Language Variance and its Impact on Women of Color in Community College: Perceptions of Standard and non-Standard English

by

Andrea Isabel Juarez

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Christopher J. F. Burke, Chair
Associate Professor Martha A. Adler
Professor Suzanne Bergeron

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to young urban girls of color who because of their social environments perceive their current lives as an innate state. In particular, to my daughters and nieces who as young girls and young ladies of color will undoubtedly face adversities as they navigate through their journeys of higher education and strive to pursue their dreams. May this dissertation serve as inspiration and hope. I also dedicate this dissertation to my immediate family: my fiancé Ron Oliver and children, Isaias Juarez, Pedro Juarez, Malea Oliver, Jackson Oliver, and Isabella Oliver, as well as to my parents Baltazar and Julia Guzman, and my siblings Baltazar Guzman, Jr., Edwin Burgos, Jr., Pedro Guzman, Bobby Guzman, Ricardo Guzman, Rafael Guzman, and Antonio Guzman. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me along the way.

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Abstract

Factors tied to the intersection of race, class, and gender still act as a barrier to academic success. Gee (2008a) and Schleppegrell (2004) assert that student success correlates with the acquisition and utilization of academic language [Standard English]. Tannen (1992) contends that traditional classrooms are most congenial to teaching men. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Delpit (1992) attest that people of color continue to be marginalized by pedagogy designed for white students. Such findings have strong implications for fostering Standard English as well as for designing teaching strategies that are conducive for women of color. The central research question this study answers is: How do women of color perceive the role of language in shaping their experiences and their success at the community college? In order to address the research question, classroom observations, a faculty interview and 11 student interviews were conducted. Data collected from observations and interviews revealed three themes. First, students realize that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English, which causes students to feel split between cultures. Second, the realization that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English results in the conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually. Third, content knowledge is privileged over language usage by both students and faculty.

Keywords: academic language, code-switching, functional language, non-Standard English, Standard English, women of color

Chapter One: Critical Self-narrative and Introduction to the Study

Chapter one begins with a critical self-narrative, which offers insight on how I have acquired Standard English and the lens with which this study is conducted. In addition, this chapter contains the study's introduction, which provides a brief overview of language acquisition and its relationship with success and power as well as inferences on its impact on women of color in urban community colleges. Chapter one concludes with the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Critical Self-narratives

Narratives are used to document stories of an individual, or group of individuals, in order to understand their life experiences as a marginalized person or group of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Critical narrative involves analyzing such experiences through a theoretical lens. Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain that critical narrative analysis "makes explicit a theoretical focus on issues of power, access to linguistic resources, and the ways these resources are distributed unevenly across both dominant and marginalized populations" (p. 23). This study commences with a critical self-narrative in which my own experiences with language acquisition are reflected upon and documented. The self-narrative provides a chronology of specific milestones that led to my own acquisition of Standard English and how it has impacted my personal and professional life. Additionally, it sets the foundation for my study and provides the lens through which my study is conducted.

The Narrative of Andrea I. Juarez

Both my mother and father migrated to the Midwest from Puerto Rico in the early 1970's. Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States, is a small island in which Spanish is the native language. As a child, Spanish was the primary language spoken within my household. English was acquired upon entering grade school, yet Spanish continued to be expected in the home. We lived in a highly concentrated Hispanic neighborhood in which Spanish could be spoken virtually everywhere. We attended Spanish church services and shopped at Hispanic owned grocery stores. On weekends, my older brothers and I received written and verbal instruction in Spanish at home. By the fifth grade, I was able to speak both Spanish and English.

As a student in a large urban public school district, I do not recall a single incident in which the significance of language use was ever discussed. Emphasis was placed on learning how to speak and write English as a means to understand course content. Yet Standard English, as a language spoken by the educated and found in textbooks, was not fostered nor encouraged during my K-12 education. My inability to adhere to the grammatical and lexical rules of English resulted in my being placed in "Bilingual Education" for primary school. The Bilingual Education Program was a "pull-out" program in which students who spoke home languages other than English were removed from their regular classes and sent to a separate room for general education such as English and Social Studies.

Initially, I enjoyed the Bilingual Education Program. I was in a classroom with students who looked and spoke like I did, but the enthusiasm only lasted a semester. I learned English quickly and wanted to be in classes with peers who spoke English. The paper mache projects and coloring books became tedious. I was becoming increasingly frustrated with the teachers who would simply increase the number of workbook pages for me to complete in a day. I was learning more English in the playground than I was in the Bilingual Education Program. In addition, schoolmates looked at Bilingual Education students as if we were less intelligent. They laughed at us and yelled out things like “Go back home spic,” “Speak English” or “What? What are you trying to say? I can’t understand that jibber!” Luckily, my mother realized that the program did more harm than good and had the school remove me from it. By the time I entered middle school neither my mother nor I would allow the school counselors to even discuss Bilingual Education with us.

Middle and high school placed an emphasis on content knowledge and skill competencies. My English classes discussed proper nouns, verbs, tenses, and other grammatical rules of English, but outside of this course, language use varied. In the hallways we often spoke slang or a combination of Spanish and English. At home I spoke Spanish. Since I excelled in all subject areas, I never questioned the English I had acquired. Graduating Salutatorian, I was not aware that there was a Standard English or how the lack of Standard English would affect my future goals. It was not until I began attending a prestigious university that I realized that the way I was accustomed to speaking was different than that of other students and of my professors.

In each course in which I enrolled, I was exposed to a linguistic code foreign to the English I was accustomed to speaking. Initially I was not aware that my grades were reflective of my lack of Standard English. While professors spoke differently, their education was superior to mine. My classmates spoke differently too, but I figured they were just different people. Many of them came from surrounding suburbs and were from upper middle class or upper class families. I viewed their language differences as a sign of social status and outright arrogance. In the summer of 1997, after completing my first year of college, I enrolled in a 200 level literature course. This course became the catalyst for a new perception on language use and resulted in a drastic shift in how I communicated with others.

My first assignment was a fifteen-page paper. Every page came back with red markings, strikethroughs, circles and arrows. The final page contained my grade: a big bold "E." I could not believe what I was seeing. I had never received a failing grade before. I figured it had to be a mistake. That day I stayed after class to discuss the assignment with my instructor. The conversation went something like this:

Me: "I noticed you gave me a failing grade. Can we talk about it? I think it's a mistake."

Professor: "No, you earned the failing grade."

Me: "I don't understand how I did so badly. I've never received such a low grade."

Professor: "You write like you speak. I don't know how you've made it this far to be honest."

Embarrassed and on the verge of tears I stood there in disbelief. That day, my professor made a commitment to help me, in her words, to "acquire the proper language." We would spend hours visiting different museums and different sectors of the city or role playing that we were at the white house or an elegant art gallery. I did not understand how these interactions were going to improve my grades, but she assured me that my writing would improve as my verbal skills improved. Soon, the only red markings on my assignments were big bold A's. In addition, I noticed that the way my professors and peers treated me was different. They actually listened to what I had to say and appeared to understand what I was saying. I no longer felt as if the only students who listened to me were those of color. I made a conscious decision to utilize this new language, Standard English, when I was in class. The grim alternative was continual use of non-Standard English, alienation from classmates, and mediocre grades.

Yet this new linguistic style was not one that I could take back home with me. In the inner city we spoke a different language which often involved mixing Spanish and English into a unique code-switch known as Spanglish. An example of Spanglish would be:

> "Hey girl! Cuando regresaste [when did you return]? We are so proud of you. Eres el orgullo de la vecindad [you're the pride of the block]!"

Utilizing Standard English at home would immediately alienate me from family, friends, and the community in which I grew up. Another option was selecting one linguistic style over the other, which meant abandoning my identity or abandoning my educational and professional aspirations. Therefore, I had no choice but to learn how to utilize both Standard and non-Standard English contextually.

Applying language contextually involves selecting the linguistic codes best suited for one's environment. In my hometown I utilize Spanish or non-Standard English because these are the linguistic codes with which most of my family and friends are familiar. Standard English would be confusing to them and would immediately position me as being an "outsider" -- someone who does not belong in their inner circle. With my children, I speak both Standard and non-Standard English with clear demarcations on the appropriate context for each. At school I utilize Standard English since non-Standard English is not an acceptable form of communicative language for graduate school. At work I utilize a combination of non-Standard and Standard English depending on the constituent I am addressing.

Learning to utilize Standard and non-Standard English contextually has been advantageous in my personal life as well as in my educational and professional endeavors. It empowered me with the confidence and ability to maneuver through higher education and to transition from one position to another with ease. Hired as an Academic Advisor, I ascended to Educational Associate, Associate Dean, Campus Chief Academic Office, and Provost of Health Sciences/Campus Chief Academic Officer in approximately ten years. I attribute these advancements, in part, to the ability to utilize Standard and non-Standard English contextually in order to communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders who utilize varying linguistic codes.

As Provost of Health Sciences/Chief Academic Officer of a community college, I have the opportunity to observe faculty and student interactions on a daily basis. I became aware that language use was much more non-Standard than Standard, inside and outside of the classroom. I began to question whether women of color are being prepared to move beyond the boundaries of community college or for employment outside of their immediate surroundings; whether they are even aware of the unspoken power of language. Do they perceive their use of language to be Standard English like I did when I enrolled in college? Where will they learn about the differences between Standard and non-Standard English? Will they feel forced to adopt one over the other or will they learn how to use the codes contextually?

Acquisition of Standard English was not a byproduct of the schooling I received in primary, elementary, or secondary schools. Acquisition of Standard English and the decision to utilize language contextually derived from three sources:

1. Consciousness or the realization that the way in which I used language influenced social perceptions of who I am and of my intellectual capacity.

2. Exposure to the use of Standard English and environments in which Standard English was utilized.
3. The desire to maintain self-identity and culture while excelling in higher education and in my career.

Based on my experience and perceptions of language use prior to entering a four-year institution, it is my belief that low-income urban women of color remain unaware of the existence of Standard English and the implications of its usage. Similarly, these women transition to institutions of higher education utilizing non-Standard English and, as I experienced, are at risk of failing academically. The use of non-Standard English in some contexts may also hinder their ability to seek employment outside of their communities or secure upper level positions within their employment. My study explores the perceptions such women have with regards to their use of language inside and outside of the classroom and questions whether they believe it will impact their ability to succeed academically and professionally while maintaining self-identity and culture.

Considering my own life experience as a Hispanic woman from a low-income urban environment, and mindful of the difficulties I have encountered in my educational journey, this study is profoundly meaningful to me. As a researcher, I am immensely grateful to be in a position to equip women of color in urban settings with invaluable information that can impact their educational lives in a very positive and direct way while allowing them to maintain self-identity and culture. In addition, I aim to expose and challenge institutionalized adversities these women face in the complex realm of higher education where they are not fully prepared linguistically and not even aware of their level of unpreparedness. Even daring to think that I could contribute to the empowerment of women of color in urban communities by raising awareness of the existence of Standard English and the benefits of its use in our society gives me great hope and fulfillment.

Introduction

Globally, the use of language has been shown to be hegemonic and access to it may be dependent upon a number of variables including gender, race, educational level, and socio-economic class (Enright, 2011; Gee, 2008a; Howard, 2010; Labov, 2002; Tannen & Kendall, 2001). It is because of this hegemonic relationship that Standard English has become the language of power in the United States: the "right" way to speak. Standard English refers to the common language spoken amongst, and expected by, the educated and affluent. Individuals who utilize non-Standard English are believed to speak incorrectly and in need of remediation. The common assumption is that they are incompetent.

Language is also believed to vary as the context in which language is used changes, such as language used in the home versus language used in school (Gee, 2008a; Labov, 2010; Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). For middle and upper class white families, language used in the home closely aligns with language used in the school (Gee, 2008a; Heath, 1983). Therefore, middle and upper class white children are readily able to acquire and adhere to Standard English. On the other hand, low-income children of color are most commonly exposed to non-Standard English at home and in their communities and, therefore, experience challenges acquiring Standard English.

Students utilizing Standard English in the home and in their communities have been shown to be more successful in school than students who use non-Standard English. Gee (2008a) and Schleppegrell (2004) believe that the correlation of language to student success is attributed to the fact that textbooks are written in Standard English. Furthermore, textbooks utilize examples and concepts most familiar to students coming from middle and upper class homes. Therefore, it is of no surprise that students from lower or working-class homes struggle with the language used in their textbooks, as it does not align with the language used at home or in their communities.

For students who speak variations of English, such as Spanglish (a combination of Spanish and English) or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), challenges are magnified given that they lack the vocabulary and contextual experiences, as well as the language and cultural structure, of Standard English (Labov, 2010; Gee, 2008a). In addition, societal expectations of how men and women should utilize language may not align with their own cultural expectations of language use and gender. Hence, the way in which low-income and working-class women of color utilize language is not only impacted by socio-economic status, social class, white privilege, and race and ethnicity, but it is also impacted by gender.

The ability to attain career training or advance educationally for many low-income women of color can be challenging. Limited access to transportation, reliable childcare, and the expenses associated with tuition and books create barriers for attending a four-year institution. Therefore, many low-income women of color depend on community colleges to achieve their educational and professional goals. Community colleges can contribute to the empowerment of women of color by understanding their perceptions of language and providing resources that foster acquisition of Standard English without invalidating non-Standard language patterns. Non-Standard English forms a part of these women's identities and should not be eradicated, since utilizing Standard English within their communities is not always an option and may, in turn, isolate them from family and friends.

Furthermore, graduates of community colleges tend to work within, or in close proximity, to their communities. Standard English would most likely be ineffective when communicating with patients or clientele from the same community. Nonetheless, Standard English is needed to communicate effectively with employers and personnel and is also needed to be successful in a four-year institution. Therefore, women of color attending community college would benefit from learning how to use non-Standard and Standard English contextually: the ability to code-switch depending on one's environment. In addition, it is important for women of color to understand the culture of power and the complexities associated with utilizing language contextually. Such consciousness will allow these women to successfully navigate through higher education and to communicate effectively with a wide range and diverse population without losing their identity or culture.

In order to better understand how women of color perceive and utilize language, I observed student interactions in three sections of a medical ethics course. This course was purposely selected because it serves as a pre-requisite for most Allied Health and Nursing programs at Midwest Community College[1]. Allied Health and Nursing programs require students to complete clinical or practicum hours in rural, urban, and suburban environments. In

[1] In order to provide anonymity and for the protection of study participants, all institutions and study participants will be referred to using a pseudonym.

order to determine whether students have received adequate training within their selected health program, Midwest Community College utilizes a number of evaluative tools.

One such tool is a clinical competency check-off sheet that is completed by an employee of the clinical site the student is assigned to; this employee is referred to as a clinical preceptor. Students attending Midwest Community College traditionally receive favorable clinical competency scores that demonstrate the students' ability to perform skill based tasks. Midwest Community College students also receive above average scores in state and national certification exams with several programs receiving pass rates of 100%. Nonetheless, clinical preceptors have reported that students continuously demonstrate challenges with affective behaviors, or soft skills, and effective communication. This assessment reflects the preceptor's negative assessment of the manner in which community college students utilize language and the social perception of what is considered the "right way to speak" and the "right way to act."

Statement of the Problem

High dropout rates have plagued community colleges across the nation for years. "The worst numbers appear to come from low-income students, who enter community college in an effort to bring themselves to a higher earning level" (Chen, 2011). A national initiative proposed by President Obama, and supported by the American Association of Community Colleges, seeks to increase the number of students graduating from community colleges by five million within the next eight years. Since community colleges were designed, and uniquely positioned, to service marginalized populations they attract a high percentage of low-income women of color, many of whom face a number of academic challenges.

Factors tied to the intersection of race, class, and gender still act as a barrier to academic success. Gee (2008a) and Schleppegrell (2004) assert that student success correlates with the acquisition and utilization of academic language [Standard English]. Tannen (1992) contends that traditional classrooms are most congenial to teaching men. Ladson-Billing (1995) and Delpit (1992) attest that people of color continue to be marginalized by pedagogy designed for white students. Such findings have strong implications for fostering Standard English as well as for designing teaching strategies that are conducive for women of color. Yet none of these studies are within the context of community college.

Studies related to gender and language acquisition are conducted in K-12 systems or four-year institutions involving white middle-class participants (Hyde & Deal, 2003; Tannen & Kendall, 2001; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Tannen, 1992). Research pertaining to non-Standard English is usually conducted within K-12 institutions (Enright, 2011; Labov, 2010; Gee, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Delpit, 1995). My research, then, addresses a gap in the literature by examining the perceptions of women of color as it relates to their use of language inside and outside of the classroom at the community college level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether women attending community colleges utilized Standard English or non-standard English inside and outside of the classroom, whether their selection of language was intentional, and whether they believed it would impact their ability to succeed academically and professionally. Second, the study worked to identify and understand the pressures that women of color feel as they relate to their choices of language use. Finally, the study worked to identify the experiences that allow women of color to be academically successful without losing their identities.

Research Questions

The central research question I aimed to answer was: How do women of color perceive the role of language in shaping their experiences and their success at the community college? This study also addressed the following sub-questions:

1. What circumstances or factors bring women of color to community colleges?
2. What are their educational goals? To enter the workforce, transfer to a four-year institution, or both?
3. Do women of color in community colleges feel they are learning Standard English?
4. What resources can community colleges provide to women of color in order to foster and facilitate their acquisition of Standard English?

Such questions are best examined through the lens of critical race theory, which allows me to examine the identified problem through a critical lens in which race is the central issue (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Since it is my goal to give women of color attending community colleges a voice to express the complexities of acquiring Standard English without losing their sense of identities, these questions will also be examined through the philosophical lens of "advocacy/participatory."

Chapter two will provide an overview of each lens as well as a review of literature on the intersections of language, gender, race, and power.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature, Philosophical Lens, and Theoretical Framework

Chapter two consists of a review of literature as it relates to language, language and gender, and language, race and power. The role of community colleges is included as well as the philosophical lens and theoretical framework in which the study is written.

Language

Language is a mechanism by which people communicate ideas, feelings, or experiences through a system of linguistic codes such as words and gestures. These linguistic codes are believed to be shared amongst community members, yet fluctuate as the community--or members of the community-change (Gee, 2008a; Heath, 1983; Labov, 2002; Spolsky, 1998). Labov (2002) contends that communities are altered naturally over time as they are impacted by factors he refers to as “trigger events.” Trigger events include migration, changes in the workforce or economics and the converging of dialects. According to Labov (2002), trigger events create language variances, which divide society into distinct groups, or “speech communities,” based on language association.

Language variances are languages that deviate from any identifiable language such as English, French, Spanish, or Chinese (Spolsky, 1998). As variations of language they may be used to identify others as pertaining to a specific social group (Labov, 2002; Spolsky, 1998). Spolsky (1998) contends that social status is prescribed to social groups based on the language variant used, making language a source of social and political power. Globally, this aspect of language becomes hegemonic when one variant is privileged over another.

It is because of this hegemonic relationship that Standard English has become the language of power in the United States: the "right" way to speak. Trudgill (2000) defines Standard English as:

> That variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. (pp. 5-6)

Non-Standard English refers to variants of Standard English such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Spanglish. It is important to note that AAVE and Spanglish have linguistic codes that make them unique variations of English (Labov, 2010; Ogbu, 1999; Lindblom, 2005). Nonetheless, AAVE and Spanglish deviate from the linguistic rules associated with Standard English. As a result, individuals utilizing such languages outside of their speech communities are viewed as speaking incorrectly.

Additionally, language is believed to vary as the context in which language is used changes, such as language used in the home versus language used in school (Gee, 2008a; Labov, 2010; Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The way individuals use language at home and school has been correlated with student success or the lack thereof. Gee (2008a) attests that "Success in school requires children to comprehend the complex academic language found in content areas (e.g., science, math, social studies)" (p. 1). Academic language is the language most commonly spoken in academia and found in textbooks. The inability to comprehend academic language may result in students being underprepared for school and labeled as incompetent (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

An example of such power dynamics is found in Delpit (1995) when she describes Marge, an African American student who was denied entrance into a doctoral program based on her GRE score and writing skills, although she had already earned a Master's degree. Marge was assigned a faculty mentor named Susan because she was considered "at-risk." According to Delpit (1995), "Susan recognized early on that Marge was very talented but that she did not understand how to maneuver her way through academic writing, reading, and talking" (p, 156). Within one year Susan had taught Marge the intricacies of Standard English, which allowed her to reapply for, and be admitted into, the doctoral program to which she was previously denied entrance.

This example demonstrates how indisputably valuable language can be, but it also demonstrates how language can perpetuate inequities by distorting social views. A number of scholars attest that in order to be considered academically proficient and avoid such labeling, students must acquire Standard English (Enright, 2011; Gee, 2008b; Gee, 2003; Delpit, 1995). Yet, others contend that the adoption of Standard English as the correct language assumes that all people have access to education, or the same quality of education, are able to acquire Standard English over time, and are culturally homogeneous (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lindblom, 2005). Lindblom (2005) expresses his concerns as follows: "But insisting on only one version of English – Standard English – whitewashes the many Englishes that are actually used in the world and erases cultural differences that make students and their perspectives unique and original" (p. 108).

Similar concerns are made by Labov (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2000) who contend that we must meet students at their current linguistic levels, teach them accordingly and allow

Standard English to evolve as a product of education. Deviation from this process will result in the loss or redefinition of one's identity. Although I personally agree with this view, I am also compelled to agree with Gee (2008b) in that most students are well versed in and comfortable with the language variant spoken within their homes and communities. Gee (2008b) refers to this language variant as "functional language" since the language variant is effective for the purpose of communicating within the home and within their communities. When functional language drastically differs from language used in schools, or academic language, it becomes difficult for students to learn, primarily because of differences in linguistic styles and life experiences. Yet our educational system does not account for variations of English and assumes that all children are exposed to, and can acquire, academic language.

The demarcation lies in the degree of acquisition required to learn academic language, since academic language builds on a conversational language that our school system assumes all students share. According to Gee (2008b), academic language is a combination of formal and technical words utilized in complex syntactic and discourse patterns that address either an academic or school content area. A similar definition of academic language or "school language" is provided by Schleppegrell (2001). Both Gee (2008b) and Schleppegrell (2001) provide examples of how some students are familiar with lexical and grammatical features of academic language as early as kindergarten. Yet these students are typically middle-class and white. In addition, these students usually have college educated parents who are aware of how language is used in schools and in textbooks.

For these students, each new style of academic language differs from, but also builds on, their conversational varieties of English. For English language learners, however, the challenge of learning academic styles is greatly magnified" (Gee, 2008b, p. 62). Gee (2008b) contends that English language learners are tasked with acquiring Standard English as well as acquiring a new conversational language: the conversational language of middle-class white Americans. A similar phenomenon may be found in students whose conversational language is AAVE or Spanglish. Like English language learners, AAVE and Spanglish speakers must learn a new conversational language and Standard English simultaneously.

Although not all children are equally prepared to use academic language, scholars contend that its use in schools and textbooks is critical. Schleppegrall (2001) asserts, "But the academic writer cannot abandon the conventions of school-based texts and still create texts that will be functional for the purpose of conveying information authoritatively in conventionally structured ways" (p. 453-454). Therefore, teachers need to provide students with authentic experiences that relate to the context in which academic language is used in textbooks and in the classroom (Gee, 2008b). Yet the effectiveness of such teaching is dependent upon teachers being competent of the unique experiences of their diverse student populations and how language used by students is impacted by race, culture, class, and gender.

Language variation across gender impacts all classroom settings and encompasses race, culture, and class. Several studies related to language variance in classrooms reveal that men and women continue to utilize "gendered language" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Hyde & Deal, 2003; Tannen, 1992). Gendered language refers to variations of language made by men and women based on their gender and dependent upon context or locality. In studies of language variation across gender it was found that traditional classrooms were more congenial to men (Tannen, 1992). Men, according to Tannen (1992), are naturally inclined to seize attention in large group settings, such as classrooms, because boys are raised to be assertive and independent. Women, on the other hand, tend to be more reserved in similar settings because girls are raised to be modest in large groups or mixed-sex groups. These distinct language patterns disadvantage women by creating the perception that women are less competent when compared to men in the same class. It is important to note that women's participation in classroom discussion is also impacted by how faculty members perceive and treat genders and races differently.

Tannen's (1992) findings also indicate that conditioned use of language patterns by men and women may be changed by altering the context in which language is used. In the traditional classroom setting, Tannen (1992) contends that classroom discussion yields more reactions from men than from women and that women felt "silenced" in more traditional classroom settings. Yet splitting the class into smaller groups altered the use of language by allowing a forum in which women felt comfortable to speak. Tannen found that "women who never opened their mouths in class were talking away in small groups" (Tannen, 1992, p. 5). Women in small groups did not feel the pressure to prescribe to social norms of coyness and timidity as they did in large groups.

The belief that language patterns utilized by men and women mirror gender polarities is also supported by Bell, McCarthy and McNamara (2006). Although this particular study was conducted on men and women engaged in marriage counseling, its findings support previous research conducted on gendered language patterns being socially constructed (Tannen & Kendall, 2001; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Tannen, 1992). Bell et al. (2006) examined variations in language use across genders utilizing both biological and sociological theories of language. Biological theory assumes that linguistic styles across genders are dictated by preexisting innate gender polarities. In other words, men and women are naturally inclined to use a specific language pattern associated with being a man or a woman. Sociological theory assumes that language does not naturally prescribe to gender polarities, but instead, is socially influenced. Therefore, men and women select language patterns that are expected of them as men and women.

To determine which gender theory most accurately predicted linguistic patterns utilized by men and women, Bell et al. (2006) extracted and analyzed text from counseling transcripts of couples experiencing marital conflicts. Data demonstrated that language patterns used by men and women are not fixed, but instead vary depending on the setting in which language is being used. Such findings can help explain language variance across genders within other settings such as classroom dialogue.

Language Use in the Classroom

Class participation is often used to gauge student comprehension of a particular subject matter. Many instructors include class participation as part of their grading scale. The assumption is that those who participate in class are well informed and those who do not participate are not. But this assumption does not account for gender-related language patterns or language variance. Hyde and Deal (2003) explored gender dynamics within the context of graduate social work courses to determine why students censored, or suppressed, their participation in classroom discussions. Researchers looked specifically at self-censoring in which self-censorship was defined as a reduction or elimination in participation caused by "discomfort of the participant to share opinions or ask questions" (Hyde & Deal, 2003, p. 193). Although the level of self-censorship was comparable for both men and women, reasons for self-censorship were significantly different and aligned with social assumptions of language use across gender. Hyde and Deal (2003) found that:

> The female students' lack of participation stemmed from relational or personal factors ("I'm shy", "I may hurt someone", "the topic is too personal") that parallel more traditional communication styles. Even with female instructors as role models, the female students still seemed to exhibit more passive and deferential styles in communication. (p. 202)

Female use of self-censoring within this study was similar to Tannen's (1992) conclusion that language used by females prescribes to stereotypical language patterns of women when women are within the context of a traditional classroom environment.

Male participants attributed their use of self-censorship to their "minority status" within the class and to the fear of being labeled "sexist" or "chauvinistic" (Hyde & Deal, 2003, p. 203). Although male participation appears to counter male gender norms, researchers contend that their lack of participation is situational; it occurs solely as a result of being in a predominately female class and not as a result of systemic oppression. Hyde and Deal (2003) found that:

> Male students offer the opinion that they are "oppressed too", as a way of signaling that they do not feel power and privilege in the classroom. They probably do not feel privilege in these settings, but what is interesting is the unacknowledged notion that it is normative for them to assume otherwise (p. 203).

Hence, men are more likely to self-censor in classes where females are dominant in number, or where the instructor is female, as a result of the situation, but in reality still maintain the power and privilege within the classroom, whether or not they realize it. Equally important is the manner in which males and females alter their use of language based on what he/she believes will be socially accepted.

The inability for men to recognize privilege, and their notions of feeling oppressed when placed in situations where they appear to be the minority, is known as male privilege. McIntosh (1988) contends that men are unconscious of their advantages as men even when they are able to recognize that women are disadvantaged. "We are taught to think that sexism or heterosexism is carried only through individual acts of discrimination, meanness, or cruelty toward women, gays, and lesbians, rather than in invisible systems conferring unsought dominance on certain groups" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 18). In addition, McIntosh (1988) asserts that men who are aware of their advantages are unwilling to relinquish their power in order to improve the status of women and consider their status to be attained naturally through evolutionary pressure or religion.

Likewise, white privilege has become socially ingrained so that those maintaining power are unaware of their advantages over people of color. McIntosh (1989) reflects that as a white woman she was unaware that the advantages she enjoyed could, in turn, disadvantage individuals who were not white. "I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of is corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 1). White privilege, in her experience, was packaged as an "invisible weightless knapsack" full of unearned assets that she was raised to take for granted. Hence, white women experience the backlash of sexism and male dominance, but enjoy the advantages of being white within a society that ascribes power to whiteness.

McIntosh (1989), in her exploration of the phenomenon of male and white privilege, identified 46 daily experiences associated with white privilege that are not privy to people of color. In addition, McIntosh (1989) contends that acknowledging white privilege challenges notions of meritocracy and calls into question America's assumptions of liberty, ethics, and success. In her analysis, McIntosh (1989) explained:

> If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtue of their own. These perceptions mean also that my moral condition is not what I had been led to believe. The appearance of being a good citizen rather than a troublemaker comes in large part from having all sorts of doors open automatically because of my color (p. 9).

It is this level of awareness that social systems attempt to obscure, and in some cases hide, in order to sustain and protect white male power.

Issues of power, as they relate to race and culture, are endorsed in schools through textbooks, curriculum, and codes of power. Delpit (1995; 1992; 1988) provides extensive research on the "culture of power" and its impact on the success of people of color. The culture of power is the belief that schools perpetuate social inequalities by impeding children of color from acquiring the rules or codes used by people in power. One example in which schools perpetuate social inequalities is by limiting the access to learn "literate discourse" (Standard English) in poor urban schools. Delpit (1988) provides five aspects of power that collectively create a culture of power that negatively impacts the success rate of students of color.

First, power relations are endorsed within the classroom by positioning the teacher as the sole authority and by utilizing textbooks and curriculum that present a worldview that negatively positions children of color. In addition, assessment tools are designed by those in power and are used to measure the intelligence of children of color without being aware of their cultural and social backgrounds. Second, there are rules or codes associated with those in power. These rules include language patterns as well as mannerisms. Third, school culture reflects the culture of those in power and prescribes to their rules of power. Hence, children of color or children of low socio-economic status are unable to navigate through the culture of schools because it is not reflective of their own culture. Fourth, to become a member of the culture of power, one must receive precise and explicit direction on the rules and codes of those in power. Lastly, persons of power are unconscious of their status, or otherwise deny their position of power. Yet, those who maintain less power are aware of this deficit (Delpit, 1988, pp. 283-284).

Although I agree with the five aspects of the culture of power as described by Delpit (1988), I contend that her notion that those with "less power are often most aware of its existence" (p. 283) is much more complex. An alternative view is that individuals with little or no power are often as unaware of their status in society as those with power. People with little or no power have, to an extent, grown to believe that their social status is a circumstance of birth and therefore they do not have the power, or the entitlement, to change (Freire, 2009; Bourdieu, 1984). Such perceptions can be explained through what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as habitus.

Habitus can best be described as perceptions and behaviors that are created and reinforced by social norms (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu (1984), habitus is reproduced unconsciously and becomes mentally inscribed through language, education, religion, and cultural symbols. In addition, habitus allows for divisions in social powers and can lead to "misrecognition." Bourdieu (1984) describes misrecognition as a false sense of consciousness in which systems of power are reinforced through cultural beliefs and social perceptions. It takes a deep level of consciousness, and is some instances a change in environment, to unravel this misconception (Freire, 2009; Bourdieu, 1984).

Similarly, McIntosh (1988) and Delpit (1988) have both described systems of power and privilege and demonstrate how such systems can exist unconsciously and become socially accepted. Furthermore, both have described coming to a personal level of consciousness that empowered them as teachers to want to change these views. I believe such consciousness could, and should, be cultivated by community colleges since community colleges service, in large part, marginalized populations such as women and people of color.

The Role of Community College

Historically community colleges were designed and uniquely positioned to serve the needs of marginalized populations and serve as catalysts for educational reform. Each institution adopts its own mission, but shares similar goals and traditions. Vaughan (2006), in *The Community College Story,* conveyed that most community colleges are committed to:

- serving all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy that offers equal and fair treatment to all students;
- implementing a comprehensive educational program;
- serving its community as a community-based institution of higher education;
- teaching; and
- lifelong learning.

Hence, community colleges were designed to provide opportunities of higher education to a broad and diverse population.

A distinctive feature of community colleges is their accessibility to non-traditional college students. Non-traditional students include students of color, students of low socio-economic status, women, single parents, English language learners, and underprepared students. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2011), “Since 1985, more than half of all community college students have been women. In addition, the majority of Black and Hispanic undergraduate students in this country study at these colleges” (para. 1). In providing a number of curricular functions, such as vocational and technical training, community colleges offer educational opportunities to individuals otherwise excluded from four-year institutions.

The Women’s International Center attests that “Traditionally a middle-class girl in Western culture tended to learn from her mother's example that cooking, cleaning, and caring for children were the behaviors expected of her when she grew up” (1994, para. 8). Hence, middle-class women were systematically discriminated from many institutions of higher education because their prescribed gender roles did not require formal education. Women of color were also denied access to higher education due to widespread discrimination and racism. Institutions that did admit women required higher aptitude scores and often limited women to gender differentiated programs such as home economics and nursing. Community colleges became attractive alternatives for women because of their open-access admissions, low cost, flexible schedules, and range of curricular functions.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2011) released a report indicating that community colleges currently educate more than half of the nation’s undergraduate students, of which more than half are women. In their quest to educate marginalized populations, community colleges also inherit many of the social and educational challenges of their students and service areas. These challenges include consideration for learning curves of students who score below state proficiency averages for reading and writing. Chong (as cited in Whissemore, 2010) recognizes the challenges faced by community college students and contends that "Two-thirds of incoming community college students need extra help in some area" (para. 3). Therefore, one prominent curricular function of community colleges that cannot be disregarded is that of developmental education. Basic skills are enhanced by offering remedial courses in reading, writing, and math.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) provide several explanations for the evolution of developmental education in the United States. One explanation is the decline in literacy requirements in American school systems and an overall reduction in scholastic standards:

> Not only were students taking less science, math, English, and history, but in the academic classes they did take, the amount of work assigned and the standard to which it was held deteriorated as well. Furthermore, the texts used in secondary schools and two-year colleges became more simplistic. . . . The expectation for student writing had dropped so low that students wrote at most a few pages in any course (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, pp. 258-259).

Furthermore, school systems within urban and poor school districts have continuously failed to meet Annual Yearly Progress. Students graduating from urban school districts often read and write below college level and are required to enroll in remedial education. Many become discouraged with having to take courses that are not related to their field of interest and, as a result, drop out within their first year.

Community colleges have embarked on a national initiative to increase the number of students earning college certificates and degrees by 50% within the next 10 years (AACC, 2011). Referred to as the "College Completion Challenge," and committed to the "Democracy's Colleges: Call to Action" statement, community colleges are tasked with reevaluating open access, student retention initiatives, pedagogy, and student success. The statement reads:

> We affirm the need for a dramatic increase in the number of Americans with postsecondary degrees and certifications to fulfill critical state and national goals. With the "completion agenda" as a national imperative, community colleges have an obligation to meet the challenge while holding firmly to traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality (AACC, 2011).

Traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality ensure that nontraditional students and those otherwise excluded by four-year institutions, such as women, be provided an opportunity to higher education. But maintaining traditional values means seeking new ways to conquer old challenges. If community colleges seek to increase college graduates by 50%, they need to be more effective at reaching and understanding diverse students, specifically those utilizing non-Standard English.

Philosophical Lens

My study aimed to demonstrate that women in community colleges might be unaware of the implications associated with the use of non-Standard English, which, in turn, may hamper their ability to succeed academically or professionally. Furthermore, I aimed to demonstrate that women of color feel pressured to acquire language patterns socially ascribed to white middle-class women. Women of color who fail to utilize language patterns ascribed to white middle-class women are looked upon as incompetent. Since it is my strong belief that women of color in community colleges lack the level of consciousness necessary to understand implications of white privilege as it relates to the use of language, my study was conducted through the philosophical lens of "advocacy/participatory."

Advocacy/participatory worldview aims to provide marginalized populations with a voice and to empower them through advocacy and reform. Creswell (2009) notes that the advocacy/participatory worldview "focuses on the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised" (p. 9). This approach establishes a context in which institutionalized issues of race, gender, social class, and privilege and how they affect women of color in community colleges can be addressed. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) provide four features to be considered when applying this perspective:

1. Advocacy/participatory research is recursive or dialectical and focuses on bringing about change in practices. Thus, at the end of advocacy/participatory studies, researchers advance an action agenda for change.
2. The form of inquiry is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures and in the relationships of power in educational settings. Advocacy/participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society, such as the lack of empowerment.
3. It is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. The

advocacy/participatory studies aim to create a political debate and discussion so that change will occur.

4. It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed with others rather than on or to others. In this spirit, advocacy/participatory authors engage the participants as active collaborators in their inquiries.

Advocacy/participatory worldview best suits my study because I sought to raise awareness amongst women in community colleges about the importance of the use of Standard English in the classroom and professional settings and to give women of color in community colleges a voice to express the complexities of acquiring such language patterns without losing their sense of identity. I also aimed to encourage community colleges to develop pedagogical strategies that empower women of color by fostering the acquisition of Standard English and providing students with diverse learning environments.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory derived from critical legal studies in the mid 1970's when a number of legal scholars and social activists began to challenge the gains of the civil rights movement by examining laws through the analytical lens of race and power (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is argued that the very laws written to address racism and discrimination opposed in the civil rights movement socially benefited those in power and perpetuated social inequalities. Hence, critical race theory seeks to "unmask and expose racism in its various permutations" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Critical race theory also seeks to transform social views and alter power structures that marginalize people of color. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) best explain this dimension of advocacy in the following excerpt:

> It [critical race theory] not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (p. 2).

Critical race theorists contend that racism is embedded within the American society and is perpetuated by power structures, such as the legal and educational system, that need to be exposed and transformed.

Within the educational system, critical race theory is utilized to understand issues such as equal access, leadership, curriculum, instruction, funding, student assessment, and equal opportunity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Public education has been criticized by scholars as a mechanism to maintain White supremacy and perpetuate the marginalization of people of color by legitimizing inequities (Delpit, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). One example of this strategy is the white-washing of curriculum or master scripting. "Master scripting means stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Hence, textbooks and curriculum content distort or omit the roles of people of color in the building of American society.

In addition to master scripting, teachers are taught instructional strategies believed to be effective on all students regardless of race or culture. Critical race theory maintains that when instructional strategies prove ineffective for a group of students, it is the students who are viewed as deficient, not the instructional technique (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Master scripting and generic instructional strategies position students of color at a disadvantage since the curriculum and strategies are not reflective of their unique cultures or their daily experiences. Hence, students of color are often presumed to be "at-risk" and in need of remediation.

In order to provide students of color voice and dispel the notion that students of color are academically deficient, critical race theorists believe in the power of "narrative inquiry" or storytelling. Ladson-Billings (1998) explains that:

> The use of voice or "naming your reality" is a way that CRT [critical race theory] links form and substance in scholarship. CRT scholars use parables, chronicles, stories, counter stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine. (p. 13)

Within education, storytelling plays an important role in providing students of color a way to communicate their unique experiences and to apply their knowledge toward understanding the intricacies of racism.

This study utilizes critical race theory to understand the perceptions of women of color attending community college as they relate to language use, language perceptions, and language acquisition. In addition, this study provides women of color with a voice to express the complexities associated with acquiring and utilizing Standard English without losing their sense of identities. The actual research methodology, including a description of how these stories were collected, is included in the forthcoming chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Data Organization and Analysis

This chapter details the research methodology and includes a description of the qualitative research strategies, study site, study participants, data collection, data organization and analysis.

Qualitative Research Strategy

A qualitative research strategy consisting of a critical self-narrative, classroom observations, and faculty and student interviews is utilized in this study. These research strategies were selected because they allow for in depth explorations and rich dialogue; both are necessary in order to understand and properly explain experiences of others. In addition, qualitative research is best suited for studies that seek to explore or understand perceptions (Creswell, 2009). My study seeks to understand the perceptions of women of color as it relates to their use of language inside and outside of the classroom and how their perceptions may impact their ability to succeed academically and professionally.

It is my belief that women of color have a unique story to tell regarding their use of language. Therefore, my study attempts to provide these women a voice by documenting their perspectives of language use as well as their individual experiences as they navigate through higher education. Former studies related to language use in higher education typically consider gender and how classroom participation is impacted by socially constructed language patterns of men and women (Hyde & Deal, 2003; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Tannen, 1992). Stories from my study differ from those relayed in former research because they derive from a unique intersection of race, class, and gender and demonstrate how the culture of power and institutionalized racism continues to impact women of color attempting to enter the workforce or transfer to four-year institutions. Participants of this study were African American, Hispanic, or women of mixed races and are referred to as "women of color" throughout.

Study Site

The study was conducted in an urban community college located in an industrial Midwestern city that provides educational programs for residents who are predominately people of color. In 2011, Midwest Community College reported approximately 22,000 students enrolled at the study site of which 79% were enrolled part-time, 68% were women, 59% were African-American, 19% were Caucasian, 2% were Hispanic, 4% were of mixed race, and 16% were reported as unknown. Over 80% of the student population received financial aid and 57% were within the ages of 18 and 34.

Written authorization to utilize this site was obtained from the Division of Institutional Effectiveness and the Campus President. Consent was also obtained from the instructors on record and students enrolled for each class observed. Participation in the interview phase was voluntary and there were no direct or indirect consequences for choosing not to participate. Furthermore, there was no compensation for participation in any phase of this study for any participants.

Study Participants

Study participants were selected from three sections of a face-to-face medical ethics course. This course was purposely selected because it is considered a requisite for most Allied Health and Nursing Programs at Midwest Community College. Allied Health and Nursing programs incorporate clinical or practicum assignments that take place in hospitals, nursing and assisted living homes, pharmacies, and medical or dental clinics. The actual clinical sites are assigned by the state and students may be placed in urban, rural, or suburban settings. Some programs require that students be placed in more than one setting in order to ensure they are able to apply their training to diverse populations. How students use language in these programs is of particular interest because students are expected to acquire not only the didactic knowledge necessary to perform specific tasks, but the communicative competence necessary to work effectively with hospital personnel and patients of all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses.

Seat capacities for each course were set at 36 students. None of the classes observed enrolled the maximum number of students. Such enrollment rates are low in comparison to other semesters and are believed to be attributed to shifts in student demographics, higher employment rates for the region, and changes to federal requirements for financial aid. Class one had a maximum number of 22 students in attendance during the observation period, while class two and three had a maximum of 13 and six students respectively. A total of 41 students were observed within the observation phase.

Of the 41 students observed, 35 were female and six were male. Class one had a total of 19 female students of which two were Caucasian, 16 were African-American, and one was Arab-American. There were no Hispanic, African (non-American), or Asian-American women in class one. Class two had a total of ten female students of which eight were African-American, one was Arab-American, and one was Hispanic. There were no Caucasian, African (non-American), or Asian-American women in class two. Class three was the smallest class observed with a total of six female students of which four were African-American, one was Arab-American, and one was African (non-American). There were no Caucasian, Hispanic, or Asian-American women in class three. Cumulatively, there were two Caucasian, 28 African-American, three Arab-American, one Hispanic, and one African (non-American) female during the observation phase.

There were three males enrolled in class one, three males enrolled in class two, and no men enrolled in class three. Class one had two African-American men and one Asian-American man. There were no Caucasian, Arab-American, Hispanic, or African (non-American) men in class one. Class two had one Caucasian, one African-American, and one Arab-American man. There were no Hispanic, African (non-American), or Asian-American men in class two. Cumulatively, there were a total of one Caucasian, three African-American, one Arab-American, and one Asian-American men in the observation phase.

Data Collection

Classroom observations. Classroom observations were employed in order to explore how students and faculty of an urban community college communicate with and amongst each other. A total of three courses were observed for six consecutive class sessions. Each session was audio recorded for future reference. Field notes were written during the observations and analytical memos written immediately after. Classroom maps were created to provide a visual image of where men and women were seated in relation to each other, in relation to the instructor, and in relation to race. Classroom maps were also utilized to document participation trends amongst gender and race. Each student was coded “F” for female or “M” for male with a secondary code denoting their respective race. A tick mark was placed above the student’s code each time he/she participated in class. Classroom maps were then evaluated for trends across the three courses.

Each course was taught by an adjunct faculty member who has been employed by the institution for a minimum of three years. The faculty member for class one was an Arab-American female in her late thirties who was fluent in both English and Arabic. Class two was taught by an African-American female in her early sixties whose sole language was English. Class three was taught by an African-American male also in his early sixties whose sole language was English. Language observed in class three was also non-Standard English. The average number of students in each observation session was seventeen, ten, and five respectively.

Student interviews. The purpose of student interviews was to develop an understanding of how women of color attending community college perceived their use of language inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, student interviews also provided insight on factors perceived by participants that could facilitate their acquisition of Standard English as well as factors perceived as hindrances not only to the acquisition of Standard English, but to their ability to meet academic and professional goals. To that end, the interview protocol (Appendix 1) was developed with preliminary questions related to the following themes: demographics, communication in class, communication outside of school, and developing language skills. All of the questions, with the exception of questions pertaining to demographics, were open-ended and allowed students to provide in-depth responses.

Student interviews were conducted in a private office following the six-week observation phase. Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym in order to maintain anonymity. Consent to audio record each interview was verbally obtained and notes were taken throughout the interview. Audio-recordings were transcribed and securely stored in electronic format. Member checking was also employed to ensure proper interpretation and validity.

Women attending the three observed classes were asked to participate in the interview phase. Although a total of 16 women expressed an interest in interviewing, only 13 agreed to an interview appointment of which 11 actually interviewed. Ten participants identified themselves as African-American in terms of race. One identified herself as bi-racial (Black/White). Ten students classified themselves as African-American in terms of ethnicity, while one classified herself as "mixed" identifying with Haitian, Puerto Rican and Mexican ethnicities. Participant ages range from 17-50 years old with a median age of 34.

Additionally, all 11 participants were raised in an urban city and nine remained in the same environment in which they were raised. Two students recall traveling back and forth to southern states as children, but currently lived in the same urban city as Midwest Community College. Nine received public assistance as children and currently received federal aid for their college tuition. Two students currently do not live in the city and currently live outside of the socio-economic bracket in which they were raised. Both pay for their tuition either with cash or tuition reimbursement from their place of employment.

Each participant attended public school for most of his or her early education. One student was transferred to a prestigious private school during her senior year of high school and one student is a dual-enrollment student and currently attends a high performing high school considered a public school of choice. Ten students have attained a high school diploma or GED. Two have acquired a degree in higher education and are working on a second degree.

Grade Point Average (GPA) at Midwest Community College is based on a 4.0 scale. The lowest GPA amongst participants was a 1.8; the highest GPA is 3.8, with an average GPA of 3.4 and a mode GPA of 3.0. Credits earned amongst participants range from eight to 132 with six students earning 60 or more credits; the minimum number of credits required for an Associate Degree.

Faculty interview. Faculty interviews were intended to obtain faculty perceptions of language use in the classroom. In addition, faculty that teach medical ethics are typically employed in health related professions and can provide insight on their perceptions of students' use of language inside of the classroom and how language may impact their ability to communicate effectively in the field. Hence, faculty members of the three observed classes were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews. Of the three instructors, only one agreed to participate in a face-to-face interview. The interview was conducted in a private office and audio-recorded with verbal consent from the instructor. Interview questions were open-ended to allow for in-depth responses (Appendix 2). Notes were taken throughout the interview. Notes and audio-recordings were transcribed and securely stored in electronic format. Member checking was employed to ensure proper interpretation and validity of responses. A pseudonym was selected by the faculty member to ensure anonymity. There was no compensation or consequences for her participation.

Data Organization

Initial concepts for this study derived from a thorough literature review and preliminary research questions. Classroom maps, field notes, and analytic memos for each classroom observation were hand written and organized first by section and then by date and time in a three ring binder. Handwritten notes documented student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student interactions as well as interactions across gender for each class session and included both formal and informal interactions.

Audio recordings of classroom observations, student interviews, and faculty interviews were transcribed and stored electronically. Hard copies were printed and stored in a three ring binder with its corresponding hand-written notes. Data collection, analysis, and initial study propositions occurred simultaneously in an effort to develop a well organized and coherent interpretation of the data obtained.

Generating themes. Initial coding consisted of reviewing literature for similar key words or concepts. Articles were then sorted into two broad categories: language and gender, and language and power. In the category of language and gender were Bell, McCarther and McNamara (2006), Hyde and Deal (2003), Tannen and Kendall (2001), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), and Tannen (1992). The following theory-generated themes were identified:

1) Men participate more than women in traditional classrooms.
2) Women use personal anecdotes when participating in classroom discussion considered hostile or controversial.
3) Men utilize ritual opposition and debate when participating in classroom discussion.
4) Women participate more in classroom discussions when they are in the majority.

In the category of language of power were Enright (2011), Labov (2010), Gee (2008, 2008b, 2003), Lindblom (2005), Schleppegrall (2001) Ladson-Billings (2000), Delpit (1992), and McIntosh (1989). The following theory-generated themes were identified:

1) Utilization of Standard and non-Standard English have social implications tied to power.
2) Academic success correlates with one's ability to utilize and comprehend Standard English.
3) Low socio-economic students most commonly learn and utilize non-Standard dialects of English, which differs from language used in textbooks and instructional materials.
4) Standard English can be taught and acquired by understanding the culture of power.

A grid was created and referred to during classroom observations. Code "TG" was written on classroom maps to denote when theory-generated themes were observed. Classroom maps were later analyzed for recurring themes across course sections and amongst gender and race. Data were coded first by themes associated with language and gender and a second time by themes associated with language and power. Analysis of the data obtained from classroom observations and student/faculty interviews resulted in three emergent themes.

First, students realize that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English, which causes students to feel split between cultures. In such cases, students are aware that the language spoken in urban communities differs from the language spoken in the professional realm or outside of the urban environment. Furthermore, these students are aware that there is a social expectation that they speak non-Standard English because non-Standard English is socially associated with their race and culture. Utilizing Standard English alienates them from their peers and makes them feel split between their culture and the culture outside of their environment.

Second, the realization that Standard English and non-Standard English is valued differently results in the conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually. These students are aware that the way they speak will determine how they are perceived by those around them and as a result, code-switch between non-Standard and Standard English. Some students indicated that although they were not sure if they were utilizing Standard English, they consciously attempted to adapt their use of language to the language being spoken around them.

Third, content knowledge is privileged over language usage by both students and faculty of community college. Students indicated that learning course content would allow them to be successful in their field. This was also noted by instructors who were mostly concerned with students learning course objectives and put little or no emphasis on the language used in the classroom. Yet learning course content is insufficient in Allied Health and Nursing professions, which expect students to not only perform tasks appropriately, but also speak Standard English and adhere to specific mannerisms. This is best understood through an assessment of current program examination pass rates and input provided to Midwest Community College from clinical preceptors and university partners.

For instance, 100% of the Surgical Technology students passed their national exams in 2012; 100% of the Dental Hygiene students passed state examinations and 93% passed national examinations in 2012; and 84% of the Nursing students passed national examinations in 2012 (Institutional Effectiveness Third Party Examination Report, 2013). Such pass rates are a clear indicator that although students may struggle with the verbal utilization of Standard English, they are able to learn and retain critical course content necessary to successfully pass examinations written in Standard English.

Unfortunately the ability to pass such examinations is not an indicator of student success beyond Midwest Community College. Area universities report high levels of failure and attrition rates for students entering equivalent bachelor level career programs. Maple University reported a combined attrition and dropout rate of 93% of the students who transferred from Midwest Community College; a mere 7% was retained from year one to year two. City University also reported attrition and dropout rates of approximately 75% of the students transferring from Midwest Community College. Under preparedness in reading comprehension, composition, mathematics, and sciences were attributed to these rates.

Chapter four will present the data collected in the study and demonstrate how each of these themes emerged.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

Chapter four addresses the research question by presenting overall findings and demonstrating how they emerged in the study. Chapter four also addresses the study's sub-questions.

Overall Findings: Addressing the Research Questions

The central research question I aimed to answer was: How do women of color perceive the role of language in shaping their experiences and their success at the community college?

In order to address the research question, classroom observations, a faculty interview and 11 student interviews were conducted. Data collected from observations and interviews revealed three themes. First, students realize that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English, which causes students to feel split between cultures. Second, the realization that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English results in the conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually. Third, content knowledge is privileged over language usage by both students and faculty.

Standard English is Valued Differently than non-Standard English

Standard English was perceived by participants as a language that was valued differently than non-Standard English. Christi, Britanny, Dee, Nefa, Laura, Marla, Taylor, Earnestine, Paige, and Sophie each defined Standard English as "the proper way to speak" and associated its use with language utilized outside of their community or within a professional realm. Marla defined Standard English as "the language heard on the news," while Nefa described it as "speaking with good pronunciation." Paige referred to Standard English as "basic English learned in school" and Laura contended that "Standard English involved speaking correctly, with diction and fluidity."

For each of these students, Standard English was perceived as having a higher social value when compared to non-Standard English. Standard English was perceived as the proper way to speak. Yet classroom observations demonstrated that most students utilized a combination of Standard and non-Standard English during classroom discussions with non-Standard English predominating before and after class. Classroom observations also demonstrated that students who were more apt to utilize Standard English were less likely to participate in classroom discussions than students who utilized non-Standard English.

For instance, Laura consistently utilized Standard English during all junctures of the class and began the semester by sitting in the front middle aisle. Within three classroom observations, Laura rarely participated in class and had voluntarily moved her seat from the front of the classroom to the rear. In addition, Laura did not appear to hold conversations with classmates before or after class. During her interview, Laura described how her normative use of Standard English made her feel isolated from her peers.

Laura. Laura is twenty-two years old and described herself as African American in terms of race, but mixed in terms of ethnicity. Her ethnic background includes Haitian, Puerto Rican, and Mexican. Physically, Laura appears to be, and is perceived by others, as African American. She holds a bachelor's degree, but enrolled at Midwest Community College in order to take a pre-requisite course for a nursing program at a private four-year institution. This is the only class Laura has taken at Midwest Community College and she does not anticipate returning for subsequent semesters since her goal is to continue her education at the private institution. She maintains a 3.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale and does not receive federal aid as both her parents hold professional jobs.

During the interview, I asked Laura a series of questions related to her perceptions of how she utilized language at home, school and outside of school such as with peers or at work. Laura explained that she considered her language use to be Standard English. She attributed this to her parents' insistence on her attaining higher education. Both parents immigrated to the United States, learned English and went on to attain degrees. Although she attended public school in urban schools for most of her life, her parents' reinforced the importance of utilizing Standard English.

Laura found her use of language to be at conflict with the language used by her peers, which made her feel isolated. During her interview, Laura explained:

> There've been times when I've been in class, this isn't the first community college I've been to, or just in casual conversation with certain people and they'll ask me, 'Are you proper or do you feel like, oh I don't know, almost like better than other people?', but that's certainly not where I am coming from. It's just the way I talk.

When asked why she discontinued her participation in class Laura responded:

> Students here speak more relaxed. I want them to feel comfortable around me. My use of language might intimidate them so I make a conscious effort not to speak. I always feel like I have to try to adapt to them in order to be loyal to them.

Laura disclosed that attempting to adapt to her peers involved modifying her language from Standard to non-Standard English, which left her feeling disloyal to what she considered her identity.

During her senior year, Laura was transferred to a private high school and went from attending a predominately African American school to a predominately Caucasian school. Laura believed she would be able to adapt easily to her new school due to similar socio-economic status and similar use of language. Yet this was not the case. Although she excelled academically and spoke Standard English, Laura felt that teachers viewed her as being less knowledgeable and rarely called on her to participate in class. Laura recounts:

> I would raise my hand, but they wouldn't call on me. I finally stopped raising my hand. I didn't really fit in when I went to the all Black school because it was like everyone knew I was mixed. Students would even say I had an accent. I thought I would fit in at my new school, but I didn't; to them I was Black.

In tears Laura went on to say, "I try to be loyal to both sides, but I don't want to feel like I have to pick a side in order for others to be comfortable."

It is evident that Laura perceives her use of language to differ from that utilized amongst students at her former high school and within Midwest Community College. Nonetheless, Laura considers Standard English to be of high value and extremely important in attaining her educational and professional goals. Standard English, she believes, is perceived by society as a sign of authority and competence; an ideal she attributes to her upbringing. Laura explained that Standard English, for her, is the way she was raised to speak. There was not an alternate or non-Standard language utilized in her home. Laura explained:

> When my dad came to America, he was very firm on learning how to speak and stay in the culture and pick up on things and, you know, you don't ever want anyone to look down on you for not being competent, not being a functional American, so, yes, my parents have always ingrained that in me… 'speak properly, you're educated, you know how to speak'… .

Being a functional, or respected, American meant being able to speak Standard English. As a result, Laura struggled with language in her early years of public schooling where pop culture and slang were the norm amongst her peers. Now that she is older, Laura continues to feel as if she doesn't quit fit in. She explained how she is constantly questioned about her race and ethnicity and how she makes concessions in order to make others feel comfortable around her. When asked how this reality makes her feel, Laura responded with one word, "torn." For Laura, Standard English was valued differently than non-Standard English, yet its utilization emphasized dual consciousness and caused her to feel split between two cultures that make up her identity.

Earnestine described a similar phenomenon of dual consciousness, but unlike Laura who valued and consistently utilized Standard English inside and outside of the classroom, Earnestine utilized non-Standard English with the perception that Standard English occurred outside of her social realm. Additionally, Earnestine described a negative view of her instructor whom she believed was intentionally being deceitful by utilizing Standard English when classroom observations were conducted and non-Standard English in the absence of classroom observations. Earnestine recognized that Standard and non-Standard English were valued differently, yet perceived non-Standard English as the language that connected her to her peers and the community in which she lived.

Earnestine. Earnestine was forty-five years old and identified herself as African American. She indicated that she enrolled at Midwest Community College in order to take courses toward a new career. Her grade point average was a 2.8 and she had earned over 100 credits. During her interview she identified several career programs she was interested in, yet only one was offered at Midwest Community College and was a short-term certificate. Earnestine was not employed and received federal aid to pay for college. Her last employment was Federal Work Study. She seemed eager to respond to my questions, but was very short with her responses at times.

When asked regarding her use of language in class, Earnestine stated that she tried to adapt to the language being used in school and described her language use in the classroom as "just normal, not proper. I use whatever students are using." Yet classroom observations revealed that Earnestine often struggled with language and had been corrected by her instructor on at least five occasions during my classroom visits. Earnestine almost always responded to her instructor by saying "I'm from the south. We talk that way in the south." When I asked her about these occurrences she appeared agitated by the question. After a short pause, she responded:

> I try to adapt to how my teacher talk, but she talk like she wanna be something that she's not. She's pretending when you are there. When you aren't there she is more 'ghetto' and doesn't correct me.

Earnestine perceived her instructor as using Standard English during classroom observations and non-Standard English on days that classroom observations were not conducted. Furthermore, Earnestine attributed a particular identity to her instructor, which was dependent upon the language the instructor was utilizing.

During instances in which non-Standard English was utilized by her instructor, Earnestine referred to her as being "ghetto." Ironically, Earnestine self-identified with the culture of non-Standard English and admitted to utilizing it on a daily basis. "I'm one to short-cut it [language]. Most people don't talk proper. That [Standard English] is like a foreign language." Hence, when Standard English was utilized by the instructor, Earnestine considered her instructor to be pretentious. Earnestine recounted:

> I have no idea who she is trying to be like. She is like two different people. Now when you were sitting in the classroom, I had never seen *that* person.

It is also evident that although Earnestine realized that Standard and non-Standard English were valued differently, she disassociated herself from the culture of Standard English since it was not a language utilized within the environment she communicated in. As a result, Earnestine did not feel it was important to learn Standard English. Earnestine contended:

> I know how to talk correctly, but I adapt to my environment. However they talk, I talk. Community college don't use Standard English. Maybe in the university, but not here.

I asked Earnestine if it worried her that the community college did not reinforce Standard English. She replied that it was not of concern since it was not utilized by most individuals and she believed she could adapt to whatever language was being used in her presence.

To better understand her statement, I provided Earnestine with a mock scenario outside of the community college setting in which one goes to work in a hospital located in a wealthy suburb. I inquired whether the lack of Standard English would prohibit her from being able to communicate effectively. Earnestine did not believe it would affect her ability to communicate effectively reiterating that she would be able to adapt to the environment. I rephrased the question so that I was inquiring about a peer who could not utilize language contextually. Earnestine provided the following response:

> At first they wouldn't because that's foreign language to them [Standard English]... They need to observe everything. Observe everything for maybe a week. Some people is a little longer… They should be ok if they just listen to what's going on.

Earnestine perceived Standard English as a linguistic code that could be learned through observation and emulation. Although she indicated that she was able to utilize Standard English, I did not observe evidence of such use either during class observations or during the interview phase.

Based on her explanations and our interactions, Earnestine appeared to utilize variations of non-Standard English. Her disassociation from Standard English and strong feelings toward her instructor when she perceived her instructor, an African American woman, utilizing Standard English, illustrated how Standard English emphasizes dual consciousness. Unlike Laura, who described a sense of loyalty toward both cultures, Earnestine was critical of those who utilized Standard English although she realized that Standard English was valued differently than non-Standard English because she viewed Standard English speakers as individuals outside of her social realm. Individuals within her social realm who utilized Standard English were perceived by her as being disingenuous.

Paige. Paige also realized that Standard English was valued differently than non-Standard English and, like Laura, felt split between two cultures. Yet, unlike Earnestine, Paige acknowledged that Standard English was necessary to maneuver through higher education. Paige enrolled at Midwest Community College as part of the Dual Enrollment Program, which allows high school students to take high school and college courses simultaneously. She was a senior in high school and had completed 12 college credits through the Dual Enrollment Program. Her Midwest Community College grade point average was a 3.0. Paige anticipated graduating from high school and transferring to a four-year institution where she would like to study pre-med.

During classroom observations, Paige was always the first student to arrive and sat in the same seat every week. She appeared to be fascinated by my presence in the classroom and always had a number of questions to ask ranging from the study itself to what motivated me to pursue higher education. Once class was in session, Paige withdrew to taking notes in a spiral notebook and only spoke if she was called upon by the instructor. When asked about her level of participation, Paige stated, "I'm shy and young so I just try to observe. I just don't want to say the wrong thing." However, Paige's interview suggested that her lack of participation was directly tied to her feelings of dual consciousness.

Paige was bi-racial. Her mother was Caucasian and her father African-American. She had a medium complexion and long wavy hair. Like Laura, she described being questioned about her race and ethnicity. Paige considered herself middle-class and although neither parent had a formal degree, both parents were employed in the automotive industry. Pursuing a college degree was not an option for Paige, but an expectation. She lived within city limits that bordered a suburb and described her neighborhood as diverse in race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Paige was very mature for her age. Had she not revealed her age, I would have assumed she was a traditional college student. When asked about her use of language at home in comparison to school or work, Paige stated the following:

> I speak the same all of the time. Just like I'm speaking to you. A lot of Black people try to act and talk white. I even know a Black guy that hot combs his hair so he can look white. They get around a different group of people and they talk funny. They try to fit in I guess. I'm mixed so I'm just trying to be me. I'm not going to do that. I just stay to myself.

Paige resolved to isolating herself in an attempt to maintain her identity as a person of mixed race. She perceived her African American peers as attempting to utilize Standard English in order to be accepted by non-African American students who attended their school.

Furthermore, Paige alleged that her high school instructors were indifferent towards her. She described her high school as "white" and stated that most of her friends were "Black." When asked regarding her relationship with her instructors, Paige paused. She looked at me as if she wanted to cry and slowly recounted:

> I'm nervous around them [high school instructors]. I try to talk to them, but I don't feel comfortable. It's like they don't care. Like I'm not as valuable as a white student and I don't like talking to them. Here it's different. Teachers can relate to me. I feel like I won't be judged.

Her response provoked me to revisit one of the initial interview questions, "If you feel that teachers here can relate to you and you won't be judged, then why don't you participate more in class?" Paige responded, "I could participate more. I don't because I talk and sound different." Paige's use of language fluctuates from Standard to non-Standard English, yet her perception is accurate in that she speaks differently in comparison to other students in her class.

Paige recognized a difference in the way she spoke in comparison to students at her high school and students at Midwest Community College. Additionally, she did not wish to share that her reluctance to participate in class was a result of her interactions with her high school instructors. Nonetheless, Paige recognized that Standard English is important in attaining her educational and professional goals. She states, "I know I will need to speak it [Standard English] when I get a job and I will need to learn it for when I go to the university. I have to learn to communicate with both groups."

Learning to communicate effectively with diverse populations involves utilizing language contextually. Based on my own experience, the process for learning to utilize language contextually is complex as it involves clearly defining and understanding one's own identity. Additionally, it not only involves acquisition of Standard English, but involves learning the mannerisms associated with the culture of power and having the confidence to apply both without feeling split between two cultures.

Conscious Utilization of Standard and non-Standard English Contextually

In order to address social implications and in an attempt to gain social acceptance and success, students described contextual use of language based on the environment in which they were in. Sophie, Taylor, Marla, Angie, Christi, Britanny, Paige, and Dee consciously adapted language, to the best of their abilities, to mirror the language used by those around them. Sophie and Taylor each contended that they utilized Standard English in the classroom and at work, while reverting to non-Standard English at home. Marla, Angie, Christi, Britanny, Paige, and Dee did not consider the language utilized during classroom discussion as Standard English, but they believed that the language they used when they were outside of their communities differed from the language they spoke within their community.

When asked whether the utilization of Standard English was important, each of the women believed it was and attributed its importance to social implications of language use. Standard English was viewed as the language utilized in the professional realm as well as the language utilized outside of their communities. The inability to utilize Standard English was believed to carry negative connotations that would hinder students from attaining professional goals. Hence, students' awareness of social implications of language use resulted in the conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually.

Sophie. Sophie was 39 years old and identified herself as African-American or Black. She preferred the term Black because she believed African-American was "so intermixed." She had been attending Midwest Community College for several years and had earned approximately 60 credit hours. Her tuition was paid for by her place of employment through tuition reimbursement benefits. Sophie had a 3.8 grade point average and aspired to be a surgical technologist. She foresaw continuing her education and ultimately earning a bachelor's degree in science or in a medical field.

Sophie sat in the front of the classroom and participated quite often. She was sometimes overlooked because she had a tendency to raise her hand and waited to be called on before speaking. She had a quiet voice, but was one of the few students who appeared to be consistently prepared for class. Sophie admitted that the textbook was hard for her to read and that occasionally she had a hard time articulating her views. Sophie explained how she had learned to deal with this dilemma:

> It's [pauses] challenging. I actually made kind of a cheat sheet. I took definitions from the Webster's Dictionary Online and defined the things that weren't defined clearly to me. I took examples from the book to explain to me what they [the author] meant and that helped a lot… Sometimes it's a little difficult to put the words in the right way when you're trying to express what you're trying to say. If the idea comes to me before I'm speaking, I take a little bit more time to figure out how I want to say it. If it happens while I'm speaking, then I'll think of an example to try to explain it better.

Sophie contended that was important to express yourself "as best as possible" because others may judge you by the way you speak. As a result, she continuously looked for ways to improve her vocabulary and consistently utilized what she described as a formal tone when outside of her home. Sophie not only realized that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English, but also consciously utilized each language contextually.

When asked about the language used at home, Sophie described it as "more relaxed," but said she would switch to Standard English when she wanted to make a serious point. For instance, she explained:

> Sometimes I have small kids in my house on the weekends so sometimes I might use a little slang with them. Sometimes I may use extremely proper English to make a point about how they're speaking to try to make them aware of what they're saying and how

they're saying it and how that could be either a hindrance or an aid to getting what they want.

Sophie demonstrated awareness of social implications of language use and, therefore, attempted to adapt to the environment in which she was. She also attempted to teach children how to use language contextually. Sophie indicted that she learned to use language contextually by living in an inter-generational home in which children were raised to respect elders. Respect, according to Sophie, included speaking "properly." Sophie believed her classmates viewed community college as an extension to high school. "They have no perception of what respect is. They are not going to succeed. Society doesn't tolerate it." Sophie's awareness of social implications and the value attributed to Standard English drove her to utilize language contextually.

Taylor. Taylor also utilized language contextually and indicated that she often "filtered" her language in order to avoid negative stereotypes associated with non-Standard English speakers. Standard English was recognized as having a different value than non-Standard English, particularly in the professional setting, and therefore required individuals to utilize language contextually. Taylor was 43 years old and classified herself as African-American. She enrolled at Midwest Community College to purse a degree in nursing and held a 3.5 grade point average. Taylor indicated that she participated in class often and had little to no difficulty articulating her views. Although classroom observations depicted moderate participation, Taylor, for the most part, appeared to utilize Standard English, but would switch to non-Standard English when utilizing personal anecdotes as examples or when speaking with peers before and after class.

When asked regarding her language use in class, Taylor indicated that she adapted her language according to the language utilized by the instructor. She recounted,

> If you go into a classroom where the instructor is more formal, then you should follow their pace. I have a tendency to speak up, you know in a more professional matter, but it's the instructor that sets the tone or culture of the class.

Taylor believed it was important that instructors utilize Standard English when delivering instruction because she believed students looked up to instructors and would attempt to emulate them if held to that standard. She stated,

> Instructors should be forced to use Standard English… They should help us build our vocabulary. If you correct them, the young people will correct themselves if you tell them it's [non-Standard English] inappropriate. I think it's connected to the environment. I worked at a young age and was around professional people. That's why it's important that faculty watch how they speak. Students pay attention to words!

Taylor also suggested that she utilized Standard English at her place of employment, the hospital. Although she believed that society utilized a more relaxed form of language, Taylor acknowledged that there were rules in the workplace, which required you to utilize language contextually. She explained:

> If I'm at home I can speak however I want or as relaxed as I want. At work there are consequences… so I filter, you know, my hat switches automatically to work mode.

When asked why she perceived Standard English to be important, Taylor indicated,

> Because you want to be able to represent yourself well. You don't want people to automatically make negative perceptions about you. I want people to say I speak well and have a good foundation.

Hence, Taylor's awareness of social implications of language use resulted in her conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually.

Content Knowledge is Privileged over Language Usage by both Students and Faculty

Although students and faculty recognized that Standard English and non-Standard English are valued differently, at least two students privileged content knowledge over language usage. In addition, faculty believed that it was their responsibility to teach course content even if this meant allowing students to utilize the language they were most comfortable using. In an effort to meet students at their perceived level of competence, two out of three instructors resorted to utilizing non-Standard English during the delivery of instruction.

Classroom observations revealed that one instructor, Mrs. Gamila, utilized Standard English consistently, while Mrs. Brown and Mr. Liams primarily used non-Standard English. All three instructors expressed concerns regarding their students' ability to read and understand the course textbook and attempted to utilize teaching methodologies that would not only foster rich dialogue but that would promote critical thinking and allow students to learn course objectives. However, acquisition or utilization of Standard English did not appear to be within the scope of course objectives.

Mrs. Gamila. Mrs. Gamila was an adjunct faculty member at Midwest Community College who teaches in more than one discipline including Allied Health. Her class was the largest in the study with 22 students enrolled and an average class size of 17 during the observation phase. Mrs. Gamila is 35 years old and identifies herself as Arab-American. She has lived in the United States for 16 years and holds a Master's in Science from a university within this region. She is currently working on a doctorate degree in education and has been teaching for five years.

When asked to describe students most likely to participate in class, Mrs. Gamila indicated that older students or students who were better prepared for class were most likely to participate. In regards to the course I observed, Mrs. Gamila responded, "Even though I have less [sic] males in my class than females, I find that males participate more. Considering race, I find African-Americans, which are the majority in my classes, participate more than other minority students. White students participate less than Black students." When asked to describe students who participated the least in her class, Mrs. Gamila responded, "Students who participate the least are white females." Yet my analysis of who participated most and least in her class are contrary to her perceptions.

Collectively, all students participated at least once during the six sessions with the least participation exhibited by the Asian-American male, Hispanic female, and an African-American female with participation rates of six, seven, and eight respectively. Both the Asian-American male and Hispanic female were absent for three of the six observations, which may account for their significant lack of participation. The African-American female was in attendance all six sessions, but sat alone in a corner of the classroom and participated only during extremely intense dialogue and if called upon to participate.

Highest participation rates were exhibited by a Caucasian female, followed by an African-American male and an African-American female with participation rates of 262, 211, and 209 respectively. Both the African-American male and African-American female were present for all six sessions, while the Caucasian female was present for five of the six sessions. Although the Caucasian female was absent during one session, she participated more than any other student across the three classes. In fact, the Caucasian female participated the same number of times as both African-American males combined.

Regarding Mrs. Gamila's perception of language use in the class, Mrs. Gamila indicated that students demonstrated difficulties in articulating their thoughts and were sometimes intimidated by those who demonstrated preparedness or knowledge of the subject matter. Mrs. Gamila responded to the question regarding students' abilities to articulate clearly by saying, "Some students do, but many end up feeling more comfortable expressing their ideas using their own dialect." During the six class observations in Mrs. Gamila's class, I found that students often began in a somewhat Standard form of English, but reverted to non-Standard when attempting to explain difficult concepts or to validate a comment. Very few students, if any, demonstrated the use of Standard English at all times, even though Mrs. Gamila never used non-Standard English.

Moreover, data demonstrated that students routinely switched between non-Standard and Standard English during classroom discussion with little or no guidance from their instructors to what is or is not acceptable in the workplace. In most instances, students' use of language was not corrected even in cases in which language use was clearly outside of the context of discussion. It was also noted that instructors in two of the three courses observed consistently utilized non-Standard English while delivering instruction. When asked whether she encouraged students to speak Standard English in her class, Mrs. Gamila responded, "I avoid talking about it so I do not offend their dialects. Also, I do not want to discourage them from participating." Mrs. Gamila expressed that it was important to her that students felt comfortable speaking so that she could gauge whether students understood the content of her course. In this class, the instructor consistently spoke in Standard English, which she attributed to her formal education and upbringing.

Mr. Liams and Mrs. Brown. To the contrary, Mr. Liams and Mrs. Brown interacted with students in non-Standard English and more often than not discussed core concepts of the course from their chair or while sitting on the edge of the desk. Although Mrs. Brown often stopped students and corrected their English, she herself, did not adhere to Standard English during class discussions. Students interviewed from her class, such as Earnestine and Dee, described her as being "ghetto" and did not feel it was appropriate of her to correct language use when she herself used non-Standard English. Dee explains, "I think it's needed. Sometimes I want to correct them! But Mrs. Brown don't need to correct anybody with her half reading self." In this case, the student saw a value to correcting language, but felt the instructor did not have the professionalism required to do so.

Mr. Liams appeared to be unconcerned with students' language use and focused predominately on trying to get his class to discuss the course content. When asked why he taught in non-Standard English, Mr. Liams explained, "Girl! They aren't going to be able to speak that way. I just want them to speak. I figure they would feel more comfortable. Ethics is hard and I need to make sure they are learning." Mr. Liams believed that delivering instruction in what he perceived was the language students were most comfortable with would improve academic performance.

Each of the instructors described the importance of ensuring students learned course content regardless of the students' reading or writing proficiency. Pedagogy reflected their goal in teaching course content. Mrs. Gamila used case scenarios in which students were able to work together to explain the scenario provided and the ethical codes related to the case. Mrs. Brown chose to read excerpts from the book verbatim because she believed students did not read at home. On occasion she would ask for volunteers to read and would explain important concepts as they were read. Mr. Liams opted to show films every week. Each film contained several ethical violations and students would be required to report the violations found in the film. He chose films because he too believed that students arrived to class without reading the book.

Although two of the three instructors were employed in health careers and could attest to the importance of students being able to communicate effectively in the hospital or clinical setting, instructional pedagogy was designed to teach course content and not the linguistic codes or mannerisms necessary to be successful outside of the classroom environment. At least two students expressed a similar view. Nefa and Earnestine believed that although Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English, content knowledge is more significant than language usage.

Nefa. Nefa was 20 years old and identified herself as being African-American. She enrolled at Midwest Community College to further her education and pursue a career in nursing. She maintained a 3.0 grade point average and had completed a total of 12 college credits. Nefa relayed that it was not difficult for her to participate in classroom discussion or to articulate her viewpoints. Yet classroom observations demonstrate that Nefa rarely participated on her own accord and participation was usually a result of being called upon by her instructor.

When asked about the language utilized at home in comparison to the language utilized in school, Nefa stated, "I always talk the same." I provide a scenario in which I would switch from Standard to non-Standard English depending on the environment I am in. I asked Nefa if she ever utilized language differently depending on whom she was talking to. She responded, "No." In reflecting on her language use during classroom discussions, small group assignments, and during the interview, I concur with her self-assessment. Nefa did in fact speak the same on all occasions and, for the most part, utilized non-Standard English.

Standard English, according to Nefa, was utilizing proper pronunciation and "knowing what you're talking about when you're speaking." She perceived that her instructor, Mrs. Brown, and the majority of her classmates utilized Standard English. However, classroom observations did not support her perception. During one visit, Mrs. Brown addressed her class by stating, "Come on ya'll. Let's try to stay woke today." Mrs. Brown did not utilize Standard English and was the same instructor Earnestine and other students referred to as "ghetto." When asked to consider the language utilized in her textbook and whether she, her instructor, or classmates utilized the same type of language found in her textbook, Nefa laughed and responded "No."

Aware that Nefa's perception of Standard English could be inaccurate, I asked Nefa the following question, "Would it worry you if I told you that Standard English, or the type of English that society considers correct, is the type of English used in your textbook?" She responded, "No." I asked Nefa to explain her response to which she recounted, "Cuz I still feel like even though we don't talk like the book, we're still getting the same information. We're learning the content." Based on her interview, I concluded that Nefa not only appeared to have an inaccurate perception of Standard English, she also appeared to be unaware that the culture of power included the ability to speak Standard English. Nefa perceived content knowledge to be more powerful and, therefore, privileged content knowledge above language usage.

Like Nefa, Earnestine also failed to understand that the culture of power included language usage and believed that merely acquiring course content would result in academic and professional success. Yet data collected by the Division of Institutional Effectiveness at Midwest Community College demonstrate that although students are able to learn and retain course content needed to pass rigorous national and state credentialing exams, students often lack the professionalism and affective behavior, or soft skills, necessary to succeed at four year institutions or health care facilities.

Addressing Sub-questions

In order to explore whether women perceived Standard English to be detrimental to their future educational and professional goals, this study also addressed the following sub-questions:

1. What circumstances or factors bring women of color to community colleges?
2. What are their educational goals? To enter the workforce, transfer to a four-year institution, or both?
3. Do women of color in community colleges feel they are learning Standard English?
4. What resources can community colleges provide to women of color in order to foster and facilitate their acquisition of Standard English?

Students interviewed indicated that they enrolled in community college to better their lives. Two enrolled to meet pre-requisite requirements for other institutions, but nine were seeking skills necessary to attain viable employment. For some, Midwest Community College was the first opportunity they had to attain education beyond high school and described Midwest Community College as a stepping stone. When asked why she selected a community college Christi responded:

> I have to take baby steps in order to get ahead. Because I know that college life is not one-on-one and it's bigger classes versus community college, so I'd rather start small and work my way up.

In addition, all of the women interviewed expressed an interest in continuing their education beyond Midwest Community College. Laura plans on transferring to a private four-year institution in order to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Brittany and Sophie intend on transferring to a four-year institution for a Bachelor's Degree in Science. Dee returned to Midwest Community College after previously earning a degree and is currently transferring credits to a four-year institution, while Taylor foresees continuing her education until earning a graduate degree.

Participants also indicated that in addition to continuing their education, community college was a means to gainful employment or skill development for a new career after being displaced by a crashing employment market. Of the 11 students interviewed, eight identified "enter the workforce" as their primary reason for enrolling in community college. Participants were also asked whether they believed they were learning Standard English in their classes and whether they felt confident in their ability to succeed educationally and professionally considering their current language use. Several students expressed that they did not feel Standard English was facilitated in class and questioned whether the responsibility of teaching Standard English pertained to community college instructors.

Nine students indicated that they did not feel Midwest Community College was instrumental in their acquisition of Standard English, yet all of them believed they were capable of learning language codes associated with Standard English or capable of expanding their current use of language. Two students perceived Standard English as a skill that students needed to learn independently through life experiences, their families, or in high school. For instance, Marla stated, "You should enter college able to apply Standard English. It would take an instructor too much time to teach that [Standard English] and the course material." Angie expressed that students may feel offended if instructors attempted to teach or enforce Standard English in the classroom. She went on to say:

> They [students] used to speaking that one particular language so they may feel embarrassed, you know, or even disrespected, you know, upset, because they don't understand and can't follow what the conversation is about.

Angie viewed the teacher's role as one of facilitator so that students would feel comfortable to learn Standard English gradually on their own.

In contrast, Laura, Christie, Nefa, Dee, and Taylor believed that Standard English should, in fact, be taught in community college. Each perceived the instructor as the responsible party for teaching Standard English and enforcing Standard English in the classroom. Christie states, "You're in a learning institution and part of it is learning how to speak correct English. Well, I think it it's up to the teacher to teach it." Taylor also offers an interesting perspective regarding Midwest Community College and the instructors she has had:

> Instructors here are real laxed. Which is a negative and a positive. It's a negative because it isn't acceptable at all, but it's a positive because I feel comfortable, you know?

When asked how communication could be improved in the classroom, Taylor responded:

> Instructors should be forced to use Standard English, but in a comfortable environment. It's important that faculty watch how they speak and go back to the basics. Students pay attention to their words!

Taylor conveyed that she viewed Standard English as a requisite for success, but recognized the challenges associated in teaching it. Nonetheless, she believed that instructors should utilize Standard English in the classroom because she believed that students would feel compelled to adapt to the language being heard.

When asked how acquisition of Standard English could be fostered within community college, several students indicated exposure to diverse social environments. Brittany believes that employment opportunities outside of the city allowed her to hone her language skills better than students who have never left the city. "I worked in catering and we went all around the state for corporate events, so I had to learn to talk the right way." Similarly, Sophie discussed how being around educated adults as a child framed the way she viewed language. "For the longest time I was the only kid and my mom would take me with her to class or with her study groups. They talked so different. Almost pretty." Dee also referenced her early years working in the hospital and how she learned that non-Standard English was inappropriate amongst other nurses. Dee recounted:

> I walked up to a group of nurses on the floor and said 'wat up girls?' An older Black nurse grabbed me by the arm and pulled me to the side. She said that was an embarrassment to her as an educated Black woman and to the profession of nursing. I never did that again!

Although not every woman interviewed had a personal experience to share regarding language acquisition outside of the city, they all described an awareness that language codes changed from one environment to another. In addition, students realized that Standard English was valued differently than non-Standard English and its value dependent on the situation in which one was using language.

Other resources students believed would be instrumental in the acquisition of Standard English included supplementary instruction for students and professional development for faculty. Laura stated that developing a writing lab or specialized courses would be of value to her and her peers. Marla indicated that a class on professional mannerisms and having access to positive role models would be beneficial. Brittany wasn't exactly sure what resources could be offered to promote Standard English, but believed Standard English should be imbedded in all career classes. Whereas Taylor believed that faculty should be provided with professional development in order to learn how to incorporate language acquisition into classroom discussion.

The following chapter presents the results of this study, conveys a discussion of the results and provides implications for further research as well as limitations of the study and final thoughts.

Chapter Five: Results, Discussion, Implications for Further Research, Limitations, and Final Thoughts

The relationship between language and competence has been studied extensively by a number of scholars (Delpit, 1995; Enright, 2011; Gee, 2008b; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Delpit (1995) provided the example of an African American woman who had attained a master's degree yet was denied entrance into a doctoral program based largely on her inability to communicate in Standard English. The perception was that the student was in need of mentoring and remediation. The deficit in Standard English translated to academic incompetence. In order to avoid such labeling some scholars believe that students must acquire and utilize Standard English (Delpit, 1995; Enright, 2011; Gee, 2008b). Yet the utilization of Standard English is complex and may result in students feeling split between cultures.

Chapter five provides the results of this study as well as a discussion related to the results. The chapter ends with implications for further research, limitations to the study, and final thoughts.

Results

Data collected by conducting classroom observations, student interviews, and a faculty interview identified three patterns of interest. First, students realize that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English. Second, the realization that Standard English is valued differently than non-Standard English results in the conscious utilization of Standard and non-Standard English contextually. Third, content knowledge is privileged over language use by both students and faculty of community college.

Students Realize that Standard English is Valued Differently than non-Standard English

Women in this study demonstrated an understanding that Standard English holds a status more prestigious than non-Standard English. Marla described Standard English as being the "language heard on the news," while Nefa believed Standard English was "the proper way to speak." Taylor and Sophie associated Standard English with professionalism and respectfulness and Laura was taught by her parents that Standard English was used by "educated" people. Student participants also realized that the language spoken within their communities differed from language spoken outside of their communities and that the way one utilized language could determine how one was received by other speech communities.

For instance, Taylor described how utilizing non-Standard English within the hospital setting was viewed as "embarrassing" by another African American nurse. Her colleague viewed the choice of language as a negative reflection of "educated Black women" and to the profession of nursing. Taylor realized that her use of non-Standard English could be viewed as a lack of competence by other nurses and patients. In addition, the lack of competence would not be associated as a deficit held solely by Taylor, but as a deficit of other African American women within the profession.

Paige serves as an example of how language and identity are connected and how utilizing Standard English emphasizes dual-consciousness similar to those discussed by a number scholars of color (Anzaldua, 1999; Delpit, 1988; hooks, 1984; Rodriguez, 2009; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). Paige, a bi-racial student, described her experience in a predominately white high school as one of isolation. She recounted, "I try to talk to them, but I don't feel comfortable. It's like they don't care. Like I'm not as valuable as a white student." Paige went on to say that she found a level of comfort at Midwest Community College because she felt a connection to students and teachers, yet recognized that her use of language was different than the language used by students at the college. Paige also realized that Standard English was valued differently than non-Standard English and believed that she would have to learn the intricacies of Standard English in order to be successful in her educational and professional goals. Nonetheless, it was important for Paige to feel connected to her African American peers and, as a result, felt that she had to refrain from classroom discussions in order to belong to that particular community.

Laura is another example of how language and identity are connected and how utilization of Standard English emphasized dual-consciousness. Similar to Paige, Laura found it difficult to feel loyal amongst African American peers when speaking Standard English. Although she tried to adapt to non-Standard English she was unable to do so effectively, which alienated her from individuals she considered peers. She also felt alienated amongst Caucasians who, like her, utilized Standard English. Laura believed that Caucasians treated her differently not because of the language she utilized, but because of her mixed-race. In an effort to avoid feeling disloyal to the many ethnicities she associated herself with, Laura also refrained from classroom discussions.

Paige and Laura both describe incidents of feeling silenced while attending predominately white schools, which align with research conducted by Delpit (1988), hooks (1984), and Ladson-Billings (1998). In Delpit (1988), a number of personal anecdotes are included in which African Americans and Native Americans described incidents in which they felt as if their voice or knowledge was not valued by colleagues or peers. As a result, these individuals ceased dialogue in an effort to contain emotions and maintain professionalism. Ladson-Billings (1998) also contends that voices of people of color are silenced by school curriculum. The curriculum utilized in public schools intentionally omits or distorts stories of African Americans and other people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Consequently, students of color cannot relate to the stories or experiences embedded in curriculum making it difficult for them to participate in classroom discussion even when the topic discussed is related to their culture. Attempting to participate may result in feeling disconnected from their classmates.

In addition to feeling split between cultures, Paige and Laura consciously chose not to participate in classroom discussion in order to gain acceptance, and feel connected, to their African American peers. Paige and Laura's decision not to participate in classroom discussion may be viewed as a way in which women use discourse to make social connections. Tannen and Kendall (2001) found that language patterns utilized by women were directed toward the avoidance of conflict and as a means to acquire or maintain meaningful relationships. Likewise, Hyde and Deal (2003) found that women often self-censored or limited classroom participation based on "personal factors," which included not wanting to upset other students. Laura and Paige relate to writings of how language continues to be gendered within the classroom setting. This is in an important finding because the aforementioned studies were conducted on students attending four-year institutions of very distinct demographics.

Although data analysis demonstrated similarities between women of color attending community college and Caucasian women in studies conducted by Tannen and Kandall (2011), several differences were also noted. For instance, classroom observations demonstrated that although there were only two Caucasian women in classes observed, these women participated more than African American women and African American men. To the contrary, studies conducted by Tannen and Kendall (2011) demonstrated higher participation for males when compared to female students. Additionally, Tannen (1992) found that women often chose to sit next to each other in order to provide support to one another and build rapport. African American women in my study almost always sat alone while the two Caucasian women always sat together. Data suggests differences in participation based on gender and race as well as gender and social class, and highlights the experience, and complexity, of intersectionality.

Conscious Utilization of Standard and non-Standard English Contextually

The realization that Standard English and non-Standard English is valued differently resulted in students consciously utilizing Standard and non-Standard English contextually. Students appeared to situate the language used at home and in their communities as being conventionally non-Standard English, while language utilized outside of their communities was perceived to be of Standard English. Writings related to contextual use of language can be attributed to a number of academic scholars (Delpit, 1992; Gee, 2008a; Heath, 1983; Labov, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Gee (2008a) contends that students traditionally prescribe to the language they feel most comfortable with. For students of color or low socio-economic status, such language usage is traditionally non-Standard English. Since social status is prescribed to social groups based on the way in which social groups utilize language (Spolsky, 1998), it is important for community college students to recognize social implications of language in order to effectively communicate in diverse environments.

Taylor described herself as "wearing multiple hats that switch automatically" depending with whom she was speaking. Taylor also relayed that she was not always able to sustain the vocabulary being utilized outside of her community. Yet she attempted, to the best of her ability, to adapt to the language and mannerisms being utilized by her instructor while in class or other nurses when working in the hospital. Sophie explained a similar strategy in which she adapted her language use depending on where she was or to whom she was speaking. Sophie stated, "At home you can speak informal, at school you use school language, at work it's professional. You have to play the part. It's expected." Seven other students expressed variations of this phenomenon, yet the implication was the same: language codes shift from one environment to another and it is the expectation that one learns the appropriate codes for the environment one is in.

The notion that Standard English is the "expected" form of English has been associated with research conducted by Delpit (1995), Gee (2008b), Ladson-Billings (1998), Spolsky (1998) and Trudgill (2000). For the majority of student participants, acquisition and utilization of Standard English was important as they recognized that utilization of non-Standard English outside of their communities was not socially accepted and would result in labeling or stereotyping. Delpit (1995), Enright (2011) and Gee (2003) contend that such labeling can be eradicated by teaching students Standard English. Yet focusing solely on Standard English assumes that all students have the same access to education and are culturally homogeneous (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Teaching students at their current linguistic level (Labov, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2000) while providing them with authentic experiences that relate to the context in which academic language is used may allow students to gradually acquire Standard English without losing their sense of identity.

Additionally, the ability to effectively code-switch and utilize Standard and non-Standard English contextually can prove to be advantageous for women of color seeking employment in health care careers. These women have the unique ability to serve as a bridge between high poverty communities and health care institutions. For instance, women of color who are effective code-switchers would be able to communicate effectively with hospital personnel such as specialists and doctors who utilize Standard English. These same women would also be able to communicate effectively with patients from high poverty communities who may not understand Standard English or who are unfamiliar with medical terminology. Hence, women of color who learn to effectively code-switch possess the power to bridge the linguistic gap between medical professionals and patients of high poverty communities.

The ability to bridge the linguistic gap between medical professionals and patients of high poverty communities is particularly important because low-income patients are oftentimes skeptical of medical professionals who not only speak differently, but physically look different. Low-income patients may also be embarrassed to discuss ailments with medical professions out of fear of being considered uninformed or incompetent. In addition, women of color, such as Taylor, who work within health care institutions, express concerns of being viewed as less competent when compared to Caucasian health care professionals. Hence, women of color with the ability to effectively code-switch reposition themselves from being viewed as less competent practitioners to valuable professionals.

This repositioning of oneself as a less competent practitioner to a valuable professional by way of effective code-switching aligns with hooks (1984) restructured feminist theory "from margin to center." hooks (1984) explains,

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . . . Living as we did, on the edge, we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both.

Women of color who learn to utilize Standard and non-Standard English contextually will be empowered with the ability to understand both the patients of high poverty communities and medical professionals as described by hooks (1984) and in the process become a bridge between the two communities.

Content Knowledge is Privileged over Language Usage by both Students and Faculty

Faculty participants of this study privileged content knowledge over language usage and as a result employed teaching methodologies that focused solely on teaching student learning outcomes with little or no importance on whether students utilized Standard English in the classroom environment. Although all three instructors recognized that Standard English was essential for working in the medical field, Mrs. Gamila was the only instructor that utilized Standard English in the classroom environment. Mr. Liams and Mrs. Brown chose to deliver instruction in non-Standard English with the hopes that students would be able to grasp difficult concepts more easily.

The decision to deliver instruction in Standard or non-Standard English is controversial. Delivering instruction in non-Standard English may allow the instructor to meet students at their linguistic level, allow students to gradually acquire Standard English, and preserve the relationships students share with their speech communities (Labov, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). To the contrary, delivering instruction in non-Standard English may give the perception that such language use is permissible in other institutions of higher education and within the workforce. Although, it may be permissible in some settings, it is not viewed as acceptable in others and may stigmatize and further marginalize women of color (Delpit, 1995; Spolsky, 1998).

Delivering instruction in non-Standard English also assumes that students are incapable of learning course content in Standard English. When asked why non-Standard English was permitted in the classroom, Mr. Liams responded, "They aren't going to be able to speak that way. Ethics is hard and I need to make sure they are learning." Mrs. Brown also utilized non-Standard English in the classroom and attributed her use of language to the under preparedness of students in her class. Similarly, Mrs. Gamila, who always utilized Standard English, permitted students to utilize non-Standard English in classroom discussion as a way of ensuring that course content was understood. At least two students, Nefa and Earnestine, also valued content knowledge above language use.

Ensuring that students learn course content has proven to be beneficial in terms of examination pass rates. Students enrolled in Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Surgical Technology, and other health related career programs at Midwest Community College traditionally score above national averages on certification exams. Nonetheless, data gathered by Midwest Community College from clinical preceptors and employee graduate surveys indicate that students struggle with effective communication and affective behaviors. Furthermore, four-year institutions have reported staggering attrition and failure rates of students transferring from Midwest Community College to their institutions. Data suggest that content knowledge may not be sufficient to be successful in future educational or professional goals of students attending community college.

Delpit (1988; 1992; 1995) contends that language patterns and mannerisms are tenets of the culture of power. Hence, equipping students with the linguistic codes and mannerism associated with the culture of power would prove beneficial for students of color attending urban community colleges who wish to transfer to four year institutions or attain employment outside of their community.

Implications for Further Research

Ten out of eleven students perceived Standard English as being socially acceptable and as more prestigious than non-Standard English. Utilization of non-Standard English was attributed to students' feeling culturally connected to their peers and instructors. Eight students indicated that they believed they were able to utilize Standard English and non-Standard English contextually. When asked how they learned to use language contextually, students attributed this ability to experiences outside of their social realms or relationships with people outside of their social realms. Yet many students attending community college do not have the opportunity to leave their communities and experience varying language patterns and mannerisms upon entering clinical placements. Their inabilities to utilize Standard English and demonstrate appropriate affective behaviors have resulted in students being removed from clinical sites or program dismissal. Hence, community colleges would benefit from further research on the intersection of language and culture as well as how to develop curricula that incorporates experiential learning.

Hyde and Deal (2003) and Tannen (1992) contend that women participate less in classroom discussions in an effort to form social connections and develop meaningful relationships. Class participation by women rose when women were placed in small groups or in classes that were predominately attended by women. This study demonstrated that although in the majority, African American women participated less in classroom discussion even in classes in which only two or three students were male. Former studies in language and gender were conducted at four year institutions with predominately white students (Hyde & Deal, 2003; Tannen, 1992; Tannen & Kendall, 2001). Further research in language and gender patterns as they relate to women of color is recommended, as it will expand the current body of knowledge.

Finally, faculty participants relayed that they believed their roles as instructors were to ensure students attained content knowledge. Although each faculty member believed Standard English was necessary within the medical field, none viewed teaching Standard English as their responsibility. Hence, it would be valuable to study where, how, and whose responsibility it is for teaching Standard English at the community college. If the responsibility for teaching Standard English is not assigned, students could potentially graduate from Midwest Community College without ever learning Standard English or understanding social implications associated with language.

Further research that explores the perspective of hospital personnel as it relates to language usage in the workplace is also recommended since students in health careers are required to complete clinical hours in a hospital setting. Such research would provide insight on how non-Standard English speakers are perceived in such settings and whether the inability to utilize Standard English impacts their ability to attain or maintain employment or qualify for future promotions. Such research would also benefit community colleges seeking to develop curricula that adequately prepare students for the workforce.

In addition to preparing students for the workforce, community colleges also provide a number of transfer degrees that include articulation agreements with four-year institutions. Therefore, further research on whether universities perceive community college students as linguistically prepared for their institution would assist community colleges in preparing students for transfer opportunities.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included time constraints, low student enrollment, and the unforeseen illness of a participating faculty.

This study relied on six weeks of observations followed by face-to-face interviews. Conflicts with student and faculty schedules made it difficult to arrange for interviews within the 15-week semester structure at Midwest Community College. Additional time for student and faculty interviews is recommended.

Additionally, enrollment capacities for the classes observed were set at 36 seats each. None of the classes observed enrolled the maximum number of students. Such enrollment rates are low in comparison to other semesters and are believed to be attributed to shifts in student demographics, higher employment rates for the region, and changes to federal requirements for financial aid. Due to low enrollment, generalizations associated with findings are not recommended and an expanded study with more participants and different community college is encouraged.

Lastly, Mrs. Brown and Mr. Liams were unable to meet face to face, yet were provided with the interview protocol and asked to complete and return their responses prior to the end of the semester. Mrs. Brown was hospitalized one week prior to the end of the semester and did not complete the interview protocol. Mr. Liams completed the semester, but did not complete the protocol as requested.

Final Thoughts

I began this study with a critical self-narrative in which I reflected upon my own experiences with language acquisition. I also reflected upon conflicting moments within my educational experience in which I struggled to acquire Standard English without losing my sense of self-identity and the connections I felt with my family, friends, and community. As evident in this study, I too recognized that Standard and non-Standard English were socially valued differently with Standard English being of higher status than non-Standard English. I also realized that in order to meet my educational and professional goals, I had no choice but to acquire Standard English. Yet maintaining self-identity required me to learn how to use Standard and non-Standard English contextually.

Unlike the women within this study, my realization of how language influences social perceptions was not instinctive. Although I realized that the language I used differed from the language utilized by my classmates, I did not realize that language had varying social values. Realization, or consciousness, was achieved through mentorship. Additionally, the faculty member providing the mentorship did not solely focus on teaching me Standard English, but also focused on providing me with social experiences I would not have had otherwise come upon. These encounters led to the realization that not only did my language use differ from the language used by classmates, but so did my mannerisms. My mentor was explicit in demonstrating that speaking Standard English was not sufficient if I wished to align myself with the culture of power. The explicit teaching of rules associated with the culture of power, which includes language and mannerisms, is believed to facilitate acquisition of social power (Delpit, 1988).

Based on my own experiences with language acquisition and the experiences of women such as Laura, Paige, and Earnestine, I contend that the issue of language, power, and awareness are complex. Women of color have grown to believe that their status is a circumstance of birth and created by socialized norms or, as explained in Chapter Two, what Bourdieu (1984) describes as habitus. Nefa and Earnestine serve as examples of how habitus can guide behavior. Both participants associated Standard English as a language utilized outside their communities and as a result neither saw value in learning to speak Standard English. The perception was that social advancement is connected to their ability to succeed academically through the attainment of content knowledge. Yet the inability to utilize Standard English has negatively impacted students entering clinical placements, transferring to four-year institutions, or seeking employment outside of their communities. Hence, privileging content knowledge over language usage could prove detrimental to students enrolled in health careers at community colleges.

Intricacies associated with language, power, and privilege impact students academically and professionally and therefore should be considered by community colleges working to meet President Obama's National Completion Agenda. Community colleges are ideally situated to address these challenges because they were developed, in part, to provide educational services to marginalized populations. But addressing such challenges require that faculty be culturally competent and understand the culture of power as well as their roles as instructors, mentors, and student advocates. By providing students with diverse experiences and a safe environment to explore language variations and social mannerisms, community colleges could better serve students of color wishing to be successful inside and outside of their social realms without losing their sense of identities.

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Appendix 1: Student Interview Instrument

Student:

Pseudonym:

Course:

Date:

Demographics

1. How would you describe your race and ethnicity?
2. How old are you?
3. What made you enroll in college? Why did you pick community college?
4. What program are you in? If you're not in a program, what program are you interested in?
5. How many credits have you completed so far?
6. What is your current GPA?
7. What are your plans once you graduate?
8. Do you receive financial aid?

Communication in Class

1. How would you describe students that participate the most in your class?
2. How would you describe students who participate the least?
3. How would you describe your own participation?
4. Is it ever difficult for you to participate in class?

5. Do you ever have a hard time explaining yourself? If so, describe when this happens.

6. How about your textbooks? Are the textbooks used in your class easy to read and understand?

Communication Outside of School

1. Do you know what Standard English is?

2. How would you define it?

3. If I were to tell you that Standard English is the English that appears in your textbook, would you say your teachers sound like your textbooks?

4. Do you think you sound like your textbook?

5. How do you speak at home? Is it different than how you speak in class? If so, how is it different?

Developing Language Skills

1. Do you think it would be difficult for you to communicate with your teachers or your boss if they spoke the same way your book was written?

2. Would you say your classes were "teaching" you how to speak like your textbooks? If yes, how are they teaching you? Can you describe an assignment or an indicator that you are being taught to speak like your textbook? If no, what makes you think they are not? Can you give you give me an example?

3. Does this worry you at all? Do you think it's important? Why or why not?

4. What resources could we, as an institution, provide to help improve communication in class?

5. What resources could we provide to help you better understand your textbooks?

Appendix 2: Faculty Interview Instrument

Instructor:

Pseudonym:

Course:

Date:

1. Describe students who are most likely to participate in class.

2. How would you describe those that participate the least?

3. Do students participate openly? Are they able to articulate clearly?

4. How do you encourage students to participate?

5. Would you say your students communicate effectively? How do you know?

6. Are the textbooks used in your classroom easy for students to read and understand?

7. How do you know whether students understand the textbook? What are some indicators? (Class discussion, written assignments, etc.)

8. Would you say students in your class use the same language used in textbooks? If yes, describe a scenario when it is used?

9. Describe students who typically speak like their textbooks. Describe those that do not.

10. Do you speak like your textbook? Why or why not?

11. What resources could we offer students to better prepare them linguistically to be successful academically or in their selected health fields?