

# Looking back while moving Forward: When teacher Attitudes Belie Teacher Motive in Bidialectal Classrooms

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Accepted: October 03, 2012 Published: October 26, 2012

Doi:10.5296/ijld.v2i5.2569

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v2i5.2569>

**Abstract:** This study compares and contrasts the language attitudes of teachers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and West Indian Creole English (CE) speakers over the last fifty years, to determine if there have been any significant changes, to draw out the implications of these findings and offer reasons for the results. Teachers' attitudes towards these languages were generally negative over the decades, but I noticed that as the number of teachers of colour increased in the USA, there was a slight shift in attitude towards AAVE in a positive direction. I conclude that though language attitudes are very difficult to change, teacher education which specifically targets and challenges teacher language attitudes will be a major step in helping to shift these attitudes further for the benefit of teacher and student.

**Keywords:** Teacher Attitude, AAVE, Creole, Language Discrimination

## Problem statement

This work is a continuation of research started by Moses, Daniels & Gundlach (1976). That research reviews the history of teacher language attitudes to African American Vernacular English (AAVE) over a fifty year period until the 1970s; whereas, my work extends to the present time, while comparing and contrasting teachers' attitudes to AAVE in America and Creole English (CE) in the Anglophone West Indies.

I start from the premise that most teachers of English want their vernacular speaking students to succeed academically, despite contrary classroom behaviour. This negative behaviour, I contend, is partially rooted in the frustration of not knowing how to help. Teachers have gone about dealing with the challenges blindly, and so while they have the right motives, their attitudes and practices are wrong. I establish that teachers' language attitudes have hardly changed in fifty years, and concede that attitudinal change is very difficult, but argue that teacher training has failed to understand the fundamental issues surrounding this debate, and so have not targeted attitudinal change. This work therefore examines teacher attitudes to AAVE and CE. It also explores the educational consequences of teachers' language attitudes on teaching practice, showing how classroom practices of the last fifty years have only served to contradict teachers' real motives (helping students acquire SE more proficiently).

### Rationale

My reason for this research is partly grounded in Webber's (1979) justification for language attitude studies. He professes that "an acquaintance with language attitude studies can reveal to a teacher his own language attitudes and help him to distinguish between unfounded prejudice and justifiable opinion" (p. 217). I agree, but I am more concerned with what happens *after* the distinction is made. I expect that such studies should make teachers *actively* aware, so they go beyond introspection into willingness and responsiveness to change, so that teaching becomes "responsive instruction" (Collier, 1988 in Cabello & Burnstein, 1995: 285).

I am also researching this field because of the paucity of information about it. While much has been written about language attitudes, not enough has been written about *in-service* teachers' language attitudes, especially to CE. In the WI context, these attitudes tended to be observed from the perspective of the minority West Indian community educated in foreign countries like Britain, USA and Canada (Edwards, 1982; Nero, 1995, 2000; Zephir, 1997, 1999). This made it a minority language issue, and so WI language as majority language never came into sharp focus, but when it did, in Webber's (1979: 227) words "[i]f it is depressing to note British teachers' poor regard for West Indian English, it is even more so to note that West Indian teachers have similar attitude[s]". In my opinion the majority/minority dichotomy would make for interesting and worthwhile research, as it raises certain ethical questions about the appropriate language of instruction.

I chose these languages because of their similar socio-linguistic histories and the fact that a lot was written about AAVE which was easily accessible for comparative purposes. As a teacher educator working in the WI context, teacher attitudes are of special concern to me, but very little has been written and published about this subject from a WI perspective. I want to correct this.

### Methodology

This is anti-positivist, interpretive historical research. It is a combination of basic and applied research, in that I wish to develop and refine a theory about teachers' attitudes to AAVE and CE, while also demonstrating how an understanding of the implications of this theory can enrich teaching practice. To test my theory about the kinds of language attitudes teachers display, I first formulated 2 research questions; the third emerged from them.

1. How do the attitudes of teachers of AAVE and CE speakers compare across the decades?
2. How do the attitudes of teachers of AAVE and CE speakers differ across the decades?
3. What are the educational implications of these attitudes?

Afterwards I conducted a subject index search of keywords like 'teachers' attitudes' 'AAVE' and 'CE' in leading educational search engines. From this, I found two types of historical overviews on language attitudes, which became the starting point for my research. The Moses, Daniels & Gundlach (1976) overview evaluates the history of teachers' language attitudes from the 1920s-1970s in the USA. The other, Webber (1979), reviews language attitudes in general, but also speaks specifically to teacher attitudes to non-standard dialects. I then compiled the data according to the period in which the research was carried out.

I started my own review from the 1960s as this period began the controversy surrounding the debate. Having now had a start and end point I searched for the materials comprising my list. For expediency, I specifically defined teacher language attitudes as emotions/feelings, thoughts/beliefs and behaviours (manifested actions) as they applied to AAVE and CE, based

on Edwards' (1982) definition. I physically coded these descriptions as I read, so as to ensure they matched mine, and noted the predominant language attitude of the period to make a comparison across decades. Finally, based on the findings of the readings, I conceived possible and relevant educational implications. By conducting the research in this tightly focused way, I was able to directly answer my three research questions.

### **Limitations**

Admittedly, there were a lot more US works which could have informed this study. I however did not intend to review every work published in this area, but to give an adequate overview of the research findings as they relate to teacher language attitudes. I felt that a substantial amount of readings in the field, across the decades, would reveal enough to draw an informed conclusion. Another, somewhat more frustrating limitation, concerned the lack of published research into CE attitudes, especially in the later decades, which made the comparison/contrast very difficult. Wassink (1999) certainly did not misrepresent the truth in saying: "the body of published research concerning language attitudes held by speakers of pidgin or creole varieties is rather limited" (p. 58).

### **Context**

A brief socio-linguistic history of these two codes under review will help to contextualise the research. The WI vernaculars are the result of a contact situation between white European traders and Africans whom they brought from Africa to the WI As slave labour on sugar plantations. To facilitate communication, the African and European created a pidgin, which was expanded in the WI context when the language became the mother tongue of the slaves born in these islands (creole). The situation in the USA was similar, as Dillard (1972) confirms that "[l]ike the West Indian varieties, American Black English can be traced to a creolized version of English based upon a pidgin spoken by slaves" (p. 6). These varieties had similar origins, though different destinations, having been created within a slave system, and denigrated within that system because its principal speakers were regarded as socially and otherwise inferior. These negative societal views were perpetuated throughout the communities which birthed them, shaping the language attitudes of the majority.

### **1960s: Attitudes & Discussion**

Teachers of English in the 1960s had very negative attitudes towards these vernaculars. For example, in Jamaica, society and teachers alike viewed CE as synonymous with backwardness and unintelligence (Bailey, 1964). One school principal in Jamaica condescendingly answers a question about the creole in this way: "I don't know it, and wouldn't want to know that I knew it either" (ibid: 106). No wonder Cassidy (1961) refers to the attitudes of a section of Jamaican teachers this way: "the only painful group is that of the parvenu in education who, having crossed the middle of the scale, now feel that the folk speech is beneath them and scornfully reject it" (p. 3). Similarly, teachers in an urban area of the US were said to have stereotyped and negative attitudes towards their *students' dialect* (Shuy, Wolfram & Riley, 1967). According to Moses, Daniel & Gundlach (1976: 79) teachers of this period saw AAVE as 'substandard', 'inferior' and an 'educational, economical and occupational handicap'. In the 1960s the notion of AAVE and CE as languages was now really coming to the fore, bringing with it the angst of the English language teacher. Both sets of teachers were vehemently opposed to the labelling of these codes as languages, so they registered their disdain with the use of derogatory terms, being very vocal in the rejection of each language. However, in the US, criticism appeared to remain verbal; whereas, in the WI it extended to physical castigation, on which I will expound

later. Though derogatory, the terms used are also telling, because if teachers think this way about a language, certainly these feelings cannot be filtered when thinking about those who give *voice* to them—the students.

These negative feelings about the language manifested themselves as outspoken negative opinions about its speakers. A language does not make a sound without a voice, so that any negative attitude towards a language is transposed to its speakers. The consequences of which are detrimental in the educational setting (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Hudson, 1980; Dandy, 1988; Brophy, 1985). This proved true as teachers began labelling children as cognitively deficient. A startling case in point is the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Task Force Report of 1965. This report vociferously attacked AAVE, claiming that it *retards* the language development of its speakers (Moses, Daniel & Gundlach 1976). A similar report from Hughes (1967), uncovers teachers' sentiments about AAVE speakers. One teacher said that "We had two or three problems of children who could not speak at all", another said that "Some had a vocabulary of about a hundred and some words, I'd say; no more than that" (p. 92). The effect of such attitudes was that teachers came to have very low expectations of AAVE speaking students, even *behaving* negatively towards them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Teachers in the WI behaved somewhat differently, though no less negatively, as their abuse of the students became physical. Alleyne (1961) cites the case of a head teacher at the MICO School in St. Lucia who walked the countryside and flogged the students for speaking creole. His actions might repulse many today; still, it does not mitigate the actions of American teachers, who, though refraining from physical beatings, still inflicted psychological strikes in the form of negative evaluations and low grades assigned Black students *due to their speech*. This kind of penalty, like the corporal punishments meted out in the WI, must have been just as damaging to the students' psyche (Lambert et al., 1960).

Regardless of the reasons for these attitudes certain very important issues are raised. Teachers who believed that students could not speak "at all" because they used AAVE/CE might simply have been demonstrating the level of socio-linguistic ignorance of the time. Nonetheless, this ignorance is indicative of an underlying attitude that is detrimental to the student. I am thinking here about the statement that students had a vocabulary of no more than 100 words. Personally, the question becomes: with whose vocabulary do teachers initiate and sustain talk in the language classroom? What do we talk about? Are the topics of interest or relevance to the students' lives, or are we forcing them to use 'academic language' because we are more attuned to attainment targets? For example, do we speak about 'encyclopaedias' and 'thesauri' when some students have rarely encountered 'books'? Perhaps there are words with which students are familiar, but will never be known to us because we find it unsettling to broach certain topics/realities in our classrooms. Perhaps if the teachers of this era were courageous and curious enough to let the child's voice into the discussion, they would have easily dispelled the myth of undeveloped vocabularies and in the process might have expanded our own.

It is only fair to contextualise the debate within the framework of what was happening socially around this time. In the WI, this was a period when some of these territories were fighting for their national independence from the white colonial master, and in the case of the US, this was the time of the Civil Rights Movement. In both scenarios Blacks are fighting against 'oppression', and Whites are fighting to hold on to supremacy, through political power. For centuries prior, White rule stood for superior education, higher levels of literacy and proficiencies in SE. Blacks in both contexts must have wanted the opportunity to show themselves 'equal' to Whites, and having 'white education' and 'white language' meant that

Blacks could have ‘white social and political status’, and hence be equal. Black teachers in the WI scorned the language Whites denigrated, and White teachers in the US denigrated the language which deviated from their own. Whether or not they realised it, both groups of teachers felt the same way about these languages, for the same reason— what they stood for in the eyes of the White power. The contextualisation of struggle does not excuse the negative attitudes held, but it does show how the White ruling class in both circumstances fashioned the attitudes of the majority. I will therefore sum up the attitudes of this period with Johnson’s (1969) own characterisation of the time, when saying that the greatest problem of teaching SE to dialect speakers is teachers’ attitudes to the dialect [and its speakers].

### **1970s: Attitudes & Discussions**

In the 1970s teachers learned to be more politically correct about their behaviour towards the language, but still viewed it negatively. In particular, Moses, Daniels & Gundlach (1976) show how studies like Kochman (1969) and Labov (1972) aided in the disappearance of words like ‘substandard’ from American educational literature. This literature might have taught teachers how to refer to AAVE in non-derogatory terms, and might even have played a part in stifling negative classroom behaviour, but it hardly influenced teachers’ underlying thoughts and feelings about AAVE, as I will later show. Likewise, creole research lent insight into the unique WI linguistic situation. For instance, Craig (1976) proposes that because of research into, and published works about WI creoles, educators began to view language problems differently, as one would in a bilingual or multilingual context. Despite this, teachers continued to refer to the creole as “bad English” (Winford, 1976).

This education seemed to have affected teachers’ educational views of the language rather than their attitudinal behaviours towards it. Both groups of teachers better understood, at least descriptively, the challenges they were facing in the classroom. Increased research into the language meant that theoretically they understood that the vernacular is a rule-governed system, but in practice, they treated it as a deviant form of SE to be eliminated. Moses, Daniels & Gundlach (1976: 80) highlight that at this time “[t]ypical school practices emphasize either eradication of non-standard speech, or some version of bidialectalism”. While accepting that this was not sanctioned by any language teaching organizations, they make it clear that techniques of eradication continued in many American schools because “the long standing occupational and personal attitudes of teachers towards language [vernaculars] blocked significant changes in classroom practice” (p. 84). I hasten to clarify that emphasizing “some form of bidialectalism” does not mean that teachers accepted the non-standard, but they began to accept, unlike the 1960s, that this was a linguistic problem. In fact, Taylor (1973) in exploring this view, reports that the 422 US teachers in his study were not against using dialect materials for “it would appear that the teachers may not like a non-standard dialect, but they are willing to attempt to use it in hopes of finding a useful teaching tool” (p. 206). American teachers saw bidialectal programmes as a way of helping them to cope in the classroom. The same is true in the WI context, where according to Roberts (1994: 54-55) “[t]he practice of using the creole in the classroom has been a matter of expediency”, as teachers felt that in using it to teach SE, it would lose efficacy when students became proficient in the target language. However, not all agree with these analyses. Some believe that there was a real change in attitude towards the language itself. Carrington (1976), for instance, claims that overt extreme expressions towards creole had been moderated; yet, admits to teachers’ ‘aggressive attitudes of rejection’ of the creole at this time (p. 33). Hoover (1978) also professes that teachers’ attitudes had changed towards AAVE, but presents little substantive evidence.



If there was some shift in attitude towards the *language* then this should have been reflected in (1) the way teachers treated vernacular speaking students and (2) their response to curricula changes. Nevertheless, teachers in the US continued to display old biases, referring to African American children as non-verbal and lacking a wide vocabulary and good audio discrimination abilities (Johnson, 1971; Shuy & Fasold, 1973; Williams, Whitehead & Miller, 1972). Additionally, studies call attention to teachers who passively accepted that AAVE speakers would not succeed academically and therefore did not lift the proverbial finger to ensure otherwise (Guskin, 1970). Woodworth & Salzer (1971) further demonstrate that US teachers who held such views were more likely to practice discrimination. Their study found that the majority of the 119 teacher participants who evaluated materials read orally by Black and White male sixth graders gave higher ratings to the Whites despite the fact that the content was identical to their black colleagues'. This in their estimation was because teachers made judgments about students based on speech cues. Like their 1960 forerunners, teachers were still assigning AAVE students lower and failing grades on the basis of their speech. Meantime, in the WI, a change in policy invited complicity rather than change. Teachers appeared to conform to directives perhaps for the sake of job security, but undermined them through teaching methodologies aimed at language eradication. Carrington (1976) explains how this was possible by featuring teacher responses to changes in educational curricula to validate the creoles in Trinidad and Jamaica. These curricula changes did not mirror teacher attitudes, and so Carrington concedes: "[t]he orientation of the syllabus referred to is somewhat ahead of the training levels and linguistic sophistication of the teachers who are to implement them and most importantly ahead of the attitudes which they hold privately on the question of language acceptability" (p. 35).

Educational literature and curricula in both spheres were changing to recognise the vernacular as a language, but the teacher view was not shifting to accommodate these changes. At this stage, teacher response is an acknowledgment, rather than an embracing of changes. They appear compliant, though they work to eradicate the vernaculars from the classroom. Why would teachers engage in such behaviour? Conceivably, they simply could not accept these systems as languages. If the heart does not believe/in something it is going to be impossible to convince the mind to do so. Contained in the heart of the teacher are her values and beliefs, the core of who she is. Who has the right to tell her that who she is, is wrong? Spradley & McCurdy (1984: 2-3) eloquently elaborate on this view: "[w]e tend to think that the norms we follow represent the 'natural' way human beings do things. Those who behave otherwise are judged morally wrong. This viewpoint is ethnocentric, which means that people think their own culture represents the best, or at least the most appropriate way for human beings to live". To make the link, most teachers in the US are middle class European-American, (Terrill & Mark, 2000; Champion et al, 2012) who have a very different experience from some of the disadvantaged AAVE speakers they teach. In the West Indies however, teachers, for the most part, are of the same ethnicity and come from the same communities as their students; still, their language attitudes are similar to their US colleagues'. In light of this, the issue seems to be less about race and more about socialization. Irvine (2003: 46) explains it this way: "[t]eachers bring to their work values, opinions, and beliefs; their prior socialization and present experiences, and their race, gender, ethnicity, and social class. These attributes and characteristics influence teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals". Teachers are people first and professionals after, so that they stepped into their professional roles with personal attitudes shaped first by their communities. Essentially, in the 1970s, teachers' professional language attitudes might very well have been a mirror image of their personal socialization.

### 1980s: Attitudes & Discussions

In the 1980s the tactics were different, but the motives appeared indistinguishable from one group of teachers to the next. In the WI and the US, teachers continued to stymie the vernacular in the classroom. Devonish (1983) corroborates this in his account of WI teachers who were *compelling* students to function in a language they never spoke. Additionally, they were refusing to accept linguists' suggestions to teach creole literacy. In fact, teachers in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), formerly the Danish West Indies, were still referring to CE as "broken English", and asserting that CE interfered with students' understanding of SE and so devoting time to creole literacy would only serve to take away time that could be spent in English instruction (Elsasser & Irvine, 1985). Over in the US, Dandy (1982) cites a typical case in South Carolina where teachers' continuous interruptions to correct a student's phonological error caused him to cease participating in a reading activity. Allington (1980) and Good & Brophy (1987) also report the ways in which vocal stereotyping of AAVE affected students, mentioning, teachers calling on students less frequently, if at all, giving fewer prompts to their incorrect answers, giving less praise for correct answers and even interrupting responses more frequently. It seems that both sets of teachers were attempting to stymie the language, while ignoring expert advice, but why? Zephir (1997) in speaking about Haitian Creole students in the American educational system answers that it is discrimination and prejudice or "at best strong misunderstanding" (p. 232). It is the latter statement I wish to explore when considering that black teachers in the WI were behaving the same as white teachers in the US. Is it possible not to intend discrimination, but still try to eradicate the language? It is possible in a situation where people do not understand something and judge it incorrectly as a nuisance or a hindrance. They perhaps begin to fear it, fear that it will cause some damage. The fears are genuine, but so too is the ignorance about that thing. As respects this language issue, I agree that prejudice plays some part in making teachers ignorant, but ignorance does not necessarily make them prejudice.

The attitudes in the US were perhaps resultant responses from the 1979 court ruling in the Ann Arbor, Michigan case. This case, brought by eleven parents of the Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School, argued that the school had violated students' rights to equal educational opportunities by failing to take action to overcome a language barrier. The court ruled in their favour, and in Judge Joiner's words: "If a barrier exists...it exists...because in the process of attempting to teach the children how to speak standard English, *the students are made somehow to feel inferior and are thereby turned off from the learning process*"[sic] (Labov, 1983 qtd in Zephir, 1999: 143). Two things are striking here, firstly and notably, the debate had moved from the classroom to the courtroom, but even the threat of the law cannot make people feel and think differently, because attitudes cannot be legislated; perhaps why teachers continued as normal. Secondly, the thoughts and feelings underlying this statement are more revealing than the words themselves. How and why does a judge, who sits outside the educational system, see more clearly the fundamental issues of this debate, than do the teachers who operate within these systems? Is it possible that by allowing their personal views to take precedence that some teachers have unwittingly behaved unprofessionally in the classroom. At what point does a good teacher separate the personal from the professional self in a debate of this kind? I am really asking: When does a teacher stop fighting for what he/she sincerely believes, for some of these teachers sincerely believe the language to be a hindrance. I think that happens when they question the bases on which their beliefs are founded?

It seemed that even in the late 1980s there was little progress in the USA, but not so much so in the WI. In the USA, studies like Cecil (1988) and Jackson & William-Ige (1986), which found that teachers still felt AAVE speakers intellectually inferior must have led Dandy (1988) to the verdict that the outlook is bleak for the dialect different student. On the other side of the Americas, there was progress, as the National Association of Teachers of English (NATE) in Jamaica called on education officials to “validate JC [Jamaican Creole] in the schools” (Wassink, 1999: 57). This spoke to how these teachers felt about the vernacular and its worth in the education system, despite the criticism. The lack of clear articulation as to what validation entails is a disappointment however, for would it mean what Aaron (1989) envisaged; whereby, “aspects of the creole may even precede or accompany English lessons in certain areas” (p. 17)? Even if it did not, publicly acknowledging the existence of creole in the educational sphere was a breakthrough in the debate, as it implied a readiness for discussion and a softening of teachers’ attitudes to the language. I think the key to this change in Jamaica, was empathy. Creole research at this time saw linguists making recommendations with the view of improving the educational experience of creole speaking children. The focus was therefore shifting from teaching the language to teaching the learner, which would require a shift in pedagogical approaches. When the student became the face of the issue, rather than the language, maybe, WI teachers came face-to-face with the human issue, as they saw themselves in their students, for these teachers too were creole speakers, who were able to code shift. Many American teachers might not have so readily been able to empathize, as their experiences were vastly different.

### **1990s: Attitudes & Discussions**

In the 1990s the debate moved from the legitimacy of the vernaculars to their role in education. Teachers were not enthusiastic about vernacular education to say the least. To illustrate, Bowie and Bond (1994) found that, 61% of teachers felt that AAVE had a faulty grammar system, suggesting that it would not be suitable for classroom instruction, and two years later, Boyd (1996) discovered that 66% of practising teachers had negative attitudes towards AAVE as an instructional medium. Down south in the WI, teachers engaged in a similar debate exhibited the same negative outlook. On the small island of Carriacou teachers contend that creole is only suitable for folk tales, not teaching and learning new material. Kephart (1992: 78) identifies these “trained educators” as his strongest critics when he tries to implement a dialectal programme in schools. He journals their opposition, calling attention to their insistence that “learning to read in Creole...would confuse the children and that their reading in ME (Metropolitan English) would suffer as a result”. Correspondingly, in neighbouring St. Lucia, Winch & Gingell (1994) disclose teachers’ view of creole in education, blaming it for the poor acquisition of written competence in St. Lucian Standard English. Although the debate moved forward to the role of vernaculars in education, teachers were still stuck on the point of legitimacy.

The debate was moving ahead without the teachers. This is problematic because it means that someone other than teachers is making decisions which teachers are expected to implement when they have not mentally arrived at that stage of the discussion. For instance, unbelievably, in Jamaica where teachers led the charge in this debate, some of them still saw creole as English which broke Standard English rules (McCourtie, 1998). Likewise, in the US, Harper, Braithwaite & LaGrange (1998: 28), deliver a report on teachers who habitually ignored Black students who wanted to answer in class. When confronted, one teacher said she assumed they would give the wrong answer or would not be able to express themselves in SE. In another case, in the same study, the teacher refused to accept a Black student’s paper because it was



“too well written” (p. 28) and she did not believe Black students could produce writing of that calibre. The point here is that teachers’ attitudes were not changing as quickly as policy makers, linguists and teacher educators would have them, and perhaps would not change hastily. In a study conducted by Barry & Lechner (1995), although teachers had positive attitudes towards receiving more multi-cultural training, they admitted that the problem was not a lack of training but that “people’s [teachers’] biases were too established to change through multicultural education” (p. 158). Whatever strides were being made in policy and curricula seemed to be overshadowed by the painfully slow progress of teachers’ attitudes in a positive direction. I argue however, that running ahead despite teachers’ negative attitudes, and in spite of, any real understanding of these attitudes have slowed down any meaningful progress. Postman & Weingartner (1987: 33) say it well: “[there] can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its centre the attitudes of teachers”. Those who have pushed ahead ignore the fact that the debate is not about the language, but the teachers’ attitudes towards it. Teacher language attitudes must be addressed first if there is to be any measure of success.

In the 1990s teachers were being educated and trained, but not probed and challenged. Research gave them information, so too did teacher training, and educational materials, but they felt, thought and behaved the same. Boyd (1996: 32) remarks that “[i]n spite of decades of research supporting the legitimacy of African-American Vernacular English [and CE], it would appear...that teacher attitudes toward AAVE [and CE] have not yet changed”. Teachers had the knowledge needed to inform their attitudes, but *they did not* change, because they were informing *their intellects*, and to my mind, they were rejecting the information acquired to prevent it from conflicting with their personal beliefs (Cabello & Burstein, 1995).

### **2000s: Attitudes & Discussions**

There is a slight shift in the negative language attitudes held by US teachers in this period. Research by Champion et al (2012) shows that overall, teachers, irrespective of gender, had negative attitudes towards AAVE; however, Euro-Americans had more negative attitudes than did African American teachers. This aspect of race corresponds with findings in the Terrill & Mark (2000) study. In that study, of the 97 participants, 89% were European-Americans, none were African American, and of that demographic the overwhelming majority had lower expectations for AAVE students, believing that there would be fewer gifted and talented students in schools with children of colour. These findings led me to conclude that there was some level of ambivalence on the part of black teachers, and to scrutinize the teaching demographics in the US to better determine what might be happening. In 2011 the US demographics for teachers showed that while it was still predominantly white and female (84%), that number fell from (91%) in 1986, “but there is some shift toward more people of color entering the ranks of teaching” (Feistritzer, 2011: 10). Interestingly, the age of teachers under 30 rose dramatically from 2005-2011, and more than half of Black and Hispanic teachers are teaching in cities, compared to 28% Whites (ibid.: 16). These statistics are revealing. Firstly, there are currently more teachers in circulation who can probably identify with the experience of the AAVE speaking student. The connection of identities could aid in the development of empathy, which could lead to less negativity towards these students. The age of teachers is also significant from the point of view that younger people tend to be less set in their ways, and have perhaps grown up in a world more culturally integrated, so that they are more tolerant, and perhaps more curious of other cultures different from their own. Finally, most teachers of colour are distributed in schools in the cities, where typically AAVE speaking students attend, which means that these students are now being taught by teachers with whom

they can identify, at least racially, and perhaps even linguistically. I could see that teachers of colour would be ambivalent in these situations, as they want their coloured students to succeed academically, as they did, but they also want them to appreciate their language and culture. Hence, their 'less negative attitudes' might be directed towards the language itself, but their more negative attitudes might be towards the use of it in education because they see the acquisition of SE as the way to get ahead.

WI teachers in this era were ambivalent towards CE. Aberg & Waller (2012) in their work on Jamaica conclude that "teachers expressed an ambivalence [sic] opinion about what language is or should be the first and second language" (p. 3). My own research also uncovers some ambivalence of a slightly different nature. Teachers praised the vernacular in areas like drama and poetry in the classroom, using terms such as 'vivacious', 'colourful', and 'efficient' to define it; yet, deemed it unsuitable for 'mainstream' classroom use (Denny, 2002). Additionally, I found that of the 88 teachers surveyed across the island of Barbados, 42% opposed dialectal incorporation programmes, but surprisingly, a similarly large percentage (40%) were undecided. I construed this ambivalence to be a positive thing when compared to previous decades when teachers appeared negatively inflexible on the issue.

Despite the ambivalence, on both sides there were still some very negative views about the language, its speakers and its role in education. DiOrio (2011), for instance notes that teachers described AAVE as "'bad' language, using imperative statements or strikethroughs to correct nonstandard language" (p. 3). Additionally, Sabree-Shakir (2001: 301) affirms that "despite the wealth of information presented...the perception still persisted that the African American child's language is basically an inferior, defective and pathologically deficient system of communication". The Aberg & Waller (2012) study of Jamaican teachers reveals that some also see Jamaican Creole (JC) as a deviant form of English, because they believe there is only one standard, and because JC differs from SE, it is an improper version of it. One teacher says that JC is not a language in itself but a dialect "consisting of slang words" (p. 36). As regards vernacular speakers, the Bundgens-Kosten (2009) study of 52 white teachers from rural central Illinois confirms "the frequently made assumptions that teachers hold lower expectations for those students that speak AAVE" (p. 69). This is a reflection of WI teachers' thinking who continue to see creole speaking students as "linguistically and cognitively deprived, and consequently low in mental ability" Craig (2006: 11). Finally, as to its role in education, educators were equally negative. In the US, Secretary of Education, Richard Riley announced that "elevating black English to the status of a language is not the way to raise the standards of achievement in our schools and for our students" (Rickford & Rickford, 2000: 6). WI teachers made similar comments, such as students would not go very far in life if dialect instruction were used (Denny, 2002). Despite all this negativity, some researchers strongly believe that attitudes have changed in a positive direction (Witkosky, 2005).

### **General Summary**

This section summarises the answers to research questions 1 and 2 about how teachers' attitudes compare and contrast over the decades.

In the 1960s both groups of teachers used derogatory terms to refer to the language, viewed it as an educational handicap, and termed speakers cognitively deficient. For these reasons both groups had low expectations for their students. There is one significant difference; whereby teachers in the US were more passive aggressive towards the use of the language, assigning low grades and negative evaluations, WI teachers were openly antagonistic, resorting to corporal punishment. In the 1970s both cohorts saw a time of change in educational policy and

curricula to validate these language varieties. There was more linguistic information available, so that both sets of teachers' view of the language *situation*, rather than the language, shifted somewhat. Teachers in the USA were using less 'derogatory' terms than were WI teachers, but they were equally attempting to eradicate the vernacular from the classroom.

In the 1980s increasing pressure to accommodate the vernacular in the classroom, was met with resistance on both sides. Teachers in each camp employed sophisticated educational arguments against the use of vernaculars in education, and appeared to be more covert in attempts to eliminate vernacular usage, perhaps so as not to not appear anti-policy/curricula. The significant difference, later in this period, was the public support of the vernacular in education by WI teachers in Jamaica, something which was not done as a cohesive group in the US for AAVE. In the 1990s both sides opposed the call for the use of the vernacular as an instructional medium, and appeared to more consistently employ what they were learning from published materials to advance linguistic arguments against this kind of education. In the 1960s and 70s societal views shaped their biases, now it seemed that educational training did the same.

Teachers in both areas currently still hold negative attitudes towards the language and its speakers, but there is some shifting of attitudes in the US with a shift in demographics. This period brought black teachers' views in the US to the fore, unlike any other time. There was a significant enough percentage of black teachers in both groups who were ambivalent about vernacular education when compared to the resoluteness of teachers as a whole in earlier periods, so that despite the view that teacher attitudes have changed minimally in 40 years (Champion et al, 2012), even a minimal shift gives hope.

### **Implications & Discussion**

The issues arising from this study are complex because they involve deep-seated, long-held beliefs. I will however attempt to dissect these issues by speaking to the implications from three angles, understanding (1) teachers' attitudes, (2) the effects of these attitudes on language learners, and (3) the relationship between these attitudes and language policy.

Despite an increase in educational programmes, teachers still have negative attitudes towards the vernacular and its speakers. It is simply not correct to equate increased educational programmes with increased educational *opportunities*. In many cases teachers cannot access these programmes for whatever reason, and being able to access them does not mean that they are adequate or appropriate. These programmes might simply be dispensing information about teaching techniques rather than targeting teachers' underlying thoughts and feelings towards the language and its speakers, with the aim of helping them modify negative classroom behaviours. In other words, the training has to "educate...teachers in the complexities of language and linguistic variation, lessening linguistic prejudices..." (Hamilton-Kelley, 1994: 35) I admit that it is simplistic to correlate acquisition of knowledge with lessening prejudice as if it were a scientific equation, as "mere contact with linguistic knowledge...is not an effective means for improving attitudes toward basilectal varieties" (Bundgens-Kosten, 2009: 123). Still the point is that when researchers and teacher educators begin to emphasize attitudinal *change*, not attitudinal scales, nor theoretical Linguistics, they will begin to design appropriate programmes that target, rather than talk about, this change.

### *Socialisation*

The reasons for teachers' negative attitudes are complex, but evidently rooted in socialisation. I reiterate that teacher language attitudes first have been shaped by community experiences over

an extensive period. This means that these attitudes will not change as a result of a week-long workshop, a month-long in-service training programme, nor perhaps even as a result of a four year degree programme. Roberts (1994: 54) effectively explains that “[n]either glossy radical surgery nor glossy campaigns can reverse hundreds of years of acculturation and remove the stigma attached to creole...in the minds of ...Caribbean...societies”. The approach of radicalism with the objective of reversal is unsound. Instead of immediately aiming for change of attitudes, we can work towards *shifting* attitudes, nudging them encouragingly until they become dislodged. The understanding that language attitudes are perpetuated in the larger community does not negate that such attitudes can be especially damaging when adopted by teachers. Teaching is after all the only profession which interacts with, and shapes *all* of the most valuable resource of any nation, *its people*, and it is this kind of interaction that determines the level of success of that nation (McCullough, 1981).

### *Help to function*

In the recommendations section of most research, teachers are constantly urged to do better. The implication is that teachers have acknowledged their own deficiencies, and can make these improvements alone. There are a lot of recommendations out there, but who helps teachers to analyse them, understand them and even implement them. Teachers should be *helped* to shift their attitudes, not simply told that they need to. This means that researchers, teacher educators, workshop coordinators, etcetera, need to take up support roles for teachers. In this role, they support teachers in identifying negative attitudes, taking responsibility for these attitudes, challenging these attitudes rather than laying blame in places where they have little/no influence (vernacular speaking communities/children’s homes). Burling (1973: 95) addresses this point sympathetically: “[i]t is always so easy to blame the children...when we blame them, we ease the burden of our own guilt”. This is an interesting point for which the implication is not so straightforward. I gather from this statement that it is hard to look into the mirror and see our flaws, let alone accept them, and perhaps it is not as simplistic as teachers having low expectations for students as much as it is teachers having low expectations of their abilities to help these children, and I could see that this could make them feel guilty. Guilt can cause people to behave negatively, and what might manifest on the surface, disdain for a language, anger towards the students who speak it, could be a facade of feelings of ineptitude.

### *Training that builds confidence*

It is naïve to assume that with knowledge comes understanding. Even when teachers attend the rightly titled courses, it should not be presumed that they know how to use the knowledge acquired in a practical way. Many can be educated and trained without being guided or advised, so they still feel as unprepared as when they first started, as expressed by Walker-Dalhousie & Dalhousie (2006), who lament that teacher education programmes do not properly prepare teachers for the culturally diverse classroom. This is significant when married with the observation made by the Barry & Lechner (1995) study, that many teachers who felt unqualified to deal with these issues (cultural and language diversity), simply avoided them in the classroom. The implication is that avoidance will lead to disappearance, but this strategy is not effective pedagogy, for obvious reasons. The more issues left unattended, the more will arise, which culminate in extreme frustration for teacher and student. I have shifted my own views during this research, for while I do believe there are instances of racism and classism, I am now more disposed to the view that teacher frustration is due to a build-up of unattended issues and feelings of ineptitude, which can feed into, and manifest as, negative teacher language attitudes. When teachers’ linguistic sophistication is limited and their preparation to deal with these language problems is woefully inadequate (Shuy, Wolfram & Riley, 1967), this

kind of inefficiency “is bound to thwart the learning and teaching enterprise in the classroom” (Crawford, 2001: 51). Teachers who *are* prepared and *feel* prepared, feel more confident; more confidence should at least translate into better strategic planning in tackling and overcoming classroom challenges, which should result in fewer frustrations and fewer instances of negative teacher behaviours.

### *Effect on students*

Another important issue raised herein relates to the effects of teachers’ attitudes on students’ learning. Although discussed at length in other research, I feel it necessary to allow some space for discussion because of the obvious devastating educational and psychological effects. These attitudes generate feelings of inadequacy and inferiority which can affect the students’ level of participation in the class (Miller-Hill, 1998; Dandy, 1988), and contribute to their failure (McCullough, 1981). The result is a ‘hellish’ cycle, whereby, teachers’ attitudes precipitate students’ lack of motivation and participation, leading to student failure, and so validating and intensifying teachers’ negative attitudes towards the vernacular and its speakers. These attitudes may cause black students to internalise white society’s view of things black as ignorant and incorrect (Hartman & Guiora, 1968), so that they “become ashamed of their own language, seeing it as...inadequate, debased and wrong— and because language is...so intimately entwined in one’s personality...to despise one’s language must mean, in part, to despise oneself” (Burling 1973: 105). Halliday’s (1968) statement is even more poignant: “A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being; to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin” (p. 165). I doubt that this could be the intention of any good teacher. Admittedly, it could be that negative student behaviour is inhibiting learning, but consider that students might be resentful of learning a language, from/of a people they believe have no respect for them (Hess, 1973).

### *Attitudes and policy*

It is also important to discuss the implications of negative language attitudes for language policy. Firstly, a policy that ignores the linguistic reality will ultimately lead to educational problems for all in terms of inappropriate pedagogical approaches and poor quality educational experiences for vernacular speakers. Students who are forced to use the school’s language because policy ignores the home language will rebel or recoil; either way, there will be limited educational benefit to that child. McCullough’s (1981) research attests to how these negative attitudes affect policies and practices. For example, a certain language policy may be chosen not “by explicit and rational processes” but “under the force of historical and emotional commitments” (Craig, 1980: 246). This is well illustrated by, even though corrected in the case of Haiti. Ninety per cent speak Haitian Creole (HC), but were forced to use French (the school language), at the end of which the majority were still not proficient. Today HC has been given official status and is the medium of instruction. Like the Haitian situation many AAVE and CE students leave school unable to effectively communicate in SE. The policies are not working partly because the attitudes underpinning them are unsympathetic, revealing dire ignorance of the linguistic realities for which they are developed. The fact is that English is not the native language of many of these children. Sabree-Shakir (2001) elaborates on the devastating implications of thinking otherwise, such as assuming that the vernacular is a deficit model of SE and should be eliminated from the classroom. Such a practice, only serve to ‘decelerate instruction’ and is “destructive to the cultural identity of these students” (ibid: 306). If policy-makers continue to ignore the role of the vernacular in shaping policy, the view that it is valueless can be directly or subliminally communicated to the teacher who implements policy



in the classroom. Craig (1980) therefore promotes the view that the only way policy can change to benefit these students is if there is a development of the understanding of the true nature of these vernaculars.

### **Concluding remarks**

I conclude by speaking as an educator, linguist and researcher. I do not desire White teachers to become Black, or middle-class teachers to become working-class in understanding this issue. I desire that we become more humane, more empathic, less academic in our talk, and more soulful in our speech. I want us to communicate to our students that we want them to succeed. As a linguist and researcher I feel that even those who initiated the discussions and rallied for the cause, seemed not to follow through, and moved on to other areas of research. Perhaps they felt defeated because teachers were not cooperating, but attitudes are difficult to change (Greenbaum, 1985; Garcia, 1992), and in seeming to retreat from the challenge, they are suggesting to teachers that it was never an issue to be taken seriously, just a matter of researchers looking for the next research topic. A lifetime of working towards helping teachers shift their negative attitudes is crucial to teacher and student classroom success. Shifting *one* teacher's attitude can mean changing *many* students' lives for the better. As language teachers we do not teach languages, we teach students, and in so doing we must challenge ourselves, our beliefs and attitudes, and our students' beliefs and attitudes so that we develop thinking people inside and outside the classroom. I now challenge teachers to meditate on what we can be inspired to do when we "submerge and/or eradicate our own prejudices, to recognise and respect the students' language for what it is, and to use their existing linguistic competence as a foundation upon which to expand and develop those language abilities that will give them the linguistic versatility, facility, and security, they deem necessary for the realization of their personal, academic, and professional goals (Stokes, 1976: 11).

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