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**COMMENTARY ON:**

**Communicating about Communication: Multidisciplinary Approaches to  
Educating Educators about Language Variation**

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Charity Hudley and Mallinson's "Communicating about Communication: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Educating Educators about Language Variation" is a well written article with a well supported argument: Linguistically-diverse students, in particular those who are native American English speakers but who speak a non-standard variety of American English are shortchanged in society and schools because of non-conformity to standardized school language, social, and cultural norms. Although this argument is not new, as Charity Hudley and Mallinson show, it is still prevalent and still a thorn in the side of quality of education for all in the United States.

While sociolinguists and linguistic educators have provided evidence for the need for inclusion of language and linguistics research for K-12 teachers, as evidenced in the *Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary v. Ann Arbor Schools* (1979) court case and supported by the judge, Judge Charles Joiner, teachers—

whether pre-service or in-service—and administrators often do not receive the training or access to information they need and could use to address, understand, and integrate knowledge about language variation in the classroom.

Although there are recent publications on providing toolkits, such as the one by Charity Hudley and Mallinson (forthcoming), or other practical classroom manuals, such as the one by Wheeler and Swords (2006), more is needed to continue to substantiate the need for knowledge about language variation in the classroom for teachers and administrators—and even parents—but also about the application of such knowledge. It is a pleasure to see this article by Charity Hudley and Mallinson as well as these other efforts.

What is also pleasing about this article is the novel use of existing literature. For example, the revision to Peggy Macintosh's *White privilege and male privilege: a personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies* (1988) adapts a critical discourse analysis/critical race theory critique of standard language as Macintosh does for a critique of racism and white privilege. What makes this adaptation even more powerful is the implicit connection between racism, white privilege, and language discrimination. While most linguists would support this analogy, the impact of the adaptation makes it even more salient.

Another contribution this article makes is the inclusion of links to research and tools that scholars, teachers, and administrators can access to reference current research in linguistically diverse classrooms. Often teachers are talked to about research and provided with handouts, etc. This article dialogs with teachers and provides links to materials that enlighten and enhance pedagogical skills and inform administrators about the need for such skills. Too often administrators and school boards are disconnected from the practical needs of classrooms or even the tools needed to help teachers and students succeed. This article provides the evidence and access. For all these things, I must applaud the efforts of Charity Hudley and Mallinson.

For all the efforts of Charity Hudley and Mallinson, an area they only broach is the role of school funding and the view of education in the United States today. While language diversity in the classroom and language research knowledge for schools, teachers, administrators, and parents is crucial and, I would argue, fundamental, underfunding of education in general and the negative attitudes by some state and local governments about public education and taxpayer reluctance to fund education is a major problem. Charity Hudley and Mallinson do show that socioeconomic class is a factor in the gap between the quality education of some and the poor education of

others, the issue a bit more complex. As Ogbu (2003) showed, it is not just about money—even though that is a significant factor. Intersectionality Theory as presented by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1991) and Lesley McCall (2005) is helpful in compiling the multitude of factors involved in the lack of opportunity and oppression of various groups and how the fact we all belong to and identify with different groups complicates issues that we sometimes try to simplify too soon. Money is significant; but so is race, gender, class, region, sexuality, religion, and the like and the complexity of each works to contribute to the hegemony many linguistically diverse students encounter.

Secondly, the issue of much information about teaching training in linguistic diversity in the past having not contributed significantly to improvements in education quality and opportunity needs to be addressed as well. Alim (2004) shows how even when teachers have received training about language diversity in the classroom, the practicality of being in a real-live classroom on a day-to-day basis in overcrowded classrooms with disengagement and heterogeneous groups requiring differentiated teaching has the potential to bring out the worst in teachers. So, while they may have been trained to value diversity, provided with current research, given additional tools, and given classroom strategies and materials, some teachers will still revert to biased beliefs about language or at least biased pedagogical practices because, at the end of the day, it can be easier to teach those who conform than those who can or do not.

Finally, the future for this area of research as well as its development is headed in the right direction. Linguists have moved from dictating to collaborating with teachers and other educators to improve school for all instead of just those who come with the same expectations as schools. As Paul Krugman points out in his editorial, “The Uneducated American” (2009), “...we need to wake up and realize that one of the keys to our nation’s historic success is now a wasting asset. Education made America great; neglect of education can reverse the process.” Hence, we need people like Charity Hudley and Mallinson, Wheelock and Swords, and others to continue to expand the spread of knowledge to break down barriers that might one day lead to schools and a society that value the diversity of language and culture and see its potential for brilliance instead of trying to separate the perceived wheat from the chaff.

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