5. Later chapters in this book handle how speaking a variety other than "standard" American English can cause issues with employment, law enforcement, and education. Based on what you understand about rhoticity, how could you imagine, as we say near the end of this chapter, that "non-rhotic speakers in the United States today have fewer social opportunities"? What does this mean?

11 The communicative burden in education

The medium of instruction

Imagine trying to teach a child to read. How might you go about it? Some will begin by teaching the child the letters of the alphabet, what sounds they make, how they fit together. Others will begin by teaching children to recognize lists of common words by sight, reasoning that the child will associate the repeated forms with the sounds they represent and learn by analogy to extrapolate these memorized forms to new words. One might also combine these approaches and other methods to help the child learn to connect the language they speak naturally and have learned since birth with its artificial, written form. It may not seem like it anymore, but writing is advanced technology that has been invented probably not many more than four times in all of human history (in China, Sumer, Mesoamerica, and Egypt). Mapping one's spoken language to writing is a daunting task for any child, even those who seem to take to it with relative ease, and it is an essential one because literacy, as we will see, is the cornerstone of education. Critics of the primacy of literacy in educational contexts, which mark this specific kind of literacy as the necessary and sufficient conditions for economic success, call this the *literacy myth*, and in this chapter we'll see how its entanglement with the Standard Language Ideology spells trouble for speakers of undervalued Englishes.

Now imagine yourself trying to teach a child to read a language that they do *not* already speak. Imagine a French-speaking child has arrived in your English-medium classroom. If you do not speak French yourself or, worse, if you are convinced that speaking French is a choice and clear evidence of an inferior mind and limited intellectual potential, how successful is the child likely to be learning to read and write in English? Hand this child the same alphabet and list of sight words as the children sitting to their left and right, instruct them exclusively in your clearest, loudest English speech, reprimand them when they make mistakes or make a joke about their difficult-for-you-to-pronounce name. How successful will this child be?

Much of education, whether the subject is mathematics, physics, or literature, happens through the medium of language. Our thoughts are not, themselves, made of language, but language is the channel that allows us to move thoughts from one head to another. It is crucial, therefore, that teachers and students be able to understand one another. A tragic mistake that happens too often in the process of teaching and learning is confusing different meanings of *language*.

In the previous reading example, there are at least three distinct language varieties involved. First, there is written language, with its own particular rules and limitations (written language lacks gesture, for example, so spatial relationships that would be obvious in a conversation must be more laboriously specified). This written language is distinct

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from the spoken language that is the medium of instruction (the language a teacher uses to explain concepts and ask questions and the language teachers typically expect students to respond in). There are also the native languages of the children (and the teacher) in the classroom. People often assume that the language used by the teacher and the different language varieties used by students will all be basically the same variety. And sometimes they are all very similar, especially when a middle-class white child walks into the average American classroom and the written standard, the language of instruction, and the child's native, or home, language are all likely to be closely related to one another. For children who speak undervalued Englishes, however, these understandings of "language" rarely align.

There may be benefits to having all these levels of language in instruction be related in this way, but there is no logical reason this must be the case. One can easily imagine a situation, for example, where the written variety is Latin, the language of instruction is French, and the children speak a variety of languages at home. In a situation like this, it would be clear that the children must be taught both Latin and its grammar along with the formal rules of writing and French with its grammar and the formal rules of speaking. Standard Language Ideology causes problems in American classrooms when it is assumed that 1) written English is just the standard spoken variety set in ink (it is not), 2) the language of instruction must logically be as close as possible to the written standard (it need not), and 3) children who speak a variety that differs substantially from the prescriptive standard are inferior, disadvantaged, or inexpert language users (they are not).

Children arrive at school already skilled participants in their native culture and adept users of their native language(s), with some rare exceptions (see specific language impairment and non-verbal autism in Chapter 3 and childhood access to signed languages in Chapter 8). The importance of this fact cannot be overstated: acquiring a language, signed or spoken, as an infant and toddler is an intrinsic capacity of human beings. What children are expected to do in school is to learn to read and write standard written English and to communicate with their teachers and classmates. As we have discussed throughout this book, "standard" written English may be similar to the child's home language or it may differ dramatically from it. In either case, reducing all of "language ability," "intelligence," and "potential" to the ability to read and write standard written English overlooks a tremendously complex negotiation of codes, culture, and modes of communication that will need to happen between the children and their teachers for instruction to be successful.

The situation described earlier, the French-speaking student arriving in an English-medium classroom and receiving no accommodation is not so far removed from the everyday lived experience of children who natively speak varieties of English that differ substantially from the imagined "standard" English. Often these children are met with bias from their teachers, bias from their classmates, and even bias from themselves and their own families (in the form of linguistic insecurity) simply based on their native variety of English.

Educators could make their own lives, and the lives of their students, much easier and better if they recognize two facts: 1) that "standard" English is just another variety of English that students can learn to add to their treasury of linguistic expertise, and 2) that students' home languages are logically-structured, valid forms of language that can be drawn upon to *connect* the student to the goals of the classroom rather than *exclude* them from those goals. Education requires mastery of new forms, not assimilation. The assumption that "standard" English is the default, correct, and basic form of communication reifies and exacerbates deep problems in the educational system that mirror and radiate out into deep problems in society.

Invisible ideologies go to school

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 50.7 million, more than 90%, of children in the United States are educated in public schools (NCES 2020) where attendance is mandatory, and the curriculum is intended to prepare children to be competent, successful adults in civic, commercial, and cultural capacities. Furthermore, people hold schools responsible for turning the children in their care into productive citizens capable of critical thought. The ultimate goal of freely available, compulsory education is an informed electorate, one capable of electing and participating in a democratic government, participating in an economy, etc.

Malcolm X (1970) once said, "Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs only to the people who prepare for it today." By teaching students how to think and how to communicate, and by giving them a boost onto the shoulders of giants, teachers help prepare children to live fulfilled, engaged lives. Teaching is a particularly challenging way to make a living, undertaken by people who are deeply dedicated and truly wish to do well for the children in their charge. Faced with limited budgets, dedicated teachers regularly use their own pay to purchase supplies, books, and food for their students. As both an authority figure and a role model, a teacher has tremendous influence in a child's life.

When we write about education, we must keep in mind that teachers operate within the educational *system*, and, like all systems in our society, it is imbued with Standard Language Ideology. The focus, then, is on the system itself; when the system fails, it fails teachers and students. All of us have biases and expectations, and "standard" language ideology is by no means limited to educators. Our goal is to consider how inequality and disadvantage are perpetuated through language – for the most part unwittingly – when they emerge in the classroom and to explore ways in which these inequalities might be corrected.

There is a large body of research on the ways in which teachers' attitudes play out in the classroom. For example, Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) studied education majors who had had extensive coursework teaching writing. This coursework taught teachers to focus on writing as a creative, iterative process and to deemphasize the importance of "error correction" in that process. In this study, the education majors were asked to correct several essays, but despite their training and the framing of the task, the subjects were highly consistent in focusing on errors and attributing non-standard usage with carelessness, laziness, and incompetence. These findings supplemented Briggs' and Pailliotet's own observations on the power of language conventions and provided some insight into "how grammatical instruction remains a locus of power and control in English instruction at any level" (1997: 1). There is a crucial question without any clear answer: Most teachers are aware of the power and control they have, but how many of them realize how very influential their personal opinions are in student success? Ideology is most powerful when it is least visible; the invisibility of ideology also makes it much easier to propagate in a classroom.

Oh, bother!

A 2003 study asked non-academic professionals to evaluate 66 written sentences, each with one error (and a few with no errors, as a control). Their choices were "does not bother me," "bothers me a little," "bothers me a lot," or "no error." The researchers found that the professionals were very inconsistent and sometimes incorrect in

their evaluations, and more interesting still, "while nonacademics are less bothered by usage errors, the errors that they find most bothersome are still common dialectical features" (Gray & Heuser 2003). Although the subjects had forgotten the grammatical rules they were taught in school, they retained language ideologies that denigrate undervalued varieties of English.

Language ideology in education is a multi-faceted and complex subject that cannot be addressed by means of a handful of academic studies. Instead, we focus here on two specific angles. First, we consider how children who speak stigmatized varieties of English (e.g., Appalachian English, Jamaican Patwa, Gullah, Chicanx English, Navajo English, etc.) cope or fail to cope with the implications of Standard Language Ideology. Second, we'll look at the language varieties spoken by the teachers themselves. When a teacher who grew up speaking a stigmatized variety is assigned to teach a first-grade class in their old neighborhood, what does institutional policy tell them about the kind of English they should use as the medium of instruction with those children? Do teachers in this position follow prescriptive usage rules, or do they simply use whichever language works best in reaching the children? How do they talk to children about their language? What advantages and disadvantages might there be to this?

The setting of goals

Figure 11.1 provides some insight into one of the most difficult and intractable problems in public education: there are large populations of children who do not learn to read. This

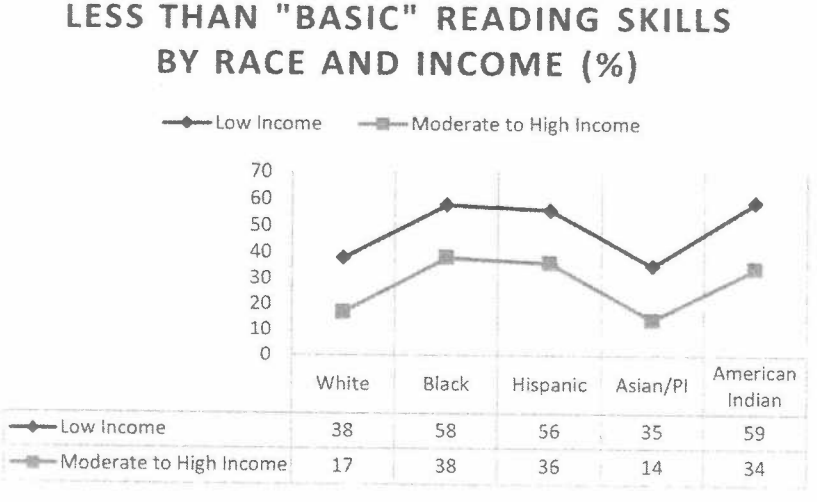

Figure 11.1 Percentage of fourth graders who scored less than "basic" reading skills, by race and income

Source: adapted from Fiester (2010)

disparity has been described for decades as the "reading gap." This not a new problem, but it is one that has evaded solutions. Educators, social scientists, government agencies, psychiatrists, and linguists spend a lot of time and ink trying to understand the reading gap and how to fix it. Meanwhile, whole generations of children leave school unprepared and, perhaps even worse, uninspired. A 2012 study suggests that children who do not read at grade level by the fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Hernandez 2012). Even if a child does not end up dropping out of school, reading is the gateway to education. Math, science, social studies, technology, engineering, art, and music education all hinge critically on the student being able to read. There is even evidence that reading ability is positively correlated with empathy (Mar et al. 2009) and self-confidence (Hisken 2011).

When the subject of the reading gap comes into the public consciousness, it is almost always in connection with issues of race and ethnicity. Blame is also often attributed to bilingualism and stigmatized varieties of English; by which logic the reading gap is the fault of the linguistic backgrounds of the children who suffer because of it. One particularly insidious modern instantiation of this viewpoint is the so-called "Word Gap." According to Hart and Risley (1995, 2003), the social science researchers who perpetuated the idea in the late 1990s, the Word Gap (and subsequently the reading gap) was attributable to poor and working-class parents simply not speaking enough words to their children, as many as 30 million fewer words by age 3. This idea has been convincingly debunked by both linguists (see Baugh 2017) and educators. Sperry et al. (2019) report, after attempting to replicate the original "Word Gap" study under conditions more carefully controlling experimenter bias, the observer's paradox, and other methodological flaws:

> Not only did the Word Gap disappear, but also some poor and working-class communities showed an advantage in the number of words children heard, compared with middle-class communities. Our study also revealed a great deal of variation among communities within each socioeconomic stratum. . . . Our failure to replicate [Hart and Risley]'s findings when using their definition of the vocabulary environment raises the possibility that variation across communities within a particular social class is so great that it swamps variation across classes.
>
> (Sperry et al. 2019: 11)

Continuing to promulgate the "Word Gap" idea requires simultaneously a deep misunderstanding of how children acquire language and a willingness to use language as an excuse to blame the poor as somehow responsible for their poverty.

Word Gap?

The Word Gap argument goes something like this: "Some parents don't talk to their children enough and this causes most/all/some of the educational disparities." Like so much of Standard Language Ideology this beguiling idea is as powerfully harmful as it is simple. It allows dominant communities to feel absolved of any responsibility for low educational success among non-dominant groups because lack of success becomes their own fault. Adair et al. (2017) conducted a year-long video ethnography in two first-grade classrooms serving mostly children of Latinx immigrants. The teachers in these classrooms used dynamic teaching

practices in which students "influenced and made decisions about how and what they learned in many different individual and collective ways." Children in these classes had more freedom to use their linguistic expertise and participate in learning instead of being told that they were somehow linguistically deficient. Three years later, 91% of these children passed the state assessments compared with an average of 60% passage rate for comparable children in three more standard learning environments.

To demonstrate the success of this methodology, Adair et al. produced and screened an 18-minute film demonstrating a typical day in these dynamic classrooms to 232 teachers, administrators, and first graders from schools serving a comparable immigrant population in five Texas schools in four separate districts. They found the teachers and administrators understood and approved of the practices in the film. However, because of Standard Language Ideology and the Word Gap, these professional educators were convinced that the immigrant children in their own classrooms could not benefit from such sophisticated learning experiences because they simply lacked enough vocabulary. They echoed the Word Gap myth that these children's parents didn't talk to them enough. They accepted the deficiency-based Word Gap argument despite the evidence before them and despite all their tremendous desire and efforts to help the children in their care succeed. And the children had learned the lesson of the Word Gap as well. When Adair et al. showed the same film to the first graders in these schools, they uniformly rejected the dynamic teaching practices as terrible. To learn, children need to "keep your mouth zipped, eyes watching and . . . and . . . and ears listening!", one boy interjected. The teachers in this scenario aren't to blame any more than the children are, but the Word Gap idea is dangerous to the very children it was intended to help.

The scientists who invented the Word Gap, like their eugenicist colleagues a century earlier, confused correlation with causation and bias with scientific reasoning. For the eugenicists, like famed statistician and geneticist Ronald Fischer, the mistake was believing the poor had more children than the elites because they were inherently inferior people. For Word Gap proponents, the mistake is believing that the poor speak to their children less (and the wealthy more) because the poor are somehow linguistically deficient. It also assumes that talking to children is a good measure of language acquisition, a point that was refuted in Chapter 7. Despite strong evidence that poverty is at the root of the reading gap and numerous other education challenges, the importance of poverty as a factor in educational inequality is rarely raised (but see Baugh 1999: 115 ff.). The imagined "poverty of words" has come to stand in for actual experiences of real-world poverty, deflecting attention away from the economic disparities at the root of educational inequalities.

Whose language?

In 1972, the executive committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, "the world's largest professional organization for researching and teaching composition, from writing to new media" (NCTE 2020) passed a statement on "Students' right to their own language." The statement was ratified by the membership in 1974 (and reaffirmed in 2003 and 2014).

> 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.

Despite these clearly defined and articulated goals and a great many dedicated professionals who believe in the stated principles, more than 45 years have not seen much progress in terms of large-scale policies. Nevertheless, the discussion continues, and individuals have been working on ways to incorporate these goals into their research and teaching methodologies (Bruch & Marback 2005; Katz et al. 2009; Scott and National Council of Teachers of English 2009). Kinloch (2005) has taken an integrative approach, encouraging her colleagues

> [to] reimagine our educational commitments, our shared values, in ways that mobilize public and professional attitudes circulating around the education of monolingual and multilingual students. This mobilization, I believe, needs to be grounded in linguistic and cultural negotiation and not in a wrong language/right language debate.
>
> (2005: 94)

Consider that every child comes to school with a home language (sometimes more than one). They arrive fully fluent in that language. The child must now learn a series of concrete and abstract skills – reading and writing as well as an understanding of how and when different varieties are used to greatest effectiveness. But it is at this point that trouble arises. As discussed previously, many students find that their home language, the language of instruction, and the written standard are not aligned. This fact becomes painfully obvious when the teacher makes clear that the assumption of the classroom is that they are, indeed, aligned by discussing almost interchangeably the realities of all three varieties. The solid and reasonable arguments for literacy are now attached to the spoken language without discussion or pause. If Student A can learn to read and write, this mindset seems to go, then Student A can also learn to speak a different language variety. The two goals (mastering the standardized written language and replacing one spoken language with another) have different underlying motivations, and, in fact, they stand in opposition to each other. Instead of using children's expert mastery of their home language(s) to scaffold the acquisition of reading (as one might do with a French or German-speaking student arriving in an English-speaking classroom), the home language is devalued and stigmatized. For many American children, the opportunity to learn to read and write is often the first time they are told, in no uncertain terms, that something is fundamentally wrong with who they are.

What may seem minor in the first grade (reminding students to use a certain verb form) can mushroom across the curriculum into broad exclusionary practices that go beyond issues of spelling to the silencing of discourse, to the detriment of everybody (Gee 2007a [1996]: 221). This is an issue that is always close to the surface in African American communities in

particular, in part because of what John Baugh has called educational malpractice stemming from educational apartheid (1999: 4). According to June Jordan (1989): "Black children in America must acquire competence in white English, for the sake of self-preservation. But you will never teach a child a new language by scorning and ridiculing and forcibly erasing his first language."

Appropriacy arguments

Professional organizations and educators often respond to the issue of language prejudice by arguing that although all dialects are equal, some varieties of English are simply "inappropriate" for the classroom. Such appropriacy arguments are typically tied to language segregation, with children being told that they should only speak their home language when they are physically at home. In addition to promoting racist views of language variation, such arguments confuse written and spoken standards. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association regularly review, revise, and publish "Standards for the English Language Arts," a 12-point list which emphasizes reading and reading comprehension skills. The spoken language is mentioned only three times. A survey of language arts textbooks provides a similar picture, in which the focus is primarily the written language. In this view of education, children are potentially productive members of literacy communities rather than language communities (National Council of Teachers of English 1996: 3). Only a spoken variety that is as close as possible to the written variety is "appropriate" for use as the language of instruction. Therefore, any variety of English that is deemed to be too unlike the written standard can be targeted for culling with a ready-made but shallow set of appropriacy rationalizations as a matter of professional practice.

Tightly bound to the concept of linguistic appropriacy is that of communicative competence. Taken in its loosest form, communicatively competence refers to the ability to adjust one's language to fit specific social contexts (and the ability to recognize which contexts are associated with particular linguistic varieties). Communicative competence includes both learning the "appropriate" language to speak in the classroom and learning the "appropriate" ways to interact (such as raising your hand and waiting to be called on before speaking). In other words, communicative competence refers to the collection of indexical meanings that an individual recognizes. If communicative competence is taken as a speaker's ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, and we do not challenge the construction and implications of "appropriacy," then we have opened a back door to exclusion on the basis of another kind of "correctness" logic (see Cameron 1995: 234–235).

Appropriacy judgments cloak subjective, culturally bound judgments of "correctness." This might be made clearer by the contrast between two statements:

1. It is inappropriate for a law student to pose a question in Navajo English in the classroom.
2. It is inappropriate for a wife to contradict her husband.

While the second statement was once unremarkable, it would now evoke resounding criticism in most quarters. The first statement might still pass without comment, although the underlying issue, the silencing of voices considered unworthy or unequal, is the same. To challenge the first statement in the US educational system is to question the primacy of one language variety over all others.

At the same time, it is important to remember that ideologies and social strategies for the limitation of one language over another are not limited to one segment of the population. The

following statements indicate that the concept of appropriacy has a wider and quite relevant place in the discussion of the distribution of language varieties over social space:

1. A child who is a native speaker of Navajo English may be criticized for using her home language rather than "standard" English in the classroom.
2. A child who is a native speaker of Navajo English may be criticized for speaking "school English" rather than her family's home language at the dinner table.

The varieties of English spoken in peripheralized communities persist because they are a primary way to establish solidarity and loyalty. Minority language community ideologies can be just as powerful as the ideologies and strategies of the dominant bloc institutions, and both are worthy of study. Individuals caught between competing ideologies must learn to deal with this "push-pull." As noted in Chapter 9, speakers of undervalued varieties of English are faced with a linguistic tightrope, maintaining balance between competing (and contradictory) language ideologies.

The argument put forth in support of "standard" English-only classrooms and schools generally sounds something like this:

> Student A must give up their home language in certain situations for their own good. This doesn't mean they have to give it up completely; there's no reason to deny that language. Instead, we should redirect the student's use of that language to environments and circumstances in which it is appropriate. At the same time, we should give the student another language ("standard" English) – for those situations in which it will be the only socially acceptable language. This is necessary if they are to pursue a career or education in the wider world where potential employers would otherwise reject them because of the variety of English they speak.

The NCTE guidelines for teaching the English language arts includes this very idea, but in different terms:

> All of us who speak English speak different varieties of English depending on whom we are communicating with, the circumstances involved, the purpose of the exchange, and other factors. Indeed, creative and communicative powers are enhanced when students develop and maintain multiple language competencies.
>
> Nonetheless, *some varieties of English are more useful than others* for higher education, for employment, and for participation in what the Conference on College Composition and Communication . . . in a language policy statement calls "the language of wider communication." Therefore, while we respect diversity in spoken and written English, we believe that all students should learn this language of wider communication.
>
> (National Council of Teachers of English 1996: 22–23; emphasis added)

The "appropriateness" argument is the basis for an approach to teaching "standard" English called "code-switching" (Swords & Wheeler 2006, 2010). The proponents of "code-switching" use the term only to mean *situational code-switching* (Blom & Gumperz 1972) or switching languages according to context (rather than using two languages in the same interaction). The code-switching approach is recommended for use in "urban classrooms" ("urban" serving potentially as a dog whistle indexing Blackness). The code-switching

approach attempts to train children to recognize the differences between their speech and the "standard" to acquire the linguistic competence to use different varieties in different contexts. Of course, school-aged children already know how to adjust speech to contexts. The code-switching approach reduces language variation to two distinct varieties, one of which should be left at home when a child comes to school.

Teachers are directed to appreciate and respect the otherwise stigmatized languages of peripheral communities but, at the same time, reminded that those languages must be kept separate. This faux egalitarianism is well known to African Americans and others who fought for the reversal of the *separate but equal* doctrine. It is no coincidence that the "language of wider communication" is the primary language of white middle-class people. As has always been the case, the divide between socially stigmatized and socially sanctioned language runs along very predictable lines: certain vernacular varieties of US English should be restricted to the home and neighborhood, to play and informal situations, to the telling of folktales and stories of little or no interest to the wider world.

Variation in language socialization

Linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath examined patterns of language socialization in three communities in South Carolina. One community was primarily white and middle class, one was primarily African American and working class, and one was rural, white, and working class. The white middle-class homes tended to have many more books compared to the other communities. The parents in the homes socialized the children to interact with books in specific ways, typically having nightly bedtime stories where parent and child interact with the book together. During bedtime stories, parents typically ask the types of questions one might expect in a classroom context. Of course, not all parents have the resources to purchase books and spend large amounts of time with their children. Because the types of interactions and the use of books in school are based on white middle-class norms, white middle-class children will naturally find the culture of the classroom especially familiar.

With both feet firmly planted on the false assumptions of Standard Language Ideology and the literacy myth, a teacher may be adamant about the need to weed out the bad language and replace it with the good. This approach, which is mistakenly assumed to be in the best interest of the children involved, is built into the educational system at various levels (e.g., pedagogy, curricula, school rules). To give these children any chance for a better life, they must supply the children with a currency they don't have when they come to school: "standard" English, which is defined by default; it is not what these children speak. What is more destructive than this reliance on the idealized and imagined "standard," however, is the way in which these targeted varieties of English are devalued; the undefined "standard" is preferred, obligatory, appropriate, and widely used, while all other varieties of American English are narrow, inappropriate, unworthy of inclusion, and deserving of derision and ridicule. Indeed, in many cases, the push to change a child's language is part of a larger project attempting to make the child behave according to the norms of white middle-class culture.

Languagelessness

In addition to the belief that some children come to school speaking varieties of English that are "inferior," some educators go so far as to suggest that some children come to school with no language at all. This is particularly common with children who come to school speaking a language other than English. In his research in a high school in Chicago, Jonathan Rosa (2016, 2019) found that teachers often commented on the supposed "languagelessness" of students who were bilingual or were not native speakers of English. One of the teachers in Rosa's study described the bilingual *principal* of the school by saying, "Her English is horrible, and from what I hear, her Spanish isn't that good either."

The languages targeted for eradication from the classroom varies according to changing political climates. For example, during World War I, there were attacks on the use of German in the classroom. As noted in Chapter 7, US varieties of Spanish, French, and Chinese are often denigrated as "bad" or "broken" varieties. The same is true for the Englishes found in communities where other languages are spoken. The racist view that Chicanx, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and many Latinx Englishes and Spanishes are inferior creates obstacles for bilinguals. This racism is made worse by the prejudicial (and ignorant) belief that people code-switch because they cannot speak either language. In fact, most types of code-switching require fluency in two languages.

This view of languageless Latinxs aligns with racist stereotypes of Latinx people as backward, ignorant, and incapable of assimilating to broader American culture. The racist nature of these ideologies is reflected in this quote from a Massachusetts teacher discussing her Puerto Rican students:

> These poor kids come to school speaking a hodgepodge. They are all mixed up and don't know any language well. As a result, they can't even think clearly. That's why they don't learn. It's our job to teach them language – to make up for their deficiency. And, since their parents don't really know any language either, why should we waste time on Spanish? It is "good" English which has to be the focus.
>
> (Zentella 1997: 8–9)

This focus on "good" English erases students' home language and treats being bilingual as a problem that must be resolved. Indeed, the principal at the high school where Rosa conducted his research actually equated being "bilingual" with an inability to speak English: "They're bilingual. That means they don't know the language. The other ones just don't want to speak it" (Rosa 2019: 128). Of course, being bilingual means a person can speak two languages. The principal's attitude takes a bilingual's verbal skills and redefines them as part of a language deficit.

Perceiving emotion

Amy Halberstadt and her colleagues performed a study to see if race played a role in the ways that teachers interpreted children's emotional states (2018). Students in teacher training programs were shown images of children with facial expressions conveying a particular emotion (like in Figure 11.2). The future teachers were asked to note the emotion associated with the child's facial expressions. The researchers focused on the

Figure 11.3 In 1884, the Carlisle (Pennsylvania) Indian School had 375 students

Source: image from Cumberland County Historical Society and Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center

and become "civilized." The children were sent to boarding schools so that they could not be influenced by their parents or other members of their family. In addition to attempting to eradicate Native American languages, these schools forced children to "learn" in ways that were culturally unfamiliar and were counter to the ways they were used to interacting before they were sent to school.

Terrorizing Native American children

Pulling Native American children out of their communities not only denied them exposure to their own cultures; it also exposed them to new diseases and severe forms of corporal punishment. The children were kept in crowded quarters where diseases could spread easily. It is estimated than around 200 children died in the years the school operated (1879–1918). Among the dead were three Arapaho boys who were brought to the school in 1881. The school had its own cemetery to accommodate the children who died there. In 2016, the families of the three Arapaho boys petitioned to have the boys' remains returned to the Arapaho community. In 2017, the boys' remains were returned to the tribe for proper burial on Arapaho lands (Wenson 2017).

Although the boarding schools are now history, the role of schools in pushing children toward cultural assimilation continues. Consider, for example, the cultural norms associated with silence in Apache culture. As discussed in Chapter 6, it is usual for people who have just

met to remain silent until they have gotten used to being around one another and have a sense of what the other person is like. Traditional Apache ways of teaching involve cultivating a learner's engagement with some aspect of their immediate environment. This may involve telling a story that uses some element of the current situation metaphorically. It may also mean that the teacher and learner sit together and remain silent. However, it does *not* involve lecturing or reprimanding children who are trying to learn.

In her work with Apache language revitalization efforts, Marybeth Nevins (2013) observed numerous examples demonstrating this approach to learning. For example, when Nevins asked a group of Apache women what the best way to learn the language would be, the women replied by saying that the best way to learn Apache would be to make bread. The reasoning is that in baking bread, Nevins would participate in a common activity where speakers used the language all around her. The process of baking produces the sort of interactional context conducive to learning Apache in a natural way. Of course, formal classroom teaching is typically quite different, with silence expected only from the children and only until they are called upon to speak (in which case failure to do so results in public embarrassment). Indeed, the "standard" American approach to education is often founded upon instilling children with fear; they will learn to avoid the public shaming associated with not knowing the answer when called upon. This approach differs drastically from the Apache approach of creating a context for learning one that is comfortable and natural.

In a study of education on the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon, Susan Philips (1993) found a similar pattern. Philips found that the children were used to learning largely through observation. A child would observe an adult performing a task and then practice some small part of that task on their own before returning to the adult for advice about how to improve what they have done. Philips found that different types of classroom participation structures produced very different reactions from students. For example, the Warm Springs children rarely participated in contexts where the teacher would address the class, asking questions to individuals or to the class. In contexts where the teacher worked with a small group of students, such as to practice reading, the children refused to talk at all. The students' responses were best in cases where they worked alone and the teacher was available for help. Of course, this is the participation structure that would be most familiar to the students.

The teachers in Warm Springs did not recognize that the problem was due to different expectations for learning. Rather, they attributed the lack of participation to the children's natural "shyness." In cases where different cultural expectations lead to different ways of interacting, it is quite common for members of the dominant culture to interpret those differences in terms of stereotypes based on the presumed race of their interlocutor. This occurs for children entering school with different understandings of how learning occurs. Their behavior is often seen as a basic part of the child's personality, usually based on racial stereotypes (even if unconsciously). Native American and Asian children may be assumed to be naturally shy and quiet. African American and Latinx children may be stereotyped as being loud and angry. As we have seen so many other times, this is another example of blaming the child for the results of discourse structural racism. Children end up being written off as incapable of engaging in classroom culture, whether it is because they are wrongly perceived as being too shy, too loud, too disruptive, too lazy, too angry, too quiet, or simply unable to use any language properly.

Indexical bleaching is another aspect of cultural assimilation commonly found in educational contexts (Bucholtz 2016). As discussed in Chapter 7, boarding schools regularly gave Native American children new "English" names to use at school. Similarly, it was common for immigrant children to be given "American" names when they began school (see

Figure 11.4 April Lou, a teacher at PS 1 in New York with six immigrant children from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The children are holding up signs with their original name and the English name they were given for use in official school records

Source: photo by Fred Palumbo, *World Telegram & Sun*, Library of Congress

Figure 11.4). As discussed in Chapter 4, names continue to trigger forms of discrimination; identical schoolwork consistently receives lower grades when the student's name is associated with a minority group.

Zhao and Biernat (2017) tested what would happen if both names were linked to the same person by focusing on international graduate students. In higher education, international students continue to face pressure to adopt names that sound more "American." Zhao and Biernat sent out email messages to professors who were looking for graduate student researchers. All of the messages were from a student named *Xian Zhao* who openly identified as Chinese and requested a meeting with the professor to discuss their research program. Half of the messages contained the phrase *My name is Xian Zhao, you can just call me Xian* while the other half said *My name is Xian Zhao, but you can call me by my English name Alex*. The "Alex" messages were signed *Alex (Xian)* and were sent from an email account listed as belonging to Alex Zhao (rather than Xian Zhao). Even though "Alex" was clearly Chinese, the Alex messages were more likely to receive replies compared to the Xian messages. The authors of the study conclude that having an "American" name indexes a willingness to assimilate to American culture. In other words, the professors preferred students they believed to be more open to cultural assimilation. This bias demonstrates the importance of cultural assimilation in educational settings.

People expect education to mold children into good moral citizens. But this seems to presume a uniform cultural ideology of which behaviors are acceptable and which are likely to be sanctioned. It also presumes a single approach to learning, even if that approach is unnatural and alien to a subset of students. For such students, the classroom is a crucible of cultural assimilation: they must interact in new ways that reflect the norms of the dominant culture, their language is banned from the classroom, they must communicate in a language that they have never been explicitly taught, and the curriculum is overwhelming based on the culture and history of the dominant group. Efforts to create a multicultural curriculum help a great deal, but sanctions on language and interaction continue to make the classroom an unwelcoming place for too many students.

Ignoring Chicanx histories

In 1968, Chicanx high school students in East Los Angeles began a series of walkouts to protest the quality of education in their schools (see Figure 11.5). The school curriculum did not contain any material related to Chicanx history and few of the teachers spoke Spanish. Among the student demands were the introduction of bilingual education, teaching the students "standard" Spanish, and incorporating Chicanx topics into the curriculum. School funding was based on the number of students attending school each day. Roll was taken every afternoon in home room to produce the student count for the purposes of funding. The organizers of the Chicanx walkout had students leave

Figure 11.5 Pickets out front of Los Angeles Police headquarters protesting arrest of Mexican American student leaders, 1968

Source: *Los Angeles Times* Photographic Archive, UCLA Library

school immediately before home room so that they could not be counted, undermining the school funding process. It is estimated that some 20,000 students from different schools participated in the walkouts. Several of the organizers were arrested and were only released after further protest. The walkouts resulted in major changes in the Los Angeles school system and began an important era in the Chicanx civil rights movement (García & Castro 2011).

How teachers talk

Teachers are expected to speak the imaginary "standard" English. Each state has a complex administrative body which is responsible for reviewing and licensing teachers, and each publishes those guidelines openly. The guidelines for California, Michigan, New Mexico, and New York, for example, all have similar expectations for teachers to be speakers of "proper" English. For example, the New Mexico guidelines for evaluating teacher performance includes "grammar and vocabulary may be incorrect" as a marker of "unsatisfactory" teacher performance (Patterson 2019: 79).

Parents who encounter teachers with "accented" English are often afraid that their children will adopt the accent of their teacher. In linguistic terms, this fear has no foundation. Children learn the phonology of their language first from their families and then from their peers, a process that is largely stabilized by the time children enter school. Phonetics and phonology cannot pass from adult to children like viruses. A teacher helps students expand their vocabulary and stylistic repertoire, but these are additions to the basic grammar of language, which is well-established by age 6. By this age, children imitate their peers (other children) rather than parents or teachers. Other than possibly expanding their ability to understand accented speech (see later in this chapter), a teacher's accent in English has no real effect on their students' language abilities.

In 2002, after passage of the No Child Left Behind act, the state of Arizona began monitoring the speech of classroom teachers to ensure that all teachers were "fluent" in English. Teachers who spoke Spanish or used Spanish classroom materials were reported for breaking the state's "English Only" law, which prohibited the use of other languages by the state government. Monitoring teachers was part of a larger anti-immigrant movement in Arizona that specifically attacked Latinxs. Most of the teachers who were reported for "heavy accents" or "bad grammar" were teachers working in bilingual education classrooms. Students in bilingual classrooms had low scores on standardized tests, and Arizona state officials argued that the gap resulted from teachers who were not fluent in English or who used Spanish in the classroom. This, of course, is a highly unlikely explanation for the gap in test scores. Anyone unable to speak, read, and write in English would not be able to obtain teacher certification or make it through a job interview for a teaching position. Equally implausible is the idea that the children weren't learning English because their teachers occasionally used Spanish in the classroom. A much more likely explanation is that the "English Only" policy results in children being taught content (like math or science) in a language they do not speak. These "English Only" policies rob children of the educational foundation needed to do well on standardized tests. Attempting to eradicate Spanish from the classroom has the same effect as trying to force children to speak "standard" English (without teaching them this second dialect). It does little more than alienate and marginalize minority children.

The *Arizona Republic* newspaper reviewed the complaints filed against teachers in 2007. The examples of "heavy accents" resulting in teacher sanctions were largely features of Chicanx English. For example, teachers were reported for things like saying *lebel* instead of *level* and saying *mush* instead of *much*. Both "errors" are regular, predictable patterns found in Chicanx English. Spanish does not distinguish between the speech sounds /b/ and /v/. Although Spanish writing makes the distinction, these two sounds have long been merged in the spoken language with both pronounced with the sound /ß/, which is a fricative like [v] but made with both lips like [b]. This merger between consonants has been borrowed into several English varieties used in Latinx communities. Similarly, the [ʃ] sound represented in English by the digraph "sh" does not occur in Spanish, so some speakers of Chicanx English substitute [ʃ] with [tʃ] (the sound represented in English by the digraph "ch").

Other examples of "bad grammar" were also regular patterns in Chicanx English. One teacher, for example, was reported for saying *What do we call it in English?* rather than *How do you say it in English?* The idea that this "error" reflects an inability to speak English is ludicrous. It would stand to reason that teachers who are able to speak the languages of their students would be more capable when it comes to communicating with these same students. Nevertheless, just as with students, teachers who use undervalued language varieties in the classroom are seen as unqualified and face language-based discrimination. None of the teachers reported for using Spanish or speaking "bad English" were fired, although some were transferred out of classrooms with English learners. Otherwise, teachers were reprimanded and highly encouraged to attend free English classes. Of course, this meant that teachers who were native speakers of English had to take courses on English as a second language to "learn" the language they have spoken their entire lives, just like the bilinguals discussed in Chapter 7. The results of teacher monitoring did nothing to help Arizona children who were learning English. The primary result was the discriminatory treatment, denigration, and humiliation of Latinx teachers.

According to federal guidelines, it is against the law to discriminate against non-native speakers of English because their English is "accented." For speakers of English as a second language (L2), accent discrimination is considered a form of discrimination based on national origin. In 2010, federal officials informed the Arizona government that the practice of monitoring teachers for "fluency" in English likely violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act for discriminating against Latinx and immigrant teachers. Working with the Departments of Justice and Education, Arizona officials rewrote their language policy so that it did not assess teachers based on "fluency." To comply with federal law, Arizona officials changed their policy so that local school districts were required to report on the fluency of their teachers. While the state policy was changed, Latinx teachers could still be subjected to language-based discrimination at the local level (Kossan 2011).

How graduate students talk

The resistance to teachers with unfamiliar accents is perhaps strongest in university settings. Most large research universities with graduate programs employ graduate students to teach, or assist in teaching, introductory courses in their areas of expertise and scholarship. This is an important part of training future professors and an economic necessity in larger universities. Many of these graduate students come from outside the United States and speak English as a second language. All universities have policies in place to ensure that graduate student instructors and teaching assistants have sufficient English fluency to effectively teach. Even so, students often complain about having to take courses from instructors with accented

speech. Although universities recognize the importance of screening and training non-native speakers of English with teaching responsibilities, there is no parallel recognition of the need to educate undergraduates to discern between real communicative difficulties and those stemming not from language but from stereotype and bias.

The impact of student evaluations

In college, student evaluations play an important role in job security and salary determination. Evaluations continue to be widely used despite widespread evidence that they are fraught with bias (Heffernan 2022). As student evaluations are private school records, several researchers have analyzed evaluations posted on the RateMyProfessors.com website. Although the website data is somewhat outdated (the popularity of the site has greatly declined in recent years), it is the largest database of the language used in student evaluations. In comparing instructors with English-sounding names to those with Chinese or Korean-sounding names, Subtirelu (2015) found that (presumably) Asian instructors were much more likely to have comments focusing on their language, with words like *accent, understand,* and *English* all being significantly more frequent in evaluations of Asian-named instructors. In contrast, words that were more common in the evaluations of those with English-sounding names included *amazing, fun,* and *interesting*.

Evaluations are also known to contain widespread gender bias. In comparing evaluations of instructors with typically male names against typically female names, one can also see differences in the frequency with which particular words are used to describe instructors. Historian Ben Schmidt created a website that allows people to compare the frequency of different words according to gender and academic discipline. For example, words like *intellect, genius,* and *smart* are much more likely to be used in evaluations of (presumably) male professors. In contrast, female professors were more likely to be described using words like *bossy, strict, frumpy,* and *stylish.* Students evaluate professors of different genders and ethnicities according to different expectations based on social stereotypes.

Nicholas Subtirelu (2015) examined comments about instructors with Korean and Chinese-sounding names on the RateMyProfessors.com website. He found that, as a group, instructors with Korean or Chinese names received lower scores for both clarity and helpfulness. Instructors with Asian names were also less likely to be described with positive adjectives like *interesting* or *wonderful.* In a qualitative analysis of the comments, Subtirelu also found that negative evaluations of accents often assumed that the communicative burden falls entirely onto the non-native speaker in the interaction. In Chapter 4 we discussed the importance of sharing the communicative burden in producing successful communication. Often, native speakers of English fail to share any part of the communicative burden when interacting with someone they perceive as having a "foreign" accent. In looking at comments on the RateMyProfessors.com website, Subtirelu found that students often made comments absolving themselves from bearing any part of the communicative burden. Comments like *can't understand a word she says* or *don't take his course unless you speak Korean* suggest

that there is no point in exerting any effort in trying to understand their instructor. Thus, while the issue involves two distinct problems, only one of those problems is addressed in trying to resolve the issue (see Table 11.1).

There is a growing body of research considering an individual's ability to distinguish between accents and make fair assessments of English proficiency (Baese-Berk et al. 2020). This work makes it clear that achieving success in communication between native and non-native speakers is far more complicated than one might assume.

Understanding speech is not a passive activity, and some people do it more accurately than others. The range of languages a listener knows or has studied, the range of dialects and varieties of these languages, phonological proficiency (flexibility hearing speech sounds), and even language attitudes have all been shown to play a role in predicting perceptual accuracy. Bent and Bradlow (2003) asked participants with different language backgrounds to transcribe sentences spoken by a mixture of native English and non-native Mandarin and Korean-accented speech. Their results demonstrate an "interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit" in which the non-native English speakers transcribed accented English more accurately than the native English speakers. This was true not only for participants who spoke Mandarin or Korean, whose language experience matched that of the talker, but for participants from other language backgrounds as well. Bent and Bradlow also found this benefit for non-native listeners who spoke a *different* first language than the talker in the experiment. Non-native listeners transcribed non-native and native speech with equal accuracy while native English listeners had more difficulty with the non-native speech.

In a similar study, native listeners of Cantonese, Japanese, Mandarin, and English listened to English spoken by native speakers of Cantonese, Japanese, Polish, and Spanish. These participants listened to the same set of recordings and, despite the differences in their native language experiences, tended to agree about which speakers were most or least intelligible (Munro et al. 2006). As in the Bent and Bradlow study noted earlier, native Japanese listeners in the study were slightly better able to understand Japanese-accented English, but Cantonese listeners show no such benefit for Cantonese-accented speech. Munro and his colleagues argue that this finding, along with similar discoveries since, suggests that both the properties of the speech itself and the native background of the talker are important factors in influencing how accurately accented speech is perceived. Although the properties of the speech itself and assumptions about a speaker's backgrounds are important, the deciding factor (particularly for native listeners) in producing successful communication may well be the language attitudes of the listener.

Attitudes can predict how well participants think an interaction went, independent of how successfully they actually communicated. Lindemann (2003) asked native English and

Table 11.1 Language conflict in the university classroom

Problem	*Proposed solution*
Graduate student speakers of English as a second language have special hurdles to deal with to become effective classroom teachers	Increased and more diligent screening and training of non-native English-speaking graduate student teachers
Undergraduates have stereotypes and biases which, if not put aside, interfere with a potentially positive and valuable learning opportunity	None

Korean-speaking students to collaborate on a task that required them to give each other directions from partial maps. Participants' ratings of the interaction were largely predicted by the native English-speaking students' attitudes toward Koreans. In her study, Lindemann found that participants with negative attitudes toward Koreans used interactional avoidance strategies that impeded the success of the interaction, such as failing to provide feedback or to ask questions even when there were obvious misunderstandings. This use of avoidance strategies reflects the language ideology expressed by students who make no effort to understand or communicate with instructors who are not native speakers of English.

Rubin and Smith (1990) found that native English-speaking students were not always able to distinguish between different levels of accentedness. Rather than reflecting actual levels of a teacher's accent, teacher ratings correlated with a student's *perceptions* of accent. Thus, if a student assessed an instructor with a very slight Cantonese accent as highly accented, the student also found that person to be a poor teacher. In another study that drew a great deal of attention, Rubin (1992) tested how perceptions of accent were tied to student attitudes and learning experiences. Undergraduate native speakers of English listened to a brief recording of a lecture on an introductory topic. While listening, the student saw a photograph meant to represent the instructor they were hearing. Both recordings heard were made by the same speaker (a native speaker of English from central Ohio), but there were two different projected photographs: half of the students saw a slide of a woman who appeared to be white, while the other half saw a woman who appeared to be Asian (the photographed women were otherwise dressed and styled similarly). After listening to the lecture, each student completed a test of listening comprehension and memory recall. Students were asked to rate the instructor's accent ("speaks with an American accent, speaks with an Asian accent"), ethnicity, and quality of teaching. Figure 11.6 show students' perceptions based on the slides they looked

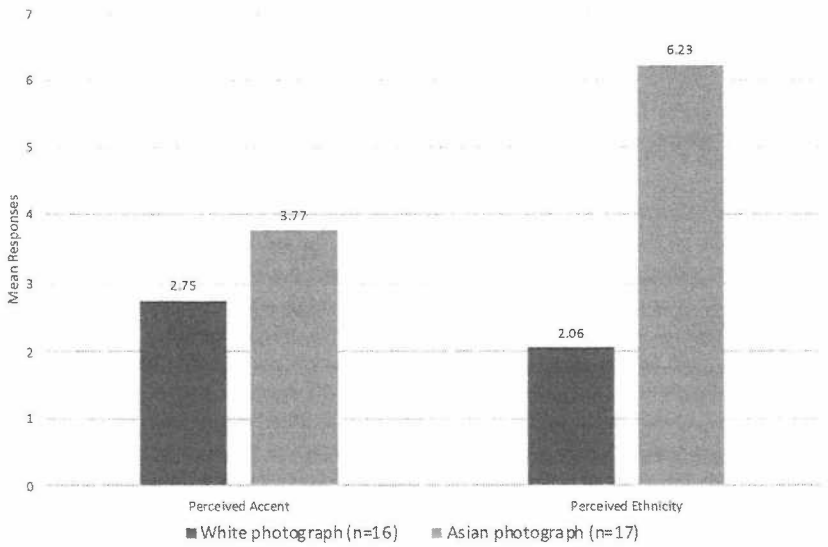

Figure 11.6 Student evaluation of lecturer's ethnicity and accent based on a recorded science lecture
Source: Rubin (1992: 516, Table 1)

at. These figures indicate that perceived ethnicity (based on the photographs) was a significant factor in student evaluations. The students who were shown the Asian face evaluated the same recordings as having more of an accent. One possible interpretation of these results suggests that some students who saw an Asian face were biased – incapable of hearing objectively. It can be stated with absolute certainty that the prerecorded language they listened to was native, Ohio-accented English. However, students looking at an Asian face were sometimes convinced that they heard a non-native accent. The students' negative preconceptions regarding Asians are clearly at work in accentedness ratings.

Overall, students remembered less of the lecture when they believed that the lecturer was Asian. When shown an Asian face, students were less able to retain the information they heard. The experiment was conducted with a lecture on a science topic and a lecture on a humanities topic. The decrease in scores associated with the Asian face was greater for the science lecture. Although it would be unwise to make broad generalizations from a single humanities lecture and a single science lecture, the study suggests that this effect might be stronger for Asian professors and graduate student instructors in STEM fields than for those in the humanities.

The actual mechanism by which a student's expectations lead to a communicative breakdown is not certain from the Rubin study alone. One possibility, endorsed by Rubin and previous editions of this book, is that listeners in this study see the Asian face, shirk their role in the communicative burden, and then simply pay less attention. This would explain both why participants report hearing a non-native accent that does not exist and why they tended to remember the words of the lecture less well. Rubin and colleagues have since named this effect Reverse Linguistic Stereotyping (Kang & Rubin 2009). The assumption behind this name is that listeners stereotype Asian speakers as "foreign" and subsequently hear an accent that does not actually exist.

However, it is equally possible, given the design and results of this and related studies, that when listeners are shown an Asian face of a graduate student instructor in an experimental context, they quite reasonably infer that this speaker may speak foreign-accented English. When this visual and social information is paired with central Ohio-accented English, the pairing is incongruous. At a social level, the participants believe the experimenters that the face provides reliable information about the identity of the talker, but at the level of speech perception – at the level where listening and comprehension occur – this social belief conflicts with the large amount of social information present in the voice (McGowan 2015, 2016; Babel & Russell 2015). A similar mismatch effect has been observed for Quechua/Spanish bilingual listeners in Bolivia when social information was provided in the instructions rather than visual cues (McGowan & Babel 2020). This incongruity hypothesis suggests that the problem results from a mismatch between listeners' expectations and the voice they are hearing.

To test this incongruity hypothesis, McGowan (2015) performed an inverted version of the Rubin (1992) listening experiment. Instead of playing native-accented American English paired with white and Asian faces, McGowan played Chinese-accented English. Listeners were instructed to look at the photograph of the speaker, listen carefully to Chinese-accented speech embedded in noise, and transcribe the sentence as accurately as possible. If Rubin's interpretation that listeners simply pay less attention because they've been shown an Asian face is correct, then the pattern of results should be identical regardless of whether listeners are hearing Ohio-accented or Chinese-accented speech.

McGowan's 2015 results are shown in Figure 11.7. Listeners in the "Chinese face" condition were significantly more accurate at transcribing Chinese-accented speech than listeners

in the white face condition. This improvement was true regardless of experience level with Chinese-accented English. Listeners with more experience listening to Chinese-accented English did better on the task overall. In fact, this experiment also included a control condition where a third group of listeners heard the same voice as in the two experimental conditions but were shown only a rudimentary silhouette as the "face" of their talker. These results are displayed in the central column in Figure 11.7. It seems clear from these results that listeners in the Asian face condition were most accurate, listeners in the control condition were less accurate, and listeners in the "mismatched" white face + Chinese-accented English condition were the least accurate. Given that listeners generally performed well, and everyone performed *best* when Chinese-accented English was combined with a Chinese face, Rubin's interpretation that listeners simply shirk their part of the communicative burden and pay less attention when shown an Asian face simply cannot be correct.

So what can be learned from this thread of experimental research? Both studies suggest that whether an instructor needs further training in English may be irrelevant. The proposed rationale typically given for the rejection of instructors with foreign accents in teaching should be carefully examined. This rejection of non-native speakers presumes the following formula:

ACCENT → COMMUNICATIVE BREAKDOWN → POOR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

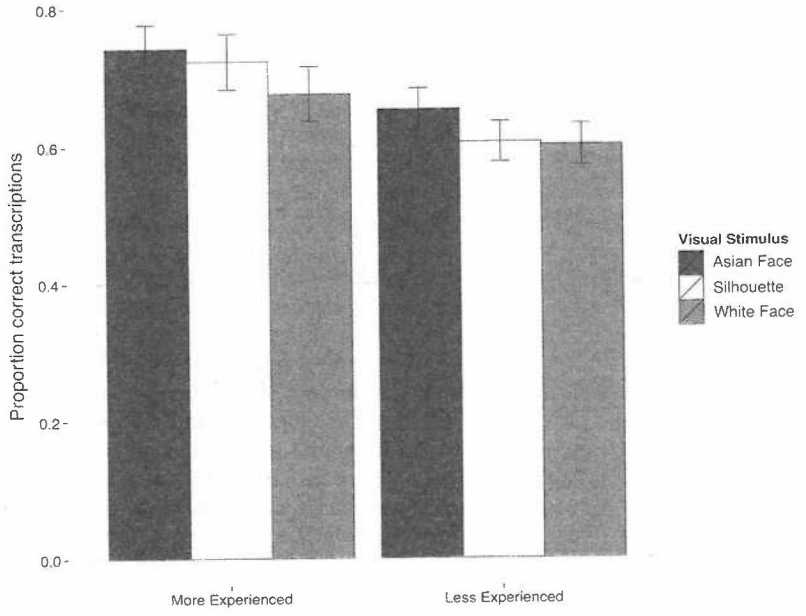

Figure 11.7 Proportion accuracy transcribing Chinese-accented speech when shown a Chinese face, silhouette, or white face for listeners with More and Less experience listening to Mandarin-accented English

Source: adapted from McGowan (2015)

Regardless of whether they are based on visual cues or emerge from bias, student expectations can have the dramatic effect on perception shown in both Rubin's and McGowan's studies. The mere *expectation* of hearing an accent may be enough to shift the communicative burden entirely from the student to the teacher. In this case, the formula takes on another dimension:

INSTRUCTOR'S PERCEIVED ACCENT → STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS → COMMUNICATIVE BREAKDOWN → POOR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

A second observation that can be taken from this pair of studies is that scientists are subject to the same biases and language ideologies as non-scientists. It seems clear that Rubin, in designing the matched guise study that paired different faces with a "Standard American English" voice is forgetting that an Ohio-accented voice carries just as much social information as a Chinese-accented (or any other accented) voice. Everyone has an accent, even people who speak the imagined standard. Pairing a face intended to lead listeners to expect foreign-accented English with a voice that is clearly not foreign-accented creates a mismatch effect. The effect of this is undone when McGowan pairs an Asian face with a genuinely Chinese-accented voice. Rubin and other researchers are making the same mistake discussed in the first half of this chapter when educators, administrators, and even parents argue that "Standard American English" is the only logical medium of instruction for the K-12 classroom. There can be no such concrete thing as "Standard American English" because there is no such thing as a linguistic variety that is devoid of social information. Children know this long before they come to school; college students know this and use this knowledge in their daily lives. When people open their mouths to speak, they reveal to the world not only what they think but who they are and where they come from. To devalue these "accented" voices is to devalue the real, living human beings who have them.

What Rubin does not get wrong, and what McGowan's study only reinforces, is that student complaints about instructor accentedness are usually about power and bias, not about language. Of course, sometimes unfamiliar accents really do make communication more difficult. It is possible that a true communicative breakdown may cause difficulties between a non-native speaker of English and a student. One important difference remains, though. A student new to the lecture hall has no way of knowing whether the person teaching the course is going to be a good communicator and dedicated teacher, and the native language of the instructor should be irrelevant to these questions. Native speakers of English are usually given the benefit of the doubt; some turn out to be good teachers and others do not. However, non-native speakers of English – especially speakers of non-European languages – may never be given a chance to show their excellence. Instead, they are predetermined to be "bad" teachers purely based on students' stereotyped expectations of "bad" English.

While universities and colleges across the country are trying hard to deal with the complicated issue of graduate student instructors who are not native speakers of English, it seems that policies to address the question of quality of classroom instruction must take a broader view. Foreign students need help in acclimating to a very different academic and social culture in a variety of matters. Language is of primary importance and deserves careful attention. In addition to the training of the foreign students, it is vitally important that native English-speaking students (and teachers) be similarly educated about matters of language and communication – both in and out of the classroom. People should be taught to take a reasonable amount of responsibility for their portion of the communicative burden and for their contributions to a successful educational experience.

What the science tells us

Arguments for the selection of one linguistic variety as somehow better or uniformly more useful than any other are circular arguments with no basis in the available evidence regarding how language works and how people learn. The insistence of a single "standard" as the best possible language variety for educational contexts does little more that create an additional burden for the least-privileged students and exclude potentially wonderful teachers from acceptance in the mainstream classroom. Educators have an incredibly difficult job. People want educators to provide children with a great variety of skills, from reading and writing to job training. Furthermore, people entrust them with teaching children the basics of good citizenship and responsible behavior as social beings; they are charged with occupying, entertaining, and teaching the next generation to think. On top of all these expectations, the teacher is asked to do the impossible and provide children that mythical unicorn of perfect spoken language called "standard" English, an imaginary language which is not only grammatically homogenous and accentless, but somehow has the power to eradicate racism, sexism, and many other forms of bias.

Expectations and biases can guide perceptions of foreign-accentedness even more than the accentedness of the voices themselves. Dedicated researchers in the study of language and education are themselves not immune to the effects of the Standard Language Ideology. There will always be a need for more carefully designed studies to fully understand not only what is wrong with debunked ideas like the Word Gap hypothesis of "standard" English but also to understand the social and psychological factors that make such bad ideas attractive to highly educated individuals.

Where does all the science leave us? Are people to allow, and even to encourage, the use of non-standard varieties of English in the classroom? Should college students be told to work harder as listeners when their instructor has an unfamiliar accent and to be aware that some of the difficulty they really, genuinely, are experiencing in understanding these instructors may be attributable to their biases and expectations and not to the instructor's accent? In a word, yes. Research has shown, in fact, that experience listening to different accents leaves the listener not only better able to understand the accents they have heard, but better able to understand any novel accents they might encounter as well. Baese-Berk et al. (2013) asked participants to listen to recordings of talkers from five language backgrounds. After this experience, these listeners could better understand talkers from both these and additional, unfamiliar accents. This learning suggests that exposure to foreign-accented speech prepares the student to be a generally more capable listener.

The primacy of "standard" English in the classroom appeals to habitual thought but does not stand up to rigorous reflection. The ideology of "standard" English limits the number of Americans who can benefit from education at all levels. It also limits the teachers who can provide the benefit of their experiences and professional standards. Education is intended to broaden the base of people who can participate in the American democracy, not limit it. Education is intended to broaden the experiences and thinking of the students participating in it, not limit them. Insistence upon "standard" English in the classroom fails all these tests.

Discussion questions

1. Write your own linguistic history. Where did your influences come from? What ideologies were you exposed to? Which did you accept and to what degree? Have you studied any world languages? Do you feel as though you could survive in a country where that language is spoken? What would it take?

2. Do you have any memories of being corrected for the way you said something? Who did the correcting? What reason was given, and how did you react?
3. Describe your own experiences in school. Were there speakers of stigmatized varieties of English in your classroom? Were you one of those speakers? How did perceptions make things easier or harder for them (or you)?
4. Search online in communities that discuss education and look for terms such as "standard English," "non-standard English," "dialect," "grammar," and "ugly." Was it easy or hard to find discussions of the issues covered in this chapter? What trends (if any) did you come across?
5. Interview a friend who has never taken a linguistics class. Ask that person for definitions of "standard" and "non-standard" English and be sure to ask for examples. Don't give away your thoughts or reactions, just record what your informant has to say, no matter how much you agree or disagree. Compare your findings with others in the class.
6. Consider this from the chapter:

   INSTRUCTOR'S PERCEIVED ACCENT → STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS → COMMUNICATIVE BREAKDOWN → POOR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

   How accurate do you think this is? What might be missing?
7. Write a short list of guidelines you might go over with a biology class where all of the teaching assistants are non-native speakers of English. How can the students contribute to making communication work? Are there concrete steps to take when communication breaks down?
8. Interview a graduate teaching assistant or a professor or instructor who speaks English with an accent that contrasts with the average person on campus (e.g., someone with a Texas accent teaching in northern California, someone whose first language is Japanese teaching in Cincinnati). Ask what experiences they have had because of accent: positive, negative, neutral?