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**Standard English in Schools: Perceptions of Language Use in the Classroom and  
Approaches to Teaching Language Variation**

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### **Abstract**

The language used in most classrooms throughout the United States is standard American English (SAE). Although this language is difficult to define, it is often perceived as the correct or proper usage of the English language. Students grow up learning that there is one correct way to speak and write, and consequently, they learn that any variation from this standard must be incorrect or improper. Student speakers of stigmatized variations of English face academic, social, and personal consequences such as poor academic performance, isolation from peers, and assimilation. The ideology that promotes SAE as correct also ignores the connection between language and identity and the value of language variation. Variations of the English language have their own cultural and communal ties, and there is value in the speakers' ability to communicate effectively using the language. This paper observes the effects of SAE in schools, the value of language variation, and the connection between language and identity through existing research and literature. To illustrate how the perception of language appears in classroom practice, this paper discusses interviews with three English teachers who explained their classroom environment, their beliefs surrounding SAE and language varieties, and their teaching philosophies for language variation. This paper concludes by proposing a process for teaching language variation so students learn to effectively communicate in the SAE expectations of today's society while placing equal value on all variations of English.

## **Standard English in Schools: Perceptions of Language Use in the Classroom and Approaches to Teaching Language Variation**

Students come to the classroom from a variety of backgrounds. These different lived experiences inform the identities of the students, and they bring these identities with them to the classroom. They can express these identities, whether consciously or subconsciously, through their language use because different communities use language in different ways. In the education system, standard American English (SAE) is the established language of use, and students are held to that standard. Students spend most of their school days having SAE enforced in their written and verbal communication, and there is little consideration of what this means for students who communicate using other variations of the English language, such as African American Vernacular English. The K-12 education system's decision to frame standard American English as the correct variation of the language negatively affects the students whose language of nurture varies from the standard, and it is the role of the teacher to foster a classroom environment that allows them to effectively teach English while respecting the connection of language and identity.

### **Standard American English Definitions**

As Lippi-Green (2012) explains, many people have attempted to define standard English, and their definitions often reveal their perceptions of language and misconceptions about language use (p. 57). Out of the handful of definitions she provides, there is a clear pattern in the perception of standard language throughout three sources: *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage*, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, and *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Lippi-Green (2012) begins with the definition from *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage*:

Standard American English. The term has been variously defined and heavily politicized, but essentially it is the form of English that is most widely accepted and understood in an English-speaking country and tends to be based on the educated speech of a particular area... It is used in newspapers and broadcasting and is the form normally taught to learners of English. (p. 57)

She then provides the *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* definition:

Standard American English: the English that with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform though not devoid of regional differences, that is well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated, and that is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood. (p. 57)

Finally, she lists the definition from *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

[The] language described as standard is the form of the language which is considered acceptable and correct by most educated users of it: Most announcers on the BBC speak Standard British English. (p. 57)

In all three of these definitions, the idea that standard English is the language of the educated is prevalent. It is unclear what “educated” means, but it is obvious that the creators of these definitions believe that the educated have the authority to determine a standard that the uneducated must follow and respect (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 57). This idea that standard American English is the language of the educated means that it has also become the language of education. The perception of SAE as “correct,” “acceptable,” “educated,” and “understood” carries into the school system where students learn that varieties of English that vary from the

standard cannot also be “correct,” “acceptable,” “educated,” and “understood” and are thus stigmatized and devalued (Lippi-Green, 2012).

### **Effects of the Standardization of Language in Schools**

Framing standard American English (SAE) as correct and enforcing that standard on all students in the education system can lead to a variety of negative effects on students who speak stigmatized variations of English. These effects can be seen academically, socially, and personally.

Students whose language of nurture varies from SAE face unique difficulties in school. These students are graded on their ability to use SAE, a language that is not native to them, at a native speaker’s ability level. According to Prudence Carter, a professor of education at the University of California Berkeley, schools don’t know how to incorporate these language varieties into the language tests they give students, which can cause serious consequences for these speakers and their mobility in society (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). This insistence on instruction in an unfamiliar language simply because that language is viewed as more correct often perpetuates a cycle of failure for students who speak stigmatized language varieties. This cycle occurs because they are not given the support they need to learn the material in this unfamiliar, standardized language. It is assumed that they know how to navigate it naturally, which may be the case for students whose language of nurture is similar to the standard but is not the case for students who speak stigmatized variations such as African American Vernacular English (Smith, 2016, p. 195). In schools, they are told that they cannot speak language varieties aside from the standard and still be successful (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 200). They learn from a young age that “assimilation is the price of success,” and they must give in to the ideology that SAE is the correct way to communicate to find that success (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 333).

Framing SAE as the correct way to communicate also perpetuates assumptions about speakers of other English varieties, leading to isolation and even stigmatization. Students' peers and teachers notice when students do not follow the standard American English rules, and when peers and teachers notice language variation, they "use it to structure [their] knowledge about that person" (Lippi-Green, 2012, pp. 38-39). The issue with this is that the image peers and teachers construct of these students who speak other variations of English is often based on their perceptions of language usage. This can be seen in a study on students who were learning to apply process-based evaluations of student work instead of error-based evaluations. In this study, education majors were asked to grade and correct students' papers using process-based evaluations. Despite their training in this area, however, these students attributed language "usage errors with student carelessness, laziness, and incompetence" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 78). The image that these students constructed of the writers was based on how they perceived deviation from the standard. Their "knowledge" of the writers was based on their view of SAE as correct and anything else as incorrect or inappropriate. These misconceptions can then translate into the isolation of these speakers from their SAE-speaking peers because they and their language usage are perceived as inferior (Smith, 2016, p. 197).

When language varieties are viewed as inferior, speakers of those languages are forced to consider when their language is appropriate to use and when it is not. The education system claims that SAE is the appropriate language to use if students want to be respected (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 83). There is a strong pressure to assimilate to SAE by both White speakers of the dominant language and speakers of fellow stigmatized languages such as African American Vernacular English (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 198). Students attempt to find a balance between these languages and often end up switching between the two, or code-switching. Code-switching, or

“the switching from the linguistic system of one language or dialect to that of another,” requires students to reject their language of nurture in favor of the one the education system has decided is correct (*Code-switching*, n.d.). In doing so, they are forced “to drop allegiances to the people and places that define them” in favor of that established standard (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 66). According to Jasmine Williams, having to code-switch between language that is appropriate to use with teachers and language that is appropriate to use with family “makes you self conscious, and it makes you feel, for me, as though I was not necessarily being true to myself or being Black” (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). Students begin to internalize the ideology of SAE being correct, and their language and identity are devalued in the process.

### **The Value of Language Varieties**

The value a language has is related to its ability to be used for effective communication by its speakers. SAE is framed as the most correct English variety in the education system, but realistically, other versions of English accomplish everything that SAE accomplishes. Keith Cross, a professor of education at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, explains that variations of English aside from the standard are not the barrier to opportunities like jobs and higher education. Instead, the “isms” that accompany society’s perceptions of English language variation create the barrier (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). After all, Lippi-Green (2012) argues that “all spoken languages are equally capable of conveying a full range of ideas and experiences, and of developing to meet new needs as they arise” (p. 8). Although society may place different amounts of value or correctness on different languages, all language “is always right because there’s always a systematicity, a patterning to it” (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). The rules of a language are not random or made up—they are intentional and suited to their

specific community of speakers and their communication needs (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018; Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 9).

Simply adhering to the standard does not automatically equate to effective communication. Some speakers use SAE “clearly and concisely, while others seem incapable of expressing simple ideas clearly” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 15). Likewise, the use of a highly stigmatized or vernacular language does not determine how effective a speaker’s communication will be; their ability to be understood in that language is what determines the effectiveness of their communication (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 15).

### **African American Vernacular English**

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a variety of English spoken in many Black communities by many African Americans. It is guessed that around 80% of African Americans speak AAVE, especially younger, lower to working-class speakers in urban environments (Wheeler, 2016, p. 370). This variety has its own set of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical patterns that its speakers follow (Wheeler, 2016, p. 369). According to John R. Rickford, a linguist at Stanford University, there are strict rules for AAVE in the same way that SAE has strict rules of usage. For example, a speaker can say “John be studying Saturday nights” or “John is sitting down right now,” but they can’t say “John be sitting down right now” because “be” is used in AAVE for habitual or frequently occurring actions (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). Although these patterns do not adhere to the rules of SAE, the message is not more or less clear between the sentences “He be studying Saturday nights” and “He studies on Saturday nights.” This raises the question: if the message of the communication is easily understandable, do teachers need to correct students’ language patterns that do not follow SAE rules?

## The Connection Between Language and Identity

Language and identity are deeply connected; the language that a person uses reflects their background and affiliations. The film *Talking Black in America* demonstrates this particularly well through the personal stories of a handful of Black individuals. AAVE is “imbued with cultural richness,” according to linguist Sonja Lanehart (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). As mentioned previously, AAVE is a language with a specific system of rules that belongs to a specific community, and its use by a person implies a sense of belonging to or affiliation with the community of speakers. Nicky Sunshine explains how her language usage has played a role in what groups she identifies with. Although she came from an African American background, she went to a predominantly White school and lived in the suburbs, so she found that the way she used language differed greatly from how her Black family members would use language. Since she used a language variety that was closer to SAE than AAVE, her family would call her “White girl” to make fun of how her language reflected that of the dominant, White language (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). She also found herself using language differently depending on the context, saying “I talk like this with this group of people and I talk like this with this group of people” (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). For her, and for many, the ultimate goal is inclusion and acceptance, so language usage has to change according to the context and need for communication (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018).

Linguist Tracey Weldon from the University of South Carolina touches on the subject of language and identity as well. Similar to Sunshine’s story, Weldon changes her language use depending on her setting. Outside of the professional setting, she explains that AAVE “is sort of my language of comfort. It’s my language of home. It’s my language of family. It’s my language of friendship” (Hutcheson & Cullinan, 2018). SAE is not a language of identity for her, but

rather the language to use in specific situations, and AAVE is the language that reflects who she is and her background. As she says, it is her language of home. AAVE isn't learned by children from celebrities or social media "but in their homes, as their first and native variety of U.S. English" (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 192). AAVE and other English language varieties are not inherently bad or wrong. They are simply different ways of expressing identity and communicating, and usage of these variations sends "a complex series of messages about ourselves and the way we position ourselves in the world" (Lippi-Green, 2012. p.38). However, teachers do not always view language in this way, and they often become the enforcers of teaching SAE as correct or more acceptable than other variations of the language and viewing language variation as a statement of intelligence rather than identity.

### **Language Variation Perceptions and Teaching Approaches**

Interviews with three current and former middle school teachers sought to uncover common perceptions regarding SAE and language variation and strategies teachers use to teach English in their classrooms. These teachers were asked questions regarding the context of their classroom, their beliefs surrounding SAE and language varieties, and their teaching philosophies and strategies for language variation.

#### **Teacher 1**

Teacher 1 is a current middle school language arts teacher and has been for the past 20 years. Throughout their career as a teacher, they have taught grades 3-8 and some college, and they have taught 8th grade the most out of the middle school grades. Their undergraduate degree was in elementary education, and their graduate degree was in English.

In their current middle school language arts classrooms, Teacher 1 teaches both reading and writing. The students in their community are mostly White speakers of non-stigmatized

language varieties; however, they have a few bilingual students who learned to speak English at a young age and three Black students, of whom only one is being raised by Black parents. Due to this, the variations of English they encounter in their middle school classroom primarily consist of what they call “slang.” This is in direct contrast with their experience teaching at a college level. In their college classrooms, the majority of their students are Black, and Teacher 1 notices an obvious difference in these students’ language usage. Teacher 1 describes their college students’ use of English as “a different language completely,” saying that “sometimes I don’t understand what they’re saying” even though “they’re all understanding each other.”

Teacher 1 recognizes that the English their Black students use with each other varies greatly from the English that they grew up speaking. Their response to this, however, is a lesson on appropriateness. They explain that they are open to learning about different ways to use language, but they intend to follow with a conversation on what language usage is appropriate to use in what settings. They use the example of speaking to different audiences, and they explain that “if I’m talking to my superior, I’m not speaking in a certain way. If I’m talking to my friend, you would hear a different [Teacher 1] because I don’t speak the same way to my friend that I speak to you.” Language is situational, and they believe that “you have to kind of teach [students] when it’s appropriate because it’s always contextual.” In an academic and professional context, Teacher 1 believes that standard American English, what they call “academic language,” is needed.

Teacher 1 defines standard American English as “grammatically correct.” To them, this means having both a subject and a predicate in a sentence, avoiding words like “ain’t,” using correct punctuation, having subject-verb agreement, and avoiding switching tenses. They also claim that grammatically correct does not necessarily have to be the most acceptable use of the

language, but it has to be understood by everyone. This teacher's views on correctness and standard language contradict each other in this way. They seem to view understandable language use as correct grammar and confusing language use as grammar mistakes when, in reality, clarity and grammar are not always connected. A singular subject and a plural verb do not always take away from the readability of the content. Regardless, Teacher 1 chooses to correct grammar habits that do not adhere to the standard because they "think it makes you sound less intelligent." In their mind, the reality is that if two people are going for the same job with the same qualifications on paper, the person who speaks standard American English is more likely to be hired than the person who speaks a stigmatized variety of the language.

Teacher 1 argues, however, that there is a place for language variation in the education system. In their classroom, they embrace many varieties of English in creative writing, but they explain that they expect their students to follow the standard when writing essays. However, following SAE rules is only a small portion of their rubric, and they state that their students are "not going to fail their paper if their language variety is off." They explain that they primarily look for clarity because "the content is always more important than how [students] do it." Teacher 1 explains that their main strategy for teaching English is to work with students on an individual level, looking primarily at the most important concerns in a paper, which they list as clear and accurate content, thesis effectiveness, good organization, audience-centered writing, and strong analysis.

When asked about the connection between language and identity, if there was one, Teacher 1 explained language as both a characteristic and a choice, both of which reflect a student's identity. For many students, the language they use is an unconscious reflection of the group or groups they belong to, and Teacher 1 states that "you're a product of where you are and

who you grow up with.” However, for other students, their language usage is an active choice that shows a desire to belong. For example, a child trying to fit in with the popular crowd may use more popular and “cool” language, even if it is not their language of nurture, because they want to show an affiliation with that specific group. They see this type of language used frequently in their classroom.

In general, Teacher 1 held beliefs that both aligned and did not align with the mindset of SAE as “correct.” While they expect their students to write in a grammatically correct way and follow the rules they outlined in their definition of SAE, they primarily grade from a rhetorical point of view, looking at audience, purpose, and effectiveness. They maintain that SAE is the language of the classroom in “formal” writing, but there is room for variation in creative writing and verbal communication. In their mind, SAE being the “correct” and valued language is simply the way things are; this is the way they were brought up, so this is the way they teach. Most importantly, however, they are open to learning. Teacher 1 is constantly seeking learning experiences to better understand their students. Whether this happens through conversations about language with their students or through conferences, podcasts, and discussions with other teachers, this teacher allows space for learning and change. They say that “our profession is not stagnant. It’s always changing, and I have to change. And if you don’t change, you can’t do this job.” They are willing to leave room for language variation in their classroom, but they still place value on SAE as a dominant language.

## **Teacher 2**

Teacher 2 is also a current middle school English language arts teacher whose classes this year are for 7th and 8th grade. Like Teacher 1, this teacher’s school community is not very

diverse, and the language variation they encounter the most includes popular slang, different vocabulary, idioms, colloquialisms, and some dialects.

Similar to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 places a large emphasis on appropriateness in language use. They explain that “there's not just one way” to use language, but there is a correct time and place for different types. For example, the language students use to answer questions in class should differ from the language they use when talking with their friends. Likewise, the language that the teacher uses to text their sibling compared to the language they use to talk to their boss should look different. They emphasize the importance of writing with a specific purpose and for a specific context. Personal writing such as taking notes or journaling is appropriate for language variation, but talking to the school board would require the use of standard English.

Unlike Teacher 1, Teacher 2 argues that language use is an active choice all the time. In the same way that someone actively expresses their identity through hairstyles or clothes, they believe “we can express ourselves through our words as well.” Language use can change to show belonging to a group or an attempt to fit in, and this is a choice made by the speaker to influence how others see them. As Teacher 2 says, “whatever type of perception or identity you want to embrace at that time, might be how you use your language to show that.”

Teacher 2 defines SAE as rules regarding spelling, grammar, and punctuation; SAE is “what we would do in a formal situation for the conventions of English.” They mention that spelling and grammar are important, especially in essay and argumentative writing, but they focus their writing goals more on purpose, clarity, and audience—similarly to Teacher 1. They explain that their students are expected to write for a specific audience and with a specific purpose, and they look for clear claims, evidence, and reasoning in their students’ essays. They work with students individually, so they can cater their teaching to each specific student.

Interestingly, they acknowledge that “there’s many different ways to get the same information across,” and they encourage creativity and individualism in the writing process, even in essay writing. In this way, there is room for language variation in the classroom. It is more important that students’ writing makes sense than is perfect because “as long as somebody else reading it can understand your message, I think you’ve communicated.” Teacher 2 says that they often ask themselves the question “did they communicate to me their point?”, and they believe that “if I can walk away understanding their point, then they’ve met that big, huge standard.” Editing and looking at the SAE rules is the last step of the writing process in their classroom, and the main focus is more on effective communication than the rigid rules of SAE.

In general, Teacher 2 holds similar beliefs to those of Teacher 1; however, Teacher 2 places slightly less emphasis on SAE as “correct.” They encourage individualism in writing, and they prioritize clarity, purpose, and audience over anything else. In their classroom, unique and personal writing is encouraged because “writing takes all different forms and lengths, and the big idea is: are you getting your idea across to somebody else?” While this teacher does not explicitly discuss SAE as being the “educated” language, they imply its higher value in their definition when they say that it is the language used in formal communication. It seems that this teacher may not actively try to frame SAE as correct or more valued in their classroom, but their belief in this ideology is certainly there.

### **Teacher 3**

Teacher 3 is a former middle school English teacher. This teacher taught at many schools, most of which were middle schools but also include college level, high school, and a juvenile home. They have experience teaching in urban environments at schools whose Black students were the majority group. However, they have taught students of many ethnicities, immigrants,

and English Language Learners and have encountered diverse dialects and understandings of the English language.

This teacher, like both Teachers 1 and 2, touched on the idea of appropriateness. They discussed how social media and texting have influenced language use and that “you don’t type a paper the way you text to your friend.” Additionally, they explain that language varies between audience and context, saying that “you don’t speak to your teacher or give a public speech the way that you would talk to your friend on social media or if you were Facetiming them.” When discussing their bilingual students, they also discussed appropriateness, stating that SAE was meant for the school setting and is separate from their home language. This seems to imply that Teacher 3 believes that not only are variations of English out of place in the education system, but other languages are as well and should be saved for the home.

This is an especially surprising answer when considering this teacher’s point of view on the connection between language and identity, which is that language is a part of the identity of English Language Learners and multilingual students. They may use one language for their parents, one for their friends, and one for their teammates, and each expresses a different part of their identity. Combining this thought with the idea that SAE is for the classroom and that anything else should be left at home, Teacher 3 seems to encourage code-switching or the separation of identities in a much more drastic way than Teachers 1 and 2. They also say that language is not a part of identity for American students who just speak different dialects or variations of English. For these students, their language usage is not as much an identity as a “fad,” Teacher 3 claims. They view language variation within English as differences that have more to do with being trendy than identity.

This teacher defines SAE as “the language necessary to navigate American education systems, including higher education. The standard language that is expected of someone in an American professional setting.” They go on to explain that SAE is the language of the educated and that “it separates the educated from the uneducated,” defining “educated” in this situation as White people or the people who have the majority of the resources. The group’s position as the majority gives them control over language expectations, and Teacher 3 says the educated wants SAE to be spoken in higher education and the professional world; therefore, the rest of society’s speakers must follow their rules. Teacher 3 believes it is necessary to teach SAE to students so that they can navigate the world they live in because “the reality is, these kids—Americans—are going to need to conform to certain norms in order to move up the ladder.” Whether or not students like it, America is not the melting pot it claims to be, and diversity of language is not as accepted or valued as the melting pot term implies.

In their classroom, Teacher 3 prioritized aspects of writing such as sentence structure, grammar, correct spelling, subject-verb agreement, and a large vocabulary. Their primary goal as a teacher was to “make sure that [students] understand how to put sentences together, how to put paragraphs together,” and this teacher did so through the use of workbooks and practice correcting mistakes in other people’s writing. They would often start class with sentences or paragraphs for their students to correct to get practice recognizing and then correcting SAE mistakes. When Teacher 3 was growing up in the education system, this is how they learned English, and they believe this method helped them become a better writer because they understood the basics and brass tacks of reading and writing, something which they do not believe many English teachers today still teach.

In general, Teacher 3 holds the belief that SAE is correct and the most acceptable use of English. Unlike Teachers 1 and 2, this teacher does not believe there is any room for language variation in the classroom aside from creative writing styles such as narrative writing. Their decision to teach English with an emphasis on the rules is because they believe their students need to know the SAE rules to successfully navigate the society they live in. It does not necessarily need to be this way, they argue, but the reality is that it is, so it is their role as the teacher to teach them the correct language usage.

### **Proposed Process for Teaching English**

The three teachers all hold slightly different viewpoints on the value of SAE in the classroom. Each of them attempts to teach English in the most beneficial way for their students, but the question is raised: Is there an ideal way to approach teaching English in the classroom? Teacher 3 leaves no room for language variation in their classroom, expecting students to learn the SAE rules and conform to them because they are the “correct” version of English. This practice largely ignores the purpose of students’ writing, though, which is to communicate with a specific purpose to a specific audience. Teachers 1 and 2 both acknowledge that language variation does not always take away from the writing’s ability to communicate its purpose to its audience effectively. Clarity is the most important aspect of writing for them, and teaching English with this in mind leaves room for students to communicate or express themselves in their languages of nurture. Smith (2016) might define this approach to teaching language as an accommodation approach, meaning that teachers accommodate and accept students’ usage of language variation but do not teach these variations in the classroom. This type of approach has been proven to help students benefit over time with “acquiring reading mastery, developing self-confidence, motivation, and cognitive growth in reading” (Smith, 2016, p. 196).

In an ideal world, one language would not have more value than the other, and students could effectively communicate verbally and through writing however they please, no matter the context. However, “idealism does not put food on the table,” and the society that students exist in does place more value on SAE and stigmatizes variations of English that differ greatly from the standard (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 333). It is not realistic to completely stop teaching SAE because the preexisting beliefs society holds regarding language will still exist. Perhaps a more realistic goal is to make students, teachers, and other speakers aware of language subordination (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 334). Students cannot escape the need for SAE in society as it is currently built, but they can be made aware of why it is that their language of nurture is treated so differently from the standard. By breaking down misconceptions surrounding language variation and making speakers aware of the process by which language subordination targets certain languages and devalues them, teachers and students can approach language in a way that places equal value on all variations of English, while acknowledging the dominant ideology’s existence.

### **Conclusion**

The decision of the K-12 education system to frame standard American English as “correct” usage of English negatively impacts students whose native languages vary from the standard, and teachers must make an effort to create an educational environment that allows them to teach English in a way that does not devalue language variation. Students who speak stigmatized varieties of the English language face academic challenges, stereotyping, social isolation, and personal battles between language usage and value. It is important to recognize that language varieties are valuable in that they are effective ways to communicate, and languages like African American Vernacular English are more than just mistakes. They are intentional language systems that speakers use as a part of their own identity, and taking the

value out of that language of nurture causes conflicts with students' ability to value their own identity in its relationship to language. Teachers are in a position in students' lives where they can choose to uphold the ideology of SAE as correct, better, or more valuable or where they can choose to dismantle that ideology and instead find a way to support language variation in an English language arts classroom. Teaching English with a more rhetorical approach and acknowledging the power dynamics influencing language in the world of education are more realistic approaches to teaching English than simply ignoring language variety or eliminating SAE. There is no perfect, immediate solution that balances the values of all English language variations, but actively challenging standard language ideologies is a place to start.

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