THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTORS' SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN COLLEGE WRITING COURSES: A DISCOURSE ANALYTIC / ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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By

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THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTORS’ SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN COLLEGE WRITING COURSES: A DISCOURSE ANALYTIC / ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in literature on the miseducation of students whose native varieties of English differ most noticeably from the standard academic variety (Delpit 2006; Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006), this dissertation examines the links between the sociolinguistic language awareness of college writing instructors and their discursive interactions with students. Using a case study approach that is at once broadly ethnographic and closely focused on unfolding discourse, the study concentrates on the language awareness of three European American teachers, two of whom teach basic (developmental) writing and one who teaches a more advanced technical writing class.

After determining the three instructors’ respective levels of language awareness through analysis of the pejorative or affirmative lexical choices they make when discussing the varieties of English their students speak, this study analyzes the discursive interactions of the two basic writing instructors in one-on-one writing conferences. Focusing on student responses to the instructors’ comments on vernacular features in their writing, it also examines the students’ levels of engagement through their conversational backchanneling, word repetition, overlapping speech, and proactive commentary on their own writing.

The study finds that:
• One of the two basic writing instructors, who has received no training in language variation, uses far more pejorative language to describe the variety of English most of her students speak (i.e., AAVE) than do the other instructors, both of whom are enrolled in a PhD program that addresses issues of language variation in educational settings.

• While both basic writing instructors engage in highly interactive discussions of general grammar and writing issues with students, only the instructor with more developed sociolinguistic language awareness maintains comparable levels of interaction when discussing language variation per se.

• Even the basic writing instructor with highly developed language awareness lacks the specific linguistic knowledge needed to engage students in interactive discussions of AAVE phonology and morphosyntax.

This study concludes that while general teacher training in language variation leads to more interactive conferences overall, knowledge of the specific linguistic details of students’ varieties of English is needed for the most engaging instruction.
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CHAPTER 1

THE CALL FOR LINGUISTICALLY INFORMED DISCOURSE IN MULTIDIALECTAL WRITING INSTRUCTION

Figure 1.1. One instructor’s feedback on the essay of a college-level “basic” writer

The preceding essay was written by Aaron, a young African American man enrolled in a U.S. community college basic writing class. Because he did not receive a passing grade on the college’s pre-entry writing exam, he must now successfully complete this non-credit-bearing course before he will be permitted to matriculate and enroll in any credit-bearing courses at the

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1 In addition to referring throughout this study to Sweetland’s (2006) dissertation, Teaching Writing in the African American Classroom: A Sociolinguistic Approach, I also want to credit her with the inspiration to begin this chapter with a student writing sample. As Sweetland so graphically reveals at the beginning of her dissertation, a picture truly is worth a thousand words.

2 While the issue of language variation and education is addressed in schools throughout the world (e.g. Cheshire, Edwards, Münstermann, and Weltens 1989), the current research focus is on U.S. implications.
college. His instructor, Rachael, is aware of the gatekeeping role her class plays in his ability to meet his educational goals and is determined to help him pass the course. As evidenced by the many marginal and interlineal comments, as well as the heavy sentence-level editing of this paper, moreover, Rachael has given Aaron’s essay a lot of attention. Not only does she provide global feedback such as “Give examples” and “Expand on the ideas in this ¶,” she also circles and/or edits a phonologically influenced spelling or a morphosyntactic pattern in almost every line of text. Yet at no point does Rachael refer to the variety of English that Aaron clearly speaks (i.e., African American Vernacular English).

As early as the 1960s, William Labov (1969; 1972a) and other linguists (e.g., Le Page 1968; Stewart 1964; Shuy 1965) stressed the need for educators to recognize the rule-governed patterns that underlie many of the “errors” they address in students’ speech and writings. In 1979, moreover, the issue became a legal matter when a Michigan judge ruled that the Ann Arbor School District had contributed to the miseducation of students at Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School by failing to address the variety of English they spoke (i.e., AAVE). Since then, linguists and education scholars have continued to call for increased linguistic knowledge among teachers who work in the growing number of linguistically diverse U.S. schools (e.g., Delpit 2006; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). These scholars also argue that it is often the instructors’ minimal understanding of (and negative attitudes toward) the varieties of English their bidialectal and multidialectal students speak that prevent these students from fully building

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3 Discussed in Rickford (1999). Rickford also mentions studies of AAVE funded by “the Office of Education and/or by private foundations interested in potential educational applications” (p. 292), including Shuy et al. (1967), Wolfram (1969), Mitchell-Kernan (1969), Legum et al. (1971), and Fasold (1972b).
on their underlying linguistic competence while adding Edited American English\textsuperscript{4} to their linguistic repertoires. A growing number of studies and teacher texts describe the linguistic characteristics of the varieties of English that U.S. teachers encounter in the classroom, and they often offer linguistically informed pedagogical approaches for addressing or incorporating these varieties into instruction (e.g., Ball and Lardner 2005; Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011; DeKleine 2006; Denham and Lobeck 2005, 2010; Farr and Daniels 1986; Klein 2003; Labov 1972a; LeMoine 2003; Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 2009; Reaser 2006, 2010; Rickford 1999; Schleppegrell 2004; Smitherman 1999; Sweetland 2006, 2010; Wheeler 2005; Wheeler and Swords 2006; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Yet widespread understanding of language variation does not appear to have reached the majority of pre-service or in-service teachers in U.S. schools (Ball and Muhammad 2003; Blake and Cutler 2003; Agnew and McLaughlin 2001; Bowie and Bond 1994; CCCC 2000; Corson 2001; Cross, DeVaney, and Jones 2001; Rickford 1999, 2006; Smitherman 1999; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Lippi-Green 1997; Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 2009).

The disconnect between the literature and what teachers know about language variation is especially noticeable, moreover, in the context of writing instruction, as many multidialectal students are still “faced with a conflict between their own cultural and linguistic systems (and their own sense of identity) and those of the standard academic written language” (Ball 2002, p.89). Nowhere is this conflict more evident than in the U.S. college-level basic (or developmental) writing class, which is often heavily populated with speakers of stigmatized varieties of English, including, among others, AAVE, Chicano English, Appalachian English,

\textsuperscript{4} Throughout this study, I use the term “Edited American English” (EAE) primarily for written language used in academic contexts. While Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills (2009) use this term instead of “Standard English” to avoid “perpetuating” the myth of a universal American standard” (footnote #3), I also consider it to be more appropriate for written academic English, which even for speakers of “standard” varieties of English differs from their primary spoken language. As Elbow (2006) argues, "standard written English is no one’s mother tongue” (p. xiii).
West African Pidgin English, or Caribbean Creole English. Moreover, in the particular case of writing instruction, in which teachers often work one-on-one with students to help them acquire the conventions of Edited American English, the language that teachers use when discussing the individual compositions their students write often has a profound effect on both learning and engagement (e.g., Auten 1991; Fife and O’Neil 2001; McLaughlin and Agnew 1999; Meier 1985; Straub 1999; Taylor 1989).

While the studies briefly mentioned here already provide compelling arguments for increasing writing instructors’ understanding of (and appreciation for) the language varieties of their multidialectal students (see Chapters 2 and 3 to follow), I argue in the current study that for meaningful change, linguists and education scholars also need to explore the links between the language knowledge and attitudes of individual writing instructors and their day-to-day discursive interactions with students. While surveys, quantitative studies, and anecdotal examples of teacher talk provide invaluable data to support macro-level changes (Ball 2002), in-depth analysis of teacher discourse about language can illuminate at a micro-level the areas in which these changes are most needed.

With this goal as a guiding principle, the current study uses a broadly ethnographic and detailed discourse analysis approach to examine how teachers’ basic knowledge of language variation (or lack thereof) is linked to their everyday discursive interactions with students. Focusing primarily (but not exclusively) on the instructors’ interactions with speakers of African American Vernacular English, this study also has wider applicability to educational contexts in which other varieties of English (e.g., Appalachian English, Chicano English, English-based creoles) are spoken. This broader perspective is reflected, moreover, in the study’s three central research questions:
1. What knowledge of language variation do college-level writing teachers bring to the classroom?

2. What are the discourses of these teachers with respect to language variation?

3. What are the links between their knowledge of language variation and their discursive interactions with students?

Finally, the motivation for focusing specifically on the language awareness of writing instructors in this study is twofold. That is, it is first rooted in the very nature of a writing class, which not only offers multiple opportunities to observe metalingual discussions between teachers and students, but also provides a window into the linguistic knowledge-base of instructors that might not be as evident in discussions of math, science, or history. Secondly, the decision to focus on writing instructors stems from my personal background as an English teacher and as English as a Second Language writing instructor. In addition to offering a unique perspective on the challenges faced by teachers who struggle to give meaningful feedback to their students, my background also allows me to talk with teachers both as a researcher and as a fellow writing instructor. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, this profoundly influences the nature of this study.

1.1. Description of the Study

The current study took place at a community college and a four-year university on the U.S. East Coast. It began in August of 2009, when I began to interview prospective teacher participants (see interview questions and follow-up questionnaire in Appendices A and B). Three college-level instructors participated in individual one- to two-hour recorded interviews, and all three agreed to participate in the study. I then observed most sessions of a single writing class taught by each instructor over a two- to three-month period between September and December of
2009. Two of the classes were basic (developmental) writing classes at the community college, while the third was a more advanced technical writing class at the university. At the end of this time period, I then conducted a one- to two-hour follow-up interview with each instructor.

During the research period, I observed one-on-one writing conferences between the instructors and their students and was provided by the instructors with copies of the students’ essays. My class observations also yielded a wide variety of metalinguistic data, including the instructors’ written comments on student papers, their spoken discourse in the classroom and in one-on-one writing conferences, and the pedagogical discourse of the texts they incorporated into their instruction (e.g., textbooks or handouts). While the current analysis focuses primarily on the initial interviews with all three instructors and on the written commentary and one-on-one writing conferences of the two basic writing instructors, this wealth of additional data has provided much-needed context for the many intertextual references that occur (or do not occur) in the interviews, writing conferences, and written commentary.

1.2. The Writing Instructors

Known by the pseudonyms Al, Rachael, and Barbara, the instructors who participated in this study are all European American. Al and Rachael taught the two basic writing classes that I observed, while Barbara taught the technical writing class. At the time of the study, all three instructors already had extensive experience teaching writing to speakers of African American Vernacular English. Al and Barbara had taught both basic and more advanced writing courses at the college level for a number of years, while Rachael had taught primarily at the middle-school and high-school levels and was beginning her second semester as a college-level basic writing instructor. Barbara and Al were also enrolled in a PhD program that included a focus on issues related to language variation and education. While neither Al nor Barbara had completed any
courses devoted solely to specific varieties of English such as AAVE, they had each explored the broader issues of language variation in their course work. Rachael, on the other hand, while holding an MA in Education, had never completed any classes or workshops on language variation. When asked what varieties of English they spoke, all three instructors claimed to be speakers of Standard English, with Barbara adding that she also spoke a variety of Southern English. The instructors were also eager to discuss their views about language and writing, both in the interviews and before and after each class.

1.3. The Instructors’ Language Awareness

In the study to follow, I first analyze the instructors’ discursive approaches to language variation in their initial interviews with me in order to determine their respective knowledge of (and attitudes toward) language variation. Appropriating the expression “language awareness” from the field of second language acquisition (Andrews 2007), I focus in particular on three areas of awareness argued to be essential for effective instruction of multidialectal students (Hymes 1974; Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Rickford 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). These include:

1. The instructors’ general understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation, including both their specific linguistic understanding of the phonological and morphosyntactic patterning common to many stigmatized language varieties (e.g., verb regularization, double negation, consonant cluster reduction, etc.) and their general awareness of varying discourse styles.⁵

⁵ While awareness of discourse styles is an essential component of a general awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation, I do not include it every time that I list the three types of language awareness. Rather, I refer to it on a case-by-case basis when it is particularly applicable to the discussion.
2. Their familiarity with the concepts of *linguistic repertoire* (all of the varieties of languages or styles available to an individual) and *communicative competence* (a person’s ability to make appropriate choices from his or her linguistic repertoire).\(^6\)

3. Their awareness of the importance of the vernacular in confirming membership in a *community network*, along with their *critical* awareness of the fundamental “rights” of students to have their varieties of English treated as genuine rule-governed language.\(^7\)

It is important to note, moreover, that this definition of “language awareness” is not intended as a replacement for the often extensive metalinguistic understanding of *Edited American English* that writing instructors possess. Nor does it dismiss as trivial the general “folk awareness” of language variation that allows teachers and others to recognize and identify phonological and morphosyntactic features that distinguish one variety of English from another (Preston 1996; 2002). As Preston (2002) notes, people often hold deep-seated and very strong beliefs about standard and vernacular varieties of language. Moreover, these beliefs emanate from a systematic view of language as something *external* to the speaker with one “fully correct form” that is “the only rule-governed variety” (Preston 2000, p. 64). As Preston argues, moreover, these beliefs should not be dismissed lightly since they often reflect genuine perceptions of the social and linguistic issues that surround different varieties of a single language. Thus Sweetland (2006) discusses the importance of taking teachers’ existing language awareness, which often includes a “passive” knowledge of vernacular patterns, and their pedagogical goals into consideration when attempting to effect change. Describing a study in which she combined a literature-based curriculum with a contrastive-analysis approach to language variation in order to help language arts teachers transition from a deficit approach to

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\(^6\) Milroy and Milroy (1999) devote an entire chapter to this issue (pp.99-115).

\(^7\) This “right” is described in a 1974 resolution of the National Council of Teachers of English Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC 2000) entitled “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.”
AAVE to a more affirmative one, she notes, “Most significantly, the fundamental approach to race-related language differences embodied in the curriculum was a moderate one that left standard language ideology essentially unchallenged” (p. 89). Hence, by not simply dismissing the instructors’ heavily entrenched “folk” views about the superiority of Standard English, Sweetland was better able to effect attitudinal changes toward the importance of respecting and building on students’ vernaculars in writing instruction. The current study, therefore, not only “describes” the language awareness of the three college writing instructors, it also explores how these instructors discursively build (or might build) on their underlying and often systematic folk beliefs about language in order to acquire (or apply) the linguist’s scientific view of language variation as internally rule-governed and valid.

1.4. The Instructors’ Lexical Choices

The current analysis of language awareness is also grounded in a Bakhtinian interpretation of the words the instructors use to refer to vernacular patterns in their students’ writings. That is, as I explore the specific noun phases (NPs), adjective phrases (APs), and verb phrases (VPs) that they use in both their interviews with me and in their one-on-one writing conferences with students, I also recognize that their lexical choices may reflect a multitude of factors, including their own linguistic, educational, and professional backgrounds; the institutional contexts in which they teach writing (e.g., a basic writing class vs. a more advanced technical writing class); and their individual approaches to (and beliefs about) the process of writing itself. As Bakhtin (1981) argues,

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (p. 276)
Therefore, as I explore the many “semantic layers” of the instructors’ lexical choices during the interviews and in the writing conferences, I also compare their specific references to vernacular patterns with the language they use to address general issues of grammar and writing unrelated to language variation *per se* (e.g., sentence fragments, comma usage, essay organization, etc.). By doing so, I am better able to highlight the meaning features of the words and expressions the instructors use to address the vernacular with their students. Moreover, I am able to discern very different levels of language awareness between Rachael, on the one hand, and Al and Barbara on the other.

**1.5. Discursive Interactions in the Interviews**

The purpose of first analyzing the instructors’ lexical choices in their interviews with me, moreover, is that I am able to provide an initial description of the instructors’ language views before exploring how these views are linked to their discursive interactions with students (see Chapter 6). In addition, the interview questions (see Appendix A) also allow me first to ask general questions about the instructors’ approaches to grammar and then to probe more closely their approaches to language variation. So, too, the follow-up questionnaire at the end of the interviews (see Appendix B) allows the instructors to reconsider some of their views and either add to or revise their oral responses, providing additional data for analysis. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 5, the semi-structured conversational nature of the interviews often leads to more frank discussions of language views than might be revealed in a more a quantitative study.

**1.6. Discursive Interactions in the Writing Conferences**

In addition to exploring the instructors’ language awareness through analysis of their lexical choices in the interviews, this study seeks to link that language awareness to their respective interactions with students. As multidialectal basic writing classes provide especially
rich opportunities to observe such links, moreover, this investigation focuses in particular on Al’s and Rachael’s discursive interactions with their basic writing students in one-on-one conferences. That is, it explores the effects of the instructors’ lexical choices on the interactions themselves by examining the backchannels and other response tokens that students use. As argued by a number of scholars (e.g., Clancy et al. 1996; F. Farr 2002; Meier 1985), these are strong indicators of student engagement and understanding.

1.7. Written Commentary

The current study also takes a brief look at some of Rachael’s and Al’s written feedback on their students’ papers. Not only is written commentary considered an integral component of the broader ongoing conversation about writing that occurs in writing conferences and class discussions (Fife and O’Neill 2001; Straub 1996), but, as revealed in Rachael’s comments on Aaron’s paper above (Fig. 1.1), it presents a strikingly visual portrayal of an instructor’s approach to vernacular features in a student’s writings. As stressed by Farr and Daniels (1986) and Wolfram et al. (1999), overly heavy marking of vernacular features will serve to discourage many multidialectal writers from even attempting to acquire the conventions of Edited American English.

1.8. The Context of Writing Instruction

Finally, by very briefly addressing the discursive interactions of Barbara and her technical writing students, I also explore the effects of different writing contexts on teacher/student discussions about language. In the basic writing class, the focus is often remedial. Students are expected to “clean up” their language in order to move into regular first-year composition courses (Blanton 1999, p. 126). In the technical writing class, on the other hand, the focus is primarily on the application of writing to students’ professional careers (e.g., learning to
create resumes, job application letters, and technical reports). These very different instrumental goals are often reflected, moreover, in the language the instructors use. In order to effectively analyze how a teacher’s language awareness is linked to his or her discursive interactions with students, therefore, it is also essential to understand the teacher’s perception of the context in which he/she is working. As Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) have observed,

More particularly, research that addresses the contexts as much as the behaviors of talk can tease out the ordering - motivational, strategic, behavioral, attributional, and evaluative - that interactants themselves impose upon their own communication experiences, and the ways in which the social practices of talk both are constrained by and themselves constrain goals, identities, and social structures. (p. 1)

1.9. Organization of the Study

In order to ground this study in the appropriate linguistic and educational literature, the review of the literature is divided between Chapter 2, which examines the literature on teachers’ knowledge of (and attitudes toward) language variation, and Chapter 3, which reviews studies on writing instruction for multidialectal speakers of English. Chapters 4 then discusses the data and methodology used in this study, while Chapter 5 addresses the educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds of the three participating instructors. The instructors’ varying discourses about language are then analyzed in the next three chapters as follows: Chapter 6 focuses on Al’s, Rachael’s, and Barbara’s discussions of language variation during the initial interviews; Chapter 7 addresses Al’s and Rachael’s discursive interactions with students during their writing conferences; and Chapter 8 examines the written commentary that Al and Rachael provide on their students’ compositions. Finally, Chapter 9 explores the implications of Al’s and Rachael’s very different levels of language awareness and the effects these differences have on their discursive interactions with students. It also offers directions for future research on achieving linguistically informed writing instruction for multidialectal students.
Thus through in-depth analysis of the discourse of three writing instructors, two of whom teach “basic writing” with very different levels of language awareness, this study provides what educational researchers Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Ferris (2005) call a “microethnographic” picture of how teachers talk, particularly as they address the “nonstandard” patterns they encounter in their students’ writings. In doing so, moreover, this study not only finds that increased language awareness helps instructors to engage in more interactive discussions of language variation with their multidialectal students, it also demonstrates how a lack of such awareness can hamper the efforts of even the most well-intentioned instructors. In addition, the focused attention to the instructors’ lexical choices helps to distinguish one particular type of language awareness that could still be more fully developed among the instructors who otherwise demonstrate strong general awareness of (and appreciation for) the rule-governed nature of language variation. That is, it reveals a need for far deeper linguistic knowledge of the phonological and morphosyntactic features and patterns of specific varieties of English. In sum, this study adds in-depth discursive support to the argument for increased linguistic training of language arts and writing instructors.
CHAPTER 2
DEVELOPING TEACHERS’ LANGUAGE AWARENESS

In 1974, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC 2000) passed a resolution entitled “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” which defined the organization’s policy on language variation in the classroom:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language--the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

Twenty-two years later, however, in a survey of a representative sample of NCTE and CCCC members, it was found that approximately two-thirds of the secondary and post-secondary language arts and composition teachers surveyed were unaware of this language policy (CCCC, 2000). Moreover, the survey revealed that almost a third (28.4%) of the teachers had never had any exposure to the study of linguistics in college, while almost half of the remaining teachers had had only a basic “Introduction to the English Language” course. Far fewer had taken courses such as “African American English,” “American Dialects,” or “Linguistics for Teachers” that specifically address language variation.

These findings come, moreover, after 40 years of research by linguists and education scholars indicating a need for greater language awareness on the part of U.S. teachers. Ever since the landmark ruling in a Michigan court case (Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District 1979) determined that the failure of a group of AAVE
speaking children to become literate was due to their teachers’ ignorance of the variety of English they spoke, studies have shown that when language arts and composition instructors ignore or denounce the language practices of their students, they often fail to achieve the pedagogical goal of helping them to add Edited American English\(^8\) to their linguistic repertoires (Delpit 2006; Rickford 1999; Sweetland, 2006; Taylor 1989; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999). Conversely, when teachers receive instruction on the rule-governed nature of different varieties of English such as AAVE, as well as specific methodologies for incorporating the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their speakers into instruction, they not only exhibit more positive attitudes toward these varieties in their classrooms, they are also in a position to effect greater academic achievement among their students (Ball and Muhammad 2003; LeMoine 2003; Rickford 1999, 2006; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler and Swords 2006). A few studies also provide quantitative data on improved student learning when language arts and writing instructors use a “contrastive analysis” approach to language variation in their classes (e.g., Harris-Wright 1999, LeMoine 2001, Taylor 1989, all discussed in Richford 2006, pp. 84-85).

In order to analyze the language awareness of writing teachers and its effect on their interactions with students in multidialectal classrooms, it is important to review the literature on what such awareness entails. In addition to exploring what linguists and education scholars believe teachers should know about language variation in order to communicate effectively with students who speak varieties of English that differ from Edited American English, this area of research also explores what teachers actually do know and believe and the effects of their knowledge and attitudes on student learning.

\(^8\) For an explanation of my use of the term Edited American English (EAE), see Footnote 4 in Chapter 1.
2.1. Defining Language Awareness

The term *language awareness* has been used in many contexts to describe “a person’s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life” (1982 Language Awareness Working Party definition, quoted in Andrews 2007, p. 11). According to Andrews (2007), however, the term is so broadly used that it is “increasingly difficult to pin down the concept” (p.12). That is, *language awareness* has been used in both L1 and L2 contexts to include awareness of

…the relationships between languages, language development in young children, the nature of social interaction, language-choice and personal identity, individual and societal bilingualism and multilingualism, language variation, and the (mis)uses of language for social control, as well as the more traditional questions (of central importance to both mother-tongue and L2 teachers) about the contribution made by explicit study of language to the learning of language, i.e. mastery of the system. (p. 12, referring to Mitchell, Hooper and Brumfit 1994, p. 5)

In the current paper, I use the term to describe a teacher’s *sociolinguistic* awareness of language variation in the classroom and in society. That is, I examine both the *linguistic* knowledge a teacher has about the different varieties of English he or she encounters in the classroom and the *social* understanding that instructor possesses about language variation in society at large.

Arguments for studying these issues in tandem go back as far as the early 1970s, when William (1972a) discussed the relationship between Black English Vernacular (BEV) and the “culture,” “social organization,” and “political situation” of inner-city African American youth and Dell Hymes (1974) defined “the problems of education and social relations in highly urbanized societies” as a primary focus of sociolinguists (pp. 84-85). Since then, the social significance of linguistic differences in U.S. classrooms has been a major focus of research (e.g., Baugh 1988; Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Kells 2006; Labov 1972a, 1995; Lippi-Green 1997; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram *et al.* 1999; Wolfram and
Schilling-Estes 2006). As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) note, one of the most serious implications of language variation in society is the fact that the “innate intelligence” and “morality” of a speaker is often judged according to the particular social or ethnic variety of English he or she uses (p. 167). For this reason, Corson (2001), referring to the work of Norman Fairclough (1985, 1995) and Pierre Bourdieu (1966, 1981, 1984), claims that the educational system and “the discourse practices that it authorizes” can serve to “repress, dominate, and disempower” speakers with different language practices (p. 16) unless both teachers and students develop “critical awareness” of language variation (p.67-68). Rickford (1999), referring specifically to the higher levels of AAVE features in the speech of working-class versus middle-class AAVE speakers (e.g., Wolfram 1969 and Rickford 1992), argues that “the fact that working- and lower-class African American students tend to do worse than their middle-class counterparts” may well be related to differences in their language use, or to teachers’ attitudes and responses to their language use” (p. 335). Kells (2006) also argues that in order for composition teachers to work effectively with Chicano English speakers, they need to be trained “in facilitative ways of analyzing their students’ language,” including the examination of “the historical and sociocultural contexts within which the students’ language and literacy practices have emerged” (p. 192). Finally, a number of studies refer to the “covert prestige” of the vernacular in multidialectal classrooms (Milroy and Milroy 1999; Siegel 2006; Delpit 2006; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). While proficiency in Edited American English retains the “overt prestige” associated with academic and professional advancement, many students resist adopting it in school because of the sense of “group identity” the vernacular provides in an environment where students believe their community is not respected (Delpit 2006, pp. 94-95). Thus “widely recognized stigmatized features such as multiple negation, nonstandard subject-
verb agreement, and different irregular verb paradigms may function at the same time as positive, covertly prestigious features in terms of local norms” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 184).

In addition to these global discussions of the need for teacher language awareness, many studies also focus more locally on the specific knowledge about language and language variation that students (and thus teachers) need to acquire. It is generally agreed among linguists and educational scholars that a fundamental component of such knowledge involves a teacher’s awareness of the rule-governed nature of the different varieties of English he or she encounters in the classroom (e.g., Reed 1981; Rickford 1999; Siegel 2006; Wolfram et al. 2006; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Winer 2006). From a social perspective, it is argued that teachers who understand the underlying rule-governed nature of the vernacular features they observe not only become more tolerant and accepting of the students who use them, they also raise their expectations for these students (Farr and Daniels 1986; Ball and Muhammad 2003; Rickford 1999; Siegel 2006). From a purely pedagogical standpoint, moreover, some research indicates that teachers who actually study the underlying grammars of their students’ speech and writing may also be able to deliver more effective instruction and feedback when teaching these students to read and write in Edited American English (De Kleine 2006; Delpit 2006; Farr Whiteman 1981a; Labov 1972a; 1998; Nero 2006b and 2006c; Reed 1981; Rickford 1999, 2006; Taylor 1989; Wolfram et al. 1999). Moreover, by studying the rule-governed nature of the vernaculars they encounter, teachers can learn to treat the acquisition of Edited American English as an “additive” process, rather than a “replacive” one that substitutes one variety of English with another (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 318). According to a number of scholars, such an
approach will also help students to build on the linguistic knowledge they already possess (Rickford 1999; Siegel 2006; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

In sum, three key areas of competence are often discussed in the literature on teachers’ sociolinguistic language awareness.

1. General understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation, including both their specific linguistic understanding of the phonological and morphosyntactic patterning common to many stigmatized language varieties (e.g., verb regularization, double negation, consonant cluster reduction, etc.) and their general awareness of varying discourse styles.

2. Familiarity with the concepts of linguistic repertoire (all of the varieties of languages or styles available to an individual) and communicative competence (a person’s ability to make appropriate choices from his or her linguistic repertoire).

3. Awareness of the importance of the vernacular in confirming membership in a community network, along with critical awareness of the fundamental “rights” of students to have their varieties of English treated as genuine rule-governed language.

In order to create a working definition of teacher language awareness, therefore, I examine the relevant literature in all three areas.

2.2. Phonological and Morphosyntactic Patterning

Before discussing the level of phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge a writing instructor may need in order to work effectively with students whose varieties of English differ most noticeably from Edited American English, it is first useful to review studies that describe dialectal influence in writing. Table 2.1 (below) lists some of the most common vernacular patterns that appear in student writing. While many of the features are unique to African
American Vernacular English, some are also shared by English-based creoles and other varieties of American English. Moreover, as will be discussed in Section 2.2.4 below, some also resemble developmental patterns found in the writings of all new writers.

Table 2.1. Some vernacular patterns encountered in student writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Variety of English</th>
<th>Student Writing Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ø subject/verb agreement</td>
<td>Most American English vernaculars</td>
<td>I think that a person that <em>don't</em> go to college, <em>don't</em> have the opportunity to have a better life (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 115).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø –ed with past tense forms, perfect forms, verbal adjectives, and passives</td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td>When he was <em>finish</em> I <em>return</em> to find out why my combatants has left me like that (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 97). They have <em>work</em> hard (Smitherman 1992, p. 52). I am writing because I am <em>concern</em> of the recreation project…in our town (Smitherman 1992, p. 52). I am <em>lock</em> in an apartment (Smitherman 1992, p. 52).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø plural –s</td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td>Pioneers didn’t have such <em>thing</em>…to keep their foods (Smitherman 1992), p. 52.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø plural –s after nouns preceded by quantifiers</td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td>…for at least four <em>year</em> of college (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 106). …all my <em>relative</em> (De Kleine 2006, p. 214).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“they” for possessive “their”</td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td>They don’t see and hear things the same way as <em>they</em> children do (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 11). …they will have a lot of money in the bank for <em>they</em> family and <em>they</em> self (Smitherman 1992, p. 53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past-tense be leveling</td>
<td>AAVE Most Am. English vernaculars</td>
<td>The pioneers then <em>was</em> no different than what we do today (Smitherman 1992, p. 53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø copula</td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td>A child begin to feel that it Ø <em>true</em> (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 102). He Ø a real good citizen (Smitherman 1992, p. 52).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expletive <em>It</em></td>
<td>AAVE English-based creoles</td>
<td><em>It</em> is a lot of different things that would brighten up our community (Smitherman 1992, p. 53).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple negation (less frequent in writing)</td>
<td>AAVE Southern American English vernaculars</td>
<td>Last night there was a straight-looking new bird in the neighborhood <em>no one</em> seen before <em>nowhere</em> (Smitherman 1992, p. 53). …they <em>don't</em> have <em>no</em> crime (Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999, p. 131).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypercorrection</td>
<td>Resulting from over-correction of vernacular features (Wolfram <em>et al.</em>, 1999)</td>
<td>Now you wish you had <em>stucked</em> to your job (Shaughnessy 1977, p. 102). I decided that I was going to <em>talked</em> to some police officers (De Kleine, p. 218).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 The features of AAVE are described in Labov (1972a); Rickford (1999); and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006); the general characteristics of pidgin and creole languages are discussed in Romaine (1988) and Singh (2000); and developmental writing patterns that resemble vernacular patterns are discussed in Farr Whiteman (1981). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) also discuss vernacular features common to more than one variety of English.
Several studies in the past three decades have provided detailed analyses of the vernacular features most likely to appear in student writing (e.g., De Kleine 2006; Farr Whiteman 1981; Pratt-Johnson 2006; Smitherman 1992; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989). For example, Farr Whiteman (1981) notes five features that appear most frequently in the essays she has analyzed (p. 156), including “verbal –s absence (“He walk to school every day”); unmarked plurals (“They walk down the street with their radio- in their hand-”); possessive –s absence (“my girlfriend house”); unmarked past tense with consonant clusters (“He miss- the bus yesterday, so he walk- to school”); and copula absence (“She so calm and look so at ease”).

Taylor (1989), in an analysis of compositions written by AAVE speakers from inner-city Chicago enrolled at a small college in Illinois, adds the following features to the list: multiple negation (“I didn’t know nothing…”); habitual be (“Sometimes I be studying…”); irregular subject/verb agreement (“…my two wonderful children makes life even better”). She also distinguishes influences from two types of consonant cluster reduction: (1) that which occurs generally at the end of a word (e.g., “First of all I like to laugh and joke to almos always keep a smile on my face” and that which is involved past –ed consonant clusters (e.g., “Then one day while driving around in one of his many cars,…he happen to be driving on the highway and decided to turn off at a exit” (p. 106)

Smitherman (1992), in an examination of 2,764 essays written by 17-year-old African American students (from all over the country) from 1969 to 1988/89 in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) finds that AAVE features are more likely to occur in some “rhetorical modalities” than others (p. 48). For example, while students wrote essays in three categories in both 1969 and 1979 (i.e., “imaginative/narrative,” “descriptive/informative,” and
“persuasive,” p. 48), they showed reduction in AAVE features in the narrative essays, but not in the descriptive essays, in which there were actually increases in the numbers of some variables, including irregular verbs (e.g., “Back then they eat a lot of health food”) and subject-verb agreement (e.g., “The pioneers then was no different than what we do today.”) (p. 53).

Smitherman also notes that copula absence, which represented six percent of the AAVE features, remained the same over the ten-year period from 1969 to 1979. In the essays written in the 1984 and 1988 testings, however, Smitherman finds a significant decline in certain AAVE variables over the four-year period, specifically, Ø copula, expletive it “(It is a lot of different things that would brighten up our community,” p. 53), Ø –ed morpheme, and Ø –s morpheme (i.e., Ø 3rd person sing. –s, Ø plural –s, and Ø possessive –s), suggesting that the writings of students who speak AAVE have in fact been converging toward Edited American English over time.

Sweetland (2006) claims that there is often an “inverse relationship” between the “linguistic saliency” 10 of a particular feature in speech and identification of that feature in writing (p. 209). For example, she notes that while certain plural nouns (i.e. nouns of measure and count nouns) often remain uninflected in spoken AAVE and other varieties of English, nouns of measure (e.g., “ten pound”) are uninflected more often than count nouns (e.g., “all the holiday”) in speech. Yet in a revision task in which students were asked to circle features of AAVE in a sample essay and substitute Edited American English equivalents, Sweetland found that the percentage of students who noticed and revised uninflected plural count nouns, the least salient feature in speech, was greater (69.5%) than that of students who revised nouns of measure, a

10 It is important to note that the term “linguistic saliency” is not readily defined in linguistics. While Sweetland does not define the term, she does explain her use of it as follows: “One factor which may affect student learning is linguistic saliency. A more detailed look at the results from revision task results suggests that features that occur more frequently in speech may also be more difficult for students to discriminate in writing. It is easy to see how the frequency of variable in speech may affect saliency of feature, thereby influencing how easily it is raised to consciousness. If a given variant occurs only infrequently in a particular environment, it may be more noticeable when it does occur. Conversely, when a variable occurs more frequently, its presence becomes less obvious” (p. 209).
more salient feature in speech (55.7%). Sweetland found a similar inverse relationship for zero copula. Students were more likely to circle and revise copula absence before a noun phrase, the least favorable environment in speech, than before a verb…ing construction, a more favorable environment in speech. Thus she argues that “additional instructional emphasis should be given to those linguistic environments that strongly favor vernacular variants in speech, as those environments are likely to be the most difficult to raise to the level of consciousness” [i.e., in writing)] (p. 212).

Finally, two studies examine the influence of Creole English grammatical features in the writings of students from the Caribbean and Anglophone West Africa (De Kleine 2006; Pratt-Johnson 2006). In a study of 98 writing samples produced by middle school and high school students from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia enrolled in ESL classes in a school district outside of Washington D.C., De Kleine (2006) found the absence of plural marking in 60 of the 98 samples, all in contexts where plurality is already indicated by other lexical items such as quantifiers (e.g., “People can make many thingØ from it,” p. 215). De Kleine also found unmarked possessives (18 writing samples), lack of subject/verb agreement (47 samples), and unmarked past tense (45 samples). Copula absence was also noted (47 samples), as well as the absence of the indefinite article in contexts where it would be used in Standard American English (e.g., Miss T have small eyes, Ø small mouth, and Ø big head,” p. 216).

Pratt-Johnson (2006), in a summary of Jamaican Creole features found in the writings of elementary, middle school, and high school students, notes the influence of Jamaican Creole phonology on spelling. For example, the pronunciation of “h” before vowels in some Jamaican Creole words produces written spellings such as hat for “at,” hone for “own,” hairplane for “airplane,” and hit for “it,” while the deletion of initial “h” in other words leads to spelling such
as *orse for “horse,” etc. (pp. 128-129). Certain Standard English words with a “special creole meaning” also add a certain amount of confusion, including the use of SE “foot” for *leg*, “hand” for *arm*, and “look for” for *visit* (pp. 123-124), as well as a number of lexical items that do not exist in Standard English (e.g., *labrish* [to gossip], *nyam* [to eat], *smaddy* [somebody], etc., p. 123). Thus she implies that an instructor would need special knowledge of Jamaican Creole to provide effective feedback on the following sentence written by an eleventh-grade student:

*The boy nyam him lunch hat one* [The boy eats his lunch at one] (p. 127). Moreover, teachers’ awareness of the “more global” patterns of creole Englishes (e.g., as manifested in different subject/verb agreement patterns, lack of noun and verb inflections, etc.) would help them to view patterns such as these not as “weakness” in students’ writings, but rather as “the ongoing interaction between their native creoles and standard English along the creole continuum” (p. 128).

### 2.2.1. Teacher perceptions of rule-governed language variation

Even as linguists continue to portray vernacular features in student writing as rule-governed patterns emanating from the writer’s “tacit” knowledge of language (e.g., Farr 1986), however, many instructors, parents, and students continue to view them as incorrect forms of Standard English (Ball and Muhammad 2003; Corson 2001; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, and Carpenter 1996; Lippi-Green 1997; Shaughnessy 1977; Sweetland 2006; Walsh 1991; Wheeler 2005). Anecdotes of such beliefs abound at all levels of education. As one preservice teacher expresses her views, “double negatives are like scraping nails on a chalkboard” (Ball and Muhammad 2003, p. 76). Another teacher claims that her Puerto Rican students “come to school speaking a hodge podge. They are all mixed up and don’t know any language well. As a result they can’t even think clearly” (Walsh 1991, p. 107, cited in Zentella 1996, pp. 8-9, and in
Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 111). Sweetland (2006) describes an elementary school teacher who would give students detention for using the words “I” and “be” together, while Wheeler (2005) finds that pre-service teachers continue to believe “with remarkable consistency” that when a student uses a vernacular pattern such as invariant be (e.g., “I be playing baseball”) or unmarked plurals (e.g., “I have two sister and two brother”), he or she has “problems with verb agreement” or ‘doesn’t know how to show plurality” (p. 171). Shaughnessy (1977) finds beliefs such as these to be particularly evident at the college level. Describing reactions of writing teachers in 1970, when the City University of New York initiated its open admissions policy, she notes that as they encountered entirely new groups of college students coming from all areas of New York City and speaking many different varieties of English, “not uncommonly, teachers announced to their supervisors (or even their students) after only a week of class that everyone was probably going to fail” (p. 3).

For this reason, many of the recent language attitude scales administered to pre-service and practicing teachers have tried to ascertain not only the knowledge of language variation that teachers possess, but also the positions they take on its presence in the classroom and in society at large. Sweetland (2006) included 25 items designed to examine four “subscales” concerning teachers’ attitudes toward (1) “the inherent value of AAVE”; (2) “the role of AAVE in the classroom”; (3) “the cognitive and social abilities of AAVE speakers”; and (4) “the role of AAVE in society in general” (p. 66). Combining these findings with qualitative measures such as classroom observations and interviews with teachers, Sweetland found that teachers had a passive knowledge of AAVE features and a viewpoint that hovered between “an eradication/deficit perspective and a pragmatic bidialectal perspective” (p. 80). Bowie and Bond (1994) found that 76 percent of the teachers they surveyed felt that Standard American English
(SAE) sounded better than AAVE, while 61 percent thought that AAVE “operated under a faulty grammar system” (quoted in LeMoine and Hollie, 2007, p. 43). Cross, DeVaney, and Jones (2001) discovered that teachers made judgments about speakers’ intelligence, education, and ambition based solely on dialectal features heard during a short oral reading, while Ball and Muhammad (2003) use the term “zero tolerance” to describe the views of the preservice teachers they surveyed.

A review of the literature suggests, moreover, four areas of misunderstanding that a fuller awareness of phonological and morphosyntactic variation would address: (1) the general public belief that some varieties of a language are inherently “better” than others (Milroy and Milroy 1999, p. 1); (2) the failure to perceive subtle yet important differences between many varieties of English and Edited American English (Hymes 1974; Labov 1972a; Rickford 2006; Siegel 1999; 2006; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006); (3) the difficulty of distinguishing genuine vernacular patterns from developmental strategies (Reed 1981; Farr Whiteman 1981a); and (4) the challenge of identifying and addressing hypercorrections (Wolfram et al. 1999). As will be discussed below, misunderstandings in all four of these areas contribute to a continuing view of vernaculars as “bad” or “broken” English and are considered important issues in the development of a writing instructor’s phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness.

2.2.2. Debunking the inferiority myth

One of the strongest arguments for developing teachers’ awareness of phonological and morphosyntactic variation in language is the need to challenge the belief that the varieties that many students bring to the classroom are inferior to (or incorrect versions of) Standard English. The persistence of such beliefs is analyzed by Godley et al. (2006) in their in-depth review of the challenges of preparing teachers for dialectally diverse classrooms. Finding that teachers’ beliefs
are difficult to change because they are rooted in community beliefs that standard English is more logical and stylistically better than the stigmatized varieties of English their students speak, the authors note as well that teachers are often “positioned by institutions, students, parents, and themselves as privileged authorities on language” who are responsible for guiding students “to a ‘correct’ understanding of the English language” (p. 31). According to Milroy and Milroy (1999), moreover, the societal view of language correctness results from a false “ideology” of standardization that “inclines us all to view a language as a relatively fixed, invariant, and unchanging entity” (p. 21). This misconception leads, in turn, to the variety that is sanctioned by governments, schools, and professional organizations becoming the “legitimate language” against which all other varieties are measured (Corson 2001, p. 70, referring to Bourdieu 1981). Thus definitions of correctness often reflect social, political, and historical processes rather than linguistic realities (Bourdieu 1981; Corson 2001; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Moreover, definitions of Standard American English itself are often based on “the axis of stigmatization rather than the axis of prestige” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 158). That is, the standard is defined more by the absence of vernacular features such as multiple negation (e.g., “They didn’t do nothing”), verb regularization (e.g., “They knewed they were right”), and “different subject/verb agreement patterns” (e.g., “We was there”) than by the presence of any particularly standard features (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 158). Finally, Corson (2001) claims that some teachers who have had to reject their own varieties of English in order to teach in the language of school find it difficult to “value the very thing they have often jettisoned from themselves” (p. 83).

The effects of these negative beliefs and attitudes on student learning have also been discussed at length (Agnew and McLaughlin 2001; Blake and Cutler 2003; Coelho 1988; Corson
Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez (1972) discuss data suggesting “that urban language differences, while they may or may not interfere with reading, do have a significant influence on a teacher’s expectations, and hence on the learning environment” (p. 105). Noting that teachers with lowered expectations may inhibit “the students’ desire to learn,” they argue that “teachers must be given instruction in both the linguistic and ethnographic aspects of speech behavior” (p. 106).

Farr and Daniels (1986) discuss the negative effects of such attitudes on writing instruction in particular. Pointing to the “preponderance of lower track courses in schools that serve nonstandard-dialect-speaking students,” they note that these students “are often given repetitive language drills rather than genuine writing assignments (pp. 5-6). Cross et al. (2001) also found that the main purpose of one southern university’s remedial programs was to eliminate nonstandard varieties and that the students enrolled in these courses were primarily speakers of AAVE.

Agnew and McLaughlin (2001) note similar attitudes at a Georgia university. In a longitudinal study that examined the academic progress of 61 students enrolled in two basic writing courses, they found that after the first quarter, only 37 students (60.6%) had passed and exited the basic writing program. Of the 24 students who had to repeat basic writing for a second semester, 18 (75%) were African American. At the end of the second semester, 10 (55%) of the African American students passed, with seven required to take basic writing for a third semester. Of these students, six (85.7%) ended up leaving the university before the end of their second year (p. 91). In order to understand these statistics, Agnew and McLaughlin examined the exit criteria
of the basic writing program, finding that it was grammatical features of AAVE in the students’

essays that heavily influenced the graders:

The Exit Criteria Score Sheets list eight possible strengths, ranging from “clear
communication” to “adequate length,” but graders usually write in any sentence-
level deficits they find: typically s/v agreement, missing verb and noun endings,
pronoun and punctuation errors. How evaluators mark the criteria sheets clearly
reflects the department’s focus on grammatical and mechanical correctness above
all other considerations. Not until we conducted our longitudinal study, however,
did we discover the degree to which such a focus prevents many students whose
home language is AAVE from ever entering regular college English classes. (p 89)

For the many speakers of English-lexifier creoles in U.S. and Canadian schools, belief in
the inferiority of creole languages can also lead to major miscommunication between teacher and
student (Winer 2006). Nero (2006b) claims that Caribbean students’ self-identification as
English speakers often creates a “dual impulse” on the part of U.S. teachers (p. 505). That is,
teachers either assume a high level of Standard English competence in their students and
“penalize” them for any evidence to the contrary, or they consider the English the student speaks
to be basically deficient and reflect this attitude in their evaluations (Nero 2006b, p. 505). Coelho
(1988) also notes that Caribbean Creole-English speakers who were placed in Canadian ESL
classes were not given the same treatment as most other ESL students because a creole language
“simply does not have the status that other languages, such as Spanish or Japanese, have in most
teacher’s eyes” (p. 144). Thus these students were not even considered to be language learners,
but rather “English speakers who are careless with the language” (Coelho 1988, p. 144).

In addition, a general lack of respect for the many varieties of Chicano English is blamed
for the failure of some Hispanic students to successfully complete college writing classes. Kells
(2006) notes that the general misunderstanding of language practices that include not only “inter-
and intrasentential code switching,” but also the use of lexical items such as “parkear” (to park)
and other morphosyntactic adaptations, often results in the categorization of these students as nonnative English speakers and their subsequent placement in remedial writing classes. Both Losey (1997) and Kells (1995, cited in Kells 2006), find, furthermore, that most Mexican American students who are placed in basic writing classes fail to graduate, while less than half even complete the first-year writing requirement. According to Kells (2002), it is the educational community’s “deficit” view of Mexican-American students’ language practices that is at the heart of their lack of success:

The prevailing thinking at this southern Texas university about the poor performance of bilingual, Mexican American, entry-level writers rests on what I consider one variation of the deficit theory. The claim that L1 (first language) interference is the primary “obstacle of the acquisition of Standard English” pervaded the educational literature throughout the mid-1970s (Wald, 1984, pp. 14-15) and persists today. However, when I had occasion to study the progress of Spanish-dominant bilingual students from Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela who often fared better than their Texas native, Spanish-dominant, bilingual classmates, I began to wonder whether extralinguistic variables might be stronger factors influencing the performance of Mexican American college writers. (pp. 9-10)

On the other hand, a number of studies indicate that teacher training in phonological and morphosyntactic language variation does lead to more positive attitudes toward the vernaculars that many students speak. Ball and Muhammad (2003) note that when in-service teachers return to the classroom to upgrade their credentials, the few who take courses on language and culture, language change, or a specific variety of English such as AAVE “praise them for providing eye-opening perspectives and tools for improving their teaching” (p. 81). Similar attitudinal changes were found by Sweetland (2006) in an analysis of pre- and post-intervention scores on a language attitude scale administered to teachers before and after they attended a three-day workshop on AAVE and implemented a six-month literature-based curriculum highlighting linguistic diversity and contrastive analysis. With a score of 75 points representing a "mildly positive attitude," the overall mean score rose from a pre-intervention 61 to a post-intervention 73.44.
Moreover, on the subscale of "educational response to AAVE," with a total possible score of 55, teachers moved from a pre-intervention group mean of 24.27 to a post-intervention mean of 36.22. In a survey that attempted to measure teacher attitudes toward the inherent and educational value of AAVE, Bowie and Bond (1994) also found that teachers who had learned about AAVE in at least one course demonstrated somewhat more positive attitudes than teachers with no knowledge of the variety (discussed in LeMoine and Hollie 2007, p. 49). For example, teachers with some knowledge of AAVE were more likely to disagree with one or more of the following negative statements:

- Black English is an inferior language system.
- One of the goals of the American school should be the standardization of the English Language.
- Black English should be discouraged.
- The sooner we eliminate Black English, the better.

(Cited in LeMoine and Hollie 2007, p. 49)

LeMoine and Hollie (2007) also describe improved attitudes among teachers who completed the professional development component of the Los Angeles Unified School District Academic English Mastery Program. Involving “a weeklong summer institute, an educational seminar series, intersession courses, demonstration lessons, and a weekend professional development conference,” this program provides teachers with historical and linguistic information on a number of American varieties of English, including “AAL, Chicano English, Hawaiian Pidgin English and Native American dialects” (pp. 44-45). According to LeMoine and Hollie, results from an earlier analysis of questionnaires filled out by teachers at the end of the program (LeMoine 2003) “reveal substantial attitude shifts and further validate the positive effect of knowledge building in this area” (p. 50).
In sum, the development of phonological and morphosyntactic understanding of language variation is argued to be a crucial first step in changing negative attitudes toward the many varieties of English students bring to the classroom.

2.2.3. Improving feedback and instruction

A number of studies also argue that when instructors develop their phonological and morphosyntactic awareness of the varieties of English spoken in their classrooms, their feedback and instruction can improve as well. Reid (1981) argues that this type of language awareness will help teachers approach what appear to be “errors” in their students’ writings in a more enlightened way. That is, they will begin to understand that many of these patterns are not “incorrectly learned standard English,” but rather “the result of correctly learned nonstandard dialects” (p. 144). In a discussion of research-based “principles of best practice” for the teaching of Caribbean English Creole speakers, Winer (2006) also includes one important principle that calls on educators to “Respect the Logic of a Student’s Language” (p. 115). In following this principle, moreover, teachers should “always suspect that a student is applying a rule, consciously or unconsciously, in the production of language” (Winer 2006, p. 115).

Wolfram et al. (1999) demonstrate how knowledge of the phonological features of a particular variety of English can help teachers give more enlightened feedback on spelling errors. For example, since all writers need to learn spelling conventions for cases in which a word is not spelled the way it sounds (e.g. in the case of “could,” “tough,” and “though”), teachers who understand that AAVE speakers often pronounce word-final voiceless th as f will not overreact to the spelling of tooth as toof (p. 136). In addition, Wolfram et al. note that an understanding of vernacular patterns makes it possible for teachers to distinguish between dialect influence and general mechanical errors in writing. Referring to a student’s use of the clause “you the age of 6
or 9” in an essay, they note that awareness of the AAVE copula rule would help prevent the absence of *be* from being treated as a mechanical error like the use of *your* for *you’re* (p. 132). Rather, a teacher would presumably be able to help the student understand the difference between the AAVE copula system, which allows *be* absence before predicate nouns and adjectives, and that of Edited American English, which does not (Labov 1972a).

Klein (2003) describes a scenario in which a composition instructor would be able to use knowledge of AAVE phonological patterns to give more effective feedback on a written sentence such as “Yesterday I loan’ her a table” (p. 442). Noting that the apostrophe represents the phonological reduction of the consonant cluster formed by the addition of *ed* to *loan* (i.e., *loaned*), Klein suggests an “intervention” that “would recognize a student’s understanding of tense, and might begin with a conversation about sound and spelling rather than one about tense marking” (Klein 2003, p. 442).

Siegel (1999), referring to second language acquisition research, also notes the need for teachers to address issues that can arise when “many of the aspects of the L1 and the L2 are similar, as in situations involving a stigmatized variety and the standard” (p. 717). Referring to Schmidt’s (1990, 1993, 1994) “noticing hypothesis,” which states that the target language cannot be acquired without attention to specific forms, he argues that this is particularly relevant when the “language distance” between two varieties is minimal (pp. 717-718). Winer (2006) also argues that it is the “misperceptions of the similarities and differences between two closely related language systems” that cause teachers to misunderstand their Creole-English speaking students (p. 116), while Rickford (2006) notes the claim of a number of studies that “it is precisely the many subtle differences between the two varieties [AAVE and SE] that cause students difficulty in reading and especially in writing when they fail to recognize that they are...
switching between systems (Stewart 1964; Taylor 1989)” (Rickford 2006, p. 87). Labov (1972a) addresses this issue in his discussion of the AAVE use of invariant be (e.g., “He be always fooling around”), which he calls “be₂” to distinguish it from “the ordinary finite be which alternates with am, is, are, etc.” (p. 51). As Labov argues, the use of be₂ to indicate “‘habitual’ behavior” is an “element” of the AAVE “copula system” that is “missing from other dialects” (p. 51). Linguists have also explored “camouflaged forms” such as “She calls herself painting” that in their resemblance to a Standard English expression (i.e., “She calls herself a painter”) actually obscure the underlying rule of the vernacular, in this case, the one that permits the occurrence of the calls oneself construction with a verb + ing structure (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, pp. 216-217).

Reid (1981) also found that by developing knowledge of the variety of English a student speaks, a teacher “gains insight into the specific rules of that dialect which are most likely to create cross-dialectal interference problems” in the student’s attempts to write in Edited American English (p. 145). Describing a course on AAVE for elementary school teachers that she co-taught with Williams Stewart at Columbia University, Reid notes that when the teachers tried to translate their own varieties of English into AAVE, they made “standard English-conditioned errors in subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and the like” (p. 145).

As the literature demonstrates, moreover, writing instructors need relatively in-depth knowledge of the vernaculars their students speak in order to address complicated syntactic issues in some students’ sentence structures. According to Milroy and Milroy (1999), it is often the most socially stigmatized aspects of “nonstandard” varieties (e.g., “don’t for “doesn’t” or “seen” for “saw”) that are noticed and assessed. Yet these features are often the most superficial differences since they do not interfere with communication (p. 70). Deeper, less obvious
semantic differences related to tense and aspect often remain unnoticed. Thus the distinction between punctual aspect (“He is there”) and habitual aspect (“He does be there”) that exists in Hiberno-English and many English-based creoles (p. 74) may go unrecognized, while more superficial differences are assessed en masse.

Noticing the underlying grammatical patterns in student writing is not always an easy task, however. For example, while the pattern of using existential it for there in sentences such as “It was a new student in the class yesterday” may directly reflect the student’s use of this pattern in a rule-governed spoken variety of English (Wolfram et al. 1999, p. 135), Shaughnessy (1977) found that even when college level AAVE speakers did not exhibit overt examples of existential it in their writing, their use of the standard “there is” (which is not a pattern of AAVE) was often problematic (p. 72). Thus sentences such as the following were not uncommon in the essays she analyzed: “There is always before entering an academic high school you could see what special vocational and technical high school have to offer you” (p. 72). Klein (2003), in an essay on language diversity in the composition classroom, argues that “writing teachers should have as clear a picture as can be drawn of the linguistic systems from which their students work” (p. 424) in order to give effective feedback on complicated syntactical structures that appear in their students’ writings, while Delpit (2006) insists that teachers who want to help students discover the grammatical differences between AAVE and Edited American English must “be aware of the grammatical structure of Ebonics before they can launch into this complex study” (p. 96).

One of the most fully discussed arguments for teachers to develop awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation focuses on the need to implement a pedagogy of contrastive analysis in the classroom (Delpit 2006; Rickford 1999, 2006; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler and Swords 2006; Wolfram et al. 1999). With this approach, teachers help
students to notice the specific grammatical and phonological areas in which their vernaculars differ from Edited American English. For teachers who do have an understanding of language variation, the contrastive analysis approach has also enabled them to improve writing instruction overall. According to Rickford (2006),

One argument is that this approach proceeds from a position of strength: the students are already competent in a valid, systematic variety (their vernacular), and this fluency can be used as a springboard for teaching about important qualities of language in general (metaphor and rhyme, logical argument, authentic dialogue, rhetorical strategy) and about differences between the vernacular and the standard or mainstream variety in particular. (p. 83)

This approach is also seen as a way for teachers to focus specifically on areas of Standard English grammar that present problems for vernacular speakers without trying to cover every rule (Rickford 1999, p. 13, cited in Rickford 2006, p. 83). Rickford (2006) also points to “three empirically validated studies” that demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach (Harris-Wright, 1999; LeMoine, 2001; Taylor 1989), while Sweetland (2006) demonstrates its successful incorporation into a literature-based language arts curriculum.

The literature on contrastive analysis also shows the approach being used as a tool for helping teachers to become aware of the patterned nature of language varieties. By asking teachers to notice the patterns in two varieties (X and Y), Wheeler (2005) attempts to change pre-service teachers’ beliefs that AAVE is a form of incorrect English. The following example demonstrates how differences in possessive patterns are brought to the teachers’ attention:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety X</th>
<th>Variety Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My goldfish’s name is Scaley.</td>
<td>1. My goldfish name is Scaley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I go to Justin’s house.</td>
<td>2. I go to Justin house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The dog’s name is Bear.</td>
<td>3. The dog name is Bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Did you see the teacher’s pen? (Wheeler 2005, p. 175)</td>
<td>4. Did you see the teacher pen?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This method is also recommended for speakers of English-lexifier creoles, whose writings also demonstrate patterns of juxtaposed possessives (Coelho 1991; De Kleine 2006). For example, De Kleine finds this pattern in the writings of West African students (e.g., “TinaØy” and “peopleØ phone,” p. 35), while Coelho notes the same pattern for Caribbean English creole speakers in Canada: “Rohan mother send for her son…,” p. 54). As Coelho, De Kleine, and Wheeler all argue, teachers who are aware of the pattern used to express possession in AAVE and in West African and Caribbean creole languages may be able to give more effective feedback than merely telling a student that he or she has left off the ‘s.

While the contrastive analysis approach has been found to work well at the elementary and middle-school levels, Rickford (2006) warns that at the secondary level of education it is important to focus on “larger conceptual and organizational problems rather than getting bogged down in grammatical minutiae” (p. 89). Wolfram et al (1999), on the other hand, claims that this approach is better used with older students who are able to look more analytically at grammatical structures. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) also warn that focusing primarily on contrastive drills and exercises may bore some students unless they are “creatively packaged in some way” (p. 325), while Delpit (2006) describes a number of activities that teachers have used to help students highlight and appreciate the differing patterns, including working together with students to create bidialectal dictionaries.

On the other hand, a number of studies also suggest that when teachers are unable to discern the grammatical and/or phonological systems underlying what on the surface appear to be SE errors, they are also unable to give students the specific feedback and instruction that they need. Del Hymes (1974) noted this over thirty years ago, claiming that

…one serious difficulty for some children in fact is that their speech is referred by teachers to the same grammatical system as standard English. In the case of West
Indian and many American black children, it may have a distinct history involving past creolization, so that a grammar superficially similar may be importantly distinct (e.g., Dillard 1968). (Hymes 1974, p. 95)

In his classic study of AAVE, William Labov (1972a) argued that “if we do not accept the fact that BEV [Black English Vernacular] has distinct rules of its own, we find the speech of black children is a mass of errors…” (p. 36). Wolfram et al. (1999) note, moreover, that often speakers of stigmatized varieties of English may become so discouraged by the constant correction of their vernacular features that they are reluctant to even attempt the transition from spoken to written language that all students must accomplish (e.g., choosing the correct style, mastering the mechanics of writing and communicating with an “absent reader” (pp. 129-131). Farr and Daniels (1986) also discuss the ineffectiveness of voluminous error corrections and comments in the margins of students’ written work, attributing it to the students’ general inability or unwillingness to respond to such feedback. Thus it is not surprising that Massey, Elliott, and Johnson (2005), finding increased use of vernacular and colloquial features in the formal writing of British 16-year-olds between 1980 and 2004, attribute the increase in part to “failure to appreciate the distinction” between speaking and writing (p. 64, cited in Myhill 2010, p. 110).

Teachers who lack morphosyntactic awareness of the vernaculars their students speak, also risk giving genuinely faulty feedback. For example, Nero (2006c) describes a teacher who crossed out a Caribbean student’s use of the word does before the main verb in a sentence. Noting that in Caribbean creoles, does carries a habitual meaning, Nero discusses the teacher’s explanation that she had assumed the student was using the Standard American English contrastive meaning of the word (i.e., does vs. doesn’t) and had crossed it out because it made no sense in the context in which it was being used (p. 507). This has long been noted for the teaching of reading (Labov 1972a, 1995; Piestrup, 1973). For example, when Piestrup (1973)
examined six different styles of addressing “dialect differences” among reading teachers, she found that the least successful approach was used by instructors who consistently confused AAVE pronunciations with reading errors and constantly interrupted student reading to require corrections in pronunciation. The failures of this “Interrupting Approach” was contrasted, moreover, with the most successful “Black Artful Approach,” in which teachers who were native AAVE speakers addressed students in their own vernacular and used verbal play to draw their attention to standard English pronunciations.

In addition, a number of studies warn that in writing instruction in particular, attention to vernacular features should take place primarily within the context of a student’s own writings (Wolfram et al. 1999; Farr and Daniels 1986). It should also not overshadow important issues related to content and organization (Rickford 2006; Smitherman 1999) or be “disproportionately weighed in the evaluation of students’ ability to express themselves in written form” (Wolfram et al. 1999, p. 134). Rather, it should be balanced with attention to what Smitherman (1999) argues are the “real components of rhetorical power,” that is, “content and message, logical development, use of supporting details and examples, analysis and arrangement of style,” etc. (p. 130). Both Farr and Daniels (1986) and Pratt-Johnson (2006) stress that teachers should restrict the number of individual grammatical features they mark in a student’s paper, focusing instead on general patterns that manifest themselves. Pratt-Johnson (2006) also claims that with Creole speakers, teachers should prioritize patterns that impede communication and address those that do not at a later time. Moreover, vernacular features should only be addressed during the final editing phase of the writing process, according to a number of linguists and composition scholars (e.g., Elbow 2002; Smitherman 1999; and my review of the process approach to writing in Chapter 3).
It is also important to note that similar arguments have been made in the cases of students who come to the U.S. as children or adolescents and thus overlap two categories: first and second generation immigrants. Referred to as Gen 1.5 students (Rimbaugh and Ima 1988, discussed in Harklau, Siegel, and Losey, 1999, pp. 4-5), these students, while appearing to have learned the English language through immersion, may have missed out on mainstream academic writing instruction during their K-12 education because as non-native English speakers, they were often placed in low-ability classes in U.S. high schools. In these classes, the emphasis was also on “highly controlled language exercises at the sentence or paragraph level such as “substitution drills, dictation, short answer, and writing paragraphs from models” (Harklau et al. 1999, p.9), leading them to “write below par and [be] designated ESL or basic/developmental/remedial in their college placement” (Blanton 1999, p. 124).

Finally, Myhill (2010), in a discussion of the role of linguistics in writing pedagogy, argues that the greater a teacher’s linguistic awareness, the greater the likelihood is that he or she will be able to understand issues involved in the entire writing process. For example, she points to one study in which teachers’ increased linguistic awareness improved their ability to look beyond superficial errors in their students’ writings and notice “writing virtues” that had previously often gone “unseen and unacknowledged because of their own lack of knowledge about language” (Gordon 2005, p. 63, cited in Myhill, p. 118).

In sum, the studies discussed above suggest that teachers’ awareness of the many grammatical and phonological issues that underlie the writing patterns of their vernacular speaking students will not only help them to give more effective feedback and instruction, it will also help them to address vernacular patterns without overshadowing or interfering with other writing issues.
2.2.4. Distinguishing vernacular patterns from developmental writing strategies

As discussed in the literature, a third component of phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness is the teacher’s ability to distinguish between genuine developmental writing patterns and rule-governed vernacular forms that appear in a student’s writing. Even though many of the vernacular features discussed above appear to be common to basic writers from a variety of different language backgrounds (Shaughnessy, 1977), they may have very different origins. For example, De Kleine (2006), in a study of the writings of Anglophone West African students placed in U.S. ESL classes, argues that many of the “errors” in their writings are in fact patterns found in the variety of Creole English they speak and thus differ significantly from similar developmental errors of other ESL students. Noting the “persistence of these errors at higher proficiency levels,” De Kleine argues that the influence of West African Pidgin English (WAPE) is a more plausible explanation for the presence of these patterns (p. 223).

Yet instructors cannot entirely discount developmental or language acquisition features in their students’ writings. Farr Whiteman (1981a) discusses an earlier study (Whiteman 1976) in which she examined data from the writings and speech of 32 African American and European American “working-class” eighth-graders in Southern Maryland in order to distinguish the influence of dialect on writing from general acquisitional strategies employed by all new writers. The students all spoke either a “nonstandard” variety of Southern White English or, in the case of the African American students, a variety of AAVE. Noting that the absence of inflectional suffixes is a common feature of AAVE speech while occurring much less frequently in southern white varieties of English, Farr Whiteman examined the frequency of absence of two suffixes -- plural –s and third-person singular verbal –s -- in the speech and writings of both groups of students. Farr Whiteman argued that if, for example,
…plural -s absence were found in the writing of both groups of students, but only in the speech of one of the groups, then it would be apparent that dialect influence could not be solely responsible for the omission of the plural –s in writing. If, on the other hand, plural –s absence occurred only in the writing of those who used it in speech, then it would be reasonable to attribute its occurrence solely to dialect influence. (p. 158)

Farr Whiteman’s analysis reveals several interesting results concerning dialectal influences on writing and the developmental strategies common to many new writers. Even though the students who spoke a variety of Southern White English demonstrated much lower frequencies of verbal –s and plural –s omission in their speech than did the AAVE speakers (i.e., 14.5 % verbal –s absence and 3.9% plural –s absence vs. and 83% verbal –s and 29% plural –s absence respectively), the frequencies of these omissions in their writings were much greater and closer to those of the African American students (i.e., 30.8% verbal –s absence compared with 50% in the writings of the AAVE speakers and 13.1% plural –s absence vs. 26.9% in the writings of the AAVE speakers). (See Fig. 2, Farr Whiteman, p. 158). Farr Whiteman thus concludes that since the speakers of the Southern White vernacular showed greater percentages of verbal –s and plural –s absence in their writings than in their speech (30.8 percent vs. 14.5% and 13.1 % vs. 3.9% respectively), these omissions in the writings of the Southern White vernacular speakers cannot be attributed to dialectal influence alone. Rather, after replicating these results in an analysis of “more extensive written data from another study (NAEP 1972),” Farr Whiteman hypothesized that “a factor other than dialect influence” (i.e., the general tendency of beginning writers to omit inflectional suffixes) could account for some “nonstandard forms” in student writing (p. 159).

In order to explore this possibility, Farr Whiteman also analyzed the NAEP speech and writing samples for past -ed consonant cluster absence, finding that even though two kinds of consonant cluster reduction routinely showed up in the speech of AAVE speakers (i.e.
monomorphic clusters such as the *ld* in *cold* and biomorphic clusters such as the –*ed* in *walked*, *missed*, and *jumped*), biomorphic clusters were far more likely to be reduced by these speakers in writing (“29% of the time” vs. “3.4 % of the time”) (p. 160). While Farr Whiteman does not discuss comparable NAEP data on monomorphic and biomorphic cluster reduction in the writings of white vernacular speakers, she does note differences in frequency, with AAVE speakers omitting -*ed* in their writing far more often than white vernacular speakers (e.g., 25.9 % of the time vs. 9.0 % of the time, Fig. 6, p. 164). Whiteman also notes “a striking age grading” in the rates of verbal –*s*, plural –*s*, and consonant cluster –*ed* absence between the nine year olds and all other students who were tested (p. 161). That is, the nine year olds have much higher rates of absence for all three suffixes than do the older students (Figures 3, 4, 5, p. 162), suggesting that inflectional suffix absence is a common pattern in the writings of developing writers. That is, the writers unconsciously attempt to simplify the acquisition of a new code (i.e. writing) by paying less attention to the suffixes.

On the other hand, Farr Whiteman’s analysis does not completely contradict the likelihood that the absence of d/t in written past-tense forms results from a phonological influence (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). As Farr Whiteman stresses, even though this “acquisitional” strategy “may operate independently from the dialect of the writer,” one “cannot totally discount the role of dialect influence in writing since there are significant differences in the frequencies of suffix omission between dialect groups” (p. 164) despite the fact that the white speakers in her study have more suffix omission in writing than in speech. As indicated by Farr Whiteman’s analysis of data from the NAEP (1972) study (e.g., Fig. 6, p. 164), AAVE writers demonstrate much greater percentages of inflectional omission in their writings overall (e.g., 37% verbal –*s* absence vs. 19.1 % in the writings of white English vernacular speakers; 31.1 %
plural –s absence vs. 11.7%; and 25.9% consonant cluster –ed reduction vs. 9%). Thus, according to Farr Whiteman, “dialect definitely influences writing, although it is not solely responsible for the occurrence of nonstandard features in writing” (p. 164). As Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) suggest in their discussion of Farr Whiteman’s data,

Writing failure, like reading failure, is a complex issue that goes far deeper than surface differences in dialect forms. Nonetheless, a writing instructor who is aware of the way in which dialect may be manifested in writing is certainly in a better position to improve writing skills than one who has no awareness of potential spoken language influences on the written medium. (p. 338)

Reed (1981) argues, moreover, that many of the “mistakes” that teachers find in the writings of students who speak stigmatized varieties of English often “fall somewhere in the ‘gray area’ between nonstandard and standard dialect” and “can often be seen to conform neither to the rules of the nonstandard dialect, nor to the rules of the standard grammar” (p. 143). In an analysis of one student’s paper, Reed finds examples of the AAVE pattern of plural –s omission when a noun is preceded by a quantifier (e.g., “*most of our professor”), along with another pattern, referred to as “conjoined noun constructions,” in which the second noun in a series is marked with the plural –s, but not the first (e.g., “it’s the lack of adequate instructor and professors”). According to Reed, the student possibly feels that “one –s is enough” here since the context of a series of nouns already implies plurality, just as the use of a quantifier does in the preceding example. Yet the student has also achieved a “partial assimilation to the standard, which would require both elements to carry the inflectional marker” (p. 151). Like Farr Whiteman (1981a) and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), Reed suggests that understanding the influence of dialect on writing involves more than simply noting the vernacular features in a student’s writings. Rather, “without the needed sophistication about such dialect influences, teachers may be more likely to induce confusion, rather than understanding” (pp. 149-150).
De Kleine (2006) found several examples of such confusion in the writings of speakers of West African Pidgin English enrolled in a U.S. ESL program. While 60 of the 98 writing samples examined showed rule-governed omissions of plural –s, that is, occurring “exclusively in sentences where the context clarified the plural meaning” (p. 214),

...several of the writing samples created the impression of students being confused, with students alternating randomly between marked and unmarked forms, even when using the same noun phrase with identical reference:

5. I will give it to my parentØ because they are parents (p.215)

As the studies discussed here suggest, writing instructors who are aware of the difference between acquisitional strategies and dialectal influence may be in a better position to address such patterns in the writings of their students.

2.2.5. Hypercorrections

A fourth argument favoring the development of phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness involves the ability of writing teachers to recognize hypercorrections. According to Wolfram et al. (1999), students who are constantly corrected for using vernacular features in their writings often begin to make new errors in an effort to avoid using these features. Wolfram et al. (1999) give an example of a hypercorrection in the following passage from an essay written by a ninth-grade African American student (italics and boldface mine):

I would prefer living the way the Hanzakuts live. because they live a whole lot longer and they don’t have no crime and they don’t get sick and if you are the age of 60, or 80 you can play many game like you the age of 6 or 9 and don’t have to worry about Cancer or Heartattacks. Its would be a whole lot better living their way. (p. 131)

In addition to noting the presence of some rule-governed features of AAVE (i.e., the double negative in they don’t have no crime, plural –s absence in many game, line 3, and the absence of the copula in you the age, line 3). Wolfram et al. (1999) point to the addition of –s to It in Its
would be, line 4, as a probable hypercorrection. That is, the gratuitous addition of the copula, “may represent an unconscious effort to avoid the mistake of leaving is or are out, without a full understanding of the structure in question” (p. 132).

De Kleine (2006) also points to the high number of writing samples (20 out of 98) that contain hypercorrections related to tense marking in the essays of students who speak West African Pidgin English. According to De Kleine, examples such as the following show that “tense marking in Standard American English is an area of great difficulty and confusion” for these students (p. 218):

25. I decided that I was going to talked to some police officers.
26. If I could enter the capital [Capitol] or the white house and just take a looked.
27. …live my owned life.
(De Kleine 2006, pp. 218-219)

Reed (1981) attributes these hypercorrections to “linguistic insecurity” on the part of students who cannot depend on their “native dialect” to tell them whether or not a specific utterance or pattern of usage is standard English” (p. 147). This insecurity is evident in the number of crossed out words in a student’s original draft of the following sentence (italics mine): (e) My reason are that some people have children to soon (p. 148). According to Reed, the student first wrote the verb are, then crossed it out and wrote is, and finally replaced that change with are again.

Thus, as all of these studies imply, “it is essential that teachers be aware of the specific linguistic structures involved in order to be able to help students deal with these problems” (Farr Whiteman and Hall 1981, p. 7.)

2.2.6. Developing a solid grounding in phonological and morphosyntactic variation

In sum, for teachers of writing, an extremely important component of language awareness involves not only an awareness of the rule-governed nature of the varieties they encounter, but
also the ability to distinguish the relationships between these and the developmental and hypercorrected patterns that appear in their students’ writings. As suggested by the studies discussed above, moreover, the more knowledge an instructor has about the phonological and morphosyntactic patterns that influence a student’s writing, either directly or indirectly, the more likely he or she is to give effective feedback, to have higher expectations, and to treat that student with respect. Moreover, the examples discussed here all serve to demonstrate specific kinds of phonological and morphosyntactic information that linguists and scholars of education have argued teachers need.

2.3. Linguistic Repertoire and Communicative Competence

Even as teachers begin to develop their understanding of the rule-governed nature of the varieties their students speak, however, they may not fully appreciate or know how to build on the full range of linguistic competencies these students possess. For example, Blake and Cutler (2003), in a study of teachers in five New York City high schools, found that even when teachers recognized the legitimacy of AAVE as a variety of English, they nevertheless found it to be “inappropriate for the classroom” and “unprofitable for its speakers” (p. 188).

Linguists and education scholars, on the other hand, have continued to press for a broader understanding of linguistic competence than the narrow view of mastering a single code. According to Hymes (1974), for example, every speaker operates “within a verbal repertoire” (p. 199) consisting of different “ways of speaking” (p. 201). This repertoire is “characterized,” moreover, “in terms of a relationship between styles, on the one hand, and contexts of discourse, on the other” (p. 201). These styles can include (but are not limited to) the use of different languages, language varieties, or other codes, and the speaker must choose from them according
to the context in which they will be used. The ability to make this choice, moreover, is what Hymes refers to as “communicative competence” (p. 75).

Building on the work of Dell Hymes, Milroy and Milroy (1999) define linguistic repertoire as “the totality of styles (both written and spoken) available to a community,” claiming that “speakers learn to select from this repertoire in order to fill various communicative needs…” (p. 100). According to Milroy and Milroy, the fact that some vernacular speakers do not have a command of the formal “message oriented” style (Brown 1982) of formal written English does not mean that they “command little or no stylistic variety in their linguistic repertoires” (pp. 108-110). Rather, “they are likely to be competent in a different range of styles” (pp. 108-110). As an example, Milroy and Milroy point to Labov’s (1972a) study of AAVE speakers’ soundings (ritual insults), in which they produce “short decisive closures” and maintain a “ritualized” style to avoid turning them into personal insults (p. 109). They also discuss Labov’s (1972a) analysis of the “linguistic complexity” of AAVE speakers’ narratives (i.e., their use of “various syntactic devices such as subordinate structures, modals, and comparatives”) as evidence of the speakers’ “developing communicative competence” (p. 109). Arguing that teachers should learn to build on these competencies, they note that

The difficulty appears to be that since the educational system has quite appropriately concentrated on developing the more formal linguistic skills, no systematic framework has emerged for recognizing other types of linguistic ability and using them systematically as a basis for developing formal skills which may be lacking. (p. 198)

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) argue, moreover, that “if we hope to achieve a full understanding of variation in human language, we have to include in our investigations not only variation across speakers but variation within individual speakers as well” (p. 266, italics mine). This “style shifting” can include both variation between “features associated with different
dialects‖ and variation between features associated with “different registers” (p. 266). Farr (1986) applies this view, in particular, to the act of composing:

writing can be seen as one way in which to use one's tacit knowledge about language, or one's communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). Within this theoretical framework, learning to write can be seen as adding to one's oral communicative competence and as changing one's tacit competence in language. (p. 196)

Thus the acquisition of Edited American English is often considered by linguists to be a process of adding one more style to a student’s linguistic repertoire.

Another type of communicative competence discussed in the literature is a speaker’s ability to code switch between two languages or varieties. According Gardner-Chloros (2009), "The motivation to code-switch relies on factors independent of the varieties as such, including the speakers' relative competence and that of their interlocutors, the identities they can express through each language, the acceptability of CS in their network and in particular contexts, and a variety of further factors" (p. 42). One of these additional factors, which Gardner-Chloros attributes to Thomason and Kaufmann (1988), relates to specific conversations in which "CS is a major conversational resource for speakers, providing further tools to structure their discourse beyond those available to monolinguals…"(p. 43). This factor might explain the motivation of the student in the following exchange provided by Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez (1972) in which the student resists speaking (and writing) solely in the standard variety.

STUDENT (reading from an autobiographical essay): This lady didn’t have no sense.
TEACHER: What would be a standard English alternate for this sentence?
STUDENT: She didn’t have any sense. But not this lady: she didn’t have no sense. (p. 102).

Finally, Lippi-Green (1997) argues against the “misappropriation” of the term communicative competence to include “the concept of social acceptability” or “appropriacy” (n.
2, p. 251). According to Lippi-Green, the original purpose of the term, as used by Hymes, was “to capture reality of the stylistic multiplexity of any speaker’s repertoire” (n. 2, p. 251).

Two studies in particular demonstrate the different effects on student writing of ignoring this “multiplexity” on the one hand (Balester 1993) or recognizing it on the other (Smitherman 1999). In the first case, Balester (1993) examines the oral and written discourse of successful African American students in university-level writing classes. Arguing that these students face unique challenges because of the “cultural divide” between their own rhetorical strategies and those expected by mainstream teachers, she points out the missed opportunities to build on the strengths these students bring to the college composition class. Balester combines an in-depth discussion of the African-American rhetorical tradition with her analysis of the written and spoken texts of eight AAVE speakers who attended the University of Texas in 1987. Claiming that differences between AAVE and Edited American English, which she refers to as Black Vernacular English (BEV), go well beyond syntactic, lexical, and phonetic differences, Balester finds examples of rhetorical strategies such as “fancy talk” and “respectable talk,” which are often misinterpreted by mainstream teachers as “boasting” or “indecisiveness” respectively (p. 4). As a result, successful students often demonstrate an ambivalence about these and other AAVE features, one that may negatively influence their writing:

In oral storytelling, Shanique constructs an independent and spirited ethos, in the African-American tradition of the smart talker by drawing on the covert prestige of BEV. Her sense that she cannot use BEV in an academic narrative leaves her without alternatives for constructing this witty and effective ethos in writing. (Balester 1993, pp. 4-5)

In Balester’s view, teachers who lack awareness of this tradition have “failed to tap” “a source of expressive and intellectual power” that these students bring to the classroom and thus miss a
crucial opportunity to help them develop their own voices in mainstream academic writing (Balester 1993, p. 5).

On the other hand, Smitherman ([1994]1999), in an analysis of essays written by 17-year-old African American students in the 1984 and 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), notes an unexpected trend among essays written in a distinctly African American discourse style (e.g., those using proverbs, sustaining a “a sermonic tone reminiscent of traditional Black Church Rhetoric,” containing “rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language, or demonstrating other traits of the African American verbal tradition). Smitherman found that the essays with the greatest amount of AAVE syntax “did not have a discernibly African American discourse style, thus suggesting that the production of BEV grammar goes up as the writing becomes less “black” rhetorically” (p.185, emphasis mine). Moreover, when Smitherman examined how these essays were rated by the NAEP scorers, she found that “the greater the degree of black discourse, irrespective of the degree-amount of BEV grammar, the higher will be the rating in primary trait scoring, that is, scoring for fluency-accomplishment of the rhetorical task” (p. 185).

In sum, linguists and educational scholars believe that a key component of language awareness is the ability to recognize the full range of linguistic competence their students bring to the classroom. To do so, moreover, teachers must treat the acquisition of Edited American English as an addition to their students’ already rich linguistic repertoires, building on skills these students already possess. As Valdés et al. (2005) argues, “to create a context in which the language that students bring to school can be enhanced, teachers must understand enough about language itself so that they can recognize the ways in which their students are already extraordinarily healthy” (p. 146).
2.4. Community Language

Another level of language awareness discussed in the literature concerns teachers’ understanding of the importance of the vernacular in their students’ lives. Teachers who focus too heavily on eradicating all signs of the varieties of English students speak from their compositions may also alienate those students from the entire process of writing. Linguist John Baugh (2005) describes the conflicts he felt about acquiring Standard English while attending public schools in inner-city Philadelphia and Los Angeles:

At that time, I tended to associate Standard English with what Fordham and Ogbu (1985) have classified as “talking white,” and African American language usage with “talking black.” My comfort level was higher with nonstandard usage; it was the language of my peers and my community. Also, those boys who embraced Standard English with enthusiasm were castigated within the Black peer group, or worse. (p. 8)

According to Milroy and Milroy (1999), “Social network theory proposes that varieties of language are subject to maintenance through pressure exerted by informal ties of kin and friendship.” (p. 49). Therefore, when a student adopts the language of the school, he or she must often choose between the maintenance of solidarity (i.e., “the moral, emotional, and practical support of his [sic] network peers”) through use of the vernacular or the acquisition of status (i.e. “social mobility”) through adoption of the “high prestige form of the language “ (p. 50). In making the latter choice, the student must often “distance himself [sic] from the norms of his group” (p. 50).

Labov (1972a) discussed the consequences of this choice, in his classic essay “The Linguistic Consequences of Being a Lame” (pp. 255-292). Noting that individuals who distance themselves from membership in the inner-city “street culture” are often referred to as “lames” by those more closely connected to it, Labov finds a direct correlation between the level of AAVE grammatical usage and a person’s designation as a member or a lame. For example, Labov’s
study of language use in the neighborhoods of south-central Harlem in New York City found that 31 members of the Thunderbird, Aces, Jets, and Cobras, referred to collectively as “Club Members,” demonstrated only 10 examples of third-person singular –s usage in the verbs have, do, want, and say (i.e., he/she has, does, wants, says) as opposed to 395 zero -s forms (i.e., he/she have, do, want, say). On the other hand, a group of 10 lames demonstrate 23 third-person singular –s usages as opposed to 190 zero –s forms. In sum, members of the street culture showed a ratio of 395/10 vernacular usage for third person singular, while the lames demonstrated a much lower ratio of 190/23 (pp. 272-273). According to Labov, moreover, “the social and psychological price of moving away from one’s peers and community is well known” (p. 291).

For this reason, many students may actively resist learning Edited American English as they go through school because of the “group identity factor” (Delpit 2006, p. 94). Referring to a study of Pima Indian school children by Nelson-Barber (1982), Delpit (2006) observes that …in grades 1-3, the children’s English most approximated the standard dialect of their teachers. But surprisingly, by fourth grade, when one might assume growing competence in standard forms, their language moved significantly toward the local dialect. These fourth graders had the competence to express themselves in a more standard form but chose, consciously or unconsciously, to use the language of those in their local environments (p. 94).

Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) also mention the many anecdotes they have collected from students who were ridiculed by their peers for using Standard English, “even in the context of the classroom” (p. 319).

Yet the literature also portrays an attachment to community vernaculars that goes beyond a simple opposition to Standard English. LeMoine (2001) gives a poignant description of what AAVE means to her:
For me, African American language evokes my grandmother gently chiding me in the comfort of her home, warmed by a pot-bellied stove and scented by peach cobbler and castile soap. It represents the love of my mother, the intelligence and humor of my dad. It is the language of my thoughts, the sounds of my community, the soul of my being. (p. 175)

According to LeMoine, moreover, teachers who “reject” a student’s community language are also rejecting the student (p. 175).

For all of the reasons discussed above, linguists and scholars of education are beginning to emphasize the need for teachers to help students become “critically aware” of the role language plays in their lives (Alim 2005; Corson 2001; Delpit 1995, 2006; Lippi-Green 2007; Fairclough 1985, 1995). As Corson describes the goal of a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approach, it not only requires teachers to “value” the varieties of English their students speak, it also requires them to help students “become aware of the factors that make one variety of the language seem more ‘appropriate’ in some settings” (p. 90, italics mine). Lippi-Green (1997) also discusses the uncritical acceptance of the “standard language ideology” by those whose language varieties have been stigmatized: “When an individual cannot find any social acceptance of her language outside her own speech communities, she may come to denigrate her own language, even as she continues to use it” (p. 66). Lippi-Green argues, moreover, that it is in fact the teaching of language arts in the schools that “perpetuates – for the most part unwittingly” – this state of affairs (p. 106). Claiming that schools continue to relegate “socially stigmatized” languages to the more “appropriate” domains of “home and neighborhood,” “informal situations” and “the telling of folktales and stories” (p. 109), she notes that by the time children have graduated from elementary school, most are “firm believers in the appropriacy argument” (p.113).
On the other hand, in a discussion of the Linguistic Profiling Project conducted at Stanford University (Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh, 1999; Baugh 2000, 2003), Alim (2005) describes the attempts of the project to use “findings of language-based discrimination” to develop a critical pedagogy based on Freireian principles (Freire, [1970] 2000). Such a pedagogy “aims,” moreover, “to educate linguistically profiled and marginalized students about how language is used and, importantly, how language can be used against them” (Alim 2004, in Alim 2005, p. 28). Alim describes the following exchange with a seventh-grade student who has become critically aware of her choice to use certain variables of the vernacular (p. 28).

Student: People think I talk too ghetto. They be like, Yo English is toe [tore] up!"
Interviewer: Why do they say that, though?!
Student: Cuz I say things like “I ain’t gon…” like, “I ain’t gon do it,” or I won’t say “eating,” I’ll say “ea’in.”

Alim notes, for example, this student's awareness of the “social standing” of “the reduced (glotalized) consonant in “ea’in,” that is, her reference to its being considered “too ghetto” (p. 29).

Some scholars also argue that when teachers are able to bring discussions like these into the classroom, they make it easier for students to think critically about why they choose one variety over another in a given context. For example, Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) describe the following teacher/student exchange during a 7th-grade language arts discussion of a poem written in African American Vernacular English (boldface mine):

Ms. Wilson: I’m not askin’ you the differences, but I am askin’ you when you come to school, when you walk into this classroom particularly, you choose to speak one way, when you go home, you speak another. How many of you say yes?
Students: Several students raise their hands.
Ms. Wilson: How many of you feel that when you do switch - we’re gonna call this code switching (Ms. Wilson makes quote marks with her fingers) - when you do switch you do it by choice (p. 64)
According to Bloome et al., the teacher in this exchange is able transform a traditional literature lesson into a critical “interrogation of language variation and race” (p. 56). That is, she is able to help students analyze why and when they switch from the vernacular to the standard and *vice versa.*

In sum, awareness of the choices and dilemmas faced by some students when asked to adopt Standard English in the school, as well as awareness of the role that language plays in their communities, is considered a key component of language awareness.

**2.5. Summary**

In the preceding review of the literature, I have attempted to create a research framework for the current analysis of teacher language awareness in the college-level basic writing classroom. In order to study the effects of this awareness on teacher/student discourse, moreover, it is essential to begin with a clear definition of what language awareness is. As the studies reviewed above indicate, there are many levels of awareness that work in concert to provide full understanding of the role that language variation plays in the social and educational lives of today’s students. Clearly, as a number of studies demonstrate, teachers who understand the phonological and morphosyntactic patterning of their students’ home language varieties will be able to give more linguistically informed feedback on their students’ essays and compositions (Reed 1981; Taylor 1989; Rickford 1999; Wolfram *et al.* 1999). They may also provide more challenging assignments and have greater expectations for their students (Ball and Muhammad 2003; Farr and Daniels 1986; Wolfram *et al.* 1999). Yet improved feedback and instruction may not be easily incorporated into student performance if teachers remain unaware of the broader meanings attached to vernacular use in the classroom and elsewhere. As Balester (1993) and Smitherman (1999) both note, teachers who acknowledge the validity of different language
varieties but still insist that they be kept out of the classroom fail to build on the linguistic competence that all students bring to the classroom. Moreover, if teachers remain unaware of the covert prestige of vernaculars, both among peer groups and in the local community at large, they may experience very limited success in helping students to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires (LeMoine 2001; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Finally, teachers who lack critical awareness of the ways in which language can be used to promote the interests of some members of society over those of others will rarely be able to help students make informed choices about the varieties they ultimately use in school (Corson 2001; Lippi-Green 1997).

In sum, a working definition of language awareness that is based in the literature includes informed background knowledge of the rule-governed patterns common to many varieties of English; awareness of (and appreciation for) the linguistic competence of their speakers; sensitivity to the dilemmas students face when trying to balance the covert prestige of their home varieties and the overt prestige of Edited American English; and finally, a broader understanding of the role that language standardization can play in marginalizing speakers of varieties considered to be “nonstandard.”
CHAPTER 3

ACADEMIC WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

While the call for greater linguistic awareness on the part of teachers has been well supported by studies and surveys of teachers’ understanding of (and attitudes toward) language variation since the early 1960s (see discussion in Chapter 2), there is still a need for studies that examine how that linguistic awareness (or lack thereof) affects classroom interactions. As Godley et al. (2006) argue at the end of their discussion, “Preparing Teachers for Dialectally Diverse Classrooms,”

additional research is needed that follows preservice and inservice teachers into the classroom to see how their teaching practices are affected by the teacher preparation that we call for and by revised language ideologies. (p. 35)

In an effort to build on the literature on teacher language awareness, therefore, I seek to add a level of understanding gained from in-depth analysis of what teachers actually say about language in the writing classroom. In focusing on classroom talk, moreover, I take what Schiffrin (1994) calls an “interactional sociolinguistic approach” to my analysis of teacher discourse. That is, I seek to examine the “situated meaning” (Schiffrin, p. 133) of teachers’ references to language by analyzing the effects they have on overall teacher-student interaction. As Schiffrin explains it, “interactional sociolinguistics views discourse as a social interaction in which the emergent construction and negotiation of meaning is facilitated by the use of language” (p. 135).

It can be argued, furthermore, that in college-level developmental writing classes, the situated meaning of the interaction between teacher and student is important precisely because of the nature of the class. That is, students placed in a developmental writing class are there because their mastery of Edited American English (EAE) is perceived to be insufficient. Thus communication between the teacher and the student becomes a major factor in the acquisition of
EAE. Not only do a teacher’s comments about a student’s essay often serve as the primary focus of one-on-one discussions of the student’s writing, but the responses of the student in the interaction also become essential in any negotiation of meaning. Whether or not the student accepts or understands the teacher’s comments about his or her writing is a crucial element in the interaction, as is the teacher’s ability to understand the student’s reactions to his or her comments (Auten 1991; Fife and O’Neill 2001). The sociolinguistic emphasis on discourse as social interaction in which meaning is negotiated, therefore, becomes particularly relevant in a developmental writing class.

In the current study, moreover, the rationale for focusing on teacher discourse about language is not simply to analyze what teachers say about specific vernacular patterns that appear in student writing. It is also to explore the influence of teacher language awareness on the broader issues related to the acquisition of “essayist literacy” (Scollon and Scollon 1981). As discussed in Chapter 2, genuine language awareness includes much more than recognition of structural differences between varieties of a language. It also involves an awareness of students’ existing linguistic competencies (Hymes 1974), including a variety of different approaches to telling a story, making a point, or expressing an opinion (Farr 1986; Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). As discussed in Chapter 2, moreover, the way that these differences in discourse style are addressed and assessed can greatly affect the quality of writing instruction that multidialectal students receive (Balester 1993; Smitherman [1994] 1999). Moreover, as Rickford (2006) notes in his discussion of the contrastive analysis approach, which focuses primarily on phonological and morphological language variation, this approach may not be as important at higher levels of education as the way a teacher approaches the entire process of composing. For example:
Some recent high school writing samples I have seen do indeed have several intrusions from the vernacular into what was supposed/expected to be a standard English text. But if all those were converted to standard English immediately, the writing would be no less poor, and we can’t fix the minor mechanical issues and ignore the larger conceptual ones. (p. 89)

In order to determine the effect a specific teacher’s language awareness has on the way these “larger conceptual” issues are addressed in multidialectal contexts, it is also necessary to consult the literature on composition theory and pedagogy. As Sweetland (2006; 2010), Reaser (2006; 2010), and Wheeler (2010) have all found, teachers are more likely to develop “pluralist attitudes” toward linguistic diversity when offered curricular materials and perspectives that relate the study of language variation to classroom practices they already use (Sweetland 2010, p. 173). As will be discussed below, moreover, explorations of writing instruction, both in the K-12 classroom and in post-secondary settings, reveal a tremendous amount of change in the way such instruction has been delivered over the past 40 years, as well as some controversy over the way it should be delivered to students whose first language or language variety is not Standard English (note, for example, the differing views of Delpit 1986 and Smitherman [1994]1999). As part of a major shift in emphasis from a “product” to a “process” approach, writing instruction has grown from narrowly focused attention to student writing errors to much broader examinations of how students compose (see in-depth descriptions of this pedagogical transformation in Clark 2003 and Kroll 2001). Moreover, feedback on writing has also expanded from sole dependence on a teacher’s written comments in the margins of a student’s paper to the use of one-on-one writing conferences, peer reviews, and visits to a writing center for individual tutoring (Clark 2003 and Kroll 2001). Simultaneously, composition theory and analyses of discourse in the writing classroom have expanded from explorations of teachers marginalia, to in-depth analyses of the effects of teacher discourse in multiple one-on-one and group contexts. Coupled with this
attention to classroom discourse, moreover, are a number of studies that also examine the texts used by writing instructors and the writing tasks they assign. Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011), for example, describe the different messages about language variation that a number of commonly used grammar textbooks and style manuals convey, while Losey (1997) analyzes Mexican American students’ reactions to one teacher’s assignment structures and content. In addition, the differences (and similarities) between written and spoken English have been explored at length in discussions of writing pedagogy for linguistically diverse students, with varying approaches to how these should be addressed (e.g., Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011; Wolfram et al. 1999). Finally, a large body of literature debates the overall efficacy and justice of college-level basic (or developmental) writing courses. Since these courses often serve a gatekeeping role in the academic progress of students who speak stigmatized and “nonstandard” varieties of English, a number of studies argue that basic writing classes lead to further marginalization of the students placed in them (Blanton 1999; Gleason 2001; Lalicker 1999; Shore 2001; Soliday 2001; Sternglass 2001). Others, on the other hand, claim that these students benefit from the focused attention on Edited American English and essayist literacy that these classes offer (Fitzgerald 2001; Shaughnessy 1977; Wiley 2001; White 2001).

In the following sections, I first give an overview of basic writing instruction as it has developed in colleges and universities throughout the United States. I then discuss some of the changes that have taken place in writing pedagogy in the past four decades, along with the effects these changes have had on writing instruction for multilingual and multidialectal students. I also examine the nature of academic writing and the particular challenges it poses for students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ most noticeably from the language and culture of the academic community, and I explore how a general understanding of the distinction
between written and spoken English has affected the way writing is taught. Finally, I describe several studies that explore teacher discourse from a sociolinguistic and interactive perspective (Schiffrin 1994), focusing in particular on one-on-one teacher-student interactions in multilingual and multidialectal contexts. By adding a discussion of these disparate areas of research to my description of the literature on teacher language awareness in Chapter 2, I hope to provide a deeper framework within which to examine the effects of three writing instructors’ language awareness on their classroom interactions.

3.1. The Basic Writing Class

Many post-secondary students are placed in basic (or developmental) writing classes because they do not receive satisfactory scores on the entrance writing exams of the colleges or universities they plan to attend. Whether these exams are a national standardized test such as the SAT verbal or whether they are created by faculty of the institutions themselves, several views emerge in the literature concerning student placement in basic writing. One is the argument that students with second-language or second-dialect backgrounds are unfairly placed there “by readers who lack the essential language background to make fair assessments” (Sternglass, 2001, p. viii). Another is the claim that these students have received impoverished writing instruction from elementary and high school teachers who lacked basic sociolinguistic understanding of language variation (Rickford, 2006). In either case, depending on the area of the country in which they are offered, basic writing classes are often heavily populated with speakers of stigmatized varieties of English, including, among others, AAVE, Chicano English, Appalachian English, West African Pidgin English, or Caribbean Creole English. For many of these students, moreover, basic writing instruction offers the last opportunity to receive focused feedback on their writing before enrolling in a full college-level curriculum.
Yet the basic writing class is often accused of serving a different purpose in the college or university where it is offered. Shore (2001) argues that “writing programs have been instruments for constructing unequal outcomes for separate tracks” of writing students, those placed in Basic Writing and those placed in regular composition classes (p. 44). Referring to the work of ethnographers Erickson (1975) and Gumperz (1976), Corson, in turn, refers to “key gatekeeping situations” that favor the access of some students over others to “social opportunities” (p.48). In educational settings, these key situations often involve display of knowledge, with students being evaluated on the discourse patterns they use. Thus students who demonstrate discourse norms differing from those approved by the school are at a disadvantage (p.48). Farr (1993) discusses the gatekeeping function of “essayist literacy,” which is required in college applications and placement exams, as well as on standardized tests such as the SAT or GED. Wolfram, Adger, and Christian (1999) also claim that “the lack of institutional provision for different language varieties and ways of using language… means that some groups do less well in the gate-keeping activities that determine program access or placement” (p. 100).

One key gatekeeping activity for students as they move through school is the writing of the expository essay (Schleppegrell 2004). As students who have not mastered this task are placed in college-level basic writing courses, moreover, the courses themselves take on a gatekeeping role in the acquisition of future educational and professional opportunities that require a passing grade in the writing class.

Soliday (2001), referring to DiPardo’s (1993) ethnography of one university’s adjunct basic writing program and Gunner’s (1998) discussion of the “iconic” basic writing teacher, observes, moreover, that in marginalizing remedial or developmental writing classes as separate entities within the university community (e.g., by granting them less than full academic credit,
making them part of a separate developmental program, or relegating them to adjunct faculty), universities force basic writing teachers to “assume an inflated sense of responsibility over the destinies of their students’ educational careers” (p. 62).

Yet unlike classes designed specifically for multilingual ESL students, the composition classes in which many speakers of “nonstandard” varieties of English are placed are still designed as they have been for decades, that is, without taking the linguistic backgrounds of students into account (Taylor 1989, p. 80). Or if these backgrounds are addressed, it is often from a purely “deficit” point of view. Blanton (1999) claims that eliminating non-standardness of students’ written English remains the paramount goal of most basic/remedial programs today. Get their writing cleaned up and get them through the proficiency test that stands between them and further college study…(p. 126).

As discussed in Chapter 2, moreover, this has been the case in most writing programs in which speakers of AAVE, Chicano English, and a variety of Anglophone creoles are enrolled (Agnew and McLaughlin 2001; Coelho 1988; Cross et al. 2001; Kells 1995, 2002, 2006; Losey 1997; Nero 2006b; Winer 2006).

The failure of basic writing classes to provide instruction that addresses the specific needs of linguistically diverse students is often cited as an argument for “mainstreaming” basic writers. Gleason (2001) also argues that mature adults who return later in life to complete their education are better served by being placed in classes that meet the diverse needs of working adults than by being placed in remedial classes. Describing an introductory writing course for highly diverse group of “returning adult students” that she has taught for three years, Gleason notes that the class has always included a mix of “remedial” and “college-level” students. Yet both types of student are able to develop their academic discourse in the class because her assignments focus on ethnographic explorations of the students’ own cultural, linguistic, and
family backgrounds. Claiming, for example, that “students’ analyses of their own home and community languages can help pave the way for their acquisition of academic literacies (Groden, Kutz, and Zamel; Kutz, Groden, and Zamel),” Gleason describes the advantages for both types of student. The remedial students benefit from using “the oral to sustain the literate (Brandt 7),” as they begin each activity with storytelling, interviewing, etc., and then transition to a written work based on what they have discussed. The more advanced students, furthermore, are able to hone their analytical and research skills, since they are encouraged to cite sources and include bibliographies in their ethnographic explorations. Gleason also argues that placing adult students in non-credit-bearing basic writing classes is counterproductive since one of the main goals of educational programs for returning adults is to help them finish their education as quickly as possible. In sum, as Gleason (2001) and others argue, basic writing courses may do more harm than good and should be completely eliminated or drastically reformed (e.g., Bartholomae, 1993, cited in Collins and Lynch 2001; Shor, 2001).

On the other hand, a number of studies discuss the benefits of basic writing classes as sheltered writing programs that improve student writing (e.g., Shaughnessy 1977; White, 2001) or they explore ways in which Basic Writing can be taught more effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse students (e.g., Fitzgerald 2001; Shaughnessy 1977; Wiley 2001). In her seminal discussion of the underlying roots of student writing errors, Shaughnessy (1977) argued that students often make “dramatic” progress in a basic writing class (p. 276). Discussing an analysis of the progress of 50 basic writing students conducted by Kathy Rose of City College, Shaughnessy notes that over the course of one semester, three fifths of the students demonstrated “overall and marked improvement” in “coherence, control over sentence structure, focus,
development, organization, and care” (p. 282). Moreover, Shaughnessy’s prolific examination of individual student writing samples led her to conclude that

…even where the gains are largely confined to highly measurable features of a student’s writing [such] as subject-verb agreement, verb forms, or punctuation, one often notes a shift in tone, a more confident deliberate air that may be in part, at least, a consequence of having learned how to control certain troublesome features of written English.” (p. 278)

White (2001) also describes two groups of studies that provide quantitative data on the progress made by students enrolled in Basic Writing. The first group, conducted by the Institutional Research Office of The California State University (CSU), followed the academic progress of “fall 1978 first-time freshmen” at one of the University’s campuses through March 1982 (p. 23). White noted that students who agreed to take the Basic Writing course after receiving low English Placement Test scores were much more likely to continue their education than students who did not take the test “despite much urging” and thus did not enroll in Basic Writing at all. That is, 90 percent of the basic writers continued at the university during the spring following their first semester as opposed to 78.7 percent of the students who refused to take the test or be placed in Basic Writing (pp. 23-24). By the spring of 1981, moreover, 51.8 percent of the basic writers were still enrolled at the university compared to 37.8 percent of the students who did not participate. (It is worth noting, however, that these percentages do not take into consideration other factors that might have contributed to the students’ success, including, possibly, their greater motivation to take the test and enroll in the class in the first place.)

The second group of studies, conducted by The New Jersey Basic Skills Council at all 31 public colleges and universities in the state, found similar data for several groups of students followed during the 1980s. White (2001) notes that in the fall 1984-spring 1986 cohort, about three-fourths of the students placed in basic writing classes completed the entire sequence,
leading them to actually exceed by one percent (i.e., “64 percent vs. 63 percent) the retention rates of “high-scoring” students not required to enroll in remedial courses. On the other hand, the retention rate for students who did not complete the Basic Writing sequence (19 percent) was much lower, leading the researchers to conclude that “There is a clear, positive relationship between completing remedial writing and staying in college” (cited in White 2001, p. 27).

In addition, the way a developmental writing course is taught may influence its success or failure. For example, Fitzgerald (2001) notes that at the community college where she oversees the basic skills program, basic writing students “do not use workbooks,” but instead “write primarily argumentative essays supported with information and citations from the nonfiction and full-length text and essay collections they are reading” (p. 215). The goal of Basic Writing, moreover, is to enable students to develop the composition skills they will subsequently need in a freshman composition course “where they will write 8000 words and read the equivalent of five, full-length nonfiction texts” (p. 215). According to Fitzgerald, it is also important to focus on the context in which basic writing is being taught. While many universities are dropping basic writing courses altogether, community colleges often see the education of the basic writer as a “mission” (p. 216).

Wiley (2001) argues, as well, that basic writing courses are more successful when they are part of an overall support program focused on helping students adjust to college life (e.g., one that is well orchestrated with academic advising, tutoring, and financial support services).

Finally, Collins and Lynch (2001) describe a highly successful Basic Writing sequence offered in the General College of the University of Minnesota. While the General College program is not itself a degree-granting entity in the University of Minnesota system, the authors note that 100 percent of the students “who successfully transfer [from the General College
program] into degree-granting colleges at Minnesota complete the basic writing sequence (data based on Fall 1996 cohort)” (p. 82). In addition to offering transferable credit for the basic writing classes, the faculty of the General College has also redesigned these courses according to “multicultural educational principles” to meet the needs of its racially and culturally diverse students (p. 82).

In sum, the pros and cons of basic writing courses for culturally and linguistically diverse students are often described in reference to the ultimate ability of students to become members of the larger college or university community. While some scholars argue that the very notion of a “basic writer” so marginalizes students that they are unlikely to ever achieve this goal, others claim that when Basic Writing is designed to meet the specific needs of these students, it can serve to help them successfully add academic discourse and Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires.

3.2. Important Changes in Writing Pedagogy

Beginning with Harvard University’s introduction of a composition course for all first- year students in 1879, many U.S. colleges began offering writing classes to their students at the end of the 19th century. It is argued, moreover, that a major purpose of these classes was to assimilate the many immigrant students attending U.S. colleges into the “Anglo-protestant” norms of U.S. culture (Berlin 1996, cited in Clark 2003, p. 2). In the first half of the 20th century, the typical high school and college writing class focused on responding to literature in writing (Kroll 2001, p. 219). Thus much class time was spent on discussing the literary text being analyzed. In a typical writing class, a teacher would then assign a topic, perhaps require an outline, and finally give some feedback in the margins of a student’s paper. Very little (if any) time was devoted to learning how to approach the process of writing. Students did not meet in
groups; they rarely attended student-teacher conferences; and the only paper drafts they submitted to their instructors were the final ones (Kroll 2001). For this reason, composition pedagogy in the first half of the 20th century and through the early 1960s is said to have followed a “product” approach, that is, one focused solely on the final product (Clark 2003; Kroll 2001).

In the mid-1960s, however, the focus of writing instruction began to change. Clark (2003) describes “a different feeling in the air” at the 1963 Conference of College Composition and Communication, where research was “focused on understanding how people write and learn to write” (p. 5). Techniques and methods of teaching writing, including “staged writing, conferencing, strategies of invention, and revision,” represented a new “process approach” to writing, and it was not long before “‘Writing is a process, not a product’” was the “mantra” of many writing teachers (p. 5). Writing classes turned into writing workshops, with students working in groups to brainstorm and give each other feedback, with teachers meeting individually with students to discuss first and subsequent drafts of their papers, and with class time devoted to learning how to prewrite, write, and edit one’s compositions in an ongoing and reflective process. In addition, proponents, influenced by the ideas of cognitive psychologists Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, tended to focus on the linguistic and intellectual development of the individual writer (Clark, p. 10). Writing was considered a form of personal expression, and the emphasis was often on helping students to grow as writers by developing a personal voice (e.g., Graves 1983 and Elbow 1986, discussed in Clark, p. 14). Thus much more attention was paid to the individual writer and how he or she composed. As Murray (1972, reprinted in Villanueva 2003) describes views of the writing process,

the writing process itself can be divided into three stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. The amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his [sic] personality, his work habits, his maturity as a craftsman, and the challenge of
what he is trying to say. It is not a rigid lock-step process, but most writers most of the time pass through these three stages. (p. 4)

In sum, what Scherff and Piazza (2005) refer to as a “paradigm shift” occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s as writing pedagogy embraced the new theoretical focus on process.

Yet along with the overall transformation of writing pedagogy, a number of problems with the actual implementation of the process approach began to be noted. According to Clark (2003),

articles published during this period strongly emphasized prewriting; however, what many of them also suggested was that writing occurred in a linear sequence; each stage following neatly upon the other; the prewriting” phase preceding the “writing” phase, which then precedes the “revising” phase. (p. 8)

This formulaic perspective persisted, moreover, in spite of earlier research to the contrary. For example, Emig (1971), one of the most influential “process” theorists, had already discovered that the process of writing was much more recursive than suggested by many of its proponents. Using a “‘think aloud’ procedure” to explore what student writers actually do when they write, Emig had discovered that they do not generally follow such a linear pattern (Clark 2003, p. 9; Kroll 2001, p 220). Rather, writers “move back and forth between various phases of the process as they compose” (Clark 2003, p. 9).

In addition, in his review of several different approaches to the process of writing that emerged during this period, Berlin (1982, reprinted in Villanueva 2003) argued that only one of these, the ”New Rhetoric” approach, actually focused on the dialogic nature of the writing process. Noting that a “writer-reality-audience-language relationship” underlies each of the prewriting, writing, and rewriting phases at a “deeper structural level” (p.255), Berlin claimed that only the New Rhetoric approach viewed the message as something that evolves from this relationship. In his view, moreover, teachers of composition could not simply claim to be using a
process vs. product approach. They also needed to be able to explain the underlying rationale for the type of process they were teaching.

The formulaic manner of presenting the writing process was also criticized by Russell (1999), who contended that there is more than a single writing process and that students should be exposed to a variety of processes (see discussion in Clark 2003, p. 21). Dyson and Freedman (1991) put forth a similar argument, noting that the type or mode of writing will affect the way a writer approaches the process of writing itself. According to Kastman Breuch (2003), one additional concern of some critics was the pedagogical implication that “process” was a thing that could be taught or mastered at all.

Moreover, a number of studies began to reveal problems with how the writing process was actually being implemented. In an analysis of the written commentary of 35 writing instructors from New York University and the University of Oklahoma, for example, Sommers (1982) found that even when teachers incorporated a process approach to their writing instruction overall, their written comments on student papers often worked against the effectiveness of such an approach. That is, teachers would combine interlineal editorial comments with much broader suggestions for revision in the margins of a single draft so that students were encouraged to both view their writing as a finished product “that just needs some editing” and at the same time see it as an unfinished text whose underlying meaning had not yet been fully developed. In Sommers’ words, “The process of revising, editing, and proofreading are collapsed and reduced to a single trivial activity” (p. 151).

Scherff and Piazza (2005) also note the influence of standardized testing on the way the process approach had begun to be taught in many schools by the end of the 1990s:

Given that 38 states measured students’ writing skills with a direct assessment by 1999 (Ketter & Pool, 2001), varied process approaches began to give way to test-
driven writing, a trend that often replaced instructional priorities with legislative accountability. Explicit instruction in the five-paragraph theme soon became synonymous with learning to write. Although teachers might encounter textbooks with terms such as prewriting, revising, and editing, in actual practice, many used prescriptive rules and formulaic writing, separated from the purposes writing was supposed to serve (Mabry, 1999). (Scherff and Piazza 2005, p. 273).

More recently, Scherff and Piazza (2005) also surveyed nearly 2000 high school students from a variety of grade levels and academic tracks in four Florida high schools to determine the amount and type of writing they experienced in their English classes, as well as their level of participation in specific process writing tasks. Students responded to Likert-type questions about how often they engaged in a particular genre of writing, indicating that of 12 genres listed, most students participated in only one genre (i.e., responding to literature) “almost every week” (p. 283). For some students, moreover, writing involved answering questions at the end of a chapter. Other genres, such as expository, persuasive, and summary writing, occurred “once or twice a month,” while narratives, compare-and-contrast essays, and research papers were assigned even less frequently (p. 283). In response to how often they engaged in specific process-writing activities such as peer review and revision, twenty-eight percent (n=510) indicated they ‘never or hardly ever’ practiced peer revision and editing in class, and an additional 15% (n=262) said they did so “once or twice a year” (p. 288). In addition, “20% (n=354) of students never wrote more than one draft of an essay during the school year,” while “[t]wenty-six percent (n=476) of students said they did this on a monthly basis and another 24% (n=426) claimed to do so only “once or twice a quarter” (p. 289). As a result of these data, moreover, the authors hypothesize that “the natural process of writing, with its stops and starts and restarts,” may have been “compromised given the limited emphasis on product as narrowly defined through tests” (p. 293).
Finally, in response to the many criticisms of the writing process, even supporters of this approach have begun to shift their focus from “individual writers in isolation” to the contexts in which these writers operate (Tobin 1994, p. 11). Dyson and Freedman (1991), for example, describe the merging of sociolinguistic and cognitive perspectives in research on writing at the National Center for the Study of Writing (p. 10). While acknowledging that “from a cognitive perspective, writing is a process of individual decision making,” which “involves processes like planning, transcribing text, reviewing…,” the authors also note that “from a sociolinguistic perspective, written and spoken language use are intertwined in complex ways” as teachers and students interact during writing conferences or as students comment on one another’s writing during peer reviews (p. 10). Walker and Elias (1987) also argue that writing conferences between tutors and students are a successful means of helping students become more critical of their own writing during the writing process, while Fife and O’Neill (2001) note the importance of relating teachers’ written comments to the full context of classroom interactions.

In sum, as the studies discussed here suggest, there are many ways of implementing a process approach, some more successful than others. Thus, it may be that the distinction between “process” and “product” creates what Schleppegrell (2004) calls “a false dichotomy” (p. 149). When instructors include multiple opportunities for students to brainstorm and discuss their writing in one-on-one conferences with their instructors and in review sessions with their peers, students are often able to build on the oral skills they already possess (Dyson and Freedman 1991), as well as become more critical of their own writing (Walker and Elias 1987). In addition, when teachers tie their written comments to classroom discussions of the writing process (Fife and O’Neill 2001) and generally recognize the dialogic relationship between writer and audience (Berlin 1982, reprinted in Villanueva 2003), the writing process approach offers
multiple opportunities for growth. On the other hand, when instructors do not fully implement the process approach (Sommers 1982); when their approach becomes too formulaic (Kastman Breuch 2003; Clark 2003; Russell 1999; Scherff and Piazza 2005); or when they are forced to focus on limited genres dictated by standardized testing (Scherff and Piazza 2005), the process approach may be less effective in helping students develop their academic writing skills.

3.3. The Writing Process and Multidialectal Writers

The literature on how the writing process approach affects multidialectal writers in particular also suggests a variety of perspectives on its value. Tobin (1994), for example, claims that

Most early process theory and pedagogy paid remarkably little attention to students on the margins; to differences in race, class, and gender; or to the ways in which our goals, methods, and standards are culturally determined. As a result, the implication seemed to be that this method would work equally well for all students, or perhaps that differences in race, gender, class or culture were not particularly relevant or significant in this case. (p. 10).

Yet according to a number of scholars, the problems associated with ignoring these differences in the writing classroom are numerous. Delpit (1986; 1992) notes, for example, that teachers’ lack of awareness of the linguistic abilities of African American students often leads to a misuse of the writing process approach. For example,

In some "process writing" classrooms, teachers unfamiliar with the language abilities of African American children are led to believe that these students have no fluency with language. They therefore allow them to remain in the first stages of the writing process, producing first draft after first draft, with no attention to editing or completing final products. They allow African American students to remain at the level of developing fluency because these teachers do not understand the language competence their students already possess. (1992, p. 243)

Noting in particular that teachers outside the African American neighborhoods of Philadelphia often have little opportunity to observe the “verbal creativity and fluency” that students from
these communities display “as they devise new insults, new rope-jumping chants and new cheers,” Delpit (1986) suggests that “while there is nothing inherent in the writing process approach itself which mitigates against students’ acquiring standard literacy skills,” many misguided proponents of the approach neglect the teaching of these skills in favor of “fluency” (p. 383).

Schleppegrell (2004) also argues that the process approach may be more suited to middle-class students, who are more closely socialized into “the ways of using language that are valued at school” than are students from other backgrounds. Schleppegrell claims that while middle-class students can often rely on their instincts to guide them through much of the writing process, their classmates from non-middle-class backgrounds may need more explicit instruction in the features of academic registers. For these students, Schleppegrell argues, the acquisition of academic discourse is like “learning a second language in a context where little reinforcement is available outside of the classroom” (p. 153). Taking a functional linguistic approach to the teaching of academic discourse (Halliday 1985, 1994), moreover, Schleppegrell argues that these students need more focus on the grammatical characteristics of academic language than the writing process approach alone can provide.

Farr and Daniels (1986) also note that even when teachers do attempt to acclimate students to the entire writing process, their efforts may be too little and too late. That is, the ability of nonmainstream students to approach writing as a series of differentiated steps may also have been compromised by previous instruction. If past teachers have scrupulously marked every error (both dialect-based and other types) on every paper that a student has ever written, this may have confirmed for the student that the writing process is something he or she will never master. (p. 66)

Perl (2003) notes similar problems encountered by basic writers during the “process” of composing. Discussing an earlier case study of five basic writers (Perl 1978), she describes her
attempts to understand how “unskilled writers” approach the writing process (p. 17). Commenting on the case study of Tony, a Puerto Rican ex-Marine born in the U.S., who was enrolled at the Eugenio Hostos Community College of the City University of New York, Perl notes that the “most salient feature of Tony’s composing process was its recursiveness. Tony rarely produced a sentence without stopping to reread either a part or the whole” (p. 26). Pearl also notes that Tony edited his work with such “a concern for correct form that it actually inhibited the development of ideas” (p. 26). Thus while editing is supposedly the final stage of the writing process, for this student, it took precedence throughout the process of composing.

On the other hand, a number of scholars argue that the writing process approach is exactly what linguistically diverse students need. For example, Gray-Rosendale (2001) found the peer revision phase of the process to be particularly effective in helping a class of linguistically and culturally diverse basic writers enrolled in a summer “bridge” program at Syracuse University. Describing the contrast between some students’ writing abilities and their “oral, rhetorical dexterity” at the beginning of the class (p. 4), she notes that

What was not happening in their written documents was indeed happening in their speech. The same students who could not conceive of how to write to an audience constructed sophisticated conceptions of audience in their small-group discussions. The same students who had trouble making arguments in their writing developed complicated logical reasoning in their speech. The same students who seemed relatively unable to assert themselves as authoritative writers in their own pieces were creating interesting and intricate conceptions of ethos through speech. (p. 4)

According to Gray-Rosendale, the “peer revision” sessions had a direct impact on the writings of these basic writers as their writing became “part of the ongoing conversation of the group rather than something separate from it” (p. 14). Peer revision was also helpful in building “crucial skills in audience awareness, cooperative discourse, invention, and self-monitoring (distancing oneself from one’s own discourse)” (p. 15).
Meier (1985), in an ethnographic study of one ethnically diverse basic writing class at a two-year college in the Midwest, notes that the instructor’s frequent “invitations to write” often included a focus on first expressing or developing their ideas. For example: “Write how you feel about being in this English class...Go ahead and use the words that come to you even if they don’t sound ‘proper’ – even if they are ‘slang’ (p. 104). While Meier does not comment on the instructor’s use of lexical items such as “proper” and “slang” to distinguish Edited American English from the vernaculars these students spoke, she does note that students over time responded positively to the teacher’s definition of text. That is, they moved from their own views of text as “a body of writing in which one answers ‘the teacher’s question’ in grammatically correct sentences” (p. 151) to the teacher’s view that

Text is a body of writing in which the writer draws upon personal experience in order to communicate an idea to the reader. Text is organized into an introduction, body, and conclusion, and generally conforms to the grammatical conventions of standard written English. (Paraphrased by Meier, p. 151)

According to Meier, by relegating grammar to the copy-editing stage of the writing process, this teacher was able to take the focus off a “preoccupation with grammar” (p. 132) and place it instead on “the organization of ideas” (p. 136). Noting that students in this class responded positively to this approach, Meier provides the following example of one student’s reaction:

…when I first started writing in here, I didn’t know when they say, well take the idea and this and this and that, and put that idea, idea, idea, idea. What is a idea? I knew what a idea was, but how do you put a idea on paper, you know? Ah, I’m a great talker, um, I mean, you know, I know how to use all the charisma and all the little techniques in talking, but if I had to put those things on paper, I couldn’t do that...I can’t put it all on paper yet and I steady hear the teacher say, hey we’re going to teach you how to put what’s up here (points to head) on paper. So I’m eager and my ears are open, and I wanna, I wanna catch the techniques so I can start putting it on paper… (p. 131).

Smitherman ([1972] 1999), also suggested from the very beginning of the process movement that inner-city students were missing out because the writing process approach was
not being used in their classrooms. Noting that even though “the trend in English teaching in white middle-class schools” was moving “away from grammatical overkill and toward emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, analytical processes, and the like,” inner-city classes populated predominantly by African American students still either focused exclusively on eradicating AAVE features in student writing or on making students bidialectal (p. 126). As discussed in Chapter 2, moreover, Smitherman found that what was missing from the writing instruction given to many African American students was a focus on “the real components of rhetorical power,” including an emphasis on “content and message, logical development, use of supporting details and examples, analysis and arrangement, style, specificity, variation of word choice, sentence structure, originality, etc.” (p. 130). Noting that even at the college level many instructors still made grammar their primary focus when responding to the writings of African American students, Smitherman gave the following example of an essay written by a freshman at Wayne State University on which the only written feedback was “correct your grammar and resubmit” (p. 130):

[Assignment: Take a position on the war in Viet Nam and present arguments to defend your position.]

I think the war in Viet Nam bad. Because we don’t have no business over there. My brother friend been in the war, and he say it’s hard and mean. I do not like war because it’s bad. And so I don’t think we have no business there. The reason the war in China is bad is that American boys is dying over there. (p. 130)

The failure of this teacher to use a process approach in which the student is encouraged first to focus on the logical development of his/her ideas before addressing issues of punctuation and grammar is clearly implied in the vernacular title of Smitherman’s discussion: “English Teacher, Why You Be Doing the Thangs You Don’t Do?”
Finally, Sweetland (2006) found that when the process approach was combined with a contrastive analysis approach to language variation with 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-grade students enrolled in an elementary school in which the student population was predominantly African American, these students demonstrated higher gains between pre- and post-intervention writing assessments than peers who were taught language arts primarily through the use of workbooks and grammar exercises. Moreover, even when the process approach was not accompanied by a contrastive-analysis component, students taught to treat writing as a process fared better than those instructed with more traditional methods.

As the studies discussed here suggest, therefore, the value of the writing process approach for multidialectal students appears to depend heavily on how it has been implemented by teachers throughout the students’ elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school years. When teachers concentrate on only one aspect of the process through repeated “first drafts” (Delpit 1992), a general lack of explicit instruction (Schleppegrell 2004), or too heavy a focus on “editing” (Smitherman [1972] 1999; Farr and Daniels 1986; Perl 2003), they may fail to meet the specific needs of linguistically diverse students. On the other hand, a process approach can help students to build on the linguistic strengths they already possess under several conditions: (1) when language variation is viewed as an asset (i.e., part of a student’s communicative competence) rather than as a deficit (Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Smitherman [1994] 1999; Wolfram et al. 1999); (2) when the editing phase is saved for last and involves contrastive analysis rather than excessive error correction (Wheeler 2005; Sweetland 2006; Reed 1981); and (3) when certain ways of implementing the writing process (e.g., through
peer revision discussions) help students transfer their oral strengths to their writing (Gray-Rosendale 2001).

3.4. The Challenges of Academic Writing

In order to more fully understand the connection between teacher language awareness and effective writing instruction, it is also important to examine more closely the discourse patterns that all new writers must acquire when using academic language. Referred to by Elbow (2006) as “no one’s mother tongue” (p. xiii) and by Shaughnessy (1977) as a “separate dialect” (p. 45), Edited American English has its own patterns and conventions, which differ from all spoken varieties of English. Moving from spoken to written language is a challenge for all new writers, who must adjust to a form of communication in which text becomes “reflexively contextualized,” with the writer often needing “to achieve a state of self-effacement” (Scollon and Scollon, 1981, pp. 49-50). In addition, writers must acquire a new vocabulary in order to achieve the formality required in academic writing, as well as learn conventions that make up for the absence of an active listener (Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011; Schleppegrell, 2004; Wolfram et al.1999). In particular, it is the discourse properties of the expository essay that often present the greatest challenge to new writers, who not only must learn to write effective paragraphs with topic sentences or well-structured essays with thesis statements and conclusions, but also must be able to refer back to previous text or anticipate text to come through the subordination and coordination of clauses (Schleppegrell 2004). Yet as students move through the middle-school and high-school years, many eventually master the foreign patterns of academic writing as their teachers guide them through the writing process.
For students who arrive at school with a variety of English that differs from that valued by the school, however, the acquisition of written Edited American English becomes a different process. According to Wolfram et al. (1999), speakers of a nonstandard vernacular may have different “culturally based expectations for how to tell a story or make an argument” (p. 134). Erickson (1984), for example, noted that African American adolescents engaged in political discussions used “concrete anecdotes” to “infer” shifts in topic rather than stating them more directly (Farr 1986, pp. 209-210, referring to Erickson 1984). Finding “a most rigorous logic and a systematic coherence of the particular” in these transitions, moreover, Erickson concluded that they were organized by audience/speaker interaction” rather than “literate style linear sequentiaality” (Erickson, 1984, p. 152, cited in Farr 1986, p. 210). Differing perceptions of effective topic shifting have also been examined at the adult level. Cazden (1988, discussed in Delpit 2006) studied the reactions of African American and European American adults to oral stories of African American and European American children read by a European American adult. As all marked dialectal features had been removed from the stories, the primary difference between them was that the African American children’s stories were more “episodic” than the “topic centered” stories of the European American children. Overall, the European American adults found the African American children’s stories “incoherent,” while the African American adults found them rich with detail and “easy to understand” (Delpit 2006, p. 97). (See further discussion of the “episodic” versus “topic-centered style in Section 3.5.1. below.)

As Farr (1993) suggests, moreover, the heavy focus on “the ‘detached and objective’ stance of essayist literacy” (p. 17) can create greater challenges for students whose linguistic styles vary widely from Edited American English. Noting that “requesting an essay for a
gatekeeping situation is requesting a verbal performance‖ (p. 14), Farr argues that students whose persuasive essays demonstrate a *mexicano* performance style, which emphasizes a personal, human stance‖ and features qualities such as “*sabor* (flavor), *sinceridad* (sincerity), and *emoción* (emotion), are already at a greater disadvantage than students whose performance styles more closely match the linear argumentative style of academic language. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 2, failure to take into account these various styles can cause instructors to miss opportunities to build on the communicative competencies these students already possess (Balester 1993; Smitherman 1999).

Gray-Rosendale (2001) also questions the heavy emphasis in writing pedagogy on distinguishing written language from spoken language, suggesting that it may interfere with students‘ abilities to build on their oral skills in learning to write. Describing more recent scholarship that rejects the “dichotomizing language‖ of the written/oral language distinction (p. 25), Gray-Rosendale points to several studies in particular that demonstrate the benefits of helping students build on the links between oral and written discourse (e.g., Brandt; 1986; 1990; Fox 1990; Coleman 1995; Zeni 1994). She also describes the study of Villanueva (1994) as an example of what ensues when teachers fail to do this. In an examination of “oral and literate language features‖ in the writings of basic writers from a number of different cultures and classes, Villanueva found that rather than stemming from an “inordinate reliance on oral strategies,” their “problems came from their inordinate denial of the oral” (p. 135, cited in Gray-Rosendale, p. 27).

Tannen (1982) also suggests that “it is not ‘orality’ per se that is at issue, but rather the relative focus on communicator/audience interaction on the one hand, as opposed to the relative
focus on content on the other” (p. 3). Thus a focus on whether or not an essay has oral features when determining how “academic” it is can have the effect of dismissing alternate discourses as somehow less academic because they involve the audience.

3.5. Discourse in the Writing Classroom

Measures, Quell, and Wells (1997) claim that general research on classroom discourse has evolved from three distinct theoretical perspectives: Vygotsky’s theory of social language as mediator of a person’s higher order thinking; Bakhtin’s emphasis on the dialogic nature of language; and Halliday’s “functional theory of language as social semiotic” (p. 21). As Measures et al. argue, these research traditions are “complementary” in that they all emphasize “the social origins of the individual’s language repertoire” (pp. 22-23). Thus for many linguists and scholars of education, the focus in a language classroom must always be on how the interactions between teachers and students affect learning (Ball 2002; Hall and Walsh 2002). According to Hall and Walsh (2002), moreover, “in language classrooms, [classroom interaction] takes on an especially significant role in that it is both the medium through which learning is realized and an object of pedagogical attention” (p. 187). In her in-depth review, “Three Decades of Research on Classroom Life: Illuminating the Classroom Communicative Lives of America’s At-Risk Students,” Ball (2002) also argues that a micro-level analysis of classroom interaction is essential to an understanding of how a teacher’s perceptions and expectations are made evident to students through normative discourse patterns in the classroom, through discourse rules and participation rights, and through teacher and student script patterns that develop in the classroom. (p. 84)
In the writing classroom, these “script patterns” often occur in two one-on-one contexts: (1) In the writing conference, where instructors comment on the writing of individual students and those students indicate their engagement and understanding through backchanneling and other response moves (Ewart 2009; Farr; Haneda 2004; Meier 1985) and (2) in both the instructors’ written commentary in the margins of student papers and the students’ responses to this commentary (Auten 1991; Fife and O’Neill 2001; Sommers 1982; Straub 1997).

3.5.1. Participation frameworks

Before examining the literature on the use of these discourse patterns in multidialectal and multilingual contexts, it is useful to briefly examine two notions of “participation framework” that have been developed in many studies of classroom (and other) discourse, in particular in analyses of the interactions of teachers and students who come from different cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Corson 2001; Edwards 1997; Erickson and Shultz 1981; Goffman 1981; Michaels 1981; Philips, 1972; Schiffrin 1994). The first is the linguistic notion of participation that Goffman (1981) describes in his study Forms of Talk:

> When a word is spoken, all those who happen to be within perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it. The codification of these various positions and the normative specification of appropriate conduct within each provide an essential background for interaction analysis… (p. 3)

As Schiffrin (1994) notes in reference to Goffman’s definition, moreover, since positions that individuals take toward an utterance are also “associated with codified and normatively specified conduct” (p. 104, referring to Goffman 1981, p. 3), misunderstanding can occur when norms of conduct differ. In the classroom, “these various positions” often reflect the perceptions of teachers concerning the speech of their students and vice versa. If the instructors believe that it is
their job to “correct” the vernacular phonology, morphosyntax, and discourse styles of their students, but the students do not understand or accept what the instructors are doing, high levels of miscommunication can ensue. In contrast with Goffman’s “linguistic” perception of participation structure, on the other hand, the educational view is best understood in Philips’ (1972) use of a similar term, “participant structures,” to refer to “variations in structural arrangements” of classroom interaction (p. 377). That is, education research often focuses more on the pedagogical effects of different teaching approaches in multicultural or multilingual contexts, while linguistic analysis focuses on the interactional effects of teachers’ and students’ conflicting views of what is happening in the classroom (e.g., “instruction” vs. “criticism”). While the educational scholar focuses heavily on practical ways of overcoming these conflicting views, the linguist explores the discursive effects of revised ideologies. At the same time, however, as both linguists and scholars of education concern themselves with the need for different linguistic behaviors with different student audiences, their use of expressions such as “participant structure” (Philips 1972) or “participation structure” (Erickson and Schultz 1981) often appear to overlap as they each address the miscommunication that ensues when students and instructors share different views of the world and their place in it.

For example, Philips (1972) notes the breakdowns in communication that occur when certain participant structures are used by “non-Indian and white” teachers with Native American students at a school on the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon. For the most part, the students are unwilling to participate in teacher-controlled activities that include responding to a question in front of the class or in a small group directed by the teacher. On the other hand, these same students initiate “private encounters” with the teacher while working independently at their desks.
at a frequency much greater than that of most non-Indian children (p. 379). In addition, when working with other students in small groups, they become

…more fully involved in what they are doing, concentrating completely on their work until it is completed, talking a great deal to one another within the group, and competing, with explicit remarks to that effect, with the other groups. (p. 379)

Philips attributes the reluctance of the Warm Springs children to engage in the first two more public participant structures (i.e. responding to teacher questions in front of the class or in teacher-controlled small groups) to very different cultural patterns of adult/child instruction within their own Native American community. That is, unlike many non-Indian students, Native American children in the Warm Springs community have been taught to observe adults in silence as they demonstrate more complicated tasks; to focus on segmented parts of larger tasks until they are ready to attempt the entire process; and to test their abilities in private before publically demonstrating their skills.

Erickson and Shultz (1981) discuss cultural mismatches that can occur during “shifts in participation structures” in classroom lessons, “shifts from less formal and instrumental activity to more formal and instrumental, and back again” (p. 154). They also discuss how participation structures “with differing rules of appropriateness for paying attention, getting the floor, maintaining topical relevance” change according to the part of the lesson that is underway” (p. 154). Thus students who do not share the discourse norms of the teacher often “‘miss’ such situational shifts within an occasion” and “are sanctioned for situationally inappropriate behavior by the teacher and other children” (p. 154).

Corson (2001) surveys a number of studies that examine culturally different “participant structures within different speech events” (p. 49). In particular, Corson focuses on storytelling,
which in some cultures is highly dependent on audience participation, while in others it depends on a silent audience (e.g., Corson’s reference to Holmes 1988 and Taylor 1988). In addition, he notes the very different narrative styles found among African American and European American children during “sharing time.” Discussing the findings of Michaels (1981), which showed that while European American children were more likely to tell topic-centered stories with a clear introduction and conclusion, African American children usually told more episodic tales in which the presentation had “no end, middle, or clear beginning” (Corson, p. 51). Corson also points to Michael’s argument that since teachers were often frustrated by the narrative style of the African American children and thus unable to give them effective feedback, the school-sanctioned participation structure of sharing time put culturally different students at a disadvantage. Cazden (2001), discussing her joint research with Michaels (Michaels and Cazden 1986), provides the following example of teacher/student interaction as a young African American student tells an “episodic” story during “sharing time”:

**Denna:** I went to the beach Sunday/
and / to McDonald’s / and to the park /
and I got this for my / birthday / / [holds up purse]
my mother bought it for me /
and I had two dollars for my birthday /
and I put it in here /
and I went to where my friend / named Gina /
I went over to my Grandmother’s house with her /
and she was on my back /
and I / and we was walking around / by my house /
and she was HEAVY / /
she [was in the sixth or seventh grade /
T: [OK I’m going to stop you
I want you to talk about things that are really, really very important / /
that’s important to you but can you tell us things that are sort of different /
/ / can you do that? / / (Cazden 2001, pp. 14-15)
Cazden also contrasts the episodic story-telling style with the more traditional “topic-centered” style expected in the classroom in the following exchange between a teacher and a young European American student:

**Mindy:** When I was in day camp / we made these candles //
**T:** You made them?
**Mindy:** And I---I tried it with different colors / with both of them but // one just came out / this one just came out blue / and I don’t know / what this color is //
**T:** That’s neat --o // Tell the kids how you do it from the very start // Pretend we don’t know a thing about candles // OK // What did you do first? // What did you use? // Flour? //
**Mindy:** There’s some hot wax / some real hot wax / that you / just take a string / and tie a knot in it // and dip the string in the wax /
**T:** What makes it have a shape? //
**Mindy:** You just shape it //
**T:** Oh / you shaped it with your hand // mm //
**Mindy:** But you have / first you have to stick it into the wax / and then water / and then keep doing that until it gets to the size you want it //
**T:** OK // who knows what the string is for? // . . .

Clearly, as these interactions demonstrate, the teacher, who is European American, responds far more interactively to Mindy’s topic-centered style than to Denna’s episodic style. As Michaels (1981) notes, “Sharing time, then, can either provide or deny access to literacy related experiences depending, ironically, on the degree to which teacher and student start out ‘sharing’ a set of discourse conventions and interpretive strategies” (p. 423, quoted in Cazden 2001, p. 20.).

Biggs and Edwards (1991) analyze the subtly different interactions of teachers and their Black and South Asian students compared to their interactions with white students, even when they consider themselves to be sensitive to racial issues (discussed in Edwards, 1997, p. 97). Not
only did the teachers “interact less frequently” with the Black and South Asian children, they also “spent less time with them discussing the tasks which had been set” (Edwards, 1997, p. 97). Finally, McLaughlin and Agnew (1999) find that at the college level, the teacher’s oral comments and written marginalia can result in differing experiences for European American and African American students. In a study that traces the academic progress of pairs of scholastically comparable European American and African American students who successfully passed the basic writing class the authors had taught as a team, they explore how well the students did in subsequent writing classes. Focusing on one pair of students in particular, the authors note that while Rodney (an African American student) and Jane (a European American student) were “strong critical thinkers” and equally competent writers (p. 119), their writing styles were noticeably different. Rodney, whose writing was more personal, often used many of the discourse features that Smitherman (1994, reprinted in Smitherman 1999) describes as particularly African American, including “rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language” and “ethnolinguistic idioms” (cited in McLaughlin and Agnew, p. 121), while Jane maintained a more “impersonal voice,” even when writing about a friend’s suicide (p. 121). According to one of Rodney’s future teachers, Rodney didn’t “know how to use words” and was often “very frustrated with the fact that I [was] always questioning [his] particular choice of words” (p. 121). She also notes that “He knew what he wanted to say, but didn’t know how to say it in his language or in a language we could compromise on” (p. 121). Ultimately Rodney received a D and had to repeat the class the following semester. When asked about Jane’s writing, on the other hand, the same instructor remarked, “I think she [Jane] did fair…she got a C. I don’t remember anything spectacular, but I also don’t remember anything that was out of the ordinary or really bad. Her term paper was…acceptable” (p. 122). McLaughlin and Agnew also examined the
written comments on the papers each student had written for this instructor, noting that for one assignment, the margins of Rodney’s paper were “mostly filled with negative phrases such as ‘avoid enumeration,’ ‘vague,’ ‘choppy,’ ‘combine [sentences],’ ‘fragment,’ and so forth” (p. 123), while “Jane’s paper for the same class, same topic, same teacher, has no marks whatsoever,” but rather a single written grade, “48/60” (p. 124). Although a number of different areas of conflict and misunderstanding are revealed in interviews with both the students and the instructor, McLaughlin and Agnew argue that it is the failure of the instructor to understand cultural differences that results in Rodney receiving a lower grade for the course than Jane. For example, after reviewing the independent analysis of several papers from each student by a research assistant, the authors note that both students “virtually always had a clear purpose, a clear subject, sound reasoning, and a clear organizational plan,” and that the only difference between the two was their style of discourse (p. 124). Thus they conclude that even though “[s]tudents like Rodney depend on our linguistic knowledge as well as on effective teaching methods”…, “[a]n informed attitude toward their language, their culture, and their individuality…is the first and most important step toward helping them achieve their goal of becoming college graduates” (p. 128). Moreover, if the teacher in question had incorporated an understanding of the African American discourse style in her commentary on Rodney’s papers, she might have been able to “encourage Rodney to think about his choices” rather than simply “negate” his “word choices and writing style” (p. 123).

In sum, the studies discussed above suggest that a cultural awareness of the communication patterns of students in linguistically diverse classrooms is an essential component in the relationship between a teacher’s language awareness and his or her discourse in the classroom. As discussed in Chapter 2, a full awareness of language involves three levels
understanding: (1) a basic knowledge of the rule-governed nature of phonologic and morphosyntactic language variation, along with a deeper understanding of varying discourse styles; (2) the realization that multilingual and multidialectal students often have rich linguistic repertoires and the competence to make appropriate linguistic choices from within them; and (3) a strong awareness of the importance of the vernacular in maintaining ties to a community network. As the studies of cultural mismatch discussed above demonstrate, a lack of cultural awareness underlies misunderstandings in all three areas of language awareness as well.

3.5.2. Participation frameworks in the writing classroom

Referring to the struggles that “nonmainstream” students often encounter when switching between “their own cultural and linguistic systems (and their own sense of identity)” and those of Edited American English, Ball (2002) notes that “the learning of writing, in particular, is often a context in which communicative systems not only differ but conflict” (p. 89). As suggested in the example discussed above in McLaughlin and Agnew (1999), the manner in which an instructor incorporates certain participation patterns can have a significant effect on a student’s ultimate academic success. Therefore, as the following sections explore literature devoted to two important contexts in which writing instruction takes place (i.e., one-on-one writing conferences and instructors’ written commentary on student papers), they will also focus specifically on two aspects of teacher/student discourse: (1) the lexical items teachers use to describe the language of their students, both in their written and in their spoken commentary; and (2) the responses of students to their instructors’ comments about their writing. While not all of these studies focus on teacher references to language variation per se, they do help to describe the interactive sociolinguistic framework within which I explore the discourse of the current teachers under investigation (Chapters 6, 7, and 8).
3.5.3. Teachers’ lexical choices

While student-teacher interactions are the subject of many discourse studies (see sections to follow), explorations of teachers’ lexical choices in discussions of language variation often occur as part of broader studies of language variation and multiethnic communication in classrooms (e.g., Ball and Muhammad, 2003; Coelho, 1991; Corson, 2001; McLaughton and Agnew 1999; Sweetland, 2006; Wheeler and Swords, 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian, 1999). Thus it is useful to briefly discuss the findings of these macro-level studies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, many studies offer compelling evidence that teachers’ attitudes toward stigmatized varieties in their classrooms are reflected in the words they use to refer to these varieties. For instance, Sweetland (2006) found that before the language arts teachers in her study participated in a workshop on the rule-governed nature of AAVE, their discourse was pervaded by “the vocabulary of ‘mistakes,’ ‘errors,’ and ‘good’ or ‘bad’ grammar” (pp. 80-81). Wheeler and Swords (2006) also discuss the discourse of teacher-education students who “struggle to become conscious of their language as they continue to see ‘students making errors,’ feel a ‘need to correct,’ and try to ‘fix students’ problems,’ etc.” (p. 162). McLaughton and Agnew (1999) demonstrate that even at the college level, a writing instructor makes disparaging remarks about vernacular features that appear in a student’s writing (italics mine):

She was diligent. She came in with many grammatical problems, not so much content and organization, that tend to go along with the Black English. And she worked hard to clear them up, but it was just not successful. It’s hard, you know, to take a student who has grown up with bad speech, and then they put it into the writing, and then they don’t recognize that it’s incorrect. (p. 127)

The lexical choices made by English teachers surveyed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication Language Policy Committee (CCCC 2000) are also particularly revealing. When asked to describe what language issues concern them most, some
teaches express strongly positive or negative attitudes toward language variation, but others demonstrate a high level of confusion and ambivalence about its place in schools and society at large. For example (emphasis mine):

a. “I want [students] to appreciate the contributions of black language to America’s inclusive language and the beauty of Black English.”

b. “They need to know grammar and usage rules to be able to express themselves accurately in standard English. They also need to learn appreciation and respect for dialect and to understand appropriate usage for particular times and places.”

c. “I am convinced bilingual diversity in the classroom is wrong and harmful to students. I love diversity! Let it thrive in the home and in the neighborhoods. We need a single national language.”

(CCCC 2000, Issues of Greatest Concern)

In these brief excerpts alone, the language of the classroom is referred to as “inclusive English,” “standard English,” “a single national language,” while references to varieties and languages that differ from the standard range from “wrong and harmful to students” to “appropriate” for “particular times and places,” to having made “contributions” to “America’s inclusive language.”

Proponents of a more critical discourse analysis argue that even the word “appropriate” poses problems. For example, Lippi Green (1997) refers to the general consensus that certain varieties are more appropriate for home, literature, and folk stories, while the standard, newly termed “the language of wider communication,” is reserved for the academic and business worlds: “While the vocabulary has changed, the message remains the same, and typically
schizophrenic: appreciate and respect the languages of peripheral communities, but keep them in their place” (p.109).

Kells (2006), who argues for the introduction of language variation discussion in composition classes, also acknowledges that monolingual teachers are often unsure about how to “facilitate productive metalingual discourse without exacerbating alienation (Dean 1989)” (p. 190). So too, Wheeler and Swords (2006) discuss the “vexing process” of finding metalinguistic expressions for teachers to use (p. 19). Rejecting “nonstandard vs. Standard” because of the negative (and erroneous) connotations of “nonstandard,” they also find the distinction between “home speech” and “school speech” to be problematic since “Standard English isn’t the only English used in schools (again, think of the work of Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison or Langston Hughes)…” (p. 19). Because Wheeler and Swords work with teachers of elementary school students, they finally opt for the metalinguistic expressions “formal” and “informal” English, while also acknowledging their linguistic limitations. In addition, Wheeler and Swords use the term “code-switching” to help teachers respectfully teach students how to shift between the vernacular and Edited American English.

In a discussion of the terminology used in grammar texts to describe language variation, Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011) also describe the problematic use of lexical items such as “correct” and “nonstandard” without ample explanation. For example, they note one text’s claim that “at one time it was correct to use several negative words in one sentence” such as “Father didn’t tell nobody nothing”(Carol, Wilson, and Forlini 2001, cited in Charity Hudley and Mallinson 2011, p. 16, italics mine). Noting that the text then offers three “correct” ways to revise the sentence, the authors point out that it makes no mention of language varieties in which
multiple negatives are still acceptable. Rather, the implication is that multiple negation is a thing of the past. As the authors describe the problem:

Vague approaches to describing language variation often result in inconsistent, misleading terminology and *you know it when you see it* definitions that make teaching and learning English language standards unnecessarily difficult and confusing for both educators and students. (p. 19)

The literature on the effects of language variation study on teacher talk and attitudes is mixed. Sweetland (2006) found that different teachers who attended the same workshop on language variation described AAVE differently to their students, with some using negative or prescriptive terminology to describe it and others taking the opportunity to explore its features with their students. Heath (1983) demonstrates that teachers are able to introduce metalinguistic awareness into their students’ discussions as well, resulting in the students’ use of terms such as “dialect, casual, formal, conversational, standard” to describe the differences they observe (p. 329). Kells (2006) also managed to effect attitude changes toward Texan varieties of Chicano English and Chicano Spanish in her predominantly “Anglo” Introduction to Linguistics classes at Texas A&M University by restructuring the syllabus to include issues of language variation. Taylor (1989, 1991) describes her decision to develop “Project Bidialectalism” at a small “traditionally white” private university in Aurora, Illinois, after an African American student was sent to her for help by the Dean of Students because “he didn’t talk right and didn’t write right” (p. 1). Discussing the “subliminal barriers to interracial communication” that affect interaction in the “multiracial composition classroom” (p. 69), Taylor argues that taking the role of learner in weekly writing conferences helped her to improve communication with her students:

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11 Kells notes that while these varieties are known collectively (and pejoratively) as “Tex Mex,” some Mexican American groups have appropriated the term.
I prefaced discussions about linguistic or cultural differences by admitting my need to learn from my students: “Help me understand now,” “Can you explain to me, what that means,” or “I need some help here,” again in an attempt to “limit [the student’s] resistance [to] what he sees as the outside imposition of any authority” (Curran 1983, 148). (Taylor, p. 128)

As discussed in Chapter 2, direct instruction in the contrastive analysis approach to language variation has also enabled some teachers to change the discourse of writing instruction (LeMoine, 2001; Rickford, 2006; Sweetland, 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler and Swords, 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999).

In sum, as all of these studies suggest, finding the most effective language to discuss language variation in the classroom has not been an easy task. Moreover, while there are multiple discussions underway concerning the pejorative language that teachers use when they discuss the language of multidialectal students in their classes, few of these studies have taken a discourse analysis approach. Rather, examples of pejorative language have often been used to support broader linguistic and pedagogical arguments for a sociolinguistic approach to language in the classroom. Thus in order to create a framework in which to analyze the lexical choices of the current teachers under investigation, it is also necessary to gain insights from the broader literature on teacher/student discourse in the sections to follow. By situating the current analysis within such a framework, moreover, I am able to provide a closer look at the links that exist between the instructors’ sociolinguistic language awareness (as revealed through their lexical choices) and their discursive interactions with students.

3.5.4. One-on-one interactions in writing conferences

While I have not been able to locate any in-depth studies focusing specifically on how a teacher’s language awareness affects interactions in a writing conference, several studies offer useful terminology and frameworks for conducting such a study. In particular, the literature on
backchannels and other response tokens offers a wealth of analytical approaches to conversational exchanges between students and teachers. Originally termed “back channel signals” by Yngve’s (1970, in Gumperz, 1982, p. 163), simple interjections such as \textit{ok, right}, etc., represent a “common way in which conversational cooperation is communicated and monitored by participants” (Gumperz, p. 163). Allowing the non-primary speaker in an interaction to communicate with the primary speaker without actually taking a separate turn at talk, backchannels can be used to show agreement with the primary speaker or to encourage the primary speaker to continue maintaining the floor.

According to Clancy, Thomson, Suzuki, and Tao (1996), there has been a “profusion of terminology” to describe backchanneling behavior, with expressions such as \textit{yeah} and \textit{uh huh} also being referred to as “acknowledgement tokens” (Jefferson, 1984, in Clancy \textit{et al.}, p. 356) and “continuers” (Schegloff 1982, in Clancy \textit{et al.}, p. 356). Backchanneling behavior has also been expanded to include “sentence completions, requests for clarification, brief statements, and non-verbal responses” (Clancy \textit{et al.}, p. 356, referencing Duncan and Fiske, 1977). Clancy \textit{et al.} refer more generally to “reactive tokens,” which include, among others, (1) simple backchannels (e.g., non-lexical utterances such as \textit{mhm}, \textit{uh huh}, \textit{hm}) that express interest, understanding, or simple encouragement for the primary speaker to continue talking; (2) “reactive expressions” (i.e., one- or two-word expressions such as \textit{o=kay, ri=ght, sure, exactly, oh really}) that indicate a reaction to what the primary speaker has said\textsuperscript{12}; (3) “collaborative finishes,” by which the secondary speaker completes the primary speaker’s sentence in order to express understanding or agreement; and (4) repetitions of the primary speaker’s words in order to demonstrate comprehension (pp. 359-361).

\textsuperscript{12} Note that Clancy \textit{et al.} include any “short non-floor-taking lexical phrase or word” in this category (p. 459). It is not clear how they distinguish between simple lexical continuers such as “okay” and “right” and reactive expressions such as \textit{\textasciitilde o=kay} and \textit{\textasciitilde ri\textasciitilde ght.”}
Meier (1985) analyzes students’ use of single word utterances such as *um, yeah, and ok* during individual writing conferences with their instructor in a college-level basic writing class. Noting that in the early part of the semester students rarely used these expressions spontaneously, Meier argues that they did not represent backchanneling behavior or indicate genuine understanding. That is, they “seldom occurred in the middle of one of Charlie’s [i.e., the instructor’s] utterances, but…usually occurred either in response to Charlie’s query or at points in the conversation where it seemed clear that Charlie had completed an utterance” (p. 166). For example (boldface mine):

**Charlie:** ...so you see that would, that would help conclude the whole thing and wrap it all up. ok?

**Ann:** ok

**Charlie:** ok? if you make more of a judgment like that? Then, um, you gotta concentrate on your ed endings. You have a whole bunch of them here, right?

**Ann:** ok, yeah

(p. 165)

Later in the semester, however, when students had developed a greater sense of “shared knowledge” about writing (p. 186), expressions such as *ok, um, yeah right* began to appear as genuine backchannels. For example, in the following excerpt, each time Linda says “mm,” she does it spontaneously in the middle of one of Charlie’s utterances rather than at the end (boldface mine):

**Charlie:** Now. This ending is really good, ok? in that everything that you are saying here in judgment of her

**Linda:** mm

**Charlie:** and what she did for you

**Linda:** mm

**Charlie:** sort of, or what you learned from her

**Linda:** yeah, what I learned

**Charlie:** is supported by the descriptions of her you’ve given before
Linda: mm
Charlie: ok. So there’s real good unity there.
The problem is that you didn’t give any
sort of general main idea at the
beginning which is unified with this
Linda: yeah,
I see
(p. 172)

In a corpus-based study of one-on-one conferences between Irish graduate students and
their tutors, Fiona Farr (2003) divides response tokens used by students and tutors into three
categories: (1) “minimal response tokens” (p. 73, referring to Fellegy 1995; Gardener; 1997a;
and McCarthy 2002); (2) “non-minimal response tokens” (p. 73, referring to McCarthy, 2002);
and (3) “overlap/interruptions” (p. 74). Farr finds that minimal response tokens (e.g., mm, yeah,
ok) are used far more frequently than nonminimal tokens (e.g., right, exactly, definitely) and that
tutors are more likely to use the latter than students. On the other hand, in the third category,
interruption and overlap by both students and their tutors are found to be “strong tokens of
engaged listenership and contribute in a positive way to the dyadic conversations under review”
(p. 80).

In addition to the foregoing discussions of backchanneling behavior, Haneda’s (2004)
analysis of one-on-one writing conferences in a university-level Japanese as a foreign language
(JFL) class offers a useful perspective on how teachers and students interact in more global
discussions of content and essay coherence. Focusing on the “joint construction of meaning” in
these conferences, Haneda examines the use of initiation and follow-up moves during a number
of Initiation/Response/Follow-up (IRF) exchanges (Wells 1981). Following Wells (1996),
Haneda also uses “sequence” as the “focal unit of analysis,” with each sequence divided into “an
obligatory nuclear” exchange and as many bound exchanges as are judged necessary to complete
the topic” (Haneda 2004, p. 187). In addition, the teacher’s role in the exchange of either
“primary” or “secondary” knower (e.g., K1 or K2) is also coded. Results of the study reveal a number of insights on the different types of exchanges that occurred with advanced and intermediate students respectively. For example, the topic of a sequence plays an important role in how that sequence evolves. While most students prefer to discuss “language use” more often than “content” (i.e., 82 percent vs. 10.8 percent), the advanced students discuss content (22.5 percent) far more frequently than do the intermediate students (4.1 percent). Moreover, the mean length of content discussions is greater than that for discussions of language, with 5.44 exchanges per sequence in the former and 3.53 exchanges in the latter. On the other hand, the intermediate students engage in more metatalk about language than do the advanced students, with 4.00 exchanges per sequence versus 3.95. In addition, while the teacher initiates most of the exchanges (72.5 percent), the students are more likely to assume the role of K1 (i.e., primary knower), especially when the topic is content rather than language. Finding that the “assignment of knower roles was dynamic,” shifting “fluidly in the same conversation,” Haneda also notes that the topic of a particular sequence has a “major bearing” on “the assignment” of those roles (Haneda 2004, pp. 199-200). Furthermore, Haneda finds that when the topic of a sequence is content rather than language, teachers tend to give higher-level (i.e., more complex) evaluations and to demand more information from students, “thus acting as a questioner who builds on students contributions and extends the talk” (p. 201). Finally, when students initiate an exchange, the topic is usually language, and the student assumes the role of K2, asking “lexico-grammatical questions” (p. 209). The teacher, in turn, often assumes the K1 role and “gives” grammatical information to the student. While this study describes teacher-student interactions in a JFL composition class, its methodology offers a useful framework for examining similar dynamics in a class devoted to the acquisition of Edited American English. As Haneda discovered in
conducting this study, the “joint construction of meaning” depends heavily on the topic under discussion. When discussing content, the teacher is far more likely to “break…out of the triadic dialogue” and “share …power in both initiation and follow-up moves,” thus creating “dialogic instruction as defined by Nystrand (1997)” (Haneda 2004, p. 210). In discussions of language, on the other hand, the teacher’s assumption of the K1 role leads to “a substantial amount of monologic instruction” (p. 210). Haneda notes, however, that

… the teacher could have made sequences concerning language use more collaborative had she created opportunities for the students themselves to identify problems related to language form and to solve them on their own (see Koshik 2002). (Haneda 2004, p. 212.)

As the foregoing studies suggest, therefore, teacher-student interactions in one-on-one contexts can be analyzed from two important perspectives. On the one hand, a heavy focus on one specific behavior such as student backchanneling (e.g., Farr 2003; Meier 1985) offers ample data for analyzing the effects of teacher discourse on student comprehension and engagement. On the other hand, an in-depth analysis of one teacher’s (and her students’) use of different types of initiation and follow-up moves, along with their assumption of different roles of “knower” (i.e., K1 and K2), allows us to develop a fuller picture of what it means to engage in dialogic vs. monologic instruction (Haneda 2004). Both of these insights are useful in the context of the current study. As discussed above and in Chapter 2, a teacher’s language awareness may not only affect the type of language instruction he/she is able to deliver (e.g., Rickford 1999, 2006; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram et al. 1999), it may also affect his or her ability to interactively incorporate the linguistic competence that students already possess (e.g., Gumperz and Hernández-Chavez; 1972; Losey 1997; McLaughlin and Agnew 1999; Taylor 1989).
3.5.5. Written commentary

In addition to the discourse of teachers and students in whole-class and one-on-one contexts, the comments that instructors write directly on student papers have also been examined recently within an interactional context. Fife and O’Neill (2001) argue, for example, that with many whole-class discussions focused specifically on the process of writing, it is essential to view teachers’ written comments within the context of those broader discussions. That is, as these whole class discussions become the “framework” within which teacher commentary is viewed, they “add many layers of complexity and interaction to the traditional response dynamic of students writing and teachers evaluating isolated essays” (p. 302). As Sommers (1982) argues, “The key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other (p. 155, cited in Fife and O’Neill 2001, p.303).

In addition, much of the literature on teachers’ written commentary has focused on what Straub (1996) refers to as the “metaphor of response as conversation” (374). That is, the comments that composition instructors write in the margins at the ends of student papers are considered to be part of an ongoing dialogue with students, one in which the formal prescriptive language of correction no longer fits. In an analysis of the endnotes written by six different composition teachers on the paper of one first-year writing student, Straub notes that while all six commentaries are “thoughtful and well-crafted,” only four have the “feel of conversations” (p. 377). In analyzing the conversational language used by these instructors, Straub notes that:

1. They create an informal, spoken voice, using everyday language.

2. They tie their commentary back to the student’s own language on the page, in text-specific comments.
3. They focus on the writer’s evolving meanings and play back their way of understanding the text. (p. 380)

More importantly, these conversations become “explorations” as the instructors also “integrate informal dialogue and serious inquiry” (p. 388) as follows:

1. They make critical comments but cast them in the larger context of help or guidance.
2. They provide direction for the student’s revision, but they do not take control over the writing or establish a strict agenda for that revision.
3. They elaborate on the key statements of their responses. (pp. 389-390).

Auten (1991) also discusses the miscommunications that can occur between teachers over the language teachers use in their commentary (i.e., “the bits of rhetoric scrawled in margins,” p. 6). In a study of the reactions of students to teacher comments at both a large university and a small college, Auten found that even though 80 percent of the university students and 90 percent of the college students claimed to have had “positive experiences” with the their teachers’ written commentary, they responded negatively to two type of comment in particular (p. 7) – the “reader reaction” (i.e., “teacher disapproval masquerading as reader confusion”) and the “coaching question” (i.e. probing questions that are “belittling rather than encouraging”). Thus when teachers claimed not to understand what a student had written, the students often interpreted the teacher’s comment as dislike (e.g., “My teacher doesn’t like me”; “He hated my paper,” p. 7). When teachers asked probing questions in the margins, some students would feel “belittle[ed]” (e.g., “I become so personally insulted that I see no way of improving,” p. 7). According to Auten, moreover, this miscommunication occurs because students have “little contextual information” about their “own roles as readers of teachers’ comments” and “the way comments are supposed to work” (p. 6.) In order to address such miscommunications, Auten
proposes a taxonomy of three comment types: (1) “teacher-centered (‘I’ directed)”; (2) “student-centered (‘you’ directed)”; and (3) “text-centered (‘it’ directed)” (p. 11). She also argues that by explaining the purpose of each type of question to students in a class or workshop, teachers can bridge the communication gap.

Finally, Fife and O’Neill (2001) claim that in spite of many insights into the interactive nature of teachers’ written responses, most studies focus on the written comments of the teacher in isolation, “vastly underestimating the pedagogical complexity of the response situation” (p. 306). Referring to the works of Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1981) on the “contextual nature of conversation,” Fife and O’Neill argue that even though the term “conversation” is used to describe an “oral exchange,” it can also apply to the context of written commentary (p. 312). Thus,

important factors influencing the participants’ understanding of the exchange include the physical setting, personal background knowledge, attitudes toward each other, socio-cultural assumptions concerning role and status relationships, and social values associated with various message components. (Gumperz 1982, p. 153, paraphrased in Fife and O’Neil 2001, p. 312)

Moreover, the exchange (or conversation) can be analyzed according to the “patterns of discourse” that evolve, whether they be “IRE” patterns of ‘teacher talk’ with the teacher knowing the ‘right answer’ all along…or patterns for conversation found in other settings marked by a mutual negotiation of meaning between participants” (p. 312, footnote mine).

While not referring specifically to the written commentary of writing instructors, Meier (1985) reviews a number of studies that explore the connection between classroom interaction and writing development, noting that “certain broad-based communicative principles” appear to

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13 The IRE (Initiation/Response/Evaluation) sequence is a three-part interaction in which a teacher initiates a question, a student responds to the question, and the teacher completes the interaction by evaluating the response (e.g., good, right, okay, no, not exactly, etc.). According to Cazden (2001), it is considered to be the "unmarked pattern" in most classrooms (p. 30). Wells (1993) also claims that “in many secondary classrooms, it is estimated that this format accounts for some 70% of all the discourse that takes place between teacher and students” (p. 2).
emphasize the dialogic process of learning to write. One of these principles, “the centrality of audience response,” is considered, moreover, to be “a key factor in writing development” of students of “all ages” (p. 82). In addition, the idea that writing development involves “gradual acquisition of more sophisticated and versatile strategies for revising text” was an important one in most of these studies. That is, “the ‘voice’ of the audience responding to the writer’s text during class discussions …eventually becomes internalized” (p. 84). Referring to a study by Newkirk (1984) that explored the writing development of four college students enrolled in a summer freshman composition class, Meier notes the words of one student who was in the process of finally internalizing this audience voice:

I start questioning as I go through sentences. And so I start thinking, ‘Is this clear enough?’ I’m starting to get into the habit, I guess, of writing for other people. But I’m still having a lot of problems reading as though I were the reader and not the writer. But I’m trying, which is one thing I never did before. I think that’s the major thing, the way I’m reading papers. (Newkirk, 1984, pp. 139-140, cited in Meier (1985), p. 86).

In a discussion of her own “preliminary” study of students enrolled in a university writing course in 1982, Meier (1985) also describes her analysis of the transcripts of two students’ composing processes in which she found that each of the students engaged in “a kind of inner dialogue with an imagined teacher audience” (p. 93). Noting that the students rarely had the opportunity to discuss their writing in one-on-one contexts with their teacher or in class discussions with their peers, Meier surmises that the imagined teacher audience was based on their own teacher’s general comments about writing in class and the ones she wrote on their papers.

In sum, the studies discussed here that analyze or refer to teachers’ written responses on student writing all suggest that these responses must be viewed as part of ongoing conversations between teachers and students. When written commentary is seen in this way, moreover, it
becomes a reflection of both whole class and one-on-one interactions between teachers and students rather than an isolated component of writing instruction.

3.5.6. Peer revision and student-led discussions

Finally, while the current study focuses primarily on teacher/student interactions, it is important to note that a number of studies emphasize the critical need for peer revision and student discussion sessions in writing pedagogy. Referring to a two-year study of the writing processes of primary school children by Graves and his colleagues (Calkins 1980; Graves 1978, 1982; 1983; Sowers 1979; 1981), Meier (1985) notes that for these students, the process of writing was a “social event” rather than a “solitary endeavor” (p. 83). That is, students would read their papers to each other, often incorporating the suggestions of their peers in future drafts.

Studies of older student writers also discuss the benefits of such interaction. For example, Fife and O’Neill (2001) note that

when students' writing is only commented on by the teacher and not by the student writers themselves, dialogue does not take place on the same plane of writing -on a metacognitive level that discusses possibilities and rationales for writing decisions. Instead, the student's contributions to this dialogue become the implementations of the teacher's writing decisions, as Auten suggests. (p. 313)

As noted in the discussion of writing process pedagogy in Section 3.2, Gray-Rosendale (2001) also describes the benefits of peer revision for a group of linguistically and culturally diverse students enrolled in a university basic writing class. Noting that these students initially had trouble developing logical arguments or addressing a specific audience in their writing, Gray-Rosendale describes the contrast between their early essays and the sophisticated argumentative strategies that they demonstrate their speech. Moreover, through in-depth analysis of the discourse of these students during ongoing peer discussions, she is able to demonstrate how interacting with their peers has helped them to transfer these skills to their writing. That is,
as a result of such interactions, their texts are better organized, they reference knowledge of traditional argumentative structures (claims, subclaims, and evidence), they establish clear relationships to specific audiences, and they anticipate their audiences’ concerns, desires, and counterclaims. (Gray-Rosendale 2001, p. 15).

Finally, Knoeller (1998) examines the participation framework of a multiethnic Advanced Placement (AP) English class open to any student willing to do the work. Through participation in student-led discussions of literature, students are able to choose the books they analyze, bringing a wide variety of cultural perspectives to the discussions. According to Knoeller, moreover, in relinquishing tight control of all classroom interaction, the teacher allows students to develop their own writing voice as they prepare to take the AP composition test. Following Bakhtin’s theories of “social self – especially those involving the appropriation of the language of others…” (p. 22), Knoeller examines the ways in which students revoice: (1) their discussions with the teacher and other students in the class; (2) the characters and authors of the texts they read; and (3) the voices they encounter outside the classroom. “Classroom discourse reaches its fullest consummation,” claims Knoeller, “when students feel licensed to not only speak their own minds, but respond openly to the ideas of authors and classmates” (p. 18).

3.6. A Multi-Perspective Framework for the Current Study

In sum, the current chapter has surveyed the literature on a wide variety of issues related to writing instruction for linguistically diverse students, including the nature of academic writing, the pros and cons of a writing process approach, the efficacy and justice of college-level basic writing programs, the lexical choices made by teachers when discussing language variation in their students’ writings, and above all, the nature of student-teacher talk in one-on-one oral and written discussions about writing. While the combination of such a wide variety of research topics in a single review of the literature effectively limits the attention I can devote to any one in
particular, such a broad-brushed approach is necessary for one important reason. As linguists have continued to explore the need for teachers to become more aware (and thus more accepting) of the language variation in their students’ writings, and as composition scholars have continued to seek insights into the cognitive and social dimensions of learning to write, these fields of inquiry often overlap (Kells 2006; Losey 1997; Reed 1981; Rickford 1999, 2006; Schleppegrell 2006; Smitherman [1994]1999; Sweetland 2006; Whiteman 1981; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Wolfram et al. 1999). In addition, scholars in both fields are turning to discourse analysis to provide micro-level pictures of what actually goes on in the writing classroom. Therefore, just as it would be somewhat disingenuous to analyze the way a composition teacher addresses language variation without discussing his or her approach to the writing process, it would also be difficult to accurately analyze the interactions of that teacher and a student whose writing incorporates vernacular features without some attention to the teacher’s approach to language variation. In sum, this review of the literature on writing instruction is intended as a supplement to the preceding review of language awareness studies in Chapter 2. Together, the two reviews are provided as a framework for my analysis of teacher-student discourse in the Basic Writing classroom.
In the current study, I explore the links between teachers’ language awareness and their interactions with students in multidialectal writing classrooms. Working within the framework of interactional sociolinguistics, I seek both to define the language awareness of three college-level writing instructors and to correlate their levels of awareness with their discursive interactions with students. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the phenomenon under examination is a social one, that is, the (mis)education of speakers of nonstandard varieties of English within an educational system that often fails to provide teachers with a basic understanding of dialects and language variation or with the pedagogical tools to address these in instruction. As such, my investigation of developmental writing instruction falls midway along a continuum of “philosophical persuasions” of researchers who include at one end relatively conservative positivists and postpositivists …seeking to find external truths and ultimately be able to make predictions; interpretive and constructivist scholars…somewhere in the middle of the continuum, who seek to understand the how and why of phenomena from a holistic participant-informed perspective [italics mine]; and critical standpoint theorists at the far end of the continuum who seek to understand the social, political, and economic (material) conditions (e.g., related to race, gender, power, class, age, immigrant status) that they assume may systematically disadvantage certain people… (Duff 2008, p. 33, referring to Pennycook 2001).

In placing this study in the middle of the continuum, I seek primarily to explore the “how and the why” of developmental writing instruction from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective and to add a level of understanding gained from in-depth analysis of what teachers actually say about language in the writing classroom. For this reason, the teachers I observe are not categorized precisely as either linguistically “informed” or linguistically “uninformed.” Rather, their levels of language awareness are defined by where they fall on a number of
different continua, including those describing the teachers’ phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge of the varieties of English their students speak, their awareness of their students’ underlying linguistic abilities, and their sensitivity to the importance of the vernacular in their students’ lives.

4.1. Rationale

As discussed in Chapter 3, my assumption that a teacher’s language awareness plays a key role in classroom learning stems from one of the basic premises of interactional sociolinguistics. That is, it reflects the view that the meaning of an utterance is “situated” in the social and cultural context in which it occurs (Schiffrin 1994). It is also grounded in the belief that “language and context coconstitute one another: language contextualizes and is contextualized, such that language does not function ‘in’ context, language also forms and provides context” (Schiffrin 1994, p. 134). Thus what a teacher has to say about language both reflects and creates the context in which students acquire Edited American English. If an instructor believes that his or her primary responsibility is to eradicate all signs of the vernacular from a student’s writing, for example, the instructor both operates within and creates a very different pedagogical context than that of an instructor who seeks to build on the vernacular in order to add Edited American English to a student’s existing linguistic repertoire. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 3, the responses of a student to a teacher’s discourse on language are equally important in the creation of context, for within the interactive sociolinguistic framework, the “emergent” meaning of any interaction is viewed as a “negotiation” that “is facilitated by language” (Schiffrin 1994, p. 134).

While not related specifically to the teaching of writing, two vivid examples of the very different ways in which a teacher’s language awareness (or lack thereof) influences the context
in which students acquire Standard English are provided by Wheeler and Swords (2006) and Sweetland (2006) respectively. Wheeler and Swords gives the following example from a 3rd-grade class with many speakers of AAVE (line numbering, boldface, and italics are mine):

1  **Student:** Mrs. Swords, why you *be teachin’* math in the afternoon?
2  **Mrs. Swords:** *Why do I WHAT?*
3  Student: Why you *be teachin’* math in the afternoon?
4  **Mrs. Swords:** *Why do I what?*
5  **Student:** Why you *be teachin’* math in the afternoon?
6  **Mrs. Swords:** We don’t say, “Why you *be teaching* math in the afternoon?”
7  We say, “Why *are you teaching* math in the afternoon?”
8  **Student:** Oh, OK. (p.30)

As the teacher twice asks the question “Why do I what?” (lines 2 and 4) in an effort to get the student to use a Standard English alternative to invariant *be*, she fails to make her point, as the student continues to ask “Why you *be teachin’* math in the afternoon …?” Only when the teacher provides a Standard English alternative (“Why *are you teaching* math in the afternoon?”) does the student respond. However, the student’s minimal response (“Oh, OK”) provides little evidence that he/she understands or accepts the teacher’s explanation that “We don’t say, ‘Why you be teaching math in the afternoon?’” In this context, the teacher’s failure to recognize the student’s vernacular as legitimate not only serves to end the interaction, it also prevents her from achieving her pedagogical goal of having the student speak in Standard English.

In contrast, Sweetland’s (2006) example from a 4th-grade discussion of the children’s story *My Brother Fine With Me*, by Lucille Clifton, portrays a very different scenario. In the following Initiation/Response/Follow-up (IRF) sequence (Wells 1993), the teacher’s high level of language awareness is evident, as are the pedagogical implications of that awareness (line numbers, boldface, and italics are mine):

1  **Ms. G:** What do you notice about this sentence?
2  **Mantez:** *They left the’s’ off, and there ain’t no ‘is.’*
3  **Mrs. G:** Is it *wrong*?
1 Mantez: No!
2 Ms. G: Why not?
3 Mantez: Cause that’s the way they talk. That’s they dialect.
4 Ms. G: Oh. And what dialect is it?
5 Mantez: Uh, African American.
6 Ms. G: Right. Good job. (pp. 128-129)

Unlike the interaction described in Wheeler and Swords (2006) above, this exchange
demonstrates a deeper level of language awareness on the part of the teacher, who manipulates
the follow-up moves of this triadic dialogue to emphasize the sociolinguistic importance of
AAVE while also helping the student to notice the grammatical differences between AAVE and
Standard English. Not only does the teacher challenge the idea that AAVE features are “wrong”
by framing the suggestion as a question that the student can answer negatively (lines 3-4), she
also uses follow-up questions to extend his response (“Why not,” line 5, and “what dialect is it,”
line 7) before evaluating his answer (“Right. Good job,” line 9). Moreover, this teacher has
clearly been able to help the student understand the grammatical differences between AAVE and
Standard English, as evidenced by his metalinguistic response in line 2: “They left the ‘s’ off,
and there ain’t no ‘is.” In sum, the different types of student response to each instructor’s
discussion of language variation in the two preceding passages demonstrate how the discourses
of two language arts teachers create very different contexts in which the teaching of language
takes place.

Simultaneously, the broader context in which an instructor operates can in turn influence
the language he or she uses. This becomes particularly evident in the college-level basic writing
classroom, where teachers are responsible for helping students to acquire “essayist literacy”
(Scollon and Scollon 1981). As discussed in Chapter 3, basic writing instruction varies widely
from one institution to another, with some colleges focusing more heavily on the overall process
of writing and others on the elimination of vernacular features. Moreover, in many institutions,
the basic writing class remains an isolated noncredit course that students must pass in order to fully matriculate in the institution. For this reason, basic writing teachers often take on a greater gatekeeping role than many of their colleagues. Thus they may also feel bound by a discourse of correction as they experience greater pressure to “improve” their students’ language and move them on to the next level. As Blanton (1999) argues, eliminating the non-standardness of students’ written English remains the paramount goal of most basic/remedial programs today. Get their writing cleaned up and get them through the proficiency test that stands between them and further college study…. (p. 126)

Within this context, then, teacher-student discourse may not fully reflect a teacher’s underlying beliefs concerning the different varieties of English he or she encounters in the classroom, but rather the pressure to meet institutional standards. As Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) argue,

research that addresses the contexts as much as the behaviors of talk can tease out the ordering - motivational, strategic, behavioral, attributional, and evaluative - that interactants themselves impose upon their own communication experiences, and the ways in which the social practices of talk both are constrained by and themselves constrain goals, identities, and social structures. (p. 1)

Finally, any description of context must also include an acknowledgement of the social tensions that underlie teacher-student interactions concerning language. For example, while students may want to improve their writing, they may also struggle with issues related to abandoning their own vernaculars for Edited American English (Delpit 2006; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Siegel 2006; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). By learning to eliminate all traces of their own varieties from their writing and academic discourse, they risk alienating themselves from the communities in which those varieties are spoken, in some cases being accused by friends and family of talking “white” (Balester 1993, p. 11). For this reason, classroom discussions of how language is used in society may also reveal certain aspects of the context in
which a teacher operates. Whether or not that teacher embraces such discussions may both influence and be influenced by unstated social dynamics that run beneath the surface of any classroom interaction.

In sum, while linguists continue to call for more linguistic awareness on the part of educators (see Chapter 1), there is still the issue of how teachers will incorporate that knowledge into their classroom talk and how their talk will affect the participation frameworks of the classes they teach. Delpit (2006) argues that teachers need to give students “access to the politically mandated language form” while at the same time recognizing that “the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity” (pp. 94-95). How writing instructors accomplish (or fail to accomplish) such a task requires in-depth analysis of what they actually say and do in the classroom.

4.2. A Multiple-Case-Study Research Design

In order to provide an effective analysis of teacher discourse in the college-level developmental writing classroom, I employ a multiple-case-study research design. That is, I examine the discourse of three teachers in the contexts of the writing classes they teach. As discussed in Duff (2008), case studies are not restricted to studies of single individuals. Rather, …individual groups (e.g., a class of students), organizations (e.g., an intensive language program), or events (e.g., a Japanese language tutorial or a seminar in medicine) may also constitute cases, because any of these contexts could provide “a particular concrete instance” (Lewin 1979, p. 286) of a phenomenon, where researchers might conceivably find relationships between variables or factors of interest. (p. 34)

In the current study, the variables under investigation are (1) the teachers’ overall language awareness (in particular, their knowledge and attitudes concerning language variation) and (2) their discourse about language in multidialectal classrooms. In order to find relationships between these variables, I have combined descriptive case studies of two developmental writing
instructors with that of an instructor who teaches a more advanced technical writing class. There are three key advantages to such an approach. Most importantly, a case study allows the researcher to explore a particular phenomenon through very detailed description and triangulation of data (Duff 2008). Thus, through observation of three separate writing classes over the course of a semester, I have been able to combine data for analysis from teachers' responses to interviews and a questionnaire, from recordings of their class discussions, from their written comments on student papers, and most importantly, from recordings and transcripts of their one-on-one writing conferences with students.¹⁴ A second advantage of a descriptive case study is that it allows “a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (Yin 2003, in Duff 2008, p. 32). Thus in a multiple-case study of teachers who teach different types of writing (i.e., developmental writing vs. technical writing), I have also been able to investigate the effects of a developmental (or “basic”) writing context on the way teachers discuss language with their students. If the context is one of remediation, as is often the case in developmental writing classes, it may have a very different effect on teacher-student interaction than would a context in which a more advanced level of writing is taught. Finally, by observing two different developmental writing teachers, I have been able to conduct a cross-case analysis of the links between their backgrounds and language awareness and their classroom discourse in both written and spoken contexts.

4.3. Subjects

The subjects of my study include three European American writing instructors and 27 of the students enrolled in their classes in the fall of 2009. Two of the instructors taught developmental writing at a community college outside a large urban area, while the third taught a more

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¹⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 1, while the current study examines the responses of all three instructors in the interviews and on the questionnaires, its primarily focus in the classroom is the discursive interactions and written commentary of the two basic writing instructors.
advanced technical writing class at a four-year university in the same area. The ethnicities of the students were primarily African American and European American, although one student mentioned his Mexican American heritage, while another, who also spoke Urdu, clearly demonstrated some English as a Second Language (ESL) issues in his writing. The focus of the current study, however, is on the native English speakers.

4.3.1. Instructors

The instructors who participated in this study either responded to a recruitment notice sent to writing faculty at the community college or were introduced to me personally by an acquaintance with ties to professionals in the field of education. All three instructors, who will be known by the pseudonyms Rachael, Barbara, and Al, were chosen as participants in the study after individual one- to two-hour interviews with me during August and September of 2009 (see Appendix A) and after completing 20-minute follow-up questionnaires (see Appendix B). (I also contacted three additional writing instructors who were recommended to me, but I was unable to interest them in being interviewed.) It is important to note, moreover, that potential teacher participants were minimally informed about the underlying purpose of the study. That is, in both email correspondence and in formal interviews with the instructors, I stressed the overall goal of learning about “the challenges faced by writing teachers in today’s multilingual community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities” (see Appendix B for a description of the study on the follow-up questionnaire administered to interviewees). I also avoided focusing specifically on language variation in any of my promotional discussions. Finally, the instructors were each offered $200 in exchange for allowing me to observe their classes and writing conferences for a

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15 For this study, I chose not to survey participant students about their ethnic, linguistic, or educational backgrounds. As my main concern was to observe the effects of teacher discourse on classroom interaction, I decided that asking students for too much personal information might make them reluctant to sign the necessary permission forms. However, through comments made by students in their papers, as well as in class and online, I was able to glean some very useful ethnographic information.
full semester and for providing me with samples of student writing that included the instructors’ written commentary.

Of the three instructors who agreed to be interviewed and to ultimately participate in the study, two (i.e., Al and Rachel) taught developmental writing at the community college – Al three days a week in the early afternoon and Rachel one evening a week during a single three-hour session. The third (i.e., Barbara) taught technical writing two mornings a week at the university.

4.3.2. Students

Students were invited to participate in the study during 20-minute in-class presentations of the project early in October of 2009. During these presentations, I stressed my interest in finding out how teachers teach writing and how students learn to write. Students were also invited to ask questions about the study before signing consent forms. Finally, participating students were each offered a $25.00 gift certificate to their college or university bookstore in exchange for allowing me to collect data from their recorded in-class conversations, to observe and record selected writing conferences, and to obtain copies of their essays from their instructors. Of the 27 students who agreed to participate, 18 were enrolled in the two basic writing classes (8 and 10 respectively) and 9 were enrolled in the technical writing class. Students in all three classes who chose not to participate were assured that none of their in-class comments would be used as data in the study. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of participant students in each class according to gender and ethnicity (but again see Footnote 15). Additional background information about the students, including discussions of the varieties of English they used in class, is provided in Chapters 7 and 8.
### Table 4.1. Student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor/Class</th>
<th>Number of participating students</th>
<th>Ethnicity and Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al/Basic (Developmental)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>AA/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>EA/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>EA/Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 8 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel/Basic (Developmental)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>AA/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>AA/Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>EA/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>EA/Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other/Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 10 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara/Technical</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>EA/Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>EA/Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 9 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.4. Data

The data for this study is divided into the primary data used for analysis and the supplemental data used to provide context for that analysis.

**A. Primary data:**

Texts have been selected for analysis from transcripts (or copies) of the following data:

- Audio-recordings of initial one- to two-hour interviews with each instructor
- Audio-recordings of 50 individual writing conferences
- 60 student writing samples with the instructors’ written comments

**B. Supplemental data:**

The following data has helped to provide a contextual framework for the analysis of the interviews, writing conferences, and written commentary on student papers.

- The instructors’ written responses on follow-up questionnaires at the end of the interviews
- Audio recordings of approximately 75 total class hours (25 hours from each class)
- Audio recordings of final one- to two-hour interviews with each teacher
- Selected textbook pages and hand-outs
- Field notes written during class observations

4.4.1. Interview questions and follow-up questionnaire

My purpose in interviewing writing instructors at the beginning of the study was to find a number of teachers who held a range of attitudes toward and background knowledge of language variation. By asking these instructors to talk in general about the challenges they faced in teaching basic or technical writing, I hoped to distinguish which instructors had the most knowledge and understanding of language variation and which ones had the least.

With this goal in mind, I decided that the best way to determine the attitudes and backgrounds of potential participants would be to conduct semi-structured hour-long interviews. As the literature demonstrates, moreover, one-on-one interviews with a teacher can provide useful background information to supplement both qualitative and quantitative measures. By interviewing teachers at various stages of her study, Sweetland (2006) was able to measure teachers’ changing attitudes to two specific interventions: (1) a workshop designed to help them become aware of language variation and explore their own attitudes toward speakers of AAVE and (2) a language arts curriculum that allowed them to experience the results of incorporating language variation study into their lessons. In doing so, Sweetland combined quantitative measures of teachers’ changing attitudes with qualitative insights obtained as teachers discussed their views before and after the workshop, as well as at the end of the instructional portion of the study. One-on-one interviews also allowed Losey (1997) to recognize certain themes that informed the classroom discourse of the basic writing teacher she observed. For example, in talking with the teacher outside of class, she discovered that the teacher was driven by her belief
that all students in the class should be prepared for future academic writing at the university and that her course was “an integral part of the sequence needed for the AA degree” (p. 113).

4.4.2. Design of the interview questions

The 19 questions addressed to the instructors in one-on-one interviews at the beginning of this study (see Appendix A) cover a range of topics, including the instructors’ educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds; their general approaches to the teaching of grammar; their specific approaches to the vernacular features they encounter in their students’ writings; and their beliefs about the process of writing itself. One primary concern in designing these questions, however, was the need for an interview format that would elicit discourse from teachers reflective of their general views on linguistic diversity and one that would elicit direct responses to specific questions about language variation. As Sweetland (2006) notes when discussing the creation of an effective survey, “subjects may be unable or unwilling to share their language attitudes frankly” (p. 69). Thus I decided that I would need to surround questions related specifically to the issue of linguistic knowledge and attitudes with a larger group of more general questions related to the overall teaching of writing.

In order to ground my own interview questions within the literature, I first consulted two sources: (1) a survey administered by the Conference on College Composition and Communication Language Committee (CCCC 2000) and (2) a teacher questionnaire and set of interview questions designed by Belanger (1995). While the former examined “the state of knowledge, training, and attitudes about language diversity” of U.S. high school and college-level English and composition teachers, the latter was designed as part of an ongoing study of the language awareness and practices of Canadian teachers who teach English language skills to
native speakers of English. I then adapted questions from each in order to create a set of semi-structured open-ended questions about the teaching of writing. (See Appendix A.)

During the same period (the summer of 2009), I also enrolled in a week-long workshop entitled Language and Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. There I received extremely useful feedback from a number of K-12 classroom teachers concerning the types of questions they would feel comfortable answering if interviewed about their own views toward language variation. In particular, I received valuable suggestions about the following question from the CCCC survey:

What approaches do you use with students who use nonstandard dialect features in their writing?
Circle all that apply.

a) I discuss knowing both standard and nonstandard and the contexts when each is appropriate.
b) I use private conferences to discuss issues of correctness.
c) I might say nothing.
d) I tell them for an English class only standard English is appropriate.

(CCCC Survey, Part II, Question # 12)

For example, one teacher pointed out that the arrangement of certain answers lower down on the list (e.g., “I might say nothing”) might be interpreted as a less desirable answer or *vice versa.* Another said that he would be very uncomfortable answering a question like this on a questionnaire unless it was an anonymous one. These responses and others led me to realize that this type of question might not accurately elicit the views and pedagogical practices of a respondent who knew he or she was being evaluated as a potential study participant. I decided
that I would need to go into greater depth in order to couch my direct questions about language variation within a general discussion of writing. I also believed that more open-ended questions would encourage the instructors to more fully discuss their views while also allowing me to ask follow-up questions.

As can be seen from the interview questions listed below ((#6, #7, #9, #11), I transformed the CCCC question discussed above into several different queries (see also Appendix A):

a) #6: What is your approach to grammar instruction? How, if at all, do you incorporate the teaching of grammar into your lessons, and what do you do to address individual grammar issues as they appear in a student’s writing?

b) #7: How do you address dialectal grammatical patterns that appear in your students’ writings? If your approach to this issue has changed in any way during the past five year, please describe how it has developed.

c) #9: What are your views on the use of languages and dialects other than standard academic English in the writing classroom? Describe circumstances, if any, in which you would encourage a student to incorporate his or her native language (or dialect) in the writing process. Under what circumstances would you actively discourage this approach?

d) # 11: How do you address the issue of linguistic diversity in class discussions? For example, under what circumstances have you deliberately incorporated it into a lesson plan? How have you addressed it when it has arisen spontaneously during a class discussion?
In designing these questions, moreover, my aim was to encourage teachers to use their own words (i.e. make their own lexical choices) to describe the issue of language variation in their students’ writings. By first referring to “grammar instruction” in general in question #6, I try to set the stage for a more probing question about “dialectal grammatical patterns” and provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on how their approaches have changed over time (see Belanger 1995). In question #9, I invite the teacher to think about the issue of actually incorporating different dialects (or languages) into the writing process. In sum, the interview questions I adapted from the CCCC survey and the Belanger questionnaire have been redesigned to elicit lexical choices reflective of teachers’ backgrounds and attitudes.

4.4.3. Follow-up questionnaire

In order to supplement the teachers’ spontaneous lexical choices in the interviews, I also designed a follow-up questionnaire to allow them to re-think or further explain some of their responses. As Godley et al. (2006) point out, “close readings of teachers’ views about stigmatized dialects reveal a variety of beliefs about dialect diversity” (p. 32). So, too, as is revealed in the section of the CCCC survey that asks teachers to list issues that concern them most about linguistic diversity (CCCC 2000, Issues of Greatest Concern), individual teachers may also have conflicting attitudes toward language variation. (See discussion in Chapter 3.) For this reason, I decided to add a follow-up questionnaire to the initial interview (Appendix B). While some of the questions are close approximations of the interview questions, others are designed specifically to elicit additional information. Together with the interview questions, they help to categorize more effectively the instructors’ respective understanding of language variation and their attitudes toward its place in the writing classroom.
4.4.4. Classroom observations

My classroom observations began during the weeks of September 28 and October 5 (2009) and continued through mid-December. While recording all class sessions, I also sought to remain as unobtrusive an observer as possible. As Duff (2008) explains, “Although sustained participant observation is one of the hallmarks of ethnographic research, it is not always a central feature of case studies” (p. 138). Rather, “observational work” in case studies is used to “help researchers understand the physical, social/cultural, and linguistic contexts in which language is used, and also collect relevant linguistic and interactional data for later analysis” (p.138). Thus during all class sessions, I sat off to the side or in the back of the room, where I wrote field notes as I observed.

At the same time, however, my observations remained ethnographic in nature in that they extended over a period of eight to 10 weeks; took place in a very limited number of classrooms (i.e., three); and were supplemented with triangulated data (e.g., from interviews, writing conferences, and student papers), thus allowing me “to see the ‘same’ interactions from different perspectives” (Duff 2008, p. 143). Moreover, as Duff points out, in cases of extended observation, “the researcher inevitably becomes an unofficial participant in the speech event by her mere presence” (p. 138). The students were definitely aware of my presence and greeted me when they arrived, while the teachers and I often chatted at the end of class.

4.4.5. Observations of the writing conferences

In the two basic writing classes, I was able to observe and record at least one (and in many cases, two) one-on-one writing conferences between the instructor and each student. In Rachael’s class, these were conducted during class while other students worked on their writing at the computers lining the classroom. In a few cases, they occurred before class, with Rachael
coming in early for this purpose. In Al’s class, the writing conferences were scheduled twice
during the semester in his office. On each occasion, two class periods were set aside for this
purpose. In both basic writing classes, student participation in the writing conference was a
requirement.

In the technical writing class, on the other hand, Barbara left it up to the students to
schedule meetings with her in her office on specific class days set aside for conferences. If they
did not feel that they needed her input on a paper, students were not required to meet with her. In
some cases, students chose instead to line up at her desk at the end of class in order to discuss
any issues they were having with their writing. She also encouraged students to email her
whenever they had questions. I was able to attend (and record) at least one private conference
with the students who scheduled them, and I managed to observe and record most of the
impromptu conferences at the end of each class.

4.4.6. Student writing samples

Each instructor provided me with at least one writing sample (and in many cases two or
three) from each student. These samples included the instructors’ marginal and or interlinear
comments and editing, as well as copies of their grading rubrics. In some cases (but not all), the
writing samples were the ones discussed in the writing conferences I observed.

4.4.7. Class texts

All three instructors provided me with copies of any hand-outs used during class sessions,
and I was able to review copies of the textbooks they used. Barbara and Rachel tended to use the
textbooks more often than Al, while Al brought in more outside material, including videos. Al
also used the Internet, requiring students to post regularly on a class blog to which I was given
access. Barbara made frequent use of PowerPoint presentations, while Rachael used both
PowerPoint slides and the chalk board to convey information. Rachael also made copies of student papers to be used in class discussions.

4.4.8. **Field notes**

During my observations and recordings of whole-class lessons and one-on-one writing conferences, I made extensive field notes, including notations on the different physical layouts of the classrooms, the various physical stances of teachers and students in one-on-one conferences, and my overall impressions of the tone and tenor of many interactions. I was also able copy material written on the board by both the instructors and the students.

4.4.9. **Triangulation of data**

In sum, by drawing from such a large and diverse pool of data, I have been able to note recurring themes in the interactions of three writing teachers and their students. In addition, I have been able to analyze how the two basic writing instructors discuss language variation with their students in both spoken and written channels (i.e., in their one-on-one conferences and written commentary), and how all three instructors describe their language views and pedagogical approaches the in the interviews. By observing the classroom interactions of the instructors over a long period of time (i.e., almost every class day for approximately 10 weeks), moreover, I have also been able to gain a deeper understanding of the many intertextual references to previous instruction that occur during the writing conferences and in the instructors’ written commentary.

4.5. **Methodology**

My analysis of teacher discourse is divided into four parts. In Chapter 5 I briefly analyze how the instructors describe their own educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds and their goals for their students. In Chapter 6, I analyze teacher responses to my oral and written
questions about their approaches to the teaching of writing, including issues of grammar and language variation that arise in the written work of their students. In doing so, I attempt to gain a preliminary understanding of their levels of sociolinguistic language awareness. In Chapter 7, I examine the basic writing teachers’ one-on-one interactions with students in individual writing conferences, and in Chapter 8, I examine their written commentary. Throughout these chapters, moreover, I take an interactive sociolinguistic approach to discourse by exploring the links between the teachers’ levels of language awareness and their discursive interactions with students.

4.5.1. Units of study

In analyzing the writing instructors’ sociolinguistic language awareness, as evidenced in their discourse, I focus on three units of study:

1. The choice of lexical items by teachers when (a) referring to the grammatical and/or stylistic patterns of different varieties of English that appear in their students’ writings and (b) specifically naming the varieties (e.g., “nonstandard” vs. “standard” English, etc.).

2. Students’ interactive moves in the writing conferences. The use of backchannels and other reactive expressions by students during individual conferences about their writing.

3. Students’ written responses to both oral and written feedback.\(^{16}\)

In choosing these particular units of study, moreover, I situate my analysis of teacher talk about language and language variation within the broader tradition of classroom discourse analysis discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^{16}\) My analysis of this data is focused primarily on the responses of one student. Brief references are also made to revisions that other students made.
4.5.2. Lexical choice

While the current study of classroom interaction focuses heavily on participation structures involved in teacher-student interaction (see Section 4.5.3 below), it also incorporates a close examination of the lexical choices teachers make when describing the different grammatical and stylistic patterns they observe in their students’ writings. As Bakhtin (1981) argues, every word that we speak influences an interaction because of the connotations that word holds for each of the interlocutors. Thus every word used to evaluate a student’s speech or writing (e.g., “good,” “correct,” “mistake,” etc.) can take on a life of its own depending on the underlying attitudes of both teachers and students alike. In Bakhtin’s words, it “becomes an active participant in social dialogue” because it encounters “thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by social ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance” (p. 276). The effect of a pejorative word such as “wrong,” for example, may depend heavily on the context in which it is used and on the shared experiences of teachers and students who use that word. As the literature demonstrates, pejorative terms such as “incorrect” or “mistake” can have devastating effects when applied to a student’s vernacular speech (Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Lippi-Green 1997; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999). As I explore how teachers’ lexical choices in the interviews reflect their language awareness or how their negative or positive feedback on language variation is linked to students’ response behaviors in the writing conferences (see Section 4.5.3 to follow), I focus primarily on the following lexical items:

1. Noun phrases (NPs) and adjectival phrases (APs) used by teachers to describe the vernacular phonology and morphosyntax they observe in their students’ writings, such as errors, mistakes, bad English, slang, street talk, inappropriate language,
incorrect usage, vernacular features, good, poor, bad, better, vague, clear, unclear, correct, incorrect, effective, ineffective, etc.

2. NPs used to refer to individual varieties of English such as standard English, proper English, the language of wider communication, academic English, written English, informal/formal English, everyday language, the language of the community, home language, dialect, conversational language, casual language, African American Vernacular, Black English, Ebonics, Internet Vernacular, Southern English, etc.

3. Verb phrases (VPs) used to address revision and word choice in student writing, including clean up, revise, edit, fix, change, choose, communicate.

In addition, I also pay particular attention to the lexical items and symbols that the instructors use to address language variation in their written commentary. These include

1. Comments, questions, and suggestions in the margins of students’ papers or on accompanying grading rubrics.

2. Circled, underlined, or crossed out words and phrases.

3. Edited words and phrases.

4. Editing symbols or expressions placed above a word or in the margins (e.g., “SP,” “run-on,” “frag.”).

As Farr and Daniels (1986) have observed, heavy grammar correction and comments in the margins of papers can discourage some students. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, some students actively anticipate the reactions of their audience (in many cases, the teacher) during the composing process (Meier 1985). Therefore, by examining the responses of students to these written comments during their individual writing conferences and by analyzing the revisions that one student in particular makes on a future draft, I note whether students incorporate the
instructors’ feedback on the vernacular patterns in their writing, challenge it, or simply ignore it. In doing so, moreover, I am able to highlight how written lexical choices also influence the teacher-student dialogue.

In addition to exploring the effects of teachers’ lexical choices concerning language variation *per se*, I also analyze the lexical choices teachers make when discussing the overall process of writing, both in the interviews and in their one-on-one interactions with students. Not only does this facilitate a comparison of the instructors’ attitudes toward general writing and grammar issues and their beliefs about particular vernacular patterns and expressions, it also helps to foreground the discursive effects of the two basic writing instructors’ references to language variation in their one-on-one discussions with students.

4.5.3. *Students’ interactive moves*

My choice of interactive moves as a unit of study is grounded in the findings that backchanneling and other response behaviors can serve as clear indicators of active engagement in a writing conference (Meier 1985 and F. Farr 2002). They can also serve as indicators of understanding (Clancy *et al.* 1996). While the term “backchannel” is often reserved for non-lexical or single-word expressions such as *mhmm, okay, yeah*, etc. (Yngve 1970; Gumperz 1982), I use the more expanded view of backchanneling behavior that Clancy *et al.* categorize as “reactive tokens” and that includes, as well, repetition of a primary speaker’s words or completion of his/her sentence. In addition, I examine instances of student overlap and interruption that occur in the writing conferences, as these responses can also indicate both “high involvement” in a conversation (Tannen 2005, pp. 41 and 106) and “engaged listenership” (F. Farr 2002, p. 80). Finally, I note instances in which students take on the role of “primary knower” in the writing conferences (Haneda 2004) by providing information from their own
knowledge base. That is, I note when students respond to direct questions from an instructor, self-initiate on-the-spot revisions of their writing, or spontaneously add clarifying background information to a discussion. By focusing on student responses to teachers’ comments about their writing, moreover, I evaluate their levels of engagement in the writing process from three perspectives:

1. **Reactions to specific comments about “nonstandard” language use:** For example, if the instructor makes a negative comment about a vernacular feature in the student’s writing, I record whether the student (a) answers with what F. Farr calls a “minimal response token” such as *mm* or *ok*; (b) repeats what the teacher has said; (c) interrupts the teacher with a revised phrase; or (d) simply remains silent. I also analyze whether students are using genuine backchanneling behavior or whether they are simply providing elicited responses (Meier 1985).

2. **Reactions to more general feedback on the process of writing:** I also note the reactive moves students make in response to more general organizational feedback from the instructor, such as comments about topic sentences, thesis statements, etc. In particular, I focus on instances of revoicing as students incorporate the language of instruction into their writing and speech (Knoeller 1998). In doing so, I seek a point of comparison between student reactions to comments about their vernacular speech and their reactions to other types of commentary.

4.5.4. **Students’ written responses**

By focusing primarily on the revisions of one student, I explore in depth how she responds to the instructor’s written feedback on the vernacular patterns in her essay. I look in particular at her revisions of uninflected verbs and nouns.
4.6. Catalytic Validity

Finally, by analyzing teacher discourse within the context of the basic writing classroom, I seek to add a deeper qualitative understanding to insights about teachers’ language awareness already gleaned from quantitative studies such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication survey of teacher attitudes (CCCC 2000). As Godley et al. (2006) argue, research on teacher statements of their beliefs “suggests that fine-grained analyses of teacher statements about stigmatized dialects and pedagogical responses to them may be more valid indicators of teachers’ beliefs than the quantitative surveys often employed in research on language attitudes” (p. 32). Moreover, while a language awareness survey often provides an overall quantitative measure of an instructor’s awareness and attitudes, it does not demonstrate how these attitudes affect the contexts in which many students are taught to use Edited American English.

In sum, the ethnographic nature of this study, along with the multiple-case-study research design, allows me to analyze teachers’ classroom discourse from three vantage points: (1) careful study of the particular lexical choices teachers make when giving feedback or describing their teaching views and practices; (2) observation of their dyadic interactions through the study of student response moves during individual writing conferences; and (3) analysis of their written feedback and its effects on student learning. Moreover, by comparing the pedagogical discourse of teachers who demonstrate different levels of linguistic knowledge and different attitudes toward language variation, I hope to add to the body of knowledge needed by both language arts and writing instructors in order to teach both effectively and justly in today’s multiethnic classrooms. That is, I aim to provide a measure of what Lather (1991) refers to as “catalytic validity” (cited in Duff 2008, p. 102) to the study of teacher language awareness. As Duff
explains it, one purpose of research can be to “[achieve] social justice” for disenfranchised members of society by actually “[catalyzing] change” (p. 102). Thus by providing a detailed analysis of teacher discourse in the basic writing classroom, my goal is also to provide evidence in support of the call for more courses on language variation in teacher preparation programs.
When I first met the three writing instructors who ultimately agreed to participate in this study, I was struck by their eagerness to discuss their approaches to the teaching of writing. Known here by the pseudonyms Rachael, Barbara, and Al, these teachers were brimming with thoughts, questions, and concerns about the best ways to help college-level students who had yet to master the basics of writing an essay. While only Al and Rachael were currently teaching Basic Writing, Barbara had had previous experiences teaching introductory writers and held equally strong opinions about the best way to do so. Of particular importance to this study, moreover, were the instructors’ views on the teaching of writing to multidialectal students, and it is their willingness to discuss their successes and challenges in this area that has made this study possible. So, too, has their openness about their own linguistic, academic, and professional backgrounds, which has added much valuable data to my study of their classroom discourse. Finally, the instructors’ descriptions of their own goals and aspirations for their students create a much richer context in which to view their discussions of language variation per se. In the current chapter, therefore, I focus primarily on what the instructors have told me about themselves and their aspirations for their students. I also discuss the semi-structured conversational nature of the interviews and the effect that had on the way the teachers described their views and experiences. In sum, I try to introduce these instructors as the dedicated and enthusiastic teachers they are before focusing specifically on their discussions of language variation in the chapter to follow.
5.1. The Instructors

As the following discussion demonstrates, Al and Barbara clearly have a stronger preparation than Rachael does for teaching writing to linguistically diverse students. On the other hand, their dedication to helping their students learn to write is certainly no greater than Rachael’s. As the many extracts from their interview responses reveal, all three instructors have high expectations and hopes for their students. They also all go to great effort to address their students’ particular needs. Finally, all three instructors refer to their students as people with interesting and meaningful lives. Thus the primary differences among these instructors are their levels of preparation for teaching writing to multidialectal students. By highlighting these differences, moreover, I am able to provide valuable insight into their respective levels of language awareness in the following chapter (Chapter 6).

5.1.1. Educational and professional backgrounds

A crucial component of any exploration of teacher language awareness is what we learn about a teacher’s educational and professional background. As has been found in a number of studies (see Chapter 2), in-service and pre-service teachers who receive formal training in language variation and in specific language varieties (e.g., AAVE) are far more likely to express positive attitudes toward different varieties of English than those who do not (Ball and Muhammad 2003; Bowie and Bond 1994; LeMoine and Hollie 2007; Sweetland 2006). Moreover, as revealed in the “Language Knowledge and Awareness Survey” conducted by the language committee of the College Conference on Composition and Communication (CCCC 2000), there are statistical links between respondents’ training in language diversity and their levels of language awareness. For example, CCCC researchers found that respondents who had taken courses in African American English (AAE) or American Dialects (AD) were far more
likely to agree with the statement “There are valid reasons for using nonstandard dialects” than those who had taken more general courses such as Introduction to the English Language or Linguistics for Teachers (Section: Detailed Analyses and Findings, Subsection: Academic Training in Language Diversity, paragraph # 4). Specifically, they note that significantly more of the AAE course group strongly agreed with the statement (49.3%) than those in the non-AAE course group (24.3%). Further, among the AAE course group, NONE strongly disagreed with the statement, compared to 6.7% of the non-AAE group (sig. .000). Among those who did not have an American Dialects course, the percentage of those disagreeing with the statement (14.9%) was TWICE that of those who took an AD course (7.1%). (sig. 001). (CCCCC 2000, Section: Detailed Analyses and Findings, Subsection: Academic Training in Language Diversity, paragraph # 4)

Thus at the beginning of this study, as I conducted a one- to two-hour individual interview with each instructor, I asked questions about his or her educational, professional, and linguistic background throughout the interview. As discussed in Chapter 4, moreover, these questions were scattered among a list of 19 semi-structured conversational questions that also explored the instructors’ general approaches to the teaching of grammar; their specific approaches to the vernacular features they encounter in their students’ writings; and their beliefs about the process of writing itself (see Appendix A). The purpose for asking questions in this fashion was to glean information about the instructor’s sociolinguistic language attitudes and knowledge without drawing specific attention to that issue. I began the the interviews, therefore, by first asking the instructors to describe what led them to become writing instructors and by encouraging them to discuss their academic and professional backgrounds (Int. q. #1). Later in the interview, I also asked them more specifically to describe courses or professional workshops they had completed in writing pedagogy (Int. q. # 14) and linguistic diversity (Int. q. # 15), as this information would clearly help to put their comments about language variation into perspective. I also administered
a two-part (20-questions) written questionnaire at the end of the interviews on which the instructors were encouraged to add additional details about their backgrounds (see Appendix B).

As revealed in Table 5.1 (below), two of the instructors, Al and Barbara, had received much stronger academic training in issues of language variation than had Rachael, the third instructor. Al and Barbara both had Master’s degrees in English and at the time of the study were enrolled in a PhD program that focused, in part, on language variation in education. In that capacity, they had been exposed to many theoretical issues related to linguistic diversity in the classroom, although neither had taken a course dedicated specifically to language variation or to a particular variety of American English. The third instructor, Rachael, who had a Master’s degree in Education, admitted that she had received no instruction in language variation during her Education course work. She also emphasized the unlikelihood that she would have time for such instruction in the near future since she was currently staying at home with her children during the day and only available for part-time teaching in the evenings.

In addition to their positions as basic writing instructors (Al and Rachael) and as technical writing instructors (Al and Barbara) at the time of the study, all three instructors had previous experience teaching students who spoke African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Al and Barbara at the community college and university levels and Rachael at the community college,\(^\text{17}\) middle school, and high school levels. Al had also previously taught first-year composition at a historically black university (HBU), while Barbara, in addition to teaching technical writing at one university, was also at the time teaching composition at an urban university with an approximately 25-percent African American student population.\(^\text{18}\)

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\(^\text{17}\) In addition to the basic writing class that she was currently teaching, Rachael had previously taught only one semester of basic writing.

\(^\text{18}\) I was unable to observe Barbara’s classes at the urban university because during that semester she was teaching only online sections of the classes.
Table 5.1. Academic and professional backgrounds of participant writing instructors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity:</strong></td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>European American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest degree:</strong></td>
<td>MA (English)</td>
<td>MA (Education)</td>
<td>MA (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current education:</strong></td>
<td>Current student in a PhD program that addresses linguistic diversity in education</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Current student in a PhD program that addresses linguistic diversity in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current teaching status:</strong></td>
<td>Full-time non-tenured faculty at a community college</td>
<td>Part-time faculty at a community college</td>
<td>Part-time faculty at two universities, one urban and one suburban.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current teaching:</strong></td>
<td>(1) Developmental (basic) writing*; (2) first-year composition; (3) technical writing</td>
<td>(1) Developmental (basic) writing*</td>
<td>(1) Technical writing at the suburban university*; (2) 300-level composition (online) at the urban university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous teaching:</strong></td>
<td>First-year composition, developmental (basic) writing, and technical writing at the current community college; first year composition at two universities, one an historically Black university (HBU)</td>
<td>Developmental (basic) writing at the current community college; middle-school language arts; high-school English</td>
<td>First-year composition at the current urban and suburban universities and at one additional university; technical writing at the suburban university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courses on specific dialects:</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Courses that address language variation and education:</strong></td>
<td>Composition theory General courses in the PhD program</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Composition theory General courses in the PhD program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Al, Barbara, and Rachael all refer to their previous education and teaching experience when describing their current approach to writing instruction. As is revealed in a number of extracts from the interview, moreover, the instructors’ responses themselves provide a far richer
picture of their educational and professional backgrounds than can be seen in Table 5.1. In the following extract, for example, Rachael describes a female student who had worked as a fork lift operator but was getting too old to do the heavy physical work involved. Her reaction to the student’s writings reveals her deepening awareness of the type of student who is often placed in a basic writing class.

**Extract 5.1**

1. R: And you know, when I would look at her papers, in fact, at one point I got _teary eyed_ talking to her at the end of the class, because _this is so awesome to me_ that you are working to make yourself- _to make your lot in life better_. And she had a couple kids- her _nieces_ - her _nephew_ who was living with her.. and I just _admire_ that.
3. R: They’re doing that for themselves and for their _families_, [so.
4. K: ] _Yeah. So your satisfaction comes from the fact that you are working with people who have a lot of gumption, who are trying to do things late [in life.
5. R: ] _Right, right, right, right, and improve_ - _improve their lot in life_, you know, through education and through writing.

Rachael’s use of emotional language to convey her reactions to her student’s efforts (i.e., the adjectives “teary-eyed” and “awesome,” line 2); her admiration for this student’s and other students’ attempts to care for their own families (i.e., her references to “nieces,” a “nephew, and “families,” lines 4 and 7); her animated repetition of the adjective “right” (“right, right, right, right,” line 11) as cooperative overlap to my comments about her respect for her students; and finally, her praise for her students’ efforts to “improve” or “make better” their “lot in life” (lines 3 and 12) all suggest awareness of the particular needs of many of her writing students.

Yet in the following extract, Rachael’s description of why she feels “well prepared” to teach basic writing actually suggests a lack of preparation for addressing the specific needs of some multidialectical writers:
Extract 5.2

1. R: And the course they had available was basic writing and I thought well, if it’s
2. basic writing, that’s a good place for me to start because I can do that,
3. definitely. Um, and I taught one semester last year, and then this is my second
4. semester.
6. R: So, how I got /?/. I definitely feel very well prepared to teach basic writing.
7. It’s a different- It’s a- I always enjoyed teaching middle school and ninth
8. graders. This is sort of the same approach.

Here, by claiming that basic writing is “a good place” for her to restart her teaching career
because it is something that she “can do” (line 2), Rachael reveals her confidence in her ability to
help students learn to write. Yet her claim that basic writing requires “sort of the same approach”
(line 8) that she used when teaching “middle school and ninth graders,” (lines 7-8) also suggests
a lack of specific training for the linguistic issues she may encounter in some of her students’
 writings. That is, she appears to be unaware of the possibility that some multidialectal students
may be placed in basic writing as a result of the failure of previous middle school and high
school writing instruction to meet their linguistic needs (Rickford 1999). This lack of awareness
appears again toward the end of the interview in the following extract:

Extract 5.3

1. R: um- my husband teaches high school, I taught high school, I feel like I'm
2. teaching high school again,
4. R: um, I wonder why it is that they didn't learn it in high school. I can
5. understand the people who've been out of high school for 15 or 20 years, but
6. the ones who've just gotten out of high school...
7. K: You're wondering why they don't know that.
8. R: And you know what, it's pers- I- I- It's got to be personal responsibility
9. somewhere because Come on, you know, /?/ everybody says the same thing, a
10. paragraph with a topic sentence. /?/ everybody /?/
11. K: They're not getting it.
12. R: They're not getting it, so I mean there's a lot that can go wrong in a high
13. school English class, but everybody's going to say a topic sentence in a
14. paragraph.
In this extract, Rachael’s repeated use of the noun “high school” (lines 1-2, 4-6) again emphasizes her belief in the similarities between basic writing and high school English. Yet her use of the verb phrase (VP) “wonder why” (“I wonder why it is that they didn't learn it in high school,” lines 4-5) also reveals her lack of training for addressing linguistic diversity. That is, by failing to understand why some students arrive at college without having mastered the conventions of Edited American English, Rachael also seems unaware of the circumstances in which multidialectal students often receive impoverished writing instruction in their elementary school, middle school, and high school classes (Farr and Daniels 1986). Moreover, her suggestion that their lack of preparation must be due to lack of “personal responsibility” (line 8) contrasts dramatically with the admiration she expressed for some students in Extract 5.2 above. The contrast is hinted at, moreover, in her claim that she can understand why students who have been out of school “for 15 or 20 years” (line 5) might be unprepared, but not why students who have “just gotten out of high school” are (line 6). As noted in Chapter 4, Rachael has a large number of AAVE speakers in her current basic writing class, yet she does not mention their use of the vernacular when discussing their previous writing instruction. Instead, her repeated focus on the fact that every student has been taught the importance having a “topic sentence” in a “paragraph” (lines 10 and 13-14) highlights her lack of training in the underlying issues that may have prevented some multidialectal students from learning this basic writing convention. That is, not only does Rachael seem unaware of the possibility that too heavy a focus on vernacular features in some of her students’ previous writing instruction may have diverted attention from other important issues such as paragraph structure (Farr and Daniels 1986; Smitherman 1999), she also appears not to understand that the failure of previous teachers to recognize an “episodic” versus “topic centered” discourse style in the writings of some AAVE speakers may have
contributed to their current misunderstanding of the topic-centered paragraph structure (Cazden 2001; Michaels 1981; Michaels and Cazden 1986).

Finally, while Rachael writes N/A next to all questions on the follow-up questionnaire relating to the study of linguistic diversity (see Appendix B), she does indicate that she has completed courses related to the teaching of K-8 language arts and the teaching of high school composition. She also mentions a useful book entitled Writing Workshop that “helped me to use mini-lessons, i.e. description of topic, reading a model, practicing the technique.” Thus, as is suggested in Extract 5.3 when Rachael “wonder[s] why” some students are so unprepared for college writing (line 4), specific training in writing pedagogy for multidialectal students might help her to build on the solid training she has already received in general writing pedagogy and to develop a better understanding of why some multidialectal students are placed in basic writing classes.

During the interviews and on the written questionnaires, Al and Barbara both refer specifically to issues of linguistic diversity addressed in their PhD course work, frequently referring to the works of specific linguistic or educational scholars. Barbara, for example, focuses heavily on theoretical issues when I ask whether she has completed any courses or professional workshops devoted specifically to the teaching of writing (Int. q. #14):

**Extract 5.4**

1. **B:** And also just reading the *theories*, you know, **Bartholomae**, and just reading, and *Elbow*, you know, um, and um **Paul Prior**, you know?
2. **K:** Yeah.
3. **B:** And reading these *theorists*’ approach. What do they think about it? Do they value- Do they think all- You know, there’re some *theorists* who say all writing is autobiographical. It just got me to really thinking, about how much of the self is in writing, and *how much?/agency am I taking away by mandating what they write.*
4. **K:** /?/
5. **B:** Absolutely, it made me think about a lot of stuff.
In this exchange, Barbara gives a vivid picture of the effects her studies have had on her approach to writing instruction. Not only does she mention David Bartholomae (line 1), a scholar who writes critically about the teaching of basic writing (e.g., Bartholomae 1993), she also refers to Peter Elbow (line 2), whose scholarship has focused on approaches to composition in multidialectal writing classes (e.g., Elbow 2002). Barbara also stresses her interest in the issues she has studied in the PhD program in language, literacy, and culture by repeating the lexical item “theory” (i.e., “theories,” line 1, and “theorists,” lines 4 and 5) and by describing the effects of these theories on her own approach to writing instruction. That is, her reflection on “how much /?/ agency am I taking away by mandating what they write” (lines 7-8) sets in motion an interaction with me (lines 11-16) that leads to her declaration that her approach is a “constant work in progress” (line 16).

Moreover, when I ask Barbara about previous coursework or professional workshops on linguistic diversity per se (Int. q. 15), she explains how her studies have led her to be more thoughtful about the issues that multidialectal students face in typical writing classrooms:

**Extract 5.5**

1 B: We read you know, like Pedagogy of the Oppressed, um Freire, you know, 
2 and we talked about Experience and Education by Dewey, and just talking about 
3 how where students come from, including their *linguistic background*, how 
4 much that plays out in the classroom and how we do...*we value Standard 
5 English, Standard White English*, you know, *what does that mean?*

In this extract, Barbara not only mentions the issue of students’ “linguistic background[s]” (line 3), she also reveals her growing awareness of how multidialectal students (in particular speakers
of AAVE) might be affected by the way writing instruction focuses on Standard English. That is by first mentioning “Standard English” (lines 4-5) and then changing the name to “Standard White English” (line 5), Barbara reveals her understanding of the conflicts some students face when adding Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires (Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999; to be discussed more fully in Chapter 6). So, too, Barbara’s final question “what does that mean?” (line 5) resembles her final comment about her approach to writing instruction in Extract 5.4 (line 5): “A constant work in progress.” As both of these extracts demonstrate, Barbara’s educational training has led her to be more open to evaluating the way she teaches writing, both in general and in multidialectal contexts.

Al’s descriptions of his educational background also reveal a broad understanding of issues related to language variation in the classroom. In the following extract, for example, he not only summarizes a long list of related topics, he also emphasizes their importance by calling them the “hot topics.”

Extract 5.6

1 A: I think the overview classes are really
2 K: [Yeah
3 A: [about the issue of language diversity.
4 Ah, English as a global language,
5 K: mhm
6 A: um, um, language rights,
7 K: Yeah.
8 A: um,
9 socioeconomic differences, ah pedagogy and negotiation of dialect. You know,
10 things like that.
11 K: Oh, so you are very well- You have a strong background.
12 A: Yeah. I mean it’s XX/XX,
13 K: [Yeah
14 A: so that’s definitely the hot topics.

In this extract, Al’s inclusion of “pedagogy and the negotiation of dialect” (line 9) in a list of “language diversity” issues (line 3) that include “English as a global language” (line 4),
“language rights” (line 6), and “socioeconomic differences” (line 9), reveals two aspects of his educational background that are not evident on Table 5.1. The first is that Al’s interests in language diversity appear to stretch beyond the classroom to include more global language issues as well. The second is that he considers the “negotiation of dialect” in the classroom (line 9) to be as important as these other issues.

While Al’s approach to linguistic diversity in his own writing classes will be analyzed more fully in Chapter 6, the following excerpt demonstrates how he approached discussions of “race” while teaching composition at an historically black university (HBU). Even though it is not clear whether Al is referring to language when he uses the word “race,” in this extract, his description of his efforts to create a dialogue with his students suggests that the subject was most likely addressed:

**Extract 5.7**

1. A: It was funny because I taught there three semesters /?/. I taught in the summer. And the first semester, I really tried to not even approach race, which is ridiculous.
2. K: Yeah
3. A: But the second semester, we were conversing.
4. K: Yeah
5. A: And then we- In the summer semester I was teaching pre-freshmen, and I was trying to devise lessons to get into the whole conversa- to get into the meat of it.
6. K: Yeah
7. A: In a way that I think was- you know, I was trying to be a little provocative to get them thinking differ[ently]
8. K: [Right]
9. A: um, I don’t know if it succeeded, but um- you know, it was very novice, um, so-

In this extract, Al’s repetition of the verb “try” (lines 2, 8, and 11) serves to highlight the efforts he made over three semesters to address the issue of race. In the first semester, he tries not to “approach race” (line 2), but by the second semester he and his students are “conversing” about
it (line 5). In the third semester, moreover, he not only tries to devise “lessons to get into …..the meat of it” (lines 8-9), he also tries to be “a little provocative” (line 11) in order to get his students to think about the issue. By admitting that he doesn’t know whether his efforts were successful (“I don’t know if it succeeded,” (line 14) and that he was “very novice” at the time (line 15), Al portrays himself as an instructor whose approach to writing instruction has, like Barbara’s, been a work in progress.

While a number of the extracts discussed here will also be analyzed more fully in Chapter 6, I have included them in my description of the instructors’ educational and professional backgrounds in order to more vividly portray the contexts in which their language awareness has developed. Thus in Chapter 6, I will frequently refer back to the instructors’ training and experience when analyzing and comparing their respective levels of language awareness.

5.1.2. Language backgrounds

In this section, I briefly describe the instructors’ language backgrounds, as these have also been found to influence the language awareness and attitudes of language arts and English instructors. For example, results of the CCCC (2000) survey showed that instructors who were People of Color (POC), that is, “African, Asian, or Native American, Latino, Alaskan Native, or Pacific Islander” (Section: Description of Sample, Paragraph 1) were not only more likely to identify themselves as bilingual, bidialectal, or current speakers of “nonstandard American English” than non-POC instructors (Section: Detailed Analyses and Findings, Subsection: Members’ Attitudes Toward Their Own Language, Paragraph 1), they were also more likely to be aware of (and support) the CCCC’s “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” and “National Language” policies than non-POC instructors (Section: Detailed Analyses and Findings, Subsection: Members’ Attitudes Toward Their Own Language, Paragraphs 5 and 7). A greater
percentage of POC instructors also recommended courses in AAVE or American Dialects for future English teachers, while non-POC instructors generally recommended more general linguistic courses such as “Introduction to the English Language” or “Linguistics for Teachers.” (Section: Other Statistically Significant Findings, Paragraph 5). In sum, there appeared to be an indirect correlation between POC instructors’ self-identity as bilingual or bidialectal and their beliefs in the importance of taking courses in African American English or American Dialects. With this correlation in mind, therefore, I was particularly interested in exploring how the current instructors, all European Americans, described their own linguistic backgrounds.

All three instructors claim English as their home language, while Al and Barbara also mention additional varieties of English (see Table 5.2 below). Describing herself as a speaker of “Southern dialect,” Barbara refers to this variety of English in her responses to numerous interview questions (to be discussed further in Chapter 6). When asked if he speaks any other varieties of American English, Al mentions his use of “informal written language” and “Internet dialect,” both in the interview and on the written follow-up questionnaire administered at the end of the interview (see Appendix B). As my interview query about the instructors’ home languages and dialects (Int. q. # 18) comes well after my questions about their approaches to language variation in the classroom and since the questionnaire was also filled out after the interview, it is possible that Al’s responses reflect his earlier references to Internet language as a focal point for addressing language variation in the classroom (to be discussed further in Chapter 6). On the other hand, Al also speaks passionately about his own right to diverge from Standard English when communicating on the Internet. Describing an incident in which he was reprimanded for using a common but “nonstandard” adverbial phrase online, he notes that he wrote back, “This is the Internet. Don’t correct me.”
Table 5.2. Language backgrounds of the writing instructors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Rachael</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home language(s)</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional varieties of</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American English</strong></td>
<td>Informal written language, Internet dialect</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Southern dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(as described by the instructor):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Rachel claims not to speak any other varieties of English, she does admit after questioning that she can “throw on” a Northern New Jersey accent “when I see my relatives, when we /?/ playing around, you know. If I get especially upset about something happening, it comes out.”

Finally, Barbara is very willing to discuss her use of Southern English. For example, in the following extract, she describes occasions when she does or does not use it:

**Extract 5.8**

1. **B**: My husband grew up in an adjacent town to me, so we speak the same, um,
2. **K**: Would you say that your speech changes when it’s just the two of you or when you have friends from XXXX [the city where she currently lives]?
3. **B**: Nope, I don't think so.
4. **K**: Yeah
5. **B**: I do not think so at all. Um...I mean um, sometimes I'll- when I first hang out with friends from XXXX, I would say things like 'fixin to' and they'll be like 'What? I'm like 'you know'. I mean I don't- I'll tell you this though. At first, when I first moved here, when I first started teaching,
6. **K**: Yeah
7. **B**: I pulled like the anchorwoman maneuver. I spoke Middle American. You know, my accent not as strong- I don’t- I mean, I'm much more comfortable with it. I don't worry. I mean, unless somebody can't understand me
8. **K**: [Uh huh?]
9. **B**: [I'm not worried] about it.
10. **K**: Yeah
11. **B**: /?/I have no problem if somebody says like 'What word was that?' I like tellin em, you know?
12. **K**: /?/And your class probably enjoys that.
13. **B**: They do. They seem to.
14. **K**: So what did you mean by conference? Do you change things at a conference?
B: Well, you know we- yes, sure, *when I'm reading a paper, um, I'm not saying that I totally erase my accent*, because people usually come up and ask me where I'm from- They're like 'Are you from Mississippi?'

K: Yeah

B: Um, or Georgia? *But I wouldn't say all right, I'm fixin to show you some pictures.*

In this extract, Barbara’s descriptions of when she does or does not change the way she speaks reveals a level of sociolinguistic awareness that appears throughout the interview in her discussions of language variation (see Chapter 6). That is, not only does she describe her decision to speak “Middle American” (line 11) when she first began teaching in the city where she currently lives, her reference to it as a “maneuver” (“I pulled like the anchor woman maneuver,” line 11) also reveals her awareness of repertoire. That is, she understands that speakers have the competence to choose one variety over another in different circumstances. Equally significant is Barbara’s distinctions between morphological variation (i.e. when she would or would not use the term “fixin to,” lines 7 and 28) and phonological variation (i.e., when she would make her accent “not as strong”, line 12 or be unable to “totally erase” it, line 25). That is, by acknowledging that she eventually became comfortable enough to use expressions such as “fixin to” with her friends and to not worry about her accent in the classroom (lines 12-16), Barbara is also able to describe a context (i.e., reading a paper at a conference) when she might still try, although unsuccessfully, to “erase her accent” (“I’m not saying that I totally erase my accent,” lines 24-25) and when she would definitely not use a vernacular expression such as “fixin to” (“But I wouldn't say all right, I'm fixin to show you some pictures,” lines 28-29). Thus of the three instructors, Barbara is the one with the most personal experience with language variation. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this experience colors her approach to linguistic diversity in the classroom as well.
5.1.3 Goals and aspirations

Finally, of equal interest to this study are the instructors’ goals and aspirations for their students. As suggested in Chapter 2, teachers’ goals are frequently influenced by the educational contexts in which they develop. That is, teachers are often expected to play the role of “privileged authorities on language” by students, parents, and institutions alike (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, and Carpenter (2006, p. 31). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, the very nature of the basic writing class in many institutions (i.e., its non-credit status and the gatekeeping role it plays in the full matriculation of certain students) may influence how instructors view their own teaching responsibilities. Thus I presumed that the instructors’ discussions of their goals would provide additional insight into the lexical choices they made when discussing language variation (see Chapter 6).

During their initial interviews with me, all three writing instructors express a strong interest in the welfare of their students. In some cases, this interest is revealed in their response to my specific question about their goals (Int. q. #3). In other cases, it becomes evident in their responses to my questions about why they became writing instructors (Int. q. #1) or what they find most challenging and/or rewarding about teaching Basic or Technical Writing (Int. q. #5).

In the following exchanges, the instructors each describe their own motivations for teaching writing and their aspirations for their students. Rachael, for example, emphasizes her goal of helping students to pass the Basic Writing course.

Extract 5.9

1 R: Um ultimately, I would really like to get them out of this class. That's my goal.
2 K: Uh huh
3 R: Because, um, my experience last semester, ah-more so than this semester, is that many of the students are returning to school after an absence of you know, for some, 10, 20 years.
K: Oh.
R: Um- And I see in that, I- I *value* that. I *admire* that. It takes a lot of *chutzpah* to come back after 20 years and then sit down and write a paper."
K: Sure.
R: Um, I me- I just- I want to help them. I know that they're all doing this because they have...they see their situation and they don't like it and they *want something better*. So I really- I see that as a *mission* that I have..that I gotta get them *out of the course*.
K: Okay, so then they can go on to other levels [of]
R: [Right./*?*/ This is at XXXX. It’s a *noncredit course*. They *have to pay for it* but they *don’t get college credit* for it.
K: Yeah, yeah.
R: And that’s probably true for other developmental writing courses. And then they *can’t take any other courses* until they *get out of this course*.

In this exchange, Rachael emphasizes the gatekeeping role she is required to play as a Basic/Developmental Writing instructor (Erickson 1975). Her repetition (and variation) of the VP “get out of this class/course” (lines 1, 13-14, 21) underscores this, as does her claim that this is her “goal” (line 2). In addition, Rachael’s repeated references to the fact that the course is noncredit and thus a costly addition to the students’ college education (line 17) emphasize the pressure she feels to make sure students succeed in her class. So, too, does her acknowledgement that they “can’t take any other courses until they get out of this course” (line 21). Finally, Rachael’s admiration for the efforts her students are making (“I value that. I admire that. It takes a lot of chutzpah,” line 8) and her awareness of her students’ own goals (“and they want something better,” lines 12-13) adds strength to her description of her goal as a “mission” (line 13).

Barbara, who focuses heavily on how her students view themselves as writers, emphasizes her goal of helping them to build self-confidence. In the following extract, she notes that one of her primary reasons for becoming a writing instructor was the lack of confidence some of her own friends and family developed when learning to write:
Extract 5.10

B: Or they didn't feel they were very good at it and so and some of them also had teachers who maybe belittled, not belittled, you know, maybe made them feel like they weren't good enough and so I don't know, I just I- it sounds cliché, I guess, but that's really why I went into it. I really wanted to help students because I knew- you know what, everybody’s gonna have this.

In this extract, Barbara’s repetition and variation of one VP in particular demonstrates a strong concern with affect. That is, her use of the VP “feel like they weren't good enough” (lines 2-3) not only mirrors her first claim that some writers she knew “didn't feel they were very good” (line 1), it also suggests that her general pedagogical approach may rely heavily on understanding what students are feeling as they learn to write. So too, does her emphasis on building students’ self-confidence in the following extract:

Barbara Extract 5.11

B: You know, one of the biggest challenges is that a lot of the beginner writers, the lower-level writers, think that they're worse than they even are. They have no confidence as a writer. And that’s actually another word I use in my class is confidence. Like when I discourage them from hedging, for example. Um, or beginning a sentence as- In my opinion

K: Yes

B: They’re like why, why not. I’m like “that statement lacks confidence,” and I was like, “you know what, even if you actually aren’t confident, you need to pretend that you are. Otherwise, your reader’s never going to believe what you’re saying. So just make your statement as though you really believe that it’s true,” and some of them have a hard time with that, but they love that I say that.

They’re like “That’s good, you know. Confidence. I never thought about it that way,” um because their confidence as a writer is a problem.

In this excerpt alone, Barbara’s repeated use of the noun “confidence” (lines 3, 4, 7, 12, and 13) and her use of the adjective confident (line 8) suggests a strong focus on the “feelings” of the individual student writer. So, too, do her claims that her students “think they’re worse than they even are,” (line 2) and that they “love” what she tells them about building their confidence (line
11). By thus highlighting the reactions of her students, moreover, Barbara also stresses the value of their input in her attempt to meet her goals for them.

Barbara also describes many of her goals for her technical writing students in terms of the students’ goals. For example, in Extracts 5.12 and 5.13 below, her emphasis on learning to write a cover letter and resume is on the help it will give students in finding a job:

**Extract 5.12**

1 B: and to help them, for example, write a cover letter  
2 K: [yes]  
3 B: [that's tailored]  
4 K: [right]  
5 B: [to a job]  
6 and that is gonna *get their foot in the door.*

**Extract 5.13**

1 B: “He was like the resume and cover letter you helped me with *got me the job,* actually *got him the job* that he applied for in that class.

Here, Barbara’s repetition of the VP “got____ the job” in Extract 5.13 (lines 1 and 2) not only echoes the VP “get their foot in the door” in Extract 5.12 (line 6), it also highlights her enthusiasm for the effect that her teaching has on her students’ lives. So, too, does her choice of the adjective “actual” in the following exchange:

**Extract 5.14**

1 B: For that assignment I get them to find an *actual job*  
2 K: [yes]  
3 B: [that they’re either]  
4 qualified for now or they will be upon graduation. And I- You know, I get them  
5 to apply for the *actual job* …

In sum, Barbara’s dual emphasis on what her students feel about themselves as writers and on how relevant they consider their writing instruction to be reveals that her goals are heavily defined by the students’ reactions to what they learn in her classes.
Finally, when I ask Al about his goals for his writing students (Int. q. # 3), he initially claims that it is difficult to have one set of goals since his students come from so many different groups. For example, some are 16-year-old students who are taking a developmental writing class as part of their high school curriculum; others have recently graduated from high school; and still others have been out in the work world for 15 years and are returning to finish their education. Nevertheless, he does describe his goals for his developmental and introductory writing students at several points during the interview. For example, Al first refers to specific items on his rubrics. As he points to the different categories for which he “take[s] off points,” he notes:

**Extract 5.15**

1. A: Ah, I don’t want to turn them into literary critics.
3. A: You know I want to turn them into solid writers in the fields.
4. K: Right
5. A: So, but, you know, they still have to know when to use objective voice
6. K: Yes
7. A: Um, you know, varying sentence structure and vocabulary. If every sentence starts with ah the ah um, you know, if they’re reading about Obama and they
8. write twenty sentences in a row that start with Obama, that’s a problem.

In this exchange, Al’s repetition of the VP “want to turn them into_” (lines 1 and 3) suggests that his goal is to transform his students by teaching them specific academic writing conventions such as “when to use objective voice” (line 5) and “varying sentence structure and vocabulary” (line 7). Moreover, his use of a very detailed example to describe a student’s inability to master the latter practice (“write twenty sentences in a row that start with Obama,” line 9) highlights the importance he places on this goal.
In his responses to other questions, however, Al’s goals appear broader and less tied to the rubric. For example, in the following exchange, when discussing the most satisfactory aspect of teaching writing (Int. q. # 5), Al focuses more heavily on who the students are:

**Extract 5.16**

1. K: When do you get a sense of I enjoy this, I really like this…
2. A: When you’re able *to tap into a student’s prior knowledge*
3. K: Yes
4. A: You know, and- and when you’re able *to tap into a student’s interests*
5. K: Yeah
6. A: And use that as a way to get them *to communicate clearly*

Here Al’s repeated use of the VP “tap into” to describe his attempts to build on the students’ “prior knowledge” (line 2) and “interests” (line 4) suggests that his goal of getting them “to communicate clearly” (line 6) depends on more than teaching them to master the specific writing conventions listed on his rubric. It also depends on helping them want to communicate.

Moreover, his interactive repetition of my words in the following exchange states this goal even more explicitly. After describing a successful project in which a cohort of technical writing students created employee handbooks to be used in the workplace, he notes:

**Extract 5.17**

1. A: Um, but that’s not something you could do necessarily in a general admissions class.
2. K: Yeah
3. A: *Ah, but when you can…*
5. A: *It’s very satisfying.*
6. K: Because you were meeting a need. Or they were-they felt what they were doing really *applied to their own work.*
7. A: *To their own work. To their own lives.* Yeah, that’s you know, that’s the *ultimate goal.*

In this extract, after Al admits that such a project is “not something you could do necessarily in a general admissions class” (lines 1-2), his following comment, “Ah, but when you can…” (line 4)
initiates a series of repetitions that clearly define what he considers to be his most important goal. As he pauses, and I automatically finish his sentence with the comment “It’s very satisfying,” (line5) his repetition of my words in line 6 leads me to collaboratively state why I think his project was so satisfying (“Or they felt what they were doing really applied to their own work”) (lines 7-8). At this point, the conversational pattern we have established leads Al not only to repeat and rephrase my words (“To their own work. To their own lives,” line 9), but also to spell out his “ultimate goal” (line 10) of making writing relevant to the students themselves. This goal resembles Barbara’s aspirations, moreover, as it focuses on the real-life skills he hopes to give his students.

In sum, all three instructors reveal strong goals and aspirations for their students. While Rachael focuses most heavily on her goal of helping students to overcome the barriers that the basic writing class itself presents, Barbara emphasizes the goals of building self-confidence and delivering instruction that is relevant to her students’ lives. Al, in turn, combines his basic goal of developing clear communication with the deeper goal of helping all students to build on their own knowledge and interests. In the analysis of the instructors’ language awareness in Chapter 6, therefore, I refer frequently to these goals in order to better understand the instructors many (and differing) references to the language variation they encounter in their students’ writings.

5.2. The Interviews as Conversations

Finally, before focusing specifically on the words these instructors use to refer to language variation in Chapter 6, it is important to describe the contexts in which they reveal their own backgrounds, their goals for their students, and ultimately their varying levels of language awareness. Throughout the interviews, even as the instructors respond directly to my questions, they also take the opportunity to give examples, tell stories, and interact with me as well. Thus it
is not possible to fully analyze their responses without also acknowledging the role I play in eliciting them. As Bell (1984), Coupland (1980), and Schilling-Estes (2004) have all found, interviewees accommodate their speech to that of the interviewer when they feel some kind of social connection. As Bell explains the phenomenon of “audience design,”

the audience is, at one level, simply the people who hear the speaker's utterances. Yet their role is by no means passive. As in a theatre, the audience is the responsive, critical forum before whom the utterances are performed. Under an older meaning, speakers "have an audience with" their hearers. They are in a real sense subject to their audience, dependent on its goodwill, responsive to audience response. It is that responsiveness which informs a speaker's style design. (p. 161)

Moreover, a key component in this accommodation of the “audience” is often topic (Bell 1984; Coupland 1980; Schilling-Estes 2004), including “such matters as speakers’ attitudes toward their topics and toward each other” (Schilling-Estes 2004, p.169). As the instructors are aware that I am both a fellow writing instructor and a student writing a dissertation about “the teaching of writing,” their responses become increasingly conversational and introspective throughout the interviews.

One factor that adds to the conversational tenor of the interviews, moreover, is my use of spontaneous questions as the occasion arises. While I for the most part follow the prepared list of interview questions discussed in Chapter 4 (see also Appendix A), questions that Schiffrin (1994) refers to as “information-seeking questions (p. 165), I also encourage the instructors to reflect on their comments or add details to their narrative through the use of additional “information checking questions” (Schiffrin 1994, p. 170). These questions in turn help to transform the interview into a “hybrid speech event “incorporating “mixed genres” (Schiffrin 1994, p. 163). That is, it becomes at some points both an interview and a conversation. While Wolfson (1976) argues that the interview is a particular type of speech event that can never be considered a true conversation, the occurrence in these interviews of conversational patterns such
as overlapping speech, backchanneling, and the affirmative repetition of the other interlocutor’s words (Tannen 2005) suggests that a semi-formal interview can certainly slip into a conversational mode at different points.

The instructors’ frequent use of narratives to embellish their comments also gives the interviews a conversational tone, even if the narratives themselves differ from those that occur spontaneously in real conversations as Wolfson (1976) argues. As the following exchange with Al demonstrates, for example, it is the conversational nature of his story about his first experiences as a writing instructor at a historically black university (HBU) that leads to his most introspective revelations:

Extract 5.18

1. A: and, uh, what’s really funny- I always tell the story about um, you know, about the third week of my first semester at XXXX [the HBU] [Yeah]
2. K: [where I was]
3. A: trying to mimic my composition- my comp theory teacher from the University of XXXX who um, you know, had a- the long grey pony tail and a beard, and I would sit on top of the desk Indian style [Yeah]
4. K: Yeah
5. A: Let’s all talk [Yeah]
6. K: Yeah
7. A: By the third week at XXXX [the HBU], I was like ‘This is a terrible idea. This isn’t what is getting positive response. This isn’t just that this isn’t what students expect, it’s not what the students like.’ [Yeah]
8. K: Yeah
9. A: ‘They don’t want this.’ [Yeah]
10. K: They want you to take- to treat it more seriously?
11. A: More serious- Give some actual rules and regulations and- and actual ah rules about writing.
12. K: Yeah
13. A: You know, not- And- And- Not just um… It’s hard to explain. You know, I don’t want to stereotype [/?/ Not touchy feely, yeah]
15. A: Yeah. So I lost respect in the first semester. The first semester I was the young white teacher who gave me an easy grade because he had lost control of the class.

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Here, in lines 1 to 15, the conversation tenor of the exchange is created by my frequent repetition of the backchannel “Yeah” (lines 3, 8, 10, and 14), which encourages Al to become increasingly introspective about his failure to reach students during his first three weeks at the HBU. That is, after treating my first utterance of “Yeah” (line 3) as an invitation to begin his narrative, Al vividly describes his efforts to “mimic” (line 5) his former composition instructor by “sit[ting] on the desk Indian style” (lines 6-7). After my second “Yeah” (line 8), he adds dialogue to the narrative (“Let’s all talk,” line 9) as a mocking comment about his first approach. In response to my third “Yeah” (line 10), moreover, Al becomes increasingly self-critical, noting his developing awareness that his approach was a “terrible idea” (line 11) and not what the students wanted. Al’s repetition of verb phrase (VP) “is not,” which he uses five times in lines 12-13 to emphasize his dawning awareness of his students’ needs (“This isn’t what is getting positive response. This isn’t what students expect, it’s not what the students like”) also demonstrates how effective the conversational format is in eliciting information. Moreover, as Tannen (1989) argues, a speaker’s repetition of a single word such as “not” in a conversation often creates an “intensifying list-like intonation” that contributes to further interaction between interlocutors (p. 68). Thus as my responding “Yeah” to his list of reasons why his approach did “not” work (line 14) leads to yet another use of “not” (“They don’t want this), I am finally compelled in the following line (line 15) to ask a clarifying question about what the students do want (“They want you to take- treat it more seriously?”). Here, as I switch from simply backchanneling to asking a specific question, moreover, the mutual repetition of Al’s and my words that ensues in lines 15-18 reveals that we are now in full conversational mode:

15  A: ‘They don’t want this.’
16  K: They want you to take- to treat it more seriously?
A: More serious- Give some actual rules and regulations and- and actual ah rules about writing.

That is, my use of the verb “want” in line 16 is a repetition of Al’s use of the verb in line 15, while Al’s use of “more serious-” in line 17 is a repetition of my adverbial phrase “more seriously” in line 16. As Tannen (2005) argues, such repetition is a sign of high involvement in a conversation. Finally, the conversational tenor of this exchange leads Al to reach an even deeper level of introspection as he describes himself as “the young white teacher” who lost the respect of his students and “control of the class” (lines 24-25). It is doubtful, moreover, that Al would have been so forthcoming had our exchange not become so conversational.

In sum, as my analysis of the above exchange with Al demonstrates, the hybrid interview/conversation speech event not only plays a significant role in encouraging the instructors to speak naturally and unguardedly when describing their backgrounds and goals for their students, it also helps them to reveal more information than might be gained in a more formal interview format. Moreover, the occasional references that I make to my own experiences as a writing instructor during these exchanges with the instructors (e.g., my comment that “It’s very satisfying” in Extract 5.17) helps me to better address the Observer’s Paradox that can occur in interviews such as these.\(^{19}\) That is, by allowing the instructors to more comfortably (and unselfconsciously) discuss the successes and challenges of being writing instructors with someone who also grapples with these issues, I am able to both formally observe their speech and also participate in the speech event itself. Thus it is important to acknowledge the inevitable influence that my participation in the interview has on the speech event, including the benefits of

\(^{19}\) The “Observer’s Paradox” describes the conflict between the need to observe the way a person speaks when “not being systematically observed” and the need to systematically observe that person as he or she speaks (Labov 1972b, p.209).
this influence, which leads the instructors to discuss more openly the challenges they face in the multidialectal classroom.

5.3. Conclusion

As the extracts analyzed in this chapter reveal, Al, Barbara, and Rachael have very different backgrounds and goals for their students. While Al and Barbara are enrolled in a PhD program that focuses in part on language and education, Rachael has never completed any classes or workshops that address linguistic diversity. These fundamental differences in the instructors’ educational backgrounds reflect, moreover, the very different ways in which they react to their own teaching experiences. Both Barbara and Al contemplate the linguistic challenges faced by their multidialectal students, with Barbara reflecting on the issue of Standard English being perceived as Standard White English and Al trying to effectively create a dialogue with his students at an HBU. Rachael, on the other hand, is more focused on the instrumental goals of her students as she describes her “mission” to get them out of the Basic Writing course as quickly as possible. Ironically, she appears to have a greater sense of the gatekeeping role of the Basic Writing class than does Al, even though he is more tuned in to the linguistic needs of multidialectal students. The fact that he and Barbara also teach more advanced technical writing students may also influence their broader goals to “tap into” their students’ interests and make their classes relevant to their students’ lives. Finally, Barbara’s own use of Southern English appears to give her a personal perspective on language variation that both Rachael and Al lack. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this perspective clearly influences the way she discusses language variation with her students. Al, on the other hand, has the most varied teaching experience, having taught at both an HBU and a more diverse community college. His efforts to incorporate what he learned at the HBU into a focus on Internet language at the community
college will also be explored in Chapter 6. In sum, as will become evident in the chapter to follow, all three instructors focus heavily on adding Edited American English to their students’ linguistic repertoires, but their approaches are influenced by their very different educational, professional, and language backgrounds, as well as their differing goals for their students.
As discussed in Chapters 1 (Introduction) and 4 (Data and Methodology), the current study explores the correlation between college-level (basic) writing instructors’ underlying language awareness and their classroom discourse. While this correlation is viewed primarily within an interactive sociolinguistic framework (Chapters 7 and 8), it is first necessary to position these teachers according to their overall sociolinguistic language awareness. In the current chapter, therefore, I examine how three college-level writing instructors reveal their own language awareness and attitudes during initial interviews with me. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the instructors and I engaged in one- to two-hour semi-structured conversational interviews at the beginning of the study in August and September of 2009. While I used a list of 19 prepared questions (see Appendix A) to guide our discussions, I also followed up with additional spontaneous comments and questions in response to their replies. In order to elicit more frank and introspective responses about the instructors’ language views, moreover, I asked a mixture of general questions that addressed their approaches to grammar and the process of writing as a whole and more specific questions that explored approaches to language variation in particular. I also interspersed these with questions about their educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds in order to take the focus off my particular interest in their language attitudes and linguistic knowledge. Finally, at the end of each interview, I administered a 20-minute written questionnaire that allowed the instructors to reconsider or expand upon their responses in the interview (see Appendix B).

As suggested in the review of the literature on teacher language awareness in Chapter 2 (Farr 1986; Farr Whiteman and Hall 1981; Hymes 1974; Labov 1966; 1972a; Milroy and Milroy
defining a teacher’s level of language awareness is a complicated task. Not only does it involve the exploration of that teacher’s basic understanding of the rule-governed nature of different language varieties, it also requires a way of measuring the teacher’s awareness of students’ underlying linguistic strengths and their abilities to build on these strengths when adding new varieties of English to their linguistic repertoires. Moreover, a complete definition of a teacher’s overall language awareness will also include a measure of his or her sensitivity to the importance of students’ vernaculars within home and community networks (Milroy and Milroy 1999) and the personal conflicts some students face in acquiring Edited American English\(^{20}\) (Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Finally, as discussed in the review of the literature on composition pedagogy in Chapter 3, the way an instructor approaches the “process” of writing may both influence and be influenced by his or her underlying language awareness and beliefs (Delpit 1986; 1992; Farr and Daniels 1986; Meier 1985; Smitherman [1972] 1999; Sweetland 2006). Thus my goal in the current chapter is not to create a rigid categorization of the teachers’ knowledge and attitudes, but rather to achieve a general understanding of their language awareness in all of these areas. In doing so, moreover, I aim to provide a useful backdrop to my exploration of the links between the instructors’ levels of language awareness and their one-on-one and whole-class interactions with students in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.1. A Linguist’s Approach to Measuring Language Awareness

Before discussing the language awareness of the instructors in the current study, it is important to stress that my discussion is grounded firmly in the linguist’s view of language as a rule-governed system of communication available equally to all speakers, irrespective of what

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\(^{20}\) In using the term Edited American English, I follow the lead of Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills (2009). See Footnote 4, Chapter 1.
language or language variety they speak (e.g., Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). While Preston (1996; 2002) and others have emphasized the importance of recognizing the influence of “folk linguistics” on language attitudes, an important goal of the current study is to explore the benefits of adding the linguist’s perspective on language variation to teachers’ educational training programs. Ever since Labov (1972a) described the rule-governed nature of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), linguists have focused their attention on the need for teachers to understand, value, and build upon the different varieties of English their students speak (see discussion in Chapter 2).

In discussing what the linguist’s view of language awareness is, however, it is also important to acknowledge that many excellent and well-trained writing instructors have very different perspectives on language variation as a result of their own non-linguistic or “folk” awareness of language (Preston 1996; 2002). While they may not be able to describe a particular variety of English scientifically, they often have an acute awareness of the patterns and sounds of the varieties their students speak (e.g., Sweetland 2006). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, their views of what language is, while differing from those of the linguist, can nevertheless be highly systematic. As Preston (2002) notes, the folk linguist maintains a strong belief in language as something outside the speaker with only one rule-governed variety:

A Platonic extra-cognitive reality is the “real” language, such a thing as English or German or Chinese. Speakers who are directly connected to it speak a fully correct form (the only rule-governed variety), although one may deviate from it comfortably not to sound too “prissy.” Go too far, however, and error, dialect, or quite simply, bad language arises. (p. 4)

Such a view of language can also lead to what Preston (1996; 2002) refers to as a folk linguistic preoccupation with “correctness” in American English. Moreover, many language arts and writing instructors take seriously their obligation to help students master the conventions of
Edited American English. Thus it is important to acknowledge this “folk” awareness of language as I delve more deeply into what the instructors say, know, and believe about the language variation they encounter in their students’ writings. As Preston (1996) notes,

many linguists (applied and even theoretical) have done a great deal to promote ‘language awareness’ in the sense of understanding scientifically discovered aspects of language structure and use, and there is no doubt that such understandings are important for many in public life (e.g. teachers, lawyers, health professionals). I believe this programme should be coupled with one which asserts that the discovery of what non-linguists believe about and do with language (‘folk linguistics’ in general) is an equally important issue, one worthy of study not only for its independent value but also for the undeniable importance it has in the language professional’s interaction with the public in this most human of concerns. (p. 72).

At the same time, however, we cannot ignore the devastating effects that writing instructors’ negative views of the vernacular have had on the abilities of some students to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires (e.g., Farr and Daniels 1986; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Therefore, as I briefly review a number of approaches that have been used to characterize different levels of language awareness, I do it primarily from a linguist’s perspective, which is steeped in decades of research on the equally legitimate and rule-governed nature of all language varieties (e.g., Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

In the literature, a number of approaches have been used to characterize different levels of language awareness with respect to dialectal variation. For example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), describe three different “philosophical positions” that educators take toward the teaching of Standard English:

1. The first position treats Standard English as a “replacive dialect” for a student’s own vernacular. Within this position (also referred to as “eradicationism”), two different
viewpoints exist. The first assumes that vernacular patterns of English are “corruptions of standard English” that need to be corrected, while the second presumes that even though these forms are “linguistically equal,” they need to be replaced because they are “socially unequal” and will disadvantage students “in the mainstream linguistic marketplace” (p.316).

2. The second position treats Standard English as an “additive dialect,” that is, one that is added to the student’s existing linguistic repertoire. Also referred to as “bidialectalism,” this position supports “maintaining both standard and vernacular varieties for use in different social situations” (p. 316).

3. Finally, the “dialect rights” position argues that vernacular-speaking students should not be required to learn “spoken Standard English at all” (p. 317). While Wolfram and Schilling-Estes note that this position is clearly “idealistic,” they also argue that it “rightly points to the unequal burden placed on vernacular speakers” to adapt to the standard (p. 316).

Reaser (2006), in discussing the two “replacive” viewpoints described by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), argues that with education, it is not difficult to move people from the first to the second point of view. That is, once people understand the rule-governed nature of many stigmatized varieties, they are more likely to accept them as legitimate varieties of English. On the other hand, these same individuals often believe that vernacular features should still be eradicated from students’ speech and writing because they serve to isolate them socially. Thus Reaser argues that it is much more difficult for people to adopt an “additive” position in which maintenance of both the vernacular and the standard are encouraged. In order to embrace this
position, according to Reaser, people must have a deeper understanding of the nature of language variation and its cultural and historical roots.

Sweetland (2006) discusses three “pedagogical-philosophical” views on how to approach language variation in the classroom. Between the “traditional-conservative” view that nonstandard varieties are deficient and the “legitimizers’” view that since all varieties are equally valid, no variety, not even Standard English, should be given preference, Sweetland describes a bidialectal position espoused by many linguists and education scholars. That is, students need access to the “language of power” but should not be taught to “devalue or replace the vernacular” in the process of obtaining it (Sweetland, p. 89; see also Delpit 2006).

Finally, taking the third “dialect rights” position discussed by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), a number of scholars argue for more “critical” language awareness (CLA) on the part of teachers. For example, Lippi-Green (1997) suggests that even though “the most factual stand” (i.e., “that every language is in fact completely viable and functional, therefore we don’t need and should not attempt standardization”) is “doomed, at the present time,” a “realistic goal” is to “make people aware of the process of language subordination” (p. 242). Alim (2010) claims that while a
cognitive ‘awareness’ of language is certainly the foundation for CLA approaches, …CLA developed as a means to go beyond cognitive awareness and move toward social and political consciousness-raising and action, thus radically transforming most ‘language and dialect awareness’ approaches.(p. 215).

As Corson (2001) describes CLA, it is not enough for teachers to simply “value” the different varieties of English their students speak: “For that ‘valuing’ of varieties to really count, it needs to be carried out in a generally critical context where [students] become aware of the factors that make one variety of a language seem more ‘appropriate’ in some settings” (p. 90). From this perspective, moreover, the CLA approach also implies that students have the right to
make informed choices about the varieties they use in particular contexts and that the teacher’s role is to help students become aware of these choices.

In sum, the different positions toward Standard English and the vernacular discussed here suggest a broad spectrum of language awareness. Ranging from a basic awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation to an understanding of the linguistic rights of those who speak stigmatized varieties of English, this spectrum includes as well the recognition that students are capable of having more than one variety of English within their linguistic repertoires and the understanding that the vernacular plays a crucial role in tying students to their families and communities.

6.2. Units of Study

In the current chapter, I focus heavily on the “lexical choices” instructors make while discussing their viewpoints on (and approaches to) linguistic diversity. As revealed in Chapters 2 and 3, the words that teachers use when referring to language variation are often cited as evidence of their linguistic knowledge and attitudes (e.g., Alim 2010; Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Kells 2006; Lippi-Green 1997; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Often, teacher talk is said to reflect a number of societal language ideologies, such as (1) a belief in the linguistic superiority of a single variety of English (i.e., “the standard language myth,” Lippi-Green 1997, pp. 53-62; the “ideology” of standardization, Milroy and Milroy 1999, p. 21); (2) the conviction that vernacular features are errors in need of correction (i.e., “the ideology of correctness,” Corson 2001, p. 69); and (3) the view that teachers are “privileged authorities” on what is correct or incorrect language use (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, and Carpenter 2006, p. 31). On the other hand, a number of studies reveal the positive impact of linguistic education on teachers’ attitudes (e.g., Ball and Muhammad 2003;
Bowie and Bond 1994; LeMoine and Hollie 2007) and on their classroom discourse (e.g., Sweetland 2006). Thus I argue that the lexical choices the instructors make when discussing linguistic diversity in their interviews with me provide an initial view of their underlying assumptions about language.

By exploring the instructors’ lexical choices, moreover, I also attempt to fill a gap that exists in the literature on teachers’ knowledge of (and attitudes toward) language variation. As discussed in Chapter 2, anecdotal examples of pejorative references to the vernacular abound in the literature (e.g., Alim 2010; Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Kells 2006; Lippi-Green 1997; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006), and these examples are often used to support arguments for better linguistic training of language arts and writing instructors. Yet these studies do not provide comprehensive analyses of the specific words that teachers use when describing their views on vernacular usage in the classroom (but see Sweetland 2006). Nor do many of the discourse studies discussed in Chapter 3 (e.g., Auten 1991; Cazden 2001; Ewart 2009; Farr (F.) 2003; Fife and O’Neill 2001; Haneda 2004; Hall and Walsh 2002; Losey 1997; Meier 1985; Sommers 1982; Straub 1997; Wells 1981, 1983). Rather, these studies focus more specifically on the effects of teacher talk and written comments on one-on-one or classroom interaction (i.e., its “situated meaning,” Schiffrin 1994, p. 133), an issue I also address in Chapters 7 and 8. Thus in order to provide an initial picture of the three instructors’ underlying language awareness, I find it necessary to branch out into somewhat unchartered territory. That is, before examining the effects of the teachers’ lexical choices on students in the classroom, I first try to glean meanings from the words themselves within the semi-structured and conversational context of the interview. Basing my approach on a Bakhtinian interpretation of “the word,” moreover, I argue that the lexical items teachers use can
also reflect attitudes beyond the here and now of a specific interaction. To repeat a quote from Bakhtin (1981) referenced in Chapter 1 of the current study:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (p. 276)

Thus in focusing specifically on the words teachers use to refer to language variation, I try not only to highlight the personal “value judgments” the words reflect, but also to explore the “complex interrelationships” between these words and the overall vocabulary of the educational institutions and society in which these instructors work. That is, I examine the many “semantic layers” that each word carries, whether they reflect an instructor’s underlying views about language, simply echo the teacher’s tendency to use that word in most instructional contexts, or suggest the pressures the instructor feels to meet educational and societal expectations. I also bear in mind Preston’s (1996; 2002) argument that “non-linguists” often have a deeper understanding of language variation than their lexical choices reveal.

In analyzing these lexical choices, moreover, I focus on the particular noun phrases (NPs), adjective phrases (APs), verb phrases (VPs), and adverbial phrases (ADVPs) that the instructors use to refer to linguistic diversity in their classrooms. I also discuss the semantic distance between these choices and other synonyms and “near-synonyms” (Cruse 1986; Edmonds and Hirst 2002; Murphy 2010) that the instructors might have chosen. As Saussure (1914) argues,

In a given language, all the words which express neighboring ideas help define one another’s meaning. Each of a set of synonyms like redouter (‘to dread’), craindre (‘to fear’), avoir peur (‘to be afraid’) has its particular value only because they stand in contrast with one another. . . . No word has a value that can be identified independently of what else is in its vicinity. (p. 114, cited in Edmonds and Hirst, p. 108)
Thus by analyzing the semantic features of the NPs and APs used to characterize vernacular patterns (e.g., mistake, error, slang, pattern, correct, right, wrong, grammatical, ungrammatical, different, appropriate, etc.), I attempt to discern whether instructors view these patterns as faulty uses of Standard English or whether they recognize them to be reflections of other rule-governed varieties of English. As argued in a 1997 resolution of the Linguistic Society of America, linguists believe that the use of adjectives and nouns such as “ungrammatical” and “slang” reflects an “incorrect” and “demeaning” view of vernacular speech (cited in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 7). Similarly, by focusing on the lexical properties of the VPs and ADVPs the instructors use when discussing their pedagogical approaches to composition and revision (e.g., choose, clean up, revise, edit, fix, change, correctly, incorrectly, etc.), I explore how these approaches to composition and revision also reflect their underlying language awareness. As Alim (2010) discovered in an interview with one high school teacher, the teacher believed the biggest challenge facing instructors at her school was the need to “combat” the use of AAVE by their students (p. 212). Finally, by examining the NPs that instructors employ in order to specifically name a variety of English, I attempt to shed some light on the their overall sociolinguistic understanding of vernacular speech in society. For example, while NPs such as “informal language,” “casual language,” “conversational language,” and “home language” reveal a general understanding of the vernacular as spoken language, the use of a more specific name for a variety (e.g., “African American Vernacular English,” “Black English Vernacular,” or “Ebonics”) may indicate a deeper recognition of both the rule-governed nature of that variety and the meaning it has for its speakers. As Rickford (1999) notes, the name “African American Vernacular English” is not simply the preferred term of many linguists to describe a set of phonological and morphosyntactic features; it also represents
the way skilled AAVE speakers use those features, together with distinctive AAVE words, prosodies and rhetorical/expressive styles, to inform, persuade, attract, praise, celebrate, chastise, entertain, educate, get over, set apart, mark identity, reflect, refute, brag, and do all the varied things for which humans use language. (p.12)

Thus, by referring to the variety by name, instructors indicate that they not only have some “linguistic” understanding of the variety, but also recognize its “social” relevance in many African American homes and communities.

Finally, I explore the contexts in which certain lexical items are repeated. As Tannen (2007) notes, “repetition evidences a speaker’s attitude, showing how it contributes to the meaning of the discourse” (p.60). Thus, in the interview, if an instructor repeatedly refers to the vernacular as “incorrect,” I argue that the repetition itself serves to accentuate the perspective that the vernacular is an incorrect version of Standard English. I also note the different topical contexts in which the instructor repeats a specific lexical item. For example, if an instructor repeatedly chooses a lexical item such as “problem” to define the presence of vernacular features in a student’s writings, while rarely using it to describe other non-academic writing patterns, I posit that its use in the former context is accentuated by its absence in the latter. To again quote Tannen (2007), “Paradoxically, repeating the frame foregrounds and intensifies the part that is repeated and also fortifies and intensifies the part that is different” (p. 60). On the other hand, if the word “problem” is used indiscriminately to refer to any type of writing issue, I argue that it may simply be part of the instructor’s overall teaching vocabulary. In sum, by focusing on the different textual contexts in which a particular lexical item is used (or not used), I try to show how it reflects the underlying language awareness and attitudes of an instructor.

6.3. Four Continua of Language Awareness

In the current analysis, I also employ four continua on which to describe the language awareness of the participating teachers (Table 6.1 below). As discussed in Section 6.2, it is
important to note that these continua reflect awareness of the “scientific” and “social” understanding of language espoused by linguists. They do not rule out the many types of “folk” language awareness that native speakers of American English also possess (Preston 1996, 2002). Rather, they reflect the type of language awareness that linguists believe teachers need in order to effectively help students learn to write in Edited American English.

Table 6.1. Four continua for measuring the language awareness of writing instructors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of rule-governed language variation</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of students’ communicative competence and linguistic repertoires</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity toward the importance of the vernacular in family and community networks and ability to discuss the social and political issues related to language standardization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to the process of writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The first continuum reveals the instructors’ overall awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation. This awareness not only includes the instructors’ phonological and morphosyntactic awareness of the varieties of American English their students speak, it also reflects their deeper understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation itself. Ranging from “low” to “high,” this continuum measures one of the most fundamental types of language awareness that linguists argue teachers need (Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Wolfram et al. 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Most important to this analysis, moreover, are the specific lexical choices that instructors make when discussing the vernacular patterns they discover in their students’ writings. For example, the beliefs of an instructor who refers to these primarily as “errors” or “problems” are placed at a lower end of this continuum than those of an
instructor who clearly recognizes vernacular features as rule-governed patterns and refers to them as such. In addition, the views of an instructor who refers to these patterns as belonging to a specific language variety (e.g., AAVE) are placed much closer to the “high” end of the continuum.

The second continuum reveals the instructors’ approaches to language variation on a scale from “replacive” to “additive” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). That is, it describes the instructors’ willingness and ability to build on the vernacular while helping students add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. If instructors recognize that students can simultaneously have access to a number of different language varieties, they are more likely to demonstrate an additive approach to the instruction of Edited American English than a replacive one (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006; Reaser 2006). Instead of describing a vernacular pattern as incorrect, for example, these instructors are more likely to take a contrastive analysis approach in which the structures of both Standard English and the student’s home variety are studied and compared (Rickford 1999, 2006). In doing so, moreover, the instructors also build on their students’ linguistic knowledge of the vernacular in order to help them acquire the patterns of Edited American English needed in academic writing (Rickford 1999, 2006). Finally, the instructors’ viewpoints are placed closer to the additive end of the continuum if in addition to acknowledging that students can have more than one variety of English in their linguistic repertoires, they also recognize their students’ communicative competence, that is, their ability to make appropriate choices from those repertoires (Hymes 1974; Milroy and Milroy 1999).

The third continuum measures teachers’ sensitivity to the importance of the vernacular in the students’ homes and communities and the conflicts that students may feel concerning the acquisition of Edited American English. Ranging from “uncritical” to “critical,” this continuum
is similar to the second in that it also measures the instructors’ awareness of repertoire. However, it goes further in measuring the efforts instructors make to address language variation in classroom discussions, as well as the specific opportunities they provide for students to reflect on the meaning of their vernaculars in their own lives (Alim 2005, 2010; Corson 2001; Lippi-Green 1997). While I appropriate the term “critical” from Critical Language Awareness (CLA) scholars who argue that teachers need to empower students by helping them become aware of how language standardization can be used against them (Alim 2005, 2010; Corson 2001; Lippi-Green 1997), I use it more broadly to define a teacher with a high level of sensitivity to this issue, but not necessarily a specific agenda for social change. That is, I use the term “critical” to define an approach that leads to more emphasis on student choice. Thus instructors whose views lie at the “uncritical” end of the continuum are more likely to take a no-nonsense “that’s the way it is” approach to the need to acquire Edited American English, while teachers whose views sit at the “critical” end of this continuum will indicate a belief that students need to reflect on the many social issues related to language standardization when choosing to write their academic papers in Edited American English.

Finally, a closely related fourth continuum, while not reflecting language awareness per se, reveals the instructors’ general approaches to writing instruction. Ranging from a “product” to a “process” approach, this continuum reveals how important “correctness” in a final written product is to instructors compared to overall mastery of the developmental stages of writing. It also measures the teachers’ general approaches to conveying “knowledge.” In Freire’s ([1970] 2000) words, a teacher can operate under a banking theory of education in which “the teacher is the depositor and the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 72), or that teacher can engage in a form of dialogic
“problem-posing” through which both the teacher and the student participate in acts of discovery (pp. 79-80). Understanding how instructors view the processes of teaching and learning is therefore essential to any discussion of their approach to the process of writing itself. If teachers hold the first viewpoint, they are more likely to believe that they alone possess the knowledge about language that students need in order to write effectively. On the other hand, instructors espousing the second viewpoint will be more likely to recognize the role of a student’s underlying knowledge of language in the writing process as well.

6.4. Analysis

In the current analysis of the instructors’ lexical choices, which are revealed during their initial interviews with me, I attempt to explore and compare the very different levels of language awareness that each teacher demonstrates in the four areas discussed above. The discussion is thus divided into the following subsections: (6.4.1) awareness of rule-governed language variation; (6.4.2) awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire; (6.4.3) sensitivity to community ties and dialect rights; and (6.4.4) approaches to the process of writing. By organizing the discussion in this manner, I also try to create a richer backdrop against which the instructors’ classroom discourse and interactions with students can be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. In addition, I hope to provide a detailed and fuller understanding of the links that may exist between specific types of language awareness and the development of effective teacher-student interaction in the writing classroom.

6.4.1 Awareness of rule-governed language variation

As the literature reveals (see Chapter 2), a common approach to vernacular features in student writing is to treat them as mistakes or errors in need of correction (Agnew and McLaughlin 2001; Coelho 1988; 1991; Farr and Daniels 1986; McLaughlin and Agnew 1999;
Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Taylor 1989; Wolfram et al. 1999). Moreover, their presence is often viewed as a serious problem even when students have mastered other aspects of the writing process (McLaughlin and Agnew 1999). Therefore, I seek to determine the positions that participant teachers take toward these features by examining the linguistic choices they use to characterize them and their presence in student essays. Specifically, I explore the NPs, APs, VPs, and ADVPs the instructors use to refer to vernacular usage and then compare them with the lexical choices they make when discussing writing challenges that are unrelated to language variation. As discussed in Chapter 4, in order to avoid focusing the instructors’ attention on the specific lexical items I am analyzing, I purposely ask about their general approaches to grammar instruction (Interview question 6, Appendix A) before focusing on issues of language variation per se (Int. q. 7). I also follow my direct question about language variation with additional questions concerning the instructors’ approaches to English as a Second Language (ESL) issues (Int. q. 8) and culturally different writing styles (Int. q. 10).²¹

The language awareness of each instructor, moreover, is first analyzed separately, and then, as discussed above in Section 6.3, compared with that of the other instructors on a continuum ranging from “low” to “high.” As the following analysis reveals, the NPs, VPs, APs, and ADVPs that Al and Barbara use indicate a far greater understanding of rule-governed language variation than do those used by Rachael. On the other hand, a number of Al’s and Barbara’s lexical choices suggest that they, too, lack some metalinguistic knowledge that would be useful for addressing linguistic diversity in the classroom.

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²¹ As the students who ultimately agreed to participate in this study included only one non-native speaker of American English, the instructors’ responses to interview questions 8 and 10 are beyond the scope of the current study. Nevertheless, these questions did help to divert the instructors’ attention from my specific focus on their responses to issues of language variation in American English.
6.4.1.1. Rachael’s awareness of rule-governed language variation

The NPs, APs, VPs, and ADVPs that Rachael uses to discuss the vernacular reveal her extremely low level of understanding or appreciation for the dominant “non-standard” variety spoken in her basic writing class (i.e., AAVE). That is, not only do Rachael’s lexical choices indicate her inability to recognize many of the vernacular patterns that appear in some students’ writings as rule-governed patterns of AAVE, their pejorative tone also creates a sharp contrast with the affirmative lexical choices she makes when describing her admiration and goals for her students. As discussed in Chapter 5, not only is Rachael extremely dedicated to helping her students succeed, she also describes the efforts they’ve made to do so as “awesome” (Chapter 5, Ext. 5.1, line 2). Thus it is important to note at the beginning of this discussion that any remarks that Rachael makes about vernacular speech do not appear to reflect her attitudes toward the speakers themselves. This is particularly important as I analyze Rachael’s response to a question about her approach to “general” grammar instruction (Int. q. 6). In the following extract, Rachael focuses on a verbal pattern characteristic of AAVE usage:

Extract 6.1

1  R: and then verb tenses, but that’s a little...that’s more habitual like slang
2  coming in
3  K: mhm. What kind of ah issues with verb tenses? Can you give me some
4  examples?
5  R: Like uh everything I do have to be planned.
6  K: Instead of has to be planned, ah ha.
7  R: Things with helping verbs like have gotten and got to, and things like-[just
8  K: [mhm
9  R: you know, sloppy slang writing

Here Rachael includes the student’s use of “have” in line 5 (“everything I do have to be planned”) in a category of usage that she calls “slang” (i.e., “slang coming in,” lines 1-2, and “sloppy slang writing,” line 9). As Rickford (1999) notes, however, “slang” is an inappropriate
label for this usage, since “slang refers just to a small set of new and usually short-lived words in
the vocabulary of a dialect or language” (p. 321). In using it here, Rachael appears to be unaware
of two rule-governed vernacular patterns that the student might be using. The first, in which
“have” remains uninflected in the third person singular present tense) is an AAVE pattern (e.g.,
“She have it,” Rickford 1999, p. 7). The second, in which “everything” is interpreted as a
collective noun followed by the plural form of the verb “have” also suggests a more “flexible”
vernacular interpretation of subject-verb agreement (see discussion of verb agreement with
collective nouns in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, p. 90). As this verbal pattern represents
one of two underlying grammatical patterns rather than a transitory expression, Rachael’s use of
the lexical item “slang” suggests a deep misunderstanding of what vernacular speech is.
Moreover, her use of the adjective “sloppy” implies that this usage results not from dialectal
difference, but rather from carelessness. It is interesting to note here, moreover, that even though
Rachael is able to identify a grammatical pattern from AAVE (i.e., uninflected “have”), it is her
“folk” awareness of this pattern that causes her to call it “slang” rather than identify it as an
AAVE feature per se. While Preston (1996) argues that the tendency of non-technical or “folk”
linguists to mislabel a phonological or morphosyntactic feature does not necessarily reflect a lack
of awareness of the feature itself, the particular lexical item that Rachael has chosen for this
AAVE feature (i.e., “slang”) can be viewed, I believe, as something more than a label or a name.
By referring to uninflected “have” as “slang,” Rachael reveals a belief about language that
represents what Preston (1996) refers to as the fundamental difference between the “folk”
linguist or “non-linguist” and the linguist who has been trained in the scientific study of
language. That is, by referring to the AAVE feature as “slang,” Rachael describes it as a word
that does not come from the “real” English language, but is instead an impermanent and
transitory word. In sum, while we cannot say that Rachael is unaware of the feature itself, we can say that she is unaware of what the linguist considers to be the rule-governed nature of that feature.

The lexical choices that Rachael makes in her response to my specific question about dialectal grammatical patterns (Int. q. 7) also reveal a low level of morphosyntactic understanding. In the following extract, she frames the vernacular patterns in one AAVE speaker’s writings as “incorrect” Standard English.

Extract 6.2

R: Um, this semester I don’t have a big problem with that just looking at the writing. There was a student I had last semester who just wrote down anything like wrote exactly as she would speak and it took several- several drafts of talking to her and saying this- and I had to point to the word and say, “this isn't correct. It should be this,” and then she’d say, ‘Oh, okay...and so, in terms of- she ended up actually not passing the course and it was- it was because her standard written English was just so poor and in the scope of the class, basic writing, this is the format of an essay, this is how to write an essay, what she needed was something I think a step below that, you know. She really needed to focus – she needed to take a grammar class before she would have been able to take this class because there just wasn’t enough time in the class. She was the only student who had that problem. Everyone else was able to clean up their language and have its idea- They may speak one way, but they were able to write another.

In this passage, Rachael’s use of the APs “not correct” in line 5 (“This isn’t correct”) and “so poor” in line 7 (“Her standard written English was just so poor”) indicates a clearly deficit view of the vernacular features she notices. So too does her reference to “standard” written English (line 7), which further highlights the idea that it is the nonstandard (i.e. vernacular) features that make this writing “just so poor.” In addition, Rachael’s choice of the modal should in the VP “should be” (line 5) also frames the vernacular as “incorrect” Standard English. That is, by juxtaposing what is “incorrect” with what it “should be” (“This isn’t correct. It should be this,” lines 4-5), she reveals her assumption that the writer was making an unsuccessful attempt at
using a “standard” English grammatical structure rather than using her own rule-governed vernacular.

Rachael’s choice of the verb “clean up” to describe other students’ abilities to remove vernacular features from their writing also highlights her negative view of vernacular speech (“Everyone else was able to clean up their language,” lines 12-13). That is, by choosing a verb whose lexical properties stress the act of “cleaning” over one that implies “refashioning” or “reworking” (e.g., “revise,” “edit,” etc.), Rachael positions these writers as speakers of “unclean” language. While it might be argued that she has simply employed an expression commonly used in educational circles to refer to any type of editing, Rachael’s use of the verb “clean up” in the context of the “problem” of vernacular features (“She was the only student who had that problem,” lines 12-13) gives her lexical choice heightened significance.

Rachael’s repetition of the noun “problem” in lines 1 (“this semester I don’t have a big problem with that”) and 11-12 (“She was the only student who had that problem”), moreover, also highlights her attitude toward language variation. For example, by repeating the noun “problem,” rather than alternating it with a synonym such as “issue” or “challenge,” Rachael also emphasizes the more pejorative meaning features of the word. That is, while the ranges of collocation for “issue” and “challenge” include both negative and positive attitudes toward the issue or challenge under discussion, the semantic properties of “problem” more strongly connote a negative stance. Thus by repeating “problem,” Rachael frames the presence of vernacular features in her students’ writings as obstacles to be overcome rather than as opportunities for discussing the differences between the vernacular and Edited American English.

In addition to directly calling the vernacular a “problem,” Rachael also implies the problematic aspects of vernacular usage through other lexical choices during the interview. For
example, when I ask her if she ever uses linguistic diversity as the subject of a class discussion (Int. q. 11), she describes a conversation she had with a “very good writer” who was trying to “correct” the AAVE features of the student discussed above during a peer review session.

**Extract 6.3**

1. R: No, no I think, I mean, I had again last semester when they were doing um the
2. peer editing, I had one student who was a very good writer, in fact I think she
3. didn’t really need the course, she could have stepped up, and she was working
4. with the woman who had – and she came up to me after class and she said, ‘I
5. don’t know how- how to correct this writing I- I- you know,’ and she used the
6. word ‘Ebonics,’ ‘You know, she’s writing in Ebonics and I can’t, you know, I’m
7. trying to correct her,’ and I just can’t help her with that, so, um, that’s the only
8. time I saw that.

Here Rachael’s repetition of the verb “correct” (“I don’t know how- how to correct this writing,” lines 4-5; I’m trying to correct her,” lines 6-7) again highlights her view that AAVE is incorrect English. Moreover, by using the AP “very good” (line 2) to describe the writing of the student who is doing the correcting, Rachael implies that the AAVE speaker’s writing is such a problem that even a student who is a “very good writer” can’t help her.

Finally, the lexical choices that Rachael makes when referring to specific varieties of English (i.e. AAVE and Standard English) also reveal a general misunderstanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation. For example, even though the majority of her students are AAVE speakers (see Chapter 4), Rachael refers to this variety by name only once during the interview (i.e., as “Ebonics,” line 6, Extract 6.3, above). Moreover, even when she does so, she makes a point of attributing the name to another speaker (“…and she used the word Ebonics, you know, ‘She’s writing in Ebonics,’” Extract 6.3, lines 5-6). Thus Rachael’s lack of awareness of the rule-governed nature of AAVE is also reflected in her discomfort with even referring to the vernacular by name.
In addition, as can be observed in Extract 6.4 below, the NPs and APs that Rachael uses instead of directly naming AAVE also reveal a low level of phonological and morphosyntactic awareness. Referring again to the student whose writing contained so many AAVE features, she compares her vernacular usage with that of other students in the class:

Extract 6.4

R: Like again, she was just a real glaring example of that,

K: [Yeah

R: [um, you know. I didn’t have so much...[At this point. Rachael appears to switch to a description of the other vernacular speakers in the class:] I wouldn’t necessarily call it dialect as just ...slang...like I mean, maybe that is dialect, you know, [how-

K: [mhm

R: how you would talk to somebody and just write it down. It wasn’t grammatically poor, it was just not formal

K: [yeah. Okay.

R: [writing, whereas she was both grammatically poor and informal.”

Here, in line 6, Rachael’s repetition of the NP “dialect,” first to suggest that writing of the other students does not include dialectal features and then to suggest that it might (“I wouldn’t necessarily call it dialect as just ...slang...like I mean, maybe that is dialect”), suggests general confusion on her part over the nature of language variation. So, too, does her use of the NP “slang” as a possible alternate for “dialect” (line 6). Finally, as Rachael twice makes the distinction between language that is “grammatically poor” (lines 9-10 and 12) and language that is “not formal” (line 10) or “informal” (line 13), she demonstrates her greatest misunderstanding of morphosyntactic variation. That is, while she is willing to admit that some language, which she refers to as “slang” or “informal” language, might possibly represent a different dialect (line 6), any language demonstrating syntactic variation from Edited American English is simply “grammatically poor” (lines 9-10 and 12) and a “glaring example” (line 1).
As all of the extracts discussed here suggest, Rachael’s lack of educational training in language variation (see Chapter 5) is clearly reflected in her pejorative lexical choices when discussing the vernacular. Yet, as Preston (1996, 2002) would argue, Rachael clearly demonstrates a non-linguist’s awareness of the vernacular speech used by her students. Not only does she mention a specific AAVE feature (i.e., uninflected “have,” line 5, Extract 6.1), she also distinguishes between vernacular usage that she considers to be “grammatically poor” and that which she views as simply “informal.” Nor do her linguistically inaccurate references to AAVE as “slang” mean that she is completely unaware of the phonological and morphosyntactic properties of this variety of English. As Preston (1996) notes, “When people characterize (however generally, however badly) linguistic facts, we cannot say they are ‘unaware’” (p. 45). On the other hand, adjectives such as “poor” and “sloppy” carry strong implications of incorrectness or carelessness and thus do suggest a lack of linguistic understanding when applied to stigmatized varieties of English. Therefore, notwithstanding Rachael’s clear “folk” awareness of a vernacular spoken by many of her students (i.e. AAVE), her lexical choices suggest that her understanding of the “rule-governed” nature of that variety is decidedly low.

Finally, in order to add some perspective to the language Rachael uses when discussing the vernacular features she encounters in her students’ writings, it is also helpful to examine her references to general grammar and writing issues. That is, it is useful to note which references to the vernacular reflect her general teaching vocabulary and which do not. In the following four extracts, for example, Rachael chooses a number of pejorative NPs and APs to characterize issues such as comma use, word choice, and composition length.

**Extract 6.5**

1. R: Um, I would say that maybe at a different level, that the least important would be that final editing step, um, however, the *mistakes* they make at this level-
That’s so important that they have their commas and their word choice correct because it’s so bad. It really inhibits the reader from understanding anything they’re trying to say. So at this point like everything is equally important.

Extract 6.6

R:...Don’t...Don’t do that because that’s- you know, that’ll just get them too tangled up. And they’ll write way too much. It will be very bad. I’ll have to correct it and it won’t further the essay.

Extract 6.7 (Note that this extract occurs again as lines 15-22 of Extract 6.35 below)

R: … Part of the process, then, is going back and correcting your errors.
K: Yeah
R: So I guess I would disagree that they- the person who [said that]
K: [?] more [important]
R: contrast because that is the process. The process is- It’s a process and part of the process is going back and fixing your errors.

In these extracts, Rachael’s choice of NPs, AP, and VPs suggests a general teaching vocabulary focused on correctness. For example, she repeats the lexical item “correct” throughout, either as an adjective (“That’s so important that they have their commas and their word choice correct,” Ext. 6.5, line 3); as a gerund (“Part of the process, then, is going back and correcting your errors,” Ext. 6.7, line 1); or as a verb (“I’ll have to correct it,” Ext. 6.6, lines 2-3). She also repeats the noun “errors” in the NPs “correcting your errors” and “fixing your errors” (Ext. 6.7, lines 1 and 7) and uses its synonym “mistakes” to describe general writing challenges such as comma use and word choice (Ext. 6.5, lines 2-3). Finally, Rachael uses the adjective “bad” to describe general writing challenges in both Extract 6.5 (“because it’s so bad,” line 4) and Extract 6.6 (“It will be very bad,” line 2). As all of these repetitions indicate, Rachael’s focus on errors, mistakes, and bad writing is clearly not reserved for the vernacular. In fact, one might argue that the lexical choices she makes when discussing language variation are simply reflections of her general teaching vocabulary.
Yet a closer comparison of the words Rachael uses to discuss the vernacular (Extracts 6.1-6.4) and the language she uses to describe general writing issues (Extracts 6.5-6.7) suggests otherwise. If, for example, we broaden the examination of the lexical item “correct” to its near synonyms, Rachael’s repetition of words whose semantic features imply correctness (or correction) reveals some distinct differences between the way they are used to address general writing and grammar errors and the manner in which they are applied specifically to the vernacular. For instance, when discussing general writing errors, Rachael uses the NP “fixing your errors” synonymously with the NP “correcting your errors” ((Ext. 6.7, lines 1 and 7). That is, both NPs are used as complements of the NP “part of the process…” (Ext. 6.7, lines 1 and 6-7). In her discussion of vernacular patterns, however, the concept of correcting one’s errors is expressed through the far more pejorative VP “clean up their language” (Ext. 6.2, line 12). Here, not only does the verb “clean up” imply that the vernacular is in some way unclean (see discussion above), the use of the specific noun “language” as its complement appears to single out the vernacular in particular. This usage can thus be contrasted with Rachael’s more general references to “correcting” or “fixing” other types of writing and grammar errors.

In a similar vein, Rachael’s repetition of the adjective “bad” to describe the quality of essays that contain errors of comma use, word choice, and composition length can be contrasted with her repetition of near synonyms for “bad” when discussing vernacular features in student writing. In the latter case, Rachael not only uses a wider variety of synonyms, including “glaring” (“a glaring example,” Ext. 6.4, line 1), “poor” (“just so poor,” Ext. 6.2, line 7; “grammatically poor,” Ext. 6.4, lines 8 and 10), and “sloppy” (“sloppy slang writing,” Ext. 6.1, line 9), she also uses them in APs that include more fine-tuned semantic traits. For example, in her general comments on grammar and writing challenges, “bad” is modified by a single
intensifying adverb in each case (“because it’s so bad,” Ext. 6.5, line 4; “It will be very bad,” Ex. 6, line 2). On the other hand, in her descriptions of the student whose writing reflects AAVE patterns (her standard written English was just so poor”), the adjective “poor” is preceded by two such intensifiers (“just” and “so”). Thus Rachael’s use of various synonyms for “bad” (i.e., “glaring,” “poor,” and “sloppy”) to describe writing influenced by the vernacular conveys a more derogatory view than does her repetition of the adjective “bad” itself, which she uses to refer generally to a variety of writing issues.

In addition, Rachael’s repetition of certain nouns and their near synonyms reveals different attitudes toward general grammatical errors and vernacular patterns respectively. For example, while the nouns “mistakes” and “errors” are used in Rachael’s discussions of comma use, word choice, and the process of writing (Extracts 6.5-6.7), the more pejorative noun (and adjective) “slang” is reserved specifically for vernacular patterns (Extracts 6.1 and 6.4). As discussed above, the lexical item “slang” reflects an incorrect understanding of the vernacular according to many linguists (e.g., Rickford 1999; The Linguistic society of America, cited in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Moreover, the general, non-linguistic connotations of ‘slang,’ as revealed, for example, in Merriam-Webster (online), are more pejorative than those associated with “error” or “mistake.” That is, while the meaning features of “mistake” can imply varying degrees of responsibility for the mistake (i.e., a mistake can be a “a wrong action or statement proceeding from faulty judgment, inadequate knowledge, or inattention”), the semantic features for “slang” connote more agency on the part of the user (i.e., use of “coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech” (Merriam-Webster, online).
Finally, it is also noteworthy that during the interview, Rachael uses the noun “problem” to refer to vernacular patterns in her students’ writings (Extract 6.2), while never using it to refer to general grammar or writing challenges. Instead, she chooses the less pejorative “issue” for these. For example, in the following extract, Rachael refers to the “issue” (line 6) of “sentence structure” (line 2) and “writing a complete sentence” (line 4):

**Extract 6.8**

1. R: Well I touch on the *big*gies like um ... in terms of grammar, a lot of it has to 
do with their *sentence structure*.
2. K: mhm
3. R: So, *writing a complete sentence*?
4. K: mhm
5. R: That’s the *big* grammar *issue* we talk about.

Here, Rachael not only uses the noun “issue” instead of “problem” to characterize the general grammatical challenges related to sentence structure (i.e., “the big grammar issue,” line 6), she also repeats the lexical item “big” (“I touch on the biggies,” line 1; “That’s the big grammar issue,” line 6) to indicate that for her, this issue is a primary focus. Moreover, Rachael’s emphasis on the importance of this “issue” stands in stark contrast to her suggestion that the “problem” of vernacular patterns is beyond “the scope of the class” (Ext. 6.2, line 7). While this distinction between “problem” and “issue” does not appear in the one-on-one writing conferences discussed in Chapter 7 (i.e., Rachael frequently refers to both general writing issues and vernacular patterns as “problems”), it is nevertheless noteworthy in the context of the interview. That is, the semi-conversational nature of the initial interviews with the instructors not only leads to deeper introspection on their part (see Chapter 5), but also allows them to reveal their views outside the setting of a busy classroom. Thus while the semantic gradations between “problem” and “issue” may be lost in the interactively demanding context of discussing students’
language use face-to-face, they appear to provide a useful set of lexical choices for Rachael as she describes that language from afar.

In sum, while Rachael’s approach to vernacular patterns in her students’ writings neither invalidates her clear motivation and talent as a writing instructor (see discussion in Chapter 5) nor suggests that she is unaware of the language variation that exist in her multidialectal classroom, it does reveal a lack of what linguists believe to be a fundamental (and essential) awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation.

6.4.1.2. Barbara’s awareness of rule-governed language variation

Barbara’s interview responses include much less pejorative language to describe language variation than do Rachael’s, and they suggest a somewhat greater understanding of the vernacular. For example, in the following two extracts, she demonstrates detailed knowledge of the linguistic, demographic, and historical issues related to the use of AAVE in the classroom:

**Extract 6.9**

1. B: You know what. I have to tell you. The reason that question is so interesting is that I have not had much of an issue with like- with African American Vernacular. Of the black students that I have, I don’t know why but like even at XXX, which tends to be inner city kids, they don’t tend to have that problem. Um, I don’t know why. I have more problems with, for example, Arabic students not using articles.

**Extract 6.10**

1. B: But anyway, yeah, I’ve taken courses on linguistic diversity, and it has- we talked about like the Oakland um, the Ebonics debate in Oakland, if nothing else, it made me realize that this is an issue that even if I don’t see it, it’s going on, you know? Um. It’s made me see my students differently. It’s made me actually, when I say how I’m really careful

2. K: [Yes. Yes.]
3. [and I mean,]
4. B: [Uh huh]
5. [to not make it seem that]
6. I devalue their background; those classes have helped me... think about that,

7. K: Yeah
It is notable that in each of these extracts, Barbara refers to AAVE by name, using the NPs “African American Vernacular” (Ext. 6.1, lines 2-3) and “Ebonics debate in Oakland” (Ext. 6.2, line 2). These references not only differ noticeably from Rachael’s description of AAVE as “sloppy slang writing” and “poor” standard written English, they also stand out particularly when compared with Rachael’s apparent unfamiliarity (or discomfort) with the name “Ebonics” (see discussion of Extract 6.3 above). Moreover, Barbara also appears to be more comfortable discussing the demographics associated with the name AAVE, as she uses the NPs “black students” and “inner city kids” to describe its speakers (Ext. 6.9, lines 3-4). Rachael, on the other hand, makes no references to race or ethnicity in her discussions of language. In addition, Barbara’s use of specific NPs such as “linguistic diversity” and “the Ebonics debate in Oakland” (Ext. 6.10, lines 1-2) demonstrates an historical understanding of issues related to AAVE that appears to be absent in Rachael’s discourse. This is not surprising, of course, when we compare Barbara’s studies of linguistic diversity with Rachael’s lack of background in this area (see Chapter 5).

Of equal interest to this comparison is Barbara’s use of the nouns “problem” and “issue” to refer to vernacular patterns. While Barbara, like Rachael, uses the noun “problem” to describe morphosyntactic variation in student writing (“They don’t tend to have that problem,” Ext. 6.9, line 4; “these problems they’re having,” Ext. 6.10, line 14), she also alternates it with the less pejorative noun “issue” (“I have not had much of an issue with like- with African American Vernacular,” Ext 6.9, lines 2-3; “it made me realize that this is an issue,”Ext.6.10, line 5).
Rachael, on the other hand, reserves the noun “problem” for vernacular patterns and the noun “issue” for discussions of general grammar challenges (e.g., writing a complete sentence, Ext. 6.8). Barbara’s broader use of “problem” to include ESL challenges (“I have more problems with, for example, Arabic students not using articles” (Ext. 6.9, lines 5-6) can also be contrasted with Rachael’s more narrow use of the word for challenges with vernacular usage. Finally, Barbara’s choice of the noun “problem” in the sentence “It’s not my problem” is especially noteworthy since she is claiming just the opposite: “Instead of just assuming oh well, I’m just going to tell them, you know, just using the banking method or whatever, I’m just going to tell them and if they don’t get it, it’s not my problem” (Ext. 6.10, lines 15-17). Here, Barbara’s repetition of the VP “just going to tell them” in the voice of someone who espouses the “banking method” (Freire [1970] 2000) not only highlights her rejection of that approach to learning (i.e., “instead of just assuming”), but also emphasizes her belief that addressing vernacular patterns is an important part of writing instruction.

This belief is highlighted, moreover, in her choice of other lexical items that stress the effort she has made to develop a more enlightened approach to the vernacular. For example, her use of the VP “see differently” (“It’s made me see my students differently,” Ext. 6.10, line 6) implies that she has changed her former view of the vernacular, while the VP “think about that” (“those classes have helped me… think about that,” 6.10, line 10) suggests that her views are continuing to change. Even more telling is her use of the AP “really careful” and the VPs “not seem” and “devalue” in the sentence “I’m really careful to not make it seem that I devalue their background” (Ext. 6.10, lines 7-10).

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22 This distinction does not appear in Rachael’s one-on-one interactions with students. As revealed in Chapter 7, she uses the lexical item “problem” to discuss general issues of grammar and writing as well.
Again, the fact that Barbara needs to take extra “care” not to “seem” to make disparaging references to AAVE suggests that she has only recently become aware of the issue and may still struggle with how to address it.

Barbara’s claim not to have encountered many AAVE features in the writings of her students (Ext. 6.9), even at an inner city university with a large African American population (see discussion in Chapter 5) is puzzling, however. While many of her students may already code-switch effectively between the vernacular and Edited American English in their writing (perhaps, because they are third-year students at the 300-level), several of her references to general verb usage suggest that she may in fact fail to recognize some AAVE patterns in their essays. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is often difficult for teachers to distinguish between developmental patterns and those related specifically to dialectal differences (Farr Whiteman 1981a). Thus in the following extract, it is not clear whether Barbara attributes her inner city students’ confusion about verb inflection specifically to previous failures to address linguistic diversity in the classroom or to disrupted and impoverished instruction in general:

**Extract 6.11**

1. **K:** And then when they get out of that, do you find that- What- what level of
2. **B:** writer you would say you get in the 300 class, just-
3. **K:** A 100 level. Interesting.
4. **B:** A 100 level. Students- and I’m not talking about non-native speakers. I’m talking about
5. native English speakers who just do not have a strong background. Maybe they
6. went to a city school where they had six different English teachers because of the
7. turn-over rate, you know...um, I have students who have never- or they claim to
8. have never heard of you know, like a comma splice, and even when I show them
9. what I mean by that- Maybe it’s not just the term- You know, maybe it’s just the
10. terminology. When I show- show them what it is, they’re like ‘I have absolutely
11. never heard of this. I have never heard of, you know, Do you have to change
12. your verb when you have a plural subject?’
In this exchange, Barbara’s references to the generally weak educational backgrounds of her inner city students (―native English speakers who just do not have a strong background,” line 6) and the high “turnover rate “of their teachers (line 8) suggests that she attributes their confusion about verb inflection to a lack of effective instruction rather than to a failure to notice differences between AAVE and Edited American English verbal patterns. While the former explanation does not necessarily rule out the latter, the VP that Barbara chooses to describe the students’ lack of awareness is particularly telling. That is, her repetition of the VP “have never heard of” in lines 9 and 12 not only creates a “list-like rhythm” that implies an even longer list of conventions of Edited American English that the students have never learned (Tannen 2007, p. 60), it also serves a “tying function” (Tannen 2007, p. 60), in which confusion about verb inflection (“Do you have to change your verb when you have a plural subject?,” lines 12-13) is given the same status as ignorance of comma splices (“they claim to have never heard of you know, like a comma splice,” line s 8-9). As Schiffrin (1994) has noted, “such repetition is iconic simply because the introduction of different items through a single predicate structure is a linguistic reflection of their co-existence in a common conceptual realm” (p. 296). Thus the fact that Barbara attributes students’ ignorance of both comma splices and verb patterning to generally impoverished city schools suggests that she may not have considered the possibility that the latter could be related more specifically to the failure of the school to address language variation per se. That is, she may have failed to recognize patterns of verb regularization (e.g., “they was” for “they were”) that are characteristic of AAVE (Rickford 1999). In addition, Barbara’s distinction between “native English speakers who just do not have a strong background” (line 6) and “non-native speakers” (line 5) highlights the absence of a third category – native speakers who speak varieties of English that differ from Standard English.
The likelihood that Barbara fails to recognize some AAVE features in the writings of her inner city students is also suggested in the following description of one student’s prior educational experience:

**Extract 6.12**

1. B: … he was like ‘This school is *horrible*. He was like ‘my school w- You know, you
2. you had to walk through metal detectors in the fourth grade, you know, you
3. didn’t feel safe there, the teachers didn’t feel safe there, the classes were
4. constantly disrupted.’ It just made me, because, you know, say there’s a reason
5. why so many of these students at XXXX [the urban university], for example,
6. as opposed to XXXX [the suburban university] can’t, you know, don’t know
7. which verb form to use. It’s not because there’s something wrong with their
8. brain, it’s because they just haven’t been really taught in an effective way.

Here, Barbara’s repetition of the VP “didn’t feel safe there” (“you didn’t feel safe there, the teachers didn’t feel safe there,” line 3), along with her use of the APs “horrible” and “constantly disrupted” (lines 1 and 4) highlights her belief that it is the impoverished learning environment that has caused some students’ to be confused about Edited American English verb forms (“there’s a reason why so many of these students at XXXX [the urban university], for example, as opposed to XXXX [the suburban university] can’t, you know, don’t know which verb form to use,” lines 4-7). So, too, does the contrast she draws between the students she teaches at the inner city university and the ones she teaches at the suburban university. By emphasizing geographical differences, Barbara takes the focus off linguistic differences and keeps it on the contrast between the types of high schools these students have attended. That is, no mention is made of the inner city schools’ failures to address the needs of a linguistically diverse population. Rather, the students uncertainty over “which verb form to use” is attributed to the disruptive and unsafe inner city schools they attended. In sum, Barbara’s lexical choices in Extracts 6.11 and 6.12 suggest that she may not recognize the underlying differences between some AAVE and Edited American English verbal patterns.

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Finally, like Rachael, Barbara also refers to the vernacular as “slang”:

**Extract 6.13**

1. B: I mean, I try to get them to understand that I’m on their side when it comes to
2. that, but I just stress *professionalism* and just tell them *in writing* you do not use
3. *slang*.

As this comment is made during a discussion of Barbara’s approach to the different varieties of English her students speak, one can surmise that she is referring to vernacular usage as a whole rather than to specific slang usage within the vernacular. Thus, like Rachael, she appears to view AAVE from a non-linguistic “folk” perspective here (Preston 1996, 2002). Moreover, as discussed above (Extracts 6.11 and 6.12), Barbara’s apparent failure to recognize her students’ “nonstandard” verb inflections as rule-governed vernacular patterns suggests that she, like Rachael, lacks what linguists would argue to be fundamental phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge of the vernaculars her students speak (Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

On the other hand, Barbara’s very positive references to the vernacular in Extracts 6.9 and 6.10 (above) indicate that she considers different varieties of English to be more than “incorrect” Standard English. This becomes even more apparent when we compare her references to the vernacular with the language she uses to discuss general grammar issues. As the following four extracts reveal, Barbara expects a high level of grammatical accuracy in the writings of her students:

**Extract 6.14**

1. B: …Okay, I take them home and I look at em, I highlight the *correct* answers,
2. give em back. Then, when they are sitting there with the tests that I’ve marked
3. the *right* answers on, I go over the test with them on the white board, um, and I
4. explain all of those concepts, that like *comma splices, run ons*, you know, *how
to use a semicolon*, things like that. I just *explain* it, and um.
Extract 6.15

1. B: I mean I do that the first day and then what I do, I- I don’t really, you know, I
don’t really go into grammar in- on specific class days other than that first day,
but what I do is- when I take- when I grade their papers, if I see for example
consistent, you know, comma errors in several papers, I take those mistakes and
put them on a white board and I point them out to the students, the incorrect and
then the revision, /?/ Do you see the difference?

Extract 6.16

1. B: So, if I show them like a comma splice sentence and they don’t- I’m like look
at that. Do you see why this is not good?

In these extracts, Barbara’s references to general writing challenges such as comma splices (Ext.
6.14, line 4; Ext. 6.16, line 1); run-on sentences (Ext. 6.14, line 4); and semicolon use (Ext. 6.14,
line 5) include frequent use of the language of correction. In addition to selecting the NPs
mistakes” (Ext. 6.15, line 4) and “errors” (Ext. 6.15, line 4), Barbara chooses APs that focus on
what is correct or incorrect throughout. For example, there are “correct” and “right” answers on a
grammar test (Ext. 6.14, lines 1 and 3), and “incorrect” grammatical patterns in her students’
papers (Ext. 6.15, line 5). Moreover, a comma splice is referred to pejoratively as “not good”
(Ext. 6.16, line 2).

In the following extract, moreover, the decidedly pejorative language that Barbara uses to
refer to general “grammar mistakes” (line 5) contrasts dramatically with her references to
vernacular patterns in Extract 6.10 above:

Extract 6.17

1. B: Well, you know, /?/ I have- I actually have some friends and colleagues who-
and I think this is so idealistic- they’re like ‘grammar smammer, we don’t – I
want to look at the content’ and I’m like ‘Okay, in the real world you cannot
separate those two things. You can have a fantastic idea, but if you fill it with
grammar mistakes, no-one’s going to take it seriously. You can have the best
credentials, a 4.0, Dean’s List all throughout. If you give an employer a crap
resume with grammar mistakes, you are not, period period, not going to get
hired.’
[Lines 9-30. Barbara describes her response to a student who asked whether she placed a greater value on grammar or content.]

B: ......I was like ‘You know, the great news is, ‘you have editors, you have tutors, and while you’re in college you have free tutors. You know you can get somebody to help you with the grammar. I was like ‘but but if you think you can have great content and turn it in and get great feedback and you have horrible grammar.’ I was like ‘That’s not gonna happen.’

In this extract alone, Barbara’s five uses of the lexical item “grammar” (lines 2, 5, 7, 33, and 35) are characterized by her repetition of the NP “grammar mistakes” (lines 5 and 7); her choice of the highly pejorative adjectives “crap” (“crap resume,” lines 6-7) and “horrible” (“horrible grammar,” lines 34-35); and her use of the nonsense rhyme “grammar smammar” to characterize teachers who do not consider grammar to be important (line 2). Moreover, even Barbara’s use of APs and NPs whose semantic features connote commendation (i.e., “a fantastic idea,” line 4; “great content,” line 34; and “the best credentials,” lines 5-6) or praiseworthiness (“a 4.0, Dean’s List,” line 6) serves to further set in relief the pejorative references she makes to general grammar mistakes. Finally, Barbara’s emphatically negative pronouncements about how grammatically incorrect content will be received “in the real world” (line 3) stand in stark contrast to her strongly positive remarks concerning the issue of AAVE patterns in student writing (Ext. 6.10 above). For example, while she describes herself as “more patient” and “much more cognizant” of the reasons that underlie the presence of vernacular features in some students’ writings (“And so it makes me- It’s actually made me more patient, I think, and much more cognizant of the reasons behind these problems they’re having,” Ext. 6.10, lines 13-14), her choice of the VP “is not gonna happen” when describing how she will react to content with general grammar errors (i.e. “horrible grammar”) portrays her as far less patient (“if you think you can have great content and turn it in and get great feedback and you have “horrible grammar.’ I was like ‘That’s not gonna happen,’” lines 33-35). So, too, does her emphatic
repetition of the lexical items “not” and “period” in the VP “will not, period period, not get hired” (lines 7-8). Thus by making such pejorative lexical choices when describing general grammatical errors, Barbara actually foregrounds the far more affirmative choices she makes when discussing the vernacular.

In sum, even though Barbara’s level of morphosyntactic knowledge of the vernacular (in particular, AAVE) is not entirely clear from her interview responses, a comparison of her lexical choices when discussing general grammar issues and her choices when talking specifically about AAVE reveals a generally positive attitude toward issues of language variation. Moreover, the fact that both Barbara and Rachael employ a general discourse of “mistakes,” “errors,” and “bad” grammar when discussing general grammatical issues serves to highlight the very different attitudes they each demonstrate when addressing the vernacular. That is, Barbara’s references to vernacular usage stand out because they are more affirmative than her references to general grammar problems, while Rachael’s references to vernacular patterns are noticeable because they are even more pejorative than her discussions of general grammar and writing errors.

6.4.1.3. Al’s awareness of rule-governed language variation

In order to develop an understanding of Al’s phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness, it is helpful to examine a number of different extracts from his response to interview question 9 (“What are your views on the use of languages and dialects other than standard academic English in the writing classroom?”). For example, Al uses the lexical item “correct” only once when answering this question. Moreover, he uses it in a way that contradicts the view of vernacular English as incorrect Standard English:

**Extract 6.18**

1. A: I mean, I never correct a student for the way they speak.
3. A: Um, and I try to- I call a lot of attention to register
A: You know. Um, I do a whole lesson in tech writing on personal, public, and professional voice.

Not only does Al’s use of the adverb “never” (line 1) serve to distance him from the concept of correcting his students’ speech, his choice of the VP “call attention to” (line 3) helps him to accentuate the value of their speech. That is, by choosing an idiomatic expression whose semantic features suggest action by both the teacher (i.e., “call”) and the student (i.e. “attention”) to describe his approach to the to the notions of “register” (line 3) and “voice” (line 6), Al suggests that he wants the students to notice circumstances in which they would or would not choose to use the vernacular. Moreover, by using the adjectives “personal, public, and professional to describe the different voices in which a student might write (lines 5-6), he also highlights the value of using different varieties of English in different contexts. Thus Al’s lexical choices in this extract highlight his belief that language by itself is neither correct nor incorrect.

Al also never uses the noun “problem” when referring to the different varieties of English he encounters in the classroom. Nor does he use the noun “issue.” Rather, he uses a variety of VPs that accentuate the actions he takes to address vernacular features that appear in his students’ writings. In the following extract, for example, Al’s choice of the VP “point out” mirrors his use of the near synonym “call attention to” in Extract 6.18 above.

Extract 6.19

K: Now what about, for instance, when you were at XXXX [HBU] and you probably heard a different variety of English there.
A: mhm? mhm?
K: If you saw expressions in the- the writing that
A: [mhm]
K: [sort of reflected that, how would you-]
A: Um-
K: Would you treat that as a grammar difference? Or how would you-
A: You know, and I see it here too.
K: Yeah.
In this passage, the meaning features of the VP "point out," like those of the VP "call attention to" (Extract 6.18, line 3) imply an active approach to vernacular patterns in writing ("I- point those things out," line 12). Yet at the same time, they differ from those of the verb "correct," whose features more strongly imply the presence of error. Thus Al’s use of "point out" suggests his belief that vernacular patterns are something to be noticed rather than "corrected." In using a less "error" oriented verb than "correct," moreover, Al also de-emphasizes the idea of vernacular features as problems. Al does this as well through his repetition of the verb "treat" (17), which I use in a spontaneous question about vernacular features (i.e., “Would you treat that as a grammar difference,” line 9). Not only do the meaning features of “treat” imply less emphasis on correction and greater focus on handling or addressing an issue, but Al’s use of it to include AAVE in the same category as informal, conversational, and Internet language (“I treat those all the same,” line 17) also suggests that he is not overly concerned about the vernacular features he sees in his students’ writings. As Wolfram, Adger, and Christian (1999) have noted, too heavy a focus on vernacular patterns can lead to genuine writing problems in the form of hyper-correction (pp. 131-132).

Finally, Al’s use of specific names and/or distinctive terminology for some vernaculars (i.e., “African American Vernacular,” “Internet Vernacular,” and “conversational” language, lines 14-15) suggests that he, like Barbara, considers these to be legitimate varieties rather than incorrect versions of Standard English.
At the same time, however, Al’s claim that he treats these “all the same” (line 17) makes it difficult to discover what his level of phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness actually is. For example, he does not explain how he distinguishes a vernacular pattern from a genuine developmental error (Farr Whiteman 1981a). Moreover, like Barbara and Rachael, Al makes certain lexical choices that suggest a more “folk” than “linguistic” understanding of vernacular speech (Preston 1996, 2002). In the following extract, for example, he also appears to confuse AAVE with slang.

**Extract 6.20**

1. **K:** They- They’ve been pretty accepting, then
2. **A:** I- Yeah, yeah. You know, to tell you the truth, *when I was at XXX [HBU]*, you know, I didn’t get a deluge of papers that students were using, you know, *verbal slang.*
3. **K:** Yeah
4. **A:** I mean, you know, they’re in college. They *know better* than-. They *know that* - I, you know, *intuitively* whether- whether it’s you know, um whether it’s *on the surface or sort of subconsciously*, they *know that their writing shouldn’t match their talking,*
5. **K:** Right, right
6. **A:** *but neither should a white student’s.*

Here Al’s use of the NP “verbal slang” in reference to the papers he received from students at an historically black university (“I didn’t get a deluge of papers that students were using, you know, verbal slang,” lines 3-4) suggests that he may focus on the informal and conversational aspects of AAVE rather than its underlying morphosyntactic patterning. For example, his repetition of the verb know (i.e., “They know better than-,” line 6; They know that-,” lines 6-7; and “they know that their writing shouldn’t match their talking,” lines 8-9) implies that the students already have the knowledge they need in order to distinguish between AAVE and Edited American English. So, too, does his use of the ADVPs “intuitively,” “on the surface,” and “sort of subconsciously” to modify this verb (lines 7-9). Moreover, the NP that serves as the complement
of the verb “know” (i.e., “that their writing shouldn’t match their talking,” lines 8-9) suggests a somewhat general understanding of the vernacular. That is, it implies that AAVE differs from Edited American English primarily in terms of formality and informality. This suggestion is highlighted as well by Al’s claim that a “white student” also needs to write differently from the way he or she speaks (line 11). In sum, while it is clear that Al recognizes, respects, and focuses on language variation in his writing classes, it is less clear whether or not he recognizes more subtle morphosyntactic features of AAVE such as phonologically influenced spellings or uninflected verbs (Rickford 1999; Wolfram et al. 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

In order to gain a clearer picture of Al’s phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness, therefore, it is also helpful to examine the language he uses to describe general grammar and writing issues. As discussed above in Sections 6.4.1.1 and 6.4.1.2, the lexical choices that both Rachael and Barbara make when discussing language variation stand out when compared to their general teaching vocabularies. That is, Rachael uses more pejorative language to discuss vernacular usage than she does to describe general grammar and writing challenges, while Barbara chooses more affirmative lexical items to discuss the vernacular than she does to refer to general grammatical issues. Al, on the other hand, does not differentiate quite so clearly between vernacular usage and other grammar and writing issues. As the following analysis reveals, Al’s references to language variation differ in some ways from his general teaching vocabulary, but they are also heavily influenced by it.

One notable difference between Al’s discussions of vernacular usage and his descriptions of general grammar and writing issues is the level of detail that he includes in each. For example, in the following extract, he provides a very descriptive example of a general writing “problem.”
Extract 6.21

A: So, but, you know, they still have to know *when to use objective voice*

K: Yes

A: Um, you know, *varying sentence structure and vocabulary*. If every sentence starts with ah the ah um, you know, if they’re reading about Obama and they write twenty sentences in a row that start with Obama, that’s a *problem*.

Here, not only does Al directly name the compositional issues his students need to address (i.e., “when to use objective voice,” line 1, and “varying sentence structure and vocabulary,” line 3), he also gives a vivid example of the failure to do so (i.e., “writ[ing] twenty sentences in a row that start with Obama,” line 5). Moreover, when compared with his less specific discussions of language variation (e.g., “I point those things out,” Ext. 6.19, lines 12-13; “You know, and I see it here too,” Ext. 6.19, line 10), Al’s references to the writing process itself in Extract 6.21 seem far more specific and knowledgeable.

In addition, Al’s various uses of the lexical item “problem” also reveal different approaches to language variation and general writing issues. As noted above, he never uses this lexical item when discussing vernacular usage; yet his frequent use of the word to describe general issues of sentence structure, rhetorical style, and grammar reveal that it is clearly a part of his overall teaching vocabulary. In Extract 6.21 (above), for example, he refers to a student’s failure to vary his/her sentence structure as a “problem” (“…that’s a problem,” line 5), while in the following extract, he refers to the “problem” of culturally different writing styles among his international students:

Extract 6.22

A: ………………………………...but, ah you know, the *problem* is, we can have people here, you know that have Masters degrees from foreign countries and you know, if they have a *different rhetorical style*…Ah, the *problem* is you know, as an introductory teaching course, you know, I’m- have to…*prepare them for success*.  

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Here, Al’s repetition of the noun “problem” to refer both to the “different rhetorical style[s]” of international students (lines 1-3) and to the need to “prepare” these students for “success” (lines 4-5) serves to emphasize the difficulty of the task. It also serves as a revealing contrast to the lexical choices he makes when discussing the language variation of native speakers. As noted above, he completely avoids any references to “problems” in such cases, assuming that his students “know” “intuitively” that their written language should not “match” their spoken language (Extract 6.20, lines 6-9).

At the same time, however, Al’s avoidance of the word “problem” when discussing language variation may also reflect a general effort to speak affirmatively about all writing challenges. In the following extract, for example, while Al uses the word “problem” four times to refer to either ESL patterns or to a general punctuation error that many native speakers often make, his other lexical choices mitigate the pejorative meaning of the word.

Extract 6.23

1 A: But ah I try to in the mini-conferences do the same thing I do with regular
2 students you know non-ESL students which is
3 K: [Yeah
4 A: [when I start noticing a trend?
5 K: mhm?
6 A: You know, you have to hone in on that trend,
7 K: Yeah
8 A: and sometimes you know it almost it will come out like we’re almost- you
9 know, it’s so severe we’re almost joking about it
10 K: Yeah
11 A: You know, you get to the point where we’re at the end of the semester you
12 say- and so for a non-ESL student, a regular/?/problems might be dropped
13 quotes. So/?/ Say here we are, dropped quotes, you’re still having problems with
14 dropped quotes. /*/ an ESL student it might be adding do
15 K: [Yeah
16 A: [ you know, as an
17 auxiliary for every verb
18 K: Exactly
19 A: or no articles
20 K: Yes
A: /?/ Well, here we are, you know, you have to add the or you have to drop do.
You know, but you try to- you try to hone in on those problems.

Here, as Al responds to my question about his approach to ESL patterns in his students’ writings (Int. q. 8), he first describes a writing challenge common to native speakers (i.e., “dropped quotes,” lines 12-14). Moreover, his repetition of the NP “dropped quotes” here, along with his repetition of the noun “problem” in lines 12 and 13, creates the impression that “dropped quotes” are a grammar issue that he finds troubling. On the other hand, Al’s prior repetition of the noun “trend” at the beginning of the extract (“when I start noticing a trend,” line 4; “you have to hone in on that trend,” line 6) has already created a less pejorative context for his use of the noun “problem.” That is, while the meaning features of “problem” often suggest a more negative stance than do those of some near synonyms (e.g., “issue” or “challenge”), they appear to be tempered here by the more neutral semantic traits of “trend.”

The mitigating effect of “trend” is enhanced, moreover, through Al’s choice of the VP “hone in on” (“you have to hone in on that trend,” line 6; you try to hone in on those problems,” line 22). That is, when Al also refers to the ESL patterns of adding “do” as an auxiliary verb (lines 14-17 and 21) and the tendency to include “no articles” (lines 19-21) as “those problems” (line 22), the pejorative semantic traits associate with “problem” are softened by the more neutral semantic features of “hone in on.” Moreover, the fact that the verb “hone in on” takes both “trend” and “problem” as its complement in parallel phrase structures (i.e., “hone in on that trend,” line 6, and “hone in on those problems,” line 22), creates a connection between these two nouns that helps to alleviate some of the pejorative meaning features of “problem.” Thus by alternating the more negative noun “problem” with the more neutral “trend” and by highlighting their interchangeability through the use of a less pejorative VP (i.e., “hone in on”), Al also
manages to lessen the potentially negative impression that his use of the noun “problem” might create.

Finally, Al rarely uses adjectives such as “right,” “wrong,” “correct,” and “incorrect,” either to describe vernacular usage or to address general issues of grammatical accuracy. The one time that he uses the lexical item “wrong,” for example, he is referring to spelling rather than morphosyntax:

Extract 6.24

1. A: Because if you spell something wrong, you’re not, you’re not going to look credible.”

In the following extract, moreover, even as Al describes his students’ incorrect punctuation use, he avoids using adjectives such as “wrong” or “incorrect,” whose semantic features carry strong implications of error.

Extract 6.25

1. A: I try to do.. At least in [basic writing], I do like a three-week grammar unit.
3. A: And /?/ go through sentence level, you know. I mean, we do semicolons. We do apostrophes. We do commas. We do- we do the nuts and bolts, um because in [basic writing], it’s pretty much unanimous that that stuff is not where it should be.”

In this extract, Al avoids the dichotomous language of right and wrong as he discusses what is clearly the “incorrect” punctuation use of his students. Instead, he chooses the less direct ADVP “not where it should be” to describe his students’ punctuation use (lines 5-6). Even though his use of the modal “should” in this ADVP implies that the student’s punctuation is incorrect, its meaning features include slightly more ambiguity than those of adjectives such as “incorrect” or “wrong.” For example, unlike these adjectives, which share an either/or relationships with other adjectives (i.e., “correct” and “right”), the ADVP “not where it should
be” allows for a range of interpretations of what level of proficiency the students are expected to have reached. Thus Al’s avoidance of the lexical items “right,” “wrong,” “correct,” and “incorrect” in reference to general grammatical and writing issues may have also influenced his reluctance to use these adjectives when discussing vernacular issues as well (see Extracts 6.19 and 6.20).

In sum, the language that Al uses to refer to language variation appears to be part of a teaching vocabulary that generally lacks references to what is correct or incorrect, right or wrong, etc. On the few occasions when Al does use a lexical item such as ‘wrong” or “problem,” it is reserved for general writing challenges such as incorrect spelling, punctuation, or sentence structure, as well as ESL grammatical patterns and rhetorical styles. It is never used to refer to vernacular issues. In addition, Al’s references to different varieties of English by name (e.g., AAVE and Internet Vernacular) suggest that his attitude toward language variation is fairly advanced. At the same time, however, Al’s claim that he treats all varieties of English “the same” (Extract 6.19, line 19) makes it difficult to describe his morphosyntactic understanding of specific varieties such as AAVE.

6.4.1.4. A final comparison of the instructors’ awareness of rule-governed language variation

As the preceding discussion indicates, much of the instructors’ phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness is revealed through the specific lexical items they employ (or do not employ) to refer to both written and spoken vernacular usage. These lexical items include (1) words used in reference to the process of correction and revision; (2) names and terminology applied to different varieties of English and to language variation in general; and (3) vocabulary used to describe the challenges of addressing dialectal features in student writing. In addition, the instructors’ attitudes toward language variation are revealed through comparisons of
their references to vernacular usage on the one hand and general grammar and writing on the other. That is, the language they use to describe the vernacular is compared with their overall teaching vocabulary. Finally, the NPs, VPs, and APs, and ADVPs that all three instructors use suggest very different levels of phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness. For example, Barbara and Al exhibit a much greater understanding of phonological and morphosyntactic language variation than Rachael, but their lexical choices also suggest definite gaps in their knowledge.

In order to summarize the overall similarities and differences in the phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness of the three instructors, therefore, it is useful to examine them on a continuum of awareness ranging from “low” to “high” (Table 6.2 below). While this is a qualitative rather than a quantitative comparison, I nevertheless provide numeric categories ranging from 0 to 4 on the continuum in order to more clearly describe the different possible levels of phonological and morphosyntactic awareness. As indicated in the key, an instructor who considered all vernacular English to be an “incorrect” version of the standard and who did not tolerate any use of the vernacular (either spoken or written) in the classroom would be placed at the “low” end of the continuum (i.e. at level # 0). Similarly, if an instructor fully recognized the rule-governed nature of the varieties of English his or her students speak and were able to refer knowledgeably to this variety when discussing student writing, that instructor would be placed at the “high” end of the continuum (i.e., at level # 4). As the following continuum indicates, however, there are many grades of language awareness between these two poles, and the lexical choices of all three instructors suggest that they each fall somewhere in between. Moreover, it is again important to stress that this continuum does not address the strong “folk” awareness that characterizes the speech of all three instructors at certain points in the interviews.
(Preston 1996; 2002). Nor does it presume to precisely “measure” the instructors’ respective awareness of Edited American English phonology and morphosyntax. Rather, the continuum is presented as a visual representation of both the instructors’ general understanding of rule-governed language variation and their specific knowledge of the phonological and morphosyntactic patterning underlying the vernacular features in their students’ writings.

Table 6.2. Continuum of instructors’ awareness of rule-governed language variation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rachael</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Al</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low 0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key

0 Does not recognize or tolerate any varieties of English other than Standard English. Considers vernacular patterns to be incorrect forms of standard English and vernacular usage to be a form of slang. Rarely, if ever, addresses different varieties of English by name.

1 Tolerates the use of vernacular speech in conversation, but does not understand the rule-governed nature of different varieties of English. Considers vernacular patterns to be incorrect forms of Standard English and vernacular usage to be a form of slang. Rarely, if ever, addresses different varieties of English by name.

2 Recognizes that different vernaculars (e.g., AAVE) are legitimate varieties of English that may differ structurally from Standard English. Lacks understanding of the phonological or morphosyntactic features of specific varieties of English, but attempts to address these sensitively when they occur in student writing. Addresses different varieties of English by name, but also refers to their use as slang.

3 Demonstrates strong awareness that vernaculars (e.g., AAVE) are legitimate rule-governed varieties of English. Is able to recognize specific vernacular patterns that differ structurally from Standard English. Refers knowledgeably to these patterns when discussing their presence in student writing. Always refers to different varieties of English by name and never refers to their use as slang.

4 Demonstrates deep knowledge of the specific varieties of English spoken by students and refers to their use as legitimate rule-governed speech. Recognizes specific vernacular patterns that differ structurally from Standard English and refers knowledgeably to these patterns when discussing their presence in student writing. Always refers to different varieties of English by name and never refers to their use as slang.

As Rachael, Barbara, and Al all respect their students’ rights to speak in their own vernaculars during class discussions, none of them are placed at the lowest end of the continuum (i.e., at level # 0). Even Rachael, whose level of phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness (i.e., at level # 1) is the lowest of the three teachers, tolerates the spoken vernacular as long as students are discussing their ideas about writing. On the other hand, Rachael remains at a
lower level of the continuum than Barbara and Al, with both listed just below level # 3, for a number of reasons. For example, Rachael makes broad use of the lexical item “correct” as an adjective, verb, and adverb (i.e., correctly) when discussing vernacular usage, while Barbara and Al never use this item in references to the vernacular (except as a verb when noting that they do not “correct” the way their students speak). Moreover, when used as synonyms of “correct” or “incorrect,” Rachael’s lexical choices are far more derogatory than those she makes when referring to general grammar and writing issues (e.g., “just so poor” vs. “so bad”; “clean up” vs. “correct” or “fix,” etc.). They also appear more negative when compared with the lexical choices that Al and Barbara make when discussing vernacular patterns in their students’ writing. For example, Al uses verbs and VPs such as “point out,” “call attention to,” and “treat” rather than “correct,” suggesting a focus on noticing rather than simply correcting vernacular patterns. In the same vein, Barbara, who claims not to see many AAVE patterns in the writings of her African American students, nevertheless describes the efforts she makes not to “devalue” the vernacular when she does. Thus Rachael’s emphasis on “correcting” vernacular speech (in particular, AAVE) keeps her morphological and phonological awareness at a level no higher than # 1. Barbara and Al, on the other hand, are placed farther along the continuum than Rachael (i.e., close to #3) because they avoid the language of errors and correction when referring to language variation.

Rachael’s references to “slang coming in” and “sloppy slang writing” also keep her at level # 1, as does her failure to name the vernacular (i.e., AAVE). In fact, her one use of the term “Ebonics” occurs only as a reference to a student’s use of the name. Al and Barbara, who also refer to the vernacular as “slang,” are placed at a higher level on the continuum, however, because they refer less pejoratively to “slang” and are more likely to refer to different varieties of
English by name (i.e., African American Vernacular, Ebonics, Southern English, Internet Vernacular). At the same time, their levels of morphological and phonological language awareness do not fully reach level #3 because their references to “slang” suggest some misunderstanding of language variation.

The language that the instructors use to discuss the challenges of addressing vernacular patterns in student writing is also revealing. For example, the different ways in which the instructors use the noun “problem” to refer to AAVE and other vernacular patterns are significant. While Al never uses this lexical item when discussing the vernacular, Barbara alternates it with the less pejorative “issue” in discussions of AAVE and Rachael uses it solely in the context of vernacular patterns, reserving “issue” for general writing and grammar challenges. Thus Rachael, who has not completed any courses or workshops on language variation, considers the vernacular to be a problem that is beyond the scope of a basic writing class, while Barbara and Al both claim to address the vernacular pedagogically.

In addition, the different relationships between the instructors’ references to language variation and their overall teaching vocabularies also highlight their different levels of morphological and phonological language awareness. For example, while Rachael’s references to general grammar and writing instruction contain many lexical items such as “bad” and “incorrect,” her references to vernacular usage are far more pejorative (e.g., “sloppy,” “poor,” and “glaring”). As such, they further emphasize her view that vernacular patterns represent incorrect Standard English. On the other hand, Barbara, who refers to general grammar errors as “horrible,” uses carefully worded expressions such as “not seem to devalue” when referring to AAVE patterns, thus highlighting her understanding that AAVE is a legitimate variety of English. Moreover, Al’s general avoidance of words such as “incorrect” or “wrong” to describe
both general writing issues and issues related to language variation suggests that his positive
views of the vernacular may be partially influenced by his overall positive teaching beliefs. In
addition, his tendency to mitigate any references to general grammatical and writing “problems”
with lexical choices such as the VP “hone in on” or the noun “trend” is mirrored in his use of
VPs such as “call attention to” and “point to” in discussions of vernacular usage. That is, owing
to his overall focus on “noticing” rather than “correcting” general patterns in his students’
 writings, he may be better able to address vernacular patterns. In sum, the relationships between
Barbara’s and Al’s overall teaching vocabulary and the lexical items they choose when
discussing language variation also place them very close to level # 3 on the continuum. In
Rachael’s case, however, that same relationship serves to keep her firmly at level #1.

Finally, while Al’s and Barbara’s levels of phonological and morphosyntactic
understanding are placed farther along the continuum than Rachael’s, this placement is primarily
a result of their more positive attitudes toward the vernacular and their recognition that other
rule-governed varieties of English do exist. Their lack of reference to specific vernacular features
in their students’ writings, in particular those related to AAVE, indicates that they may have a
less detailed knowledge of the vernacular than would be useful in a linguistically diverse
classroom. For example, Al claims to treat all varieties of English “the same,” while Barbara
claims not to see many AAVE features in her students’ writings even though she also describes
some native English speakers who “don’t know which form of the verb to use.” Thus in spite of
Al’s and Barbara’s very positive attitudes toward language variation in the writing classroom, the
apparent gaps in their knowledge of specific grammatical and phonological features keeps them
from fully reaching level #3 on the continuum. As this continuum measures only the
phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness of the instructors, however, it is also important to view it the context of the other areas of language awareness discussed below.

6.4.2. Awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire

While developing a basic knowledge of phonological and morphosyntactic language variation is argued to be a fundamental step in broadening an instructor’s underlying language awareness (e.g., Labov 1972a, 1995; LeMoine and Hollie 20017; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler 2005; Wolfram et al. 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006), it does not represent the full scope of linguistic understanding expected by many linguists and education scholars. Rather, a more complete language awareness reflects a deeper understanding of students’ underlying linguistic competencies as well. Instructors with high levels of this type of awareness will have developed what Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) describe as an “additive” rather than a “replacive” view of the different varieties of English their students speak (p. 316). Thus in order to gain a better understanding of each instructor’s awareness of communicative competence, I explore how he or she claims to build on the different varieties of English students already use when helping them to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. As the following analysis reveals, Rachael demonstrates the least understanding of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire, while both Barbara and Al attempt to incorporate their understanding into classroom pedagogy.

Some of the most noticeable examples of the instructors’ awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire occur in their responses to my question about the circumstances in which they “would encourage a student to incorporate his or her native language (or dialect) into the writing process” (Int. q. 9). For example, while Rachael reveals a
certain tolerance for the idea that students would be more comfortable using the vernacular to
discuss their ideas, her lexical choices nevertheless suggest a heavily “replacement” attitude:

Extract 6.26

1 R: Well, class discussion... I mean, we have class discussions and that’s just the
2 way people talk and I get past their remarks since that’s the way you talk and I
3 mean we’re just having a discussion and I’m not grading you on – This is not a
4 public speaking class, so- um- and I know... um you know to me that makes it...
5 if they’re going to worry about speaking correctly, then they’re not going to
6 discuss things in class so and that’s not in the scope of this course. I want them
7 to learn how to write. Talk however you want, as long as we talk about writing.
8 K: Yeah.
9 R: So, um, it’s just- it’s like engaging. You know, if they can free themselves up
10 enough not to worry about speaking more formally than they would normally,
11 then that means that they’re really engaged. You know, they’re not worried
12 about their grammar. They’re just getting their ideas out, which is you know the
13 first part of writing. Don’t worry about it. Just get it down and then clean it up
14 later.

In this extract, while the NPs “the way people talk” and “the way you talk” (lines 1-2) indicate
Rachael’s recognition of the vernacular as a genuine component of her students’ linguistic
repertoires, her use of the adverb “just” (“that’s just the way people talk,” lines 1-2) implies that
it is a less important one. Moreover, even though she claims that correcting students’ speech is
“not in the scope of this course” (line 6), some of her lexical choices reveal a belief that it should
be corrected at some point. For example, the repeated use of the VP “(not) worry” (lines 5, 10,
11, and 13) creates the impression that under different circumstances the students should be
worried about the way they are speaking. This is suggested in lines 5and 6, in particular, when
Rachael states that students should not “worry about speaking correctly” because doing so will
prevent them from expressing their ideas. Here the adverb “correctly” actually serves to highlight
how students are not speaking in her view. So, too, in lines 9 and 10, Rachael’s claim that
students need to “free themselves up” in order “not to worry about speaking more formally”
suggests that they are already worried about doing so. Moreover, her two references to grammar
(“not worried about their grammar,” line 12; “Don’t worry about it,” line 13) create the implication that vernacular speech is actually incorrect grammar. Finally, even though one might argue that Rachael understands her students’ abilities to choose between two varieties of English for different purposes (i.e. the vernacular for discussion and Edited American English for writing), her level of understanding appears diminished by her use of the VPs “get past” (“I get past their remarks,” line 2) and “clean up” (“clean it up later,” lines 13-14).

In sum, while Rachael does tolerates the vernacular as a useful tool for class discussions that students can “clean up” later, her lexical choices reflect very little awareness of her students’ underlying linguistic competencies. In dismissing the vernacular as something that will ultimately be “replaced” by correct Standard English, Rachael appears unaware of the value of building on the vernacular in order to add Edited American English to students’ linguistic repertoires (e.g., Rickford 1999).

Barbara, on the other hand, demonstrates a much deeper understanding of her students’ linguistic repertoires and their abilities to make linguistic choices. In the following extract, for example, she refers to her own use of a Southern English verb phrase:

**Extract 6.27**

1. B: You know, what I tell them is, and I’m from the South, right? And you know, in my class, when I’m talking to them conversationally, - Have you ever heard of the ter- the phrase fixin to?-  
3. B: I’m fixin to go to work, whatever?  
5. B: Alright, I have said- I say- I use that kind of dialect in my [class  
6. K: [Yeah  
7. B: and what I tell them is ‘if you’re- when you’re having a conversation, nothing wrong with it, perfectly fine, you know, as long as it’s not offensive.’ I was like ‘but don’t make the mistake of writing the way you talk.’ I was like ‘just-’ You know, I was like ‘think of an anchor person, you know, do anchor people have southern accents? Do anchor people talk like they’re from the Bronx?’ I was like ‘it’s
not because there’s something wrong with a southern accent or you know, a Brooklyn accent, but it’s- there’s just like a level standard…” And I also tell them like ‘look, I totally agree that it’s pretty boring,’
you know? [I mean I try to-
K: [The standard is boring, yeah.
B: I mean, I try to get them to understand that I’m on their side when it comes to that, but I just stress professionalism and just tell them in writing you do not use slang. In writing you don’t want to reveal your region
K: [Yeah
B: [you know, typically
unless there is a rhetorical reason. Like if you’re writing a travel brochure for New Orleans, then maybe you want to sound like you’re from there.
K: Yeah
B: Um and but I- my main thing again is that I just explain that ‘the writing situation that we are typically in, that I’m helping you to be in, to function in, is a professional one...or an academic one.’

Here, Barbara, like Rachael, notes that students should not “make the mistake of writing the way you talk” (line 11). Yet unlike Rachael, who claims that she is able to “get past” the way her students speak (Extract 6.26, line 2), Barbara identifies with her students by choosing a specific VP from her own Southern English (i.e., “fixin to,” lines 3 and 5) to demonstrate the value of using one’s own dialect in conversation. She also strengthens the appropriateness of such usage with affirmative lexical choices such as the NP “nothing wrong” (line 10) and the AP “perfectly fine” (line 10).

The lexical items Barbara uses to refer to Standard English, moreover, reflect an effort to treat it as an addition to (rather than a replacement for) the varieties of English her students already speak. For example, by referring to SE as “a level standard” (line 16) instead of “Standard English,” Barbara takes the focus off any innate superiority suggested by the noun “standard” and places it instead on the utilitarian value of having a standard in certain contexts. She accomplishes this both through her use of the article “a” instead of the zero article and through her choice of the adjective “level,” which implies that speakers of more than one variety of English find this standard useful. This implication is enhanced, moreover, through Barbara’s
detailed list of NPs describing regional language variation (i.e., “southern accent(s),” lines 13 and 14-15; “The Bronx,” line 14; “Brooklyn accent,” line 16; and “New Orleans,” line 26).

Moreover, by repeating the NP “anchor person/people” in lines 13 and 14 to refer to a typical SE speaker, Barbara puts the focus on a professional situation (i.e., news reporting) in which SE is likely to be used rather than on the speaker alone. She does this as well with her choice of the NPs “writing situation,” “professional one,” and “academic one” in the following sentence: “I just explain that the writing situation that we are typically in, that I’m helping you to be in, to function in, is a professional one...or an academic one” (lines 28-30). Here, by repeatedly using NPs that emphasize the type of writing situation rather than the correctness or incorrectness of the writing, Barbara again highlights her belief in the students’ competence to choose from their linguistic repertoires. This viewpoint is further accentuated, moreover, by her repetition of the pattern “V + in” in the following clause: “the writing situation that we are typically in, that I’m helping you to be in, to function in, is a professional one...or an academic one.” (line 29). Here, as she stresses the view of students learning to “be in” or “function in” a professional or academic environment, Barbara creates the image of students actively participating in academia, thus stressing her belief that they can use Edited American English for their own purposes should they choose to do so. As Tannen (2007) argues, such repetition often serves to emphasize and thus reveal the underlying beliefs of a speaker. Finally, Barbara’s choice of the NP “rhetorical reason” (line 25) to describe a situation in which one might choose to write in a local variety of English (“Like if you’re writing a travel brochure for New Orleans,” lines 25-26) also highlights the idea of choosing from one’s linguistic repertoire for a specific purpose. That is, rather than imply that the local variety is a form of “incorrect” Standard English (as
Rachael does), Barbara describes a context in which it would be more appropriate than Standard English.

In the following extract, Barbara makes a similar point as she appears to criticize the very concept of language standardization (Int. q. 19):

**Extract 6.28**

1. B: ........................................... and I think, you know, the
2. standardization does tend to devalue other dialects. It’s like there’s only one
3. way, you know, one verb that can possibly work here.
4. K: [Laughs]
5. B: Well, that really depends on the purpose of that communication.
6. K: Yes
7. B: So I think that if people could just focus on purpose and audience and
8. situation instead of ‘This is how it should be all the time,’
9. K: [Yeah
10. B: ........................................... that would be better. You know, um because I um think it’s a shame to devalue other
11. languages, which is like the English Only movement?/ And just like the
12. Ebonics thing, I mean devaluing African American……..

In this passage, Barbara’s repetition of certain lexical items serves to bolster her view that students who speak different varieties of English have the competence to make appropriate choices from their linguistic repertoires. For example, her repetition of the noun “purpose” (lines 5 and 7), along with her use of the semantically related nouns “audience” (line 7) and “situation” (line 8), serves as a clear intertextual repetition of her original emphasis on “writing situation” in the prior exchange (Extract 6.27, lines 28-29).

Moreover, Barbara’s repetition of the VP “devalue” throughout this passage (i.e., “devalue other dialects,” line 2; “devalue other languages,” lines 11-12, and “devaluing African American,” line 13) not only echoes her earlier claim that she does not want to seem to “devalue” her students’ vernaculars (Extract 6.10, line 10), it also accentuates the “value” she places on the other languages and language varieties in her students’ linguistic repertoires. In
other words, it suggests that her references to audience, situation, and purpose include appropriate contexts for the vernacular as well.

Finally, Barbara’s specific references to the controversy over bilingual education (the “English Only movement,” line 12) and the opposition to pedagogical approaches that use the vernacular to teach Edited American English (the “Ebonics thing,” lines 12-13) both serve to accentuate her belief in the linguistic competence of multilingual and multidialectal students. That is, by bolstering her claim that it is a “shame” to devalue “other languages” (lines 11-12) and “African American” (line 12), these references also serve as a thematic repetition of her emphasis on students’ linguistic repertoires.

At the same time, however, a number of Barbara’s lexical choices in Extract 6.27 (above) suggest that additional phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness would further strengthen her awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire. For example, her confusion of dialect with “slang” (line 22) and her suggestion that in some cases its use might be “offensive” (line 11) may prevent her from distinguishing between genuine AAVE slang and other AAVE patterns that are in fact not slang (e.g., the use of “ain’t,” Rickford 1999). Using the noun “slang” to refer to permanent rule-governed patterns of AAVE may actually confuse students as they learn to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. Moreover, Barbara’s choice of the NP “accent” to refer to different varieties of English (i.e. “Southern accent,” line 13; “Brooklyn accent,” line 15) is confusing, as it is not clear whether she is referring simply to phonological features of the vernacular or to morphosyntactic patterns as well (e.g., “fixin to,” lines 3 and 5). Thus, while Barbara clearly demonstrates great respect for the place of the vernacular in certain types of communication, it is not always clear from her interview responses how fully able she is to build on the vernacular (e.g., through pedagogical
approaches such as contrastive analysis) when helping students to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. What can be deduced from her lexical choices, however, is that Barbara does make an effort to refer pedagogically to the varieties of English her students speak and to build on their abilities to choose among them.

Al also puts a heavy emphasis on linguistic repertoire in his discussions of the vernacular. Frequently citing the work of David Crystal (2001), he introduces Internet language into the discussion almost every time the issue of language variation arises. For example, when I ask for his views on “the use of languages or dialects other than standard academic English in the classroom” (Int. q. 9), he describes a typical assignment that he gives his technical writing students:

**Extract 6.29**

1 A: And I had students writing a blog about the election. Ah, and I let them use informal language. I mean, and not- I told them- I told them spelling counts
2 K: Yeah
3 A: Because if you spell something wrong, you’re not, you’re not going to look credible.
4 K: Exactly.
5 A: But, you know, I allowed for shorter sentences, headlines, photographs, ah, you know, sort of multimedia-[um...
6 K: [mhm
7 A: sarcasm, you know, things like that
8 K: Right
9 A: that they use
10 K: Right
11 A: Because the end goal is to get them writing in an effective way about something important. You know, and then for one of the blog assignments, they took a standard paper that they wrote and converted it into a blog.
12 K: Interesting.
13 A: And that was an interesting process. .. to watch things go from- because then they’re actively applying the idea of professional language vs. public language.

Here it is clear from the APs that Al chooses to describe Internet language (i.e., “informal,” line 2, and “public,” line 19) that for him, Internet language encompasses a broad range of variety.
Whether this includes dialectal variation, however, is not entirely clear. The different NPs that he uses to characterize Internet language (e.g., “shorter sentences, headlines, photographs,” line 7; “sarcasm,” line 10, and “things like that that they use,” lines 10-11), create an image of stylistic rather than grammatical variation. Yet the fact that this extract occurs during Al’s response to my question about the use of different languages or dialects in his writing classes also suggests that he is referring to morphosyntactic language variation as well.

In this extract, moreover, Al’s decision to create a specific venue for the use of Internet language in his class (i.e., a class “blog,” lines 1 and 15) indicates that he not only recognizes the communicative competence of his students, but also makes an effort to build on that competence when adding Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. This is most evident in his description of an assignment in which students “took a standard paper that they wrote and converted it into a blog” (line 15). Not only do the NPs “standard paper” and “blog” suggest two equally valid writing contexts, but the fact that students are adapting the paper into a blog rather than the other way around adds validity to the blog itself. This validity is enhanced, moreover, by Al’s choice of the adjective “standard” to describe the paper that is being converted into a blog. By evoking the image of “Standard” English, which can in turn be adapted to the vernacular in the context of a blog, this adjective strengthens the validity of the vernacular as well. In addition, Al’s choice of the verb “convert” serves to highlight his impression of his students’ communicative competence. As Merriam-Webster (online) notes, two meanings of the verb are “to change from one form or function to another” and “to alter for more effective utilization.” Thus by describing the students’ abilities to convert a standard paper, which is written in “professional language” (line 18) into a blog that makes use of vernacular speech (i.e., “public
language,” line 19), Al also focuses on their abilities to choose from one variety of English in their linguistic repertoires to another.

In spite of Al’s very positive references to language variation, however, it is not clear that Al fully understands the “rule-governed” nature of language variation. For example, he uses the lexical items “voice” and “language” interchangeably in Extract 6.29 (above) and Extract 6.18 (repeated here for convenience):

1  A: I mean, I never correct a student for the way they speak.
2  K: Yeah.
3  A: Um, and I try to- I call a lot of attention to register
4  K: Yes.
5  A: You know. Um, I do a whole lesson in tech writing on *personal, public, and*
6  professional voice.

That is, his choice of the adjectives “public” and “professional” to modify both the noun “voice” in Extract 6.18 (“public and professional voice,” lines 5-6) and the noun “language” in Extract 6.29 (“the idea of professional language vs. public language,” lines 18-19) suggests that he perceives the nouns to be semantically equivalent. Yet while both nouns can refer to writing style (e.g., informal “voice” or informal “language”), the noun “language” can also refer to a specific language variety or the way words are “used and understood by a community” (Merriam-Webster, online). Moreover, as noted above, both of the extracts in which these nouns occur are excerpted from Al’s responses to Interview question 9, which refers to the use of other languages and dialects in the writing classroom. Thus it is not clear whether Al’s use of “voice” and “language” interchangeably reflects an understanding of the sociolinguistic reality that phonological and morphosyntactic features of a variety are often used by speakers for stylistic reasons (Schilling-Estes 2002), or whether it reflects a belief that separate language varieties such as AAVE are simply “styles” of speech (vs. rule-governed varieties). As Schilling-Estes (2002) notes in her essay on stylistic variation, “intraspeaker variation can involve shifts into and
out of language varieties, whether dialects, registers, or \textit{genres}” (p. 375), and “variationists have for decades debated exactly what should be subsumed under the notion ‘stylistic variation’” (p. 376). In the current study, which attempts to define the instructors’ understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation, however, it is important to distinguish what beliefs Al’s interchangeable use of nouns such as “voice” and “language” actually represents.

Moreover, an exploration of other similar lexical choices suggests that Al’s understanding of linguistic repertoire may in fact be somewhat limited to issues of formality and informality rather than broader linguistic differences. This is particularly noticeable in the following extract, also from his response to Interview question 9:

\textbf{Extract 6.30}

1 A: But I think that \textit{Black, White, Latin}, anything, at this point, one of the biggest issues with \textit{informal versus formal language} is the way that students write on the Internet. I really do.

Here, by combining different varieties of English (i.e., “Black, White, Latin,” line 1) under the single umbrella of “informal versus formal language” (line 2), Al appears to ignore other phonological and morphosyntactic differences that might exist. Thus, if he considers a variety such as AAVE to be an “informal” variety of English, he may miss the opportunity to help students notice some of the deeper syntactic differences between their varieties and Edited American English.

Moreover, when I press Al to describe his approach to AAVE features in particular (Int. q. 7), his views on linguistic repertoire and communicative competence are less clear:

\textbf{Extract 6.31}

1 A: Um, you know, I- I- I kinda subscribe to the idea like \textit{Lisa Delpit} says,
2 K: [Yeah
3 A: [you
know, that students from ah nontraditional backgrounds and students from outside of the professional .. academic .. [realm
K: [Exactly
A: want to be given the [keys
K: [Yeah
A: to
that realm, you know.

Here, Al’s choices of the nouns “realm” (lines 5, 10) and “keys” (line 7) are initially puzzling, as the word “realm” (a synonym of “kingdom”) appears to give higher status to Edited American English and the professional and academic environments in which it is used. His reference to Lisa Delpit, however, suggests that he is incorporating her argument that students who do not add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires will be at a disadvantage, however unfair that might be (e.g., Delpit 1992, 2006). Moreover, the fact that Delpit also places a great amount of importance on the need for teachers to focus on both the grammatical features of AAVE and the discourse styles associated with its use suggests that Al may in fact be using the nouns “realm” and “key” in a less regal context, perhaps referring instead to academic and professional “domains.”

As all of the extracts discussed here reveal, Al clearly values the use of different varieties of English in different contexts. By encouraging his students to convert a standard paper into a blog, he takes the emphasis off “correct” or “incorrect” writing and places it instead on the contexts in which he believes vernacular features would or would not be appropriate. Like Barbara, Al recognizes that the vernaculars his students speak are important and legitimate components of their linguistic repertoires. On the other hand, a deeper understanding of the specific varieties of English his students speak would strengthen his existing awareness of linguistic repertoire and communicative competence.
In sum, the three instructors’ differing awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire is revealed in their varied lexical choices. This difference is best viewed, moreover, on a continuum of teaching approaches ranging from “replacive” to “additive” (e.g., Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). As can be seen in Table 6.3 (on the following page), Rachael’s approach to language variation puts her on the lower “replacive” end of the continuum, while Barbara’s and Al’s approaches place them very close to the “additive” end. For example, Rachael’s belief that vernaculars such as AAVE are grammatically incorrect versions of Standard English leads her to want to “replace” one variety of English with one that is considered more correct. While the vernacular speech of Rachael’s students is something she tolerates and claims to “get past” as long as her students talk about writing, it is also something that must be “cleaned up” when they finally begin to write.

Barbara and Al, on the other hand, are placed closer to the “additive” end of the continuum since they each view Edited American English as an addition to their students’ repertoires. For them, vernacular speech is legitimate and appropriate in certain contexts (e.g., conversations, travel brochures, the Internet) and is thus a part of their students’ existing repertoires. Moreover, both Barbara and Al make an effort to explain the conventions of Edited American English by building on their students’ existing linguistic competence, Barbara through discussions of her own vernacular speech, and Al through writing assignments that emphasize the contexts in which either the vernacular or Edited American English would be most appropriate. At the same time, however, Barbara and Al are not placed at the far “additive” end of the continuum, since their limited phonological and morphosyntactic understanding prevent them from fully building on their students’ existing linguistic competence. Specifically,
additional knowledge of the differences between language varieties, slang and informal language would also enhance their understanding of their students’ linguistic repertoires.

Table 6.3. Continuum of instructors’ awareness of linguistic repertoire and communicative competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rachael</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Replacive</th>
<th>Additive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key

0 | Does not recognize the underlying communicative competence of multidialectal students. Does not consider vernacular speech to be appropriate in any context and believes that it should be replaced by Standard English. Is unable to view vernacular speech as a useful part of a student’s linguistic repertoire.
1 | Tolerates the use of vernacular speech in conversation and demonstrates some understanding of linguistic repertoire. Does not fully appreciate the communicative competence of multidialectal students, and fails to build on their knowledge of the vernacular when helping them to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires.
2 | Recognizes that multidialectal students are able to choose the contexts in which they will use one variety of English versus another. Uses this understanding of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire as a basis for instruction and focuses primarily on contexts in which Edited American English would be more appropriate than the vernacular. Concentrates primarily on the differences between formal and informal language.
3 | Recognizes that multidialectal students are able to choose the contexts in which they will use one variety of English versus another. Uses this understanding of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire as a basis for instruction. Focuses primarily on contexts in which Edited American English would be more appropriate than another variety of English in the student’s repertoire, but also discusses different contexts (both formal and informal) in which the student’s variety might be more appropriate.
4 | Recognizes that multidialectal students are able to choose the contexts in which they will use one variety of English versus another. Uses this understanding of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire as a basis for instruction. Discusses the different contexts in which students choose from their linguistic repertoires. Uses detailed knowledge of students’ varieties of English to help them build on their underlying communicative competence. Assumes that approaches such as contrastive analysis will better equip students to choose which variety of English to use in a particular circumstance.

6.4.3 Sensitivity to community ties and dialect rights

As has been discussed in the literature, instructors who focus on the vernacular in their class discussions through contrastive analysis and other pedagogical approaches are likely to see positive results in their students’ acquisition of Edited American English (e.g., Rickford 1999, 2006; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989). So, too, instructors who critically explore the importance
of the vernacular in the lives of their students can also heighten students’ awareness of the choices they make when deciding to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires (Alim 2005, 2010; Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Lippi-Green 1997). In order to understand the instructors’ sensitivity to the importance of students’ home languages, therefore, I (re-)examine and compare their lexical choices from this perspective as well. As the following analysis indicates, the three teachers’ sensitivities to community ties and dialect rights differ significantly, with Rachael demonstrating the least amount of understanding and Barbara and Al revealing levels of awareness that reflect their own studies of linguistic diversity.

In the following extract, during which Rachael discusses a student’s reference to the way she and her family speak at home, her lack of awareness concerning the importance of the student’s home language is particularly noticeable.

**Extract 6.32**

```
1 R: You know, I started my first teaching job right out of college. It was in inner city XX in '??' Catholic school and I was trying to teach grammar and I had a student who said, ‘But my mom says it this way,’ and I just had to say, ‘Well, you know, I say things too, but when I write them down, I write them differently,’” so that’s been my approach
2 K: [Yeah.
3 R: [and that’s how I started this class. Like
4 ‘It’s not a transcription of your conversation and it’s not a diary entry. It’s formal writing. You can go ahead and talk this way and I do it. Everybody does it. But when you [write,
5 K: [Yeah.
6 R: you’re writing for other people. You- there’s an expectation in college academic writing that you will write this [way
7 K: [Right.
8 R: and that’s just the way it is.
```

In this exchange, it is significant that Rachael begins by describing a conversation that occurred between her and a middle-school student during a grammar lesson. Noting that the student challenged whatever grammar point she was making with the remark that her mother
“says it this way” (line 3), Rachael seems at a loss on how to address the student’s reference to her mother’s speech. For example, she chooses the vague VP “say things” (“I say things too,” line 4) to avoid directly criticizing the student’s home language, but does not appear to take the opportunity to bring the student’s vernacular into the discussion. Rather, her repetition of the pronoun “I” takes the focus away from the mother’s home speech and puts it on the language of the teacher (“I say things too, but when I write them down, I write them differently,” line 4). In addition, Rachael’s use of the adverb “not” (“It’s not a transcription of your conversation and it’s not a diary entry,” line 8) to describe Edited American English creates a gulf between EAE and the home language of the student. Moreover, by creating this gulf, Rachael misses the opportunity to address the importance of the student’s home language and thus build on it when adding EAE to the student’s repertoire (Rickford 1999). So, too, by using the NP “expectation” when referring to academic language (“there’s an expectation in college academic writing that you will write this way” (line 13), Rachael appears unaware of other expectations that the student may face concerning appropriate language choice. That is, she (inadvertently) ignores the conflict the student may feel between using the grammatical structures of Edited American English and using those she is expected to use at home and in her community (Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Moreover, Rachael’s matter-of-fact comment “That’s just the way it is” (lines 15-16) also suggests far less introspection into why the student might argue that her mother “says it this way” (line 3). As Alim (2010) and others have noted, students who experience conflict between their own language use and that targeted by the schools may consciously or subconsciously resist the acquisition of Edited American English.
Barbara’s sensitivity to community ties and dialectal rights is revealed in discussions of both her classroom interactions with students and her educational background. While she does not focus specifically on her students’ own linguistic ties to their homes and communities, her lexical choices do reveal some perception of the ‘covert prestige’ of the vernacular (Milroy and Milroy 1999). For example, in lines 16-21 of Extract 6.27 (repeated here for convenience), she appears to understand her students’ reluctance to abandon the vernacular in their writing:

16  B: And I also tell them like ‘look, I totally agree that it’s pretty boring,’
17  you know? [I mean I try to-
18  K: [The standard is boring, yeah.
19  B: I mean, I try to get them to understand that I’m on their side when it comes to
20  that, but I just stress professionalism and just tell them in writing you do not use
21  slang. In writing you don’t want to reveal your region

Here, while Barbara’s choice of the adjective “boring” (line 17) implies (correctly or incorrectly) that her students find Edited American English uninteresting, her use of the prepositional phrase (PP) “on their side” (“I try to get them to understand that I’m on their side,” line 20) indicates that she is at least makes the effort to understand their reluctance to abandon the vernacular in their writing.

In the following extract, moreover, Barbara’s response to my question about any courses or workshops on linguistic diversity that she has completed (Int. q. 15) suggests that she has some understanding of the importance of the vernacular in students’ home lives:

**Extract 6.33**

1  B: mhm, actually um, well, you know, in the XXXX, um, we read you know, like
2  *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, um *Freire*, you know, and we talked about
3  *Experience and Education* by *Dewey*, and just talking about how *where* students
4  come from, including *their linguistic background*, *how* much that plays out in
5  the classroom and *how* we do... *we value Standard English, Standard White
6  English*, you know, *what* does that *mean.*
In this extract, Barbara’s decision to name specific educational theorists who examine the relationship between education and the lives and experiences of students (i.e., Freire and Dewey) in lines 2-3 creates a thematic platform for the subsequent discussion of the relationship between students’ backgrounds and the general educational emphasis on Standard English in lines 5-6. Moreover, her repetition of the adverb “how” (“how much that plays out in the classroom and how we value Standard English, lines 4-5), along with her use of the “wh” pronouns “where” and “what” (“where students come from,” lines 3-4; what does that mean,” line 6) not only creates a list effect, it also helps Barbara to focus the entire response on one key point - - her recognition that “Standard English” (line 5) is perceived by some students as “Standard White English (line 7). As discussed in Chapter 2, speaking Standard English is often considered a form of “talking white” (Baugh 2005, p. 8, referring to Fordham and Ogbu 1985; see also Alim’s 2010 reference to “white ways of talking,” p. 213). Finally, Barbara’s use of the lexical item “mean” (“what does that mean,” line 6) as her final word on the subject suggests that she is open to developing further insights on the conflicts some students face when adding EAE to their linguistic repertoires. Thus while Barbara does not refer specifically to the importance of the vernacular in her own students’ lives, her lexical choices suggest that she is in the process of developing critical awareness of the social issues that affect the writing instruction of vernacular speakers.

Like Barbara, Al also reveals an underlying awareness of the social conflicts that some vernacular speakers face when adding Standard or Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. In the following extract, for example, he describes some of the interactions he observed between students at the historically black university (HBU) where he formerly taught freshman composition:
Extract 6.34

A: ………………………………………………………………………..Um, and one of the uh most interesting things was the black students – I mean all of the students were black- I had two white students in um eight classes total

K: Wow

A: Um, the black students who went to mostly white high schools and then decided they wanted to go to an [HBU] [Yeah found themselves being ostracized]

K: Interesting. So that- I know that happens at the high school level, but it happens at the college level as well.

A: But they thought ‘I’ve always gone to school with white people. I want to go to school and fit in,’ and then that became difficult for them. And um, also, students um, you know, being in XXXX [the city where the HBU is located] and students coming down from NC and Alabama and students coming from Philadelphia and New York City. And the cultural clashes were really interesting.

Here, while Al never refers directly to language itself, his heavy repetition of the adjectives “black” and “white” throughout the exchange suggests that he is at least aware of some of the issues that might cause “cultural clashes” at an HBU. Whether any of these relate to language variation among AAVE speakers from a variety of geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds is not evident in Al’s descriptions of his time at the HBU. As Baugh (2005) and others have noted, however, African American Vernacular English is integrally tied to African American culture, and a rejection of the language can be perceived as a rejection of the culture. It is surprising, therefore, that Al makes no references to language when discussing the cultural clashes he observed. For example, Baugh (2005) notes that some African American students who adopt Standard English are not only accused of “talking white,” but are often actively excluded by their African American peers (p. 8; see also Labov 1972a). Thus Al’s description of some African American students who had attended “white high schools” (line 5) with “white people” (line 12) and who were thus “ostracized” for not
being “black enough” (lines 8-9) certainly suggests that the ostracism related, at least in part, to their use of Standard English. Moreover, Al’s repetition of the verb “want” in the VPs “wanted to go to an HBU” (line 6) and “want to go to school and fit in” (lines 12-13) creates the impression that he is certainly aware of the conflicts some students felt. So too does his juxtaposition of the verb “fit in” with the adjective “difficult” (“’I want to go to school and fit in,’ and then that became difficult for them,” lines 12-13). Thus it is puzzling that such an observant teacher would never mention language per se. On the other hand, Al’s descriptions of the courses he has completed in a PhD program devoted to education and linguistic diversity reveals that he has certainly been exposed to scholarship on language use in multidialectal classrooms (Int. q. 15). In the following extract, for example, he summarizes what he considers to be the “issues of language diversity” (line 3):

**Extract 6. 35:**

1 A: I think the overview classes are [really
2 K: [Yeah
3 A: about the **issue of language**
4 *diversity*. Ah, **English as a global** [language,
5 K: [mhm
6 A: [um, um, **language [rights,**
7 K: [Yeah
8 A: um,
9 **socioeconomic differences**, ah **pedagogy and negotiation of dialect**. You know,
10 things like that.

Here, the specific NPs that Al uses to describe issues of linguistic diversity create the impression of a broad socio-political awareness of the issues. By listing the NP “pedagogy and negotiation of dialect” (line 9) with the NPs “English as a global language” (line 4), “language rights” (line 6), and “socioeconomic differences” (line 9), Al also implies that the issue of language variation in the classroom relates as well to the issue of “language rights.” Moreover, his use of the noun “negotiation” in connection with the nouns “pedagogy” and
“dialect” (line 9) reflects his awareness that “dialect” needs to be addressed interactively in the classroom, with give and take between the instructor and the students. In focusing on the importance of this interaction, Al also implies that he understands the reluctance that some students feel when adding Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. Thus Al’s choice of NPs also serves to frames his language awareness in a critical light.

Finally, in the following extract, Al’s description of his efforts to incorporate this awareness into classroom discussions of “race and language differences” (line 18) not only reveals the challenges he faces in doing so, but also suggests that he would benefit from pedagogical materials that focused specifically on these issues (e.g., Alim 2010).

Extract 6.36

1 A: ........................ And I’ve always said like- especially when you were talking about XXXX [the HBU where he previously taught] before, it- As things progressed at XXXX [the HBU], you [know,
2 K: [Yeah
3 A: I was able to sort of develop a dialogue
4 K: [Yeah
5 A: [and as over-simplified as it was, it was sort of accepted since I was the only white person that you know I would I would be saying the white opinion and I would get in return from the students once they felt comfortable with me, you know, the opposite opinion, the black opinion, but at a school like XXXX [the community college where he currently teaches], because we're diverse, there's not so much open conversation, ironically, because no one wants to step on the other person's toes.
6 K: I see, so everybody is a little more careful.
7 A: So, I've never...I tried the first semester because I was coming from XXXX [the HBU] to have extensive dialogue about race and language differences
8 K: Uh huh
9 A: It didn't go that well. [So-
10 K: [What happened?
11 A: Ah I think everyone felt generally uncomfortable.[Um
12 K: [Yeah, and you could sense that.
13 A: I could sense that. And I couldn't open people up. And then they're thinking that I'm trying to drive – you know, have an axe to grind of some kind.

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In this extract, Al’s repetition of the noun “dialogue” (“I was able to sort of develop a dialogue,” lines 5-6; “I tried … to have extensive dialogue about race and language differences,” lines 16-17) serves to highlight the contrast between his efforts to critically discuss language variation with students at an HBU and his attempt to conduct similar discussions at a more diverse community college. That is, by noting that he was “able to develop” such a dialogue at the HBU, while “it didn’t go that well” (line 19) at the community college, Al also opens the door to deeper exploration of the social issues his students face when adding Edited American English to their repertoires. These issues are further highlighted, moreover, by his repetition of the lexical item “comfortable” (“once they felt comfortable with me” (line 10); “I think everyone felt generally uncomfortable (line21). That is, while students are comfortable discussing language variation with him in an environment where AAVE clearly has “covert prestige” (Milroy and Milroy 1999), they are less comfortable discussing it with him in an environment where it is not the home and community language of the majority of students. In using the NP “axe to grind” (line 25) and the VP “couldn't open people up” (line 24), moreover, Al not only creates a vivid image of the lack of trust he senses at the more diverse community college, he also reveals a lack of awareness of successful pedagogical approaches that have enabled instructors to have such discussions in multilingual environments (e.g., Alim 2010; Reaser 2006; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram et al. 1999).

The lexical items that Al uses to describe his successful conversations about language differences also suggest the need for addition training in ways to conduct more critical discussions of students’ home and community languages. For example, his use of the very general NPs “white opinion” (lines 9-10) and “black opinion” (line 11) suggests that he is
attempting to focus on broader issues than the phonological and morphosyntactic differences between AAVE and Edited American English. So, too, does his description of himself as “the only white person” in the HBU class he taught (line 9). Yet his repetition of the qualifying ADVP “sort of” (“I was able to sort of develop a dialogue” lines 5-6; it was sort of accepted since I was the only white person …,” lines 8-9) suggest that he was not as successful as he would have liked to have been. As Alim (2010) argues, for example, in order to have truly meaningful conversations about language use in the classroom, the students themselves should “be able to analyze their own communication behavior in their everyday environments from their actual lived experiences” (p. 217). Thus if Al were able to apply pedagogical approaches that focus on the ethnography of communication (e.g., Hymes 1964, 1972, discussed in Alim 2010, pp. 216-220), he would be better prepared to build on his underlying awareness of the importance of the vernacular in students’ homes and communities.

In sum, while Rachael’s lexical choices reveal a fairly uncritical approach to some students’ reluctance to abandon the vernacular in their writing, the language that Barbara and Al use suggests a deeper awareness of the conflicts that these students face when expected to write in Edited American English. As is revealed on the following continuum of sensitivity to student’s linguistic ties to families and communities (Table 6.4), however, none of the three instructors are placed at the completely uncritical or critical ends of the continuum. While Rachael misses the opportunity to build on one student’s comment about the way her mother speaks (Ext. 6.32), she nevertheless makes the effort not to insult the student’s home speech. That is, she tries to identify with the student by noting that even she speaks differently than the way she writes. On the other hand, her heavy focus on what is “expected” in academic
writing suggests a lack of focus on the conflict the student may experience between that and what is expected at home. For this reason, Rachael’s awareness is placed just above level #1 on the continuum.

Table 6.4. Continuum of instructors’ sensitivity to students’ linguistic ties to families and communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rachael</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Al</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncritical</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key

0  Does not recognize the importance of home dialects to students and their families. Is unaware of personal conflicts some students feel when adding Standard/Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. Considers continued use of the vernacular in educational settings to be an act of defiance.

1  Demonstrates some awareness of the importance of home dialects to students and their families, but remains critically unaware of the personal conflicts some students feel when adding Standard/Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. Forcefully maintains the position that the vernacular has no place in academic written English.

2  Sensitive to students’ needs to maintain linguistic ties to their homes and communities. Creates opportunities for students to examine and discuss their linguistic choices when code-switching from one variety to another. Helps students to recognize the advantages of using Edited American English in academic and professional writing.

3  Strongly aware of students’ needs to maintain linguistic ties to their homes and communities. Creates opportunities for students to examine and discuss their linguistic choices when code-switching from one variety to another. Incorporates discussions of other varieties of English when addressing the conventions of Edited American English. Heavily emphasizes student choice when discussing the advantages of using one variety versus another.

4  Critically aware of students’ needs to maintain linguistic ties to their homes and communities. Creates opportunities for students to examine and discuss their linguistic choices when code-switching from one variety to another. Incorporates discussions of other varieties such as AAVE when discussing the conventions of Edited American English. Encourages students to discuss controversial issues such as the “standard language myth,” “talking white,” etc. Heavily emphasizes student choice when discussing the advantages of using one variety versus another.

Barbara’s awareness of her students’ linguistic ties to their homes and communities is well developed. For example, she refers to some students’ views of Standard English as “Standard White English” (Ext. 6.30, line 6) and appears interested in exploring this issue further (“What does that mean,” Ext. 6.30, line 7). She also reveals some understanding of her own students’ reluctance to adopt Edited American English in their writing, saying that
she is “on their side” (Ext. 6.27, line 20). At the same time, however, she does not fully reach the critical end of the continuum since she does not describe her students’ input in discussions of their home and community dialects. As explained in the key for level 4 on the continuum, a fully critical approach to this issue would include descriptions of her efforts to engage students in discussions of controversial issues such “the standard language myth,” “talking white,” etc.

Finally, Al also reveals some critical awareness of the importance of vernacular speech in his students’ homes and communities. His references to students who were ostracized at the HBU for not being “black enough” (Ext. 6.34, line 9) imply that like Barbara, he understands the reluctance of some students to adopt “Standard White English” (Barbara, in Ext. 6.33, lines 5-6). Moreover, while both Al and Barbara reveal their awareness of the social significance of vernacular usage, Al also describes his efforts (both successful and unsuccessful) to develop a “dialogue” with students about this issue (Ext. 6.36, lines 5-6 and 17). Thus Al is placed slightly closer to the critical end of the continuum than Barbara.

In sum, while Rachael’s, Barbara’s, and Al’s lexical choices reveal different levels of awareness with respect to the vernacular’s role in maintaining community networks (Milroy and Milroy 1999), there is a clear distinction between Rachael’s awareness on the one hand, and that of Barbara and Al on the other. As Rachael has never completed a course or workshop on linguistic diversity, it is not surprising that she demonstrates the least sensitivity to the importance of the vernacular. That is, when she describes a student who says, “But my mom says it this way” (Ext. 6.32, line 3) and claims to reply “Well, you know, I say things too, but when I write them down, I write them differently” (Ext. 6.32, lines 4-5), it makes
perfect sense. Without specific training in language variation, there would be little opportunity or motivation to explore the importance of the way the student’s mother speaks. On the other hand, Barbara’s and Al’s course work in a PhD program focused on linguistic diversity in education has clearly influenced the language they use to describe the importance of the vernacular in students’ homes and communities. Not only do they each list the language issues they have discussed in their courses, they also make lexical choices that demonstrate deeper levels of understanding than Rachael reveals. For example, Barbara refers to “Standard White English,” while Al describes the dynamics between students at an HBU who went to a predominantly white high school and those who did not.

At the same time, however, it is likely that all three instructors would benefit greatly from courses or workshops that provided pedagogical approaches such as contrastive analysis (Rickford 1999; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler 2005) or dialect awareness (Reaser 2006; Reaser and Wolfram 2007) to both linguistic and social issues related to language variation. As Alim (2010) claims in his discussion of Critical Language Awareness (CLA), these pedagogical approaches “might help teachers [to] provide answers to their students’ critical questions and to work through the tensions around language teaching by confronting them head on with a CLA approach” (p.213).

6.4.4 Approaches to the process of writing

As discussed in the literature on composition theory and pedagogy (Chapter 3), the way teachers approach the process of composition can greatly affect the quality of writing instruction that linguistically diverse students receive (Smitherman 1999; Delpit 1992). In some cases, instructors who focus too heavily on a final “product” often put the correction of grammatical errors ahead of other important stages of composition, including brainstorming,
pre-writing, writing, and editing. Thus multidialectal students can spend far more time trying to “correct” the dialectal patterns in their writing than learning how to approach the entire “process” of writing. In other cases, instructors may allow their multidialectal students to write “draft after draft” without ever giving them the grammatical instruction and contrastive analysis needed at the editing stage of the writing process (Delpit 1992, p. 243). As mentioned in Chapter 2, teachers often “allow African American students to remain at the level of fluency development because these teachers do not understand the language competence their students already possess” (Delpit 1992, p. 243). Thus the way that instructors approach the writing process can also reveal something about their underlying language awareness and attitudes.

During their interviews with me, Rachael, Barbara, and Al all claim to focus on the “process” of writing. They also describe many approaches to writing instruction that reflect the theoretical shift from “product” to “process” that occurred during the second half of the 20th century (Clark 2003; Kroll 2001). For example, all three claim to incorporate some form of pre-writing or brainstorming into classroom lessons, along with frequent writing conferences to help their students move through multiple drafts. Rachael and Barbara also use peer review sessions. Thus it is not surprising that all three instructors initially agree with the statement “Learning to treat writing as a process is more important than learning to eliminate errors in one’s writing” (Int. q. 13). Yet an examination of the instructors’ lexical choices reveals very different views of what the “process” is and a clear connection between these views and their very different levels of language awareness (discussed in Sections 6.4.1, 6.4.2, and 6.4.3).
Rachael’s approach to the writing process, for example, reflects a strong desire to simplify the process for her students. When I ask her what impact her previous coursework has had on the way she teaches writing, she refers to a course she completed while in college in order to become a peer editor in the school’s writing center:

Extract 6.37

1 R: Well, it helped to solidify that the first thing you should do is to look at the assignment, and did you answer the question? Okay, well then the second thing is where’s your thesis? And the third thing is do you have enough evidence?
2 So, yeah, it- it gave me a handy mental checklist to go through.

In this exchange, Rachael’s emphasis on the “handy mental check list” (line 4) of “things” that writers should do (i.e., “first thing,” line 1, “second thing,” line 2, and “third thing,” line 3) suggests a belief in a single useful formula for every writer, as does her detailed description of each step (i.e., “did you answer the question?”, line 2, “where is your thesis?”, line 3, and do you have enough evidence?”, line 3).

Rachael’s emphasis on the useful “checklist” also appears in the following extract, when she claims to agree with the statement that learning to write as a process is more important than eliminating errors.

Extract 6.38

1 R: Oh, that’s- that’s what I base my course on.
2 K: So you-
3 R: Right. I agree strongly [that
4 K: [strongly
5 R: writing…is such a mystery to these
6 students, and it doesn’t need to be because all it is is a checklist. Did you do this? Great. What’s the next thing. Okay, did you do this? Great. Okay. And then you go back and you look at how you did it. But it… That’s the way I think about it. That’s the way I remember- and I brought this up to my class- My
7 junior year English teacher in high school, Mrs. XXXXXX, taught me about the
8 five paragraph essay…and it was what got me through college. Like all you
9 need to do is this, you know, it may be a little bit longer, but this is all you need
to do, so I think the process is…it is the process.
K: So starting with the peer writing and right up to the editing at the end
R: Right, that is... Yeah that’s... Part of the process, then, is going back and correcting your errors.
K: Yeah
R: So I guess I would disagree that they- the person who [said that more] [put it as a]
K: [said that]
R: contrast because that is the process. The process is- it’s a process and part of the
K: process is going back and fixing your errors.

In this exchange, Rachael’s repetition of the verb “do” “accentuates her view of the writing process as a “checklist” (line 6). That is, by repeating the question “Did you do this?” in lines 6 and 7, and the NP “all you need to do” in lines 11-12 and 12-13, Rachael creates a picture of the writing process as a series of steps that also include the final step of going back to see “how you did it” (line 8). Moreover, Rachael’s efforts to simplify the writing process by reducing it to a list of steps that anyone can “do” also echoes her primary goal of helping her students to “get out of this class” (Chapter 5, Extract 5.9, line 1). So, too, does her description of the “five-paragraph essay” as “what got me through college” (Extract 6.38, line 11). That is, if it worked for her, then it should work for her students as well. As will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8, moreover, Rachael’s focus on these steps is fully supported by other process approaches, including peer reviews, extensive conferencing between her and her students, and many pre-writing and brainstorming activities in class.

At the same time, however, Rachael’s heavy focus on the simplicity of the writing process does not reveal how she takes into consideration the linguistic or cultural differences her students manifest. As discussed in Chapter 3, one problem with some process pedagogy is that it ignores “students on the margin” by implying that “this method [works] equally well for all students” or “that differences in race, gender, class or culture [are] not particularly relevant or significant” (Tobin 1994, p. 10). The possibility that Rachael’s approach to the writing process
may create road blocks for students whose writing contains multiple dialectal patterns is suggested, moreover, by her emphasis on error correction as an important part of the process. This emphasis is particularly noticeable in the patterning of Rachael’s multiple repetitions of the noun “process” in the above exchange (Ext. 6.38, lines 13, 15, 21, and 22). For example, in the first half of the exchange, she repeats the noun once for emphasis as a coda to the checklist comparison: “this is all you need to do, so I think the process is...it is the process” (line 13). Yet in the second half of the exchange, when she is referring specifically to error correction, she uses the noun “process” five times, once in the Introduction to her argument that error correction is “part” of the process (“Part of the process, then, is going back and correcting your errors,” lines 15-16), and four times in the coda (“…that is the process. The process is- It’s a process and part of the process is going back and fixing your errors” (lines 21-22). In each case, moreover, this point is emphasized by Rachael’s repetition of the NP “correcting/fixing your errors” (lines 15 and 22). Thus without specific attention to issues of language variation (e.g., through contrastive analysis), the writing process may become a frustrating ordeal in which both Rachael and students with heavy vernacular usage focus on grammar to the exclusion of other writing issues.

This frustration is particularly evident in the following lines from Extract 6.2 (above) in which Rachael explains why she did not pass one AAVE speaker:

2 R: There was a student I had last semester who just wrote down anything like
3 wrote exactly as she would speak and it took several- several drafts of talking to
4 her and saying this- and I- I had to point to the word and say, “this isn’t correct.
5 It should be this,” and then she’d say, ‘Oh, okay...and so, in terms of- she ended
6 up actually not passing the course and it was- it was because her standard
7 written English was just so poor and in the scope of the class, basic writing, this
8 is the format of an essay, this is how to write an essay, what she needed was
9 something I think a step below that, you know. She really needed to focus – she
10 needed to take a grammar class before she would have been able to take this
11 class because there just wasn’t enough time in the class.
Here Rachael’s use of the VPs “took several drafts of talking to her” (lines 3-4) and “had to point to the word” (line 4) describes a process in which drafts are written and rewritten primarily to eliminate vernacular features. The difficulty of this process is highlighted, in particular, by the use of the verbs “took” and “had,” which both add the connotation of expending extra effort to address the vernacular patterns. As Webster’s notes, one meaning of “take” is “to have as a requirement,” while “had” before the infinitive implies a feeling of “obligation” to do an action (Merriam-Webster, online). So too, Rachael’s repetition of the verb “needed” in lines 9-10 (“She really needed to focus – she needed take a grammar class”) highlights a belief that it is in fact the responsibility of the AAVE speaker to adapt to the standard (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006) before enrolling in a class in which essay writing is the main focus. Rachael’s use of the VP “would have been able” (“before she would have been able to take this class,” line 10) also implies that the student would not even be capable of learning how to write an essay without first adopting the grammatical patterns of Standard English. This is also suggested by Rachael’s emphatic repetition of NPs describing the primary focus of her class (“the format of an essay” and “how to write an essay,” (line 8) and her juxtaposition of these NPs with the NP “a step below that” (“What she needed was something I think a step below that,” line 9). In sum, even though Rachael attributes her beliefs to “not enough time” for addressing vernacular patterns (line 11), her lexical choices and word repetitions reveal an underlying conviction that linguistically diverse students will not be able to master the writing process without first adopting the grammar of Standard English. Thus while Rachael espouses the writing process as “what I base my course on,” her unfamiliarity with theoretical or pedagogical approaches to language variation could make it difficult for her to incorporate the process approach with some linguistically diverse students. As will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, however, Rachael’s
focus on the different steps of the writing process also helps her to avoid focusing too heavily on the correction of errors.

While Rachael describes the writing process as a “checklist” for students to follow, Barbara compares it to a jig-saw puzzle. In the following exchange, which occurs after she has described aspects of the writing process that she emphasizes most (Int. q. 3), Barbara summarizes her views on how the process of writing works.

Extract 6.39

B: …………………………And so, you know, I do talk about rhetoric. I talk about the importance of their choices, and um that- that writing is a process, you know. It’s not like- you see this thousand piece jig-saw puzzle and to a puzzle enthusiast- like my mother loved jig saw puzzles, right?

K: Yeah

B: You know, you have to think about how many pieces it took to get that whole picture, instead of ‘Hey, I got the last piece. I’m putting it in. This is all- this is it.

K: Yeah

B: Cause what the puzzle consists of, this last piece- that completes it. I try to get them to think about it like that.

Here, Barbara’s repetition of the lexical item “puzzle” serves to highlight a very recursive view of the writing process. Instead of describing a set of steps for students to complete, she creates a far messier picture of the writing process by comparing it to a “thousand-piece jig-saw puzzle” (line 3). Yet Barbara’s references to a “puzzle enthusiast” (lines 3-4) and to her mother, who “loved jig-saw puzzles” (line 4) also creates the image of someone enjoying the messy process of writing and rewriting.

Barbara also describes her approach to the process of writing in her response to the statement “Learning to treat writing as a process is more important than learning to eliminate errors in one’s writing” (Int. q. 13). In the following extract, for example, she agrees that it is
more important to understand the process of writing since the elimination of errors “will follow” (line 1).

**Extract 6.40**

1. B: I agree..because I think..y- the other will follow.
2. K: The other will follow. Once you get the process...
3. B: I think once you start treating it as a work in process- a work in progress that you’re gonna revise- I even tell my students- I’ll show them a grammar thing and say ‘You know what, when you start writing your first draft, I wouldn’t even focus on this. I was like ‘Just focus on getting your words on the page and then go back and read through that draft and then look for this. They’ll be easier to spot, once you’ve gotten words on the page.

In this extract, while Barbara describes the writing process as “a work in progress that you’re gonna revise” (lines 3-4), her lexical choices suggest that grammatical issues, which she describes as “a grammar thing” (line 4) should be addressed well after the writing of the first draft. For example, her repetition of the VP “get (your) words on the page (“getting your words on the page,” line 6; “gotten words on the page, line 8) emphasizes the early stages of the writing process, while her stress on the adverb “then” in line 6 and her repetition of the word in line 7 (“then go back and read through that draft and then look for this”) highlight the final editing phase. Thus, while Barbara, like Rachael, clearly agrees that error correction is an important part of the writing process, her lexical choices indicate a belief that students can learn the process even when they haven’t fully mastered all of the grammatical patterns of Edited American English. That is, while Rachael repeats the NP “correcting/fixing your errors” to emphasize the editing stage of the writing process (Extract 6.38, lines 16 and 22), Barbara instead focuses on the drafting stage through repetition of the lexical item “get (your) words on the page” (lines 6 and 8). While these lexical differences do not indicate that either instructor puts more or less emphasis on the process of writing itself, they do reflect a difference in focus on the relationship between error correction and the entire process of composition. Moreover, they also reflect the
different attitudes toward “error” and language variation that the two instructors have demonstrated throughout the interview. For example, while Rachael believes that the multiple AAVE features in one student’s writings need to be addressed in a “grammar” class before she can focus on the process of writing (see above discussion of lines excerpted from Extract 6.2), Barbara claims that she has learned to value the language backgrounds of her students (Extract 6.10). Thus Barbara’s heavier focus on process versus error correction both reflects and is reflected in her more positive attitude toward language variation itself.

The connection between Al’s approach to the process of writing and his underlying language awareness is also strong. As discussed in Section 6.4.1.3, Al avoids the use of the verb “correct” when describing both general writing and grammar issues and when referring specifically to vernacular patterns in his students’ writings. Rather, he uses verbs such as “point out” (Extract 6.19) or “call attention to” (Extract 6.18). Thus it is not surprising that Al takes such an adversarial stance toward error correction in his response to the statement “Learning to treat writing as a process is more important than learning to eliminate errors in one’s writing” (Int. q. 13). In the following extract, Al’s repetition and contrast of specific VPs and NPs serves to emphasize his conviction that over-correction can hinder a student’s ability to learn to write:

**Extract 6.41**

1. A: Because when you decide that your job is to highlight to the students what they *don’t [know,*
2. K: [Yeah
3. A: what they’re going to take out of it is that they *don’t know* things. [Ha Ha Ha]
5. A: But when you *highlight* to the students that the way *to learn* is *to engage* extensively
6. K: [mhm
7. A: [ah, in a project, you know that writing isn’t a- it isn’t a
8. *document* so much as it is a *unit,* or *assignment,* or a- an *ongoing*
9. *investigation*
In this exchange, Al’s repetition of the verb “highlight” (lines 1 and 7) serves to accentuate the different effects on students of an error-correction approach (lines 1-6) versus one that focuses on the entire process of writing (lines 7-14). In addition, his repetition of the VP “don’t know” (what they don’t know, line 4; they don’t know things, lines 4-5) to describe the effect of the error correction approach contrasts sharply with his use of the VP “empower” (line 14) to highlight the effects of a process approach. This contrast is also stressed through Al’s use of the NP “document” (line 11) to describe what writing is not, and his choice of the NPs “unit,” “assignment,” and “ongoing investigation” (lines 11-12) to describe what it is. That is, while the word “document” implies a single finished product, the words “unit,” “assignment,” and “ongoing investigation” all suggest an endeavor that is a longer process. Thus one can surmise that Al is more interested in what the student is learning about the entire process of writing than what he or she is producing as a final “document.”

At the same time, however, it is clear from Al’s responses throughout the interview that he does address grammatical patterns that differ from those used in Edited American English, whether they relate to general grammar issues or to language variation in particular. In the following extract, moreover, he admits that he cannot completely ignore such issues:

**Extract 6.42**

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A:..................But *yeah*, it should- the grading’s *partly based on grammar.*
2  So, *yeah, yeah.* But um, the *three week unit* that I do, I mean it’s still- If it were
3  *just in isolation,* I think it’s a *banking concept,*
4  K:                                  [Yeah
5  A:                                [but you know, I *try* to bring it
6  back to the *paper* *[level,*
7  K:                                  [Yeah
8  A:                                  you know, so *hopefully* it becomes a *little more holistic*
9  in that way.
```
In this extract, Al’s lexical choices reveal an underlying conflict between his need to address sentence-level grammar issues and his desire to stay focused on the entire writing process. For example, not only does his rueful repetition of the expression “yeah” (“but yeah,” line 1; “So yeah, yeah,” line 2) serve to distance him from his admission that his students’ grades are “partly based on grammar” (line 1), but his use of the NP “paper level” (I try to bring it back to the paper level, lines 5-6) and the adjective “holistic” (“hopefully it becomes a little more holistic,” line 8) also indicate an effort to show how his focus on grammar is part of the overall writing process. Moreover, by using the ADVP “just in isolation” and the NP “banking concept” in a hypothetical proposition (“If it were just in isolation, I think it’s a banking concept,” lines 2-3), Al also reveals a need to distance himself from an approach to teaching that has been criticized by educational and social theorists (see the discussion of Freire’s “banking concept” in Section 6.2). At the same time, however, Al’s choice of tentative words and phrases such as “try” (I try to bring it back to the paper level, lines 5-6), “hopefully” (“hopefully it becomes a little more holistic, “ line 8) and “a little more” (line 8) suggests some doubt over how well he can accomplish this.

Finally, if we consider Al’s rejection of the error-correction approach along with his disinclination to use a vocabulary of correction when referring either to general grammar issues or to those related specifically to language variation, it becomes clear that there is a close relationship between his approach to the writing process and his underlying language awareness. That is, by focusing on all grammatical issues at a more “holistic” level, he is also more likely to treat vernacular patterns more holistically as well.

In sum, as the continuum in Table 6.5( below) suggests, all three instructors place a strong emphasis on the process approach to writing instruction, but Barbara and Al appear better
prepared to use this approach with linguistically diverse students. Rachael, who has received no instruction in theoretical and pedagogical issues related to language variation, considers vernacular patterns to be grammatical errors and also believes that error correction is an integral part of the writing process. Moreover, she believes that a student who exhibits multiple dialectal patterns in her writing is not ready to tackle the entire writing process but needs first to enroll in a grammar class. Thus, even though she is a strong believer in the writing process and bases her course on it, her level of language awareness may limit her ability to apply this to some students.

Table 6.5. Continuum of the instructors’ approaches to the process of writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rachael</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Al</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Product 0</td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the final written product. Focuses heavily on error-correction. Never uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, or multiple draft writing. Ignores positive attributes of an essay if it contains multiple grammatical errors or vernacular features.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Process 1</td>
<td>Primarily concerned with the final written product. Focuses heavily on error-correction, but may save this for the editing phase. Uses process approaches such as writing conferences and multiple draft writing, but rarely incorporates opportunities for brainstorming, pre-writing or peer reviews into class instruction. Ignores positive attributes of an essay if it contains multiple grammatical errors or vernacular features.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Process 2</td>
<td>Ultimately concerned with the final written product, but recognizes the importance of learning to write as a process. Uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple draft writing to help students create a well-organized and error-free final product.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Process 3</td>
<td>Balances a concern with the final written product with a strong focus on the process of writing. Uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple drafts to help students become comfortable with the process of writing and revision. Focuses on rhetorical choice and other writing strategies when addressing sentence-level grammatical issues and vernacular usage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Process 4</td>
<td>Heavily stresses the overall process of writing while also helping students to make effective sentence-level and discourse-level rhetorical choices. Uses approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple drafts to encourage students to focus on audience and purpose in their writing. Focuses on grammatical patterns and trends rather than specific grammatical errors. Points out, but does not correct, vernacular patterns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key

0 Primarily concerned with the final written product. Focuses heavily on error-correction. Never uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, or multiple draft writing. Ignores positive attributes of an essay if it contains multiple grammatical errors or vernacular features.

1 Primarily concerned with the final written product. Focuses heavily on error-correction, but may save this for the editing phase. Uses process approaches such as writing conferences and multiple draft writing, but rarely incorporates opportunities for brainstorming, pre-writing or peer reviews into class instruction. Ignores positive attributes of an essay if it contains multiple grammatical errors or vernacular features.

2 Ultimately concerned with the final written product, but recognizes the importance of learning to write as a process. Uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple draft writing to help students create a well-organized and error-free final product.

3 Balances a concern with the final written product with a strong focus on the process of writing. Uses process approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple drafts to help students become comfortable with the process of writing and revision. Focuses on rhetorical choice and other writing strategies when addressing sentence-level grammatical issues and vernacular usage.

4 Heavily stresses the overall process of writing while also helping students to make effective sentence-level and discourse-level rhetorical choices. Uses approaches such as brainstorming, pre-writing, peer reviews, writing conferences, and multiple drafts to encourage students to focus on audience and purpose in their writing. Focuses on grammatical patterns and trends rather than specific grammatical errors. Points out, but does not correct, vernacular patterns.
Barbara and Al, on the other hand, appear to believe that learning the process of writing takes precedence over error-correction, even though they address grammar as part of their writing instruction. While one can surmise that they might consider vernacular features to be less troublesome when teaching the writing process, their references to grammar issues throughout the interview reveal that the grammatical conventions of Edited American English are still required. Thus it is likely that if their phonological and morphological understanding of varieties such as AAVE were to increase, they would have an even better chance of addressing language variation while teaching students to treat writing as an ongoing process.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to create a comprehensive picture of the language awareness of the three instructors whose one-on-one and written discourse is analyzed in Chapters 7 and 8. This picture is portrayed, moreover, through in-depth analysis of the instructors’ lexical choices when referring to their linguistically diverse students. As has been revealed in the literature, these choices often reflect teachers’ underlying knowledge of (and attitudes toward) the varieties of English their students speak (e.g., Alim 2010; Corson 2001; Delpit 2006; Kells 2006; Lippi-Green 1997; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling Estes 2006). Thus I have focused in particular on the NPs, APs, VPs, and ADVPs that the instructors use to explain how they address language variation in their classes. In doing so, moreover, I have paid special attention to the instructors’ use of repetition since this discourse pattern is argued to reflect the underlying attitudes of a speaker (Tannen 2007). Finally, I have explored whether a lexical item used in reference to the vernacular either reflects or stands out from an instructor’s overall teaching vocabulary. This has thus enabled me to determine which lexical choices most accurately reveal an instructor’s underlying language awareness and attitudes.
While focusing on the use and repetition of key lexical items, moreover, I have also been able to measure the instructors’ language awareness from four important perspectives: (1) their phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge; (2) their understanding of linguistic repertoire and communicative competence; (3) their sensitivity to the role of the vernacular in maintaining ties to home and community; and (4) the relationship between their language awareness and their approaches to the writing process itself.

As the results of this analysis suggest, the first and most basic perspective involves an instructor’s knowledge of (and attitudes) toward phonological and morphosyntactic language variation. Without an understanding of the rule-governed nature of the different varieties of English that students bring to the classroom, it may be difficult for instructors to either build on a student’s underlying linguistic competence or fully appreciate the importance of the vernacular in maintaining ties to the student’s home and community. As discussed above, Rachael’s awareness of rule-governed language variation is relatively low, as evidenced by (1) her tendency to refer to different varieties of English as incorrect forms of Standard English, (2) her failure to use proper names for varieties such as AAVE, and (3) her propensity for choosing particularly derogatory terms when discussing vernacular usage in the process of composition and revision (e.g., “sloppy slang writing,” writing that needs to be “cleaned up,” etc.). Barbara’s and Al’s lexical choices reveal, on the other hand, a concerted effort to avoid such language. While they each occasionally refer to AAVE as “slang,” they never refer to it as incorrect Standard English. Moreover, Barbara stresses her effort not to seem to “devalue” AAVE, while Al chooses less correction-oriented language such as “point out” and “draw attention to” to refer to the vernacular. At the same time, however, neither Al nor Barbara demonstrates detailed knowledge of underlying grammatical differences between AAVE and Edited American English.
Thus it is possible that when Barbara refers to “horrible” grammar in general, she may also be referring to a vernacular feature without knowing it. So, too, when Al teaches his general three-week unit on grammar, he may miss the opportunity to use a contrastive analysis approach with his linguistically diverse students. By measuring the instructors’ phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness on a continuum ranging from “low” to “high,” therefore, I am not only able to show Al’s and Barbara’s more affirmative language use in relation to Rachael’s discourse, I am also able to demonstrate how much greater their awareness could be with further education about the varieties of English their students speak (in particular, AAVE).

The importance of measuring the instructors’ phonological and morphosyntactic language awareness in this manner is better understood, moreover, when I analyze the second type of language awareness examined in this study (i.e., the instructors’ understanding of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire). For example, both Barbara and Al describe how they discuss circumstances in which vernacular speech is more appropriate than Edited American English, with Barbara using a verb from her own Southern Vernacular English as an example (i.e., “fixin to”) and Al describing in detail the characteristics of Internet language (“shorter sentences,” “sarcasm,” etc.). Rachael, on the other hand, merely tolerates the use of the vernacular in class discussions because she doesn’t want her students to worry about “speaking correctly” when they are discussing their ideas. Thus we can see that a lack of phonological and morphosyntactic awareness has also prevented Rachael from developing her awareness of her students’ communicative competence. If she were more fully aware of this, for example, she might be able to highlight her students’ abilities to code switch from one variety of English to another. On the other hand, while Barbara and Al demonstrate only moderate levels of specific grammatical knowledge of the vernacular (in particular, AAVE), their understanding of its rule-
governed nature may allow them to better build on their students’ communicative competence. That is, because they understand that vernacular speech is “rule-governed,” they may be able to build on their students’ underlying awareness of their own linguistic repertoires when helping them to acquire Edited American English. This is suggested as Barbara not only explains to her students the contexts in which vernacular usage is “perfectly fine,” but also discusses circumstances in which it would be preferable (i.e., a New Orleans travel brochure). So, too, Al creates assignments in which students are actually encouraged to transform standard papers into Internet language. Again, greater levels of phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge might also lead to more opportunities for Barbara and Al to use contrastive analysis and other pedagogical approaches to the vernacular.

By first examining the instructors’ phonological and morphosyntactic awareness, moreover, I have also been able to shed more light on a third level of awareness, the sensitivity of instructors toward the importance of the vernacular in maintaining ties to family and community. For example, Rachael’s failure to understand the rule-governed nature of AAVE also appears to prevent her from responding interactively to a student who challenges a grammatical structure that she is teaching. When the student claims that her mother says it differently, rather than engage the student in a conversation that acknowledges the value of the mother’s way of speaking, Rachael falls back on the general argument that we write one way but speak another. Barbara, on the other hand, makes a strong effort to understand her students’ reluctance to adopt professional or academic language, claiming that she tries to be “on their side.” It is possible that her own use of Southern English (See Chapter 5) has increased her sensitivity to this issue, but her references to the Oakland Ebonics controversy, the problems with “Standard White English,” and the need not to “devalue” the varieties of English her
students speak suggest a wider sociolinguistic sensitivity as well. Finally, while Al claims to treat Internet language as a “common denominator” for the different varieties of English spoken by his students, the efforts he describes to engage students in a “dialogue” about language variation, both at an HBU and at a more diverse community college, leads me to place his sensitivity to community language ties slightly ahead of Barbara’s on a continuum ranging from uncritical to critical. Moreover, Al’s focus on Internet language as a platform for discussions of language variation suggests that with exposure to pedagogical approaches that address the different varieties of English his students speak (e.g., Alim 2010; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram et al. 2009), his ability to build on these varieties would grow. In sum, Al’s and Barbara’s sensitivity to the importance of the vernacular in families and communities works in tandem with their phonological and morphosyntactic awareness, while Rachael’s apparent misunderstanding of this issue parallels her lack of phonological and morphosyntactic understanding.

Finally, by exploring the approaches of all three instructors to the writing process itself, I try to show how their levels of language awareness are deeply entwined in the way they teach composition and revision. For example, all three instructors initially claim to emphasize the writing process approach, and they all recognize the need to address issues of grammar and syntax in their students’ writings. Yet their lexical choices suggest very different views of what the process of writing entails. For Rachael, whose main goal is to “get [her students] out of this class” (See Chapter 5), the writing process is a checklist that anyone can follow, and it includes the very important step of going back and “correcting/fixing your errors.” For Barbara, it is a messy recursive process, involving much back and forth. Error correction is certainly part of the process, but it takes a back seat to becoming comfortable with the idea of constantly writing and rewriting (i.e., it “will follow”). For Barbara, the writing process should also be “fun,” just as
putting a jig-saw puzzle together is fun. For Al, the writing process is an exploration, an “ongoing” project, a step to future writing. Too heavy a focus on error correction may prevent students from mastering the process, according to Al, since it will teach them what they “don’t know” rather than encourage them to learn to write. Thus even though he teaches a unit on grammar at the beginning of his class, he tries to make it more “holistic” by tying it more closely to the process of writing. In sum, the views of the writing process that these instructors reveal in their interviews with me closely parallel their overall approaches to language variation. Rachael, who puts the greatest emphasis on “correct” language, is also the most likely to treat vernacular features as errors. Barbara, who assumes that grammar will be corrected in time, also makes a point of not devaluing the language of her vernacular speakers. Al, who actively worries that students will become discouraged about writing if their grammar is over-corrected, also refrains from using the language of correction when addressing vernacular features in his students’ writings.

In sum, Rachael, Barbara, and Al all reveal very different levels of language awareness through the lexical choices they make when discussing their approaches to language variation and writing in general. Through the use of specific NPs, APs, VPs, and ADVPs, these instructors reveal their underlying hopes, fears, and beliefs about the teaching of writing to linguistically diverse students. While all three instructors are clearly motivated to help these students become better writers, their own linguistic, professional, and educational backgrounds have clearly influenced the way that they approach this task. By analyzing their linguistic choices, moreover, I have been able to view more closely the particular areas of language awareness that each instructor has or has not fully developed. As many studies already describe the effects on students of teachers’ negative attitudes and lack of language awareness, my goal for the current
study is to examine how instructors’ different types of language awareness may influence the way their linguistically diverse students learn to write. Thus the following chapters take this analysis into the classroom, where the Al and Rachael, the two basic writing instructors, interact discursively with their students in one-on-one writing conferences (Chapter 7) and through their written commentary (Chapter 8).
CHAPTER 7

LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND TEACHER DISCOURSE IN ONE-ON-ONE WRITING CONFERENCES

The current chapter explores links between the language awareness of Al and Rachael, the two basic writing instructors who agreed to participate in this study, and their discursive interactions with multidialectal students in one-on-one writing conferences.\(^{23}\) As discussed in Chapter 3, the writing conference has become an integral component of writing instruction in the past half century, ever since the focus of composition pedagogy moved from a “product” to a “process” approach (Clark 2003; Kroll 2001). As instructors help students to move through the different stages of composition, they often give them both verbal and written feedback during the writing process itself rather than simply waiting to write comments on their final drafts. In the basic (developmental) writing class in particular, instructors often struggle to achieve a balance between feedback relating to sentence-level issues of grammar and wording on the one hand and more global issues of unity and coherence on the other. As discussed in Chapters 1, 4, and 6, the primary hypothesis of the current study is that the discursive interactions that evolve during discussions of both vernacular syntax and vernacular discourse styles in multidialectal writing classes can be correlated with the levels of sociolinguistic language awareness that instructors develop in three key areas: (1) awareness of the rule-governed nature of all language varieties; (2) awareness of linguistic repertoire and communicative competence; and (3) awareness of the importance of students’ language varieties in their homes and communities. While these particular areas of language awareness do not by any means represent an instructor’s overall

\(^{23}\) While I originally hoped to explore similar links between the third writing instructor’s (i.e., Barbara’s) language awareness and discursive interactions with students as well, the demographics of the students in her technical writing class who ultimately agreed to participate in the study have made this more difficult. That is, while speakers of both European and African American varieties of English joined the study in Al’s and Rachael’s basic writing classes, all of the students who joined from Barbara’s class were European Americans who spoke varieties of English that resembled the Edited American English being used in the classroom. Thus issues related to vernacular patterns and expressions did not arise.
awareness of language (cf. Preston 1996, 2002) or that instructor’s specialized knowledge of the conventions of Edited American English and the writing process itself, they are nevertheless argued to be crucial in multidialectal contexts (e.g., Kells 2006; Labov 1972a; Milroy and Milroy 1999; Rickford 1999; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

The following analysis of teacher/student interaction in Al’s and Rachael’s basic writing conferences is also grounded in the sociolinguistic view of discourse as social interaction in which meaning is negotiated (See Chapter 3). That is, the “situated meaning” (Schiffrin 1994, p. 133) of an instructor’s references to language and language variation is gleaned from the effects these references have on the ensuing discussion. For this reason, the analysis focuses primarily on the students’ use of backchannels and other reactive expressions during the conferences. As these units of analysis have been cited as indicators of student engagement (e.g., Meier 1985 and F. Farr 2002) and understanding (e.g., Clancy et al. 1996), they are examined to explore the discursive influence of teacher comments about both general language and composition issues and vernacular patterns and expressions in particular. As noted in Chapter 4 (Data and Methodology), I also adopt the term “backchannel” to characterize a range of student responses, including (1) the use of non-lexical or single-word expressions such as mhm, okay, yeah (Yngve 1970; Gumperz 1982); (2) the repetition of a teacher’s words or the completion of his/her sentences (i.e., the more expanded view of a “response token” discussed in Clancy et al. 1996); and (3) the occurrence of student overlap and interruption as indicators of both “high involvement” (Tannen 2005, pp. 52 and 106) and “engaged listenership” (F. Farr 2002, p. 80). Moreover, student responses that occur in the form of completed comments or questions are also noted, as active turn-taking can also reflect conversational engagement (e.g., Tannen 2005).
Finally, in order to highlight the links between Al’s and Rachael’s sociolinguistic language awareness and their one-on-one discursive interactions with students, it is also necessary to illuminate influential factors that go beyond the instructors’ respective levels of language awareness. That is, it is important to note patterns of discourse that are influenced by other factors, including (1) Al’s and Rachael’s general approaches to grammar and writing instruction (see discussions in Chapter 6) and (2) the basic writing context itself. To this end, the discursive patterns that evolve in some of Al’s and Rachael’s discussions of general language and composition issues are also briefly analyzed and compared with those that occur in their discussions of language variation *per se*. Then, both types of discussion are briefly compared with discursive interactions in one of Barbara’s technical writing conferences. As the following analysis reveals, some inherent differences exist between a basic writing class, with its (remedial) focus on general academic writing, and a technical writing class, with its more narrow orientation toward the academic and professional goals of its students. Moreover, these contextual differences may either intensify or interfere with an instructors’ approach to language variation.

7.1. Analysis of the Basic Writing Conferences

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the basic writing conferences is the constant back and forth between global discussions of essay unity and coherence and more local discussions of word choice and syntax. As both Rachael and Al grapple with the time constraints of conferences that average between 10 and 20 minutes in length, they often struggle to give balanced attention to both aspects of a student’s writing, with their references to the vernacular often occurring just before, during, or directly after a discussion of an essay’s overall thesis. Therefore, in order to provide a framework for my analysis of discursive interaction in student-
teacher discussions of language variation, I first focus on the type of student backchanneling that occurs in discussions of general grammar and composition issues. This approach not only makes it possible to discover the “situated meaning” (Schiffrin 1994) of Rachael’s and Al’s comments in each context, it also helps to highlight the discursive differences between the two types of discussion.

7.1.1. Rachael’s Basic Writing Conferences

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, while Rachael demonstrates the least understanding of language variation of the three instructors, her dedication to helping her students acquire Edited American English is certainly no less than theirs. This dedication is particularly evident in the way she conducts her writing conferences. Often arriving 45 minutes early for her three-hour once-a-week basic writing class, Rachael engages in both prearranged and spontaneous writing conferences before and during class. These conferences usually occur after she has reviewed and written comments on students’ first, second, or (occasionally) third drafts (see Chapter 8), but students also feel free to ask her for help during breaks or during the many quiet periods when other students are working individually on the computers that line the classroom. In the following discussion, I first briefly analyze three exchanges in which Rachael addresses general organizational and grammatical issues before I explore more fully exchanges in which she discusses vernacular patterns and expressions per se.

7.1.1.1. Rachael’s one-on-one discussions of general writing and grammar issues

As revealed in the following analysis of Extracts 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3, Rachael’s one-on-one discussions of general writing and grammatical issues in her students’ essays can reach high levels of interaction. Not only does she demonstrate a keen awareness of how students might improve the unity and coherence of their essays, she also displays a well-developed
understanding of the grammatical patterns of Edited American English. Moreover, she often focuses on what Smitherman (1999) claims are the most important “components of rhetorical power” (i.e., “content and message, logical development, use of supporting details and examples, analysis and arrangement of style,” p. 130).

In Extract 7.1, for example, as Rachael and Charlotte, a middle-aged African American woman, discuss the second draft of an essay that Charlotte has revised in response to Rachael’s previous feedback, Charlotte responds positively to Rachael’s comments about the supporting details she has included in her essay.

. Extract 7.1

1 R: Up until- Like the first part of the paper is good, there’s lots of exam[plies /?/ [Yeah, 2 C: cause you told me to chan[ge this- 3 R: [Right 4 C: /?/ get my thesis /?/

Here, not only does Charlotte agree with Rachael by taking the floor and referring to a previous conference (“Yeah, cause you told me to change this,” lines 2-3), but her response also overlaps Rachael’s explanation for why the first part of the paper is “good” (i.e., “there’s lots of examples,” line 2).

Similarly, in a conference with Daniel, a young European American father who has written about the challenges of going to school while trying to work and raise a family, Rachael’s description of what would be a “good” thesis statement leads to a highly interactive exchange:

Extract 7.2

1 R: Since your- you do address everything you say here in the intro, … if you 2 organized it better up here, …then maybe reorganized these paragraphs, … 3 D: mhm
R: /?/ would come across clearer to the reader. So, at the end of the day, you
don't have to say it was a positive or it was a negative experience. You could say
something a little more general, saying, you know … something that
encompasses both. You know, there were challenges, but there were also
benefits.
D: mhm
R: And that's a good- Something like that is a good thesis statement.
D: mhm
R: You know, coming back to college, um- You know, you- I feel like I have a
second chance, um, there are some negatives, there are some challenges,
however, you [know,
D: [mhm
R: there are still positives.
D: Right
R: Um…. You know [/?/
D: [Maybe negatives was too- too strong of a word to put in
there.
R: [Right. Right…. challenge, you know, [you
D: [mhm
R: say that here. So that would be a better word.

As evidenced by Daniel’s frequent repetition of the backchannel “mhm” in this exchange (lines
3, 9, 11, 15, 22), he is fully engaged in Rachael’s discussion of his essay organization. Not only
does he use this backchannel to indicate his understanding when Rachael pauses or comes to a
full stop in her feedback (lines 3, 9, and 11), he also uses it twice to collaboratively overlap
Rachael’s words (lines15 and 22). Moreover, as Rachael assumes Daniel’s voice (i.e., “I feel like
I have a second chance,” lines 12-13) and repeatedly addresses him with the tag “you know”
(lines 12,14, and 18), he not only intensifies his agreement with the affirmative backchannel
“Right” (line 17), he also takes the floor with his own evaluation of his writing: “Maybe
negatives was too- too strong of a word to put in there” (lines 19-20).

Finally, as the high level of interaction in this exchange suggests, Rachael’s use of
evaluative language does not appear to have a negative effect on Daniel’s level of engagement.
For example, even though her use of the adverb “better” implies a deficit his writing, (“if you
organized it better up here… then maybe reorganized these paragraphs,” lines 1-2), he responds
with the backchannel “mhm” (line 3) before she finishes making her point (i.e., “/?/ would come across clearer to the reader,” line 4). So, too, as Rachael describes her own suggested revisions of his thesis statement as “good” (“Something like that is a good thesis statement,” line 10), Daniel again appears unaffected by the implication that his original thesis statement was “not good.” That is, he responds immediately with an affirmative “mhm” (line 11).

As the following discussion with Charlotte demonstrates, moreover, Rachael’s use of pejorative terminology to describe general grammatical issues (i.e., “fragments and comma problems,” line 1) does not stop Charlotte from seeking further feedback.

Extract 7.3

1. **R:** There’s a couple fragments and comma problems.
2. **C:** Yeah, fragments. Cause it kept telling me on my computer and then I would change it [and then it still be a fragment, [and I-]
3. **R:** [um]
4. **R:** I might not be understandin
5. **C:** what a fragment is.
6. **R:** Um, it- Sometimes it happens that when you use an example,
7. **C:** mhm
8. **R:** when you use an introductory phrase or an introductory word- So if you don't finish off the sentence with another...Like remember when we talked about subordinate and main clauses?
9. **C:** mhm
10. **R:** If you start off with subordinate clauses, some people forget to put the main clause [after it.]
11. **C:** Okay

Here, even though Rachael has used the word “problems” (line 1), a noun whose semantic features include the connotation of “trouble” (see discussion in Chapter 6), Charlotte appears unaffected by the pejorative implications of the word. Rather, throughout the exchange, she responds with the single backchannels “mhm” (lines 8 and 12) and “okay” (line 15); with overlapping speech (“Okay,” line 15); and with a full turn at talk (“Yeah, fragments. Cause it kept telling me on my computer and then I would change it and then it still be a fragment, and I-
I might not be understanding what a fragment is,” lines 2-6). Moreover, by providing such a detailed description of her troubles with the computer’s references to sentence fragments, Charlotte leads Rachael not only to re-explain sentence fragments (i.e., “Sometimes it happens that…,” lines 7-14), but also to refer to a previous lesson in which these were addressed (i.e., “Like remember when we talked about subordinate and main clauses?,” lines 10-11).

In sum, as evidenced by the interactive nature of Rachael’s conferences with Charlotte and Daniel respectively, she is able to engage her students in highly interactive discussions of general grammar and writing issues (e.g., essay organization, syntax, and word choice). While her teaching vocabulary includes highly evaluative words such as “good” “better,” and “problem,” her lexical choices do not appear to have a negative impact on the “situated meaning” (Schiffrin 1994) of these more general writing discussions. That is, both Rachael and her students appear comfortable with her role as an evaluator and commentator on their writing.

7.1.1.2. Rachael’s one-on-one discussions of language variation

In spite of Rachael’s ability to engage in highly interactive writing conferences about general grammar and writing issues, however, full communication with some of the AAVE speakers in her class is occasionally impeded by her approach to vernacular patterns and expressions that appear in their writing. In many cases, miscommunications can be linked simply to Rachael’s lack of awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation, as she often treats vernacular patterns as grammatical errors, prescriptively explaining to her students the changes they need to make. In other cases, however, Rachael’s references to language variation (or lack thereof) are less easily explained. As revealed in the following discussion, they may also relate to a general misunderstanding of the relationship between students’ linguistic repertoires
and their underlying communicative competence, or they may reflect a genuine lack of awareness of the role the vernacular plays in tying students to their families and communities.

In Extract 7.4a below, Rachael’s conference with Sharise, a young African American woman, starts off fairly interactively as Rachael suggests that Sharise provide additional details to support her thesis that first-year students need a special course designed to help them adjust to college life.

**Extract 7.4a (lines 1-19)**

1. **R:** Okay, so, what I have written here is 'Defend your thesis statement with a more specific idea.'
2. **S:** [**mhm**]
3. **R:** [/?!/ Um, and then once you do that, it'll have a bit of a [interfering noise from the microphone]
4. **S:** Yeah
5. **R:** Okay. Um...[Speaks inaudibly to herself as she looks through the essay.] Um. Okay.[*Reads:*] 'this or a similar course for freshmen in hopes to better understand what it means to becoming a college student? Exactly how is a course like this going to help a college student? What does it mean to become a college student? Exactly how is a course like this going to help a college student? [Um-
6. **S:** [You want me to explain that?]
7. **R:** Yeah. Say it specifically. What do you think? How exactly would a course like that actually help a freshman?
8. **S:** It'll help you with um with time management or um .. It also make you feel more comfortable around campus knowin where things are and it can help you in a lot of ways.
9. **R:** That's true. As you go through- As you read through the rest of your paper, maybe it will come to you how you can be more specific up here. Okay.

[The discussion continues somewhat contentiously in lines 20-80, as Rachael points out areas where further supporting details would help the essay and Sharise explains why she dislikes having to add so many details.]

At the beginning of this conference, as Rachael starts off by reading from her own written comments on Sharise’s essay (“Okay, so, what I have written here is 'Defend your thesis statement with a more specific idea,'” lines 1-2), Sharise appears engaged. Not only does she respond with the nonlexical backchannel “mhm” immediately after Rachael stops reading (line...
3), she also follows up with an even more affirmative “Yeah” (line 6) just after Rachael’s next comment in lines 4 and 5. Then, as Rachael lists additional questions for Sharise to address in the essay (i.e., “What does it mean to become a college student? Exactly how is a course like this going to help a college student?,” lines 9-11), Sharise’s level of engagement escalates to taking the floor and asking a question (“You want me to explain that?,” line 12). Moreover, the question, which both overlaps and puts a halt to Rachael’s next comment, “Um-,” in line 11, leads Rachael to repeat her last question, “How exactly would a course like that actually help a freshman?” (lines 13-14). This in turn leads Sharise to take an extended turn as she responds to the question, “It'll help you with um with time management or um.. It also make you feel more comfortable around campus knowin where things are and it can help you in a lot of ways” (lines 15-17).

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1 Coming up as a freshman there were not a lot of resources for me to utilize which left me
2 anger [sic] and confused. I did not know whom to ask or where to go for my issues, weather if
3 [sic] they were tutoring, counseling or safety. I felt the administrators were not much help
4 either. After gathering up enough courage to ask someone for help, it seem as if they were
5 reading from a pamphlet in another language that I could not translate. To feel Ø [sic] least
6 embarrassment I just shake my head in agreement so I could gracefully walk away with some
7 kind of dignity.
```

**Figure 7.1. An excerpt from Sharise’s essay on her experiences as a first-year college student (boldfacing and highlighting mine)**

In a later part of this conference (Ext. 7.4b), however, as Rachael begins to focus on a number of AAVE patterns and expressions in Sharise’s essay (see also Figure 7.1 above), Sharise’s level of engagement is noticeably lower. She responds to Rachael at only three points in the entire exchange and solely with minimal backchannels. She also neither responds to nor initiates any questions.

**Extract 7.4b (lines 81-103)**

81 R: Um, what- this kind of construction 'coming up as a freshman’?
82 S: mhm?
Um, it's kind of an informal way to say 'I became a freshman' or 'coming into freshman year.' Um not so much 'coming up' but 'coming into.' It's just a better way to...a better word to use...um...or you could just take this all out and say 'as a freshman.' [Continues reading from the paper:] There were not a lot of resources for me to utilize, which left me angry and confused. Okay. Resources for what? Resources for academic advising? Resources for...choosing your classes? Okay. Again, a more specific identification of the problem. Okay. Um. Back here, um, you say the- the next sentence, though, 'I did not know whom to ask or where to go for my issues,' um, 'whether'- you don't need this word here- 'whether they were tutoring, counseling, or safety.' Ah, okay, so these are the resources you're talking about. Um ...you know...

Rachael clearly invites or expects a response. That is, her first response, "mhm?" (line 82), is clearly a reply to the implied question of Rachael’s first comment, “this kind of construction 'coming up as a freshman?’” (line 81), which can be interpreted to mean, ‘Do you see the expression I’m about to discuss?’ In addition, Sharise’s second response, the extremely minimal backchannel “m”(line 94), whose meaning is difficult to decipher, occurs only after a pronounced pause in Rachael’s feedback (“Um ...you know...,” line 93). That is, she appears to interpret Rachael’s silence as a direct invitation to respond. So too, Sharise’s third reply, “mhm” (line 101), also occurs after another long pause in Rachael’s commentary (“you always want to
use past tense when you’re talking- when you’re writing- ....,” lines 99-100) and may again simply be a response to a perceived invitation to speak.

A closer examination of Rachael’s discourse in this exchange provides several likely explanations for Sharise’s less active engagement. The first involves Rachael’s commentary on Sharise’s use of the expression “coming up,” a common AAVE idiom that means “growing up” or “being raised” (e.g., “coming up poor,” Ball 1996). Rather than encourage Sharise to discuss her use of this idiom in the context of her freshman year experiences, Rachael instead focuses on its informality (“Um, it's kind of an informal way to say ‘I became a freshman’ or ‘coming into freshman year,’” lines 83-84). Moreover, she then proceeds to dismantle the idiom by giving it a literal interpretation (i.e.,” not so much ‘coming up,’ but ‘coming into,’ line 84). Rachael also stresses the superiority of the alternate expression by repeating the adjective “better” (”It’s just a better way to- a better word to use,” lines 84-85). Yet by prescriptively telling Sharise the word she should use, Rachael also misses an opportunity to let Sharise explain why she has chosen an idiom that means “growing up” in this context. Were Sharise able to provide such an explanation, Rachael might be able help her to choose a formal word that more closely captured her meaning. She would also be able to help Sharise to build on her existing linguistic competence (i.e., by tapping into the particular meaning features of “coming up” that Sharise is trying to express). As Ball (1996) found, many of the students she observed used AAVE idioms when they were especially engaged in a writing topic. With Rachael’s lack of background in language variation (see Chapters 5), however, she appears unaware of any of these possibilities for helping Sharise tap into her linguistic repertoire. Thus when Sharise ultimately adopts Rachael’s second suggestion (“or you could just take this all out and say 'as a freshman,'”” lines
85-86) in a later draft of the essay, the change appears to be a “replacive” move rather than an “additive” one (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006).

Rachael’s low awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation also appears to influence the lower level of interaction in this exchange. For example, when Rachael addresses Sharise’s use of “shake” (“I just shake my head in agreement,” Fig. 7.1, lines 6-7), she makes the automatic assumption that Sharise is writing in the present tense and prescriptively tells her that “this should be ‘shook’ - you always want to use past tense when you’re talking-when you’re writing” (lines 99-100). Yet with the exception of “seem” (Fig.7.1, line 5), every other verb in the passage is in fact inflected as a past-tense form (i.e., “were,” lines 1, 3, and 4; “left,” line 1; “did,” line 2; “felt,” line 3; “could,” lines 5 and 6), indicating that Sharise already understands how to use the past tense and that “shake” may in fact represent the AAVE tendency toward both verb regularization and word-final consonant cluster reduction (e.g., Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Moreover, Rachael’s choice of the modal “should,” whose meaning features connote a sense of obligation, prevents any meaningful discussion of the uninflected verb “shake.” So, too, does her use of the adverb “always,” which adds an implication of permanency to her remarks. Yet were Rachael aware of the morphosyntactic and phonological patterning that may underlie Sharise’s use of “shake,” she might be able to explore with Sharise the likelihood that she has not only regularized the past tense form shake to “shaked,” but has also written the past tense form as she would normally pronounce it (i.e., “shake”). In other words, a discussion of the differences between sounds and spellings might be more appropriate here than a prescriptive comment about using past tense (Klein 2003), as would a contrastive analysis (Rickford 1999) of the different past forms for shake (i.e., regularized “shaked” and irregular “shook”). Moreover, as Rachael encounters the uninflected verb “seem”
while continuing to read aloud from Sharise’s essay (“it seemed as if they were reading from a pamphlet in another language that I could not translate,” lines 96-97), rather than simply stress “seemed” in order to emphasize past –ed, she might also engage Sharise in a discussion of the AAVE consonant cluster reduction that occurs in both “seemed” and regularized “shaked.” As Sharise’s response to Rachael’s explanation of past tense is a single “mhm,” (line 101), however, we cannot know whether or not she understands the point Rachael is making. That she may not fully understand is suggested, however, in a future essay, where she includes the same sentence, again with “seem” uninflected for past tense (i.e., “it seem as if they were reading from a pamphlet in another language that I could not translate”). As noted in Chapter 2, “Without the needed sophistication about … dialect influences, teachers may be more likely to induce confusion, rather than understanding” (Reid 1981, pp. 149-150).

In this exchange, moreover, Rachael’s comments about an AAVE grammatical pattern (i.e., uninflected verbs) differ significantly from her comments relating to more general writing issues such as sentence fragments. For example, in a conference with Charlotte (Extract 7.3, above), Rachael gives specific names to the grammatical issues she notes (“There’s a couple fragments and comma problems,” line 1). Thus her use of the specific term “fragments” leads Charlotte to respond with interactive repetition of the term (“Yeah, fragments,” line 2; “and then I would change it and then it still be a fragment,” lines 2-3; “I might not be understandin what a fragment is,” lines 5-6), which in turn leads Rachael to respond with an intertextual reference to her class discussions of sentence fragments and comma use (“remember when we talked about subordinate and main clauses?,” lines 10-11). As is discussed in the chapter to follow, moreover, sentence fragments and comma issues receive a great deal of attention from Rachael and figure prominently on the rubrics that accompanies the essays she returns to her students. Thus it is not
surprising that she would refer to sentence fragments and comma problems by name when she encounters them in her students’ writings. In her discussion of the past tense with Sharise, on the other hand, Rachael lacks such intertextual frames of reference. Not only has she never discussed the rule-governed patterns of AAVE in a class lesson, her grading rubric also includes no references to code-switching from AAVE to EAE (see Chapter 8). Thus Rachael’s references to the need to use past tense are not only unclear, they also remain monologic as she is unable to engage Sharise in a discussion that builds on her innate knowledge of AAVE. In sum, Rachael’s undeveloped awareness of the rule-governed nature of AAVE leads to far less interaction than does her more fully developed understanding of EAE phonology and morphosyntax.

Finally, it is also tempting to speculate about the missed opportunity for a general discussion of language variation in Rachael’s exchange with Sharise. For example, as Rachael reads Sharise’s description of her inability to understand the college administrators she consulted for help, she makes no reference to Sharise’s claim that they seemed to be “reading from a pamphlet in another language that I could not translate” (line 97). As discussed in Chapter 2, awareness of the choices and conflicts that students face when adopting the language of school is a critical component of a teacher’s language awareness. Moreover, many linguists and education scholars argue that teachers need to discuss these issues with their students in order to help them become “critically aware” of how language is used in society (Alim 2005; Corson 2001; Delpit 1995, 2006; Lippi-Green 2007; Fairclough 1985, 1995). It is noteworthy, therefore, that while Rachael addresses grammatical issues in this section, she does not respond in any way to Sharise’s comment about encountering unfamiliar language. This lack of attention contrasts, moreover, with Rachael’s feedback on another sentence from Sharise’s essay (lines 86-89):

86  R:  [Continues reading from the paper:] ‘there were not a lot of resources for me to
87 86 utilize, which left me angry and confused. ’ Okay... Resources for what? Resources
for academic advising? Resources for... choosing your classes? Okay. Again, a more specific identification of the problem.

Here not only does Rachael give Sharise detailed suggestions for how to provide more specific supporting details in her writing (i.e., “academic advising” and “choosing your classes,” line 88), her words “again” and “specific” (“Okay. Again, a more specific identification of the problem,” line 89) also create an intratextual reference to the very beginning of the conference (Ext. 7.4a), where she first discusses the need to be more specific (“Okay, so, what I have written here is ‘Defend your thesis statement with a more specific idea,’” 7.4a, lines 1-2). Were Rachael to take the same approach with Sharise’s reference to the administrators’ speech by asking her to include more specific examples of why their advice sounded like “another language,” she might be able to tap into Sharise’s underlying awareness of language variation while also helping her to organize her essay. Moreover, were Rachael more fully aware of the relationship between the vernacular and a student’s ties to home and community, she might be better prepared to help Sharise discuss the discomfort of communicating in what can sometimes sound like “another language.” While Rachael clearly faces a daunting task as she tries to balance her sentence-level grammatical feedback with more global issues of style and organization in this exchange, a comparison of Sharise’s very minimal responses in lines 81-101 with her far more active backchanneling and turn taking at the beginning of the conference in Ext. 7.4a (lines 1-19) suggests that increased sociolinguistic language awareness would help Rachael to build on her already well-developed ability to engage students in discussions of their writing.

Finally, as evidenced by the following discussion with Janeka, another AAVE speaker in the class, increased sociolinguistic language awareness would very likely help Rachael to build on her own underlying “folk” awareness of language (Preston 1996, 2002). That is, as she addresses Janeka’s use of the AAVE verb “fussin” in an essay (see Fig. 7.2), both her own
discomfort with the topic and Janeka’s responding amusement (or embarrassment) lead to an awkward and somewhat ineffectual discussion of word choice.

When me and my boyfriend are fussing…

Figure 7.2. A clause from Janeka’s essay that is discussed in Extract 7.5

Extract 7.5

1 R: Well, not- Again I've only read it real quick, but in terms of changing the
2 topic sentences, they need to be revised.. Um, you've mentioned living life to the
3 fullest. Okay? And that's good because that will remind us of the topic- of the
4 thesis statement. Um, you know, just say if- if you read that, just say- Do you
5 want me to read that?
6 J: [Reads] 'My boyfriend and I are fussin’
7 R: My boyfriend and I...What's another way of saying ‘fussin’
8 J: are arguing.
9 R: For a paper, it sounds better than 'When me and my boyfriend are fussing.'
10 [Rachael smiles.] I'm sorry, I laugh when I say things like that because I know
11 that it doesn't sound right coming out of my mouth, but um-
12 J: [Starts to laugh] I'm sorry.

In this exchange, Rachael’s “folk” awareness of language variation is actually revealed in her discomfort with discussing the vernacular. This discomfort first manifests itself, moreover, at the juncture between her discussion of Janeka’s thesis statement ("And that's good because that will remind us of the topic- of the thesis statement,” lines 3-4) and her discussion of Janeka’s use of the vernacular expression “fussin” (“What’s another way of saying “fussin?,” line 7). That is, before broaching the subject of the vernacular verb, Rachael appears to hesitate, suggesting that she is uncomfortable about reading the expression herself ("Um, you know, just say if- if you read that, just say- Do you want me to read that?,” lines 4-5). As Rachael’s customary practice is to read aloud from her students’ essays while commenting on them (see, for example, her conference with Sharise above in Ext. 7.4a & b), her question, “Do you want me to read that?,” is highly unusual. Moreover, even though Janeka interprets the question as it is intended (i.e., as
a request for her to read and revise the words that Rachael has indicated), she clearly does not fully understand the revision Rachael intends her to make. While she changes the subject of the sentence from “me and my boyfriend are fussin” (see Fig. 7.2 above) to "my boyfriend and I are fussin” as she reads aloud (line 6), she still repeats the original verb “fussing.” While Janeka’s misunderstanding forces Rachael to be more direct (“What’s another way of saying ‘fussin’?,” line 7), Rachael is still not able to hide her discomfort, as she tries to explain why she is smiling (“I'm sorry, I laugh when I say things like that because I know that it doesn't sound right coming out of my mouth,” lines 10-11). Here Rachael demonstrates an acute “non-linguist’s” awareness (Preston 1996, 2002) of the difference between the variety of English that Janeka speaks and the variety that she speaks. Moreover, her choice of the VP “doesn't sound right coming out of my mouth” suggests that she does in fact recognize contexts in which the expression would “sound right.” Moreover, her use of the prepositional phrase (PP) “for a paper” to qualify her suggestion that another verb (i.e., “arguing”) would “sound better” (“For a paper, it sounds better than 'When me and my boyfriend are fussing,'” line 9) also implies some awareness of the student’s ability to choose from her linguistic repertoire. On the other hand, Rachael’s use of the vague expression “things like that” to refer to an AAVE expression (“I laugh when I say things like that,” line10), combined with her use of the evaluative VP “sounds better” (“For a paper, it sounds better,” line 9) suggests an overall preference for the Edited American English word “arguing.” Moreover, the reference to laughter itself lends a dismissive tone to her comment about the AAVE expression “fussing.” Thus when Janeka responds by laughing (line 12) and then apologizes for laughing (“I’m sorry,” line 12), it is not clear whether she is amused, embarrassed, or simply responding collaboratively to Rachael’s smile. Clearly Rachael is also
not sure, as she seeks reassurance that Janeka understands her point: “You see what I mean. Right?” (line 13).

In sum, as suggested by Rachael’s conferences with Sharise and Janeka, a clear link exists between her relatively undeveloped levels of sociolinguistic language awareness (as discussed in Chapter 6) and the level of interaction that occurs when she discusses the AAVE features in their writing. As neither student responds directly to Rachael’s suggestions that other words would sound or be “better” than the vernacular expressions they have used in their essays (i.e. “coming up” and “fussin,” respectively), it is difficult to know how Rachael’s evaluations have affected them. When compared with Charlotte’s responses to her feedback on the “problem” of sentence fragments, however, their response behavior is far different. While Charlotte responds by taking the floor and discussing the trouble she has had identifying sentence fragments, Sharise remains silent and Janeka appears at first to miss the point and then to be distracted from it by Rachael’s discomfort. More importantly, the silence and miscommunications that occur in Rachael’s conferences with Sharise and Janeka highlight myriad missed opportunities to build on the students’ underlying linguistic knowledge. By discussing the meaning features of vernacular expressions such as “coming up” or “fussin,” for example, Rachael might help her students to choose Edited American English vocabulary that more closely matches their intended meanings. By taking a more contrastive approach to the uninflected verbs in some students’ essays (e.g., Sharise’s use of past-tense “shake” and “seem”), Rachael might also engage her in fruitful discussions of the relationship between phonology and spelling (Klein 2003) or the difference between certain regular and irregular verb forms. Moreover, by engaging students in frank discussions of language use in different communities (e.g., Sharise’s discomfort with the language of the university administrators), Rachael might
also help her students to become more fully aware of their own language use. While all of these suggestions sound a bit utopian within the realistic confines of a 10- to 20-minute writing conference, the higher levels of backchanneling and overall response patterns that occur in Rachael’s discussion with Charlotte and Daniel suggest that when she discusses a language issue that she both understands and addresses regularly in class (e.g., clear thesis statements, effective supporting details, or grammatical challenges such as sentence fragments), students are far more engaged in the learning process. Thus were Rachael able to supplement her obvious “folk” awareness of language with that of a linguist, she would very likely be able to engage her students in lively and fruitful discussions of language variation as well.

7.1.2. Al’s basic writing conferences

While Rachael often discusses progressive drafts of a single paper over several writing conferences, Al generally focuses on the first draft of a student’s paper, both in the formal writing conferences he schedules in his office and during in-class writing workshops. That is, students usually arrive with their first drafts in hand and wait while Al reads through them. As Al has already conducted brainstorming and prewriting exercises in class in order to help students get started on the writing process, he uses his writing conference both to give them feedback on what they have written and to discuss their plans for future drafts. In addition, he frequently suggests that his students revise their essays on the spot, often physically moving both pen and paper in front of them and waiting as they revise.

The following analysis explores the similarities and differences between Al’s discursive interactions in general grammar and writing discussions and in those focused more specifically on language variation. As in Rachael’s writing conferences, Al’s discussions of general grammar and writing issues can reach high levels of interaction. He also manages to elicit strong student
engagement in some discussions of language variation. As discussed in Chapter 6, Al has a firm overall awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation. Yet in spite of this sociolinguistic awareness, not all of Al’s approaches to the vernacular lead to the same level of interaction that his general discussions of writing and grammar reach.

7.1.2.1. Al’s one-on-one discussions of general writing and grammar issues

Al, like Rachael, engages in many interactive discussions of general grammar and writing issues. Moreover, many of his discussions of sentence-level issues also occur in the midst of broader discussions of essay unity and coherence. In Extract 7.6, for example, as Al focuses on the overuse of the pronoun “I” in an essay written by Brenda, a middle-aged European woman, she reacts to each of Al’s questions and suggestions with overlapping and full-turn responses, as well as with written revisions that she makes on the spot.

Extract 7.6

1 A: What I want you to do is- I want you to make this about your uncle. And- and so
2 when you say 'I,' that kind of brings it back to you, kinda calls attention to-
3 [that you're writing this.
4 B: [I have an issue with that 'I' thing, don't I.
5 A: Yeah, well, most [of us do.
6 B: [Ha Ha Ha.
7 A: So how can we make this about your uncle instead of about you .. or without-
8 How can we make it more about your uncle?
9 B: ... ... I could put maybe 'Here is a story about a hero.'
10 A: Yeah.
11 B: Sound [good?
12 A: [Yeah. Exactly.
13 B: [Talks to herself as she writes.] Okay, cross that out. ... is a story -take that out-
14 about a hero.
15 A: Yeah, that's very good

Here, as Al notes that Brenda’s use of the pronoun “I” takes the focus off the subject of her essay (i.e., her uncle), Brenda’s response, “I have an issue with that 'I' thing, don't I” (line 4), not only cooperatively overlaps the last four words of his remarks (i.e., “that you're writing this,” line 3),
it also refers to previous feedback he has given her. Throughout the remaining discussion, moreover, Brenda signals her engagement in the conference through three different types of response: (1) directly answering Al’s repeated question about how she could revise what she has written (i.e., “I could put maybe 'Here is a story about a hero,’” line 9); briefly taking the floor with a proactive (and unsolicited) question about her essay (“Sound good?” line 11); and both verbally and physically responding to Al’s requests that she revise her essay during the conference (“Okay, cross that out. ... ‘is a story’ -take that out- ‘about a hero,’” lines 13-14).

Moreover, by revising her essay during the conference itself, Brenda briefly assumes the role of primary knower (K1) in the interaction (Haneda 2004). As Haneda argues, determining who assumes this role can help us to explore the dialogic or monologic nature of instruction (see Chapter 3). That is, if the instructor always maintains the role of primary knower (K1), and the student always only assumes the role of secondary knower (K2), the interaction will be relatively one-sided, with the teacher doing most of the talking. If, on the other hand, the student is frequently encouraged to take on the K1 role by providing information from his or her own knowledge base, the interaction will be far more dialogic.

A similarly dialogic interaction occurs between Al and Vanessa, a young African American woman, in the following exchange.

**Extract 7.7**

1  A: All right. I **like** the details here. [Reads] 'In the year1980 at the age of 23, my mother worked at a X factory for a total of 20 hard years.' So you have really
2  **good specifics** right there, right? **I know** what year she started, **I know** how long
3  she worked there, **I know** how old she was when she worked there. That's **great**.
4  ... And then, now **I know it's a X factory**. You were saying XX- you were saying
5  X?
6  V: **Yeah, yeah**
7  A: **I figured it was a cupcake factory**. [ /?/}
At the beginning of this exchange, Vanessa’s frequent backchanneling (“Yeah, yeah,” line 7; “yeah,” line 9; “Right,” line 12) and laughter (lines 12, 15, and 17) suggest that she is actively engaged in Al’s detailed description of the “good specifics” in her essay (lines 3-5). Moreover, as Al employs the clause “I know” to create a list of all of the information she has provided about her mother (“I know what year she started, I know how long she worked there, I know how old she was when she worked there. That’s great. ... And then, now I know it's a factory,” lines 3-5), he not only highlights his role of secondary knower (K2, Haneda 2004), he also helps Vanessa to assume the role of primary knower (K1, Haneda 2004). As he explains how she has cleared up his confusion about the type of factory where her mother worked (“now I know it's a X factory,” line 5; “I figured it was a cupcake factory,” line 8), she not only provides additional information (“Yeah, but that was the title,” line 9), she also highlights her own role as primary knower by joking, “You coulda asked. I woulda told ya” (line 15).

Al’s ability to engage his students in interactive discussions is also visible when he discusses general grammatical issues. For example, in the following exchange with Brenda, Al involves her in the revision of a sentence fragment.

Extract 7.8

1 A: Now this is a- a- a fragment, right here. [Reads:] 'Born to X and X, on January 2 13, 1925, the first of four children.’ So we need a subject there. Who was born to X
3 and [X?
4 B: [Um, X was.
A: Okay, *so you wanna put that in that sentence*. Right now it's understood, but that sentence doesn't have a subject.

B: *[Writes while talking to herself.]* Right here...

A: Yeah, very good.

In this exchange, as Al identifies a sentence fragment (“Now this is a- a- a fragment, right here,” line 1) and describes how it should be revised (“So we need a subject there,” line 2), he engages Brenda in the revision by asking, “Who was born to X and X?” (lines 2-3). As evidenced by Brenda’s immediate response, “(Um X was,” line 4), which also overlaps the last word in Al’s question, she is clearly engaged. Moreover, when he suggests, “so you wanna put that in the sentence” (line 5), Brenda not only assumes ownership of the process by making the revision herself, she also highlights her involvement by talking to herself as she does it (“Right here…,” line 7). Just as he does in his discussions of Brenda’s word choice (Ext. 7.6) and Vanessa’s use of detail (Ext. 7.7), Al keeps Brenda engaged in the process of revision by making her the primary “knower” in the writing process (Haneda 2004). That is, even though he is the one who identifies the fragment and suggests a solution, Brenda is the one who ultimately implements it.

Finally, in all three of the exchanges discussed here, Al, like Rachael, uses some evaluative terminology. For example, he frequently uses the adjective “good,” as he praises Brenda’s substitution for the pronoun “I” (“Yeah, that's very good,” Ext. 7.6, line 15); as he tells Vanessa how much he “likes” the details she has provided and calls them “great” (Ext. 7.7, lines 1 and 4, respectively); and finally, as he compliments Brenda on her revision of a sentence fragment (“Yeah, very good,” Ext. 7.8, line 8). Unlike Rachael, however, Al does not use lexical items such as “problem” or “better,” whose meaning features often connote negative criticism. For example, while Rachael refers to the sentence fragments and comma “problems” in Charlotte’s essay (Ext. 7.3, line 1), Al refers simply to what is “needed” when discussing Brenda’s sentence fragment (“So we need a subject there,” Ext. 7.8, line 2). Thus the missing
subject is not a “problem” that needs to be eradicated, but rather an addition that he and Brenda address together.

Finally, as revealed in the section to follow, Al’s efforts to engage his students in on-the-spot revisions and avoid the use of pejorative language also enhance his underlying sociolinguistic awareness in some discussions of language variation.

7.1.2.2. Al’s one-on-one discussions of language variation

As the following extracts reveal, there are clear links between Al’s sociolinguistic awareness of language variation (as discussed in Chapter 6) and his discursive interactions with students in one-on-one contexts. In particular, his awareness of his students’ linguistic repertoires and communicative competence leads to two highly interactive exchanges with Brenda (see Ext. 7.9 and Ext. 7.10 below). Yet, as discussed in Chapter 6 and revealed again in the following analysis, one aspect of Al’s language awareness that is less developed is his specific knowledge of AAVE. Even though at the time of the study Al had previous experience teaching writing in an historically black university (HBU) and was also enrolled in a PhD program that focused on general issues related to language variation and literacy (see Chapter 5), he had never completed any courses in AAVE per se. Thus his approach to two AAVE-related grammatical issues in a discussion with Vanessa (Ext, 7.11 below) is less interactive than his discussions of more general vernacular issues.

It is also important to note that compared with Rachael’s writing conferences, Al’s conferences from the fall of 2009 offer far fewer opportunities to observe his approach to specific varieties of English such as AAVE. While the majority of study participants in Rachael’s class were AAVE speakers (See Chapter 4), only three of the students who signed up from Al’s class spoke a variety of English that differed noticeably from the Edited American
English used in the classroom. Two of these students, Vanessa and Lakeisha, were also the only African American students enrolled in the class, while Brenda, a middle-aged European woman whose speech contained many vernacular features such as double negatives, regularized verbs, and the construction ”ain’t,” rarely used these in her writing. In addition, Al and Lakeisha, who was absent from one of the required writing conferences, never discussed the AAVE features in her writing during the conference she did attend (but see a discussion of his written feedback in the chapter to follow). Nevertheless, the level of interaction in the discussions of language variation that I was able to observe often (but not always) reveal the clear influence of Al’s general sociolinguistic awareness of language variation.

In the following exchange, for example, as Al addresses Brenda’s use of “seen” versus “saw,” he avoids any references to “seen” being wrong or incorrect. Rather, he pauses long enough in his reading for Brenda to notice it and then volunteer a different word.

**Extract 7.9**

A: [Reads aloud from Brenda’s essay:] ‘But he seen all his friends joining up and going off to war. So he didn't feel /?/ not to go as well.’ Okay.. Um, ...

B: I could put ‘watched’ there. ‘He watched all his friends joining’....

A: Okay, okay, you could do that, or ‘saw.’ It would be ‘saw’ instead of ‘seen,’ but I think ‘watched’ works as well, whatever you prefer. [A brief pause occurs as Brenda writes.] Very good.

B: I didn't get the chance to proofread.

A: No, no, it's good. It's pretty well proofread actually. We're responding to minor stuff here.

Here, as Al reads the sentence ‘But he seen all his friends joining up and going off to war’ (lines 1-2), he pauses twice (“Okay.. um….,” line 2), creating an opportunity for Brenda to take the floor with her own suggested revision of the vernacular past-tense “seen” (“I could put ‘watched’ there. ‘He watched all his friends joining,’” line 3). Moreover, when Al finally does specify the EAE past-tense form (“It would be ‘saw’ instead of ‘seen,’” lines 4-5), he not only uses the less
prescriptive modal “would” (vs. “should”), he also simultaneously validates Brenda’s own suggested revision by presenting “saw” as simply one possible alternative (“or ‘saw,’” line 4; “but I think ‘watched’ works as well, whatever you prefer,” line 5). In addition, since Brenda’s reply (“I didn’t get a chance to proofread,” line 7), clearly indicates that she understands Al’s underlying message (i.e., that the vernacular pattern “I seen” does not fit in an EAE context), her responsive on-the-spot revision (see lines 5-6) suggests that Al’s less prescriptive lexical choices have helped to maintain the highly interactive quality of the exchange. Furthermore, even though Al’s final comment (“We’re responding to minor stuff here,” line 8) does not reflect any effort to use the contrastive approach discussed by many linguists and educators (e.g., Rickford 1999; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Wheeler 2005; Wheeler and Swords 2006; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999), it does reflect his perception of vernacular patterns as examples of language variation rather than language errors in themselves (see discussion in Chapter 6).

In another discussion with Brenda (Ext.7.10), moreover, Al’s general awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation leads to a highly interactive discussion of the difference between spoken language and written Edited American English:

**Extract 7.10**

1. B: [Reads from her essay:] ‘Now I don't know about anyone else, but I don't want the federal government picking out *my* treatment.’
2. A: *Lot of I's.*
3. B: *But I think that there fits, though.* How would you take the 'I' out? Then it would sound stupid.
4. A: Well-
5. B: *And I would talk like that too!* I would. [Brenda paraphrases the sentence from her essay:] 'Now I don't know about anybody else but I wouldn't want the federal government picking out *my* [treatment. ‘
6. A: [right
7. B: *That sounds so right to me.*
8. A: Well, sure because */?/
A: Well, one of the **contrasts** that in taking the X [a concurrent speech class]- that is hopefully starting to emerge is the **difference between writing and speaking**. And, um, the farther along you go in school, the more you're going to have **two sets of language**, the one you speak in and the one you write in. Or the one you write in a [formal /?/]

B: [So it's okay if you talk like this, just don't write it like that.]

A: It's just that-

B: *To me it don't make much sense.* Ha Ha Ha.

A: Ha Ha Ha.

B: If you think it, write it. Of course I do poetry, so-

A: Ah ha?

B: What I'm thinking gets put on the paper. It ain't always good. [Laughs] Okay.

A: *So how can I fix that, though?* It just seems right for me. Because I *wouldn't* want the government picking /?/

While this discussion focuses more on stylistic variation than on differences between two different varieties of English, it nevertheless reveals Al’s understanding of (and positive attitudes toward) language variation in general (see Chapter 6). In response to Brenda’s argumentative defense of her use of personal pronouns in an academic essay (―But I think that there fits, though,‖ line 4; ―And I would talk like that, too!,‖ line 7; ―That sounds so right to me,‖ line 11), Al makes several lexical choices that apply a sense of legitimacy to the “spoken” language Brenda has used in her essay. For example, he refers specifically to the speaking class in which she and the other basic writing students are also enrolled (―Well, one of the contrasts that in taking the X [a concurrent speech class]- that is hopefully starting to emerge is the difference between writing and speaking,‖ lines 14-16). Moreover, Al’s choice of the nouns “contrast” and “difference,” whose meaning features connote a relatively neutral comparison, differs from Rachael’s choice of the evaluative adjective “better” in similar comparisons of written and spoken language (Ext. 7.3 and Ext. 7.4b). So too, Al’s choice of the NP “two sets of language” (“you're going to have two sets of language, the one you speak in and the one you write in,” lines 16-17) also confers on Brenda’s language an equal status with written EAE. That is, by choosing
a noun such as “set,” whose semantic features often connote equal membership with other sets in a larger group, Al avoids using more evaluative terminology such as the NP “a better word” (Ext. 7.4b), which creates the implication that written language is better than spoken language overall. Finally, even though Brenda remains skeptical (“So it's okay if you talk like this, just don't write it like that,” lines 19-20; To me it don't make much sense,” line 22), she nevertheless requests further input (“So how can I fix that, though?,” line 27). Her reaction can be contrasted, moreover, with Sharise’s lack of any response to Rachael’s suggestion that she use a “better” expression than the AAVE idiom “coming up” in her essay (Ext. 7.4b).

On the other hand, when Al addresses vernacular patterns related specifically to AAVE phonology and morphosyntax, his language awareness does not appear as strong; nor does the interaction progress as smoothly. For example, in Extract 7.11 (below), as Al addresses Vanessa’s use of the plural noun “women” (versus “woman”) and the (apparently) uninflected verb “do” (versus inflected “does”) in one sentence from Vanessa’s essay (Figure 7.3 below), her level of engagement and understanding begins to diminish.

My sweet mother was the type of women that will always and still do pray and always puts God first in everything she does.

Figure 7.3. A sentence from Vanessa’s essay about her mother.

Extract 7.11

1 A: Ah, okay. [Reads] 'My sweet mother was the type of woman- woman that will 
2 always and still do-do pray and always puts God first in everything she does.' [Note: Vanessa has written “women” rather than “woman.”]
3 V: I really wanted to show about that sentence. [but I put it in there anyway.
4 A: [Yeah. Well, you're writing about
5 one person, right?
6 V: Right.
7 A: So what - What do you- What word is this? [Points to the word “women.”]
8 V: Oh, that- that’s who talks about all of them, right? As in [əwəmən] - as in general.
9 That’s basically how that- how that sounds.
10 A: Well, you’re saying she’s a certain type of woman.
V: mhm.
A: So what word is that? Is that ‘women’?
V: Oh, ‘a’?
A: /?/ type of woman. That’s singular.
V: /?/
A: So what’s this singular here? ‘My mother is .. the type of woman who always
and still-
V: and still pray - should I have crossed out 'do pray,' which is... ?
A: Well, would it be do pray or what would-
V: does?
A: Always and still does pray and always puts God first in everything she does. Very
good.
V: mhm.

While Vanessa responds enthusiastically as Al reads aloud from her essay (i.e., “I really wanted
to show about that sentence,” line 4), Al appears to ignore her remarks as he begins to address
her use of the plural noun “women” instead of “woman” with the expression “type of” (lines 5-
16). Moreover, despite Al’s efforts to engage Vanessa in the discussion, he subtly begins to
assume the role of primary knower, while she slowly begins to take a more passive role in the
discussion. For example, as Al attempts to draw Vanessa into the discussion, her backchanneling
seems more formulaic than genuine. That is, her response in line 7 (“Right”) appears to be an
automatic reply to Al’s question (“Well, you’re writing about one person, right?,” lines 5-6).
Moreover, her response in line 12 (“mhm”) also appears to accommodate Al’s need for
confirmation as he comes to a full stop after telling her, “Well, you’re saying she’s a certain type
of woman” (line 11). Furthermore, even when Vanessa responds to a direct question about her
use of the plural form, “women,” her reply suggests that she does not quite understand the point
Al is making. That is, as he points to the word “women” and asks, “What word is this? (line 8),
Vanessa gives a lengthy explanation of the entire expression "type of woman": “Oh, that- that’s
who talks about all of them, right? As in [wʊmən]- as in general” (lines 9-10). At this point, were
Al more aware of the variable pronunciations of the singular noun “woman” in different varieties
of English (e.g., Webster’s lists [wəmən] as a Southern English pronunciation\(^\text{24}\)), he might also realize that Vanessa has in fact used the singular form of the noun “woman” in her explanation and probably doesn’t notice that she has misspelled it as “women.” As Shaughnessy (1977) notes, basic writers often mix the two words in their writing. Instead, however, Al continues to assume that Vanessa has written “women” because she does not understand when to use singular or plural nouns after the expression “type of” (“Well, you’re saying she’s a certain type of woman,” line 11). Moreover, it is only when he actually pronounces the word in another direct question (“Is that women?,” line 13) that Vanessa finally realizes that she has misspelled “woman” as “women” and replies, “Oh, ‘a’?” (line 14). As evidenced by the clear miscommunication in this exchange, Al’s lack of phonological awareness prevents him from realizing early on that Vanessa has simply misspelled “woman” and leads him instead to engage her in a confusing discussion of when to use singular and plural. Yet were Al more attuned to Vanessa’s pronunciation of “woman,” he might also respond to her comment that, “That’s basically how that sounds” (line 10) by encouraging her to pronounce both expressions (i.e., “type of woman” and “type of women”) and to note the spelling of the one she intended to write.

In doing so, moreover, he would not only help Vanessa to become more aware of her spelling, but would also help her to build on her innate knowledge of language in the process. Instead, however, the questioning tone of Vanessa’s final response, “Oh, ‘a’?” (line 14), clearly reflects her dependent status as a secondary knower (K2, Haneda 2004), while Al’s final prescriptive remark (“That’s singular, ” line 15) is clearly that of a K1 instructor.

As Al changes the topic of discussion to address Vanessa’s use of uninflected do (lines 17 to 23, repeated below), he first attempts his usual approach of encouraging a students to discover what needs revising and make the needed revision herself. He does not address the

\(^{24}\) Webster’s lists [wəmən] as the more general/standard pronunciation.
uninflected verb as a “problem”; nor does he tell Vanessa the “correct” way to revise it. Yet, as
the following exchange reveals, Al again misses the opportunity to tap into Vanessa’s underlying
linguistic competence as he tries to draw her attention to the verb. That is, with his sole focus on
subject-verb agreement, he appears not to recognize a possible AAVE-related pattern in her use
of *do*.

17 A: *So what's this singular here?* ‘My mother is .. the type of woman who always
18 and still-
19 V: and *still pray* - should I have crossed out *'do pray,'* *which is... ?*
20 A: Well, would it be *do pray* or what would-
21 V: *does?*
22 A: Always and still *does pray* and always *puts* God first in everything she *does. Very
good.*
23 V: *mhmm.*

As this exchange reveals, Al assumes that Vanessa’s use of “do pray” is a subject/verb issue that
can be solved simply by changing “do” to “does.” While he attempts to accomplish this
interactively by mentioning the singular subject (“So what's this singular here?,” line 17) and
then pausing after the word “still” so that Vanessa can insert the third-person singular form of the
verb herself (“My mother is .. the type of woman who always and still-,” lines 17-18) Vanessa
does not appear to understand what he is suggesting. That is, even though she cooperatively
offers a revision, her initial response is to omit “*do*” altogether, as she asks, “and *still pray -
should I have crossed out *'do pray,'* *which is... ?*” (line 19). Yet at this point, even though
Vanessa pauses mid-sentence, Al does not take the opportunity to explore why she thinks she
should completely omit *do*. Rather, he returns to the issue of subject-verb agreement with the
question “Well, would it be *do pray* or what would-” (line 20). Again, as she did in response to
Al’s focus on the singular and plural forms of “woman,” Vanessa gives a tentative answer in the
form of a question (“*does*?,” line 21). Moreover, it is Al, not Vanessa, who finally states the
“correct” EAE sentence: “Always and still does pray and always puts God first in everything she does” (lines 22-23),

Yet one cannot help but wonder how the discussion would have progressed if Al had a clearer understanding of AAVE aspectual patterns. For example were he aware that when “do is used as an “aspectual element” in AAVE (i.e., when it is combined with habitual be in a sentence such as “It do be dark at six,” Green 2002, p. 71), it also remains uninflected (see discussion and chart in Green 2002, p. 45), he might be better equipped to address Vanessa’s lack of inflection in this case. That is, he might explore whether Vanessa has used uninflected ‘do’ to emphasize the habitual nature of her mother’s praying. The following sentence from another one of Vanessa’s essays (to be discussed more fully in the chapter to follow) suggest that she may also use uninflected do in other habitual (or durative) contexts: “What do being a single parent have to do with healthcare?” While habitual do is not a feature of African American Vernacular English (Green 2002; Rickford 1999), it does occur in Caribbean English creoles, either as the basilectal preverbal marker “d” in sentences such as “He (d) a sing” (i.e., “He usually sings) or as the inflected mesolectal preverbal markers “does” or “do” in sentences such as “He does sing” (Rickford 1999). Thus it is possible that there is a creole influence in Vanessa’s lack of inflection. While it is also possible that uninflected do simply represents the usual subject-verb agreement pattern of AAVE, Vanessa’s use of inflected “does” later on in the same clause (i.e., “and always puts God first in everything she does,” Fig. 7.3) suggests that uninflected do may, in fact, be serving a habitual/durative aspectual function.

While one might also argue that Vanessa intended all along for “do” to agree with the plural noun “women” (e.g., the type of women that will always and still do pray), her third-person singular inflection of both “puts” and “does” in the last part of the clause (i.e., “always
puts God first in everything she does,” Fig. 7.3) suggests otherwise. So, too, does her pronunciation of the written plural “women” as [wəmən], a vernacular alternate for singular “woman.” While it is not possible to glean from such limited data the underlying explanation for uninflected do in Vanessa’s essays, it is reasonable to expect that a deeper understanding of AAVE syntax would help Al to address it more effectively in the writing conference. As suggested by Vanessa’s nonlexical “mhm” at the end of this exchange (line 24), she may not fully understand Al’s emphasis on substituting “does” for “do” in this case.

In sum, when working with students in one-on-one contexts, Al reveals his sociolinguistic language awareness primarily through his general approach to language variation. Not only does he avoid using pejorative language to discuss vernacular patterns in his students’ writings (e.g., Brenda’s use of past-tense “seen” vs. “saw”; Vanessa’s use of uninflected do), he also emphasizes the rule-governed nature of spoken language and the regular patterning of stylistic variation by emphasizing informal speech as a context in which Brenda’s use of the personal pronoun “I” would be effective. Yet, as evidenced by Vanessa’s lower levels of interaction and engagement in his discussion of her use of the lexical items “women” and “do,” less developed phonological and morphosyntactic awareness of AAVE per se appears to interfere with his generally strong ability to engage his students in lively discussions of their writing.

7.2. The Issue of Context: A Comparison With Barbara’s Technical Writing Conferences

While the language backgrounds of the students I observed in Barbara’s class precluded any in-depth observations of her approach to language variation (see Footnote 23), a brief look at one of her writing conferences does offer (by contrast) some insight into the particular challenges that Al and Rachael face as basic writing instructors. Moreover, the contrast is
particularly useful since Barbara and Al have very similar levels of language awareness (see Chapter 6) and are also exploring relationships between language variation and literacy in the same PhD program (see Chapter 5). Thus by noting differences in Barbara’s vs. Rachel’s and Al’s discursive interactions with students, I am also able to highlight some of the contextual influences of the basic writing setting.

For example, one of the most characteristic discursive patterns in Barbara’s one-on-one writing conferences is the tendency of her students to take ownership of the conferences. Unlike Rachael and Al, Barbara does not require students to attend writing conferences. Rather, as she has already given much of her initial feedback in the form of written comments on the students’ papers and on accompanying grade sheets, she leaves it up to the students themselves to decide whether they need additional commentary or explanation. Thus students usually arrive with their agendas for the conferences already in place. As the following excerpts from an impromptu conference with Clair reveal, this often leads students to define both the topics that will be discussed and the type of feedback that Barbara will offer.

In Extract 7.12a, for example, Clair describes the trouble she is having as she attempts to incorporate a set of key terms from an earlier “definition” paper into a final “technical” report. Specifically, she does not know whether to include them before or after her introductory problem statement.

Extract 7.12a (lines 1-8)

1 C: Because I think, uh - I think uh- not only am I gonna to need to incorporate my
2 entire definition paper in here, but I also need to expand it even further...
3 B: Okay
4 C: in order for the rest of this to make sense.
5 B: Cool. [Yeah.
6 C: [Which means that I need to add a heading somewhere that maybe says
7 something like, ah.. 'Definition of Key Terms.' And I'm wondering where should I
8 put that? After purpose? After summary?
As evidenced by Clair’s repeated use of the verb “need” at the beginning of this excerpt (i.e., “not only am I gonna need to incorporate;” line 1; “I also need to expand;” line 2; “I need to add a heading somewhere;” line 6), she has already put a lot of thought into the composition process. Thus Barbara’s role at the beginning of the conference is simply to acknowledge that she follows what Clair is saying. Moreover, as she accomplishes this primarily through supportive backchanneling (“Okay,” line 3; “Cool. Yeah,” line 5), she leads Clair ultimately to state directly what feedback she needs: “And I’m wondering where should I put that? After purpose? After summary?” (lines 7-8). As suggested in Section 7.1 above, an exchange such as this would be less likely in either Al’s or Rachael’s conferences with basic writing students. Not only do Al and Rachael take control of the conferences by both physically holding and reading aloud from their students’ essays, they also frequently interrupt their reading to address both sentence-level and more global writing issues as they appear on the page. Thus they are far more likely than Barbara to control which writing issues they discuss with their students and what feedback they ultimately offer.

As the following excerpt reveals, moreover, when Barbara does offer feedback, she, like Al, uses language designed to mitigate any prescriptive implications in her suggestions. Yet unlike both Al and Rachael, she also gives her feedback in the form of friendly advice that her students have the option to accept or challenge.

**Extract 7.12b (lines 9-14)**

9   B: *I would* put it after the summary. *I wouldn't* start with just- That *would* sort of be like just, you know, bam, here are the key terms. You want to ease into it a little bit?
10   And that's- that’s *probably* what this will do? So um, yeah, in fact, I mean..This is a *nice* way to start even though that's *first person*, it's a *little bit less formal, I think* that's fine, um, it's *fine to put some of yourself, you know, in- in your research*, so ..
11   *definitely* don't- *definitely* put it after this. You wanna start with this.
Here, even though Barbara repeats the emphatic adverb “definitely” as she advises Clair to insert her list of key terms after her introduction (“so .. definitely don't- definitely put it after this,” line 14), most of her lexical choices create the implication that the final decision belongs to Clair. Not only does Barbara use the less prescriptive modal “would” (“I would put it after the summary. I wouldn't start with just- That would sort of be like,” lines 9-10), she also chooses other words whose lexical features contradict the incontestability of her advice, including the adverb “probably” (“that’s probably what this will do?,” line 11) and the verb “think” (“I think that's fine,” line 13). Thus Barbara’s feedback sounds very different from that of both basic writing instructors. That is, she not only uses less prescriptive modals than Rachael does (i.e., see Rachael’s use of “should” in Ext. 7.4b), she also describes the use of first person in a far less black and white manner than Al does. For example, as Barbara notes that even though Clair’s use of first person in her introductory problem statement is “little bit less formal” (line 10), it is “fine to put some of yourself, you know, in- in your research” (line 11), she draws a much less definite contrast between written and spoken language than Al does in his discussion of Brenda’s use of first person (Ext. 7.10). Moreover, in doing so, she also highlights one of the most important differences between the “basic writing” context and the more advanced “technical” writing context. That is, because Al and Barbara are charged with the primary task of teaching the “formal” conventions of EAE to students who often do not yet make clear distinctions between their written and spoken language, they feel more bound by the need to emphasize the difference. Barbara, on the other hand, has the freedom to explore the nuances of written versus spoken and formal versus informal language because she assumes her students already know the difference.

Finally, a brief look at the following excerpt reveals an important difference between the type of response behavior that occur in Barbara’s writing conferences on the one hand and Al’s
and Rachael’s on the other. That is, it highlights Clair’s deep concern over the effect that Barbara’s suggested changes will have on a future reader.

**Extract 7.12c (lines 15-20)**

15  C: Okay, but someone who reads the summary, ah, *is gonna have questions* on what some of this stuff means that won't be answered until the next section...
16  B: [I-
17  C: [ But the problem is if I put the explanation in first, it's gonna be a really long 18  explanation because it kind of has to be and then the person won't even get to the 19  summary of the problem until the second or third page.

As Clair refers to the reader as “someone who reads the summary” (line 15) and “the person” (line 19), she not only describes the reader as someone who is interested in what she is writing (i.e., he/she “is gonna have questions,” line 15), she also describes the potential frustration the reader may feel if she does not provide key terms at the beginning of her paper. In doing so, Clair not only reveals her maturity as a writer, she also demonstrates the effect of the technical writing context in which she is operating. As Barbara stresses throughout her discussions of language in Chapter 6, one of the primary purposes of technical writing instruction is to help students relate their writing to their professional goals. Thus Barbara often refers to how a piece of writing will be perceived in the “real world” (again, see Chapter 6). While both Al and Rachael stress the effects that their students’ writings have on them (or may have on potential readers), there is little focus in the basic writing class on how students will use what they write in their own lives. This is not surprising, for as Al and Rachael read through their students essays, commenting on both global and sentence-level issues as they encounter them, there is very little opportunity for any other type of discussion. Thus, as this brief review of one of Barbara’s technical writing conferences suggests, the basic writing context appears to play a significant role in the discursive interactions between Al and Rachael and their respective students.

**7.3. Conclusion**
In sum, as revealed in the preceding analysis of Al’s and Rachael’s one-on-one interactions with their basic writing students, some clear links exist between the instructors’ respective levels of sociolinguistic language awareness and their discursive interactions with multidialectal students. In particular, Al’s deeper understanding of linguistic repertoire and communicative competence (discussed in Chapter 6) can be linked to greater levels of backchanneling and other response tokens than can Rachael’s more restrictive views in this area. For example, while his discussion of the difference between spoken and (formal) written language (Ext. 7.10) leads Brenda to interactively express her skepticism while also requesting additional feedback, Rachael’s attempt to discuss Sharise’s “informal” use of the AAVE idiom “coming up” results in a noticeable reduction in backchanneling on Sharise’s part. So, too, her discussion of Janeka’s use of the verb “fussin” produces amusement (and possible embarrassment) rather than any indication that Janeka understands her point (Ext. 7.5).

In discussions of vernacular syntax, moreover, Al’s deeper understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation (see Chapter 6) is also clearly visible. For example, his choice of the less prescriptive modals “could” and “would” in his discussion of Brenda’s use of past-tense “seen” vs. “saw” (Ext. 7.9) reveals an effort not to treat her use of “seen” as a mistake. Moreover, it leads to far more interaction than does Rachael’s more prescriptive use of “should” in her discussion of Sharise’s use of regularized and uninflected “shake” (Ext. 7.4b). Clearly, Rachael’s view of this and other uninflected verbs as incorrect English (see Chapter 6) has a negative impact on the level of interaction. Despite Al’s greater understanding of linguistic repertoire and the rule-governed nature of language variation, however, his lack of specific phonological and morphosyntactic knowledge of AAVE does lead to a confusing discussion of Vanessa’s use of uninflected do (Ext. 7.11). This suggests, moreover, that without additional
study of AAVE *per se*, he may continue to have difficulty engaging students in discussions of syntax that is influenced by AAVE patterns. Without addition data, however, it is difficult to know for certain (but see the discussion of his written feedback in the chapter to follow).

Finally, while Al’s and Rachael’s discursive interactions in the writing conferences clearly reflect their very different levels of language awareness (see Chapter 6), along with the their very different levels of preparations for addressing language variation in their students’ writings (see Chapter 5), we cannot ignore the influence of two other important factors on the level of interaction in their respective writing conferences. The first involves their very different teaching styles and approaches to language overall. While Al and Rachael each emphasize the “process” of writing, focusing on effective thesis statements, supporting details, word choice, and the conventions of EAE syntax (see also Chapter 6), Rachael seems to have a much stronger “folk” belief in good vs. bad language (Preston 1996, 2002). That is, she often evaluates certain language as “better” than other language. While this does not affect the interactive quality of her discussions of general writing issues such as sentence fragments (with Charlotte) or essay organization and word choice (with Daniel), it does influence the lower levels of interaction in her discussions of AAVE expressions (e.g., “coming up” and “fussing”) and syntax (e.g., verb inflection). That is, while students accept her role as “evaluator” when she addresses general language issues, they appear confused by (and even resistant to) her remarks about the varieties they speak at home or in their communities (in this case, AAVE).

While Al also expects conventional EAE syntax and word choice in his students’ formal essays, he makes a greater effort to treat diversions from these patterns as alternatives rather than mistakes. Moreover, his tendency to have his students make their revisions on the spot helps him to do so. That is, as he leads students to play more proactive roles in the revision process, he also
helps them to make decisions about the language they want to use in different contexts. Thus while Rachael addresses Sharise’s uninflected verbs by telling her that she “should” use past tense, Al leads Brenda to choose a different verb for vernacular past-tense “seen” by encouraging her to notice it herself and to revise it as they talk.

The second factor that cannot be ignored in a discussion of the links between Al’s and Rachael’s respective levels language awareness and their approaches to language variation is context. As revealed in the brief discussion of one of Barbara’s technical writing conferences, the context in which writing instruction takes place not only affects which interlocutor (i.e. the instructor or the student) controls the topic and flow of conversation, but also affects the level of ownership that students demonstrate toward their writing. As discussed in Section 7.3, students in the technical writing class focus heavily on writing that relates to their educational interests and future professional goals. Thus in Extract 7.12c, Clair not only introduces the topic of her conference with Barbara (i.e., the organization of her introduction and key terms), she also demonstrates a deep concern for a potential future reader. Moreover, the strong ownership that she demonstrates for her writing makes it far easier for Barbara to play the role of an advisor rather than an evaluator.

Despite these additional influences on the interactive quality of the writing conferences, however, the preceding analysis of Rachael’s and Al’s conferences does indicate a strong link between the instructors’ respective levels of language awareness and their discursive interactions with multidialectal students. That is, the most interactive discussions of vernacular language occur in one-on-one conferences with Al, whose educational background in language variation is far stronger than Rachael’s (see Chapter 5). On the other hand, one of Al’s conferences with Vanessa also suggests that without specific training in the varieties of English their students
speak, instructors will not be well enough prepared to discuss all of the language issues that arise in their writing.
Chapter 8

Language Awareness and Written Feedback on the Writings of Multidialectal Students

As revealed in Chapter 7, some of the most interactive writing conferences between Al and Rachael and their respective students include intertextual references to prior conferences, whole-class lectures or discussions, and their written commentary. While an in-depth discussion of the instructors’ whole-class interactions is beyond the scope of the current analysis, a brief look at some of Rachael’s and Al’s written feedback does help to highlight some links between their respective levels of language awareness and their discursive interactions with students. As argued in the literature (see Chapter 3), written commentary is an important component of a broader ongoing conversation between writing instructors and their students and should thus not be examined in isolation (Fife and O’Neill 2001; Straub 1996). Moreover, as Fife and O’Neill (2001) argue, the “written” components of a conversation about writing are influenced by many of the same factors that affect an oral exchange, including “the physical setting, personal background knowledge, attitudes toward each other, socio-cultural assumptions concerning role and status relationships, and social values associated with various message components” (Gumperz 1982, p. 153, paraphrased in Fife and O’Neil 2001, p. 312). Thus in the following discussion, as I explore Al’s and Rachael’s written comments on their students’

25 As Al usually read students’ drafts for the first time during the writing conferences, his first and primary commentary was most often oral. That is, he did not, like Rachael, read and explain previously written commentary. Occasionally he would make written annotations on the students’ drafts while they discussed them together, but I did not receive copies of these drafts since the students took them home at the end of the conferences. Thus it is not possible to know exactly what or how much he wrote on these drafts. The drafts that I did receive (and that are analyzed here) are therefore final graded drafts that were submitted after the writing conferences. As Al considered the students’ separate writing assignments to be components of a single ongoing development of their writing, however, he and his students often made intertextual references to general ongoing issues that he had addressed both in previous conferences and in his written commentary on previously assigned essays.
compositions, I do so within the broader framework of an ongoing conversation about language and writing.

As the following discussion reveals, the written notations that both Ali and Rachael use to address the vernacular and, in particular, issues related to AAVE phonology and morphosyntax, often reflect the clearly pejorative social value assigned to it in academic writing (e.g., Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Even though Ali demonstrates a far deeper understanding of (and appreciation for) language variation (see Chapter 6), he and Rachael both share the practice of circling, crossing out, and in some cases revising the vernacular patterns they encounter in their students’ writings. Moreover, Rachael’s written feedback on AAVE features appears to cause some genuine confusion for one of the students who attempts to apply it to her writing. As Auten (1991) notes, if students do not fully understand the purpose of teachers’ interlinear and marginal comments, general breakdowns in communication can occur. On the other hand, Ali’s “lack” of written response to certain vernacular patterns suggests some effort to recognize the positive social value of vernacular patterns in certain contexts.

Finally, as the following analysis reveals, both Ali and Rachael provide far more detailed feedback on issues they understand and have discussed in class. That is, they not only use more specific annotations, they also provide more in-depth feedback overall.

8.1 The evaluation rubrics

Before analyzing the written commentary that Rachael and Ali offer their multidialectal students, it is first helpful to examine the “grading” rubrics that accompany the papers they return to their students (Figures 8.1 and 8.2 below). While Rachael attaches rubrics to her students’ papers at several different points in the writing process (i.e., with first, second, and
even third drafts), Al saves them for the final graded draft. Yet, as the example rubrics reveal, Al and Rachael focus on very similar global and sentence-level issues:

![Figure 8.1. Example rubric from Rachael’s basic writing class](image-url)
Figure 8.2. Example rubric from Al’s basic writing class
The similarities between Al’s and Rachael’s rubrics are numerous. Both highlight “clear” thesis statements and topic sentences; both emphasize the need for strong “supporting details”; and both concentrate on sentence-level issues such as sentence fragments and run-on sentences, spelling errors, and incorrect comma use.

At no point, however, are the issues of language variation and code-switching mentioned in either rubric. While such an omission is not surprising on Rachael’s part, it is noteworthy that Al makes no reference to language variation at all. That is, while Rachael considers most examples of language variation to be errors (see Chapters 6 and 7), Al demonstrates a stronger awareness of the rule-governed nature of language variation, both in this initial interview with me and in his one-on-one interactions with students. Yet, as the following discussion suggests, the lack of reference to language variation on both his and Rachael’s rubrics reflects a fundamental absence of any vocabulary for addressing vernacular features in their written commentary.

8.2 Rachael’s Written Commentary

As mentioned above, written commentary is just one part of a greater ongoing dialogue between a writing instructor and a student. Written comments not only refer a student to previous whole class instruction (i.e., through written notations such as “sentence fragments” or “comma use”), they also indicate areas of writing that are unclear to the reader or that simply do not flow. When the instructors refer to issues that have not been addressed in class discussions or lectures or in one-on-one writing conferences, however, opportunities for miscommunication occur. Such miscommunication is visible when we compare the first draft of an essay written by Charlotte, a middle-aged African American woman (Fig. 8.3), with her second draft, which she wrote during
the final class session of the semester (Fig. 8.4). As evidenced by Charlotte’s revisions, she does not fully understand Rachael’s references to the vernacular features in her essay.

Figure 8.3. First draft of Charlotte’s essay about her cousin’s abuse.

Here, on the first draft of Charlotte’s essay, the many circled nouns and verbs reveal Rachael’s frequent notation of the AAVE patterns in Charlotte’s writing. Not only does she circle generalized “has” (“you has those families,” line 1), unmarked plural “door” (“behind close door,” line 2), and uninflected third-person singulars “come” and “happen” (“the truth come out,” line 2; “until something tragic happen to them,” line 3), she also circles five instances of the absence of –ed endings on verbal and adjectival forms, including the participles “close” (“behind close door,” line 2) and “abuse” (“she was being abuse,” line 6) and what she presumes to be uninflected past-tense forms of “grab” (“he grab her,” line 8), “rap” [sic], and “pull” (“he rap his
hand around her hair and pull it,” line 9). She also adds a fairly illegible “d” to the participle “abuse” inside the circle (line 9). Aside from circling these nouns and verb forms and adding “d” to one of them, however, Rachael does not address Charlotte’s lack of verb inflection or plural marking in any other way; nor does she address the few general patterns that underlie the many individually circled items on the page.

On the other hand, Rachael uses a number of explanatory notations or symbols, as well as two questions, to address other writing issues in this essay. For example, she writes “SP” to indicate the misspelling of “secrets” as “secretes” (line 2), “wrap” as “rap” (line 9), and “taught” as “thought” (line 11); she includes a “delete” symbol over an incorrectly inserted punctuation mark (line 11); she indicates the need for an upper case letter at the beginning of a sentence (line 8); and she adds the marginal note “run-on” at four different points in the essay (lines 4, 9, 11, and 12). Rachael also encourages Charlotte to provide additional supporting details by asking, “Why did you think her life was perfect? (between lines 5 and 6), and she notes an unclear sentence with the question “Was she being abused by all these people or keeping secrets from them?” (next to line 6). In fact, the only issues that are not addressed with specific editing notations, revisions, or questions are eight of the nine AAVE features26 that Rachael circles in this essay (i.e., lines 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9) and one other general vernacular verb pattern (“If only she had told someone,” line 12). As the highlighted revisions in Charlotte’s final draft (Fig. 8.4 below) reveal, moreover, Rachael’s lack of explanation or reference to rule-governed AAVE verb patterns leads to some confusing revisions:

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26 Rachael does add the letter “d” to the uninflected participle “abuse” in line 6.
Families can appear to be the loving kind caring families but there are those that have secret. In public they are one way but behind closed doors the truth comes out. We never know until something tragic happen to them that’s how I found out about some of my family members. I had a cousin who I thought her life was so perfect she had everything. She went to the Best school she had a car at the age of sixteen. She wore nice clothes she was so pretty all the young men would ask her out all the time. She was so popular. But who knew that she was keeping a big secret. She was being abused from so many people her boy friend, Mom, father, and so called friends. I remember she was coming down the stair and her boy friend was angry. He started calling her names but that wasn’t good enough for him because she was ignoring him. He grabbed her by the head and pushed her up against the stair case rails. He raps his hand around her hair and pulled it until he drew blood from her scalp. She came over to me to calm me down because I was afraid and I was real young at the time that I witnessed all of this I was eight years old. She asks me not tell anyone. So I kept it to myself.

She taught me a very valuable lesson in life. Her story was tragic I found out later as I got older that she was raped by her mother boy friend and some of her male friend. She was doomed from the start by being raised up with so many siblings. It was nine children her mother had she was the oldest out of the nine her mom was a X she made good money her dad was a X. But things got bad when her dad die.

Figure 8.4. Paragraphs 1 and 2 from the final draft of Charlotte’s essay about her cousin’s abuse (highlighting and formatting mine)

In the first two sentences of Charlotte’s final draft, she has clearly made some of the intended revisions, suggesting that she may, in fact, understand the underlying messages of Rachael’s many circles. Not only has she changed generalized “has” to plural “have” (“there are those that have,” lines 1-2), she has also inflected the participle “close” to indicate the past and added plural -s to the noun “door” (i.e., “closed doors,” line 2). Moreover, she has added a third-person singular inflection to the verb “come” (“the truth comes out,” lines 2-3). Yet in the first sentence, Charlotte has also removed plural -s from a noun that Rachael had circled and marked as misspelled. That is, she has changed “secretes” (“those that have secretes,” Fig. 8.3, lines 1-2) to uninflected “secret” (“those that have secret,” line 2), suggesting that she may simply interpret every circle as an instruction to make some type of inflectional change. This possibility is further indicated, moreover, by Charlotte’s (apparently) random revisions to the verb forms that Rachael has circled. For example, while Charlotte has inflected three of her formerly uninflected verb
forms by adding “-ed” (i.e., “abused,” line 7; “grabbed,” line 10; “pulled” line 11), she has inflected the fourth verb by adding “-s” (“raps” [sic], line 11), leading to the mixed-tense sentence “He raps his hand around her hair and pulled it until he drew blood from her scalp” (lines 10-11). Charlotte has also changed “put,” a verb that Rachael did not circle in the first draft (“he grab her and put her head against the stair case rails,” Fig. 8.3, line 9) to the inflected present-tense verb “pushes” (“He grabbed her by the head and pushes her up against the stair case rails” (Fig. 8.4, line 10). Moreover, as Charlotte has also added past –ed to the originally uninflected verb “grab,” she has now created another mixed-tense sentence with both “grabbed” and “pushes.” Thus while it appears that Charlotte is aware that a circled verb needs to have something added, it is not clear that she fully understands why.

Yet, as Shaughnessy (1977) stresses when discussing the “chaos of errors” that teachers often encounter in the writings of Basic Writing students,

...a closer look will reveal very little that is random or “illogical” in what they have written. And the keys to their development as writers often lie hidden in the very features of their writing that English teachers have been trained to brush aside with a marginal code letter or a scribbled injunction to “Proofread.” (p. 5)

In fact, a closer look at Charlotte’s first draft suggests that she may have originally intended the verb “put,” as well as all three uninflected verbs in the original sentences, to reflect a present-tense foregrounding of the most dramatic part of her story (i.e., the moment when she witnesses her cousin being abused by her boyfriend). In this case, the sentences that in Edited American English would read “He grabs her and puts her head against the stair case rails. He wraps his hand around her hair and pulls it until it drew [sic] blood” would stand out from the remainder of the text, which is written predominantly in the past tense (see bolded past-tense verbs in Fig. 8.4). If this is what Charlotte did in fact intend, then two issues have been left unaddressed. The first relates to the AAVE pattern of omitting third person singular present tense -s (i.e., writing
“grab” instead of “grabs”). The second relates to the pattern of using present tense as a foregrounding device. In order to address the latter, Rachael would first need to address the former. By simply circling the uninflected verbs, however, she may have created more confusion on Charlotte’s part. On the other hand, if Charlotte intended this sentence to be interpreted as present-tense foregrounding, it is not clear why she originally used the past tense form of “draw” (i.e., “until he drew blood”) instead of the uninflected 3rd-person present tense (e.g., “until he draw blood”). While it is not possible to know exactly why Charlotte did not inflect the verbs “grab,” “rap”[sic], and “pull” in her first draft, her mixed-tense sentences in the final draft suggest that she is still confused by the circles Rachael has drawn around the uninflected verbs.

On the other hand, if Rachael had previously addressed the contrast between EAE and AAVE verbal inflection in class, she might have been able to add more of an explanation than a simple circle around an uninflected verb. As Farr and Daniels (1986) argue, it is more effective to address general grammatical patterns than to mark every example of variable syntax. (Note, for example, how Wheeler and Swords (2006) and Sweetland (2006) both use contrastive analysis to address these issues with younger AAVE speakers.) While a full analysis of Charlotte’s verb use is beyond the scope of this paper, her revisions in this essay suggests that neither the verbal nor the written feedback she has received on verb inflection has helped her to fully master EAE patterns.

Finally, one cannot read this essay without noting its powerful content. Not only does Charlotte tell the compelling story of a cousin who was abused and then murdered, she also describes her own tragic involvement as a child and the regrets she still experiences as an adult. Yet the few marginal comments about content on this paper reveal very little effort to help Charlotte tell the story in a more effective way. While Rachael asks one question designed to
help Charlotte to add details to her story (“Why did you think her life was perfect?,” Fig. 8.3) and another designed to clarify some confusing syntax (“Was she being abused by all of the people or keeping secrets from them?,” Fig. 8.3), there is no commentary about how Charlotte might more fully address her final message (“If only if she had of told someone or I maybe she would be alive today,” Fig. 8.3, lines 11-12).

On the other hand, while the heavy amount of sentence-level corrections appears to outweigh the possibility of any meaningful commentary on content, it is very likely that Rachael and Charlotte discussed these more global issues in a conference. As this essay was written in class (as a final exam project) during the final two or three sessions of the semester, it was most likely discussed during one of the private conferences that included reviews of students’ grades and general progress in the class. Unfortunately, Rachael requested that I not sit in on those. Nevertheless, as Rachael generally did engage in highly interactive discussions of content and essay organization with her students, it is very likely that she did with Charlotte as well. In the case of this essay, however, it appears that such discussions were outweighed by the heavy focus on “correcting” the AAVE morphosyntax in Charlotte’s writing.

8.3 Al’s Written Commentary

As evidenced by Al’s written feedback in Figures 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, and 8.8 below, his commentary on vernacular syntax differs slightly from Rachael’s notations in that he does not mark every occurrence of vernacular syntax as Rachael does. In every other respect, however, Al’s feedback resembles Rachael’s tendency to circle vernacular patterns without any reference to previous discussions of the rule-governed nature of those patterns or the contexts in which they would be more effective. This is evident, for example, in Figure 8.5, which includes an
excerpt from an essay written by Brenda, a middle-aged European American woman whose speech includes many vernacular features:

| 1 | Guns, knives, blood, drugs, gangs. All part of today’s society. A part of the reason why I believe stronger punishment should be inflicted onto the criminals of the United states of America. |
| 2 | As we watched the video "30 days" with Morgan Spurlock, I thought maybe more would be seen about the inside of a prison, but with cameras rolling a lot was not going to be seen. One thing that shocked me was, that none of the inmates we saw played up much to the camera. |
| 3 | I figured they would be all on that, saying how bad it was and how badly they were being treated. |

Figure 8.5. An excerpt from Brenda’s essay on the merits of punishment versus rehabilitation of criminals

Here, Al crosses out Brenda’s use of vernacular past-tense “seen” and replaces it with the expected EAE form “saw” (line 4) without further comment. Yet in line 5, he not only addresses an issue of sentence structure by inserting needed punctuation (i.e., a period), but he also gives an explanation for why he has done so (i.e., “Run-on”). This explanation echoes, moreover, his reference to run-on sentences in the grading rubric (see Fig. 8.2), suggesting that this is an issue he has addressed in class as well.27 Thus his lack of explanation or reference to previous discussions of vernacular verb patterns (e.g., the use of “seen” for “saw”) stands out in contrast. Similarly, in the following short excerpt from a four-page essay on the healthcare crisis by Vanessa, a young African American woman (Fig. 8.6), Al notes Vanessa’s use of uninflected do by crossing out the word, writing the inflected EAE form “does” above it, and circling the entire revision.

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27 While my observations of Al’s classes began after he had completed a grammar unit at the beginning of the semester, a list of the grammar topics that he covered includes sentence fragments.
Figure 8.6. An excerpt from Vanessa’s essay on the healthcare crisis.

Here, moreover, Al’s insertion of “does” for “do” points to a particular lack of attention to Vanessa’s verb usage. As evidenced by other verbs in this excerpt, Vanessa is clearly comfortable using EAE inflections for third-person singular in her essay (e.g., “If their child needs surgery,” lines 5-6; their child then suffers, lines 6-7). In fact, the only other verb that Vanessa does not inflect for third-person singular is generalized “don’t” (“and the parent cannot afford it and don’t have healthcare,” line 6), which Al does not address. As discussed in Chapter 7, however, Vanessa’s use of uninflected do may reflect an aspectual use of the word. That is, she appears to use it when describing a habitual or durative state of affairs, in this case, the overall connection between being a single parent and lacking healthcare (i.e., “What do being a single parent have to do with healthcare?,” line 3). While habitual do does not usually stand alone in AAVE (i.e., it is used with habitual “be” in sentences such as “At six it do be dark,” Green 2002, p. 70), Vanessa’s use of it in this context might be addressed more effectively if Al were to reference previous class discussions of vernacular verb patterns. Yet during my
observations of his classes over a two-month period (see Chapter 4), language variation was never addressed directly. While it may have been addressed at the beginning of the semester before my observations began and during Al’s unit on grammar, it was very difficult for me to ask him directly how he addressed vernacular syntax during his grammar unit without making it obvious that I was focusing on that particular issue in my ongoing observations (i.e., another instance of the Observer’s Paradox28). Moreover, the unit outline that he gave me simply lists “subject/verb agreement” and “irregular verbs” without any reference to language variation, while his textbook takes a very pejorative stance toward vernacular verb patterns (see footnote below29). Thus it appears that Al lacks the pedagogical material necessary for effective intertextual references to language variation.

Finally, in Figure 8.7 below, Al uses the same type of notation (i.e., circles, cross-outs, and revisions) to address Lakeisha’s use of generalized “is” and “was” in a letter to her son about the importance of going to college. Yet in this excerpt and the one to follow (Fig. 8.8), we do see some evidence of his more developed sociolinguistic language awareness.

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28 See Footnote 19 in Chapter 5.
29 For example, in the three charts in which habitual be, completive done, and generalized has and does are addressed in the textbook, the first, second, and third-person singular and plural forms are not only listed under a column entitled “Community Dialect (Do not use in your writing),” but they are also placed next to a column entitled “Standard English (Use for clear communication)” (pp. 407-408). Moreover, the “Community Language” forms are all crossed out on the charts with large red Xs.
Here, Al clearly treats Lakeisha’s vernacular patterns as errors as he revises generalized “was” and “is” respectively in the following sentences: (1) “My parents was always in my hear [sic] telling me that college is the best choice” (lines 3-4) and (2) “I really hope you consider going to college because there isn’t any good jobs” (line 6). Not only does he circle and cross out the verbs, writing the EAE equivalents (i.e. “were” and “aren’t”) above them, he also writes on the accompanying grading rubric, “Be careful with singular and plural verbs like was and were. Let me know if you need help with grammar.” Thus his written notations and commentary not only imply that Vanessa has made an error by using vernacular syntax, they also preclude any discussion of why (or whether) these verbs should be revised at all in this context. That is, in a letter to her son, Lakeisha’s use of generalized “was” and “isn’t” instead of EAE “were” and “aren’t” might actually be considered more appropriate. Yet by crossing out AAVE syntax and substituting it with EAE patterns in what is supposed to be a personal letter, Al may send the
(most likely) unintended message that AAVE patterns are inherently incorrect. Yet were Al able to reference previous discussions or lessons on language variation and were he also able to further address these issues on his grading rubric, his written commentary would more likely reflect his underlying awareness of the value of different varieties of English in different contexts (see his discussion of spoken language and Internet language in Chapter 6).

One aspect of Al’s commentary that does reflect his more advanced level of sociolinguistic language awareness, however, is his selective marking of vernacular patterns in the letter Lakeisha has written to her son. For example, he ignores (or misses) the copula absence in the sentence “That Ø one of my reasons” (lines 2-3), and he appears to accept the colloquial PP “in my hear [sic]” (i.e., “in my ear”) in the sentence “My parents was always in my hear [sic]” (line 3) as appropriate in the context of a personal letter. Al’s tendency to pick and choose the vernacular expressions he circles and revises contrasts, moreover, with Rachael’s practice of circling every vernacular feature she encounters. For example, while Rachael circles all 10 of the AAVE patterns that appear in the 13 lines of text excerpted from Charlotte’s essay about her cousin (Fig. 8.3), Al addresses only two of the four vernacular patterns in the 11 lines of text excerpted from Lakeisha’s essay above. Thus it may be that Al’s omissions represent a struggle to address the vernacular features more sensitively.

In the following excerpt from a letter written by Vanessa to her sister, moreover, the absence of any reference to her use of multiple negation seems more deliberate:
Figure 8.8. An excerpt from Vanessa’s letter to her sister about the importance of getting a college education.

Where Vanessa has written to her sister, “Can’t nobody get your education and do all that hard work for you” (lines 6-7), the only commentary is Al’s note that the paragraph is too long.

Moreover, on the grading rubric that accompanies this letter, Vanessa receives a “yes” on all four categories related to style and grammar (see example list in Fig. 8.2), with the primary criticism being that her paragraphs are “extremely long” and her supporting detail are “too vague.” In other words, by not circling or otherwise noting Vanessa’s vernacular expression in a personal letter, Al implies that it belongs there. That is, he appears to understand that in AAVE, multiple negation may serve to add emphasis to a speaker’s comment (Green 2002) and would thus be especially useful in a persuasive argument about getting a college education.

8.4 Conclusion

In sum, despite Al’s and Rachael’s very different views on the rule-governed nature of language variation (see Chapter 6), they both tend to treat vernacular features as “errors” in their written commentary. While this practice is a genuine reflection of Rachael’s “replacive” view of language variation in student writing (see Chapters 6 and 7), it does not reflect the more “additive” view that Al espouses both in his discussions with me and in his one-on-one
interactions with students. (See Wolfram and Schilling-Estes’ 2006 discussion of “replacive” and “additive” approaches to language variation, pp. 316-318.) Moreover, other aspects of Al’s written commentary do suggest his awareness of his students’ linguistic repertoires and his understanding of the importance of the vernacular in their personal lives. These include primarily his use of the personal letter as a context for developing writing skills; his tendency not to circle every vernacular feature that he encounters; and his acceptance of a vernacular expression that clearly conveys a special meaning to the writer and reader (i.e., Vanessa’s multiple negation in a letter to her sister).

Moreover, as evidenced by Charlotte’s confusing revisions to an essay on which Rachael has circled every AAVE pattern without any explanation, both Rachael’s and Al’s written commentary lacks the intertextual references necessary to help students build on the vernacular while acquiring the conventions of EAE. Not only do they never refer to the issue of code-switching between varieties, their written notations (i.e., circled and revised AAVE syntax) also imply that vernacular use is in the same category as misspelled words or incorrectly punctuated sentences. In doing so, moreover, they fail to see these patterns as resources for expanding their students’ already rich linguistic repertoires. As Rickford (1999) argues so forcefully in his chapter entitled “Using the Vernacular to Teach the Standard” (pp. 329-347), “The sad fact … is that most teachers do not build artfully and skillfully on the vernacular” (p. 336).

Finally, and most importantly, by failing to provide meaningful class discussions of language variation that they can then reference in their written commentary, both instructors reveal a dearth of what Sommers (1982) argues to be the “key to successful commenting.” They lack the ability “to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other” (p. 155, cited in Fife and O’Neill 2001). As this brief analysis of
Al’s and Rachael’s written commentary suggests, therefore, those of us who teach writing not only need to develop our own sociolinguistic awareness of language variation, we also need to create strong intertextual frameworks for addressing it in our classes.
CHAPTER 9

SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER TALK ABOUT LANGUAGE

In the introduction to this study, I discuss the gap that exists between the call for increased linguistic awareness among teachers of multidialectal students (e.g., Delpit 2006; Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Smitherman 1999; Wolfram, Adger, and Christian 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006) and the actual linguistic knowledge and attitudes of many U.S. language arts and writing instructors. I also argue that in order to meaningfully close this gap, linguists and education scholars need to explore at a micro-level the links between the language knowledge and attitudes of individual writing instructors and their day-to-day discursive interactions with students. As discussed in Chapter 5, moreover, my own background as a writing instructor has helped me to engage in especially meaningful conversations with Al and Rachael (two basic writing instructors) and Barbara (a technical writing instructor). The questions I ask them are also the questions that I frequently ask myself. The challenges that I note in their discursive interactions with students are challenges that I, too, have faced. Thus my exploration of the links between the language awareness of these instructors and their discursive interactions with students is also intended to help me and other writing instructors who struggle to discuss language variation most effectively.

With this goal in mind, therefore, I have analyzed the language awareness of the instructors from two “discourse” perspectives. The first views the lexical choices of the instructors as reflections of their underlying language awareness. The second sees that language awareness as a significant ingredient in the instructors’ (i.e., Al’s and Rachael’s) discursive interactions with multidialectal students. By exploring the instructors’ language awareness in this manner, moreover, I have sought to add additional insight into the already well-documented but
still persistent problem of teachers’ low understanding of (and negative attitudes toward) the many different varieties of English they encounter in their classrooms. The following summary of study results, therefore, is guided by the three research questions discussed at the beginning of the study (Chapter 1):

1. What knowledge of language variation do these writing teachers bring to the classroom?
2. What are the discourses of these teachers with respect to language variation?
3. What are the links between their knowledge of language variation and their discursive interactions with students?

9.1 Summary and Discussion of the Study Findings

The findings of this study add qualitative support to the claims of many researchers that negative attitudes toward language variation persist in U.S. educational institutions (e.g., Ball and Muhammad 2003; Blake and Cutler 2003; Agnew and McLaughlin 2001; Bowie and Bond 1994; CCCC 2000; Corson 2001; Cross, DeVane, and Jones 2001; Rickford 1999, 2006; Smitherman 1999; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1989; Lippi-Green 1997; Lovejoy, Fox, and Wills 2009; Wolfram et al 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). At the same time, however, they also reveal how some teachers who develop a deeper understanding of language variation are trying to change their discourse about language. As the goal of this study is not to define the writing instructors simply as linguistically “informed” or linguistically “uninformed,” moreover, it explores several different types of language awareness that can influence an instructor’s discourse about language variation.
9.1. The instructors’ awareness of rule-governed language variation

While this investigation does not dismiss the underlying “folk” awareness of language that many native speakers of American English possess (Preston 1996, 2002), it has focused heavily on the scientific awareness of language variation that linguists argue is needed in order to help multidialectal students add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 6, a fundamental awareness of language includes the knowledge that all varieties of a language are equally valid and rule-governed (Labov 1972a; Rickford 1999; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). As revealed in Chapter 6, moreover, two of the instructors who participated in this study (i.e., Al and Barbara) demonstrate much deeper levels of this type of awareness than does the third instructor (Rachael).

This distinction is evident first in the very different lexical choices these instructors make when discussing their views on language variation during the interviews. For example, Al and Barbara frequently use terms such as “African American Vernacular English,” “African American English,” “Southern English,” and “Internet Vernacular,” while Rachael only once names the vernacular a student uses and then only to refer to a term used by another student (i.e., “she used the word ‘Ebonics,’” Ext. 6. , lines 6-7). When Rachael does refer directly to the vernacular as a form of speech, moreover, she uses vague expressions such as “just the way people talk.”

Rachael also uses far more derogatory language to refer specifically to vernacular patterns than do Al and Barbara. Her NPs (“sloppy slang writing,” “glaring examples”), APs (“just so poor,” “grammatically poor”), and VPs (“clean-up their language”) all convey the impression that the vernacular is simply incorrect or bad Standard English rather than a rule-governed variety of English. So, too, does her frequent use of the lexical item “correct” as an
adjective ("not correct"), verb ("correct this writing"), and adverb ("speaking correctly") when discussing vernacular usage. Al and Barbara, on the other hand, each emphasize the efforts they make to respect the varieties of English their students speak (in particular, AAVE). For example, Barbara refers to her attempts to be "careful" not to seem as if she "devalues" her students’ linguistic backgrounds, and she uses the noun "issue" more often than "problem" when referring to vernacular patterns in her students’ writings. Al also uses the VP "treat the same" to emphasize his belief that AAVE, Internet Language, conversational language are all genuine varieties of English. Barbara and Al also never use the lexical item "correct" as Rachael does to suggest that a vernacular item in incorrect. In fact, the only time either of them uses it at all is to note that they do not "correct" the way their students speak.

One additional distinction between Barbara’s and Rachael’s approaches to the vernacular, moreover, is the difference between their general teaching vocabularies and their lexical choices when discussing vernacular morphosyntax. While Barbara occasionally uses pejorative APs and NPs (e.g., "not good," "horrible grammar") to discuss general grammatical issues, she never uses such language to address the vernacular. Rachael, on the other hand, while using APs such as "very bad" and "so bad" to discuss sentence-level issues related to comma use or word choice, adds the intensifying adverb "just" to an AP describing vernacular patterns (e.g., "just so poor").

While Al and Barbara display a deeper overall understanding of vernaculars as legitimate and rule-governed varieties of English, however, they also appear to lack a specific discourse for addressing the vernacular patterns that appear in student writing. Barbara, for example, uses the noun "accent" four times as she revoices a conversation with students about not writing the way they speak. Al notes that he "points those things out," but he never describes a specific AAVE pattern in the interviews. Barbara also seems unaware that some of the morphosyntax she
addresses as a general grammatical issue is most likely a rule-governed vernacular pattern. For example, she revoices a typical student question, “Do you have to change your verb when you have a plural subject?” (Ext. 6.11) as an example of a general “native speaker” issue rather than one that might be addressed specifically by an AAVE speaker. In addition, both Al and Barbara use the noun “slang” to refer to the vernacular, although never as pejoratively as Rachael’s reference to “sloppy slang writing.” Thus while Al and Barbara clearly demonstrate more positive attitudes toward language variation in their lexical choices, their discourse suggests some confusion about the specific vernacular patterns they address.

Finally, the distinction between Al’s and Rachael’s lexical choices is also brought home in the comparison of their discursive interactions with basic writing students in the writing conferences (Chapter 7) and in their written commentary (Chapter 8). For example, Rachael’s discomfort with “naming” the vernacular in her interview is also visibly evident in her one-on-one conference with Janeka. After appearing extremely reluctant to read the vernacular expression “fussin” aloud, Rachael refers to it with the vague NP “things like that” (“I'm sorry, I laugh when I say things like that,” Ext. 7.5, line 10), leading Janeka to laugh and then apologize for laughing. As discussed in Chapter 7, a clear indicator of student engagement and learning is the backchanneling and other response behavior that occurs in reaction to an instructor’s feedback (Clancy et al. 1996; F. Farr 2002; Meier 1985). In this case, it is not entirely clear from Janeka’s response that she either understands or accepts the point Rachael is making about her writing. On the other hand, while Al never refers to a specific variety of English such as AAVE by name in his one-on-one writing conferences, he does use language that suggests his equal respect for the vernacular and EAE (e.g., “two sets of language”). This, in turn, leads Brenda, to
interactively argue with him (“But I think that there fits, though,” Ext. 7.10, line 4) but also to ask his assistance with her revision.

A similar contrast is visible in the students’ reactions to Al’s and Rachael’s use of modals. When Rachael uses the prescriptive modal “should” in response to Sharise’s uninflected verb “shake” (This should be ‘shook,’” Ext. 7.4b, line 99), Sharise responds “mhm” only after Rachael pauses noticeably. Yet when Al tells Brenda that she “could” use “watched” for regularized past-tense “seen” or, if she prefers to keep the same verb, that “would” be “saw,” Barbara begins to revise her essay on the spot.

Moreover, while Rachael’s lexical choices are never as pejorative in the writing conferences as they are in the interviews (e.g., she never tells a student that his or her language is “poor” or “sloppy”), she does refer to EAE expressions as “better” alternatives for the vernacular expressions that Sharise and Janeka use in their writing (i.e., “coming up” and “fussin” respectively). Moreover, her use of this adjective is met with no backchanneling or other response moves from either student. Al, on the other hand, makes a greater effort not to denigrate vernacular patterns when suggesting alternatives. For example, when addressing Vanessa’s use of uninflected *do*, he first asks a question rather than directly telling her the EAE pattern she should use (“Well, would it be *do* pray or what would-,” Ext. 7.11, line 20).

At the same time, however, Al’s interactive approach to Vanessa’s use of uninflected *do* does not produce the same level of responsiveness from her that his more general discussions of writing do. For example, by not addressing the underlying AAVE patterning of this feature, he not only misses the opportunity to engage Vanessa in a discussion of her telling question, “Should I leave out *do*?,” he also misses a chance to refer to her use of this feature in another essay as well. Instead, his heavy focus on getting Vanessa to produce correct subject verb
agreement leads to a very tentative response on her part ("does?")", which differs noticeably from her active backchanneling and overlapping speech in response to his comments about the effective details in her writing.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 8, Rachael is far more likely to circle and/or edit every vernacular feature she encounters than Al is. Moreover, as demonstrated by Charlotte’s final draft of an essay in which Rachael had circled almost every vernacular feature without comment, these circles communicate very little to Charlotte, who appears to randomly change some inflections just for the sake of changing them. On the other hand, both Al and Rachael lack the intertextual references to classroom discussions of language variation that would add meaning to their circles and edits. As mentioned in Chapter 8, the subject of language variation was never discussed by either instructor during the many class sessions that I observed.

In sum, while Rachael’s pejorative lexical choices reveal both her negative attitudes toward the vernacular and her very low understanding of the rule-governed nature of language variation, Al’s and Barbara’s word choices suggest very positive attitudes toward the varieties of English their multidialectal students speak. At the same time, however, their less direct discussions of AAVE features in particular suggest the need for a more developed discourse for discussing language variation with their students.

9.1.2 The instructors’ awareness of communicative competence and linguistic repertoire

The current study also explores how the instructors build on the different varieties of English students already use when helping them to add Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. Throughout the interviews, Al and Barbara, reveal a far more “additive” approach to the varieties of English their students speak (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Barbara uses her variety of Southern English to demonstrate the importance of repertoire and
describes a number of circumstances in which she would choose between it and Edited American English. She also discusses a context in which the use of a “regional” dialect would be preferable in a written document (i.e., in a travel brochure). Through NPs such as “rhetorical reason,” “writing situation,” “purpose,” and “audience,” she also emphasizes students’ abilities to choose the variety most useful for their own communicative purposes. So, too, Al’s use of the NPs “register” and “personal, professional, and public voice” also reveal his awareness of student repertoire, as do his repeated references to “Internet Vernacular” and a class blog on which students freely use it. Rachael, on the other hand, takes a highly “subtractive” position toward her students’ language varieties, noting that she can “get past” the way they speak as long as they learn to write. Rather than encourage them to build on their linguistic repertoires, she claims that they can “clean up” their language once they have their ideas written down.

9.1.3 The instructors’ sensitivity to dialect rights and students’ linguistic ties to family and community

Of the three instructors, Barbara appears to have the deepest understanding of the meaning of the vernacular in students’ personal lives. Basing many of her views on personal experience with adjusting her own language to the situation she is in, she gives the example of deliberately avoiding expressions such as “fixin to” in certain circumstances. She also discusses the essential unfairness of standardization, which she believes leads to the stigmatization of other varieties of English. Of the three instructors, Barbara is also the only one to repeatedly use the verb “devalue.” Moreover, she appears to have a significant amount of empathy for students who are uncomfortable using Edited American English. Using the adjective “boring” to describe their perceptions of EAE, she also adds that “I try to get them to understand that I’m on their side” (Ext. 6.27, line 20).
Al’s lexical choices also reveal some awareness of the conflicts created for students required to add Edited American English to their repertoires. For example, when listing the issues of linguistic diversity that are addressed in his PhD program, he mentions “language rights” and “pedagogy and negotiation of dialect.” While his references to his experiences teaching in an HBU also suggest an awareness of the struggles to “fit in” experienced by students who have attended “white” high schools, he surprisingly never brings the use of Standard English versus AAVE into the discussion. He does mention, however, that it was easier to discuss language variation at the HBU than at the current multiethnic community college where he teaches. Noting that students often feel he has an “ax to grind,” he explains that he instead focuses on the differences between EAE and Internet Vernacular. These comments suggest, moreover, that were Al able to develop a pedagogical approach that explored many different varieties of English (e.g., Reaser 2006; Sweetland 2006; Wolfram et al. 1999), he would also be able to develop a useful discourse for such discussions. As noted in Chapter 8, however, language variation never occurred as a topic of discussion during the classes I observed.  

Finally, Rachael’s lexical choices suggest very little understanding of the conflicts faced by students who are told that EAE is more correct than the varieties they speak at home. Describing an instance in which a middle-school student challenged a grammar point because her mother said it differently, Rachael notes that while we all “speak” a certain way, there is an “expectation” in academic writing that we will write differently. By adding the comment “that’s just the way it is,” moreover, Rachael demonstrates very little empathy toward the student. That is, since Rachael speaks a variety of English far closer to Edited American English than some other varieties (e.g., AAVE), her no-nonsense comment creates the impression that she does not

30 It is possible, however, that the topic came up during the initial three weeks of class before I was able to observe. See discussion in Chapter 8.
really understand the conflict the student may feel. This impression also comes through in her writing conference with Sharise, as she fails to address Sharise’s comment that a university administrator seemed to be speaking in “another language” that she “could not translate.” As Rachael repeatedly demonstrates a genuine concern for her students, both in the interviews (see Chapter 5) and in the one-on-one conferences (see Chapter 7), it seems likely that a deeper understanding of language variation in general, and the importance of the vernacular in students homes and communities in particular, would add a very useful dimension to her dedication as a writing instructor.

9.1.4 Influences beyond language variation

Finally, additional findings of this study suggest that the links between instructors’ language awareness and their discursive interactions with multidialectal students cannot be fully understood in isolation. Both their general approaches to writing instruction and the contexts in which they teach also have a pronounced effect on the discursive quality of those interactions. For example, all three instructors claim to focus heavily on the “process” of writing, but, as revealed in Table 6.5, the balance each instructor creates between the process and the final written “product” is different for each. For example, Rachael, while incorporating many process approaches to writing (e.g., multiple drafts and conferences for each student essay), also puts a heavy emphasis on error correction, often circling or commenting on every sentence-level issue she encounters. Al, on the other hand, is more selective in his written commentary, circling a few representative patterns. Moreover, his teaching style, which involves having students do their revisions on the spot during the writing conferences, leads to more active involvement on their part overall. Thus even when he discusses the need for Brenda to use an EAE pattern instead of a vernacular one (i.e., “saw” versus “seen”), she already assumes that the decision is hers and
begins making the change as they talk. Furthermore, when she suggests that her use of “seen” was the result of not having time to proofread, he notes that this is “minor stuff.”

On the other hand, Rachael, who is able to maintain a high level of interaction when using evaluative language such as “good,” “better,” or “problem” to address global issues with Daniel and general sentence-level issues with Charlotte, does not maintain that level of interaction when addressing vernacular morphosyntax with Janeka and Sharise. Thus it appears that her heavy focus on grammar correction combines with her minimal sociolinguistic language awareness to produce much lower levels of interaction when she discusses language variation per se.

Finally, the basic writing context itself appears to influence the discursive interactions of both Al and Rachael, who often pause in the middle of global discussions of essay content and organization to address sentence-level issues. This not only serves to emphasize their roles as evaluators, it also positions them as the primary controllers of topic and conversational direction. As discussed briefly in Chapter 7, Barbara’s technical writing students are far more likely to control the topics discussed in their writing conferences, in part because they already have agendas for their voluntary conferences, but also because they are more invested in the future relevance of their writing instruction. This finding adds some support to the argument that basic writers should not be isolated in non-credit “remedial” classes at all, but rather “mainstreamed” into classes where their academic goals are more directly met. (See full discussion of this issue in Chapter 3.)

9.2 Concluding Remarks

As the findings of this study suggest, the instructors’ own linguistic, educational, and professional backgrounds clearly inform their understanding of language variation. Moreover,
their discursive interactions with multidialectal students reveal strong links between their respective levels of language awareness and their abilities to engage these students in interactive discussions of the vernacular features and discourse styles in their writing. Most importantly, these findings lead to three conclusions about teacher language awareness in the multidialectal writing classroom:

1. Writing instructors who have received training in both the social and linguistic issues related to language variation in the classroom are better prepared to discuss these issues interactively with their multidialectal students.

2. Without such training, even well-intentioned (and well-prepared) writing instructors encounter obstacles when they try to engage students in interactive discussions of the vernacular features and discourse styles in their writings.

3. Without training in the specific linguistic features of their students’ spoken varieties of English, moreover, even instructors with otherwise high levels of language awareness find it difficult to address some of the vernacular patterns they encounter in their students’ writings.

While these findings strongly suggest that increased levels of teacher language awareness lead to improved student writing, in order to empirically support such a claim, future studies will need to directly address the links between teachers’ different levels of language awareness and the success of their multidialectal students in adding Edited American English to their linguistic repertoires. While I had hoped to move closer to this goal in the current study, the demographics of the student participants were less than ideal for such an enterprise. That is, only Rachael’s class produced a large number of vernacular speakers as study participants. Furthermore, to
protect student privacy, I was not allowed access to students’ course grades. Thus I had only anecdotal and discoursal evidence of students’ writing progress rather than empirical measures.

Nevertheless, the current study does reveal the benefits of an ethnographic and discourse analytic approach to the links between teacher language awareness and student engagement in the writing process. By triangulating data from a variety of sources (i.e., writing conferences, student essays, teacher interviews, written questionnaires, and classroom discussions), for example, this study not only portrays the teachers’ language awareness from multiple perspectives, it also reveals contexts in which that awareness is most evident (e.g., in Al’s writing conferences versus his written commentary). Moreover, by taking a discourse analytic approach to language awareness, this study provides a vivid picture of the different levels of language awareness of Al and Barbara on the one hand and Rachael on the other. It also reveals the particular types of language that each instructor has developed or would benefit from further developing.

Finally, this study reveals a number of questions for future research. For example, what level and types of “folk” awareness of language variation do writing instructors already possess? How might they more effectively build on their folk awareness to develop a sociolinguistic understanding of the varieties of English they encounter in their classrooms? As revealed in the current study, Rachael was able to clearly identify an AAVE pattern in one student’s writing even though she referred to it as incorrect Standard English. In addition, how does one distinguish between, on the one hand, a genuine lack of phonologic and morphosyntactic knowledge and, on the other hand, a lack of metalinguistic discourse with which to convey that knowledge to others? In the current study, both Al and Barbara appeared to struggle at times for the metalinguistic vocabulary needed to express their generally high levels of language
awareness. Most notably, Al describes his inability to get discussions of language variation going in the classroom because students think he “has an ax to grind.” In sum, by exploring questions such as these through in-depth analysis of teacher-student discourse in multidialectal writing classrooms, researchers will not only add needed support to the call for additional linguistic training of language arts and writing instructors, they will also help to provide the type of training that is most needed.
Appendix A: Initial Interview Questions
(Questions adapted from CCCC 2000 and Belanger 1995)

1. What led you to become a writing instructor at the college level? Describe your academic and professional background.

2. How many writing classes do you teach each semester? How many of these are basic or introductory writing classes? Do you get to choose the particular writing classes that you teach? Describe the level of writing instruction that you most enjoy.

3. What are your goals for your writing students? Which aspects of the writing process do you emphasize most? Which aspects are least important?

4. What differences, if any, do you notice between the learning styles of students in your basic or introductory writing classes and those of students in other writing classes you have taught?

5. What are the greatest challenges that you experience in teaching basic-level or introductory writers? What are the most satisfying aspects of teaching these students?

6. What is your approach to grammar instruction? How, if at all, do you incorporate the teaching of grammar into your lessons, and what do you do to address individual grammar issues as they appear in a student’s writing?

7. How do you address dialectal grammatical patterns that appear in your students’ writings? If your approach to this issue has changed in any way during the past five year, please describe how it has developed.

8. Discuss the standards of grammatical accuracy that you expect in the writings of ESL learners. In what ways, if at all, do they differ from your standards for native English speakers?

9. What are your views on the use of languages and dialects other than standard academic English in the writing classroom? Describe circumstances, if any, in which you would encourage a student to incorporate his or her native language (or dialect) in the writing process. Under what circumstances would you actively discourage this approach?

10. How do you address culturally different (e.g., extremely formal or deliberately indirect) writing styles that appear in the prose of your students?
11. How do you address the issue of linguistic diversity in class discussions? For example, under what circumstances have you deliberately incorporated it into a lesson plan? How have you addressed it when it has arisen spontaneously during a class discussion?

12. Describe how you assess student writing. At what stages of the writing process do you generally grade student papers? Discuss any assessment tools that you have found to be useful (e.g., rubrics, writing portfolios, etc.).

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “Learning to treat writing as a process is more important than learning to eliminate errors in one’s writing.”

14. Have you completed any courses or professional workshops devoted specifically to the teaching of writing? What impact did these courses/workshops have on the way you teach writing today?

15. What courses or professional workshops on linguistic diversity have you completed (e.g., Introduction to the English Language, American Dialects, Linguistics for Teachers, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, etc.)? What impact did these courses/workshops have on the way you teach writing today?

16. Do you speak any languages other than English? When, where, and with whom do you speak these languages (e.g., when at home with your family, when visiting relatives, when working in a professional capacity with other speakers of this language, when traveling, etc.).

17. What languages have you studied? Discuss your level of proficiency (reading, writing, and speaking) in these languages.

18. Do you speak any variety of English other than the one generally used in academic institutions? When, where, and with whom do you speak this variety (e.g., when at home with your family, when visiting relatives, when relaxing with friends, when working in a professional capacity with another speaker of this variety, etc.)?

19. Finally, what concerns you most about the teaching of writing? If you could make changes to the writing program at your institution, what would they be?
Appendix B: Instructor Questionnaire
(Questions adapted from CCCC 2000 and Belanger 1995)

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today and for filling out the attached questionnaire. I am a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown University and am working on a PhD dissertation on the challenges faced by writing teachers in today’s multilingual community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities. Your responses to the questions listed below will be extremely useful in conjunction with the information you have already provided in your interview today. I apologize for some overlapping questions.

In addition to providing me with information about the backgrounds, teaching challenges, and concerns of college-level writing teachers, this questionnaire is also designed to help me locate writing instructors in the Baltimore, MD, area who would be interested in participating in an ethnographic study of one of their classes during the 2009 fall semester. In exchange for their participation, teachers will be paid a stipend of $200.

If, after completing this questionnaire, you would like to discuss the possibility of participating in the study, please indicate your interest in the space provided at the end.

Thank you again for the generous donation of your time in answering the questions below.
Kathleen C. Williams
kcw24@georgetown.edu
Part I

1. Circle the term that best describes the institution where you teach writing.
   a) 2-year community college
   b) 4-year college
   c) 4-year university
   d) Other (please specify): ________________________________

2. Circle your highest level of education
   a) BA or BS
   b) MA
   c) MA + additional graduate courses
   d) PhD
   e) Other (please specify): ________________________________

3. Circle the concentration in which you received your highest degree.
   a) English
   b) Education
   c) Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language
   d) Fine Arts
   e) Other (please specify): ________________________________

4. Circle the term that best describes your current status at the institution where you teach writing:
   a) Graduate student
   b) Part-time faculty
   c) Full-time non-tenured faculty
   d) Full-time tenure-track faculty
   e) Full-time tenured faculty
   f) Other (please specify): ________________________________

5. To which of the following professional teaching organizations do you currently belong or have you belonged in the past five years? Circle all that apply.
   a) The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
   b) The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)
   c) Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL)
   d) A local TESOL organization (please specify): ________________________________
   e) Other professional teaching organizations (please specify): ________________________________
   f) I do not belong to any professional teaching organizations.

6. Which of the following teacher preparation courses have you taken as part of your undergraduate or graduate education? Circle all that apply.
a) Courses related to the teaching English to speakers of other languages
b) Courses related to the teaching of language arts in the K-8 classroom
c) Courses related to the teaching of composition at the high school or college level
d) Courses related to the teaching of basic (developmental) writing
e) I have not taken any of the above-mentioned teacher preparation courses.

7. Which of the following language courses have you taken as part of your undergraduate or graduate education? Circle all that apply.
   a) Introduction to the English Language
   b) Introduction to Linguistics
   c) Linguistics for Teachers
   d) American Dialects
e) A course on a specific American dialect (check any that apply)
     _____ African American English
     _____ Chicano English
     _____ Appalachian English
     _____ Other (specify):

8. What language(s) do you speak at home? ____________________________________

9. What languages(s) have you studied in school? ______________________________

10. Do you speak any American dialect at home in addition to Standard English? If so, please specify:____________________________________________________________

11. Please describe any other course work you have completed that involved the study of the English Language, Linguistics, or American Dialects. Please also discuss any impact it has had on the way you teach writing.

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12. List any professional development sessions or conference presentations on the teaching of writing that you have attended in the past five years. Describe their impact on the way you teach writing.

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13. List any books or articles on the teaching of writing that you have read. Describe their impact on the way you teach writing.

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14. List any professional development sessions or conference presentations on linguistic diversity in the classroom that you have attended in the past five years. Describe their impact on the way you teach writing.

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15. List any books or articles on linguistic diversity in the classroom that you have read. Describe their impact on the way you teach writing.

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Part II

1. Please rate each of the following methods of teaching topic organization and cohesion. Circle the number that best corresponds to its effectiveness (1 = ineffective and 5 = very effective).
   a. Using a textbook or workbook to provide specific exercises for developing topic organization and cohesion. 1 2 3 4 5
   a. Working individually with students to address issues of organization and cohesion in their written work. 1 2 3 4 5
   b. Having students work in groups to address issues of organization and cohesion in one another’s written work 1 2 3 4 5

2. Please rate each of the following methods of teaching English usage. Circle the number that best corresponds to its effectiveness (1 = ineffective and 5 = very effective).
   a. Using a textbook or workbook to provide exercises for specific grammar patterns and usage. 1 2 3 4 5
   b. Using patterns that you find in your students’ written work as the basis for a class lesson on grammar and usage. 1 2 3 4 5
   c. Working individually with students to address grammar and usage issues that appear in their written work. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Have the methods that you use to teach writing changed in the past five years? If so, please describe the changes and explain what motivated you to make them.

_____________________________________________________________________
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4. Briefly discuss what the term “linguistic diversity” means to you.

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5. What does the term “multicultural education” mean to you? Please discuss this term in relation to the way you teach writing.

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Part III

As indicated at the beginning of this questionnaire, I am looking for college-level writing instructors who would be interested in participating in a semester-long study of the issues and concerns of basic writing teachers.

The study will be conducted in the fall of 2009 and will involve the following participation on the part of teachers:
1. Allowing me to unobtrusively observe and record all class sessions after a brief introduction of the study to the class.
2. Allowing me to observe and record one-on-one writing conferences with students who give their permission.
3. Providing me with copies of their feedback on student writing samples.
4. Participating in a final interview with me at the end of the semester.

 Teachers chosen to participate will be awarded a $200 stipend, to be paid in two installments ($100 at the beginning of the study and $100 at the end). I will also offer $25 to each student in the class who gives me permission to use data from his/her class comments and written work.

 Complete confidentiality for teachers and students will be maintained as follows:

 1. In my dissertation, as well as in all other publication and presentation of study results, the names of students and teachers will be changed and the institution will be referred to as an East Coast community college, university, etc.
 2. No information that could identify a teacher or student will be published, and at any point in the study a teacher or student may request that certain comments (either written or spoken) be excluded from the data.

 If you would be interested in participating in this study, please fill in the information below:

 Name: ________________________________________________________________
 Telephone: _____________________________________________________________
 Best times to call: ______________________________________________________
 Email: ________________________________________________________________

 Time(s) and location(s) of the basic writing class(es) that you will teach in the fall 2009 semester:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

 Again, thank you for the time and effort you have spent meeting with me today and completing this questionnaire. As discussed above, your identity will be kept entirely confidential in any publication of study results.
Kathleen Williams
kcw24@georgetown.edu
### Appendix C: Discourse Transcription Key
*(Adapted from Schiffrin 1987 and Tannen 1989 in Schiffrin 2006, p. 175)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Speech Characteristic</th>
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<tr>
<td>/?/</td>
<td>Unclear speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rising intonation at the end of a phrase, clause, or sentence, implying the expectation of a response (e.g., a yes/no answer or an affirmative backchannel). In the writing conference, this often means, “Are you following what I’m saying?”; “Do you get the point I’m making?”; “Do you see the word I’m discussing?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[]</td>
<td>Overlapping speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Falling intonation at the end of a sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Falling intonation at the end of a clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“double quotes”</td>
<td>For direct quotes of another person’s words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘single quotes’</td>
<td>For references to text within a text. Often used to indicate references to something a student or an instructor has written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..</td>
<td>Short mid-sentence or end-of-sentence pause (less than a ½ second)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>Longer mid-sentence or end-of-sentence pause (½ second or longer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>A mid-sentence final pause (e.g., “Well-”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underlined word</td>
<td>Stressed word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>Confidential information that has been omitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>italicized comment within brackets</em></td>
<td>Notation from the transcriber.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


classroom, ed. Courtney B. Cazden, Vera P. John, and Dell Hymes, 360-394. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.


Reed, Carol E. 1981. Teaching teachers about teaching writing to students from varied linguistic social and cultural groups. In Farr Whiteman 1981b, 139-152.


