Zofia Chłopek / Przemysław E. Gębal (eds.)

Bi- and Multilingualism from Various Perspectives of Applied Linguistics

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Przemysław Gębal, Jarosław Krajka, Łukasz Kumięga
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Introduction

Bilingualism and multilingualism, both at the individual and the societal levels, are common contemporary phenomena. The growing globalization of today's world, the development of communication technologies, intensive migrations, various travel opportunities, and the growing internationalization of businesses, create multifarious opportunities of communication within and across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This calls forth the need for the knowledge of languages and the ability to use them in different situational contexts. More and more people and communities nowadays may call themselves bilingual or even multilingual.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are linguistic, social, and cultural phenomena which are not only "a contemporary reality," but also "a field of knowledge in its own right" (Singleton & Aronin, 2012, p. 1). Research studies conducted within the broad area of applied linguistics deal with various aspects of language use by bi-/multilinguals and multilingual communities, second and additional language learning, language contact, and language change, and not only contribute to their understanding, but also have significant practical relevance. Bi- and multilingual phenomena are contemporarily studied by representatives of various academic disciplines applying interdisciplinary research tools. The inclusion of the transdisciplinary perspective into the research on bi- and multilingualism is still an underrepresented area of theoretical study and empirical projects. Transdisciplinarity is to be understood as a unique dialogue between various research areas and ideas, which can become a fruitful source of theoretical and methodological development of the undertaken issues and thematic threads. This dialogue enables the research domains which come in contact with each other, in the context of theoretical considerations or empirical investigations, to keep developing in the borderland of their own conceptual solutions and their applicative perspectives. At the same time, the collaborative work stemming from the transdisciplinary methodological approach not only contributes to contacts across discipline borders, but also ensures productive transformation of various elements of contemporary humanistic studies.

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The present volume aims to view the multifaceted and rich phenomenon of bi-/multilingualism from many different angles. The texts included in the volume present cross-disciplinary – and often also transdisciplinary – research conducted within two dimensions: firstly, in the very attitude of the scholars (representing linguistics, culture studies, and literary studies) towards the phenomenon of bi- and multilingualism; secondly, in the research procedures which, under the common thematic denominator, aim to investigate the social, psychological, and pedagogical aspects of bi- and multilingualism. The readers of our volume will find here the voices of the representatives of various academic centers, offering insights into the phenomenon of bi-/multilingualism in the contexts of contact linguistics, psycholinguistics, language didactics, and literary studies.

The volume comprises 16 chapters – both research papers and theoretical contributions – grouped in three thematic sections. The papers in the first part, entitled *Discourse Communities: Languages in Contact*, adopt a social and/or historical perspective on bi-/multilingualism. In the first chapter, **Paola Attolino** investigates the translanguaging spaces of Black Semantics in a diachronic, diatopic, and diastratic perspective, in order to explicate how Black English evolves and takes root over time and space, and to highlight to what extent it permeates various registers. Next, **Michael M. Kretzer** makes an attempt to characterize the linguistic landscape of the Sarah Baartman District in Eastern Cape in South Africa, by analyzing bi- and multilingual side boards found in the region. The paper is an interesting voice in the discussion about the African language policy, as well as the status and role of Afrikaans and English, and the other nine official indigenous languages. In the last chapter of this section, **Miguel Luis Poveda Balbuena** illustrates the effects of language contact in the multilingual England of the Middle English period, by presenting the results of the analysis of the French influences observable in English military terminology. The study also indicates the significance of other languages as a source of new terms in English.

The second part of the volume, under the heading *Languages in the Mind: Language Development and language Use*, comprises eight chapters, which view issues related to bi- and multilingualism from psycholinguistic and psychological perspectives. **Anita Buczek-Zawiła** presents the results of her research on the awareness of native language sound distinctions among advanced speakers of EFL in the context of L2 pronunciation training. The author reports low sound discrimination skills in the respondents' L1, but indicates that intensive L2 training can make learners more sensitive to their L1 sound system, which in turn may prove advantageous for the L2 sound production. In her paper, **Jadwiga Cook** focuses on the way unbalanced bilingual children use locative constructions in order to describe static spatial events. As it turns out, young bilinguals make similar mistakes and use prepositions in a similar way in both languages, and interlingual

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transfer is a rare phenomenon. The relation between the age and the amount of inaccurate answers is more prominent in the case of a non-dominant language. **Giovina Angela del Rosso** illustrates the value of investigating non-native coarticulation by adopting a multidisciplinary approach, which integrates state-of-the-art knowledge about multilingualism, language acquisition, and experimental phonetics. The author believes that such an approach may not only enhance the understanding of non-native coarticulation, but also allow researchers to gain new prospective insights into long-standing issues. In the next chapter, **Monika Kowalonek-Janczarek** explores the phenomenon of multilingualism from educational and individual perspectives in the context of two nearly monolingual countries, Poland and Japan. In particular, the author concentrates on university students' attitudes towards multilingualism. Even though all students' perceptions of multilingualism are generally positive, there are some differences between the two groups in this respect. The chapter by **Ewa Kujawska-Lis** offers an analysis of Joseph Conrad's writings, thus providing a retrospective insight into the writer's multilingualism. She explains how the interplay of his three languages, Polish, French, and English, was a source of both misery and creative achievements. Next, **Rafał Krzysztof Matusiak** and **Grzegorz Wlaźlak** investigate the issue of receptive multilingualism of professional lawyers. The results of their study indicate that the legalese is probably not as internationally consistent as intended, and question the widely held assumption that lawyers need a single core vocabulary for their professional activity. **Jacek Pradela** analyzes the development of the spelling skills of a child raised in non-native bilingualism. The study results show that letter omission, letter substitution, and letter insertion are common categories of errors made in the weaker language; these are typically induced by letter-sound correspondences and cross-linguistic influences. In the chapter closing this section, **Boris Yelin** investigates the structure of the multilingual mental lexicon, by analyzing cross-linguistic influence observed in trilingual production. Based on the results of his study, which are only partially in line with previous research, the author proposes a more nuanced picture of the multilingual lexicon, in which lexical selection depends on simultaneous inhibition and activation of languages present in the mind.

Part three of the volume, under the heading *Language Education: Supporting Multilingual Development*, adopts a broadly understood didactic perspective on bi-/multilingualism. In her contribution, **Moira De Iaco** demonstrates and evaluates the cognitive and communicative functions of metaphoric gestures. The author concludes that metaphoric gestures have the potential to teach cultural differences, as well as illustrate target language vocabulary and speech properties (e.g., intonation), thus facilitating the process of L2/L3 acquisition. In the next chapter, **Dana Hanesová** presents chosen results of one phase of a project aimed at raising the internationalization level of university education, initiated in 2019 by a group of language teachers at the Matej Bel University in Slovakia. The author

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shows that it is possible to increase the level of multilingualism amongst university students during their studies with the help of the human and financial resources available to the university. **Radosław Kucharczyk** presents his SMART model of developing multilingual competence and describes a previous study, whose results indicate that the components of the model can be developed in formal L3 learning contexts where linguistic and cultural diversity is rather low. In the next chapter, **Beatriz López-Medina** describes a study conducted in a history class at a plurilingual school in Riga (Latvia), where the CLIL approach is applied. The results allow the author to draw the conclusion that translanguaging strategies have the potential of facilitating content learning in plurilingual academic settings. Last but not least, **Jacopo Saturno** undertakes the theme of intercomprehension in foreign language learning. The results of his miniature experiment indicate the beneficial effects of the possibility to exploit positive transfer to communicate in an unknown foreign language which is typologically close to a known bridge language. These effects are particularly prominent if the bridge language is the L1, though they also occur in the case of an L2.

All the chapters included in the volume are slightly modified versions of the papers presented during the international research conference *Multilingualism from Various Perspectives of Applied Linguistics*, organized by the Institute for Research on Education and Communication of the Silesian University of Technology, Gliwice, Poland, and took place in an on-line format on 23rd and 24th October 2020. Even though in many contemporary publications bilingualism is understood as a case of multilingualism (e. g., Jessner, 2006, p. 15; Singleton & Aronin, 2012, pp. 6–7), the volume's title was extended to explicitly include issues related to both bilingualism and multilingualism.

Finally, we would like to include some terminological remarks, which should facilitate the reading process. In all chapters, the term **bilingualism** is used when the knowledge and use of two languages by individuals, institutions, groups, or societies is meant; similarly, the term **multilingualism** refers to the knowledge and use of three or more languages. In most contemporary research publications it is either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed that a bi-/multilingual's knowledge of each of their languages need not be perfect, but should enable communication according to their own needs and the demands of a particular communicative situation. In some chapters, the term **plurilingualism** is used in addition to the previous ones, which encompasses not only linguistic competences in more than two languages (i. e., individual multilingualism), but also cross-linguistic interactions between these competences, as well as a rich repertoire of linguistic and non-linguistic (often culture-specific) experiences, gained in the process of language acquisition and use, which are part of the communicative competence of a language user (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4; see

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also Hanesová, Chapter 13 of this volume, for a thorough explication of the meanings of these two terms).

With reference to individual bi-/multilingualism, a distinction should be made between **simultaneous** and **consecutive** (**sequential**) bilingualism and multilingualism. The former term refers to situations where a given person acquires two or more languages at the same time; the latter applies to cases when one's languages develop at different stages of life.

In the context of language education, one of the recently advanced methods of teaching and learning foreign languages is **Content and Language Integrated Learning** (CLIL). In this method, instruction in a given subject takes place through the medium of a non-native language. This methodological design aims "to develop language proficiency as well the mastery of subject matter, critical thinking, and other cognitive skills through the use of a syllabus that integrates both language and subject matter (e.g., science, geography, history, environmental studies)" (Richards, 2013, p. 12).

A bi-/multilingual practice which is often encountered both in language education and in natural social interaction is **translanguaging**. It consists in accessing and applying all linguistic resources available to a bi-/multilingual person (by means of, e.g., code-switching or translating from one language into another), in order to achieve communicative success (García, 2009, p. 140).

We do hope that the present volume will provide its readers with interesting insights into issues related to bi-/multilingualism, as well as provoke to conduct further transdisciplinary studies in this fascinating research field.

Zofia Chłopek and Przemysław Gębal
Wrocław and Warsaw, December 2021

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List of Common Abbreviations

BE	Black English
cf.	confer, compare
CLI	cross-linguistic influence
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
EFL	English as a foreign language
et al.	et alia, and others
etc.	et cetera, and other similar things
FL	foreign language
e. g.	exempli gratia, for example
L1	first language, native language
L2	second language
L3	third language
SE	Standard English

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Part One: Discourse Communities: Languages in Contact

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Paola Attolino

Chapter 1 – "Yo word is yo bond": Black Semantics, Discourse Communities, and Translanguaging Spaces

Abstract
The term *Black Semantics* refers to a core of words and phraseological units typical of African American culture. Many of these expressions are, in a sense, translingual, as Black English is not a dialect, but a distinct language that coexists with Standard English, and the interaction between them in the African-American linguistic repertoire is governed by the same principles as those that usually govern languages in contact.
Based on the author's earlier research into Black semantics, the present paper aims to offer an overview of the translanguaging spaces where code-meshing between Black Semantics and Standard English occurs, focusing on the interplay of conventionality and creativity, which may be detected both in the lexicon and in the numerous linguistic practices and cultural modes of discourse. Further consideration on linguistic prejudice as a covert form of racism will be offered.
Keywords: Black Semantics, translanguaging, conventionality, creativity, racial prejudice

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

The term *Black Semantics* was coined by Geneva Smitherman (2006) to refer to a core of terms and sentences distinctive of African American culture. Many of these words and word-groups may be considered translingual and have crossed boundaries of time, space, gender and social class, becoming the linguistic property of all Americans and, in some cases, of the world, particularly thanks to the global spread of Hip Hop music and the universality of its language.

As James Baldwin unequivocally argued in a 1979 essay, Black English (henceforth BE) is not a dialect, but a distinct *language*, which co-occurs with the use of Standard English (hereafter SE) in the African American linguistic experience. Therefore, the interaction between them follows the same rules that generally govern languages in contact. An interesting example is offered by Barack Obama's frequent code-switching (or rather code-meshing) from SE to

Paola Attolino, University of Salerno (Italy), ORCID: 0000-0002-3277-1243, pattolino@unisa.it.

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BE, a language negotiation that has gained him a (questionable) reputation for being *articulate while black* (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

The present paper offers an overview aimed at investigating the way Black Semantics and SE code-mesh, creating a harmonious interaction as well as translanguaging spaces. It also focuses on the interplay between conventionality and creativity, which is a distinctive feature both of African American lexicon and of its linguistic practices and cultural modes of discourse. It is worth pointing out that translanguaging spaces are not necessarily considered as physical spaces, but more as spaces that bilingual/multilingual individuals create in their own minds through the process of translanguaging. Translanguaging spaces provide an environment where each single language is not separated from the other ones. Instead, the known languages become intertwined and bilingual/multilingual individuals are able to come up with new strategies to achieve a specific communicative effect (Li, 2011).

The overview offered in this paper follows previous research into Black Semantics in a diachronic, diatopic, and diastratic perspective (Attolino, 2016, 2019a, 2019b), carried out using Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2003), as a qualitative approach. CDA involves looking at lexicogrammatical choices in texts, using the tools of analysis developed within systemic-functional linguistics, or SFL (Halliday, 1978), and its metafunctions of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Field expresses the ideational metafunction, which is about what happens in the world; tenor expresses the interpersonal metafunction, which deals with the relationships established via language; mode conveys the textual metafunctions, which involves a series of features such as the degree to which the process of interaction is shared by the interlocutors, as well as its *channel* or *medium.*

The overview is focused on the interplay of conventionality and creativity in Black Semantics. On the one hand, conventionality encompasses the relationship between the individual and society, playing an essential role in social cohesion. On the other hand, creativity involves what Toni Morrison in her 1993 Nobel Lecture called *word-work:* black folks are in love with "the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 175). I will also discuss the way *word-work* may be observed not only in the ever-evolving lexicon of Black language, but also in its numerous linguistic practices and cultural modes of discourse, such as signifying and playing the dozens. Here the interaction between conventionality and creativity has led to what has been named *Hip Hop Genius* (Seidel, 2011), a term used to describe the ability to cope with difficulties in a creative way and to offer a critical insight into social events and human behavior in a given discourse community, considered as a group that works toward a common goal or purpose through communication (Swales, 1990). These considerations will provide me

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with the opportunity to investigate the subtle though strong relationship between linguistic prejudice and racism.

2. Translanguaging and Black Semantics

Translanguaging describes language as a social practice in a temporal-spatial frame, with an emphasis on the performative (Lu & Horner, 2013). As the focus shifts from language to language-users and social contexts, translanguaging should not be defined as deviance from the norm: the relationships between language and language-users are mutually shaping and constitutive. In other words, translanguaging is more about *process* than product.

That BE is not just a limited register of English used by people who are not aware of standard language is a fundamental premise to investigate the translanguaging spaces where Black Semantics and SE coexist. As Smitherman (2006, pp. 2–3) points out:

> We Black folks be knowin we got some unique patterns of language goin on up here in the U.S. of A. Yet, still today, in the twenty-first century, after more than four decades – count 'em, *foe decades!* – of research by language scholars, it's some people who say Black Language ain nothin but "slang and cuss words," or "it's just broken English."

It is worth noting that Smitherman herself here is translanguaging to structure her discourse and in doing so she is performing a kind of action, as she deliberately makes use of BE for academic purposes. In the quotation above she is referring to the studies on BE that started in the 1960s, with William Labov in the lead. It was only in 1973, however, that psychologist Robert Williams introduced the term *Ebonics* in an attempt to underline that African American Language is actually a language other than English, not a dialect or a bad variety. About twenty years later, in 1996, the Oakland Resolution officially recognized Ebonics as the legitimate language of African Americans. The aim of the resolution was to change educational policy in order to familiarize teachers with African American Language and expand the district's bilingual programs to African American students; in other words, educators would pay more attention to the home language of black children and use it to help them learn standard classroom English. The Oakland school board's endorsement of Ebonics as a separate language inspired nationwide debate. An editorial of the *New York Times*, for instance, referred skeptically to Ebonics as a simple *black slang*, not a distinct language (Haberman, 1996), whereas black leaders and intellectuals like Reverend Jesse Jackson condemned the board's decision because they considered Ebonics a sign of limited education, a legacy of slavery, and above all an impediment to black people's socioeconomic mobility. Some weeks later, the Resolution was ac-

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knowledged as commendable by the Linguistic Society of America (Rickford, 1997), which made clear that children who speak Ebonics do not have to learn Standard English by osmosis, but through a consciously comparative rather than contrastive approach, so they have to be made aware of the differences between the two languages and of the different contexts in which they can consciously choose to use them, with that emphasis on the performative that is a distinctive feature of translingualism. A decade later, Barack Obama will embody this awareness, offering examples of rhetorically effective code-meshing rather than simple code-switching. The latter, in fact, tends to relegate BE to private domains, whereas code-meshing welcomes BE into the folds of public discourse, something that Obama has masterly achieved.

However, the same fact that Obama has received unprecedented attention for his unique way of blending SE and BE is a symptom that African American Language's linguistic classification is still debated today, with scholars such as Shana Poplack (2020) arguing that its proximity to SE renders it just a dialect of English, not a distinctive language. Other scholars, including H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman (2012), have drawn attention to the negative social implications of subordinating BE to SE, reiterating the former's unique style, structure, and lexicon as justification for considering it as a stand-alone language.

As Pennycook (2000) suggests, people do not use language based on their identity, but rather to *perform* identity. This is why people who speak both SE and BE often find their bilingualism empowering: it is a tradition connected to practices of liberation and empowerment in which oppressed people could speak in ways that their oppressors could not understand. As Labov (2006) affirmed, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) – which is the expression he prefers to use when referring to African American Language – has developed its present form in the framework of the most racial segregation that the world has ever known. This is what James Baldwin also stated in the aforementioned 1979 *New York Times* article: "A language comes into existence by means of brutal necessity, and the rules of the language are dictated by what the language must convey" (Baldwin, 1979). BE is a language of necessity, the necessity to have a code, as African Americans were, and, sad to say, still are a "Negro nation within the nation," as W. E. B. Du Bois stated in a famous speech delivered to the leadership of the NAACP in 1934 (Rucker, 2002, p. 37). This "Negro nation" has developed its unique way of using English, transforming it into a separate language: "The roots of African American speech lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, that was created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class" (Smitherman, 2006, p. 3).

The dynamics of linguistic resistance can be observed in the so-called *in yo face style*, a peculiar feature of BE born in the framework of the induced illiteracy

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of black slaves, who were forbidden to learn to read and write. This style provided blacks with the opportunity to reinvent themselves and to shape their identities, as well as to resist white supremacy with their ability to use the language of the white masters twisting it against them. Thus, this skill is rooted in slavery, but it is still found in a range of black stylistic practices such as semantic inversion and double talk: you say something, but you mean something else, disorienting that part of your audience (the whites) that is not able to grasp the core message of what is said.

3. Phraseology and African Americans

Another language practice which is extremely interesting for the analysis of the translanguaging spaces where BE and SE cohabit is the use of phraseology, which is also a means to investigate the relationship between social events and human behavior, as well as the interplay between conventionality and creativity. Conventionality, in fact, takes into consideration the relationship between the individual and society, playing a crucial role in social cohesion. Proverb use, for instance, is an essential source of strategies to teach black people rapidly and in no uncertain terms about black life and living. Creativity, instead, encompasses black people's love for "word-work [which] is sublime because it is generative: it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference – the way in which we are like no other life" (Morrison, 1993). Creativity involves what has been called *Black flava* (Smitherman, 2000), the uniqueness of a language style where the medium is the message. As stated above, the right to use BE is a question of linguistic freedom, agency, and justice. It is the right to resist white supremacy, keeping in mind the historical space of slavery to understand the force of black people's languaging and translanguaging. As LeRoi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka) explains in *Blues People* (1963, p. 9): "It is ABSURD to assume, as has been the tendency, among a great many Western anthropologists and sociologists, that all traces of Africa were erased from the Negro's mind because he learned English. The very nature of the English the Negro spoke and still speaks drops the lie on that idea."

BE's uniqueness is in the power of the spoken word, the *Nommo*, an African term and concept which reverberates in African American culture, as it is believed to be the driving force of life: speaking is making something come into being (Alkebulan, 2005). This is why the statement *Don't speak on it*, often used by senior Black Americans, sounds protective in the face of potential negative events (Smitherman, 1998). For the black community naming is a creative act, as evidenced by the familiar African American expression that gives the title to the present paper: *Yo word is yo bond.* The statement has biblical origins, as it can be

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found in some passages of the *Books of Matthew* and *The Book of Numbers* in which one's spoken vow becomes a sacred commitment (Waldman, 2016). It is worth remembering that the principle *word is bond* also allowed merchant traders late in the 1500s to make oral agreements legally binding, but was popularized in the mid-960s by the Five-Percent Nation, an Islamic group that stressed authenticity and self-knowledge alongside social progressivism (Smitherman, 2000). The expression has also entered Hip Hop phraseology with positive and reinforcing expressions such as "Word is born, Word up, Word to the Mother" (Smitherman, 1998, p. 208), and it has recently hit the headlines because of its controversial use by Melania Trump in her speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention. The First Lady was accused of plagiarizing her predecessor, as her remarks bore a striking resemblance to those delivered by Michelle Obama at the Democratic National Convention in 2008. The accusation focused in particular on the use of the expression *Yo word is yo bond*, because to utter this phrase in 2016 America means to invoke "a hip hop phrase" (Waldman, 2016), as it represents the resurfacing of an old familiar saying in the black oral tradition. As a black woman, Michelle Obama was entitled to use the expression, as she was both retrieving a powerful saw from the ethical canon and, perhaps, signifying to black listeners, whereas Melania Trump gave the impression to be clueless, without any real sense of what she was talking about.

Indeed, the person who really masters the negotiation between SE and BE is Barack Obama, who was in fact defined by Bush and Biden during the 2008 presidential campaign "articulate while black" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 34). The choice of the adjective *articulate* stood out for its being used differently by blacks and whites and sparked a debate on *The Racial Politics of Speaking Well*, which was the headline of a *New York Times* article by Lynette Clemetson, who argued: "When whites use the word in reference to blacks, it often carries a subtext of amazement, even bewilderment […]. Such a subtext is inherently offensive because it suggests that the recipient of the 'compliment' is notably different from other black people" (Clemetson, 2007). Historically, when referred to black people the word *articulate* was meant to indicate *the exceptional Negro*, implying that white people are automatically assumed to be articulate, whereas most black people are not. Even if Barack Obama had not straightforwardly addressed the race issue in his electoral campaign, there was a moment when he had to publicly take it on in a memorable 2008 speech named *A more perfect union*, which in fact is known as Obama's "Race Speech" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 74). The address was delivered in a very delicate political moment of his presidential campaign, when the controversial sermon sound bites from Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Obama's pastor, had been spread all over the media as evidence of "reversal racism" (Gunn & McPhail, 2015, p. 16). The structure of Obama's *Race Speech* follows the formula of the traditional American jeremiad, a

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form of public discourse that bitterly laments the state of society and its morals. But what is new in Obama's speech is the remix of classical traditions and the creation of a hybrid form able to suit the rhetorical demands of the so-called post-racial era. An interesting example of this remix, which is in some way translingual, is offered by proverb use in the following passage: "What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds, how many were able to *make a way out of no way* [emphasis added] for those like me who would come after them" (Obama, 2008). As Dundes (1975, p. 104) stated, proverbs are "the wisdom of many and the wit of one" and in the black community are used in more life domains and more extensively than in other cultures, as the practice is a crucial source of survival strategies. Repeated by parents to their children or to friends and siblings, proverbs embody the wisdom of black people, a legacy that has allowed African Americans to keep their essential perceptions of reality and fundamental value orientations.

Making a way outta no way is one of these proverbs, often quoted by Martin Luther King in his sermons, speeches, and interviews (Mieder, 2010). Also, the late rapper Tupac Shakur once summed up effectively the content of this proverb: "This longstanding African American folk saying reflects the Black struggle to survive 'against all odds'" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 74). Obama's uttering of this familiar vernacular trope in the 2008 *Race Speech* not only symbolizes his black identity, but also functions as an important political statement, as he represents the black condition in terms of accomplishment, not breakdown. Furthermore, articulating the BE idiom *Makin' a way outta no way* in the SE form *Making a way out of no way*, Obama "found a way to articulate Blackness on a national stage" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 76), in an effort to unify a still divided America.

It is worth pointing out that this proverb has undergone a transformation in Hip Hop culture, where *Makin' a way outta no way* resembles the expression *Flipping something outta nothing*, which refers to African American creative genius, "resourcefulness in the face of limited resources" (Seidel, 2011). And African American linguistic creativity is shown in any language domain, for example in the lexicon, which in its constant evolution features onomatopoeia (e. g., the verb *pop* for *to shoot*) and ideophones (e. g., the noun *bling-bling* for *expensive jewelry*), as well as eye dialect forms (e. g., the controversial term *nigga* for *nigger*), iconic use of alphabetical letters (e. g., *G* for *a thousand dollar*) or numbers (e. g., the adjective *7–11* for *available*) and acronyms.

As far as the latter are concerned, it is worth considering the translingual significance of the acronym *CPT*, which stands for *Colored People Time.* Its connotation, in fact, changes with its users. For African Americans *CPT* is both a race-conscious expression and an inside joke, as it refers to black people's pe-

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culiar notion of time, their feeling of being *in* time rather than *on* time, thus in harmony with seasons, human events, natural rhythms and not slaves to a clock, as required by the white, mainstream culture (Smitherman, 2006). For white people, instead, the expression *CPT* embodies the stereotypical view of African Americans' indolence, untrustworthiness, and lack of punctuality, hence it is connoted as a racist joke, as shown in a recent episode of Hilary Clinton's electoral campaign. In April 2016, during a New York charity event hosting her, Mrs. Clinton poked fun at Mayor Bill De Blasio for his late endorsement of her candidacy. When De Blasio joked, "Sorry Hilary, I was running on CPT time" (Merica, 2016), the host of the event, African American actor Leslie Odom jr., warned the two politicians not to make such a joke. A few days later, President Barack Obama wanted to reiterate this warning during his last White House Correspondent Dinner. Apologizing for being late he said, "I was running on CPT, which stands for jokes that white people should not make" (Levine, 2016). In other words, when white people want to use African American expressions, they can't move away from race-consciousness.

4. Between *nigga* and *wigga:* nuances of racism in America

It is worth noting that black verbal and nonverbal communication has had an ambivalent reception in the white mainstream culture. The latter has always considered Black English as a minor variety of American English, but at the same time black talk has constantly fascinated white people. In the 1950s Norman Mailer, author of the essay *The White Negro*, ascribed the "Africanization of American English" (Smitherman, 1998, p. 30), to white people's irresistible attraction to language, gesture, and music of African Americans, who have always lived at the edge of the dominant society, but have also been capable of daring their distinctive lifestyle. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s fostered the so-called "wigga phenomenon" (Smitherman, 1998, p. 217), a derogatory expression referring to the adoption of black pop culture, language, and lifestyle by white people. In a 1991 article, *Ebony* magazine defined this crossover as the "high-five revolution" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 104) after the giving of a high-five congratulatory hand slap, which has become a greeting gesture extremely popular all over the world.

Indeed, a fundamental role in the spreading of black culture is played by Hip Hop. Since the late 1970s, this cultural movement has had a huge impact on the USA and successively in every corner of the planet. Thanks to Hip Hop and new media outlets, black talk and black phraseology in particular have spread in an unprecedented way. When white people imitate styles and practices originally belonging to African American culture, it is not considered flattery, provided that

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they pay homage to Black experience, as pointed out by rapper Ice Cube: "when you 'talk that talk' […] you must be 'true to the game'" (Smitherman, 1998, p. 218), and this explains why a white rapper like Eminem appeals to the black community, because, as rapper Nas says in a 2008 song, "he my nigga," a genuine member of the Hip Hop in-group.

Moreover, the global spread of Hip Hop has had implications for language acquisition: it contributes to English learning all over the world, even if it is not *the King's English*, the standard language, but African American phraseological heritage that mixes with local idioms, as stated by rapper Chuck D: "This is the sound and style of our young world, the vernacular used in today's speak from scholastics to sports. [Because of Hip Hop,] young people around the world are training themselves to speak English quicker than their schools could, albeit a tad different from the King's version" (Smitherman, 2006, p. 117).

However, there are dimensions of black language and culture that continue to be unfamiliar or misunderstood by the white mainstream. This is true both for verbal and nonverbal communication and it means that not everybody knows how to answer the fundamental Hymesian question as far as communication in any language is concerned: "Who can say what to whom under what conditions?" (Hymes, 1974). Often the answer to this question is not the same for black people as it is for white people: although they seem to be speaking the same language, the connotations and rules of engagement for using that language differ significantly. This is patently evident in the semantic inversion of common English words such as *nigga, muthafucka*, and *nappy*, which can be used with a positive meaning only "by Blacks with Blacks in Black social contexts" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 107), whereas if uttered by white people they take on mostly negative connotations. Such a semantic shift occurs also in the case of ritualized language traditions, for example signifying and playing the Dozens, inner city verbal games where two opponents ritually insult each other in front of a public until one of them remains in hush mode and where the use of double meaning and indirect humor as critique subsumes rhetorical tropes like metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, and irony (Attolino, 2016). As an outlet for physical aggression rooted in slavery, the performative nature of the Dozens respects the philosophy of another well-known black saying, *Laughing to keep from crying*, which represents the indomitable spirit of African Americans, their answer to the harshness of life, and gives also the title to one of the most significant works by Langston Hughes, a touchy social satire on the idea of race. As already said, the dynamics arising from the semantic inversion characteristic of black communication are often unintelligible to the white mainstream, unable to penetrate beneath the surface of obscene language. African American linguist Arthur Spears explained black language behavior as a phenomenon of reappropriation, which he named *uncensored mode*:

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> In this mode, expressions that in censored contexts [… church services and other contexts in which persons of high, mainstream-supported respect are present] are considered obscene or evaluatively negative are used in an almost or completely evaluatively neutral way, i. e., the expressions are not inherently negative or positive. That is, they are neutralized: they are negative, positive or neutral in force depending on how they are used. Many people who function exclusively or primarily in mainstream settings are not aware of this (Spears, 1998, p. 232).

Indeed, the same fact that in any society it is the language of those in power to be labelled as *standard* or *normal* is thought provoking. As Barack Obama put it, American society remains one in which, "in general, members of every minority group continue to be measured largely by the degree of our assimilation – how closely *speech patterns* [emphasis mine], dress, or demeanor conform to the dominant white culture – and the more that a minority strays from these external markers, the more he or she is subject to negative assumptions" (Obama, 2006, p. 235). Apart from having an ever-evolving lexicon, as has been already said, BE encompasses both a set of distinctive grammatical rules and numerous linguistic practices and cultural modes of discourse. BE, in fact, presents specific and systematic features regarding grammar, which differ significantly from SE and have been studied for the first time by sociolinguist William Labov (1972), such as copula absence (e. g., *We straight* for *We are straight*), expression used also by Barack Obama addressing a cashier who handed him the change in a fast food (Alim & Smitherman, 2012), invariant *be* for habitual aspect (e. g., *He be actin' crazy*, meaning *He usually acts crazy*), stressed *been* to mark remote past (e. g., *I been told you not to go there*, meaning *I told you a long time ago not to go there*), omission of the third person singular present tense *-s* (e. g., *He understand what I say*), verb featuring *-s* in other persons (e. g., *They always tries to be obedient*), possessive *-s* absence (e. g., *I'm braidin' Talesha hair* for *I'm braiding Talesha's hair*), and multiple negation (e. g., *You might not tell them nothing about it*). As far as linguistic practices are concerned, speakers of BE may participate in cultural modes of discourse, including gestures, body language, and *Tonal Semantics*, a term coined by Geneva Smitherman "to refer to the use of speech rhythm, intonation, melodious repetition – that is, voice sound – to convey meaning in Black oratorical style" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 92). Though black language cannot be defined as just a checklist of features that distinguish it from SE or a set of *deviations* from *the standard*, it continues to be scrutinized and criticized in the American public sphere, including education, and unfortunately this fact is not surprising, as it underpins racist implications: "Black Communication becomes controversial only in a society that deprecates Blackness" (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 125). Such deprecation can be shown through overt and covert racist practices. The latter are particularly interesting because they often reveal racist ideologies that even a racist may not be aware of.

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Educators, for instance, continue to view the language of black children as something to eradicate *for their sake*, as if teachers' commitment to teach them to be successful in life meant to teach them to be mainstream, because in the collective imagination being successful means being mainstream, and being mainstream means to be able to "act, talk and sound like Whites" (Alim & Smitherman, 2021, p. 190).

That the issue of race in the United States is still unresolved is shown, amongst other things, by the numerous episodes of police brutality which have recently occurred in several American cities, consistently followed by the pacific protest carried out by the *Black Lives Matter* movement, which was born in 2013 from a hashtag on social media and has established itself as a political interlocutor in today's America, as well as a sort of mantra to reiterate the urgency of the problem of racial discrimination. However, the race issue often goes unsaid in American society: "Race relations itself has been such a complicated, difficult and painful issue for so many Americans for so long that free and open discussion of racial matters may be difficult for people" (Brummett, 2008, p. 3). For this reason, the comic frame often turns out to be particularly effective for addressing race in America without the patronizing straightforwardness that comes with the tragic frame. A recent example in this regard is offered by *Black Jeopardy!*, a recurring sketch broadcasted during the television variety show *Saturday Night Live* as a funny parody of *Jeopardy!*, the most famous and longstanding television game show in the United States. As they exaggerate black stereotypes – and most of them pertain to black language – in a comedic way, the show, offering examples of translanguaging by the black contestants and affirming hyperbolically the *exclusiveness* of BE, has the potential to reverse the historically positioned hegemonic roles of black and white races, making black culture the dominant force, while giving white culture the minority. This reversal of roles gives each race the chance to see things from the other's perspective, bringing them a little bit closer (Attolino, 2019b).

5. Some closing remarks

> The language, only the language […]. It's the thing that Black people love so much – the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. There are certain things I cannot say without recourse to my language. It's terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are some-

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> times permanently damaging. He may never know the etymology of Africanisms in his language, not even know that 'hip' is a real word or that 'the dozens' meant something. This is a really cruel fallout of racism (Toni Morrison quoted in LeClaire, 1981).

Toni Morrison's words sum up effectively the core of the brief insights presented in this paper. Language plays a crucial role in shaping our ideas of race and vice versa. Language, in fact, is fundamentally relational, as language meaning comes about in interaction. Actually, in interaction most people transform linguistic diversity into linguistic hierarchies, looking at linguistic repertoires not just as a product of time, space and experience, but as superior or inferior, as appropriate or inappropriate, as right or wrong. The social reinterpretation of linguistic diversity as hierarchies may lead to social injustices, and many Americans who are racialized as black, especially the ones who are *close to the edge*, are well aware of this.

The development of the concept of translanguaging (Garcia & Li, 2013) opens up to a new understanding that language varieties are not just a list of linguistic features belonging to a given race. Moreover, the same notion of language varieties is being questioned to make room for expressions like "linguistic resources" (Alim, 2016, p. 37) that better convey the fluidity of language use: as they engage in a process of identification, speakers draw on their linguistic resources, and these dynamics entail translanguaging as a hybrid language use that is a deliberate, affiliative, and sense-making process, which calls both for new, unbiased educational policies and for a deeper social understanding.

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