Dichotomies, dialects, and deficits: Confronting the "Standard English" myth in literacy and teacher education

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Abstract

This study bridges the dichotomies between the study of multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism to explore the mythologies surrounding what is often called *Standard English* (*SE). While literacy and teacher education has made progress toward preparing teachers to work with linguistically diverse populations, such preparation is usually geared exclusively toward multi-lingual learners. Through this study, I argue that the field must also prepare teachers for the dialectal diversity that characterizes U.S. classrooms, but is often framed through racialized deficit ideologies. To fulfill this goal, this study outlines a module on multi-dialecticism embedded into a course on teaching multi-lingual learners. Drawing on survey data, participant reflections, and classroom observations, I explore the affordances and limitations of this module, asking how teachers' conceptualizations of linguistic diversity developed over the course of the semester. Initial findings highlight participants' reliance on surface-level structural features, commonality arguments, and cosmetic word exchanges in conceptualizing *SE. While varying degrees of complexity and sociolinguistic analysis emerged through participants' engagement in the module, changes were generally minor cosmetic shifts through which underlying deficit ideologies were maintained. This study brings into question the extent to which the field has made progress in problematizing the *SE myth and concludes with suggestions for disrupting this *SE mythologies in literacy and teacher education.

"Why these books be talkin' about Dominicanos y Mexicanos? Todos somos Americanos, yo." Angelo, age 16, voices objection to the other students in his English class as they discuss cultural representation in American literature. In examining Angelo's language use, many observers would immediately take note of his *translanguaging* (García & Wei, 2013) between English and Spanish. Others may note Angelo's use of the habitual *be,* and terminal *yo,* dialectical features associated with African American Language (AAL) (Cutler, 1999; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). While researchers may take up one linguistic frame or the other, the use of multiple languages and dialectical features are rarely discussed concurrently. Often conceptualized as separate areas of scholarship, multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism characterize the language practices of myriad youth who, like Angelo, navigate varied linguistic landscapes through their everyday lives. Regardless of the angle one takes to analyze Angelo's language use, however, the truth remains that such utterances are routinely characterized as *incorrect, inappropriate,* or *non-standard* in educational contexts.

Though teacher education has made progress toward preparing linguistically responsive teachers (Lucas & Villegas, 2011), such preparation is usually geared toward teaching students who are learning English as a second or additional language (henceforth multi-lingual learners). Through this study, I argue that the field must also prepare teachers for the dialectal diversity that likewise characterizes U.S. classrooms (Fought, 2006). This study bridges the dichotomies between the study of multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism, particularly as both topics involve confronting the mythologies surrounding what has come to be called *Standard English* (*SE[1]).

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[1] I borrow this convention from Lippi-Green (2012), who adapts the practice from the field of linguistics for marking phrases deemed grammatically inaccurate with an asterisk. This emphasizes the contested nature of the construct commonly referred to as Standard English (henceforth *SE).

To fulfill this goal, this study outlines a module on multi-dialecticism embedded into a course on teaching multi-lingual learners. Drawing on survey data, participant reflections, and classroom observations, I explore the affordances and limitations of such a module, asking how teachers' conceptualizations of linguistic diversity developed over the course of the semester.

Background: From English-Only to *Standard English-Only

Just as scholars have questioned the viability of *English-Only* education models for meeting the needs of multi-lingual learners (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Viesca, 2013), pedagogies that idealize certain dialectal varieties while disparaging others undermine effective teaching for multi-dialectal learners (Delpit & Dowdy, 2008; Fogel, & Ehri, 2006; Hill, 2008). Such pedagogies are often predicated on the **SE myth:* the idea that there exists a definable, agreed-upon set of conventions for "proper" use of spoken and written English. Through this mythology, divergences from these conventions are framed as improper—or "*poor, slovenly, broken, bastardized,* or *corrupt*" (DeBose, 2007, p. 31). Though linguists have largely disproven the idea that certain language varieties can be objectively superior to others, the *SE myth persists in education and public discourse (Baugh, 2000; Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2012). Moreover, the language varieties most often singled out as problematic predictably correspond to the language practices of students of color (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015). This allows *SE language hierarchies to act as a proxy for pre-existing racial prejudices across educational and societal institutions. In examining the intersections between *SE, race, and deficit ideologies, Godley, Reaser, and Moore (2015) have argued,

> To overcome this deficit thinking and develop anti-racist Critical Language Awareness
> for teaching, teachers must understand and acknowledge whiteness and Standardized
> English as non-neutral and to teach that ideologies surrounding Standardized English–

historically the dialect spoken by affluent white people–work to reinforce existing structures of power that privilege middle and upper-class whites. (p. 43)

Thus, research on literacy and teacher education must examine how the *SE myth is enacted through the education of linguistically diverse learners (a term this paper will use to encapsulate *both* multi-lingual and multi-dialectal learners). This is particularly necessary as U.S. classrooms are increasingly characterized by linguistic diversity, although the majority of the teaching force identifies as monolingual, White, and middle-class (Villegas & Lucas, 2001; Boser, 2014). While there are a variety of pedagogical approaches to meeting the needs of linguistically diverse learners in education, historically, these approaches are often grounded in deficit orientations toward language variation (Barros, 2017; Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001; Spring, 2016; Wolfram, 1998). As linguistically diverse learners continue to confront inequitable language policies and practices—from *English-Only* to *Standard English-Only*—this study draws from the fields of multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism to explore how literacy and teacher education can disrupt the overlapping educational, linguistic, and racialized hierarchies perpetuated through the *SE myth.

Theoretical Grounding

It has been nearly 50 years since Labov argued, in *The Logic of Nonstandard English* (1969), that there is "no basis for attributing poor educational performance to the grammatical and phonological characteristics of any nonstandard dialect of English" (pp. 1-2). Despite decades of research verifying the legitimacy and rule-governed nature of all naturally varying dialects, the myths surrounding the linguistic superiority of *SE persist (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007; Rickford, 1999). Although this phenomenon is certainly not bound to the field of education, educational

institutions play a key role in the maintenance and replication of these linguistic prejudices (Luke, 2004; Spring, 2016). Education systems, and the beliefs and actions of teachers therein, therefore play a crucial role in disrupting the *SE myth and the resultant marginalization of linguistically diverse learners.

Over two decades ago, Bowie and Bond (1994) approached the topic of teachers' attitudes toward dialectal variation, asking "are we making a difference?" (p. 112). Surveying a group of preservice teachers, 86% of whom identified as White, Bowie and Bond reported that 61% of respondents indicated belief that AAL operated "under a faulty grammar system" (p. 114). Furthermore, only 39% of participants agreed that teachers should allow students to speak AAL in the classroom. As Bowie and Bond concluded, "With all of the attention multicultural education is receiving... it is discouraging that negative attitudes toward speakers of [AAL] remain consistent over time" (p. 115). This study revisits Bowie and Bond's question today, asking if such attitudes toward dialectal variation have continued to endure. In other words, when it comes to preparing teachers to work among linguistically diverse learners, *are we making a difference?*

Methods

Study Context

This study takes place in the state of Massachusetts, which was recently compelled by the U.S. Department of Justice to redouble its efforts to prepare teachers to work with multi-lingual learners (U.S. DOJ, 2011). The state has since required all teachers to earn an endorsement in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) for teaching multi-lingual learners through state-sanctioned coursework or professional development (Massachusetts DESE, 2015). Although this endorsement represents a laudable effort in preparing teachers for linguistic diversity, there are

still no official standards around preparation for dialectal diversity. This focus on multi-lingualism, while undoubtedly important, exemplifies the false dichotomies between language and dialectal diversity that characterize U.S. educational policy and teacher preparation.

Participants

This paper draws from a larger study that followed four cohorts of pre-service and beginning teachers with less than two years teaching experience (n=127). All participants were enrolled in different sections of a university-based, mixed-disciplinary SEI endorsement course. The findings presented below highlight one of these cohorts (n=24), all secondary education candidates, who participated in a module on multi-dialecticism that was embedded into their SEI course. A majority of the participants (n=19, 79%) reported English as their first language, with half of the total sample (n=12, 50%) reporting as sufficiently proficient in a language other than English (spoken at home or acquired through later study) so as to self-identify as "bilingual." All indicated their belief that they spoke and wrote predominantly in *SE.

Data Sources

Drawing on multiple forms of data to triangulate and expand upon findings, three key data sources provide the foundation of this study:

(1) A pre- and post-course survey in which participants indicated their level of agreement with the following prompts on a five-point Likert scale:

(1a) In general, the use of non-standard varieties of English in school-based writing should merit lower grades on assignments.

(1b) Non-standard dialects of English are less grammatically rule governed than Standard English.

(1c) Non-standard dialects of English have a narrower range of expression than

Standard English.

(2) Pre- and post-course written reflections in which participants gave open-answer

responses to the following prompts:

(2a) How would you define "Standard English?"

(2b) In your opinion, what makes "Standard English" standard?

(3) Observational notes from the researcher's collaborative design of the intervention

module with the course instructor, along with observational data from the intervention

itself.

Participants filled out the pre-course survey and reflections during the first week of the

course (three weeks before the intervention), answering the same questions at the end of the

semester (nine weeks after the intervention, to explore any degree of lasting impact). A group of

teachers from a separate section of the same instructor's course (n=32) who did *not* receive the

intervention module also completed the surveys and written reflections in order to approximate a

control group (participants could not, however, be randomly assigned to the various course

sections).

Data Analysis

For the survey data, I calculated the percentage of participants in respective response

categories (agree, disagree, etc.) for each of the three items. However, as each item represented a

deficit-oriented statement about dialect variation, it became more meaningful to group the

percentage of participants who *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, or were *unsure* about these statements as

compared to those who countered these deficit orientations by *disagreeing* or *strongly*

disagreeing with these statements. I compared these percentages before and after the course, noting any degree of change as compared to the control group.

I analyzed participants' written reflections through thematic coding and word frequency counts. The thematic analysis allowed me to explore how individual participants defined, described, and conceptualized *SE both within and across the pre- and post-course responses (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The word-level analysis drew attention to the emergence of new words or phrases, the discontinuation of others, or any changes in frequency for certain terms between the pre- and post-course responses.

Finally, the course instructor and I took detailed notes as we developed, piloted, and implemented the intervention module, as outlined below. As this was an exploratory intervention, further research will be necessary to explore the extent to which outcomes of this study are linked to the characteristics of the module itself. With this in mind, the intervention is described below, both to give a detailed account of the intervention itself, but also as a guide for future researchers and teacher educators to explore, adapt, and implement similar interventions.

The Intervention: An *SE Course Module

The intervention consisted of one course session (approximately three hours) in which the course instructor taught a module on *SE and writing instruction for multi-dialectal learners. While it was clear that a single course session would not do justice to the complexity of this topic, the instructor and I wanted to explore the viability of incorporating this module into a pre-existing course on teaching multi-lingual learners. The session consisted of the following four phases.

Phase 1: Idiolect Exercise

As previously stated, all participants indicated their belief that they spoke and wrote primarily in *SE. In this introductory exercise, participants mapped out their unique dialect features on a worksheet that asked them to identify unique geographical, professional, social, and familial features of their own language use, then compare answers with their peers (Phillips Galloway & Dobbs, 2011). This exercise lead to lighthearted debates about whose dialectical features were "right" (e.g. whether to call a carbonated beverage *pop, soda,* or *coke*). More importantly, however, this exercise introduced participants to the idea that all language users, even those who believe themselves to speak *SE, draw on a unique mix of linguistic and dialectical features that comprise their own idiosyncratic language repertoire or *idiolect* (Coulthard, 2004). Revealing participants' inevitably divergent idiolects fostered discussion around how *un-standard* *SE actually is.

Phase 2: Expert and Student Writers

Before the session, the instructor had asked participants to give written feedback on two poems just as they would if the writers were their students. Both poems featured varying degrees of deviation from what are usually recognized as *SE writing conventions. Unbeknownst to the participants, one of the poems was written by a professional poet, Louise "Miss Lou" Bennett-Coverley (1966), notable in her writing and performance career for the Jamaican Patois dialectical features of her poetry. Participants generally marked up both poems to "correct" for *SE adherence. Volunteers read their edited versions of Coverley's poem, then listened to a recording of the original version as performed by Coverley.

Phase 3: New Lens—What is "Correct" and What is Lost

Participants then applied a new lens to approaching dialectal variation, by discussing what was *lost* in their edited versions of Coverley's poem. Participants invariably expressed

preference for Coverley's version, as opposed to the "corrected" versions which they then described as "stilted," "bland," or "voiceless." The instructor asked the class to apply this new lens to the second poem, written by a ninth-grade student whose dialectal features also diverged from *SE. Participants listed features they could highlight, discuss, or build on for feedback beyond *SE correctives. Through this phase, participants began to shift from problematizing surface-level language features toward emphasizing content, voice, and clarity of ideas.

Phase 4: Connections to Race, Society, and Multi-Lingual Learners

At the end of the session, the instructor brought the class together to discuss the ways in which participants might relate the day's discussion on multi-dialectical learners to their overall coursework on teaching multi-lingual learners. Participants discussed the overlapping challenges linguistically diverse learners face in U.S. classrooms and society, through both language and dialectal prejudice. A few offered views on framing language learning as a spectrum of varied use rather than through dichotomies between so-called "English Language Learners" and "Native English Speakers." The instructor closed the class by asking participants to also consider the ways in which race and linguistic prejudice intersect to marginalize linguistically diverse learners, and assigned a reading on the topic (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

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Findings

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Survey Data

As indicated in the survey results (see Figure 1 & Table 1), the most notable changes in pre-to-post course survey data were on Item 1a, which asked participants whether students whose writing did not conform to the conventions of *SE should receive lower grades on assignments than those whose used *SE. Before the intervention, 76% of participants indicated strong agreement, agreement, or uncertainty. This percentage dropped to 21% by the end of the course.

While this percentage also decreased in the control group (60% to 35%) the change was smaller than that of the intervention group (25% change compared to 55% change). However, the decrease in both groups indicates that some of these shifts may have been related to the course itself or to other factors beyond the intervention itself. Still, the overall decrease in deficit-framing across groups demonstrates the malleable nature of this particular belief statement. In addition, this illustrates the mutually reinforcing goals of the course itself and the intervention module, both of which aim to complexify participants' approaches to students whose language conventions do not map fully onto normative views of *SE.

Responses to the remaining survey items, which asked for participants' views on the linguistic viability of dialectal varieties, indicated smaller degrees of change. At the beginning of the course, 64% of participants, *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, or were *unsure* when asked if other dialects "were less grammatically rule governed" than *SE (Item 1b). This dropped to 46% on the post-course survey, while the control group changed negligibly (a slight increase from 56% to 60%). In addition, at the beginning of the course, 41% of participants, *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, or were *unsure* if other dialects "had a narrower range of expression" than *SE (Item 1c). This dropped minimally to 30% (control group 37% to 30%).
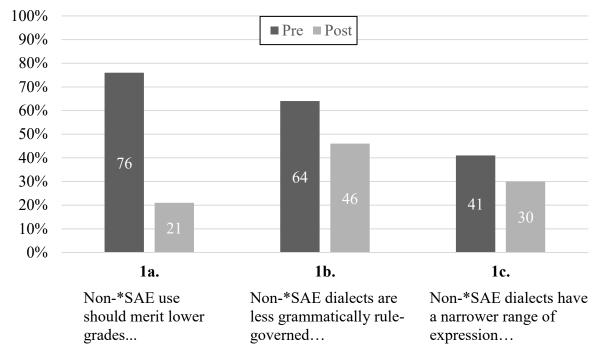
Figure 1. Percent Agreement/Uncertainty Toward Deficit-Based Statements

Figure 1. Percent agreement/uncertainty toward deficit-based statements about non-*SAE dialectal variation pre- and post-intervention.

Table 1. Response Percentages

	1a.		1b.		1c.	
	Pre	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*
*Strongly Ag.	6%	0%	5%	4%	0%	0%
*Agree	35%	0%	12%	21%	9%	17%
*Unsure	35%	21%	47%	21%	32%	13%
Disagree	15%	66%	27%	33%	27%	33%
Strongly Dis.	9%	13%	9%	21%	32%	37%

*Indicates graph focal area

Written Reflection Data

While some survey results indicated minimal degrees of change across both groups, written reflections exhibited noteworthy shifts within the intervention group that did not occur in the control group. As these questions asked participants to define *SE and discuss its characteristics, I organized responses by the linguistic or social justifications participants relied

on to construct their definitions, which primarily consisted of *structural features*, *commonality arguments*, and *word exchanges.* To provide a detailed account of changes within these categories, I outline the pre- and post-course analyses separately below.

Pre-course analysis.

Structural features. Many participants defined *SE in terms of surface-level *structural features*—such as lexical and/or grammatical usage—emphasizing vocabulary, spelling, or sentence structure. This included statements such as, "I would define Standard English as English in which traditional grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure rules apply" or "Standard English is the basic English language that is the basis of standard grammatical rules, spelling, and sentence structure." This category also included appeals to authoritative written sources such as dictionaries or textbooks, such as "[*SE is] textbook and dictionary English that follows the grammar and syntax rules of academia."

Commonality arguments. There were also many broad appeals to *commonality arguments,* such as defining *SE as, "The English that is used and able to be understood from all English-speaking backgrounds," "English spoken by the majority of people in an area," or simply, "The English that Americans speak." In this way, participants defaulted to defining *SE in terms of majority usage or through the suggested unintelligibility of dialectal variants, despite both arguments being factually inaccurate (Wolfram, 2004). In this way, commonality arguments tended to characterize *SE by what it is *not* rather than defining the term. These definitions juxtaposed *SE with what participants perceived to be uncommon usage, exemplified by statements such as, "Standard English is English that is not a dialect" or defining *SE as "English that does not include any colloquialisms."

Word exchanges. Finally, multiple participants defined *SE through *word exchanges.* These were definitions in which participants primarily exchanged "standard" for another term such as "proper," "correct," or "academic." Word exchanges characterized responses such as "I would define [*SE] as academic English" or "Standard English would be proper, unbroken English." Such responses did not necessarily add clarity in defining *SE, but instead shifted the burden onto other equally ambiguous terms.

It is important to note, however, that participants were not homogenous in their pre-course understandings of *SE. A few of the initial responses approached the concept with complexity and nuance. One participant described *SE as "an idealized way to define the language in order to search for a necessary, but not always fair normative." Such responses, however, were not characteristic of the responses as a whole.

Post-course analysis.

Structural features → Sociolinguistic analysis. In post-course responses, participants' definitions relied less heavily on structural features. Words that were common in initial definitions, such as *vocabulary, spelling,* and *dictionary,* appeared much less often. In some of these cases, reliance on structural features was supplemented by varying degrees of sociolinguistic analysis. For example, some participants made references to class or race, which were largely nonexistent in the pre-course data. One participant argued that *SE represents "the dialect of English traditionally spoken by white and wealthy Americans," while another defined it as "a term people often throw around to mean the vocabulary used by educated English speakers, often middle to upper class." Although responses were not generally long enough to allow for an in-depth analysis of these factors, such expanded definitions suggested a nascent degree of sociolinguistic analysis that was largely absent in the pre-course data, as well as in the

control group. In addition, the post-course responses began to include words such as "dominant" and "institutions" that were not present in the initial definitions (nor, interestingly, as part of the intervention itself).

Commonality → Complexity. Post-course responses also demonstrated a decreased reliance on *commonality arguments*. Notably, words that were prevalent in initial definitions, such as "majority," all but disappeared from the post-course data. Responses moved away from the idea that *SE has been democratically established through majority usage toward acknowledging the role of privileged groups in defining it, illustrated by statements such as, "Standard English is defined by scholars, not by the majority of the population" or "Standard English… is just an ideal perception developed by people with power and social authorization to define and limit a language."

In another new development, some participants began to overtly question the very existence of *SE. Statements such as "There is no definition of Standard English," and "Standard English is simply an ideal perception of the language" begin to fundamentally deny the existence of *SE in ways that diverged from the initial pre-course data. Though the majority of participants still offered definitions, these definitions were characterized by an increased complexity, even at the syntactical level. Initial definitions tended to rely on short, definitive constructions such as "It *is*" or "It *means.*" Post-course responses moved toward more complex phrasing, ranging from "It is *just,* to "[It is] a term *people often throw around to mean.*" These constructions illustrate shifts from more assured, concrete definitions toward acknowledging the concept's varying degrees of contested meaning.

Word exchanges → The entrenchment of "academic." While there were notable shifts in the intervention group as a whole, there were individual responses that remained relatively

unchanged. This was particularly the case when it came to *word exchanges.* Across the sample, the practice of exchanging "standard" for another ambiguous term continued. Although words like "proper" or "correct" lessened—and "broken" disappeared entirely—the use of "academic" as a stand-in for "standard" actually increased. Interestingly, the control group exemplified the same phenomenon, with the shift from "standard" to "academic" representing the one case in which the control group showed a notable degree of change. One explanation for this may be the popularity of the term "academic language" across discussions of multi-lingual learners, SEI, and even the Common Core State Standards. However, the migration from "standard" to "academic" does little to show any increased complexity or sociolinguistic analysis in conceptualizing *SE. In this way, the entrenchment of word exchanges seemed to offer participants a "way out" from having to further problematize *SE.

Discussion

While it is clear that a more time-intensive, longitudinal intervention is necessary to shift ideologies developed throughout a lifetime of language use, this study demonstrates the potential for bridging the dichotomies between multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism in literacy and teacher education. The variations, as well as the consistencies, in participants' views around language diversity offer insight into how *SE ideologies operate, fluctuate, or remain entrenched. Below, I discuss three key themes derived from a cross-case analysis of the survey data, written reflections, and classroom observations as a whole. These three themes—*the actionable uncertainty, cosmetic changes,* and *intersecting goals*—illustrate the affordances and limitations of this particular approach to disrupting the *SE myth in literacy, teacher education, and society at large.

Actionable Uncertainty

There is clearly a high degree of uncertainty around the topic of *SE. The pre-course survey answers tended to hover around the "unsure" response (see Table 1), and participants' definitions of *SE tended to be unspecific, inconsistent, or based on inaccurate information. However, participants' willingness to engage with, and problematize the topic of *SE suggests that this is an *actionable uncertainty*. Many were even able to reconceptualize their approach to writing feedback for linguistically diverse learners. Once participants were asked to look beyond the surface-level structural features of student writing, most began to approach student work in ways that did not rely exclusively on adherence to *SE. With minimal coaching, participants looked beyond the supposed *errors* that jumped out of a text to begin responding to students' *ideas*. Though furthering this approach will require more than a three-hour intervention, this study suggests that deficit approaches to students' language use be reframed.

However, this study also revealed that this reframing requires actionable steps and guidance toward new approaches. As one participant inquired during the intervention, "If I'm not grading their grammar, what am I grading them on?" This response illustrates how the uncertainty around *SE acts to reinforce the *SE myth itself. Ideas around what constitutes proper language use can shape the extent to which a text is valued and legitimized, regardless of the actual value or legitimacy of the ideas expressed. This ideology can be embedded to the extent that, for the participant above, "grading their grammar" becomes synonymous with grading itself. This study demonstrates, if given the proper strategies, teachers are able to approach—and even appreciate—linguistic diversity through a more asset-based lens, channeling this *actionable uncertainty* toward linguistically affirming pedagogies.

Cosmetic Changes

While nearly all participants' modified their written definitions of *SE over the course of the semester, when juxtaposed with the survey data, the group's overall positions on valuing dialectal variation (Items 1b and 1c) remained largely unchanged. This shows disrupting deficit ideologies requires more than cosmetic changes in terminology. For example, the common shift from "standard" to "academic" merely brought participants from one ill-defined, contested term to another. In pressing any of these terms too far, they tend to reveal their insufficiency. Furthermore, these cosmetic word exchanges bypass any discussion of the deficit framing of linguistically diverse learners that is sanctioned through either term. Whether under the auspices of "standard" or "academic," the language use of linguistically diverse learners will continue to be framed as deviant, deficient, or inappropriate for classroom settings. Though it remains important to shift the deficit labeling schemes often applied to linguistically diverse learners remains, the field must also work to disrupt the underlying deficit ideologies that endure across labeling systems and within the act of labeling itself.

Intersecting Goals

Finally, this research demonstrates the affordances of bridging conversations around multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism in literacy and teacher education. Throughout the entirety of this study, intervention, and post-course reflections, not a single participant asked, *"Why are we learning this? I thought this was a class about multi-lingualism."* In fact, the course instructor reported participants wanted to discuss dialectal diversity further, with many connecting subsequent course readings and discussions on multi-lingualism to "that dialect class we had." As previously stated, teacher preparation for multi-dialecticism is rarely required across the numerous state and national standards for teacher education and licensure. As this study

suggests, however, many teachers lack exposure to research-backed information on the topic. Without such knowledge, they are left to rely on societally-pervasive misinformation around dialectal variation as a deficit. This study shows that even a relatively modest intervention can start to complexify these ideas, including a module embedded into existing coursework. Within attempts to increase the field's focus on preparing teachers for multi-lingual diversity, this research illustrates the fundamental coherence of these topics and the potential for bridging these discussions in literacy and teacher education.

Conclusion

This past year marked the 20th anniversary of what has come to be called the *Oakland Ebonics Resolution* (Perry & Delpit, 1998). The California school district's attempted affirmation of AAL in their school system sparked national debate around multi-dialecticism and *SE in education. Although there has been a continuous blossoming of scholarship on dialect variation in the decades since, it is difficult to claim that substantial progress has been made in teacher preparation, educational practice, and public discourse to disrupt the deficit ideologies that continue to surround language diversity. As Labov (1969) argued, placing blame for educational inequities on students' language use "is particularly dangerous" as it "diverts attention from real defects of our educational system to imaginary defects of the child" (p. 2). Yet today, 50 years after this assertion, the overwhelming majority of interventions and instructional approaches for teaching linguistically diverse learners remain focused on the same "imaginary defects" in students' language use rather than the actual defects of systems predicated upon the *SE myth.

This study began by revisiting Bowie and Bond's (1994) question, asking *are we making a difference* when it comes to teachers' attitudes toward dialectal variation. 61% of Bowie and

Bond's respondents agreed that AAL operated under a faulty grammar system. More than 20 years later, in this study, a nearly-identical percentage of participants neglected to problematize the idea that other dialects "were less grammatically rule-governed" than *SE (64%). These similarities show that any answer to *are we making a difference* necessarily involves admitting that there is a long way to go. It also involves admitting that generations of teacher candidates continue to enter the profession with assumptions about multi-dialecticism that are not only factually inaccurate, but detrimental to the populations they serve.

In this light, the field must ask what accounts for the continued entrenchment of the *SE myth. One reason involves the argument, often well-intentioned, that schools much teach *SE to prepare students for the "real world." While acknowledging that *SE facilitates increased access to academic, professional, and societal institutions, such arguments ignore the fact that, in actuality, the real world is pervasively characterized by multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism. In compelling students toward an idealized linguistic homogeneity, education systems miss the key opportunity to more accurately reflect the language variation students will inevitably encounter in their personal, educational, and professional lives. Paradoxically, such approaches are not far out of reach of current curricular practices. The multi-dialectal works of Mark Twain, for example, are among the most frequently-taught texts in U.S. schools. But while Twain is renowned for his use of dialect variety, learners across the country who possess similarly broad linguistic repertoires are directed to circumscribe their expression to more narrowly approximate *SE.

Linguistic discrimination is certainly pervasive across a variety of institutions, but this demonstrates the need to educate those perpetuating this prejudice, not those afflicted by it. This illustrates a second factor supporting the *SE myth: framing language awareness as a topic

important only among learners considered to be multi-lingual or multi-dialectal. Linguistic discrimination is predominantly maintained, not by speakers of socially stigmatized varieties of English, but by the individuals and the institutions invested in the use of *SE and the maintenance of its perceived value. As such, although it remains important to teach the value of dialectal variation among linguistically diverse learners, it is arguably more necessary to disrupt the *SE myth among those who are socialized to believe themselves to speak "correctly." In neglecting to problematize the historical realities by which a dialect becomes the "standard," the decontextualized teaching of *SE serves to institutionally legitimize the *SE myth and the language prejudices embedded within this ideology.

Relatedly, a third reason for this lack of progress has been framing language diversity as separate from larger discussions of multiculturalism and anti-racism. Rarely are the connections between race, discrimination, and language variation an explicit focus of teacher education or professional development. Too often, linguistic diversity is used as a proxy for talking about race *without* talking about race. However, language use has as much to do with issues of racial and cultural identity as it does with lexical and grammatical features (Delpit & Dowdy, 2008; Lippi-Green, 2012; Fought, 2006). Considering the exactness with which the linguistic hierarchies established through the *SE myth map onto pre-existing hierarchies of racial discrimination, any move toward equity and anti-racism must address the links between linguistic discrimination and the larger racial prejudices *SE mythologies work to reproduce.

Thus, preparing students for the real world involves *exposing* rather than perpetuating the mythologies surrounding *SE. This will necessitate explicit discussions around the power dynamics of language use in our society in ways that are both critically aware and culturally sustaining (Alim, 2010; Baker-Bell, 2013; Paris, 2012). In the end, a single, three-hour

intervention is clearly not enough to disentangle these issues. However, this study shows there is much to be gained from simply *beginning* these conversations. As linguistically diverse learners continue to confront inequitable language policies and practices that marginalize both multi-lingual and multi-dialectal learners, these discussions must bridge the dichotomies between multi-lingualism and multi-dialecticism. As the *SE myth remains rooted in ideologies of linguistic normativity that have little to do with actual correctness or intelligibility and more to do with power dynamics, racialization, and language hierarchies, bridging these conversations in literacy and teacher preparation will allow the field to more effectively disrupt the *SE myth and its legacy.

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