

## Languages of Power & Resistance Research Project

### English 326: Applied Grammar for Teachers

*As teachers, we have daily opportunities to affirm that our students' lives and language are unique and important. We do that in the selections of literature we read, in the history we choose to teach, and we do it by giving legitimacy to our students' lives as a content worthy of study.*

—Linda Christensen, "Teaching Standard English: Whose Standard?," 2000, p. 102

#### Context

As future teachers, editors, writers, and citizens, how do we "affirm . . . students' lives and languages"? I argue that this process is much more complex than simply appreciating a student's home language. What do we have to know about how language is used? How might we consider issues of power? And to help address student agency, how do we discuss issues of resistance? It is relatively easy to say that we will honor all languages, but it is much more difficult to put this concept into practice. Rather than "ensuring" that you will know how to incorporate these concepts into your classroom, this research project will help you think about the complexities of language, power, and resistance. Consider your subject position, including what you know and what you *don't* know.

#### Assignment Focus

As students, you have a lot of freedom in how you want to complete this assignment and what the results will look like. I ask two guiding questions below, and you're free to pick either of them—or come up with your own (but please check with me first if you create your own).

Guiding questions (focus on one): *How do you, as a teacher, address concepts of linguistic power and resistance? How do you value students' home languages in the classroom?*

#### Possible General Ideas—You'll Want to Be More Specific

- Research a variety of World English; connect the histories or grammars of this language (and the people who speak it) to the classroom.
- Examine how Standard Edited English connects to power. How might the classroom challenge that power rather than replicate it? What avenues of resistance do students have?
- Connect language, power, & resistance to race, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and/or colonization.
- Consider a novel or other text you want to teach, and what linguistic background you and your students should have in order to best understand the text.
- Research concepts related to code-switching/code-meshing; consider power, privilege, and assimilation in your research.
- Research stories of resistance and hope.

#### Final Format

A 4-6 page paper due Week 11 *plus* a "poster" due Week 10. The poster may be hard copy or digital, and you must be prepared to present it to a small group of students in an interactive way. I expect that a good chunk of this project may include more summary/analysis than argument. However, at some point, I would like you to come up with some sort of argument/angle/proceeding questions for us to consider. *Do* consider how these concepts relate to the

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classroom/profession in order to apply your research to a specific context. As always, remember that you may decide to write in a variety of English (or codemesh with another language) that is most rhetorically appropriate for your audience and purpose.

### **Additional Requirements and Due Dates**

- Cite all sources (at least 3; at least 2 have to be scholarly) using MLA or APA.
- Include a brief paragraph describing your rhetorical situation and the feedback you'd like.
- Due dates:
  - Interactive Poster—Tuesday, Week 10
  - Peer Review of Written Project—Thursday, Week 10
  - Final Draft of Written Project—Tuesday, Week 11

### **Research Forum** (to prepare for Research Project)

Forum #5 [online discussion post] asks you to select, read, summarize, and respond to one of the articles below (on Blackboard). Here's a brief introduction to each of the articles:

- Black English, Ch. 1 by Geneva Smitherman: This is Chapter 1 of Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin* where she traces the linguistic roots of African American English from Africa.
- Black English, Ch. 2 by Smitherman: In this chapter, Smitherman outlines some of the grammatical patterns of AAE. (You only need to read one chapter by Smitherman.)
- "Language Diversity in Teacher Education and in the Classroom" by Arnetha F. Ball and Rashidah Jaami' Muhammad: This chapter outlines approaches to language diversity for preservice teachers. This chapter talks about language diversity broadly, rather than focusing on a particular variety of English.
- "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" by Gloria Anzaldúa. In this chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa examines how her languages are connected to her identity as a queer mestiza.
- "Student Documentary in Hawai'i Pidgin": This article addresses the historical background of Hawai'i Pidgin, as well as describes a documentary that students created to communicate the strengths of Hawai'i Pidgin.
- "Should Writers Use They Own English?" by Vershawn Ashanti Young. Young connects language and racism as he defines and argues for codemeshing as a linguistic resource that benefits everyone. To emphasize his point, Young's writing codemeshes African American English and Standard English.
- "Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory" by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. In this first chapter from her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith, of the Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou Indigenous peoples of New Zealand, traces the connections between imperialism,

history, and writing, arguing that Indigenous peoples must “recover our own stories . . . [and] language” (p. 40).

Note: For the Forum, you may not have time to finish your entire article, and that’s okay—but do try to read most of the article or make a detailed skim of all the article. Remember, this Forum is just to get you started with your research, to promote thinking and discussion. You may decide not to use this article in your research; you might also decide to research a completely different subject.