WE DO LANGUAGE

English Language Variation in the

in the

Secondary English Classroom

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Language Varies

MANY OF US ARE AWARE of language differences and the linguistic choices available to us as speakers of English, especially when we encounter words we didn't grow up hearing ourselves. We often notice whether someone says *soda* or *pop*, for instance—a question asked on the website, www. popvssoda.com. Do we say *shopping cart* or *buggy*? How do we pronounce *dog*, and what about *coffee*? How do we feel about *isn't* versus *ain't*, *hanged* versus *hung*, and *sneaked* versus *snuck*? The ways we use English can vary across groups, within groups, and even by speaker (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). Diversity in language does not only apply to people who speak different languages; there is also diversity within languages, including English in the United States, which is the focus of this book.

Where does language diversity come from and how can we best understand it? This chapter addresses the key question: How do we value students' home varieties and build on them while learning standardized English? To answer this question, we present three linguistic truths, and we examine language variation in ways that help educators determine how best to approach the language arts standards that are often set forth in their classrooms and schools. Discussion boxes, exercises and activities, and quotes and vignettes from educators throughout this chapter help model how to approach the complexity and variation of the English language in secondary English curricula.

LINGUISTIC TRUTH #1:
COMMUNICATION OCCURS IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Communication occurs in social contexts (Labov, 1972b). When we communicate, we do so in ways that are influenced by many factors, including historical and social context, the communities we live in, the institutions and social organizations we participate in, and the backgrounds, cultures, and identities of ourselves and others. Communication is a complex and nuanced behavior; it is both innate and learned. Being a good communicator depends on using language in acceptable, appropriate, and effective ways.

The linguist, anthropologist, and folklorist Dell Hymes (1966) coined the term *communicative competence*. People who are communicatively competent are able to accomplish tasks with language, express and interpret intentions, and understand the different social and linguistic functions that language can serve.

Current educational standards recognize that students must be able to understand and navigate different types of English. For example, according to the Common Core English Language Arts Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012a), Students must "[d]emonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking." To paraphrase, this aim seeks to help students become *communicatively competent* in multiple varieties of English. "Key Points in English Language Arts" from the Common Core State Standards are included in Box 2.1 on p. 14 along with discussion questions for educators to consider.

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996) have similarly advocated that students learn to communicate effectively in the "language of wider communication" and to "engage in discussions of when and where this language of wider communication can and should be used." Through this process, students "further their knowledge of audience, purpose, and context, and in so doing discover something of the social significance of different language practices" (p. 34). These organizations also emphasized the importance of building an educational climate that fosters an understanding of and respect for linguistic and cultural variation (p. 42). According to these guidelines, successful students are aware of and respect language diversity, and they are able to make informed choices about how to use language in different communicative situations.

Register

Among humans, patterns of communication are generally organized into languages. Sometimes, people may use the same language yet still misunderstand each other. While some forms of communication are perfectly shared, others are variable. Some aspects of communication, such as a smile, seem to be universal. Of course, the question of when it is appropriate to smile is far from universal (Biber & Finegan, 1994).

The term *register* refers to the different ways that language is used in different social situations and contexts. Most of us communicate differently with family members compared to friends, acquaintances, and strangers, whether we are talking, writing, texting, blogging, and so on. We often

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BOX 2.1. CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:
Key Points in English Language Arts

The following "Key Points in English Language Arts" for Speaking and Listening and Language directly address communication as set by the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012b). Some important questions for educators to consider in relation to these key points are: How can educators best prepare students to be communicatively competent? What teaching strategies are commonly used and how might they vary? In what ways are students in your classroom or school successful in meeting these standards? What challenges might they face? How might these challenges be addressed?

Speaking and Listening

"The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media."

"An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems."

Language

"The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases."

"The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language."

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also use language differently in our numerous social roles—as an educator, spouse, mother, daughter, sibling, churchgoer, or sports team member, for example. For many students, learning appropriate ways of communicating in school has much to do with register selection. Language used inside the classroom is different from language used on the playground, just as the way a student is expected to talk to a principal often differs from ways of talking to other students (Eckert, 1989). Every school subject also has its own terminology; for instance, the language of a science report is different from a word problem in math or an essay about a novel. Students are expected to communicate in multiple registers, and they are often expected to address educators in school-specific ways. In some schools, educators and

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BOX 2.2. FOR LINGUISTIC REFLECTION:
Honorifics

Honorifics are words or phrases used to address or refer to other people; they generally convey esteem or respect. Common honorifics in English are *Ms.*, *Miss*, *Mrs.*, *Mr.*, *Dr.*, *Ma'am*, *Sir*, and *Professor*. Opinions on the use of honorifics often vary widely. The following questions can be used as discussion starters.

- Do you teach your students about the use of honorifics? Why or why not? If so, how?
- What honorifics are used when teachers, students, and principals call each other by name? How do you feel about students calling an educator or principal by her or his first name? What about calling an educator or principal by last name only, as in "Hey, Jones"? How about "Yes ma'am" or "Yes sir"?
- How do students and educators in your school address each other? Have you ever been in a situation where there was a miscommunication over a student's or educator's use (or lack of use) of a particular honorific?
- Should every school ask students to use the same honorifics? Should it be left up to individual schools or educators to decide which ones to use?
- Should educators use honorifics when talking to their students? Compare and contrast your answers with those of other educators and students.

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students call each other by their first names. In others, the use of honorifics, such as *Miss Nancy*, *Mrs. Jones*, or *Dr. B.*, is appropriate. Sometimes, it will be clear to students and educators how these norms are established and how they are communicated within classrooms and schools; at other times, these linguistic and educational expectations may not be apparent.

Certain registers are often seen as being more polite or more socially acceptable than others. In the history of English, words that were borrowed from French were seen as having more prestige, due to the prevailing view that Norman French culture was more refined than the native English culture (Crystal, 2003). Because of this historical and political context, many English words that derive from French are still seen today as being more formal than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts; for example, words such as *perspire*, *dine*, and *commence* are seen as being more refined than *sweat*, *eat*, and *begin*.

Students are often not aware of the finer nuances of register, however, and they may use words and phrases that seem too informal for school, even though those words and phrases might be perfectly acceptable in other communicative situations (Biber & Finegan, 1994). By teaching about register,

educators can help students attune their ears to language variation. One way to teach secondary English students about register is to guide them to focus on the specifics of communicative situations. The "SPEAKING" model (Hymes, 1974) illustrates the components of communication. SPEAKING is a mnemonic device, in which each letter stands for a different component. As we discuss each element of the model, we apply it to the example of an end-of-the-school-year awards ceremony.

S: *Setting* and *scene* stand for the time, place, and psychological characteristics of communication. For example, in the setting of an end-of-the-school-year awards ceremony, the scene might be formal and celebratory.

P: *Participants* refer to speakers and audience—intended and unintended. At the awards ceremony, the principal might give a speech. The intended audience is the auditorium of educators, parents, and students, but there may be an unintended audience, such as the custodial staff members who also hear the speech.

E: *Ends* stands for the purpose of the communication and what participants seek to accomplish. The purpose or goal of the principal's speech might be to welcome the audience to the ceremony.

A: *Act sequence* refers to the form and the order of the communicative event—what is said and how. The principal's welcome speech might begin as a response to an educator who introduces the principal. Perhaps the audience applauds the educator and the principal, and then a student gives the main address.

K: *Key* represents the tone, manner, or spirit of the communicative event (similar to the way music is written in a certain key). The key can be conveyed verbally and nonverbally and may change during communication. Perhaps the presentation of awards begins in a serious tone when the formal awards are given and becomes more lighthearted when fun awards are presented.

I: *Instrumentalities* stand for the forms and styles of speech that are used and how speakers are strategic in their rhetoric—that is, how speakers select one register or another to convey a specific message. Perhaps the educator's introduction is given in a register that uses standardized English features in order to signal formality, whereas the principal's speech is given in a register that uses nonstandardized English features in order to signal approachability.

N: *Norms* refer to the social conventions governing the communication, including the participants' actions and how the event unfolds. For example, social norms generally dictate that a principal's speech should not be interrupted.

G: *Genre* refers to the type of communication. The principal's communication takes place in the genre of giving a speech. Lectures, poems, letters, toasts, and stories are other examples of genres, which can be oral or written.

The SPEAKING model can be used in the secondary English classroom to help students understand how to shift their own styles of communication and how to interpret others' styles and shifts, in spoken and written form. Once students identify the social components of a communicative situation, it is easier to figure out which other grammatical and stylistic conventions to follow. For example, if students are asked to prepare a speech to give to the class, it may be useful to have them identify the *genre* (speech), the *key* (formal), and the *participants* (teacher and classmates). The model can also be compared and contrasted with other models of rhetoric that students learn in secondary English classrooms, such as Aristotle's model of logos, ethos, and pathos (Freese, 1924; see also Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, & Walters, 2012). In Box 2.3 on p. 18, a 4th-grade language arts/writing educator described how she helped her students understand the *participants* component of the SPEAKING model through an exercise in which they adapted their roles as speakers to two different classroom audiences.

When teaching students how to adapt their speaking and writing to different situations, it is important to remember that not all language differences can be explained with the concept of register alone. Varieties of English are often characterized as "informal," but this assessment is based on a misunderstanding of the difference between *language variety* and *register*. Whereas *register* refers to differences in language use according to social situation (often along dimensions of formality and informality), a *variety* is the cluster of language forms, features, and patterns that are used by different social groups. For example, consider the variety of English that is often called African American English (discussed in depth in Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). It is not the case that this variety of English is always informal. African Americans regularly use African American English in many formal situations: during political speeches, in church, and at funerals, to name a few. Listening to speeches by orators such as Martin Luther King Jr. quickly reveals how African American rhetorical style can be employed to great effect, including in formal situations. In sum, the term *language variety* focuses our attention on how a language varies, by factors such as region of origin, gender, social class, age, race/ethnicity, culture, and personality, but it usually does not refer to aspects of style or formality/informality—those considerations generally belong to discussions of *register*.

All individuals, whether using a standardized or a nonstandardized variety of English, adjust their language to suit different social situations, but

who until this point had refused to engage with her on issues of writing—let her sit with him and talk about English usage. She recalled, "We looked for instances where he had written *suppose to* instead of *supposed to* throughout his essay, and he was open to talking about his use of language and also about tone and register. Just by opening that door, we were able to have the conversation about what everyday language can convey versus what standardized English can convey." Creative exercises such as this skit can help secondary English students learn to navigate between their everyday language and the norms and conventions of standardized English.

Is There a Standard English?

Thus far, we have discussed that language is adapted according to different social situations. Often, the concept of language flexibility and diversity

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BOX 2.3. AN EDUCATOR'S VIGNETTE:
An Exercise on Audience Design

Jessica Medina, 4th-Grade Language Arts/Writing Teacher

As part of a final project for a seminar in sociolinguistics that I took as a master's student in a Curriculum and Instruction program, I developed this idea for a project to help teach students about audience. Then, I used this activity with my students in my writing class.

I began by asking the students to tell a story to their friends. The topic was school uniforms and how they felt about them. The students were speaking very passionately and openly, not worrying about their peers and their reactions.

The next day, I had lined up parent volunteers to come to my classroom and play the role of "president," "principal," etc. I asked my students to retell their stories and opinions to the parent volunteers. The students all style-shifted on their own.

Afterward, we debriefed as a class and talked about how the students had changed their language and their body language, depending on the different audiences and settings. Our conversation helped my students become aware of their linguistic behaviors, which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Finally, I asked my students to write about this experience in their journals, where they were able to explore their reactions to how they, their peers, and the parent volunteers used language.

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this ability is learned over time. Many adults are adept at being able to use different registers, whereas students often must be taught explicitly how to do so. To build the skill of register selection, educators may ask students to describe, record, analyze, and interpret how their language is the same or different when they do a range of activities, including giving a class presentation or report, arguing, talking on the phone, greeting friends, greeting family members, and greeting educators (Goodman, 2003). What may seem like disrespect, inappropriate tone, or informal delivery in writing and speaking may occur when students do not understand which register is implicitly expected of them in the classroom; therefore, it is important to teach the nuances of register selection.

Attention to register can particularly benefit struggling students (Fisher & Frey, 2011). One educator who worked with us explained an exercise that she created and used in her high school English class that had the following guidelines: "Compose a short skit or conversation written entirely in the daily language you use outside of school with family and friends—for in the daily language you use outside of school with family and friends—for example, a dialogue between a mother and her son, or a short skit about a group of friends deciding what to do on Saturday night. Be creative!" The teacher explained that, after they finished the exercise, one of her students—

BOX 2.4. AN EDUCATOR'S VIGNETTE:
Teaching About Register

April Lawrence, Doctoral Student in Education at the College of William & Mary and Former Secondary English Educator

What happens when a working-class Southern girl becomes a high school English teacher? Identity crisis. I realized pretty early on in my college experience that the language of academia was more formal and much less colorful than the diction, tone, and voice I had grown up hearing. There was no *Well, I suwannee!* in college English, nor were there any *might coulds.*

When I stood in front of my first high school classroom—32 11th-graders in a culturally diverse school district—I realized that they might feel the same sort of identity crisis that I had experienced in academia. So, I put it out there on the table for them: "You know what, y'all? I don't speak like this all the time. Do you think I say things like, 'That was a great point; could you support it with some evidence?' when I'm hanging out with my friends? Heck no! And the way that I speak around my friends is slightly different from the way I speak around my Grandma. Do you think I say to Grandma, 'What the—no, he did not! Oh. My. God.' Of course not!"

As you might imagine, this honest discussion opened the door to numerous teachable moments and classroom instructional opportunities for exploring tone, voice, diction, audience, register, purpose, and persuasive techniques. Recognizing out loud that language variation is inextricably linked to identity and encouraging class discussion about situational shifts in language helped me to get buy-in from many students who had felt that they just "weren't very good at English." I highly recommend facilitating these types of conversations with your students, listening to their voices, and making those voices a part of your instruction . . . y'all.

brings up questions about whether there is a standard English. Most people have strong opinions about what types of grammar, speech, reading, and writing are "standard" or "proper" (Lippi-Green, 2011). The term *standard English* is commonly used to refer to a preferred style of English (for example, this term is used in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts). Other terms include *formal English, proper English, educated English, good English*, and *correct English*.

When we consider these terms in light of our linguistic truths, many difficulties and complexities arise. The term *standard English* may suggest that some sort of single standard variety of English exists, irrespective of social norms, registers, or situational context. Because language is a social behavior, how people communicate is always situated within specific contexts and interactions. Different situations yield different forms of talk, and ideas of what counts as "correct" or "standard" change over time. After all, no one today still speaks what was considered "correct English" in Chaucer's time, nor do we in the United States use what might be considered the proper "Queen's English" in Great Britain.

There is no single agreed-upon and canonized standard variety of English. Grammar book–style English is often viewed as the target for how students should express themselves in school settings and how adults should express themselves in professional settings. But in fact, grammar books, dictionaries, and pundits who debate what is "proper" rarely agree (Curzan, 2000). Sources that purport to be standard English authorities sometimes use inconsistent, misleading, or vague terminology as well as *you know it when you see it* definitions that can make teaching and learning about English unnecessarily difficult and confusing (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011).

Throughout this book (and in our first book), we have avoided the use of the term *standard English*, because it implies homogeneity and oversimplifies linguistic realities. Instead, we use the slightly different term *standardized English*. This term, which we and other scholars use (Dunn & Lindblom, 2003; Richardson, 2003a), makes the parallel that just as specific types of knowledge are valued on standardized tests, so, too, are specific types of language valued within the educational system. It also reflects the fact that powerful people and institutions, including the media, are involved in decisions about when and how to endorse one variety of English over others. Political, social, and cultural privilege has often determined which language varieties of English were deemed to be more prestigious, socially acceptable, or "standard" than others (Bonfiglio, 2002; Bourdieu, 1991). As Romaine (1994, p. 84) noted, standardization is not an inherent characteristic of language but an "acquired or deliberately and artificially imposed characteristic." In other words, if any language, language variety,

or linguistic feature is considered prestigious, it is only because that type of language is spoken or valued by socially, economically, and politically powerful people and is not due to any independent or inherent linguistic qualities (Lippi-Green, 2011).

At the same time, throughout this book we include many quotes and perspectives from others, including secondary English educators, who sometimes use different terminology than we do. They may use the term *dialect* where we use *language variety*, or they may use *standard English* where we use *standardized English*. Although we explain why we use specific terms, we do not view ourselves as guardians of terminology. Instead, in keeping with our model of linguistic diversity, we respect the terms used by others and allow for a plurality of linguistic choices.

LINGUISTIC TRUTH #2: LANGUAGE IS ALWAYS CHANGING

Language is always changing, to different degrees and for different reasons. Each generation creates new words, new pronunciations, and new ways of phrasing thoughts and ideas. Language also changes when different cultures come into contact, borrowing and lending each other's modes of communication. English itself has been formed and transformed by contact with other languages, and in turn English has influenced other languages around the world (Crystal, 2012). As new elements are incorporated into any language over time, outmoded grammatical constructions, pronunciations, spellings, words, and styles fall out of favor and eventually are replaced. Even school-specific vocabulary sees a great deal of variation and change. Terminology such as "briefly constructed responses," "power writing," and "21st-century learning" often varies from school setting to school setting and may or may not stay in vogue.

Most students come to school with at least the general awareness that language varies and that different situations can call for different types of language to be used. For example, Higgs, Manning, and Miller (1995) found that Appalachian children, by 2nd or 3rd grade, had already picked up on differences between language patterns used at home versus school. Educators can build on students' perceptions about language and develop them by encouraging students to analyze the differences they see and hear, perhaps in the language patterns of parents compared to children or educators compared to students. More advanced students can analyze historical changes in the English language, whether by studying texts from different time periods or by studying how dictionaries have changed over generations. English is generally described as having five distinct periods—Pre- or Proto-English, Old English, Middle English, Early Modern, and Modern

English (Crystal, 2003), and Box 2.5 provides examples of literary texts from these eras. By comparing and contrasting linguistic features across these texts, students can consider how English has changed and is currently changing, in ways that may be ephemeral or permanent. Guiding students to think about language change can increase their linguistic awareness, which can help them develop their communicative competence.

BOX 2.5. CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: From Old English to Modern English in Literature

This exercise investigates language change in English. In the passages below, what similarities and differences exist in vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other elements? Changes in pronunciation can also reveal how English has evolved. Our website, www.charityhudleymallinson.com/wdl, provides links where passages from these poems are read out loud. Educators and students can consider questions such as: What pronunciation changes are heard across these passages? What pronunciation changes are occurring in English today? Which of them seem more fleeting and which might persist?

Old English

Excerpt from Beowulf (c. 900 CE)

oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas, syððanærest wearð
feasceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning!

Middle English

Excerpt from The Canterbury Tales *(Chaucer, c. 1343–1400)*

Whan that April with his showres soote
The droughte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veine in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flowr;
Whan Zephyrus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye

That sleepen al the night with open ye—
So priketh hem Nature in hir corages—
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages . . .

Early Modern English

Excerpt from "Death Be Not Proud" (Donne, 1633)

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.

Modern English

Excerpt from "since feeling is first" (Cummings, 1924)

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
—the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

The Language of Shakespeare

Any discussion of English language and literature would not be complete without mentioning William Shakespeare. Shakespeare is a fixture of secondary English curricula, and his work provides insight into our second linguistic truth: language varies and is always changing.

Shakespeare altered the English language in permanent ways (Macrone, 1990), and his creative use of language illustrates the beauty and genius in finding new modes of expression. Students can study the many words and phrases coined by Shakespeare that contemporary English speakers continue to use every day—from *eyeball*, *assassination*, and *shooting star* to

mind's eye, love is blind, and *all that glitters is not gold*—and trace the relatively recent history of these words and phrases in the evolution of English. Students can also consider modern-day correlates to Shakespeare: What contemporary figures are coining new words, phrases, grammatical constructions, and pronunciations? How are linguistic innovations picked up and spread within groups or throughout society today?

The works of Shakespeare can also be used to discuss both the value of linguistic conventions and the value in occasionally departing from them. In his sonnets, Shakespeare typically follows the conventions of the sonnet genre, but the fact that these conventions exist also allows him occasionally to deviate from them, often for effect or emphasis. Just as Shakespearean sonnets are expected to follow specific conventions, students today have specific conventions they are expected to follow, such as when writing a school essay, a personal statement, or an email to a teacher. Other conventions operate when students write texts to friends, casual emails, tweets, blog posts, and instant messages, although these conventions are not generally codified. Students can therefore explore the linguistic conventions that Shakespeare worked with and compare them to those that they encounter: Like Shakespeare, students today must make choices, in everyday and in academic settings. Through these sorts of exercises, students can build a stronger understanding of how speakers and writers engage with linguistic conventions and routinely shift their use of language, along stylistic lines and within different genres, to meet their communicative purposes.

In addition, when studying Shakespeare's plays, students can be guided to examine how language variation is used and portrayed (Blank, 1996). Shakespeare included many characters who represent speakers from the lower classes, from ethnic and gender minority groups, and from England's diverse regions, and through them he illustrated important social, cultural, and regional differences of his time. In *Henry V*, soldiers from the four corners of the British Isles are brought together to invade France, and this regional diversity is mirrored in the language of the characters of the Englishman, Irishman, Welshman, and Scot. When reflecting differences in social class, Shakespeare not only wrote in the dialogue of the upper class and royalty, but also in dialogue that represented the speech of those who were not part of the gentry. Due to the architecture of the theaters in which Shakespeare's plays were performed and the economics of putting on a play in Elizabethan England, plays needed to appeal to multiple audiences. They not only had to capture the interest of the aristocrats, who sat in the balconies, but also that of the "groundlings" who paid a penny for entrance and who stood around the stage. As a result, Shakespeare's plays are rich in linguistic diversity, often highlighting language varieties that were very different from the Queen's English, the privileged variety at the time (Blank, 1996).

In fact, Shakespeare often upheld characters who represent groups that were stigmatized in Elizabethan times and provided them with powerful language to express themselves. In *Othello*, although people who looked like the Moorish prince from North Africa would have faced much prejudice in Elizabethan society, Shakespeare had Othello speak commandingly, in the language of the aristocracy. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's speech pleading his humanity and moral equality makes a case for the equal worth of Jews, who were at the time a highly stigmatized group. Shakespeare also allowed his female characters to share linguistic equality with (and frequently have linguistic superiority over) their male counterparts. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia dons men's clothes to argue as a lawyer, illustrating through her words that she is just as good as a man. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice is more than the linguistic match of Benedict. In *Othello*, Desdemona is assured and self-confident, in general and in high-stakes circumstances, such as speaking in front of the ruling Senate. Her use of language strongly contrasts with prevailing social expectations that equated women's eloquence with their silence (Magnusson, 2004). Shakespeare also often had his characters use language to level distinctions based on social class and education. In *King Lear*, it is the Fool (the court jester) who is the king's wisest advisor and who, through humor and sharp wit, tries to communicate his insight to a stubborn and shortsighted King Lear.

Although he wrote 400 years ago, Shakespeare illustrates the basic linguistic truths that are the cornerstone of our book. Language is a social product, which we use to communicate and express ourselves as social beings. As a natural course of action, language is always changing, frequently for the better. Finally, and perhaps most important, diverse voices are not a deficiency of our society. Rather, they are an asset, enriching our language, enhancing our thinking, and expanding ways to understand our culture and world.

Though Shakespeare has much to offer and is beloved by many, his work is also linguistically complex. Some educators find it challenging to teach Shakespeare, and students may find it difficult to read and understand (hence the popularity of SparkNotes' [2013] *No Fear Shakespeare*, which provides translations of Shakespeare's plays into contemporary English). When we surveyed secondary English educators and asked them to provide an example of a text that their students often struggle with, they overwhelmingly gave responses such as "Shakespearean sonnets," "Shakespearean plays, because they have language that students find perplexing," and "anything by Shakespeare." As one educator put it, "My students struggle with almost every piece of British literature, but Shakespeare is particularly feared and dreaded. However, many eventually find that they like it."

BOX 2.6. AN EDUCATOR'S VIGNETTE:
Language in the Works of Shakespeare

Blake Williams,

High School Writing Tutor

The fact that Shakespeare is thought to have coined so many words and phrases that persist in English today allows me to talk to my students about how English is always changing. Just as Shakespeare made English richer, I talk to my students about current linguistic developments. We examine whether texting, hip-hop vocabulary, slang terms, and dialect features are lesser forms of English, as many people claim, or whether (as many of my students and I believe) they can allow us to express ourselves in innovative ways or say the same thing more efficiently.

I also use the fact that Shakespearean English is so different from modern English as a way to practice linguistic flexibility. All of my students have to reach beyond their comfort zones to understand Shakespeare, and as a result each of them goes through the experience of learning a linguistic style that they are not natively familiar with. My students are often faced with multiple language styles in their own worlds, and Shakespeare gives them crucial practice in seeking to understand the beauty of a language style different from their own.

Another high school English educator who worked with us explained that her Southern English-speaking students often use nonstandardized pronunciations that affect how they view prose and verse. For example, one of her students told her, "The word *ball* has two syllables, Ms. Smith, *bah* and *ull.*" As a result, she said, "When I have them write a Shakespearean sonnet, they struggle." Linguistically diverse students who come to school with knowledge of different rhyme patterns may have correspondingly less familiarity with standardized English rhyme patterns, and they may need extra instruction about other rhyme schemes, including those in standardized English (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). In addition, Shakespeare frequently uses different syllables and rhymes than are used in standardized English today—as in the use of *'fore* for *before* in Sonnet 7, or the rhyming of *again* with *stain* in Sonnet 109—which may require explanation for students to understand.

In the secondary English classroom, students benefit from exploring rhyming conventions in Shakespearean English, contemporary standardized English, and the varieties they speak. They can write two versions of the same sonnet, one that follows the conventions of standardized English and the other that follows those of their home variety, and then compare and contrast the versions in terms of content, form, and function. Students can also compose their own poetry, which can develop their knowledge of

and promote their sensitivity to a range of conventions of rhyme, syllables, and word formation (Goodman, 2003). By cultivating their personal voices in writing—what Romano (1995) called "the heart" of literacy (p. xi), students enhance their capacities for linguistic versatility and linguistic awareness.

What About Texting Language?

In thinking about language change, it may be impossible to underestimate the influence of technology on the way today's students communicate. All students write daily, as any educator who has seen students send text after text knows firsthand. The Pew Internet and American Life Project studied the texting habits of young adults in the United States, aged 18 to 29. They found that 97% of young adults who own a cell phone send or receive texts daily. Within this group, "the median 18-24 year old texter sends or receives 50 texts per day (or around 1,500 messages per month)" (Smith, 2011). In the United States, 73% of online teenagers use social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter (Lenhart et al., 2010), where users engage in digital writing by creating personal profiles, updating their statuses, exchanging messages, and sharing information with others. Indeed, as Lapp, Fisher, and Frey (2012) stated in the National Council of Teachers of English publication, *Voices from the Middle*: "[S]tudents are writing more than ever before . . . communicat[ing] through their blogs, emails, texting, and Facebook pages" (p. 7).

Yet, as many of the high school English educators who worked with us have noted, many students do not know how to transfer their everyday writing skills to academic contexts. Although students write and read constantly when they text, tweet, and update their statuses, they often do not view digital writing as related to academic writing—despite the fact that there are many similarities in these literacy practices (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). In other words, "Teens write a lot, but they do not think of their emails, instant and text messages as writing. This disconnect matters because teens believe good writing is an essential skill for success and that more writing instruction at school would help them" (Lenhart et al., 2008). When they do write in class, many students view it as "an arduous task that causes them frustration, and their resulting essays often lack the quality desired by their teachers" (Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2012, p. 7).

Part of the difficulty is the fact that outside-of-school writing is not always the same as academic writing, particularly because outside-of-school writing sometimes adheres to different conventions than those of standardized English. What is often called "texting language" can include abbreviations (such as *brb* for *be right back*), initials (such as *gf* for *girlfriend*), and

acronyms (such as *lol* for *laugh out loud*). It may also follow conventions such as placing more emphasis on brevity and less emphasis on standardized punctuation. Many secondary English educators are chagrined when their students' academic writing contains elements of texting language or follows texting conventions. But there are also many misconceptions about texting language and its effect on student communication.

First, as Crystal (2008) discussed, there is a widespread belief that texting relies heavily upon the use of abbreviations, initials, and acronyms. However, studies of large corpora of text messages have found that only about 10–20% of text messages show abbreviated forms. Our perceptions of texting language are likely skewed because of the salience of these forms. In other words, it is not that students use texting language all the time, but rather that it immediately stands out to us when they do; we therefore may perceive that the effect of texting language is larger than it actually is.

Texting language is also not as innovative as it is assumed to be. As Crystal (2008) explained, when it comes to the abbreviations, initials, and acronyms that texters use, many of these features "can be found in pre-computer informal writing, dating back a hundred years or more." The use of *u* for *you* and *idk* for *I don't know* by today's students is no different from *IOU* for *I owe you* and *SWAK* for *sealed with a kiss* used by previous generations. Criticism has always surrounded the use of abbreviations, initials, and acronyms, but brevity is often an economical choice. Just as many texters write short messages to avoid extra charges, writers in earlier generations had similar financial concerns: Abbreviations, initials, and acronyms were routinely used in telegrams and letters, because telegraph companies charged by the number of letters in a message, and postage rates were based on weight. In fact, the first recorded use of *OMG* was in a typed letter sent during World War I by a British Navy admiral to Winston Churchill (Smithsonian, 2012).

Finally, although it is widely assumed that texting language is detrimental to student communication, much evidence suggests otherwise. Crystal (2008) noted the "extraordinary number of doom-laden prophecies" about the dangers and evils of texting. Just as it was once feared that the printing press would disrupt the "almost spiritual connection" between the writer and the page, and just as it was once feared that the typewriter would destroy the art of handwriting (Baron, 2012), many people continue to be wary of or to assume the worst about the effect of new technologies on the English language. In fact, fears that texting has a detrimental effect on literacy do not bear out upon investigation. "On the contrary," Crystal (2008) stated, "literacy improves. The latest studies . . . have found strong positive

links between the use of text language and the skills underlying success in pre-teenage children. . . . The children who were better at spelling and writing used the most textisms" (para. 33). Although texting language often differs from standardized English, this difference does not mean that texting language is inherently wrong or that it is a slippery slope toward bad English. It is much more accurate to view texting language as an organic linguistic product, as "the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. . . . [I]n texting what we are seeing, in a small way, is language in evolution." (Crystal, 2008, para. 35).

Research that shows the benefit of digital writing on students' literacy development makes a case for secondary English educators to tap into the creative and pedagogical potential of technology. Educators can harness students' willingness to engage in texting, tweeting, blogging, and the like to engage them in writing as a multifaceted, variable, and flexible practice (Warschauer, 2007). These sorts of activities can be fun and creative, and they can break down communication barriers between students and educators, pointing out generational linguistic differences in a lighthearted way. As a secondary English educator who worked with us said, "I once had a student who wrote a poem using Facebook/texting language. The students had a good laugh when they realized I was the one who did not understand, and they had to translate for me." Texting language also can help illustrate the crucial point of register, discussed earlier in this chapter. Just as some of the conventions of academic English would be inappropriate and inefficient to use in a text, texting language is often too brief or imprecise to be used in an analytic essay. By guiding students to theorize and analyze how language evolves and how authors communicate differently based on audience and intent, secondary English educators can engage students in the study of English language and literature and can encourage them to write their own material that incorporates their own voice. We discuss these concepts further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Language Variation Is All Around Us

Just as language changes and varies, individual people communicate in unique ways. Our voice quality and language patterns are akin to our individual fingerprints. We refer to this concept as "respect for the idiolect," since *idiolect* is defined as a person's unique language patterns (Labov, 1972b). Attention to and respect for individual variation in linguistic style is part of fostering the academic and social development of every student, which is a primary goal of multicultural education.

BOX 2.7. FOR LINGUISTIC REFLECTION:
Language and Identity

When we do language, it can reveal something about our life experiences and how we want to present ourselves. What is your linguistic identity? Maybe you are the oldest sibling, the family historian, or the family comedian. Maybe you are a "girly" girl, nerd, or jock. Maybe you are put-together and formal, or casual and laid-back. Maybe you are still figuring out your identity! How has language played a role in your identity? The following questions can prompt reflection:

- Describe yourself in five words. What do these words say about you?
- How do you use language to reflect your personality? Your culture? Your family background?
- Has the language you use been accepted by others? Has it ever been challenged by your peers? By family members? By others? How have you dealt with these challenges?

Language often plays a more or less central role at different stages in our lives. Where we grew up, where we have lived, where we were educated, and where we now live can affect our language and speech styles, from vocabulary to pronunciation, grammar, and style. People who have lived in one neighborhood or city all their lives may sound like a textbook speaker of the area, or perhaps they have decided to not adopt features of local speech. People who move from place to place may acquire some of the linguistic characteristics of each place that they have lived, and others may use language in ways that are not easily placed.

One of the social factors that affects our language development and use is age. Among family and friends, on playgrounds, in churches, in neighborhoods, and at school, students can be skilled at communicating in ways that are tailored to different social situations and different social groups, particularly when it comes to peer interactions. Parents have an early influence over a child's language, but the peer group takes over as children get older and especially as they move into preadolescence. For example, noted linguist William Labov (1972a) studied the social networks of preadolescent African American boys in Harlem, New York. He found that these students used nonstandardized varieties of English in ways that earned them acceptance and praise among their peers, indicating the social and cultural functions of language.

Social class is another dimension that can relate to language use. In another study by Labov (1972b), he examined the *r* sound in New York City. At that time (and often today), many New Yorkers dropped the *r*'s in their words, pronouncing a word such as *bird* more like *boid*. To conduct an experiment, Labov chose three department stores that catered to differ-

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BOX 2.8. AN EDUCATOR'S VIGNETTE:
A Lesson on Code Switching

Julie Roos, 10th-Grade English Teacher, AP English Language and Composition Teacher, and Debate Coach

I grew up almost preternaturally aware of the variations in English around me. I had a severe speech impediment as a young child, causing me to spend several hours a week with a specialist who drilled me on pronunciation. I was only 6 years old the first time I asked my mother why she said *worsh* instead of *wash*. Living in Pittsburgh, these variations were all around me, and my traditional schooling led me to believe that the language patterns of my household (*worsh, redd up, chipped ham, gumband, up 'ere, n'at*) were markers of inferiority, while the cottage industry of Pittsburghese paraphernalia and dictionaries argued that these variants should be used with regional pride. When I entered an undergraduate program in English Education, I knew that my inability to break myself of saying *needs washed* instead of *needs to be washed* and *keller* instead of *color* could lead to judgments about my ability to lead classrooms. But I also knew that the language I spoke is one that an entire region of the country uses and understands. If I wasn't going to make fun of my Philadelphian classmates for drinking *soda* and *wooder* (*water*), then I wasn't going to stand for them correcting me for *redding up* (*cleaning up*) my room. I had embraced my own linguistic nuances, and I was determined to let my students do so as well. While understanding the rules of academic English is important, understanding that academic English is only one code among many is even more vital.

My early formation as a proud speaker of a language variety was extremely important when I took my current job. I teach English at a large urban high school in North Las Vegas. Our student body is approximately 45% Hispanic, 45% African American and 10% everything else, with a significant number of European immigrants. Many of my students do not speak English as a primary language at home, and many are in the first two generations of their families to graduate high school. Our state requires all students to pass a writing proficiency test in order to graduate high school and emphasizes the use of academic language on the exam. I begin my students' preparation for the exam with a lesson on code switching, and I start with my own native code. Most of my students never consider that their teachers speak differently outside of school. They're used to hearing me speak in the code of academic English during class and debate practice, though I still can't break myself of saying *keller*, which causes them to look at me askance. Beginning a lecture with full-on "yinzer" (Pittsburgh) English makes them look at me differently, and they begin to look at their own language variations. Families migrate to Las Vegas from around the world, so there is quite a bit of language variation in each of my classes. Comparing their own language use to others' helps my students understand the wealth that language variation represents, and it even helps them on their tests—it's a win-win.

ent social classes: Saks Fifth Avenue (upper-class), Macy's (middle-class), and S. Klein (lower-class). Labov visited each store and asked a clerk for the location of an item that he knew to be on the fourth floor. When the clerk responded to his question by saying "fourth floor," Labov noted whether or not the clerk pronounced the *r* sound in the words *fourth* and *floor*. Then, by saying "Excuse me?" Labov was able to get the clerk to repeat *fourth floor*, this time using a more careful pronunciation. This experiment revealed two trends. First, the clerks' pronunciations of the *r* sounds correlated with the social status of the store they worked in. The higher the social status, the more likely the clerks were to pronounce *r*. Second, when they were asked the question a second time, speaking more carefully, the clerks who worked at S. Klein (the lower-status environment) were actually *more likely* than the clerks from either Macy's (middle-class) or Saks (upper-class) to pronounce their *r*'s. Labov reasoned that the clerks from S. Klein knew that many people viewed not pronouncing one's *r*'s as a lower-status behavior and were sensitive to that fact. Thus, when they were put into a social situation in which they felt compelled to speak more carefully, they were more likely than speakers of higher classes to use the more prestigious *r* sound more often.

It is not the case, however, that prestigious speech is always valued. One of Anne's former students described how, after graduating from college, she worked as a production controller on a nuclear aircraft carrier at a big shipyard. Until that point, she said, her life had been "pretty Ivory Tower—upper-middle-class, White, Midwestern family, boarding school, a great college." When she began working in the shipyard, however, she was frequently picked on for using big words and sounding like a "snob." A supervisor even mentioned originally not wanting to hire her. "When pressed as to why," she said, "I could never get a straight answer. I think the fact is, even though I did a fine job, I didn't fit in enough for them, and a large part of it was the way in which I communicate." As this student's quote reveals, while nonstandardized English is often stigmatized because it is predominantly used by working-class Americans (Wolfram, 1980), stigma can also surround language that is seen as being "too proper." For this reason, people of a higher social class sometimes may use nonstandardized features for emphasis, for effect, to fit in, to add "color" to their speech, or to resonate with an audience; lawyers and politicians are often an excellent illustration of this point (Kendall & Wolfram, 2009). People who use nonstandardized varieties of English are also often viewed as being more personable, friendly, downhome, and casual than people who speak very standardly. Some speakers can easily shift the way they talk, while for others, making those linguistic shifts can prove daunting. Social class interacts with language use in complex

ways, and understanding these nuances is beneficial for educators and students, especially those in diverse classrooms and schools.

In addition to age and social class, gender can correspond with language use. Gender-based language differences are not innate but rather are learned. Due to social pressures and norms, girls and women are often socialized to speak and act in ways that are viewed as being more polite (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). As a result, they may avoid using features such as *ain't* or swear words that boys and men sometimes embrace. At the same time, girls and women are often leaders of the pack when it comes to creating, learning, and spreading new and innovative linguistic features (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Research on language and gender in educational contexts has found that boys are encouraged to express themselves more frequently and openly; boys are more often called on in class (and by name), although they also are more likely to get into trouble (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Much classroom discord is undoubtedly due to verbal conflicts and to miscommunications between boys and educators. The majority of educators in the United States are women, and they likely have certain notions about what is polite and acceptable that may be informed by their own standpoints and worldviews. The relative lack of men as teachers, especially in primary schools, can leave boys without gender-specific linguistic role models at the very time when language patterns are being taught and codified (Hutchings et al., 2008). It is also important to take gender into account when we consider how other linguistic behaviors, such as silence and loudness, speaking up in class, acting out in class, and teasing and bullying, might be used by boys and girls in a given classroom or school.

Language is deeply emblematic of our identities and backgrounds, and as a result the ways that educators interpret and respond to students' language use may directly and deeply affect that young person. Speakers are often sensitive to negative ideologies about their language and may even interpret criticism as a personal attack (Lippi-Green, 2011). Sometimes, in the face of disapproval or correction, students may choose to remain true to the language that feels most comfortable to them in order to sound trustworthy and authentic. Other students who are critiqued for their language without sufficient explanation as to why and how to address the issue may become overwhelmed, confused, and discouraged. They may also lose confidence in the learning process, their own abilities, their educators, and school in general (Labov, 1995). Not all students will strive to speak in standardized ways at all times—nor should they, as wholesale assimilation and homogeneity is not a goal of multicultural education. It is therefore important for educators to understand the deep and abiding con-

nections between language and identity and how they can affect behavior in academic settings.

LINGUISTIC TRUTH #3: LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ARE NOT LANGUAGE DEFICITS

Language differences are not the same as language deficits. Language is always changing and is part and parcel of social interaction. As a result, language differences arise. These differences are normal and natural because language change itself is a normal and natural process (Labov, 1972b). Patterned differences in sound, grammar, and word choice help distinguish what linguists call *language varieties*, which vary by region, personal background, gender, social class, age, race/ethnicity, and more. Any language variety is just as logical and internally consistent as another, and, just like standardized English, nonstandardized varieties of English are rule-governed and predictable in their linguistic structure and use.

Earlier we discussed the fact that, in this book, we use the term *language variety*, which is roughly comparable to the term *dialect*. Dialect is a term that is commonly used, but it is also often used pejoratively. Consider the following sentence: "The kids in the neighborhood don't really speak English; they speak a dialect" (quoted in Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006, p. 3). This sentence represents the idea that a dialect is inherently somehow worse because of its linguistic differences, which is a common misperception. As we have noted, if any language variety or linguistic feature is viewed as being "better" or "worse" than any other, it is only because people have decided that it carries a certain social standing. As linguist Steven Pinker (2012) explained, "The choice of *isn't* over *ain't*, *dragged* over *drug*, and *can't get any* over *can't get no* did not emerge from a weighing of their inherent merits, but from the historical accident that the first member of each pair was used in the dialect spoken around London when the written language became standardized. If history had unfolded differently, today's correct forms could have been incorrect and vice versa." "Historical accidents," as Pinker put it, are similarly responsible for many spellings and pronunciations in standardized English that are odd and sometimes confusing, as anyone who has tried to learn or teach words like *bought, known, primer*, or *segue* will understand firsthand.

Despite these linguistic realities, language varieties are often stigmatized. Linguistic research has unfortunately found that listeners routinely perceive speakers of standardized English as being smarter, of a higher status, and as having more positive personality traits than speakers of nonstandardized English varieties (Lippi-Green, 2011). We all make assumptions sometimes,

> **BOX 2.9. FOR LINGUISTIC REFLECTION: Language Variation**
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> We often have strong feelings about the types of language we like best. Where do these perceptions come from? Some of the following questions are food for individual thought, while others can be used as classroom discussion starters.
>
> - What type of language variation do you find interesting? Where do you hear different types of language: in your neighborhood? On television? In music? Online?
> - Can people tell where you're from by the way you talk? What do they notice about how you talk?
> - Has a parent, guardian, or other adult ever tried to correct your speech? What things were they successful in changing, or not?
> - Are there things that you try to change in the speech of others? What about your own speech?
> - Do you think that trying to change others' speech is a question of ethics, etiquette, or neither? In what situations do you find it acceptable to correct another person's language? When do you find it unacceptable?
> - Listen to the podcast "Should You Point Out Errors?" by Grammar Girl (2011). She discussed several considerations for people who want to point out someone's grammatical error—but, she stated, she doesn't point out other people's errors herself. Do you and Grammar Girl agree or disagree?

but drawing conclusions about people based simply on how they talk can lead to false judgments, stereotypes, and discrimination. The tenets of multiculturalism challenge us to critically examine these notions, however, and to see differences as part of the natural spectrum of humanity. We therefore advocate for linguistic awareness in classrooms, schools, communities, and society. Our model of linguistic awareness, grounded in multicultural education, appreciates the rich and varied backgrounds and identities that students bring with them to classrooms and schools and views this diversity not as a deficit but as a resource.

SUPPORTING LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

Attitudes and beliefs about language are tightly woven into our ideas about teaching and learning and into our pedagogical practices (Reaser, 2006; Reaser & Wolfram, 2007). As we discussed in the previous section, society often privileges certain types of English and stigmatizes those that are non-mainstream. Classrooms, schools, and even education itself as a social institution are not immune from the effects of these beliefs and attitudes. Within

a mainstream educational context that privileges standardized English, it is important to consider the potential effects on students who speak nonstandardized varieties of English.

Linguistic differences, which often co-occur with cultural differences, can put nonstandardized English-speaking students at a very different social and educational starting point than students who come to school already speaking standardized English. Students who are already familiar with standardized English may be seen as being more "promising" and may receive more educational opportunities (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). In contrast, students who do not come to school already speaking the mainstream variety may face deep pressure to assimilate and may be perceived to be less intelligent or less capable if they do not (Wolfram, 1998). Some traditional sources imply that if people are educated and are native speakers of English, they could not possibly also use nonstandardized varieties of English. This idea is harmful to impart, particularly given that some of the most highly educated and successful figures in history—from presidents and other politicians to teachers, artists, novelists, and ministers—have used language variation when communicating some of the great messages of our time. Rather than pressuring them to erase linguistic differences, it is important to honor the backgrounds of nonstandardized English-speaking students, providing the social support and academic tools they need to succeed.

In line with language standards, such as the Common Core Standards and those set by the National Council of Teachers of English, teaching students to understand the English language in its many forms and varieties is an effective and culturally responsive model of English education (National Council of Teachers of English, 2003). Rather than glossing over language variation, we emphasize the importance of explicitly instructing students as to the norms and conventions of standardized English while building their understanding of nonstandardized varieties of English. In the special issue of *English Journal* (Lindblom, 2011), English educators discuss how they have explored the richness of language when teaching literature and language arts.

The ability to communicate effectively with respect to register, context, and audience enhances a student's linguistic awareness, flexibility, and versatility. As Smitherman and Villanueva (2003) noted, real-world educational and professional situations bring together speakers of different languages and language varieties. Students who are able to navigate this diversity are well positioned to succeed in our multicultural society.

In our four-pronged multicultural approach to English education (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011), it is critical to specifically discuss with students the concept of *standardized English*. Students will become aware that standardized English is considered to be the variety of privilege and prestige, a status it has acquired due to the influence of powerful decision

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BOX 2.10. AN EDUCATOR'S VIGNETTE:
Preserving Students' Heart Language

Linda Krause, 9th-Grade English Teacher

I am becoming more and more convinced that many of my students are fighting to preserve their "heart language" in the only way they know how—with typical teenage defiance. When my students' feet first hit the floor of my 9th-grade English classroom at the beginning of the year, conversations frequently included at least one emphatically delivered *ain't* complete with a "whaddaya gonna do 'bout it" look. I ignored them all. Finally, one curious kid volunteered, "You gonna let me say that? *Ain't* ain't a real word, you know."

"Really?" I said, "What makes a word real? It's in the dictionary, you used it in a sentence, and it communicated meaning."

The room went silent. Shocked faces stared.

"Our last year's English teacher said it wasn't a real word," a different student finally interjected. "We said it all the time to bug her."

"You use it like a real word. I get what you say." I shrugged.

Uh oh, I thought. I didn't want to undermine the last teacher's credibility, so I hastened to explain that *ain't* is not a word used in standard English, but then they weren't speaking standard English anyway; they were speaking Appalachian. That was a novel twist, and they loved it.

After we had The Conversation, a mystery started to clear up for me: Why, after multiple explicit grammar mini-lessons, did students continue to repeatedly make the same errors in their writing? Forget the mini-lessons; it was time for me to use a new tactic. I started highlighting grammatical "mistakes" and writing "Please translate" next to them. To my great surprise, students could suddenly self-correct the grammar, although sometimes they would frown in extreme concentration and ask for help.

Apparently, these students, all placed in my class because of their supposedly low English skills, could shift between standard and Appalachian English with a lot more fluency than I realized. They were making a choice, albeit unconscious, to stubbornly cling to their own English variation.

Were my views accurate? It was time for an open-ended survey. Only one student would admit to saying *ain't* just to irritate me, but there were other revelations. The hard-liners' opinion was, "Nobody's going to stop me from saying it." Middle-grounders said they spoke standard English more in English class than other classes because they wanted to pass or thought they would get in trouble if they didn't. However, there seemed to be a fair number who assess the effects of using standard versus Appalachian English and adjust accordingly. Overall, students expressed being comfortable in my class, and some felt much more confident in their ability to communicate. That confidence seems to have arisen from honoring their dialect's grammar rather than treating it as wrong.

Awareness and acceptance go a long way toward eliciting cooperation and engagement. I don't hear *ain't* from nearly as many students as I used to. I might start saying it myself—I sorta, you know, like, kinda miss it.

makers, including dictionary writers, curriculum writers, testing companies, and politicians. Second, we advocate the importance of explicitly teaching students the norms and conventions of standardized English while also helping students learn the differences between standardized English and the languages and language varieties they bring with them from home. Third, we advocate that educators learn about students' linguistic backgrounds and communication styles. To help all students achieve the goal of becoming communicatively competent, it is important for educators to be able to identify language variation and approach language differences in culturally responsive and sociolinguistically informed ways. Finally, we believe that educators who hold positive language attitudes can help all students understand language differences. With awareness and respect, all educators and students can develop an appreciation for the richness and beauty of language, used by others and ourselves.

CONCLUSION

With an understanding of the three linguistic truths that we presented in this chapter, secondary English educators are able to value and build on their students' home languages and language varieties as they help their students learn the norms and conventions of standardized English. As students build their linguistic awareness, they can use this knowledge and information to understand the communication of others as well as to make their own informed judgments and decisions about how to use language. Our linguistic truths parallel many language standards that are recommended or adopted in educational settings, which encourage educators to teach students the norms and conventions of standardized varieties of English *and* help them learn how to express themselves, according to different social circumstances and communicative goals.

In Box 2.11 on pp. 39–41, sociolinguist and professor Dr. Jeffrey Reaser describes his experience as a former high school English teacher who came to appreciate the centrality of language to the mission of secondary English education. He conceptualizes English Language Arts as a three-legged stool, consisting of language, literature, and writing. In fact, his metaphor carries us forward in this book. In Chapter 3, we advocate for secondary English educators to have conversations about language and culture. In Chapter 4, we examine the merits of studying language variation in literature. In Chapter 5, we empower students to find their own voices and tell their own stories, both in conventional writing and in digital writing. In Reaser's metaphor, like a three-legged stool, each topic relates to the other and is central in the quest to promote the success of all students in secondary English environments.

BOX 2.11. A SOCIOLINGUIST'S VIGNETTE:
My Linguistic Journey as an English Educator

Dr. Jeffrey Reaser,
Associate Professor of English at North Carolina State University

I took the long way to sociolinguistics, and in many ways, I tried to resist its pull long after it had thoroughly captured my imagination. My heart has always rested in education. As a kindergartener, I wrote in my journal that I wanted to be a "teacher or a garbage man" (please excuse my gendered language as a 5-year-old). English classes were my most persistent struggle in public school, and by about 6th grade, I had succumbed to the seemingly coordinated message from teachers and parents about my future in engineering. Everyone was shocked, understandably, when I announced in 12th grade that I intended to be a high school English teacher.

I had no knowledge of linguistics when I enrolled in my required "History of the English Language" class as a junior in college. Fifteen years later, I have enough vivid memories of astonishing revelations about language from that class to fill twice the space I'm allotted here. Though I was intrigued by the application of scientific principles to language, I resisted linguistics' temptation long enough to dip my toes into teaching high school. Eventually, I gave in to an MA and a PhD. Halfway through the latter, I realized, sorrowfully, that I was becoming a linguist instead of a teacher. As I attempted to step away from the academy and back into the classroom, my dissertation advisor suggested that I combine my interest in sociolinguistics with my passion for education. For almost a decade now, I have been happily working to increase the presence of linguistics in public education. I have had a few successes along the way, and my brief recounting of them here will not allow proper recognition of academic colleagues and classroom teachers who have contributed to these collaborative projects.

The work that has garnered the most attention is my coauthored *Voices of North Carolina* dialect awareness curriculum (Reaser & Wolfram, 2007), which aligns with the state-mandated Standard Course of Study for 8th-grade social studies, where students explore the history and culture of North Carolina. To a linguist, language is one of the state's richest but least publicized cultural resources and one of the most emblematic badges of its history. The multimedia curriculum examines basic sociolinguistic tenets as it explores seven dialects or languages of North Carolina. Virtually all 8th-grade curricular goals can be examined or reinforced through the linguistic lens: settlement, geography, migration, legislative policy, citizenship, and economic development. For example, the curriculum explores the lingering linguistic effects of the early English settlers in the Pamlico Sound region and of the Scots-Irish in the mountains. Examining the current state of American Indian languages reinforces the devastating effects of "civilization" legislation, a knowledge that builds empathy in students as they consider "English Only" policies threatening Spanish speakers. My argument is simple: Any treatment of the history and culture of North Carolina

that does not explore its linguistic diversity is woefully incomplete. Ours is the first state-based curriculum in the United States and is further distinguished by being designed so that teachers without a background in linguistics are able to teach it effectively as measured by gains in students' language knowledge and improving about language variation (see Reaser, 2006). Because we hope for widespread implementation, we disseminate the curriculum and all related materials for free via the NC State linguistics website.

A second project I was lucky enough to be involved with was a curriculum for high school language arts accompanying the 3-hour documentary *Do You Speak American?* (MacNeil & Cran, 2005). Under the aegis of the Center for Applied Linguistics, we created materials that facilitated use of this rich resource in classrooms and professional development settings. We listened closely to teachers, who preferred thematic units to a traditional chronological approach, and created a curriculum enmeshing the topics they found most compelling—including communicative choices and personal style, perspectives on spoken and written language, regional dialects, Spanish and Hispanicized English, and African American English—with sociolinguistic perspectives. Since the curriculum was designed for a national audience, we used as a framework content standards from the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council for the Social Studies. Like the North Carolina curriculum, these materials are available free via the web.

These are just two of the many projects I've undertaken in an attempt to integrate linguistics into the public school curriculum. With my graduate students, I have also worked on a curriculum that explores the history of English alongside British literature; a curriculum that teaches about language, gender, and ideology via canonical American literature; a curriculum that scientifically explores formal grammar; and curricula for ESL instruction based on pragmatics or enhanced through information on dialect variation. While these curricula remain in less than finalized form, many materials from them have been eagerly sought out and widely distributed to teachers.

Through these and other projects, I feel I have made some headway integrating linguistic information into public schools. While I do not wish to diminish the value of quality packaged lessons and units, it seems to me that these "add-on" curricula are bandages to a much larger issue, namely that linguistics remains outside the mainstream public school environment, and in many cases, outside of teacher education and professional development. I like to think of English Language Arts as a three-legged stool, with one leg being literature, the second writing, and the third language (I cannot claim to have originated this analogy). The stool is useless unless all three legs are of equal length. At my university, students studying to become secondary English teachers take 13 English classes beyond first-year writing. Of these, eight are required literature classes, two are electives, and the remaining three are one each of film, literacy, and linguistics. It's clear we are sending teachers into classrooms with stools of dubious balance. I see my most valuable contributions as far more local than global. With only anecdotes for data, I am convinced that my most direct

impact in the schools arises through the future teachers I am lucky enough to teach, many of whom leave our program spreading the linguistics gospel in their classrooms and schools. It is in my privileged role as teacher of teachers that I feel, finally, a meshing of two worlds into one lucid whole. My dream is that one day, all teachers of all subjects will view language as something that ought to be studied scientifically, and that those teachers are then, over time, able to wipe out the folklore associated with dialect that is damaging to so many students. To this end, I am happy to be one of many friends, colleagues, and, yes, former students, engaged in teaching about language variation. Sociolinguistics finally claimed me, but I'm still first and foremost "just" a teacher.