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# A TRANSNATIONAL BLACK LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY FOR ALL STUDENTS

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# TRENDS IN BLACK IMMIGRATION AND BLACK STUDENT MOBILITY

- As of 2022, the Black immigrant population stood at 4.6 million, and it is projected to be 9.5 million by 2060 (“Tamir, “Key Findings”)
- Sub-Saharan African student mobility is twice as high that of the world average and represents about 10.5% of global student mobility (Marshall, “International Mobility of African Students”).



# **A Transnational Black Language Pedagogy**



# QUESTIONS

- What would an ideal Black language pedagogy that makes **all** Black students feel included and represented in the curriculum look like?
- What would be the characteristics of a Black language pedagogy that accounts for Black students' **diverse language identities, histories, backgrounds, and literacies**?

# DOMINANT ASSUMPTION IN WRITING STUDIES

All Black Students speak U.S Ebonics also known as:

- African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
- African American Language (AAL)
- Black Vernacular English (BVE)
- African American English (AAE)
- Black English (BE)

# DANGERS OF A HOMOGENEOUS IMAGE OF BLACK STUDENTS

“[...] while it is important for instructors to have a general image of a particular student group’s language backgrounds and identities, this image becomes problematic when it inaccurately represents the actual student population in the classroom to the extent that **it inhibits the teacher’s ability to recognize and address the presence of differences**” (Matsuda 639).

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**Main argument:** It is a **linguistic injustice** not teach Black students, in fact *all* students, Black linguistic diversity in the U.S. and beyond.





# Black Language

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# Black Languages

# STUDENTS' RIGHT TO THEIR OWN LANGUAGE RESOLUTION

“We affirm the students' right to their **own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style.** Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. **A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects.** We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.”

# DISCUSSION

What are Black Languages? What are some examples of Black languages?

# BLACK LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY INCLUDES:

All languages, Englishes, and dialects whose history can be traced back to African Indigenous languages:

- **African languages and Englishes spoken by African immigrant students in the U.S.** (e.g., Swahili, Arabic, Igbo, Nigerian Pidgin, Sierra Leone Krio, Liberian Kreyol, Yoruba);
- **Creole languages, Englishes, dialects spoken by Black immigrant students from the Caribbean and South and Central America** (e.g., Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, Bahamian English; Papiamentu; Afro-Yungueño);
- **U.S. based Black languages** like Gullah and African American language.

<b>Primary Data: interviews and analysis of students' written work</b>			
<b>Student description</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Languages and dialects</b>	<b>Writing class</b>
International Angolan student	Angola	Portuguese and English	First Year Writing
International Angolan student	Angola	Portuguese, English, Spanish and Lingala	First Year Writing
International Rwandese student	Rwanda	Kinyarwanda, French and English	First Year Writing
Second generation Nigerian	United States	U.S Ebonics and mainstream American English	First Year Writing
Second generation Nigerian	United States	U.S Ebonics and mainstream American English	First Year Writing
Second generation Afro Caribbean	St. Kitts and Nevis	St. Kitts and Nevisian dialect and mainstream American English	Undergraduate
Second generation Afro Caribbean	Jamaica	Jamaican Creole, mainstream American English	Undergraduate
Second generation Afro Caribbean	Haiti	Haitian Creole French Mainstream American English	Undergraduate
First generation African immigrant	Nigeria	Nigerian Pidgin Igbo	Graduate

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING THE STUDY

**Decolonial Approaches**  
(Mignolo; Wa Thiong'o)

**Translingualism**  
(Makalela; Horner et al.; Canagarajah)

**Raciolinguistics**  
(Alim; Rosa and Flores)

**Critical Language Awareness**  
(Smitherman; Alim; Baker-Bell)

**Afrocentric Approaches**  
(Williams-Farrier; Gilyard and Richardson; Perryman-Clark)

# ARGUMENTS FOR A TRANSNATIONAL BLACK LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

- The impact of globalization in U.S composition
- Erasure and flattening of Black language differences in U.S composition
- Marginalization of transnational Black Language scholarship



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# **Argument#1: The impact of globalization in U.S. composition**

# CCCC'S STATEMENT ON "GLOBALIZATION IN WRITING STUDIES PEDAGOGY AND RESEARCH"

“At all levels, in all types of higher education institutions, and in all types of programs and curricula, including first-year/lower-division writing, writing across the curriculum, writing in disciplines, **writing centers**, and graduate-level writing support programs, **pedagogies need to be designed in ways sensitive to the complex effects of globalization**. Questions about writing pedagogies must be considered in terms that account for global movements of people, capital, and goods across borders, including trade, travel, displacement, and forced or voluntary migration.”

## MULTILINGUAL WRITERS: DEFINITION

“Multilingual writers include international visa holders, refugees, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants, as well as naturalized and native-born citizens of the United States and Canada. Many have grown up speaking languages other than English at home, in their communities, and in schools; others began to acquire English at a very young age and have used it alongside their native languages. Multilingual writers can have a wide range of literacies in their first languages, from being unable to read or write to having completed graduate degrees in that language. They learn and acquire English in various educational contexts, by employing various strategies, and to meet various global/local standards” (“CCCC Statement on Globalization”)

## Diversity of Raciolinguistic Experiences in the Writing Classroom: An Argument for a Transnational Black Language Pedagogy

Esther Milu

A couple of years ago, I worked in the writing center with a student on a paper about her identity development. She received high marks for content but lost points for writing. As I read her paper, two things struck me: First, she had grown up in Boston, but her parents were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At home, she spoke Lingala, which she hid from her friends after she was mocked. Second, many of her sentences were indecipherable. She wrote, for example, “I didn’t have an indistinguishable surface hair from different females in my class and they wouldn’t converse with me or simply give me disposition since I didn’t seem as though them.” (Savini)

In the January 2021 *Inside Higher Ed* article “10 Ways to Tackle Linguistic Bias in Our Classrooms,” Catherine Savini shares the above anecdote about tutoring an African student from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), whose essay was on writing development. Savini briefly shares the student’s language struggles, which included not only being constantly mocked by her peers for speaking in Lingala but also being instructed by her teachers “not to write like she speaks but to translate her Black Vernacular English (BVE) into standard academic English (SAE)” (Savini). While Savini uses this student’s language background and experience to demonstrate why literacy and writing teachers need to adopt antiracist pedagogies that promote fairness and social justice for linguistically marginalized students, here I focus on the African student example because it highlights a larger issue in the field that remains unaddressed: How do the language backgrounds of transnational and immigrant African students challenge language pedagogies that seek to support the learning needs of Black students? Savini draws from Black language scholarship to show how it can

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“[...] researchers, educators, and policymakers stop using problematic, race-neutral umbrella terms like ***multilingualism, world Englishes, translanguaging, linguistic diversity***, or any other race-flattened vocabulary when discussing Black Language and thereby Black Lives” (Baker-Bell et al., “This Ain’t Another Statement”).

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# **Argument#2: Erasure and flattening of Black language differences in U.S. composition**

# CURRENT BLACK LANGUAGE PEDAGOGIES IN WRITING STUDIES

- Afrocentric approaches (Williams-Farrier; Gilyard and Richardson; Perryman-Clark; Faison);
- Code-meshing (Young; Canagarajah, “The Place”)
- Critical language awareness approaches (Alim; Kynard; Hankerson).

# PRACTICING “STRATEGIC CONTEMPLATION”

- Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Royster, in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, describe “strategic contemplation,” as “a genre of research and scholarship traditionally associated with the process of meditation, introspection, and reflection” (84).
- Strategic contemplation forces researchers “to observe and notice, to listen to and hear voices often neglected and silenced, and to notice more overtly their own response to what they are seeing, reading, reflecting on, and encountering during their research processes” (84)



## KEY OBSERVATIONS

- International and immigrant Black students are under-represented, almost erased, in Black language scholarship.
- Writing instructors tend to conflate the language identities, histories, and literacies of international and immigrant Black students with those of African American language speaking students, which leads to the erasure or flattening of Black language differences.
- Research on other Black languages, Creoles, and Englishes outside U.S. contexts has not been adequately considered in theorizing Black language pedagogies.

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# **Argument #3: Marginalization of transnational Black Language scholarship**

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“from my experience as a Caribbean writer, often in composition studies **Caribbean languages and dialects are not always the primary focus for developing pedagogies or methodologies for teaching writing**” (Leger, “Caribbean Women’s Rhetorics” 285).

# MARGINALIZATION OF AFRO CARIBBEAN LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP

There is a small group of prominent Caribbean scholars here in rhetorical and composition studies, and they have made significant contributions to our understandings of Caribbean lived experiences and knowledges. In composition studies, compositionists and sociolinguists such as **Vivette Milson-Whyte (Jamaican)**, **Raymond Oenbring (Bahamian)**, and **Shondel Nero (Guyanese)** forefront how Caribbean ethnic identities influence the work students/writers produce in academic writing spaces, specifically the Anglophone Caribbean... in rhetorical studies, **Pauline F. Baird (Guyanese)** and **Kevin Adonis Browne (Trinidadian)** theorize Caribbean rhetorical practices beyond academic and writing spaces... These works by Caribbean writers in rhetorical studies and composition are significant to understanding rhetorical practices in Anglophone Caribbean countries. In their work, we recognize how Caribbean culture significantly influences student rhetorical performance in their writing, the writing classroom, academic and community spaces, and other learning spaces. However, there is still room and an exigency for more Caribbean representations, such as Francophone (French West Indies) Caribbean countries (285).

## CCCC STATEMENT ON EBONICS

“Ebonics is a superordinate term for a category of Black Language forms that derive from common historical, social, cultural, and material conditions. It refers to language forms such as African American Language, Jamaican Creole, Gullah Creole, West African Pidgin English, and **Haitian Creole**, as well as Afro-Euro language varieties spoken in European countries.”

# LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP ON AFRICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

- Kigamwa, James, and Ndemanu, Michael. “Translingual Practice among African Immigrants in the US: Embracing the Mosaicness of the English Language.” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol 38, no. 5, 2017, pp. 468–79.
- Kiramba, Lydiah. “Translanguaging in the Writing of Emergent Multilinguals,” *International Multilingual Research Journal*, Vol. 11, no. 2, 2017, pp.115-130.
- Milu, Esther. “The Place of Transnational and Immigrant African Students in U.S Composition.” In C. Donahue & B. Horner (Eds).. *Teaching and Studying Transnational Composition*, 2022, pp. 133-149. Modern Language Association of America (PMLA).
- Milu, Esther. “Toward a Decolonial Translingual Pedagogy for Black Immigrant Students.” In T. Do & K. Rowan (Eds, ). *Racing Translingualism in Composition: Toward a Race-Conscious Translingualism*, 2022, pp. 138-160. Utah University Press.



# **A Transnational Black Language Pedagogy**

# IMPLICATIONS OF A TRANSNATIONAL BLACK LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Raise students' awareness on Black linguistic diversity
- Educate students about the complex transnational histories of Black languages
- Interrogate how language racialization and anti-Black language racism impacts all Black students
- Train all students to work in solidarity to counter white linguistic hegemony and anti-Black linguistic racism
- Invite students to research and write about how Black languages and Englishes are being used across a variety of writing contexts and genres
- Empower students to use their languages, dialects, patterns and accents—through practices like translanguaging and code-meshing-- in all communicative contexts—formal and informal



## KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR WRITING CENTER TUTORS AND WPAS

- Don't assume all Black students speak and write in AAL/AAVE.
- Read Black language scholarship from transnational contexts (Africa, Caribbean, Latin America etc.)
- Consider the effectiveness of code-switching, code-meshing, and translingual pedagogies for various Black students
- Practice developing language profiles for Black students/multilingual writers (ask students about their language (s) and educational backgrounds and histories)
- Examine how your positionality and your institution's positionality shapes how you tutor Black and multilingual writers

## DISCUSSION PROMPT

- A Black student visits the writing center and says they need help to improve their paper because their English is not **good**. What kind of questions would you ask them as part of developing their language profile? What kind of information would you be looking for in asking the question(s) and why?
- Work small groups.

# WRITER'S LANGUAGE PROFILE CAN COVER SEVERAL TOPICS:

## **Language Repertoires**

What languages and English varieties/dialects do you speak?

## **Language Histories**

At what age did you start learning English?

## **Language Literacies**

What languages do you use when communicating with friends, family, in social media, in school assignments?

## **Language Awareness**

What word would you use to describe your language?

How do other people e.g. teachers describe your language or dialect?



Thank You!

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