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African American English: A Linguistic Introduction by Lisa J. Green. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, xii+285 pp.

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With a heartfelt analysis that encourages readers to re-examine their ideas about language education in general, Lisa Green presents a provocative discussion of African American English (AAE) in her recent book, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. In this book, Green effectively argues that AAE is both systematic and rule-governed rather than a system of isolated features that historically have been characterized as "bad" English. Throughout the book it becomes quite clear that the author aligns herself with those researchers who advocate a level of legitimacy for AAE as a linguistic system. Green's approach successfully blends the theoretical rigors of academia (i.e., discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and historical emergence) with the pragmatic concerns of language education (i.e., language acquisition, language assessment, and language use). Her end result is a text that argues for a re-thinking of teaching and learning methodologies to challenge current pedagogical approaches to language education. Therefore, the book is appropriate not only for courses that deal with language development, but also for students in teacher education programs who have an interest in literacy.

Green's chapter breakdown demonstrates well the blending of theory and practice. Chapters 1 through 4, for example, involve a discussion of the theoretical foundations of AAE study. Chapter One, "Lexicons and Meaning," focuses on the lexicon and semantics of AAE, affording the author an opportunity to discuss AAE as a system of word selection and meaning. Green contends that AAE lexicon is different from other English lexicons because of its reliance on verbal markers as indicators of how a particular event or action occurs. Her distinction offers a convenient segue into Chapter Two, "Syntax Part 1: Verbal Markers in AAE," which addresses the usage of verbal markers within AAE syntax. It is in this chapter that Green provides a detailed discussion of auxiliary verbs (e.g., *have*, *be*, *do*), aspectual markers (i.e., meaning that informs occurrence), and preverbal markers (e.g., *finna*, *steady*, and *come*). Chapter Three, "Syntax Part 2: Syntactic and Morphosyntactic Properties in AAE" and Chapter Four, "Phonology of AAE," conclude Green's structural analysis of AAE. Green's analyses up to this point challenge critics of AAE who view it as an improper, ungrammatical language whose speakers sound, generally speaking, inarticulate and unintelligent. Thus, by the end of the first four

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chapters, the author has adequately illuminated the general usage patterns of AAE that reveal it as a structured, linguistic system and not a form of English gone awry. Green recognizes, on the other hand, that it is not enough just to illustrate that AAE is syntactically and phonologically systematic and rule-governed. Indeed, to further support her argument of AAE as a rule- and pattern-governed linguistic system, Green delves into popular culture for assistance and explores AAE usage in speech acts, literature, and the media. For instance, Chapter Five, "Speech Events and Rules of Interaction in AAE," deals with such speech events and interactional situations as playing the dozens (i.e., hurling humorous and derisive insults at a person or group of people) or rolling the eyes (i.e., staring disapprovingly at a target, then quickly rolling the eyes by closing then opening the eye lids). By illustrating these speech events and rules of interaction, Green underscores the structure, meaning, and communicative competence inherent to both verbal and non-verbal African American linguistic activities.

Chapter Six, "AAE in Literature," covers the ways in which AAE in literature constructs character identity. Of particular interest is Green's discussion of *eye dialect*, a style of writing that presents the appearance of a character not associated with the dominant society, e.g., "Up dah, 'mong de Injins, chile" (Delany, 1970, p. 89). Moreover, the use of eye dialect in literature often signifies distinct social rankings and class statuses among its characters, illustrating both educational attainment and group socializing. Chapter Seven, "AAE in Media," discusses AAE in television and film. Green's goal in this chapter is "to consider the type of language that is associated with blackness and the images it is successful in creating" (p. 201). A shared trait that connects Chapters Five, Six, and Seven is Green's argument that AAE is a complex linguistic system that functions as a marker of social positions, ethnic identities, and socioeconomic status. Green, moreover, challenges the reader to understand the functions of this linguistic system not as a re-inscription of stereotypes, but rather as indicators of shared experiences that transcend human positionality.

Having discussed the academic analyses and popular usage of AAE within the introduction and Chapters One through Seven, Green has successfully laid a foundation for the eighth and final chapter, "Approaches, Attitudes and Education", a chapter dedicated to the pedagogical utility of AAE in classrooms. This discussion offers the most powerful and meaningful argument for the legitimization of AAE because of the author's ability to situate it within the proper academic context. For instance, Green spends a considerable amount of space recapitulating the arguments of those scholars who treat AAE as a culturally deficient linguistic system Most important, of course, is the attitude that accompanies the usage of AAE by people who speak standard English. There is a genuine concern to address the pragmatic limitations (i.e., employment and education opportunities) of AAE usage. Green acknowledges these limitations and shares some of the same concerns, but also points out that much of what critics of AAE emphasize devalues the knowledge the students bring with them into the classroom. Critics of AAE are not

the only culprits of this devaluing of knowledge: Educators are also complicit in this form of negative judgment when they employ language use as an assessment of intelligence and academic normalcy. Green calls to this group for a change in attitude and advocates passionately for the benefits of recognizing AAE as a linguistic system: "Teachers who know something about the children's native linguistic system are less likely to misclassify their grammatical linguistic patterns as mainstream English errors or disorders and are more likely to understand them as differences. As a result, they [teachers] will take these differences into consideration when teaching mainstream English" (p. 240).

Overall, Green has provided a clear presentation of the linguistic details of AAE and a strong argument for its inclusion as a legitimate language system. Indeed, Chapters Five through Seven, in my opinion, offer unlimited possibility for classroom discussion. Despite this endorsement, however, the text has shortcomings. One concerns the classroom teacher and the pragmatic ramifications of looking at language development from the perspective shaped by Green's suggested solutions. For instance, how would the implementation of her solutions function in schools where the district administration has been usurped and placed under state control due to testing underperformance? Green's argument would be stronger if she presented an actual school currently under state control, or perhaps under probation, whose academic success accorded to her proposed solutions. In this case the author could give actual, tangible results affecting the current state of school reform. As the situation stands now, Green's methods are a purely academic solution that provides no practical application. Another limitation lies in Green's methodology in presenting evidence. In an attempt to provide analytical balance, Green cites both critics and proponents of the legitimization of AAE, allowing plenty of space in her presentation for both sides of the argument. However, her balance fades when she fails to present examples of students of AAE who have achieved academic success despite consistently being *corrected* by their educators. The educational system is replete with examples of teachers who use methods of correction as a pedagogical practice, and Green's argument would be more valid if she offered examples of where this strategy was employed, and then discussed where its harmful effects have occurred.

The true strength of Green's book is her critical analysis of AAE as a rule-governed linguistic system and her call to shift normative paradigms of intelligence, teaching practice, and learning ability. Green's book is therefore appropriate not only for those interested in AAE, but also for those who envision a classroom atmosphere that validates the lived, oftentimes shared, experiences of students who are systematically marginalized by educators. To this end, Lisa J. Green's discussion of AAE does more than challenge us to consider the way we view AAE: It also forces us to reconsider how we envision education as a whole.

REFERENCE

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