Expanding your Toolbox: Strategies to Support Linguistically Diverse Students

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## Disclosures

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Erskine</td>
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Road map

Navigating dialect differences in an educational context as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) can be challenging

- Understanding dialect
- Clinical applications
- Case examples throughout the presentation
What is a dialect?

“American English... includes social as well as regional dialects that are systematic, highly regular, and cross all linguistic parameters ... Therefore, each represents a legitimate rule-governed language system.” (ASHA Technical Report, American English Dialects)
Different Rules: Collective Nouns

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<th>The team is playing well.</th>
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Different Rules: Negation

Agreement

● Una casa blanca
● “A white house”

“Double” negatives are *obligatory* in many languages:

● No he visto a nadie
● I didn’t see no one.
African American English

- Family of dialects spoken in communities with a substantial percentage of African Americans
- (aka “African American Language”)
- Lots of diversity

Source: Jones, 2015
Speakers of AAE

- Also commonly spoken by non-African American children in predominantly African-American areas
- Not all black Americans are speakers of AAE
- Not all white Americans are speakers of Mainstream American English (MAE)
Time and duration in AAE

- He don’t be in this neighborhood
  - Habitual be
  - MAE: He isn’t usually in this neighborhood
  - NOT “He isn’t in this neighborhood right now”

- He been don’t eat meat
  - MAE: “He doesn’t eat meat and hasn’t for a long time”
  - Stressed been/BIN

- I was tryna go to the store
  - MAE: I was planning on going to the store
  - NOT “I was making an attempt to go to the store”

Examples from Jones et al., 2019
Types of grammatical differences

- Obligatory differences
  - Collective nouns
  - Verbal -s
- Optional differences
  - He is talking about language.
  - He’s talking about language.
  - He _ talkin(g) about language

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<th>AAE</th>
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Optional Contractions in MAE

Here is my dog.
His name is Sammy.
He’s really big.
He’s running fast.
He is trying to earn a treat.
I’m not going to give him one.
Optional Copula/Auxiliary in AAE

They trying to get that
The baby’s trying to fall
He mad
He’s cooking macaroni
That train going right there
It’s a kite
Which dialect(s)?

AAE
- He like_ that.
- She ___ running.
- She be running
- She BIN run.
- I don’t want nothing

Both
- She is running
- I don’t want anything

MAE
- He likes that

I don’t want nothing

Dialect Mismatch

- Children who speak AAE have an added burden of learning to read in a different variety.
- *Yeens kno nun bout dat*
  - “You ain’t know nothing about that”
- Court reporters are inaccurate at transcribing AAE
- *He be tight about something →*  
  - *He put Tide on something*

Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015; Jones, 2015; Jones et al., 2019; Rickford & King, 2016
Many ways of talking

Example: AAE speaker from the south

- With family
- At church
- Trip to NYC
- Workplace
- Social gathering with white friends/colleagues

When supporting children, focus should be on repertoire and when to use different parts of their repertoire

Snell 2013
The way we describe AAE sounds like disorder

AAE speakers (TD)
- “Copula deletion is a syntactic feature of AAE, it is systematic and rule governed” (Bland-Stewart, 2005)
- “Dropping of possessive -S” (Washington, 2002)
- “Deletion of past tense -ed” (Craig et al., 2009)

MAE speakers (DLD)
- “Children with SLI omitted copula and auxiliary forms” (Crago & Methé, 2006)
- “Among children with SLI, grammatical markers were deleted particularly /s/ endings (e.g., possessive /-s/)...” (Dewey & Tupper, 2004)
- “Deletion of past tense -ed” (Haskill, 2007)
Deficit-driven frameworks

- Academic standard becomes the baseline of comparison for AAE

- Examples:
  - Lists of dialect differences (MAE vs. AAE)
  - “Correcting” children’s use of AAE
A need to reshape our conversations about AAE

- Deficit-based frameworks influence our ability to educate others about AAE
- It positions the speaker of the dialect as a problem that requires fixing
- It is difficult to translate deficit narratives into effective clinical practice
  - Less certainty about appropriate assessment practices
  - Less likely to identify patterns of language disorder unrelated to a speaker’s native dialect
Strategies to avoid deficit narratives

● Familiarize yourself with AAE and accurate ways to describe it
  ■ Phonology, morphosyntax, vocabulary, pragmatics
  ■ “Zero-marked” or “optionally included”

● Start from the position that the speaker is learning a complete language system while also learning the academic language

● Use caution when comparing features of AAE to MAE
Deficit narratives: Examples

“He frequently omits *-s from the third person singular verb.*”

How might we rephrase?

“He demonstrated **obligatory zero-marking** of third person singular.”
Deficit Narratives: Examples

“It is evident that the client does not systematically mark the auxiliary verb in sentences, which is a feature of AAE. He produced sentences like, ‘He going to the park’ during a story retell.”

How might we rephrase?

“The client demonstrated optional-marking of the auxiliary verb when he produced “He going to the park” in one instance, and “She is cleaning the table” in another instance.”
Diagnosing Disorders within Dialects

**Goal:** Identify tools to diagnose speech and language disorders within AAE speakers

Target parts of language that clearly show a language disorder and are not associated with dialect differences:

- Complex Syntax
- Vocabulary
- Features of Morphosyntax
- Pragmatics
Dynamic Assessment

Figure out what the child already knows and what they can learn.

Three Components:
- Test-Teach-Retest
- Task/Stimulus Variability
- Graduated prompting

Benefits:
- Reduces the bias that can come with standardized assessments
- Identifies:
  - Identifies areas of difficulty
  - Help set goals for treatment

Dynamic Assessment: Language Sample

- Observing frequency of features
- Vary the type of tasks when doing a language sample.

**More AAE**
- E.g., picture description task

**More MAE**
- E.g., narrative or story retells

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Craig et al, 2009; Craig, Hensel, and Kolenic, 2013
Dynamic Assessment: Teach then Assess

- Word learning
  - Teach then assess
- Descriptive language
  - Barrier task
- Semantic knowledge
  - Opposites
Using Contrastive Analysis with Assessment

Identify what features are dialect and what are patterns of speech and language errors.

- Use resources like descriptions of AAE
- Look for overt features
- E.g., Habitual Be, stressed BIN

Examples from McGregor et al. 1997
Standardized Assessments

Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screener (DELV-S)

- Identifies if your student speaks a non-mainstream dialect
- Justifies scoring modifications made when administering other assessments

Other tests with scoring modifications

- Check the appendix

Seymour, Roeper, De Villiers, 2003
How to Communicate Scores

“We used the recommended scoring for the CELF-5 for students who speak non-mainstream dialects like African American English because we observed that some patterns the student used reflected the local variety of English.”
Treatment

- Treat the observed speech or language disorder
  - Your focus is to treat the disorder not to address the dialect
  - Make sure your feedback is about the language or speech goal you’re targeting and not the dialect

“*She go___the park.*”
“*She go to the park*”

Seymour, 1986; Stockman, 2010
Become an Advocate for Linguistic Diversity

- **Validate** that everyone speaks and learns different dialects of English
- Share your *evidence-based resources*
- Emphasize the importance of dialect and language being an **identity marker**
What about talking to parents?

- “I am working to give your child the best care but I don't want to assign them a disorder if they don't have one. What I observed was your child using the local variety of English.”

- “My job is to determine if your child has a language disorder, meaning that they have a problem learning language. Your child has learned to talk the way the people around them talk which means their ability to learn language is typical for their age and is not a disorder.”
Conclusion

● We all speak **systematic, rule-governed dialects**
● How we discuss dialects **matters** and can help avoid deficit narratives
● Students can be **AAE speakers and have a speech or language disorder**
  ○ Select tools that best help you identify impairments regardless of the dialect
Acknowledgements

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The Learning to Talk Lab & Hearing and Speech Sciences Department (UMD)
Questions?
Resources

Oral Resources for African American Language: [https://oraal.uorgeon.edu/](https://oraal.uorgeon.edu/)
Taylor Jones’s blog has many research-based posts on AAE: [https://www.languagejones.com/](https://www.languagejones.com/)
Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: [https://ygdp.yale.edu/](https://ygdp.yale.edu/)


Selected References


Should I address codeswitching in therapy?

- The SLPs goal is to address the disorder not the dialect
  - However, if a parent has requested it be addressed or you think it’s appropriate for a student who is experiencing academic consequences due to dialect
  - Use your clinical judgement
  - Encourage the profession to keep the conversation going