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CONSTRUCTED HERE, CONSTRUCTED THERE: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF GERMAN DIALECT SPEAKERS AND AMERICAN BLACK ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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INTRODUCTION

Research on German dialect-speaking students was at its peak during the second half of the 20th century. Interest in the potential school problems facing German dialect-speaking students emerged around the same time as modern dialectology began to gain popularity in Germany (Barbour and Stevenson 1998: 113), situating it within the larger shift towards the adoption of sociolinguistic approaches to the study of language variation. Beginning in the 1970s, studies on German dialect-speaking students sought to determine whether speaking a German dialect actually had a significant impact on school performance and to identify the linguistic and/or social factors that could contribute to a German dialect-speaking student experiencing problems in school. These studies compared the performance and experiences of German dialect-speaking students with one another and with Standard German-speaking students, finding that while German dialect-speaking students do not universally underperform, they appear to be at a greater risk of doing so (Ammon 1977; Hain and Hain 1980; Reitmajer 1980). Consequently, studies from the second half of the 20th century raised important questions about the extent to which the potential school problems facing German dialect-speaking students are a product of language attitudes, suggesting that socially-constructed beliefs about language and language use can have the power to unduly influence the academic and professional attainment of German dialect-speaking students (Ammon 1972; Ammon 1977; Hain and Hain 1980; Shafer and Shafer 1975).

The problem, however, is that all this research more or less stopped in the early 2000s. Therefore, short of engaging in original research or drawing conclusions from recent state curricula, there is no way of knowing if the experiences of German dialect-speaking students have improved. The efficacy of suggested changes to German language education cannot be studied because there is no evidence of whether or not they have even been implemented. The most un-

fortunate result of this silence, however, is that it gives the false impression that the potential problems of German dialect-speaking students are no longer a worthy topic of inquiry, despite the fact that studies from the early 2000s by no means frame these problems as being solved.

Thus, this essay has two seemingly contradictory intents. On the one hand, it is meant to reopen discussion of the experiences of German dialect-speaking students. It is meant to emphasize why research in this field is still very much needed, and why linguists and non-linguists alike should have a vested interest in the role German dialects play in German language education. On the other hand, the goal of this essay is to show that although continued research on German dialect-speaking students is important, it is also possible to make recommendations for the German education system by comparing the experiences of German dialect-speaking students with more recent research on the experiences of Black English-speaking students in the United States. In other words, this essay will demonstrate that although it makes a comparison out of necessity, the conclusions drawn from this comparison can still be used to improve the experiences not only of German dialect-speaking students, but of German students of all linguistic backgrounds.

To make clear the ways in which the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and the experiences of Black English-speaking students are shaped by language attitudes and the larger language ideologies into which they coalesce, this essay will begin by providing a more in-depth look at past research on German dialect-speaking students. Section I will establish what being a German dialect-speaking student means in the context of past research, as well as the extent to which past research observes German dialect use as being associated with a particular social class/indicative of a particular set of social circumstances and outcomes. Finally, section I will discuss the potential causes and consequences of the school problems experienced by some

German dialect-speaking students, highlighting the ways in which these problems are influenced by the functioning of language attitudes and language ideology.

Section II will first explain why the experiences of Black English speakers in the United States can and should be compared with the experiences of German dialect-speaking students. It will then establish what being a Black English speaker means in the United States, explaining the ways in which this definition is similar to and different from that of a German dialect speaker, as well as the extent to which race and social class imbue Black English use with its own unique set of social connotations. In keeping with the structure of section I, section II will discuss the potential causes and consequences of the school problems experienced by some Black English-speaking students, highlighting the ways in which these problems are influenced by the functioning of language attitudes and language ideology. Most importantly, section II will emphasize what the experiences of German dialect-speaking students in Germany and Black English-speaking students in the United States reveal about how both societies develop, articulate, and disseminate beliefs about language and its use.

Finally, section III will synthesize the comparison between the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and Black English-speaking students, using it to create recommendations for the improvement of German language education. It will assert that while the American education system provides many recommendations that could be applied to existing German approaches to traditional bidialectal education, these recommendations also emphasize that the American and German education systems could go even further in promoting inclusive 21st century language education. Therefore, section III will propose that the German education system adopt a modified version of the two-way bidialectal education approach described by Malcolm (2007), because it could provide truly egalitarian German language education that encourages

German students of all linguistic backgrounds to engage in the kind of critical thought that contributes to the shifting of the ways people think about German dialects and German dialect use.

THE EXPERIENCES OF GERMAN DIALECT-SPEAKING STUDENTS

What Defines a German Dialect Speaker?

The most logical point of entry into the discussion of German dialect-speaking students is to actually explain what defines a student as a “German dialect speaker”. Upon first consideration, the criteria seem rather obvious: a student who speaks a German dialect is a German dialect speaker. But what exactly does it mean to speak a dialect? Where does one draw the line between “speaking” and “not speaking”? As is likely apparent, the problem with using very general criteria for defining a student as any kind of dialect speaker is that it is difficult to account for the diversity of the students who could potentially be categorized as dialect speakers. The vague descriptor “speaking” does not explain what it means to be capable of speaking a dialect, making no distinction between students who have a comprehensive understanding of a dialect and those who have a very limited understanding of a dialect. In addition, without further inquiry, one cannot know what role the dialect plays in a student’s linguistic repertoire, because simply “speaking” does not indicate how the dialect was acquired or the nature of its use. Therefore, it makes sense to establish a definition of the term “German dialect speaker” that reflects the ways in which German students have already been categorized, rather than attempt to impose a broad definition upon them.

It is difficult to create an all-encompassing definition because, as Ammon (1972) notes, there are many diverse stages and transitional forms between the linguistic codes of German dialects and the linguistic codes of Standard German (80). In other words, all of the students who

could potentially be described as German dialect speakers will not fit neatly under one term because they do not all use language in the same ways. Published studies on German dialect-speaking students tend to use the term “German dialect speaker” to refer to one specific group of German dialect-speaking students and use different terms to refer to other groups of German dialect-speaking students (Ammon 1972; Ammon 1977; Ammon and Kellermeier 1997; Reitmajer 1976). This means that by narrowing and reframing the definition of the term “German dialect speaker” they present it as one end of a continuum, rather than a continuum in and of itself.

With this mind, the German dialect speaker represented in published studies is best described as a German dialect speaker proper because he/she is a native German dialect speaker who lacks an active command of Standard German¹. Ammon and Kellermeier (1997) describe having an active command of Standard German as the ability to not only passively understand that particular language variety, but to use it actively and easily, labeling students who cannot confidently manipulate Standard German as “*Nur-Dialektsprecher*” (26). Therefore, a student’s categorization as a German dialect speaker has more to do with more on his/her competency in Standard German than his/her competency in a German dialect. Published studies frequently emphasize this distinction by dividing German dialect-speaking students into two groups: those who have an active command of Standard German and those who do not (Ammon 1972; Ammon 1977; Lausberg 1993 in Kremer 2002; Reitmajer 1976). Lausberg (1993), for instance, separates “code-switcher[s]” and “code-mixer[s]” from “[German] dialect speakers” (quoted in Kremer 2002: 79-80), suggesting that although code-mixers may not be as competent in Standard Ger-

¹ Meaning here: the range of spoken and written forms of German that are generally regarded as possessing the greatest social prestige and as being reflective of acceptable language use (Barbour and Stevenson 1998: 145); characterized, when applicable, by the limited use of localized vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciations (Barbour and Stevenson 1998: 148).

man as code-switchers, they are on a different level than German dialect speakers because they are capable of using more than one language form.

Similarly, Reitmajer (1976) divides German dialect-speaking students between the terms “*Nur-Mundart-Sprecher*” and “*Bilingual-Sprecher*”² (93) and when presenting data, groups students categorized as “*bilingual*” with students categorized as “*Nur-Hochdeutsch-Sprecher*”, underscoring the notion that in the context of past research, the German dialect speaker is not simply a student who can speak a German dialect. The grouping together of bilingual³ and strictly Standard German-speaking students is significant because it suggests that the strictly German dialect-speaking students are the real measure of German dialect-related school problems. This does not mean that past research assumes all students categorized as German dialect speakers will experience school problems, but rather, that it acknowledges the reality that the lowest grades in German language classes typically belong to students from that group (Reitmajer 1976: 97).

Based on the Standard Germany competency attributed to the German dialect speaker, one can further define him/her as someone who was only socialized in a German dialect (Ammon 1972: 87). Therefore, the German dialect speaker is not simply any native German dialect speaker, but someone who speaks a German dialect almost exclusively upon entry into the German education system. As Ammon (1977) notes, the German dialect speaker proper does not arrive with even a “pretty good active command” (53) of Standard German, making him/her a German dialect speaker out of necessity rather than a German dialect speaker by choice.

It is essential to define the term “German dialect speaker” for several reasons. First and foremost, by synthesizing the individual definitions created by each of the published studies, it

² Meaning here: the active command of two different language varieties, rather than two different languages.

³ Or, more appropriately, “bidialectal”.

becomes clear what kind of German dialect speaker has been the focus of past research. One sees that although the notion of “speaking” Standard German still remains open to interpretation, in the context of past research, the notion of “speaking” a German dialect is rather clear. This does not mean that the above definition of a German dialect speaker is ideal, it is simply a basis upon which the published studies can be interpreted and analyzed. With this in mind, it is also essential to define the term “German dialect speaker” because its past use demonstrates the ways in which it is useful, as well as the ways in which it can be modified to contribute to the improvement of the German language education.

The Role of Social Class

Although social class was not explicitly discussed in the above definition, the criteria for categorization as a German dialect speaker frequently suggest a connection between German dialect use and social class. When German dialect speakers are described as students who do not have an active command of Standard German – the “*Verkehrssprache [deutscher] Gesellschaft*” (Hain and Hain 1980: 41) – it is easy to make certain assumptions about their socioeconomic background. The question, however, is how often these assumptions prove to be correct. Therefore, to understand the experiences of a German dialect speaker, it is important to consider both the real and perceived social implications of German dialect use, as each influences how German dialect speakers navigate the German education system.

Of course, it would be impossible to talk about the real and perceived social implications of German dialect use if there were no other language variety to compare it against. Although speaking a German dialect and speaking Standard German are not mutually exclusive, the mere existence of Standard German creates a dichotomy between the two language varieties that em-

phasizes the ways in which their patterns of usage differ. Ammon (1977) argues that this dichotomy is a result of the different communicative ranges of the two language varieties (48). This means that Standard German is typically used by people from the middle class and above who are not only capable of communicating outside their dialect area, but have lifestyles that require them to regularly do so, while German dialects are typically used by people from the working class and below who are not only less capable of communicating outside their dialect area, but have lifestyles that rarely require them to do so (Ammon 1977: 48-49)⁴.

Unsurprisingly, the different lifestyles that Ammon (1977) alludes to are often dictated by the kinds of jobs the speakers of each language variety have (Shafer and Shafer 1975: 50). Ammon (1977) sees a connection between people from the working class and below and German dialect speakers, as well between people from the middle class and above and Standard German speakers, arguing that the lack or presence of an active command of Standard German separates the two groups of classes from one another (48-49). Similarly, Mattheier (1990) asserts that the connection between German dialect use and social class is a matter of the extent to which a job involves interaction with written Standard German, suggesting that blue collar and white collar jobs place different levels of value on Standard German (66). Therefore, although they represent simplified patterns of language use, both descriptions highlight the pervasiveness of the belief that certain language varieties are better suited to certain jobs, and that certain kinds of Germans are more likely to fill those jobs.

⁴ Ammon (1977) conceptualizes social classes in terms of Marxist social theory and empirical social research, using the terms “ruling class” and “upper class” to refer to people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and the terms “ruled class” and “lower class” to refer to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (49). However, to better express what is meant by these terms, it makes sense to reframe distinctions between higher socioeconomic classes and lower socioeconomic classes as distinctions between the middle class and above and the working class and below.

This notion of one language variety being better suited to certain modes of communication than another relates to popular and academic perceptions of German dialects having restricted linguistic codes (Ammon 1972: 84; Reitmajer 1980: 72; Shafer and Shafer 1975: 56-57). The term “restricted code” was coined by Bernstein (1962) to refer to the limited linguistic repertoire demonstrated in what he had previously termed “public language”⁵ (32), and was observed to be a consistent descriptor of the language of children from working-class families (44). Therefore, as Shafer and Shafer (1975) note, in using the term “restricted code” to draw connections between certain linguistic competencies and certain social groups, Bernstein (1962) consequently encouraged an association between dialect use and linguistic deficiency (56). Labov (1966) would argue that this association represents the assigning of social cues to linguistic variation (482), allowing certain attitudes to become synonymous with certain language varieties or elements thereof, regardless of whether or not they correspond to an objective reality. This means that language attitudes can not only be used to identify particular social groups, but can come to actually represent those social groups (Ammon 1995: 371).

One of the problems with generating language attitudes based on the perceived connection between German dialect use and social class is that their validity varies in relation to one’s definition of a German dialect speaker. While the lack of an active command of Standard German may be expected of someone from the working class or below, membership to that group of classes does not inherently define someone as a German dialect speaker and vice versa.

Reitmajer (1976), for instance, hypothesizes about whether members of the German *Unterschicht* will underperform in school, rather than about whether students from the working class

⁵ Meaning here: the language variety used by the “skilled and semi-skilled strata”; by “criminal sub-cultures, rural groups, armed forces and adolescent groups in particular situations” characterized, among other things, by “short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences, a poor syntactical construction with the verbal forms stressing the active mood” and “simple and repetitive use of conjunctions” (Bernstein 1959: 311).

or below will be more likely to speak German dialects or people from the middle class or above will be either bidialectal or strictly Standard German speakers because those likelihoods have already been documented in other research (91)⁶. Therefore, although Reitmajer (1976) makes the suggestion that someone from the working class or below could be considered a German dialect speaker proper, without knowledge of that person's command of Standard German it is not appropriate to definitively categorize him/her as such. The decision to look at language use and social class separately is important because it suggests that the connections between the two factors are not always as simple as some definitions of German dialect speakers allow them to be.

There is also evidence to suggest that although German dialect use may be common among people from the working class and below, it is by no means exclusive to that particular group of classes (Ammon 1995: 371; Reitmajer 1980: 71), and is likely due to the different patterns of German dialect use across Germany. In northern Germany, for instance, the Low German dialects are so different from Standard German that they are sometimes regarded as almost entirely different languages, therefore, Standard German⁷ has become the means of communication for most of the population, largely irrespective of social class (Ammon 1995: 369). Conversely, in central and southern Germany, German dialects are still very much a part of everyday life, even though their use is still influenced social and situational considerations (Ammon 1995: 369). In other words, while people from the working class and below or the middle class and above may still tend to use one language variety over another, people from the middle class and above may also use broad German dialect forms in private or informal contexts (Ammon 1995: 371), suggesting that although German dialect use is not completely accepted in central and southern Germany, it is more common among people from the middle class or above.

⁶ See also: Davies 2001: 10; Hain and Hain 1980: 37.

⁷ Or presumably a German dialect variety nearing it.

German Dialect-Related School Problems: Their Causes and Consequences

As is likely apparent, students who enter the German education system without an active command of Standard German may have to depend on their schools to teach them that particular language variety. Unlike their peers, these students have likely been exposed to, but rarely required to speak Standard German while growing up. This means that while students who are bidialectal or strictly Standard German speakers can continue to develop their competency in Standard German from a preexisting base, German dialect speakers must begin building their competency in Standard German from the beginning (Ammon 1977: 65). This, however, is not necessarily the fault of the parents of German dialect speakers, as they, along with other parents, assume that teachers will ensure their children's acquisition of Standard German (Davies 1995: 90). Therefore, one can argue that there is the collective expectation that the responsibility of German language education is transferred to teachers once children begin attending primary school.

This responsibility is an important one to bear because a student's performance in primary school influences the trajectory of his/her placement in secondary school (Ammon 1977: 50). Thus, while students who do well in primary school have the opportunity to attend the university-track *Gymnasium*, students who do not do as well will end up in a *Realschule* or a *Hauptschule* and will be far less likely to attend university (Ammon 1977: 50)⁸. Unsurprisingly, one of the

⁸ According to the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2016), *Hauptschulen* provide "basic general education" and award two possible vocational leaving certificates that enable entrance into further vocational education; *Realschulen* provide "more extensive general education" and award a vocational leaving certificate that enables entrance into further vocational education, typically at a higher level than that which is allowed by the main vocational leaving certificate issued by a *Hauptschule*; *Gymnasien* provide "intensified general education" and award a leaving certificate that enables entrance into any institution of higher education. Since the publication of Ammon (1977), schools offering multiple courses of education (e.g. *Gesamtschulen*) have become much more common (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016) and students are given more opportunities to transfer from one course of edu-

necessary requirements for doing well in primary school is developing an active command of Standard German (Ammon 1977: 51; Davies 2000: 121), meaning that regardless of their linguistic background, all students are expected to achieve the same language learning outcomes. In other words, students who want to or are expected to participate the social domains that require an active command of Standard German have to demonstrate it early on in their academic careers or face a more circuitous route to their aspirations. Indeed, Hain and Hain (1980) argue that even outside of the education system and in the job market itself, one's level of competence in Standard German is often of more interest than one's professional qualifications (45). With this in mind, they believe that Standard German competency has become an instrument of selection that works against German dialect-speaking students from working-class families and leads to an inequality of opportunity (Hain and Hain 1980: 37).

Ammon (1972) frames this inequality as a language/communicative barrier (83), suggesting that any difficulties German dialect-speaking students may experience are due to the fact that they are literally learning a new mode of communication. The question, however, is whether there is evidence to confirm the disadvantaged status of German dialect-speaking students or whether their status has been wrongly accepted as truth. To a certain extent, research demonstrates that some German dialect speakers do indeed underperform in German language classes (Ammon 1977; Reitmajer 1976; Reitmajer 1980). They do not always achieve at the level of other students in terms of their orthography, writing, reading, and speaking (Ammon 1977: 47; Reitmajer 1980: 73). In addition, while the overall distribution of grades among German dialect-speaking students is not dissimilar to the distribution of grades among other groups of students, the lowest grades in German language classes belong to German dialect-speaking students

cation to another (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016), suggesting that on a structural level, students' initial placement in secondary school has a comparatively smaller impact of trajectory of their education.

(Reitmajer 1976: 97). Perhaps most importantly, Barbour (1987) notes that students who come to school with an active command of Standard German do not have as much of an advantage as is often attributed to them, because even children who grow up speaking Standard German must still learn how to use it in formal registers (234). Therefore, although it is possible to talk about underperformance within the group of students termed German dialect speakers, it is an oversimplification to talk about the underperformance of the group as a whole.

The problem, however, is that the discussion of German dialect-speaking students involves a great deal of conflation and generalization on the parts of both the German education system and the general population. The experience of one kind of German dialect speaker has become the shorthand for the experiences all German dialect speakers because of the pervasiveness of incorrect language attitudes. Therefore, it does not really matter whether or not German dialect-speaking students are actually experiencing school problems, because the mere assumption that they are places them at a disadvantage. Shafer and Shafer (1975) describe this assumption as a self-fulfilling prophecy, suggesting that when a teacher encounters a student who is a German dialect speaker, the teacher may form a negative opinion of the student before he/she has the opportunity to demonstrate and/or improve his/her skills (57).

Past research consistently demonstrates that teachers and students attach social attitudes to language in a myriad of ways (Ammon 1972; Ammon 1977; Davies 2000; Hain and Hain 1980; Reitmajer 1980). In some instances, these social attitudes reflect the aforementioned belief that German dialect speakers are less likely to be successful in school (Ammon 1972: 85; Reitmajer 1980: 74). In other instances, these social attitudes reflect the perceived lesser status of German dialects and are demonstrated by the ways in which teachers choose to correct German dialect-speaking students. Davies (2000), for instance, finds that teachers will use German dia-

lects as examples of how not to write, thereby focussing on what is supposedly wrong with German dialects rather than the ways in which German dialects can be used with positive outcomes (121-122). Similarly, Ammon (1977) observes that teachers will often encourage students who use German dialect speech forms to speak “more understandably”, “more decently” or “more beautifully” and that the use of German dialect speech forms can illicit laughter from both teachers and students (62). This suggests that German dialects are often not only perceived as less communicative language varieties, but less desirable language varieties as well.

Unsurprisingly, all of this negative feedback does not provide German dialect-speaking students with a particularly supportive classroom environment. When their attempts to communicate are repeatedly deemed unsatisfactory, the developing self-confidence of German dialect-speaking students is damaged (Ammon 1972: 88) and unnecessarily so. In this way, a German dialect-speaking student who may have performed well in school could be set on a track to becoming the stereotype that was initially and unduly assigned to him/her. Therefore, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Standard German and the necessary command of it serves as what Hain and Hain (1980) describe as an “*Instrument von Herrschaft und Unterdrückung*” (43), unfairly keeping German dialect speakers from certain kinds of higher education, and by extension certain social domains.

THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Cross-Cultural Comparison?

Hoover (1978) argues against comparing the experiences of speakers of non-standard language varieties from societies that have different dynamics of ethnicity, race, and class (84).

She characterizes this practice as “sentimental egalitarianism”, emphasizing that the experiences of dialect speakers of different nationalities often bear no more than a superficial resemblance because they are products of distinct social structures (Hoover 1978: 84-85). Thus, discussions of the educational role of dialects should take place on an individual basis because recommendations tailored to a particular society are rarely transferable (Hoover 1978: 84-85). Fishman and Lueders-Salmon (1972) do not necessarily condemn comparing the experiences of German dialect speakers and Black English speakers, but argue that it is incorrect to equate the use of German dialects and the use of Black English because only the latter is associated with “demographic stereotypes” (79). Taken together, the perspectives of Hoover (1978) and Fishman and Lueders-Salmon (1972) appear to advise against the rhetorical approach of this essay. They discourage the extrapolation of one social situation onto another, especially for the purposes of identifying universally-applicable recommendations. Both perspectives assume that two societies will almost never have identical dynamics of ethnicity, race, and class, and to a certain extent, this is true. Although Germany and the United States both have diverse ethnic and racial populations, as well similar levels of social development and stratification, they are unique societies with unique histories.

However, this is not to say that there is no overlap between the experiences of German dialect speakers in Germany and Black English speakers in the United States. Race, ethnicity, and class do not necessarily mean the same things in the two countries, but the basic mechanisms by which these social concepts influence the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and Black English-speaking students are analogous. The language attitudes that have the potential to impact their academic and professional attainment are generated in very similar ways and circulated with very similar effect. Therefore, by framing the comparison of the experiences of

German dialect-speaking students and Black English-speaking students as a discussion of distilled social forces in context of distinct social structures, it is possible to learn from the parallels between their experiences without oversimplifying or conflating them. One can use the school experiences of Black English speakers to articulate and improve the school experiences of German dialect speakers while also acknowledging that these experiences fit within different realities of life.

The question, then, is why Black English? Why not compare the school experiences of German dialect speakers in Germany with the school experiences of German dialect speakers in another European, German-speaking country like Austria or Switzerland? Why insert race into a discussion that is not explicitly about race? The initial appeal of analyzing the experiences of Black English-speaking students is the number of published studies. For one, there has simply been more written about the topic on a more consistent basis. Quantity, however, is not what makes the experiences of Black English-speaking students so rhetorically⁹ valuable. The visibility of race makes it easier to trace the functioning of the social forces that are at work in both the United States and Germany. In other words, the experiences of Black English-speaking students serve as a very striking example of the potential negative educational impact of language attitudes specifically, and social attitudes more generally.

What Defines a Black English Speaker?

For the sake of comparison, it makes sense to define the term “Black English speaker” using the process that was followed for the term “German dialect speaker”. Therefore, the criteria for both terms will be derived from their use in the context of past research rather than an ar-

⁹ And intrinsically, of course.

bitrarily-selected definition. This consistency is essential, not only because it helps to position the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and Black English-speaking students as analogous, but because the diversity of the Black English-speaking population demands it. Just as there is a wide variety of students who could potentially be categorized as German dialect speakers, so too is there a wide variety of students who could potentially be categorized as Black English speakers. In other words, like the term “German dialect speaker”, the term “Black English speaker” appears straightforward, but proves more complex when considered in relation to actual language use.

As was the case with German dialects and Standard German, it is possible to speak of a continuum between Black English and Standard American English (SAE)¹⁰, meaning those who could potentially be categorized as Black English speakers do not necessarily have to exhibit identical patterns of language use (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 18). Indeed, although published studies from the 21st century overwhelmingly favor the terms “African American Vernacular English” (AAVE) (Charity 2007; Godley and Escher 2012; Horton-Ikard and Miller 2004; Wheeler 2010; Wolfram et al. 2000) or “African American English” (AAE) (Blake and Cutler 2003; Craig et al. 2009; Mordaunt 2011; Seymour 2004) when discussing Black English, they tend to use the same terms to refer to different groups within the Black English-speaking population. In other words, while some studies use the terms AAVE speaker and AAE speaker to refer to strictly AAVE/AAE-speaking students, others use the terms to refer to students who are capable of speaking both AAVE/AAE and SAE.

¹⁰ Like Standard German, SAE refers to the range of spoken and written forms of American English that are generally regarded as being reflective of correct language use and that are characterized by the absence of stigmatized features (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 12-13). However, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) argue that unlike other standard language varieties, SAE is not necessarily assigned social prestige, but instead perceived as having a neutral social value in contrast to other varieties of American English that are assigned negative social prestige (13). Of course, in response to this, one can also argue that being perceived as having a neutral social value is *in and of itself* a form of social prestige.

This terminological divide has to be discussed because it highlights two distinct, but equally important definitions of the Black English-speaking student¹¹. As previously suggested, the first definition of the AAVE-speaking student displays the same characteristics as the German dialect-speaking student who is the focus of many German studies. According to Charity et al. (2004), this subcategory of AAVE-speaking students have grown up using AAVE and have had limited exposure to SAE (1350). Therefore, they come to school without an active command of SAE because they have not been learning it within their families or communities (Charity 2007: 288; Wheeler 2010: 955). They are comparable to the German “*Nur-Dialektsprecher*” because they generally do not have to the option to engage in code-switching or code-mixing until they begin studying SAE in school (Ogbu 1999: 164). Thus, AAVE speakers are students who are capable of understanding and manipulating a linguistic system with “well-formed rules of its own” (Labov 1982: 183), the only caveat is that the linguistic system is AAVE rather than SAE. This particular interest in the experiences of non-bidialectal, strictly AAVE-speaking students is likely driven by evidence that they may be at a greater risk of encountering language-related school problems¹² (Charity et al. 2004: 1348-1349; Wheeler 2010: 958) and is significant because it reflects the aforementioned German tendency to use strictly German dialect-speaking students as primary test subjects for German dialect-related school problems.

The second definition of the AAVE-speaking student is comparable to the German code-switcher or code-mixer, as he/she has a strong enough active command of SAE and accompanying situational awareness to at least attempt to alternate between SAE and AAVE (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006: 781; Craig et al. 2009: 851; Godley et al. 2007: 107; Godley and Escher

¹¹ This essay will henceforth use the more specific descriptor AAVE when referring to Black English, Black English speakers, and Black English-speaking students.

¹² Meaning here: problems both real and created/exacerbated.

2012: 709; Paris 2009: 431). As Horton-Ikard and Miller (2004) note, this subcategory of AAVE-speaking students may be more confident using SAE because they attend schools with a greater proportion of SAE speakers, meaning that although they may still have grown up speaking AAVE within their families, they may also be members of communities in which interactions in SAE are more common (480). However, many studies seem to focus more on bidialectal AAVE-speaking students because they are either more numerous than strictly AAVE-speaking students (Paris 2009: 431) or because their apparent in-between status makes them better able to demonstrate and comment on the process of negotiating two language varieties and two potential identities.

As is likely apparent, the challenge of accounting for two groups of AAVE-speaking students is what differentiates the process of defining AAVE-speaking students from the process of defining German dialect-speaking students. While one group of German dialect-speaking students is clearly the focus of past research in Germany, in the United States, two groups of AAVE-speaking students are given relatively equal amounts of attention. On top of this, the element of race adds an additional layer of complexity to what it can mean to be an AAVE-speaking student of any kind, precluding the possibility of creating a definition based chiefly on linguistic factors. In other words, although social factors play an important role in further developing the definition of a German dialect-speaking student, they are still supplementary to that definition. Conversely, social factors like race are more or less inseparable from both of the aforementioned definitions of an AAVE-speaking student and cannot be treated as supplementary to linguistic factors.

The Roles of Race and Social Class

Although the criteria for categorization as a AAVE speaker also frequently suggest a connection between dialect use and social class, the very construction of the term “AAVE speaker” demands an association that the term “German dialect speaker” does not. While a German dialect speaker could conceivably be of any race, an AAVE speaker is connected with Blackness in one form or another. Therefore, regardless of how one chooses to approach the element of race, one must acknowledge its presence. One cannot talk about the socioeconomic background of AAVE-speaking students without considering the real and perceived interaction of AAVE use, race, and social class, because any prevailing misconceptions about AAVE use are just as important as any documented social implications. This means that although the role of social class must be explained differently than was done in relation to German dialect speakers, both processes will demonstrate why it is tempting to make certain assumptions about the social circumstances of students who speak non-standard language varieties, and, more importantly, why those assumptions often fail to consider the nuances of language behavior.

Like the existence of Standard German, the existence of SAE creates a dichotomy between it and any non-standard language variety. It suggests that although it is possible to be a speaker of both SAE and AAVE, the two language varieties have different patterns of usage and are representative of different social and cultural milieus. Godley et al. (2007) argue that the dichotomy between SAE and AAVE is a product of dominant language ideology that positions SAE as the ideal language variety within in the United States (104). Milroy and Milroy (2012) similarly describe this collection of beliefs as “the standard ideology” (161), asserting that standard language ideology is constructed and employed in the interests of those who are socially prominent and economically powerful (162). Therefore, SAE not only enjoys the linguistic prestige of facilitating large-scale communication, but the accompanying social prestige of being

designated for such purposes (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 166). In theory, this means that AAVE does not enjoy as much prestige as SAE because, like German dialects, it is less suited to use in certain social contexts. However, the crucial implication of standard language ideology is that linguistic prestige is simply a byproduct of being the language variety associated with dominant social groups.

Certainly, many of the AAVE-speaking students analyzed in 21st century studies are from the working class or below (Charity 2007; McDonald Connor and Craig 2006; Godley et al. 2007; Paris 2009). They are often noted as being eligible for subsidized lunch programs (Charity 2007: 285) or other programs intended for families facing poverty (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006: 774) and belong to working-class communities (Paris 2009: 429). Therefore, like German dialect speakers, there is evidence of overlap between people from the working class or below and AAVE speakers¹³. In addition, AAVE-speaking students from the working class or below tend to live in communities and/or attend schools with large Black (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006: 774; Godley et al. 2007:108) or Latino/a (Paris 2009: 429) populations, suggesting a connection between social class and race. The danger, however, is that while this connection is certainly consistent with findings that Black children and Latino/a children are more likely than White children to live in poverty in the United States (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* 2015: 14), this does not mean that all Black students, Latino/a students or AAVE-speaking students live in poverty.

With this in mind, it makes sense that the other portion of AAVE-speaking students analyzed in 21st century studies are from the middle class or above (Craig et al. 2009; Horton-Ikard and Miller 2004) or attend schools in high-income communities (Hill 2009). As Horton-Ikard

¹³ This overlap includes strictly AAVE-speaking students (Charity 2007) as well as bidialectal students (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006; Godley et al. 2007; Paris 2009).

and Miller (2004) note, the majority of past research on AAVE-speaking students focusses on those from the working class or below and rarely attempts to isolate and analyze the experiences of students who diverge from the trend of Black populations living in “poor, urban, and typically segregated environments” (469). Therefore, much like German dialect-speaking students from the middle class or above, AAVE-speaking students who come from or are associated with the middle or upper classes undermine generalizations about AAVE speakers as a collective. In one sense, they challenge the standard language ideology assumption that AAVE does not meet the social requirements for linguistic prestige, demonstrating that AAVE use is not exclusive to a particular social class (Horton-Ikard and Miller 2004: 481). In another sense, however, they reveal the frameworks upon which generalizations about AAVE are built, suggesting that dominant language ideology also functions on the level of race precisely because AAVE-speaking students who are from or are associated with the middle or upper classes still have to grapple with the perceived worth of their language variety and culture (Hill 2009: 126).

The use of race as an apparent shorthand for social class is significant because it illustrates what Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) describe as the “oppositional identity” of Black populations, meaning that AAVE speakers are defined not only by the linguistic and social features of AAVE, but by the places their race occupies in relation to White society (227). This clearly relates to Ammon’s (1995) observation that language attitudes can actually come to represent the social groups to which they refer (371), as it emphasizes that AAVE use is often framed as being at odds with participation in the dominant culture¹⁴ and mainstream society (Godley and Escher 2012: 708). However, as previously mentioned, the key difference is that AAVE speakers have less control over public perception of their socioeconomic background be-

¹⁴ Meaning here: White culture.

cause they cannot change one of the features for which they are being judged. Therefore, while 21st century studies on AAVE-speaking students consistently engage in more intersectional analyses, the conclusions they reach still point to lingering racial inequalities in the United States.

AAVE-Related School Problems: Their Causes and Consequences

Upon first consideration, it appears more difficult to talk about the potential problems encountered by AAVE-speaking students because there is no one definition of an AAVE-speaking student. Unlike what was done in relation to the potential school problems of German dialect-speaking students, it is not possible to frame the discussion around the fact that the majority of AAVE-speaking students come to school without any sort of command of SAE because 21st century studies show that bidialectal students make up a large share of AAVE-speaking students (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006; Craig et al. 2009; Godley et al. 2007; Godley and Escher 2012; Paris 2009). Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the experiences of strictly AAVE-speaking students, it is also necessary to approach the potential school problems of AAVE-speaking students from a slightly different perspective, focussing more on the problems that emerge as a result of the negotiation of two language varieties and two identities, rather than the initial lack of SAE competency. This shift is sensible not only because it accounts for a greater proportion of the various kinds of AAVE speakers described in the previous two subsections¹⁵, but because it demonstrates the ways in which AAVE use is pitted against SAE use to the detriment of a wide variety of AAVE-speaking students.

¹⁵ i.e. Bidialectal AAVE-speakers with a range of SAE competencies and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about 21st century studies on the potential school problems facing AAVE-speaking students is that they reach different conclusions about the influence of AAVE use on language skills and academic performance. Charity et al. (2004), for instance, find that in strictly AAVE-speaking students, reading achievement is correlated with increased familiarity of SAE (1348-1349). Similarly, Craig et al. (2009) suggest that although bidialectal students score below the mean in tests of reading achievement and mirror national level trends for Black students (850-851), AAVE use is only a predictor of reading achievement when used in written contexts (851). Conversely, McDonald Connor and Craig (2006) observe that students who use AAVE either very frequently or very infrequently exhibit stronger rhyming, sentence imitation, and letter-word recognition skills than students who use AAVE with moderate frequency (778), suggesting that on a purely linguistic level, a strong active command of AAVE can be just as valuable as a strong active command of SAE.

The problem, however, is that the value of competency in a non-standard language variety like AAVE is rarely reflected within American language attitudes and the teaching methods used in American schools, forcing AAVE-speaking students to needlessly struggle with a dilemma that does not have to exist. Therefore, as was the case with German dialect-speaking students, it does not really matter whether AAVE-speaking students are actually underperforming when the majority of Americans¹⁶ are still under the sway of standard language ideology. This means that while the problems many AAVE-speaking students encounter can certainly have a negative effect on their academic performance, the effect they have on the psyche of AAVE-speaking students is what is truly limiting.

¹⁶ Including AAVE speakers themselves.

One of the ways in which the value of AAVE competency is diminished is through the misinterpretation of the language use of AAVE-speaking students. Godley et al. (2007) note that writing errors due to lack of contextual knowledge about a particular subject can be wrongly perceived by teachers as grammatical errors within SAE, resulting in corrective explanations that do not address the true source of the error in the most effective manner (118). Similarly, Wheeler (2010) observes that the consistent application of AAVE conventions in writing can be misjudged as errors in the application of SAE conventions (956), creating a situation in which the student and the teacher each assume the other is working within the same language variety and has the same expectations (958). On the more extreme end, Seymour (2004) finds that standardized tests used to diagnose communication disorders and mental retardation often penalize AAVE-speaking students, resulting in the disproportionate representation of Black students in special education programs (7).

However, the most pervasive way in which the value of AAVE competency is diminished and the identities of AAVE-speaking students are strained is also the most seemingly benign. 21st century studies consistently report that AAVE-speaking students are aware of the preeminence given to SAE, demonstrating this consciousness through explicit admission (Godley 2012; Hill 2009), performative resistance (Godley et al. 2007) and/or the act of code-switching (McDonald Connor and Craig 2006; Craig et al. 2009; Godley et al. 2007; Godley and Escher 2012; Paris 2009). As Godley and Escher (2012) note, this suggests that many AAVE-speaking students have internalized or have begun to internalize the perception that AAVE use is not conducive to tasks like getting and keeping a job, even though they do not believe that AAVE use would prevent them from actually completing the day-to-day work of a job (708). Therefore,

AAVE-speaking students often feel the pressure to find balance between two seemingly opposing poles of language and identity, because, as Rahman (2008) asserts:

The dilemma for many African Americans is that language that serves as a symbol of ethnic identity may also serve as the focus of discrimination in mainstream society and language that can be useful for socioeconomic advancement may lead to suspicion in the African American community. (142)

This means that although teacher language attitudes may be moving in direction that reflects growing recognition of AAVE as a legitimate and rule-governed language variety (Blake and Cutler 2003; McDonald Connor and Craig 2006; Hill 2009), there are still enough voices saying otherwise, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Indeed, Godley et al. (2007) observe that even teachers with the best intentions can find themselves participating in the dissemination of standard language ideology (117). Thus, like German dialect-speaking students, AAVE-speaking students exist in a sociolinguistic environment in which their non-standard language variety is explicitly and implicitly devalued on the basis of socially-constructed measures of prestige and dominance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GERMAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Practical Considerations

As previously discussed, the intention of this essay is not convince readers that being a German dialect-speaking student is the same as being a AAVE-speaking student. In defining and analyzing German dialect-speaking students and AAVE-speaking students, it becomes clear that while the experiences of each group are shaped by the same sociolinguistic forces, they are also

reflective of the contexts in which they occur. German dialect-speaking students and AAVE-speaking students both contend with the reality that non-standard language varieties seldom enjoy the same level of mainstream prestige as standard language varieties, but this reality manifests differently in Germany and the United States. The language attitudes that limit the academic and professional achievement of German dialect-speaking students and AAVE-speaking students are borne of the same core ideology, but they are articulated and circulated in ways that vary across social structures. Therefore, although there is a great deal that can be learned from the experiences of AAVE-speaking students, it is important to consider how to apply these lessons to the German education system.

Certainly, because the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and AAVE-speaking students are analogous in an abstract sense, it is possible to talk about macro-level solutions to the potential schools problems both groups face. If dominant language ideology and its associated prejudices about social categories like race, ethnicity, and class are among the universal limiters of speakers of non-standard language varieties, then the only way to ensure sustained, systemic improvement in the experiences of speakers of non-standard language varieties is to bring about a collective change in language attitudes. The catch, however, is that macro-level solutions like more inclusive language attitudes are merely the culmination of micro-level efforts. Therefore, in order to be most effective, micro-level efforts in classrooms and communities have to be tailored to and work in conjunction with the social structures in which speakers of non-standard language varieties live.

This stipulation is necessary because it narrows the focus of this essay in several ways. Most importantly, it encourages the exploration of micro-level solutions, shifting away from the non-specific goal of changing the way people think and asking how one subsection of German

society could make its spaces, practices, and objectives more egalitarian. Thus, while this essay acknowledges that there is an abstract, universal solution to the potential problems of German dialect-speaking students, it balances this idealism with the development of concrete recommendations that are tailored to the unique social dynamics of Germany. This allows findings from the analysis of the experiences of AAVE-speaking students to be interpreted in a new context and to be supplemented with more recent perspectives on the German education system and bidialectal education in order to create a basic framework for language education that better serves German students of all linguistic backgrounds.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the recommendations outlined in this essay are created in response to a void. Aside from the small number of 21st century studies on German dialect-speaking students and recent education reports put out by individual German states, German federal agencies or international agencies, there are few web or print resources that offer a present-day look at the experiences of German dialect-speaking students. This means that unless one is able to engage in original research, one can only speak confidently about the experiences of German dialect-speaking students from decades past. Therefore, while this essay works under the assumption that the experiences of German dialect-speaking students have not drastically changed during the first two decades of 21st century, its recommendations are no less valid. In other words, regardless of the gains the German education system has or has not made, the recommendations put forth by this essay represent one possible approach to German language education.

What can be learned from the experiences of AAVE-speaking students?

The fundamental conclusion reached by 21st century studies on AAVE-speaking students is that AAVE should not be treated as a classroom taboo. This conclusion is important because it encompasses several different kinds of recommendations for the American education system. One the most basic level, it means that teachers and the curricula from which they work have to be explicit about what is expected of students and what academic consequences, if any, are associated AAVE use. Therefore, if developing an active command of SAE is an expected learning outcome for AAVE-speaking students (Godley et al. 2007: 121; Hill 2009: 127; Wheeler 2010: 959), then at the very least, teachers are responsible for not only providing AAVE-speaking students with a judgement-free space for practicing SAE, but for making clear how their language use is being marked (Godley and Escher 2012: 712). Although it is not particularly progressive, this recommendation makes AAVE less of a classroom taboo because it demands greater transparency, in effect letting AAVE-speaking students in on the criteria upon which they are graded.

On another level, the conclusion that AAVE should not be treated as a classroom taboo encourages teachers and other students to recognize the language capabilities of AAVE-speaking students. For teachers, this begins by entering the classroom with a greater understanding of AAVE and AAVE speakers because it enables them to more accurately assess the overall language capabilities of AAVE-speaking students and to anchor English language education in what AAVE-speaking students already know (Hill 2009: 127; Mordaunt 2011: 84; Wheeler 2010: 958), thus legitimizing learning that has taken place in non-standard contexts. In terms of assignments, 21st century studies emphasize the value of providing AAVE-speaking students with opportunities to use AAVE in “low-stakes” or “informal” contexts (Hill 2009: 130; Mordaunt 2011: 84), noting that it allows AAVE-speaking students to express themselves without feeling obliged to compromise their voices (Hill 2009:130). Therefore, while low-stakes and/or informal

contexts are limited mainly to tasks like creative writing assignments, journal entries, and brainstorming¹⁷, and represent one half of a code-switching pedagogy (Hill 2009: 130; Mordaunt 2011: 84), their admittance into the classroom makes a statement, emphasizing that AAVE use does not have to be synonymous with the loss of marks (Hill 2009: 125).

Similarly, Wheeler (2010) asserts that when explaining the linguistic differences between AAVE and SAE, teachers should place equal emphasis on the conventions present in AAVE and the conventions present in SAE, making clear that each language variety is “structured, patterned, and rule-governed” (961). Again, while this practice is still part of an activity intended to teach code switching (Wheeler 2010: 959), it is more inclusive because it does not disparage the rules of AAVE in order to explain the rules of SAE. Therefore, the equal emphasis serves as a positive representation of the linguistic diversity, stressing that AAVE is not a lesser version of SAE, but rather, its own language variety within the larger category of English (Wheeler 2010: 969).

Finally, the conclusion that AAVE should not be treated as a classroom taboo reflects the assertion that discussions of the social dynamics of language use should play a larger role in English language education (Chisholm and Godley 2011; Godley and Escher 2012; Paris 2009; Wheeler 2010). This means that the classroom should be a place for thinking critically about the complex interaction between AAVE and SAE and sharing individual perspectives on the two language varieties (Godley and Escher 2012: 711). Chisholm and Godley (2011) describe this practice as “inquiry-based, problem-posing discussion” and observe that it allows students of all linguistic backgrounds to consider the relationships among language variation, identity, power (459).

¹⁷ See Mordaunt 2011: 84 for a more complete list.

However, Chisholm and Godley (2011) also argue that inquiry-based discussion would be even more effective if it encouraged students to analyze the social underpinnings of language attitudes, reflecting on how they judge the language use of others, as well as how it feels when others judge their language use (Chisholm and Godley 2011: 461). This recommendation is significant because it suggests that although the American education system has made progress in treating AAVE and AAVE-speaking students with greater respect, it rarely encourages students to challenge the role that standard language ideology plays in American society. Therefore, while it is positive that more American teachers are willing to allow AAVE-speaking students to share the difficulties that come with negotiating two language varieties and two identities, if the language attitudes that create these difficulties are never seriously called into question, then AAVE-speaking students are still being placed at a disadvantage.

How can American recommendations be interpreted for the present-day German education system?

The conclusion that a non-standard language variety should not be treated as classroom taboo could also be made in relation to the available research on German dialect-speaking students. Although the lack of a racial connotation likely makes German dialect use less of a taboo than AAVE use, the experiences of German dialect-speaking students could still be improved by adapting the recommendations made by 21st century studies on AAVE-speaking students. However, as previously suggested, these recommendations do not seem to go far enough in encouraging entire classrooms to think critically about the power of language attitudes. They tend to focus on how speakers of a non-standard language variety can make an *easier* to transition to code switching, giving them more respect and agency, while still shepherding them towards ac-

ceptance of standard language ideology. Therefore, although activities like inquiry-based discussion certainly have the potential to broaden the world views of students of all linguistic backgrounds, they end up serving mainly as a forum where the power of language attitudes is articulated, but not questioned (Chisholm and Godley 2011: 460). In other words, the recommendations made by 21st century studies on AAVE-speaking students tend to leave speakers of the standard language variety as they are, suggesting that their cooperation is largely for the benefit of the speakers of the non-standard language variety.

Indeed, DeBose (2007) notes that pushing code-switching pedagogies on AAVE-speaking students sends a mixed message, suggesting that while there is nothing wrong with AAVE, it is still not the language variety of the academic or professional sphere (42). Therefore, rather than simply adapting the recommendations made by 21st century studies on AAVE-speaking students, this essay will discuss how German students of all linguistic backgrounds could benefit equally from their language education, highlighting the ways in which traditional bidialectal education could be modified to promote more inclusive language attitudes inside and outside the classroom. This means that while modifications to traditional bidialectal education would not result in an immediate collective change in language attitudes, they would put Germany one step closer, producing new generations of students whose shared language competencies help to challenge the social connotations of German dialect use and Standard German use.

The most positive feature of traditional bidialectal education is that it is meant to treat the learning of a new language variety as additive rather than replacive (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 316). This means that for a German dialect-speaking student, developing an active command of a Standard German theoretically does not diminish the value of having an active command of a German dialect. The problem, however, is that by expecting standard and non-

standard language varieties to be used in different social situations (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 316), traditional bidialectal education gives credence to language attitudes that restrict the social domains in which non-standard language varieties can be used, placing the burden of adjustment on speakers of non-standard language varieties rather than the mainstream population (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006: 317). Therefore, if German students of all linguistic backgrounds are to benefit equally from their language education, then the burden of adjustment must be distributed more evenly.

Based on the experiences of Aboriginal English-speaking students and Standard Australian English-speaking students, Malcolm (2007) provides a very straightforward framework for engaging in this redistribution, asserting that traditional bidialectal education should be replaced with “two-way” bidialectal education (58). He argues that language education should not only provide speakers of the non-standard language variety with access to the standard language variety, but provide speakers of the standard language variety with access to the non-standard variety (Malcolm 2007: 61), making at least a receptive competence in both language varieties and a productive competence in the standard language variety an expected learning outcome for all students (Malcolm 2007: 58). Thus, “two-way” means that every student is required to expand his/her linguistic repertoire, regardless of the language variety that he/she brings to school. Most importantly, as Malcolm (2007) notes, the broadening of students’ linguistic horizons leads naturally to students’ exposure to the world views and cultural practices that influence another language variety (61). Therefore, while two-way bidialectal education still does not guarantee that students will develop more inclusive language attitudes, it places them in the most optimal position to do so because it emphasizes that every student has something to offer.

Although Malcolm (2007) does not go so far as to suggest that all students should develop an active command of both the standard and non-standard language variety, this could be a feasible, albeit controversial goal for the German education system. Certainly, students, parents, and teachers who are native speakers of Standard German, and therefore, already have access to the language variety perceived as dominant may be less receptive to the notion of mandatory German dialect education. However, it is important to emphasize that complete two-way bidialectal education would provide all students with the option, *but not the obligation* to use one of two language varieties in any given context. Therefore, the German education system could take pride in the fact that every student has the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to exercise full autonomy over his/her language behavior and to think critically about the social forces that shape language attitudes and language ideology.

As is likely apparent, complete two-way bidialectal education is not an outright rejection of the principles that underlie traditional bidialectal education, but rather, a more egalitarian interpretation of them. It acknowledges the extant social utility of having an active command of Standard German, but refuses to give it more weight than the social utility of having an active command of a German dialect, thereby avoiding the mixed messages often present in recent state curricula. The state of Hamburg, for instance, simultaneously asserts “[d]ie Grundschule ist dem Grundsatz des gemeinsamen Lernens und der Chancengerechtigkeit verpflichtet” (Bildungsplan Grundschule - Deutsch 2011: 4) and “[d]er Deutschunterricht führt dabei behutsam und deutlich zur Standardsprache hin” (Bildungsplan Grundschule - Deutsch 2011: 16), suggesting that while German dialects can be a useful classroom resource, they are not so useful as to enjoy equal status with Standard German. Similarly, the state of Bavaria claims:

Oberstes Bildungs- und Erziehungsziel ist der eigenverantwortliche, beziehungs- und gemeinschaftsfähige, wertorientierte, weltoffene und schöpferische Mensch. Er ist fähig und bereit, in Familie, Staat und Gesellschaft Verantwortung zu übernehmen, und offen für religiöse und weltanschauliche Fragen. (LehrplanPLUS Grundschule 2014: 10)

However, the state of Bavaria also claims that one of the expected learning outcomes of German language education is that:

[Schülerinnen und Schüler] die Regeln der Standardsprache als verbindlicher Norm [einzuhalten], um verständlich und situationsangemessen kommunizieren zu können, und bedienen sich einer treffenden, angemessenen und wertschätzenden Ausdrucksweise. (LehrplanPLUS Grundschule 2014: 36)

Taken together, the two statements imply that teaching students to be open-minded, critical thinkers is desirable insofar as it does not threaten the internalization of standard language ideology. In other words, much like the recommendations created for the American education system, recent state curricula appear unwilling to encourage students to question the legitimacy of prevailing language attitudes.

To be clear, this does not mean that the states of Hamburg and Bavaria have their educational ideologies all wrong. The very fact that their curricula are sending mixed messages about language use and language attitudes is evidence that the two states are trying to be more liberal in their treatment of German dialects. Thus, the motivation of complete two-way bidialectal education is not to not radically change the German education system, but rather to help it more effectively meet many of its central goals. In this sense, bringing greater equality to German language education is an objective that could have an impact far beyond German language classes,

because it fosters the development of the values and behaviors desired in any 21st century student.

CONCLUSIONS

The analyses and recommendations presented in this essay represent the preliminary stages of an endeavor to improve German language education. While this essay uses past research on the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and more recent research on the experiences of AAVE-speaking students to demonstrate why complete two-way bidialectal education could benefit 21st century German students of all linguistic backgrounds, it does not outline what the implementation of complete two-way bidialectal education would actually look like. Indeed, this essay focusses more on convincing readers of the merits behind the principles of complete two-way bidialectal education than on translating those principles into a detailed curriculum. Therefore, although the recommendations made in the previous section are by no means vague, they serve mainly to introduce an alternative approach to German language education.

This limited scope, however, should not be interpreted as the failure to fulfill the stated goals of this essay. Regardless of the impact it has, this essay adds a new voice to the discussion of the experiences of German dialect-speaking students, reexamining questions raised by past research, as well as generating new topics for consideration and investigation using relatively limited data resources. Specifically, in comparing the social underpinnings of the experiences of German dialect-speaking students in Germany and AAVE-speaking students in the United States, this essay finds further evidence in support of the suggestion that language attitudes and language ideology can negatively impact the academic and professional attainment of German

dialect-speaking students (Ammon 1972; Ammon 1977; Hain and Hain 1980; Shafer and Shafer 1975). It observes that although the experiences of German dialect-speaking students and AAVE-speaking students are certainly not identical, when considered on a theoretical level, they reveal the basic mechanisms by which socially-constructed beliefs about language use create and maintain inequalities in the German and American education systems. Most importantly, this essay uses this observation to propose a more egalitarian approach to bidialectal education in Germany, reinterpreting the principles of traditional bidialectal education and Malcolm's (2007) two-way bidialectal education so that they encourage students of all linguistic backgrounds to think critically about and challenge the linguistic status quo in which they live.

Obviously, if the proposal described in this essay were to be pursued further, the next stage would be to engage in or gain access to original research on the current experiences of German dialect-speaking students. This would serve not only to test validity of the analyses this essay presents, but to provide up-to-date data from which a detailed complete two-way bidialectal German language curriculum could begin to be built. However, the hypothetical future of the proposal would also depend heavily on the reemergence of other research on the potential school problems facing German dialect-speaking students. In this sense, the analyses and recommendations presented in this essay are meant not only to convince the German education system that the experiences of German dialect-speaking students remain a worthy topic of discussion, but to show the sociolinguistic community that as long as there are speakers of non-standard language varieties – be them German dialect-speaking students in Germany or AAVE-speaking students in the United States – their experiences deserve to be studied.

This means that while this essay uses the experiences of AAVE-speaking students in the as supplementary material for the purposes of improving the experiences of German dialect-

speaking students, it does not view the experiences of AAVE-speaking students as being any less important. Although there has not been a long period of silence in the study of the potential school problems facing AAVE-speaking students, the analyses in this essay make clear that these problems have also not been solved, and that AAVE-speaking students are just as in need of truly egalitarian language education. With this in mind, the proposal described in this essay could also tailored to the unique social dynamics of the United States, taking it in a very different, but equally worthy direction.

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