & Lemoine 1999). Hence language status planning is positioned as a means to an end, that of educational achievement. Language acquisition planning for the standard is specifically mentioned, but the emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy makes room for both language varieties, preventing the "time on task" immersion/submersion model, which is dominant in the linguistic culture, from being implemented.

### Conclusion

The cases discussed above have illustrated different ways for educational institutions to face the three conflicting facts of demands for equal educational opportunity for all, a need for status-raising of AAVE as a prerequisite to acquisition of the standard and subsequent educational success, and public resistance to status-raising. Los Angeles' AEMP program changes the linguistic culture of the school to make it a place where both teachers and students see the value of AAVE and its speakers, and it does this as a means to an end, which is educational attainment for all students. This paper looked at two cases, one in Oakland in which a policy document was read by many as aiming to change language practices through education and another in Los Angeles in which an educational program aimed, and still aims, to change education through linguistic practices. This interplay between means and ends, causes and effects, complicates our notion of language policy and planning, since the greatest



strides for AAVE seem to be coming through education-oriented planning with implicit linguistic components.

By taking the focus off of explicit language planning in their policy documents, the educators in Los Angeles have managed to navigate the complicated linguistic culture which has produced backlash against similar programs elsewhere. They have brought AAVE into the schools as a tool for learning, an object of study, and a complement to cultural instruction in other aspects of the curriculum. Their practice of training teachers to understand the rules of AAVE is an explicit policy that is not emphasized in the policy documents; this ensures that teachers' ideologies include positive attitudes towards AAVE as a language and culture and leads to implicit policies and practices based on that linguistic culture in the classroom. The program positions Standard English as the only medium of instruction and thus appears not to expand the status of AAVE to that of an educational language. However, more research is needed to see how the teacher training and culturally responsive pedagogy affects the prestige and use of AAVE in and out of schools.

More research is also needed to determine whether the findings from this case can apply to other contexts in which acquisition planning of a standard or school language conflict with status planning for a vernacular or home language. Perhaps policymakers in such situations should consider the linguistic culture when wording policy documents and take care to argue for more linguistic diversity with an argumentation that taps values held in high regard by the community. In this case, that value is educational opportunity. The process of cultural change is slow, and the larger society's acceptance of AAVE as respectable minority language seems far away. Nevertheless, programs that change the attitudes of teachers and students alike can put that change into motion.

*Julia Deák is a PhD student in Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. She received her BA in sociology and music at Brandeis University. Her interests include reading pedagogy, second language acquisition, heritage languages in the US, bilingualism, and education for social justice.*

E-mail: [jdeak@dolphin.upenn.edu](mailto:jdeak@dolphin.upenn.edu)

## References

- Adger, C. (2005). Language varieties in the school curriculum: Where do they belong and how will they get there? In J. D. Ramirez, T. G. Wiley, G. de Klerk, E. Lee & W. E. Wright (Eds.), *Ebonics: The urban education debate* (pp. 96-110). Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- AEMP informative. (2005). (pp. 11): Los Angeles Unified School District AEMP / Achievement Gap Branch.
- Baugh, J. (1995). The law, linguistics, and education: Educational reform for

African American language minority students. *Linguistics and Education*, 7, 87-105.

- Baugh, J. (2000). *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, J. (1999). The Ebonics controversy in context: Literacies, subjectivities and language ideologies in the United States. In J. Blommaert (Ed.), *Language ideological debates*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Cooper, R.I. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- David, M.K., & Govindasamy, S. (2005). Negotiating a language policy for Malaysia: Local demand for affirmative action versus challenges from globalization. In A.S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice* (pp. 123-146). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- DeBose, C. (2005). *The sociology of African American language: A language planning perspective*. New York: Palgrave.
- Fordham, S. (1999). Dissin' "the standard": Ebonics as guerrilla warfare at capital high. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 30(3), 272-293.
- Harris-Wright, K. (1999). Enhancing bidialectism in urban African American students. In C.T. Adger, D. Christian & O.L. Taylor (Eds.), *Making the connection: Language and academic achievement among African American students* (pp. 53-60). McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics/Delta Systems.
- Harris, J.F. (1996, 25 December). Ebonics is form of slang, administration declares. *Washington Post*.
- Hoover, M.R. (1978). Community attitudes toward black english. *Language in Society*, 7, 68-87.
- Labov, W. (1995). Can reading failure be reversed? In V. L. Gadsden & D. A. Wagner (Eds.), *Literacy among African-American youth* (pp. 39-68). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Linn, M.D., & Piche, G. (1982). Black and white adolescent attitudes toward Black English. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 16(1), 53-69.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Los Angeles Unified School District & Lemoine, N. (1999). *English for your success: A handbook of successful strategies for educators*. Maywood, NJ: People's Publishing Group.
- Maddahian, E., & Sandamela, A.P. (2000). *Academic English mastery program: 1998-1999 evaluation report* (No. LAUSD-REB-781): Los Angeles Unified School District, CA. Research and Evaluation Branch.
- McWhorter, J.H. (1997). Wasting energy on an illusion. *The Black Scholar*, 27(1).
- Ogbu, J.U. (1993). Frameworks - variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), *Minority education: Anthropological perspectives* (pp. 83-111). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.
- Perry, T., & Delpit, L. (Eds.). (1998). *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ramirez, J.D., Wiley, T.G., de Klerk, G., Lee, E., & Wright, W.E. (Eds.). (2005). *Ebonics: The urban education debate*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.

- Rickford, J.R. (2005). Using the vernacular to teach the standard. In J.D. Ramirez, T.G. Wiley, G. de Klerk, E. Lee & W.E. Wright (Eds.), *Ebonics: The urban education debate* (pp. 18-40). Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Rickford, J.R., & Rickford, A.E. (1995). Dialect readers revisited. *Linguistics and Education*, 7(2), 107-128.
- Rickford, J.R., & Rickford, R.J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of Black English*. New York: Wiley.
- Schiffman, H.F. (1992). 'resisting arrest' in status planning: Covert and structural impediments to status change. *Language and Communication*, 12(1), 1-15.
- Schiffman, H.F. (1996). *Linguistic culture and language policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Schnaiberg, L. (1997, January 15). "Ebonics" vote puts oakland in maelstrom: Action re-sparks debate over Black English. *Education Week*, 16, 1+.
- Siegel, J. (1999). Stigmatized and standardized varieties in the classroom: Interference or separation? *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(4), 701-728.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2006). Language policy and linguistic human rights. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 273-291). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Smitherman, G. (1986). *Talkin' and testifyin'*. Detroit: Wayne State University.
- Smitherman, G. (1998). "what go round come round": King in perspective. In T. Perry & L. Delpit (Eds.), *The real Ebonics debate: Power, language, and the education of African-American children*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Smitherman, G. (2005). Black language and the education of Black children: One mo once. In J.D. Ramirez, T.G. Wiley, G. de Klerk, E. Lee & W.E. Wright (Eds.), *Ebonics: The urban education debate* (2nd ed., pp. 49-61). Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Speicher, B.L., & McMahon, S.M. (1992). Some African-American perspectives on Black English vernacular. *Language in Society*, 21, 383-407.

**Appendix 1**  
**California State Board of Education:**  
**Policy adopted 2/81,**  
**Subject: Black Language: Proficiency in Standard**  
**English for Speakers of Black Language**

The State Board of Education and the State Department of Education, realizing that there is a need to provide for proficiency in English for California students who are speakers of Black language, and to provide equal educational opportunities for these students, do hereby recognize:

- (a) that oral language development is a key strategy which facilitates learning to achieve in reading and in other academic areas
- (b) That structured oral language practice in standard English should be provided on an ongoing basis
- (c) That oral language development should be emphasized during the teaching of reading and writing
- (d) that special program strategies are required to address the needs of speakers of Black language
- (e) that staff development should be provided for policy makers, administrators, instructional personnel and other responsible persons
- (f) that parents and the general public should be informed of implications of educational strategies to address the linguistics needs of Black students
- (g) that this effort to improve proficiency in standard English for speakers of Black language IS NOT: (1) a program for students to be taught to speak Black language; (2) a program for teachers to learn to speak Black language; (3) a program requiring materials in textbooks to be written in Black language.

Therefore, the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education, with the adoption of the policy statement, provide direction and leadership to the districts and schools of the State of California in the development and refinement of proficiency in English programs for speakers of Black language. The State Board of Education hereby declares:

- (a) that school districts should develop and implement strategies to increase proficiency in English for speakers of Black language.
- (b) that the State Department of Education, in cooperation with school districts, should provide for appropriate staff development for teachers, administrators and other school personnel
- (c) that any existing general or categorical funds should be used to address these linguistic needs
- (d) that local boards should adopt policies which specifically address the needs of speakers of Black language and facilitate the implementation of this state policy in their districts.

## Appendix 2

**Resolution (No. 9697-0063) of the Board of Education  
adopting the report and recommendations of the  
African-American Task Force and directing the super-  
intendent of schools to devise a program to improve  
the English language acquisition and application  
skills of African-American students**

*[italicized words were present in the original resolution of December 18, 1996, but deleted in the amended version of January 17, 1997; wording added at that time appears in bold.]*

WHEREAS, numerous validated scholarly studies demonstrate that African-American students as part of their culture and history as African people possess and utilize a language described in various scholarly approaches as “Ebonics” (literally “black sounds”) or “Pan-African Communication Behaviors” of “African Language Systems”; and

WHEREAS, these studies have also demonstrated that African Language Systems *are genetically based* **[have origins in West and Niger-Congo languages]** and *not a dialect of English* **[are not merely dialects of English]**; and

WHEREAS, these studies demonstrate that such West and Niger-Congo African languages have been officially recognized and addressed in the mainstream public educational community as worthy of study, understanding *or* **[and]** application of their principles, laws, and structures for the benefit of African-American students both in terms of their principles, laws, and structures for the benefit of African-American students both in terms of positive appreciation of the language and these students’ acquisition and mastery of English language skills; and

WHEREAS, such recognition by scholars has given rise over the past fifteen years to legislation passed by the State of California recognizing the unique language stature of descendants of slaves, with such legislation being prejudicially and unconstitutionally vetoed repeatedly by various California state governors; and

WHEREAS, judicial cases in states other than California have recognized the unique language stature of African-American pupils, and such recognition by courts has resulted in court-mandated educational programs which have substantially benefited African-American children in the interest of vindicating their equal protection of the law rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Bilingual Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1402 *et seq.*) mandates that local educational agencies “build their capacities to establish, implement and sustain programs of instruction for children and youth of limited English proficiency”; and

WHEREAS, the interests of the Oakland Unified School District in providing equal opportunities for all of its students dictate limited English proficient educational programs recognizing the English language acquisition and improvement skills of African-American students are as fundamental as is application of bilingual education [**or second language learner**] principles for others whose primary languages are other than English [**Primary languages are the language patterns children bring to school**]; and

WHEREAS, the standardized Tests and grade scores of African-American students in reading and language arts skills measuring their application of English skills are substantially below state and national norms and that such deficiencies will be remedied by application of a program featuring African Language Systems principles in instructing *African-American children both in their primary language and English* [**to move students from the language patterns they bring to school to English proficiency**]; and

WHEREAS, standardized tests and grade scores will be remedied by application of a program that teachers and [**instructional assistants**], who are certified in the methodology of featuring African Language Systems principles *in instructing African-American children both in their primary language and English* [**used to transition students from the language patterns they bring to school to English**]. The certified teachers of these students will be provided incentives, including, but not limited to salary differentials;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education officially recognizes the existence and the cultural and historic bases of West and Niger Congo African language systems, and each language as the predominantly primary language of [**many**] African-American students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby adopts the report, recommendations and attached policy statement of the district African-American task force on language stature of African-American speech; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent in conjunction with her staff shall immediately devise and implement the best possible academic program *for imparting instruction to African-American students in their primary language for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language* [**facilitating the acquisition and mastery of English language skills, while respecting and embracing the legitimacy and richness of the language patterns**], whether *it is*. They are known as "Ebonics," "African language systems," "Pan African Communication Behaviors" or other description, *and to facilitate acquisition and mastery of English language skills*; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby commits to earmark district general and special funding as is reasonably necessary and appropriate to enable the Superintendent and her staff to accomplish the foregoing; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent and her staff shall utilize the input of the entire Oakland educational community, as well as state and federal scholarly and educational input in devising such a program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that periodic reports on the progress of the creation and implementation of such an education program shall be made to the Board of Education at least once per month commencing at the board meeting of December 18, 1996.

**Appendix 3**  
**June 2001 Board of Education Resolution**  
**(Los Angeles)**

Whereas the academic performance of African American students demands urgent action by the Los Angeles Unified School District;

Whereas the data demonstrate that African American students in the Los Angeles Unified School District are not receiving instruction that produces high academic achievement;

Whereas the allocation of staff and other resources do not occur in an equitable manner to address the needs of African American students;

Whereas the strengths of African American students are treated as deficits, resulting in a deficit-laden model of instruction;

Whereas educational research on teaching and learning have not been implemented in the culturally relevant manner for African American students now, therefore, be it,

Resolved, that staff will submit to the Board, within 90 days following the adoption of this resolution, an action plan and timeline recommending policies and procedures to be implemented in the 2002-2003 school year to eliminate the disparities in educational outcomes for African American students.