UNLOCKING THE CODE: MATTERS OF AGENCY, METALINGUISTIC SKILLS, 
AND LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT FOR 
SPEAKERS OF NON-MAINSTREAM AMERICAN ENGLISH

by

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This investigation is dedicated to my father, mother, and sister, Stanley O. Smith, Vickie O. Smith, and Neesia O. Smith. They are a constant reminder that with God, anything is possible.
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To my loving parents. Thank you for your prayers, financial support, and visionary belief in my ability to achieve the unthinkable.

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ABSTRACT

ADRINA O. SMITH
UNLOCKING THE CODE: MATTERS OF AGENCY, METALINGUISTIC SKILLS, AND LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT FOR SPEAKERS OF NON-MAINSTREAM AMERICAN ENGLISH
Under the Direction of WYNNETTA SCOTT-SIMMONS, Ed.D

This study examined the latent factors of dialect variation as they relate to reading achievement of second grade students. Sociocultural theory, identity theories, and critical theory used against a metaphorical backdrop of a bundle of locks were used to illustrate the complexity of language variation and its effect on reading achievement within minority populations. Current findings have established a negative correlation between reading achievement and use of Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE)—such that reading achievement decreases as use of NMAE increases. Although this relationship has been established, few researchers have utilized qualitative inquiry to explore the relationship between linguistic variance and reading.

This study implemented an explanatory design of mixed methods. Quantitatively, the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-S) measured the linguistic variation and the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Third Edition (WJ-III) measured the reading comprehension of four second-grade students. Qualitatively, the students participated in follow-up interviews, sharing their lived
experiences of metalinguistic awareness, dialect variation, and literacy acquisition. Findings affirmed the inverse relationship between use of NMAE and reading achievement and linguistic awareness. Findings also indicated that semantic awareness shapes linguistic awareness and conscientiousness of linguistic style, and the ability to accommodate the speech styles of others by means of convergence increases as variation away from Mainstream American English (MAE) decreases. Recommendations for further study include interviews with older students, monolingual students, and students who code switch regularly.
“Where there is a key, there is yet hope.”
— Catherynne M. Valente

Merchants traveling Asian trade routes used locks as early as 500 BC to 300 AD (Historical Locks, n.d.). Padlocks were initially used to hold livestock within a paddock, a fenced area for animals; hence, the term padlock was coined. Padlocks consist of a locking mechanism, a body, and a shackle. The shackle is the u-shaped loop that connects to whatever the padlock secures. The body contains the locking mechanism, which is the principle element. The locking mechanism can be opened with a key or combination of letters or numbers. Despite the long history of its use, padlocks have been, and will always be, used to do two things: to keep something in or keep something out.
A parallel can be drawn between the use of locks and the use of language. The body symbolizes the personal and social identities that are established as a result of the linguistic style that a person utilizes. The shackle denotes connection between language and the social, cultural, historical, and political affairs of society. Language in its most general sense, as the shackle, can be used as a mechanism to connect— to communicate desires, information, identity, values, entertainment, and can be used to open the lock of social communication. It can also be used to establish levels of distinction, difference, stratification or used to exclude and prevent entry based on cultural or social aspects.

Sociocultural factors shape the framework for the aforementioned roles of language. Sociocultural factors are macrolevel statutes, such as customs, values, and attitudes, which shape microlevel demonstrations such as the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings expressed by individuals within a society (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The processes related to curriculum and instruction are inconceivable in the absence of language; therefore, language plays an important role in the implementation of curriculum and the process of instruction. This is because language is the means by which to communicate the content of curriculum. Language is also a tool that students use to acquire knowledge and demonstrate evidence of their learning outcomes. Language, just as locks, serves as both the connecting and the exclusionary instrument.

Curriculum shapes the content, experiences, and learning outcomes that a student will experience during instruction (Caswell & Campbell, 1935; Dewey, 1902; Popham & Baker, 1970). Caswell and Campbell (1935) highlighted the influential nature of curriculum in their definition of curriculum: “The curriculum is composed of all the
experiences children have under the guidance of teachers. . . . Thus, curriculum considered as a field of study represents no strictly limited body of content, but rather a process or procedure” (p. 66, 70). Therefore, if curriculum is procedural in nature, it lends itself to being a series of actions that are capable of being shaped by society.

Popham and Baker (1970) captured the deterministic nature of curricula in their definition of curriculum. They stated, “[Curriculum is] all planned learning outcomes for which the school is responsible. . . . Curriculum refers to the desired consequences of instruction “(Popham & Baker, 1970, p. 48). Dewey (1902) defined curriculum as a “continuous reconstruction, moving from the child’s present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies. . . . The various studies . . . are themselves experience—they are that of race” (pp. 11-12). Therefore, it is important to examine the learning experiences, learning outcomes, and the sociocultural backdrops of all students during the process of curriculum and instruction-related inquiries.

This study utilized the metaphorical backdrop of locks to illustrate the complexity of language variation and its effect on reading achievement within minority populations. The image of a web of locks (a collection of locks bound together by a unifying source) symbolizes the complexity of reading difficulties related to dialect variation. Reading difficulties, specifically among minority populations, are often attributed to low socioeconomic status, disability, or inferior metalinguistic and phonological skills (Terry, Connor, Petscher, & Conlin, 2012; Washington & Craig, 2001). Furthermore, current findings establish a negative correlational between reading achievement and use of Non-
Mainstream American English (NMAE)—such that reading achievement decreases as use of NMAE increases (Craig & Washington, 2004; Terry et al., 2012). Several hypotheses and theories attempt to explain this relationship (e.g., teacher-bias theory, mismatch theory). Nevertheless, a meta-analysis of the research advances the notion that it is complicated—the relationship between reading achievement is characterized by a complex network of sociocultural, historical, linguistic, and political factors (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015).

Like a bundle of locks, literacy acquisition is a manifold and an intricate process that requires many coexisting parts. The act of reading is locked into the intersection of phonological and metalinguistic skills, adequate instruction, and culture. Three major locks that characterize reading failure are the content of discussion: the lock of context, the lock of theory, and the lock of linguistic awareness. The first lock examined is the current context of language and reading difficulties experienced by minority students. Following the contextual components of reading difficulties is a discussion of the purpose of the study: to examine the latent factors of dialect variation and metalinguistic awareness, as they relate to reading achievement, in second-grade students.

The second lock examined is theory. The theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory, critical theory, and identity theory serve to frame the historical and social backgrounds of language acquisition and reading. It is important to note that grappling with the key of one lock can lead to the loosening of the next lock, in that the initial lock leads to the closed latch of the next lock. Therefore, unlatching the lock to theory leads
to a discussion of conceptual and practical applications of the theoretical underpinnings of reading difficulty.

The third lock to investigate is the linguistic lock. To explore the components of linguistic awareness and linguistic style, the researcher utilized the attention to the speech model (Labov, 1966) and the communication accommodation theory (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987), both of which refer to linguistic awareness. The attention to speech model explores the metacognitive processes that speakers utilize to establish self-awareness of their linguistic style, whereas the communication accommodation theory explores what speakers do in response to their awareness. According to this theory, speakers are capable of converging upon (matching) the styles of others or diverging away from the style of others.

A prerequisite to understanding the context of reading achievement for minority students is to understand the context of language. The origin of human language remains an obscurity. In fact, linguists have purported there are approximately 7,000 languages, but they are unable to make this claim with certainty (B.B.C., 2014). Despite the abundance of spoken languages, they are, as the locks in the picture, linked together by shared words, sounds, and grammatical structures. Lexical similarity coefficients, defined by the degree to which words from two different languages are similar (Rensch, 1992), measure the degree to which languages have shared characteristics. For example, English shares a 60% lexical similarity with German and a 27% lexical similarity with French (Rensch, 1992). Grouping of languages into families is according to shared characteristics. Ethnologue (n.d.), a web-based platform of linguistic statistics,
acknowledged 141 language families, such as Niger-Congo, Austronesian, and Indo-European. The most widespread family of language is the Indo-European family, which consists of more than 445 individual languages (B.B.C., 2014). English is one lock in the mass of locks that comprises the Indo-European family of languages. English shares a lock with German, Spanish, Latin, French, and Greek (Potter, 2016).

The use of language also illustrates the intricate manner in which languages lock together. Regional, geographical, and societal contexts often frame the use of language. The lineage and use of language is similar to genetic expression within humans. Every human family shares an ancestral lineage; the same is for language. Commonalities, initially shaped by geographical positioning that arise out of a particular ancestral language, characterize language families (Rensch, 1992). As individuals use language within society, changes to the language occur through convergence or the mixing of languages (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Members of various speech communities learn to adapt to the contextual needs of their environment by accommodating the linguistic style of others (Giles et al., 1991).

Although the United States has no established official language, English is the most common language spoken by Americans. Nevertheless, there are several dialects within American English. Dialects, characterized by grammatical patterns, social class association, and even by association to a particular ethnic group, refer to variations of a particular language used by a particular group of people (Terry, Thomas-Tate, & Love 2010). Mainstream American English (MAE) is the dialect of American English used as a means of communication within the marketplace and government—and used as the
language of instruction in American schools (Terry & Scarborough, 2011). Other
dialects of American English, such as Southern American English (SoAE), Creole
English, African American English (AAE), or Latino English are categorized as dialects
used in more colloquial interchanges of conversation (Terry et al., 2010). In addition to
the label as a *formal* version of American English, Mainstream American English differs
from other dialect varietals in its contextual, prosodic, and rate of phonological,
morphological, and grammatical features (Terry et al., 2010). Furthermore,
differentiating dialect varieties in terms of *formal* and *informal* undoubtedly create a
stratum of linguistic preference.

As individuals participate in society, they use language to establish personal and
social identity. The style a person chooses to use, such as Southern American English
(SoAE) or African American English (AAE), establishes personal identity. For instance,
use of SoAE not only discloses affiliation with a particular geographical region of the
United States, but also imparts a connection to a particular set of customs, values, and
beliefs. As individuals interact with other members of society, they establish social
identity. As individuals engage in social communication, their asserted identity can be
affirmed or refuted. For example, as a speaker of SoAE interacts with others, his identity
is affirmed in the presence of other speakers of SoAE. The affirmation arises out of a
shared experience between speakers. However, the same speaker may face disapproval
in the presence of nonspeakers of SoAE. An awareness of the difference between styles
may cause the speaker of SoAE to change style, moving closer towards or matching the
style of his speech partner. Essentially, the conventions of a particular dialect, such as style, syntax, and grammatical structure, reflect personal and group memberships.

Humans not only use language as a form of communication, they also use it as a divergent or convergent effort to establish identity (Giles et al., 1987). The use of language is ultimately to assert (lock in) or refute (lock out) approval of various sociocultural factors (Giles et al., 1987). The relationship between digital citizens and their use of their *digital locks* (passwords) best illustrates the act of locking in and locking out approval. A digital citizen is a person who uses the worldwide web regularly (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2011). Users of the Internet are often required to create, monitor, and use passwords to establish and maintain access to various digital platforms. Just as language is a reflection of group membership, so is the use of passwords by digital citizens. The use of passwords is a nonnegotiable undertaking, a norm of digital citizenships. Therefore, as digital citizens establish passwords, they affirm their identity as users of the Internet. Despite the standard practice of password setting, there is room for user autonomy. Internet users have the freedom to change or update their passwords as needed—and even the choice to keep passwords the same. Similarly, as individuals use language, they have the ability to monitor their linguistic style and make changes to meet the linguistic demands of their audience. Essentially, because of style shifting or the lack thereof, individuals assert their desire to increase or decrease the interpersonal space between themselves and their speech partner.

When individuals use language, they do so within the context of their social history, defined by membership within particular groups based on gender, social class,
race, or geographical regions (Siegel, 2010). The aforementioned groups establish personal and social identities; therefore, language is a symbol of asserted group membership. This is because language has the power to communicate attitudes, values, and the perceptions of a particular social group.

For example, there are overlapping features of AAE and SoAE because of the shared geographical history of African Americans and Whites in the southeastern states of the United States (Terry et al., 2010). As segregation increased, whether through the means of force or choice, differences between the features of AAE and SoAE became apparent to a larger degree (Terry et al., 2010). Research on AAE, initially labeled as American Vernacular English (AAVE), began in the mid 1960s (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). The assertion was that African American children used a loosely structured and topic associating style, rather than a topic-centered style of English (Michaels, 1981; Michaels & Collins, 1984). Essentially, the features of AAE changed in response to changes in the social climate of African American culture and existence.

This research study sought to bring voice to the metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies that speakers of NMAE utilize as they engage with texts. In an effort to understand how identity shapes the use of NMAE in a classroom setting, this inquiry also took into account the social and individual identity of each participant. As each lock in the mass of locks known as literacy acquisition is unlatched, it is my hope that so will the clues, riddles, and puzzle pieces of reading achievement for speakers of NMAE be found, solved, and put together.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*I think that what matters most in literary work is the context, not the text.*

-Andrea Hirata

The Contextual Lock

The function of a lock is twofold and shaped by its context or environment. Some locks such as door locks secure the contents of a room or space. Similarly, the safety lock on a firearm secures its contents; specifically, a safety lock on a gun holds a trigger in place. Other locks, such as canal locks, prevent access to a particular section of a waterway in the event of a ship crossing. Locks also capture or assert identity, such as in the case of *locs* or *dreadlocks*.

Dreadlocks result when sections of hair go uncombed and become matted or knotted overtime (Ashe, 2015). The historical use of locs involves religious practices, disregard for vanity, and even increase in aesthetics. Despite its use, locs are a physical reminder of identity, cultural, and political history (Ashe, 2015). Just as the purpose of locks is dependent upon the context, the reading skills of minority students are locked into the contextual factors of their economic, social, cultural, and political environments. This study explores the contextual state of reading acquisition and performance for minority students and offers descriptions of the ways in which contextual and environmental locks have the propensity to immobilize the reading development for students of color.
The achievement gap is a troublesome phenomenon within the American education system. The term achievement gap refers to a statistically significant discrepancy in scores that occurs when one group of students outperform another (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). More specifically, the reading achievement gap is alarming. In 2011, NCES reported a 25-point score gap between the reading scores of White and Black fourth-grade students who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Discussion of the achievement gap is typically in regards to differences between the majority, Whites, and minority student populations (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although discussions of this phenomenon is often in terms of the phenotype that is race, several other variables account for this gap, such as socioeconomic status, teacher expectation, dialect differences, and phonological awareness (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009; Labov, 1995; Rickford & Rickford, 1995; Seligman, Tucker, & Lambert, 1972; Terry, 2014).

For fourth-grade students, no significant change in the White-Black reading achievement gap has occurred since the 2009 administration of the NAEP. Fourth-grade students eligible for free lunches scored 29 points lower, and students eligible for reduced-price lunch scored 17 points lower than their noneligible peers scored. Additionally, students who reported reading for fun consistently scored higher on average than students who reported reading less frequently—with students who reported reading least often scoring the lowest (NCES, 2011). The aforementioned statistics affirm the complex nature of the achievement gap. It is no longer sufficient to discuss the
achievement gap in terms of a difference between races, for it is a phenomenon likely to benefit from a societal and cultural analysis. As in the case of a web of locks, the unlatching of a couple of locks is not a sufficient method of disbanding the entire mass—each lock (the lock of context, theory, and linguistic awareness) must be taken apart individually.

Background: Reading, Language, and Learning

Reading is a basic requirement for academic success and productive citizenry (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015). Reading establishes an individual’s ability to acquire academic success and compete in the job market. These abilities ultimately lead to increased quality of life and academic well-being (Terry, Connor, Johnson, Stuckey, & Tani, 2016).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) defined social capital as the acquisition of past relationships that build capacity for future and meaningful relationships. Social capital is the ability to obtain membership within privileged groups of society (Cochrane, 2012). Social capital is multifaceted in that it consists of relationships, social networks, human resources, and expectation of reciprocity (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995).

On the other hand, cultural capital is the symbolic commodities, such as language, etiquette, and skills, acquired through membership of a particular social class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Brady, 2015; Sullivan, 2001). Fundamentally, “cultural capital is what you know and social capital is who you know” (Cochrane, 2012, p. 100).

Social capital includes the resources gained from social relationships, and cultural capital includes noneconomic resources. Literate individuals are capable of networking
with others who are literate and accessing the marketplace, which can lead to productive citizenry. This is a display of social capital. Literate individuals are more likely to acquire the knowledge and skills to ensure their success in society. This is a display of cultural capital. Essentially, the ability to read frames a person’s social and cultural capital.

In considering the relationship between social and cultural capital, it is plausible to presume that who a person knows is shaped by what a person knows, and conversely. Furthermore, the relationship between wealth (or the acquisition of resources) and reading emulates the relationship between social and cultural capital. To the extent that the ability to read shapes what a person knows, and because reading shapes what a person knows, the ability to read shapes who a person knows. The ability to read is a form of cultural capital; therefore, the inability to read depletes a person’s social and capital resources (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Current findings regarding reading achievement make apparent the inequality in access to social and cultural capital experienced by minority students in public education systems. For instance, NCES (2011) reported that 84% of African American students and 82% of Hispanic students did not perform at proficient levels in reading on the most recent NAEP assessment. Furthermore, data reported by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2013) authenticated the fact that African American and Hispanic students are more likely to live in impoverished homes in comparison to their White peers. Consequently, poor reading achievement among minority populations leads to increased special education referrals and restricted job opportunities for these students.
(Beneke & Cheatham, 2015; Holt, Jacewicz, & Fox, 2015). Nevertheless, many differences in reading achievement attributed to race can, in fact, be traced to differences in language background (Brown et al., 2015).

The National Research Council’s (NRC) Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties established that 6 of the 10 predictors of reading success or failure are attributed to language ability (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The NRC identified the use of Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) as a risk factor of reading difficulty. Several research studies have examined and substantiated the connection between use of NMAE and reading difficulty. For instance, Labov (1995) found students who use NMAE experience mismatches between their speech and print when engaged with a text written in Standard American English (SAE). The findings of Charity et al. (2004) also substantiated the mismatch between speech and print. Charity et al. (2004) discovered that students who used less NMAE, specifically African American English, experienced better outcomes on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test. Craig and Washington (2004) also found a significant relationship between use of NMAE and reading achievement for first-grade through fifth-grade students. Fundamentally, language and dialect are important factors that contribute to literacy acquisition (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the latent factors of dialect variation as it relates to reading achievement in second-grade students. In an effort to explore this relationship, this study investigated the literary (e.g., reading comprehension) and
metalinguistic skills (e.g., style awareness) that characterize the relationship between
dialect and poor reading outcomes.

A Historical Overview: Language Variation and Reading Achievement

The existence of an achievement gap between majority and minority groups is an
extensive component of American history. The origins of this phenomenon tie to the
historical perspectives of schooling, teaching, and learning within American society.
Arguably, it began with the broadening of humanism in the 1800s, which led to a societal
wave of reformation—the protestant reformation specifically. The reformation used
schooling to emphasize nationalism, national identity, and reformed religion.
Evangelical Protestants such as John Calvin encouraged educational institutes to teach
students the principles of Christianity in order to ensure the presence of the church in the
future and to ensure the preparation of students for positions in the church and
government (Gutek, 2011). Eventually, Calvinism spread to the western hemisphere
when the Puritans settled along the Massachusetts Bay. The Puritans held fast to the
teachings of Calvin; therefore, they sought to establish a godly commonwealth in the
newly discovered America (Gutek, 2011).

By the 19th century, patriotism had heightened and greatly influenced the
development of the common school or public school. The purpose of the public school
was to disseminate a common culture. Democratization, industrial development, and
nationalism continued to shape curriculum (Edgar, 2009). For example, 19th century
religious indoctrination morphed into courses on moral or character development, and
universal literacy became ideal practice because of its potential to provide further
freedom for colonists. Furthermore, the addition of geography and history courses to elementary curriculum served as a means to create loyal and responsible citizens (Edgar, 2009).

In the late 1800s, response to culture resulted in a shift from curriculum development into a curriculum that was symptomatic of the current state of the cultural climate. As public schooling expanded, so did ethnic and racial representation on American soil. Not all children were allowed to attend public schools in a heterogeneous setting. Because the focus of public schooling was assimilation, Native American and African American children attended schooled separately. Native American students, forced to abandon their native customs, language, and dress, received education in government schools intended to assimilate these children into American culture. African Americans created their own schools as result of exclusionary practices. The practice of exclusion illustrated the firmly held sense of nationalism during the 19th century—prejudice was a byproduct of the indivisible, uniform understanding of what it meant to be American.

The exclusionary practices of American schooling led the way for the variant and subpar schooling experienced by minority pupils during the middle of the 20th century. By the 1960s, there was an overwhelming awareness of the poverty stricken, racist, and polluted state of America. A new wave of curricular practice, in the form of humanistic curriculum, was the result of a response to the unbalanced state of American society. Humanistic curricula focused on the humanness of students (Edgar, 2009), taking into
consideration the cognitive and personal aspects of learning. Social problems and concerns of humanity were the focal points of humanistic curriculum.

The year of 1960 is also the year that linguistic research began to focus explicitly on dialect variation within the African American community (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). The first decade of research on dialect variation focused on its implications on the education of NMAE speakers. The investigations of Baratz and Shuy in 1969 and Fashold and Shuy in 1970 highlighted the necessity for a systematic method in teaching African American children who spoke NMAE to read.

In addition to establishing a need for reading interventions, exploration of the effects of bias toward use of NMAE began. The effects of teacher bias on student achievement was first brought to the attention of practitioners and the public in the case of Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District in 1979 (Labov, 1995; Pearson, Conner, & Jackson, 2013). The courts found the school district guilty of providing inadequate instruction to poor Black students. The district violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 when it did not take into account the language used at home by all students; therefore, teachers were required to undergo professional development in regards to the historical nature of AAE in an effort to assuage negative attitudes towards speakers of AAE (Labov, 1995).

In addition to professional development, teachers received dialect readers for the purposes of reading instruction. Dialect readers were books written with the use of NMAE (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). For instance, the Bridge reading program promoted the use of dialect readers to help speakers of AAE shift from use of NMAE to
use of SAE, in hopes of establishing reading proficiency (Simpkins, Holt, & Simpkins, 1977). The Bridge program received support as well as criticism. Labov (1995) praised the program for its attempt to meet the needs of students in a culturally and linguistically responsive matter. However, the texts included idioms and vocabulary that, a decade after its initial release, had become dated or extinct from the registry of AAE (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). In 1981, evaluation of the effectiveness of the Bridge reading program generated data that indicated students who participated in the program had significantly higher scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in reading comprehension than students who did not participate in the program (Simpkins & Simpkins, 1981). Despite evidence of its effectiveness, schools abandoned the use of dialect readers.

The Ebonics debate in Oakland, California incited the abandonment of the use of dialect readers. The Oakland School Board Resolution of 1996 stated that African American students used a language, known as Ebonics, that was in fact a stand-alone language, rather than a dialect of English (Rickford, 1999). After grave opposition from politicians, policy makers, community leaders, and parents, the Oakland School Board dropped the word Ebonics from its resolution in April of 1997 (Rickford, 1999). To this date, the United States Senate has not reconvened to address this matter, nor has there been any initiation of new legislation to address linguistic variation for students of color (Baugh, 2000). Although efforts to provide support for students who speak NMAE have been aborted, there is an undeniable need for intervention(s) to address the effects that linguistic variation has on literacy acquisition (Beneke & Cheatham, 2015; Charity et al., 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Pearson et al., 2013; Craig et al., 2009; Gatlin & Wanzek,
2015; Labov, 1995; Rickford & Rickford, 1995; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010; Sligh & Conners, 2003; Washington & Craig, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

*This means that no single logic is strong enough to support the total construction of human knowledge.*

—Jean Piaget

Sociocultural theory (Piaget, 1923/1959; Vygotsky, 1930/1978, 1934/1986) social identity theory (Hermans, 2001; Tajfel, 1981; Trepte, 2006), and critical theory (Freire, 1970) framed this investigation of dialect variation and reading achievement. The tenets of sociocultural theory emphasize the social nature of language acquisition and variation. Sociocultural theory explains how social and individual processes contribute to the construction of knowledge. Focusing, in part, on the social and individual processes of knowledge construction relates to this work because of the unique social nature in which communication unfolds in many minority populations.

For example, Smitherman (1977) defined the unique impulsive verbal and nonverbal exchanges that occur between African American speakers as *call and response*. She explained that the function of such exchanges is to affirm the claims of a speaker, complete a speaker’s thought, or encourage a speaker to repeat what has been stated (Smitherman, 1977). Call and response methods of communication are also exhibited through music and dance. Essentially call and response is a social communicative interaction between speaker, listener, performer, or audience. These exchanges are germane to the transference of knowledge and transmission of communication in minority populations (Smitherman, 1977). The interactive and social
nature of call and response provides evidence that language acquisition among minority populations is, in fact, a sociocultural experience.

The concept of *machismo* in Latino culture also illustrates the relationship of the social nature of language acquisition. Machismo refers to having a strong sense of masculinity or masculine pride (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000). In its most general sense, machismo reminds members of Latino culture to adhere to rigid gender roles: men are to provide and protect their families and exhibit minimal displays of emotion. This is an important factor to consider for the Latino child, who may adhere to this gender norm. Machismo provides additional evidence that language acquisition and meaning are developed and disseminated through qualitatively different means of socialization for some minority populations.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) posited that language and culture are the anchoring factors of cognition; therefore, cognition emerges as a child matriculates thorough social environments. Leontiev (1981) described the internalization of a tool such language as *appropriation*. Appropriation is the process by which young children learn modes of behavior or “human properties” (Leontiev, 1981, p. 422) as they socialize with adults.

Wertsch (1991) extended this theory of internalization. His exploration of the relationship between the individual and social environments led him to contend that cultural, institutional, and historical factors mediate psychological tools, such as language; thus, they do not develop in isolation (Wertsch, 1994). Social and cultural contexts are constantly changing; therefore, cognitive processes change to reflect the current state of society. Sociocultural experiences are a critical component of cognitive
development; consequently, Vygotsky (1930/1978) argued that learning takes precedence over the developmental process.

As children acquire language, the role of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) becomes important. The MKO is someone who is better skilled at a particular task, concept, or process (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). The MKO can be a parent, teacher, or peer. Repeated exposure to MKOs is critical in establishing a student’s social and cultural capital. As learners participate in reading activities, they not only acquire literacy skills from MKOs, but they also develop relationships that shape their cognitive ability. Therefore, it is imperative that minority students have opportunities to participate in rich and meaningful social learning that include MKOs who can model use of SAE and use of metacognitive strategies (e.g., metalinguistic skills).

In considering how cultural and social factors influence cognition, it also important to consider the process by which engaging in cultural and social environments establishes a student’s identity. Theories of identity explain how individual identities come to be and evolve. Furthermore, they are advantageous to the discussion of language within a sociocultural context.

Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998) described the stages of minority identity development in terms of fluid phases. Attitudes toward self, attitude towards others of the same minority, attitudes toward others of different minorities, and attitudes toward the dominant group shape identity (Atkinson et al., 1998). Social identity theorists (SIT) posit that group membership defines the concept of self: the self is a manifestation of the group (Trept, 2006). As individuals categorize themselves into social groups, they begin
to evaluate self and others according to various categorizations. Furthermore, membership within a particular group determines an individual’s social identity (Trepte, 2006).

Individuals use social categorization as a meaning-making tool. Social categorizations facilitate understanding of complex social networks and establish structure within social interactions (Trepte, 2006). Essentially, social categorizations define the status of individuals within the society holistically. Once an individual categorizes his social group, he compares his group to other groups. Social comparison leads to evaluation of self and others. Various categorizations develop into stereotypes used to explain behavior.

Primarily, social identity theory (SIT) frames dialect variation as a component of both individual and group identity. The use of NMAE expresses individual and collective identity. The speaker of AAE expresses his identity as an individual speaker of a specific dialect variety, and his identity is expressed as a member of a larger group of speakers of NMAE, which could include SoAE, AAE, Latino English, and more.

The dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001) also explains the process of identity development in terms of the relationship between the individual and the collective. In other words, the manner in which the individual behaves within the group and the manner in which group membership manifest within the individual characterize identity. In addition to the premise that social grouping shapes identity, the dialogical self also supports movement across groups to accommodate personal interests and or environments (Meyerhoff & Niedzielski, 1994).
An understanding of the dialogic process of self-identity is essential to understanding the various dynamics that are likely to occur as students use NMAE. For instance, a speaker of MAE and a speaker of NMAE have shared experience in that they are both speakers of English. Although speakers of MAE understand speakers of NMAE—and vice versa—each language variety communicates a different identity. Therefore, the individual’s voice is evaluated in context of that individual’s group membership; subsequently, there is a simultaneous manifestation of the individual voice and collective voice (Hermans, 2001). Essentially, one speaker expresses two forms of identity. The speaker of NMAE displays an identity as both a speaker of English and a speaker of a specific dialect variety.

Manifestations of the dialogical self may also lead to an imbalance of power between social groups. Various social positions established by various groups lead to an uneven distribution of power, for some groups have an advantage to establish power over other groups (Hermans, 2001). For example, the societal position of a speaker of MAE in the classroom has the propensity to dominate the societal position of speakers of NMAE. This dominance places strain on relationships between students and teachers.

A student may experience cognitive dissonance in response to such an imbalance in power. For example, the speaker of NMAE who becomes uncomfortable with its use in front of other speakers of MAE may accommodate his audience and his own interests by shifting to use of MAE. Movement across these social groupings does not change the individual’s identity; instead, this dialogical process leads to a simultaneous expression of two different manifestations of the self. This happens because the dialogical self is a
compilation of individual and collective voices. Both voices unite through the tension of a give-and-take process—this process in turns reestablishes social dominance (Hermans, 2001).

Critical theory best addresses this occurrence of imbalance between power and equity that arises because of social identity and language variation. A difference in language use has the potential to facilitate discord within teacher-student and peer relationships (Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2009; Delpit, 2008). Conversations about MAE and NMAE are not only conversations of language variety, but also discussions of economic disparity. Speakers of NMAE are typically situated within minority groups (Terry & Scarborough, 2011), and minority groups are typically associated with low socioeconomic status (Terry et al., 2012). Furthermore, speakers of NMAE often receive the label of subordinate to speakers of MAE because MAE is the established language of instruction (Terry et al., 2012).

In an effort to assuage the contentious interplay of socioeconomic status and language variety within the classroom, teachers and students need to engage in dialogical conversation, framed by problem-posing pedagogy, which is a three-part process (Freire, 1970). The first step is reflection. As teachers engage in critical reflection of student-centered problems, they develop a sense of empathy.

Dialogue or communication follows critical reflection (Freire, 1970). In order for communication to occur, teachers must understand that authentic education is a praxis that occurs not for (or in the peripheral of students), but with students. Dialogue should occur as a reciprocal interchange within the teacher-student relationship. As teachers
reflect upon unfavorable experiences of their students, it is important that they include students in facilitation of the solution. Communication between teacher and student is also necessary to create an interconnected relationship between the teacher and student.

The third step is action (Freire, 1970). After reflection and dialogue, teachers are capable of developing interventions or solutions for the identified problems. The dialogical solution reflects authenticity, thus meeting students’ needs. An epistemology, ontology, and axiology that genuinely reflect a student-centered praxis grounds the three-step process of reflection, dialogue, and action. In essence, a teacher who passes through the stages of problem-posing pedagogy creates the ability to intervene effectively while being undeterred by a systemic phenomenon such as the reading failure experienced by speakers of NMAE.

All three theories integrate with the use of the attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and the communication accommodation theory (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987). The attention to speech model highlights the role metalinguistic skills plays in a speaker’s ability to style shift. The communication accommodation theory emphasizes the influence of interpersonal factors in the process of style shifting. Together, the concepts of attention to speech model and the communication accommodation theory combine sociocultural factors (e.g., style variation as a reflection of social interactions), social identity (e.g., style variation as means to establish or confirm identity), and critical factors (e.g., style variation used to maintain or assert power) to explain the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and linguistic style.
Research Questions

The research questions of this study served three purposes: to define the scope of inquiry, provide perspective, and identify the audience that will benefit most from the information resulting from this inquiry (Cooper, 1988). The focus of this investigation was metalinguistic awareness use for second-grade students. Metalinguistic awareness among students with very limited reading abilities confined the scope of inquiry. Answers to the projected questions provided conclusions that scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can use. The guiding question of this study was:

1. What is the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and mainstream English variation for students with very limited reading abilities?

This question generated two subquestions:

2. How do students with very limited reading abilities differentiate semantic and pragmatic meaning of language?

3. How do students with very limited reading abilities accommodate, by divergence and convergence, different language styles and environments?

Statement of Problem

As illustrated earlier, past and current research confirms the complex nature of acquiring basic reading skills. Literacy acquisition is a multilayered process that elicits several responses from various educational, personal, environmental, and cognitive facilities (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015). The common factor among the findings of researchers is the inverse relationship between the use of NMAE and literacy acquisition (Beneke & Cheatham, 2015; Charity et al., 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al.,
2009; Labov, 1995; Pearson et al., 2013; Sligh & Conners, 2003; Terry et al., 2012). The more a student uses NMAE, the lower the student’s reading scores tend to be (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015). The inverse relationship between use of NMAE and reading outcomes is complex, variant, and confounded by socioeconomic status, cultural differences, phonological skills, and inferior schooling (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015).

Research studies to date have used assessment of phonological skills, by way of word identification, sentence imitation, spelling, and fluency tasks, to investigate the relationship between NMAE and reading outcomes among elementary students in grades K-5 (Craig, Kolenic, & Hensel, 2014; Craig & Washington, 2004; Jarmulowicz, Taran, & Seek, 2012; Kohler et al., 2007; Mitri & Terry, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2012; Sligh & Conners, 2003; Terry, 2006, 2014; Terry & Connor, 2012; Terry et al., 2010). Fewer studies have probed the effects of NMAE use on reading comprehension specifically (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009; Brown et al., 2015; Champion, Rosa-Lugo, Rivers, & McCabe, 2010; Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2009). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effects of dialect on reading comprehension. Additionally, previous investigations of dialect have focused on the use of dialect among groups of students; consequently, there is need for investigation of individual differences among speakers of NMAE (Brown et al., 2015). Investigation of individual differences among users of NMAE will allow exploration of the metalinguistic and sociocultural component of dialect and reading outcomes; sociocultural factors, such as the home language environment (e.g., access to books); metalinguistic factors (e.g., awareness of style); and qualitative reports of a speaker’s experience with the use of NMAE.
Limits/Delimitations

This inquiry was confined to the experience of four participants. Therefore, the sample size deflates the generalizability of the findings. Although the findings of this study may be transferable in that there may be a connection between the experience of the participants and that of the reader of this research, the findings are not generalizable to the population at large due to the small sample size. Additionally, the researcher’s access to speakers of NMAE was limited. The researcher recruited participants from two elementary schools in the southeastern United States. This occurrence limited the researcher’s access to a variety of NMAE dialects. Finally, reliance on the self-reported experience with metalinguistic awareness for second-grade students was a limitation. The age and developmental stage of second-grade students may have decreased their ability to provide self-reported data that was accurate, comprehensive, and free of exaggeration or bias.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions serve to guide and inform the reader:

*Minority* means “a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics often subjected to differential treatment” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2014). For the purposes of this exploration, the qualities that characterize the term minority are speech patterns, economic facilities, and cultural attributes that contrast with mainstream society.
Language variation/dialect refers to the modification of a particular language that occurs as a result of geographical and/or social parameters (Penny, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the terms interchangeably.

Mainstream American English (MAE) refers to the dialect of English used across ethnicities in both formal and informal settings such as education, government, and the marketplace (Terry & Scarborough, 2011).

Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) refers to dialects that are variations of MAE. NMAE, often used in conversation with greater colloquial interchanges, differs from MAE in its contextual, prosodic, and rate of phonological, morphological, and grammatical features (Terry et al., 2010). NMAE includes Southern American English (SoAE), Creole English, Appalachian English, African American English, and Latino English (Terry et al., 2010).

Style shifting refers to the change in linguistic style that a speaker makes in response to social expectations, settings, and audiences (Labov, 1995).

Summary

Factors that contribute to the reading failure of speakers of NMAE are multifaceted. While linguistic style is the crux of this research study, this undertaking would not be comprehensive without consideration for the sociocultural factors and expression of identity that color the experience for the pupils under study. The correlation between reading proficiency and dialect variation has an extensive political and societal history. Due to the controversy nature of this topic, efforts to provide educational intervention for speakers of NMAE have waned since the 1960s (Baugh,
A major point of contention is whether acknowledgment of the use of NMAE perpetuates a divisive linguistic expression of the English language or whether recognition of NMAE makes possible the implementation of successful intervention for speakers of NMAE. Data suggest that, in spite of public or political opinion, use of Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) is a risk factor of reading difficulty (Snow et al., 1998). Therefore, the aim of this investigation was to explore the contextual, theoretical, and linguistic components that frame the reading difficulties experienced by NMAE speakers. In essence, this study reinforces the fact that effects of dialect variation on literacy acquisition are a confirmable phenomenon. Despite the complex nature of this reality, the identification of solutions and interventions is a doable and necessary undertaking for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers.

The aforementioned inquiry unfolds in the following manner: Chapter 1 introduces the vein of inquiry through the means of a contextual and historical discussion of the occurrence of reading failure for speakers of NMAE. The reader receives a brief overview of the current state of research on the topic. Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the theories that frame the experience of reading failure. Sociocultural theory serves to explain the social nature of language acquisition and the ways this process maps onto the acquisition of dialect variation. A discussion of identity theories frames the personal and group dynamics in the use of NMAE, followed by a discussion of critical theory and effective intervention(s) for addressing the historical, political, and societal nature of reading failure. Chapter 3 provides the reader with a rationale for use of a mixed methods explanatory design to unlash the locks of reading failure for speakers of
NMAE. Chapter 4 presents a description and analysis of the data revealed as a result of disbanding the lock of linguistic style. Finally, in Chapter 5, sense is made of the findings and conclusions. The researcher offers implications and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sometimes all it takes is a tiny shift of perspective to see something familiar in a totally new light.
-Dan Brown

Unlike padlocks or knob locks, combination locks do not require the use of keys. Disbanding a combination requires access to or knowledge of a particular code. Cracking the master combination without access to or knowledge of the combination would require an extensive process of trial and error to unlatch the lock successfully. In fact, it is reasonable to assert that trial and error is an inefficient strategy for unlocking a combination lock. The required pieces, access to and knowledge of, for unfastening a combination lock are similar to the tools necessary for deciphering the complexity of reading failure for speakers of NMAE. In order to free the locks of context, theory, and language, it is necessary to have access to the foundational concepts and theoretical contributions that frame the occurrence of reading failure. It is also necessary to be knowledgeable of the current and established body of research that captures this phenomenon. Lack of consideration for the theories and research that inform this inquiry would be akin to use of a trial and error search for solutions to remedy reading failure. Therefore, an exploration of the current literature that frames reading failure for speakers of NMAE is warranted.
Unlocking the Background

By the 1960s, besides the realization of the rampant poverty and racism in the United States, there was also public opposition to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. In response, humanistic curriculum developed as a popular and innovative curriculum. This curriculum emphasized societal problems, mental processes, and personal characteristics of students as individuals (Edgar, 2009). Unfortunately, a more business-efficient model of curriculum that highlighted the importance of accountability, assessment, and performance-based objectives undermined the humanistic curriculum in the 1970s.

The age of accountability intensified during the 20th century. After the release of *A Nation at Risk* (United States Department of Education) in 1983, the American public became aware of the ways in which the U.S. education system was failing to meet the needs of the country’s workforce. This report marked the beginning of major educational reform during the 20th century. As a result, there was a move to adopt more rigorous and measureable standards. Subsequent presidential administrations echoed nationalized standards rhetoric: George Bush, Senior’s *National Council on Education Standards and Testing*, Bill Clinton’s Goals 2000: *Educate America Act*, George W. Bush’s *No Child Left Behind*, and Barack Obama’s *Common Core State Standards Initiative*.

Despite efforts to increase the rigor of learning for all students, reading achievement for minority students is a continued point of contention. In fact, The National Center for Education Statistics (NAEP) reported in 2011 that no significant change in the White-Black reading achievement gap for fourth-grade students had
occurred since the 2009 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Current studies substantiate the lack of reading achievement for minority students, specifically minority speakers of NMAE. For example, NCES (2011) reported that 84% of African American students and 82% of Hispanic students did not perform at proficient levels in reading on the most recent NAEP assessment.

Additionally, the National Research Council’s (NRC) Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties correlated Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) with reading problems and attributed language ability as 6 of the 10 predictors of reading success or reading failure (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The NRC also identified the use of Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) as a risk factor of reading difficulty.

While a substantial body of research affirms poor reading achievement for minority students and speakers of NMAE, efforts to provide support for students who speak NMAE have been discontinued (Rickford & Rickford, 1995). Interventions are necessary to mediate the effects of linguistic variation on reading skills (Beneke & Cheatham, 2015; Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009; Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015; Labov, 1995; Pearson, Conner, & Jackson, 2013; Rickford & Rickford, 1995; Sligh, & Conners, 2003; Terry, Connor, Petscher, & Ross, 2012; Washington & Craig, 2001). Furthermore, few investigations address the influence of NMAE on reading comprehension (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009; Brown et al., 2015; Champion, Rosa-Lugo, Rivers, & McCabe, 2010; Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2009). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effects of dialect on reading comprehension (Terry et al., 2015). Additionally, the investigation of dialect has
focused on the use of dialect among groups of students; consequently, there is need for investigation of individual differences among speakers of NMAE (Brown et al., 2015).

This chapter provides a metaphorical backdrop to guide the reader through the various components of this study. The chapter also affords the reader a contextual overview of the occurrence of reading failure for speakers of NMAE, which frame the rationale and purpose of initiating this vein of inquiry. Third, the review of research provides a historical overview of the use of language variation and its relationship to reading achievement. Finally, the chapter presents a summary of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide this inquiry.

Organization of Review

This chapter presents the review of literature on the relationship between dialect variation and reading achievement in three distinct parts. The theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory (Piaget, 1923/1959; Vygotsky, 1930/1978), identity theories (Hermans, 2001; Tajfel, 1981; Trepte, 2006), and critical theory (Freire, 1970) frame the conversation of language variation and reading difficulties. First, sociocultural theory describes the social nature of language acquisition. Sociocultural theory also affirms the acquisition of dialect variation as a social process—a process mediated by culture and More Knowledgeable Others (MKO). Second, a discussion of identity theories serves to frame the personal and group dynamics in the use of NMAE. Trept (2006) related that social identity theory (SIT) proposes group membership defines the concept of self. Essentially, social identity theory (SIT) explains how the use of dialect variation shapes individual and group identity. The final theory discussed is critical theory, which
provides the reader with a framework for intervention(s) that are effective for addressing the historical, political, and societal nature of reading failure.

Following the review of theory is a review of established research on the current state of reading for minority students, language variation, and the effects of dialect variation on reading achievement. A conceptual discussion of linguistic style and metalinguistic awareness finalizes the exploration. The attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and communication accommodation theory (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987) frame the next steps to unlocking the latch of reading failure among minority populations.

A thorough literature review develops a researcher’s ability to engage in meaningful and justified inquiry (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Having a comprehensive understanding of what researchers have done previously plays an integral part in identifying the subsequent steps for extending the established line of inquiry (Hart, 1998). A review of literature also allows the researcher to find gaps in previous research (Boote & Beile, 2005). Identification of the established body of research and clearly indicated gaps makes apparent to the researcher how the discussion can be extended by adding new components of inquiry or how the inquiry can be replicated in new settings or with new participants (Creswell, 2009).

Without establishing a comprehensive exploration of the literature regarding a particular line of inquiry, the researcher runs the risk of engaging in a conversation that has already taken place. Another potential pitfall for not establishing an all-inclusive literature review is a researcher’s use of a faulty methodology or use of a rationale
framed by secondary rather than primary sources (Randolph, 2009). Consequently, it is imperative to establish a systematic review by establishing evidence of the problem, completing a review of methodologies, and presenting analysis and interpretation of available data (Randolph, 2009).

In addition to relating a study to a larger body of research, a comprehensive literature review provides a framework for data analysis and interpretation (Cooper, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 2006. In qualitative inquiry specifically, the literature review serves as a tool by which the researcher can measure and interpret participant responses (Creswell, 2009). Finally, a literature review frames the importance of a study’s findings and serves as a benchmark of comparison for a study’s results (Miller, 1991).

Search Strategies

To obtain a comprehensive review of literature related to dialect variation and reading outcomes, the researcher used a database and reference search. Phrases used included “dialect and reading difficulty”, “dialect interference and reading”, and “classification accuracy of students at reading risks” as key words within ERIC, ProQUEST, and PsycINFO. Findings at this stage of the research revealed various theories of dialect variation (e.g. mismatch theory, dialect shifting/awareness hypothesis, teacher bias hypothesis). Each theory piqued the researcher’s interest, leading to a search for experimental studies that supported each theory or hypothesis.

Using the key words “dialect variation” and “style shifting” through a database search resulted in the location of a meta-analysis of quantitative studies on the
relationship among use of dialect and literacy skills. The researcher used dialect variation as a search strategy because it presented as a factor of reading failure for minority students. Style shifting was used as search strategy because data from established research indicated the ability to shift as a factor that could possible remedy reading failure for speakers of NMAE. The meta-analysis revealed existing literature on the topic from 1998-2014, resulting in 20 quantitative studies. To extend the range of dates, a database search using “dialect and literacy” as key words and 2015-2016 as key markers yielded 54 additional articles; however, only four articles and one book fit into the parameters of elementary students, reading achievement, and dialect variation. The remaining balance of articles addressed adult speakers of NMAE, English language learners, written form of dialect variation, and dialect variation in speakers with language disorders.

Next, the researcher used the same key words and “qualitative studies dialect variation” as a key phrase in a comprehensive search of quantitative studies. The search yielded results: a combination of articles, books, and dissertations. Unfortunately, the search results did not meet the parameters of the study. The articles and books addressed dialect variation among nonEnglish languages.

The Lock of Theory: Theoretical Framework(s) of the Study

Understanding the structural characteristics of a lock is essential to matching a key to said lock. In order for a key to unlatch a lock successfully, its physical characteristics must be complimentary to the internal structure of the lock. To unlatch the locks of reading failure for students of color warrants a structural analysis of the
existing body of literature. This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the historical, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks that shape reading acquisition.

Sociocultural Theory

The rise in the study of consciousness during the early 19th century by European psychologists led to methods of introspection in regards to cognitive structure (Tomic, 1993). Contesting the empiricist nature of behaviorism, which placed a focus on observable behavior, early cognitivist employed a positivist framework in their evaluation of consciousness. Such deterministic methods of inquiry quickly proved impractical due to the unobservable and inaccessible components of cognitive processes. The 19th century also introduced the cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, who posited that early learning has an effect on the development of cognition. Lev Vygotsky (1930/1978), known as the pioneer of sociocultural theory, framed the social nature of human development within his theory of child and cognitive development. The Vygotskian framework explains the familial and communal aspects of cognition, language, and child development.

Sociocultural theory highlights the coexistence of social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the researcher used sociocultural theory to explain the social nature of language acquisition and the ways this process maps onto the acquisition of dialect variation. In unlocking an understanding of the relationship between dialect variation and reading achievement, it is imperative to understand the interdependent relationship between individual cognitive development and social environments. Fundamentally, sociocultural theory explains how
individuals acquire NMAE. The theory also explains how the use of NMAE and social interaction feedback shape an individual’s identity.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) posited that cognition emerges as a child matriculates through his social environment. He identified language as a moderating component of a child’s cognition and social environment. In fact, Vygotsky (1934/1986) defined language as a tool for thinking. He also posited that language is social in nature and, as children matriculate through the developmental stages, they internalize words and transform them into thoughts. The relationship between language and cognition is best characterized by the relationship between a key and lock. Language is a key to unlock access to thinking. As children engage with their social environments and acquire language, they subconsciously assimilate the rules of language into a part of their nature. Language becomes an instinctive display of cultural appropriation.

Appropriation, according to Leontiev (1981), is the internalization of a tool, such as language, through a process by which young children learn modes of behavior or “human properties” (p. 422) as they socialize with adults. Although Leontiev (1981) shared Vygotsky’s (1930/1978) position on the internalization of language, his position differed in that Leontiev (1981) asserted that human properties are static properties. In other words, adults pass the properties to children and, in fact, they can be acquired without adult interaction. Vygotsky’s (1930/1978) work does not support such a fixed description of learning. The absence of human properties that are static is important to cognitive development because it makes possible the variance of cognition displayed among humans. Although dependent upon socialization, cognitive development is an
individual occurrence. Each individual’s cognitive development unfolds according to his own social and cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

Wertsch (1991) expanded upon the sociocultural theory of internalization. In his exploration of the relationship between the individual and social environments, he proposed that psychological tools, such as language, do not develop in isolation; instead, they are moderated by cultural, institutional, and historical factors (Wertsch, 1994). Consequently, Werstch (1994) labeled language as a “carrier of sociocultural patterns and knowledge” (p. 204).

Contemporary researchers have also refuted Vygotsky’s concept of internalization. Cobb and Yackel (1993) criticized the nature of internalization and the reductionist view of internalization as simply a transfer of knowledge that leads to imitation rather than learning. Packer (1993), a sociocultural theorist, was also critical of the terms of internalization. He asserted that the Vygotskian description of internalization places too much emphasis on the individual’s role in the construction of knowledge. Instead, contemporary sociocultural theorists would posit that learning unfolds through “mutual negotiation and collaboration” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 197) between the individual, the social setting, and others. Therefore, Packer (1993) emphasized the transformative and participatory nature of learning, which differs from the dualistic Vygotskian perspective.

Sociocultural theorists posit that cultural tools, such as language, pass between an individual and others in three ways: imitative learning, instructed learning, and collaborative learning (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993). Imitative learning occurs
when children learn by mimicking the speech patterns of adults. Instructed learning involves use of knowledge taught explicitly by a teacher or adult. Collaborative learning unfolds when children engage with their peers—the students work together to reach a common goal or acquire a specific skill (Tomasello et al., 1993).

The varied nature of cognitive development is a particularly important occurrence that aids in understanding the contextual lock of speakers of NMAE. Although speakers of NMAE are ultimately speakers of English, their display of linguistic variance is not understandable without taking into the account the cultural and social references from which they acquired the dialect. Sociocultural theory also frames the imitative, instructed, and collaborative learning processes of NMAE. Acknowledgment of the fact that the acquisition of NMAE is through the means of mimicking, direct instruction, and social interactions aids in unlocking the lock of context and linguistic variance for speakers of NMAE.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) also contended that one must look beyond the child to evaluate consciousness and cognition. Therefore, he explored the importance of social language as it pertains to the relationship between consciousness and words. In his exploration of consciousness and words, Vygotsky described the disjointed nature of thought and speech, which he viewed as separate, but equally important. He described the development of thought and speech as paralleled occurrences that eventually intertwine in later development. According to Vygotsky (1934/1986), in the early stages of development, thought is a nonverbal occurrence, speech is a nonintellectual occurrence, and an overlapping of the two does not occur until thought emerges verbally
and speech is framed logically. Therefore, he posited that the separation between thought and speech is maintained from birth until the age of two (Vygotsky (1934/1986)).

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1934/1986) highlighted the importance of language and culture in the development of cognition and investigated the relevance of sociocultural development. He argued that enculturation influences a student’s cognitive development. In other words, a learner’s social and cultural experiences shape cognitive development. Social and cultural contexts are ever changing; therefore, cognitive processes change to reflect the current state of society. Sociocultural experiences are a critical component of cognitive development; consequently, Vygotsky (1930/1978) argued that learning takes precedence over the developmental process.

Cognitive development. An additional aspect of the lock of context is cognitive development. Exploring the cognitive development of speakers of NMAE is important to the conversation of dialect variation and reading achievement. Cognition involves the processing of information. Gaining an understanding of how cognitive development unfolds allows understanding of how an individual thinks about and understands language. Making sense of how speakers of NMAE think about and use language is critical to identifying strategies to intervene in the reading failure experienced by these students.

Among sociolinguists is the general acceptance that language acquisition inextricably links to cognitive development (Clark, 2004). Before children can learn language, they must have a conceptual understanding of their world. As their conceptual knowledge solidifies, they learn and assign words to their conceptual representations. As
children assign language to their cognitive representations, their experience changes as they learn how language maps onto those representations (Clark, 2004).

Sociocultural theory outlines the role of social interaction in the process of learning and cognitive development. Vygotsky (1930/1978) purported a sociocultural approach to cognitive development around the same time that developmental psychologist, Piaget (1923/1959) surmised his theory of cognitive development. Piaget proposed the following four stages of development in the cognitive trajectory of children and adolescents: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational.

The sensorimotor stage unfolds from birth to age two. Children acquire knowledge as they have sensory experiences in their environment. During this stage, a child learns object permanence, which means that a child understands that an object, such as a teddy bear under a blanket, exists even if it is unseen. Object permanence is a prerequisite for a child’s ability to name an object attach words to an object (Piaget, 1923/1959). Language influences cognition by providing children with a vehicle for making connections.

Furthermore, naming objects or actions creates opportunities to make conclusions about similarities and differences among categories. For example, a child who utters “Mama” will likely generalize that name to all caretakers or adults. This is because the child is learning to attend to similarities among those who are typically in the role of caretaker. As language develops, the child extends the complexity of his thought as he
learns to differentiate between individuals, such as a child’s use of the word *Mama* versus *
*Dada*.

The preoperational stage of cognitive development occurs between age two and age seven (Piaget, 1923/1959). At this stage, the child acquires knowledge through play. Children at this stage lack an ability to use logic or empathy.

The concrete operational stage unfolds between age seven and age 11 (Piaget, 1923/1959). Children in this stage are capable of differentiating between their individual thoughts and the thoughts of others. Children begin to realize that others do not necessarily share their thoughts and opinions.

The final stage of cognitive development unfolds between adolescence and adulthood (Piaget, 1923/1959). Individuals in the formal operational stage experience an increase in logic. They use deductive reasoning and understand abstract concepts. Individuals in this stage also develop an increased ability to problem solve.

Additionally, Piaget (1923/1959) asserted that cognitive ability is reflective of a child’s cognitive developmental stage. Children at different stages think in different ways. Manifestations of cognitive development are not reliant on topics or linguistic content. As a child matriculates through the stages of development, he forms intelligence by means of assimilation, adaptation, equilibrium, the use of schemas, and construction of his social and physical environments. Transition between stages of cognitive development are not necessarily continuous and occurs invariantly; however, the sequence that cognitive development unfolds is fixed in that stages of development cannot be skipped.
Piaget (1923/1959) also expressed interest in schemas, which are categories of knowledge subject to modification as an individual acquires new information. The development of schemas unfolds differently for each individual, for culture shapes schemas. In some cultures, schemas arise from classification of an object’s function in everyday life, whereas in other cultures, what is taught and internalized during the schooling process shape schematic classifications (Lantolf, 2000).

Piaget (1923/1959) asserted that children seek to maintain balance between their previous knowledge and newly acquired information, an occurrence he called *equilibrium*. Equilibrium prepares children to matriculate through their stages of cognitive development. For example, a speaker of NMAE may have a monolithic schema of language. If the child’s exposure to language is characterized by NMAE, he may believe that NMAE is the sole method of human communication. Once the child encounters SAE, he will use this exposure to modify his schema of language, thus developing a schema of language that encompasses dialect variance. The process by which the speaker of NMAE takes in this new information is assimilation. The act of modifying the schema of language, in response to exposure of SAE, is accommodation.

Piaget (1923/1959) noted the role of inherited cognitive abilities in that he believed others could not teach children how to pass through one stage to another; instead, they must learn through environmental exposure. Piaget also posited that cognitive development precedes language acquisition. According to Piaget (1923/1959), language blossoms within four stages of development; therefore, language is a byproduct of cognition. Namely, a child must understand a concept before he is able to express his
experience verbally; therefore, as a child experiences complexity in thought processes, his use of language reflects that complexity. Nevertheless, the relationship between cognition and language acquisition is not bidirectional—according to Piaget (1923/1959), language does not contribute to the development of thinking.

Although Vygotsky (1930/1978) agreed that environmental factors are critical to the development of cognition, he differed from Piaget in his emphasis of the roles that culture, socialization, and language plays within cognitive development. Vygotsky placed greater emphases on the cultural influences of the environment. Piaget (1923/1959) contended that cognitive development unfolds in a manner that is universal across all cultures; however, Vygotsky (1930/1978) contested this assertion and stated that cognitive development differs from culture to culture.

Vygotsky also placed emphasis on a child’s social interactions within his environment. He characterized interactions between the child and social interaction as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1930/1978) created the notion of ZPD in response to Piaget’s (1923/1959) assertion that cognitive development occurs because of a child’s independent construction of knowledge.

Vygotsky (1930/1978) agreed that children’s construction of knowledge unfolds spontaneously and independently, but only to a certain extent—children also use cultural and social experiences to shape their construction of knowledge. In other words, a child’s environment shapes what a child thinks about and what he thinks. In terms of ZPD, which is the difference between what a child can do with and without help from knowledgeable others, the environmental influence of the adult role is paramount.
(Vygotsky, 1930/1978). Vygotsky stated that children internalize the cultural tools (e.g., language, values) conveyed by the adults in their lives; therefore, adults are essential to cognitive development. Additionally, much of what a child learns is the result of interactions with a more knowledgeable other (MKO). The MKO, who can be a parent, teacher, or peer, is better skilled at a particular task, concept, or process (Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

MKOs are also essential to student learning. As students acquire knowledge, they learn to depend on MKOs, such as teachers and peers. As they become comfortable, they take on increased responsibility for their own learning (Lave & Wegner, 1991). Rogoff (1990) described this process as guided participation. Guided participation is the process by which a teacher helps students learn to communicate, think critically, and problem-solve (Rogoff, 1991).

Repeated exposure to an MKO increases a student’s ability to navigate challenging cognitive activities (Rogoff, 1990), therefore critical in establishing a student’s social and cultural capital. As learners participate in reading activities, they not only acquire literacy skills from MKOs, but they also develop relationships that shape their cognitive ability. Therefore, it is imperative that minority students have opportunities to participate in rich and meaningful social learning.

Finally, Vygotsky (1930/1978) placed great emphasis on the role of language in the development of cognition. He contended that cognitive development is a byproduct of the internalization of language. Inherently, cultural and social components of a child’s environment are tools of intellectual adaptation (Vygotsky, 1934/1986).
The role of language. Speakers of AAE, SoAE, and Latino English use NMAE as a tool to communicate with others. It is therefore important to understand the role of language in human interaction. Examining the relationship between language and social interactions establishes a framework for understanding the role of NMAE in sociocultural processes. Namely, language is a key that has the propensity to unlock the contextual, theoretical, and linguistic locks that constrain speakers of NMAE.

As discussed previously, language is a cultural tool that provides access to cognitive processes. The use of language satisfies the human need for communication; therefore, language is also a tool that moderates the interaction between communication and socialization. Vygotsky (1930/1978) believed that language plays two roles in cognitive development: information transmission and intellectual adaptation. As children acquire knowledge of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, their use of one-word utterances expands into phrases as they interact with the world around them (Clark, 2004). In other words, children acquire knowledge as they engage in cooperative or collaborative dialogue with MKOs (Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

Contemporary research affirms Vygotsky’s (1930/1978) position that the foundation of cognitive and linguistic mastery is social interaction. Zukow-Goldring and Ferko (1994) explored the relationship between the language acquisition of young children and caregiver interaction. They found that language emerges as children develop close relationships with caregivers (Zukow-Goldring & Ferko, 1994).

As children begin to internalize their thoughts, they engage in private speech, which is self-talk used to self-regulate behavior, planning, and skills (Vygotsky,
Private speech is also symbolic of externalized thought because it functions as a form of communication of guidance and direction within the self (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Vygotsky also purported that private speech is a byproduct of a child’s social environment. He established a positive correlation between the rates of private speech and social environments—the more cognitively and linguistically rich the environment, the more private speech a child is likely to use (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). This internalization of language drives cognitive development between the ages of two and seven (Vygotsky, 1934/1986).

Once children acquire private speech, they begin to collaborate with themselves the same way in which adults engage in their own intellectual functioning. Children use private speech to enhance their imagination, thinking, consciousness, and organization of thoughts (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Thus, private speech manages executive functions, such as planning, decision-making, and organization. However, the presence of private speech dissipates with age. Typically, by age 10, children experience socialization and their private speech transforms into silent-inner speech (Vygotsky, 1934/1986).

Sociocultural theorists also acknowledge a nonverbal display of language (Lantolf, 2000). As individuals communicate with others, their meaning develops partially through gestures. Gestures are the facial expressions, body positioning, and other silent interpersonal actions used to express meaning in a nonverbal manner (Lantolf, 2000).

Language acquisition. Cognition precedes language. Infants think before they talk and often think in the form of pictures in addition to words (Pinker, 1995). In fact,
infants are capable of comprehending the structure of sentences before they learn words.

Infants learn to become sensitive to the “phonetic distinctions used in their parents’ language” (Pinker, 1995, p. 142). Namely, their ability to differentiate the phonemic component of language sets precedents for learning the grammatical structure of language. A child’s first experience with language is a result of interaction with caretakers.

The acquisition of language allows a child to engage in external communication, which is social discourse used to communicate with others. The development of social language begins during linguistic interactions between a child and an MKO (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). The mother tongue that an infant acquires is a direct reflection of what he has heard from his caretaker (Clark, 2004). Shaped by environment, the process of organizing conceptual and visual representations precedes the use of language. Specifically, the type of information offered by caretakers within the environment shapes cognitive schemas (Clark, 2004).

Upon language acquisition, children assign words to their preorganized conceptual representations. Once children acquire language, the existence of speech and thought divides. Visual representations and language are not experienced simultaneously—the language replaces the former (Clark, 2004; Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Clark (2004) explained, “We become so used to ‘thinking for speaking’ that we generally ignore conceptual information that is not needed for speaking. But this information remains available and can be invoked under the appropriate circumstances” (p. 474). In other words, infants do not necessarily access their conceptual representations during
their production of language; nevertheless, those representations remain intact despite the use of words. The automaticity of verbal responses that would otherwise remain visual or conceptual representations influences the child’s cognition. The changes in cognition that result from the acquisition of language lead to acquisition of intellectual functioning (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). The automaticity of language allows the merging of thought and speech—thoughts are verbal communication, while speech becomes a representation of thoughts.

Individuals acquire language in five distinct stages: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The preproduction stage of language is best characterized as a nonverbal period. Individuals in this stage rely on gestures to communicate and possess little comprehension of vocabulary, relying heavily on cues and modeling provided by the environment and MKOs. The degree to which a child in this stage can communicate verbally is confined to yes and no responses.

A child in the early production stage can respond in the form of one to two word responses, has limited comprehension, uses the present tense of verbs, and uses words and phrases that are most familiar (Tomasello et al., 1993). Expressive language also develops at this stage; however, expressive language is a product of imitative learning (Tomasello et al., 1993). Essentially the child mimics the language that he has overheard.

Increased comprehension, grammatical and pronunciation errors, and use of simple sentences characterize the third stage of language production, speech emergence. A child in this stage relies heavily on the contextual aspects of communication to
understand idioms, irregular verb tense, or unknown vocabulary. Typically, a child will misunderstand jokes in this stage (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

The fourth stage, intermediate fluency, is characterized by fully developed comprehension and few grammatical errors. A child at this level can understand academic language and has mastered the use of social language. Intermediate fluency also grants the ability to synthesize information and engage in complex problem solving (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

The final stage, advanced fluency, delineates a native level of speech. Speakers at this stage have acquired all necessary components of language to communicate effectively. In the classroom, students are able to provide major plot events and significant details when retelling a story (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

As discussed at length, language acquisition is procedural in nature and dependent upon social interaction. A child who speaks NMAE does so due to socialization. Imitative learning, which is supported by exposure to the style of speech that is modeled within the child’s speech community, initiates acquisition of NMAE. Proficiency of NMAE increases as the child using the dialect receives feedback from others in his community. Consequently, acquisition of NMAE is a process best characterized by social and cultural factors.

Literacy acquisition. Literacy refers to the ability to read and write (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2014). However, literacy extends beyond words on a printed page, for contextual and human experiences shape literacy. This is because literacy is a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared by a particular
group (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2008). As society changes, so does the use and content of literacy. Individuals use literacy to develop crosscultural connections with others; share information across global communities; and record, manage, and synthesize various cultural perspectives (NCTE, 2008). Therefore, literacy, like language, is a social practice.


Contemporary theorists have used a Vygotskian lens in exploring literacy acquisition. For instance, Scribner and Cole (1981) explored the relationship between literacy and schooling. They found that students are able to acquire literacy skills in the absence of formal schooling. Furthermore, the context in which an individual acquires literacy determines the cognitive competence that is established (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Chang-Wells and Wells (1993) explored the components of instructional discourse as it relates to literacy in science classrooms. The researchers found that cognitive change occurs when students engage with texts with increased text complexity. Complex texts require students to move beyond encoding and decoding, which allows them to engage in “empowering intrapersonal mental activity” (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993, p. 61).
Zebroksi (1994) explored the collaborative process of literacy acquisition. He, like Vygotsky (1930/1978), contended that literacy unfolds as a natural and fluid process. Zebroski (1994) asserted that literacy acquisition occurs as a community of learners engages in reading and writing activities.

In sum, sociocultural theory explains the social and individual processes of knowledge construction. Vygotsky (1934/1986) posited that language and culture are the anchoring factors of cognition; therefore, cognition emerges as a child matriculates thorough social environments. In considering how cultural and social factors influence cognition, it also important to consider the process by which a student’s identity is established through engaging in cultural and social environments. Theories of identity explain how individual identities come to be and evolve. Furthermore, they are advantageous to the discussion of language within a sociocultural context.

Identity Theories

Extending exploration of the lock of theory warrants a discussion of identity development. Sociocultural theory highlights the social nature of literacy and frames the process of cognitive development and language acquisition and use. The most salient relationship that arises out of social and cultural factors is the relationship between the individual and society. Social and cultural factors shape both language and learning.

During the process of cognitive development, language acquisition and identity develop. Identity is a byproduct of the internalization of language and learning. Identity forms through the process of self-categorization (Stets & Burke, 2000). To establish a comprehensive understanding of identity development, it is necessary to discuss identity
in terms of the individual and the group. For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed social identity theory (Trepte, 2006) to explain how group membership shapes identity. Use of dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001) facilitated descriptions of the ways individual identity is expressed in response to various group memberships.

Both theories describe the self as possessing the ability to reflect, which means an individual is capable of naming the specific role he takes in response to social categorization (Stets & Burke, 2000). Both theories also assert that individuals use meaning from societal feedback to shape their identity. Using the feedback for the purposes of self-verification, the individual sees himself in terms of the role that he plays within various social categories (Stets & Burke, 2000). The combination of both theories recognizes that the self exists within society and that society shapes the individual because socially defined meanings shape personal identity (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Social identity theory. As humans attempt to understand their physical and biological world, they create meaning. The mind drives the effort of meaning making—a mind that exists within “socially determined processes” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 128). The process of establishing self-identity illustrates the connection between individual consciousness and societal consciousness. As an individual’s identity unfolds, so does his perception of the world around him. Perceptions shape the attitudes and beliefs a person holds toward others. Faulty perceptions can lead to prejudice, which refers to judgments made collecting pertinent information; therefore, judgments made on erroneous evidence (Tajfel, 1981). After an individual develops prejudices toward another individual, he projects those prejudices onto groups of people. Groups subjected
to prejudice become stereotyped (Tajfel, 1981). Stereotypes develop largely because they “introduce simplicity and order where there is complexity and [sic] variation” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 132). In other words, as humans make sense of their world, they use broad categorizations to simplify complex and nuanced difference.

Personal and cultural experiences shape an individual’s prejudice and use of stereotyped judgments. Evaluations guided by subjectivity lead to biased perceptions, which become the basis for stereotypes. Stereotypes are easily perpetuated because they often occur in the absence of negative feedback (Tajfel, 1981). Even in the presence of contradictory evidence, some individuals are inclined to ignore evidence that proves they made an inaccurate conclusion. Resistance to change, in the presence of contradictory evidence, leads to hostile stereotypes. Emotional investment influences the perpetuation of prejudice. As an individual differentiates between self and others, he makes an emotional investment (Tajfel, 1981), which is particularly self-rewarding because the prejudices inherent to the said differences reaffirm the desire to establish identity separate from the outside group. Consequently, elimination of the consideration for contradictory evidence occurs because to consider an alternate would cause reconsideration of the identity established on partial beliefs. In essence, stereotypical judgments become self-fulfilling prophecies, which become locked into the lot of locks known as society.

Prejudice shapes stereotypes, and stereotypes shape group identity. The process of child development illustrates the process of group identity. Children are particularly sensitive to social dynamics, such as prejudice against a particular group (Tajfel, 1981). As children assimilate into their social environments, they experience indoctrination
through sociocultural factors, such as the values and belief systems of the group. These
sociocultural factors shape individual personalities. The intergroup norms and values
shape the experience and consciousness of the individual. As children begin to make
sense of their world and social identity, they evaluate their own intragroup and intergroup
relationships (Tajfel, 1981). Intragroup refers to identity established within a group, and
intergroup is the relationship between an individual’s own group and other groups. Inter-
and intragroup considerations have the power to strengthen affiliation with an
individual’s own group; conversely, they have the power to cause estrangement.

As stated earlier, social identity theorists (SIT) posit that group membership
defines the concept of self; thus, the self is a manifestation of the group (Trepte, 2006).
Individuals categorize themselves into social groups and evaluate self and others
according to various categorizations. Membership of a particular group and the value
ascribed to a particular group determines social identity (Trepte, 2006). SIT explains
cognition and behavior within the confines of group processes. The desire to achieve
self-esteem by establishing solidarity through differentiating between in and out of group
membership characterizes behavior.

*Social groups.* A social group is composed of individuals who have asserted in-
group membership and who have been ascribed membership by others (Trepte, 2006). In
essence, a social group is a group of individuals who consider themselves to be a part of
the same social category (Stets & Burke, 2000). Although individuals may ascribe to a
particular group, their membership is conditional and may not reflect the membership of
fellow group members. For example, speakers of NMAE may identify with group
membership within the group of NMAE speakers at large, but their experiences as individual group members may vary. For instance, speakers of SoAE and AAE may share a common thread related to language variety, but their identity as NMAE speakers is manifested and experienced differently.

It is possible to examine social groups within the context of cognition, evaluation, and emotion (Tajfel, 1981). The cognitive component refers to knowledge of group membership: an individual must be aware of his own membership. The evaluative component refers to the value placed on a particular group membership; individuals develop positive and negative perceptions regarding various memberships. The emotional component is value latent, as well; it refers to the positive or negative emotions associated with in-group membership or evaluations associated with out-group membership.

There are four latent principles of SIT. These are social categorization, social comparison, social identity, and self-esteem. The following sections provide in-depth discussions of each principle.

Social categorization. Membership within social groups is fluid, for it fluctuates between time and space—and so does the significance of each group. The significance of a particular group determines its effects on an individual’s social identity. Groups that are salient and accessible shape behavior the most. Salience refers to the clarity of boundaries between intergroup and outer-group memberships. In other words, clear delineation between what and what does not define a particular socialization category establishes salience. Accessibility, determined by the emotional attachment to and
esteem for a particular group, supports salience. Social groups deemed important by an individual are salient and accessible; therefore, they are the most influential on an individual’s behavior.

Not only are social categorizations fluid, they are also multifaceted. Individuals develop their identity from the various affiliated categorizations. Over the course of an individual’s personal history, membership within social categorizations will vary; therefore, a combination of social groupings shape an individual’s identity—making each individual’s social identity unique (Stets & Burke, 2000).

*Social comparison.* Social comparison follows social categorization. Once an individual categorizes his social group, he compares his groups to other groups. This means that evaluation occurs as well as categorization—individuals migrate into groups and evaluate the group membership of others. Additionally, an individual categorizes other like individuals as being a part of the in-group and persons who are different as being in the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social comparison occurs after an individual has internalized group membership as a part of the self-concept and leads to evaluation of self and others (Trepte, 2006). An individual makes comparisons when the group under evaluation is similar or close in proximity. Social identity and self-esteem determine the outcomes of evaluation (Trepte, 2006).

*Social identity.* Social identity is established as a result of an individual’s knowledge of group membership. Social identity is shaped by the emotional significance and value placed on group membership; therefore, social identity is established by social comparison. Differentiating between in-group and out-group membership leads to
evaluation—the in-group is evaluated positively and the out-group is evaluated negatively. Positive evaluation leads to a positively framed social identity. Although the ultimate goal in social identity acquisition is to establish a positive identity, social identity is not static and not always framed positively. As social categorizations change and undergo social comparisons, so does the social identity. Society identity changes to reflect the results of the new social comparison.

*Self-esteem.* Self-esteem serves as a motivation for establishing positive self-identity, specifically a positive self-concept and image. SIT posits that a desire to achieve self-enhancement drives individuals; therefore, they desire to establish self-esteem, which occurs through the process of social comparison. Individuals satisfy their desire for establishing a positive identity through the means of evaluation. Positive evaluation of an individual’s own group establishes self-esteem (Trept, 2006).

In sum, social identity theorists support the notion that being a member of a group leads to concept of self and evaluation of self and others, according to various categorizations (Trept, 2006). Social categorization serves to help the individual comprehend complicated social patterns and engage successfully in social interactions (Tajfel, 1981). Inherently, social categorization determines the positioning of an individual in society. Once an individual categorizes his social group, he compares his groups to other groups, consequently establishing social identity through social comparison. The resulting social identity of an individual is subject to the influence of the individual’s perceptions of the group’s value and the emotional connections with the group (Trept, 2006).
Dialogical Self Theory. Dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001) also emphasizes the impact that socialization has on identity development, for it explains the roles that an individual takes on in response to various social categorizations. The theory posits that the positions of I (person identity) fluctuates over time and space. Furthermore, a different voice or perspective arises from each role—each voice has a unique story to tell that captures a range of experience and perspective. An individual uses perspective gained from these various positions to develop a rich and complex narrative of identity (Hermans, 2001).

The two conditions of the dialogical self are that the dialogical self is (a) multi-voiced (a voice manifested in a continuous and discontinuous manner) and (b) shaped by time and space (Hermans, 2001). Manifestation of the self can be characterized by an I and my relationship. I is an expression of the internal self, and my is an expression of the external self. The internal position refers to the manifestation of self that occurs because of external factors (e.g., I am teacher because I teach students). The external refers to the people or objects that affect the internal manifestation of self (e.g., the students become important to the teacher because their performance reflects his role as a teacher).

A person’s experience as I changes according to space and time; therefore, it changes due to environmental factors. For example, I am a teacher and I am a writer. The experience of I as a teacher and writer are both continuous and discontinuous. It is continuous because I, whether as teacher or writer, is a manifestation of a single person. The manifestation as teacher and writer is discontinuous because the expression of I changes in response to space and time. Essentially, the role of I changes to reflect the
needs of a particular environment—in the classroom, I teach, but in spare moments, I write. The manifestation of self is also dependent upon time: during work hours, I am a teacher, but during hours of leisure, I am a writer. Therefore, the self’s manifestation is a reflection of its world or environment (Hermans, 2001).

The manifestation of my differs from the manifestation of I. My is a manifestation of the external self, which means that the occurrence of my is made possible by the interaction between I and an external environment (Hermans, 2001). For example, I as a teacher have a classroom and students; therefore, it is my classroom and my students. Ownership or an expression of my is only made possible when I interact with environmental factors.

The expression of my is also continuous and discontinuous. For instance, there is continuity between the experience of I in relation to my classroom and my students because they both belong to I—the classroom and students are an extension of one’s self. There is discontinuity between the two because of the relationship that the self has with the classroom versus the students. As my classroom and my students, the focus changes, and so does the reflection of self in relationship to each entity. The classroom and students are separate entities in the absence of I or my.

The dialogical self manifests in many forms, not unified and often in opposition. This multiplicity allows disagreement, understanding, misunderstanding, opposition, contradiction, challenge, and questioning to occur simultaneously (Hermans, 2001). Variation leads to dialogue between the internal and external self. Similar to the process
of problem-posing pedagogy, reflection between the internal and external self leads
to dialogue, which leads to action or change.

Discussion of the dialogical self should not be merely in terms of distinction
between the external and internal self, but also in terms of environment and the position
of others (Hermans, 2001). The manifestation of self is dependent on cultural and
environmental changes. As external factors shift and change, so does the self. The
dialogical self also has the ability to be social, which means that it has the ability to
empathize (Herman, 2001). The dialogical self acquires an ability to develop a new
perspective as it considers the condition (e.g., challenges, beliefs, experiences) of others.
The social nature of the dialogical self allows for change based on dialogue with others.
The words of another have the ability to change opinion as dialogue unfolds (Herman,
2001). Essentially the dialogical self is a self that engages in both internal and external
dialogue.

As individuals converse with one another, opinions are strengthened and
challenged. During the course of dialogue, common understandings occur, but also
dialogical misunderstandings. A dialogical misunderstanding happens when inaccurate
interpretations of dialogical interchanges reinforce or encourage assumptions. For
instance, a student who speaks NMAE perceives his dialect as intelligible and suitable for
use in the classroom; therefore, he assumes that his teacher admires and welcomes his use
of NMAE. However, the student is unaware of the fact that his teacher disapproves of his
use of NMAE. The student therefore experiences a dialogical misunderstanding—he
thinks that he shares an understanding with the teacher, but in fact, he does not.
Cultural factors contribute to dialogical misunderstanding (Hermans, 2001). As an individual from one culture (e.g. Hispanic culture) integrates into a different culture (e.g. American culture), a heterogeneous manifestation of self occurs—\textit{I} as the Latino and \textit{I} as the Latino-American. In such a position, identity is established as two, separate, paralleled identities; as a hybrid of the two; or as a homogenous mixture of the former (Hermans, 2001). This interplay of cultural identities increases the likelihood of misunderstanding because identities are actively involved in the process of reorganization and acculturation. This process causes individuals to reorganize their identity in a cultural space that may be divergent to their own cultural identity (Hermans, 2001).

The dialogical self is not limited to a verbal expression of self; it also includes nonverbal manifestations (Hermans, 2001). Nonverbal dialogic is evident in the relationship between a mother and an infant. As a mother engages her child verbally, the child responds with nonverbal cues (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions). The acknowledgment of nonverbal and verbal components of the dialogical self is relevant to the discussion of cultural identity, for people use verbal and nonverbal components differently as they communicate within and outside of their dialogical history (Hermans, 2001). The manner in which the individual behaves within the group, as well as the manner in which group membership manifests within the individual, characterizes cultural identity.

\textit{Cultural relevance.} Culture identity and group membership shape language. As an individual shifts between self and culture, he shifts between the dialogic of self and the dialogic of the collective voice. The relationship between the collective versus individual
experience as a speaker of NMAE illustrates this relationship between dialogic of the self and collective. Many language varieties exist within any given standard language. For example, Mainstream American English (MAE) is identified as the standardized language of the United States; however, there are many Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE) varieties within MAE, such as southern American English (SoAE) and African-American English (AAE). Although speakers of MAE understand speakers of NMAE—and vice versa—each language variety communicates a different cultural identity. The use of MAE versus NMAE has the ability to shape the perceived value and attitude toward what is communicated. Furthermore, the individual’s voice is evaluated in context of that individual’s group membership; therefore, there is a simultaneous manifestation of the individual voice and collective voice (Hermans, 2001).

Dialogical relationships emerging from societal frameworks characterize the voice of the collective (Hermans, 2001). In other words, various groups are defined by what they are not. For example, NMAE varieties typically receive the characterization of deficient systems of language (Delpit, 2008; Haugen, 1966; Terry et al., 2012). Namely, NMAE varieties are often negatively defined in relation to its opposite, MAE, rather than defined by its own accord, and “because such opposites are loaded with power difference, the voices of some groups have more opportunity to be heard than others” (Hermans, 2001, p. 263). Therefore, meaning of the collective voice arises from its societal position.

The collective voice is composed of individual and group voices, which means an individual can experience dialogical imbalance as he moves between his social and
personal position. For example, a young speaker of NMAE may initially be comfortable with use of NMAE in the classroom because of his personal position within the collective group of NMAE speakers. However, interactions with peers and teachers during school may cause him to dissociate from the group of NMAE speakers at large because of classroom and societal expectations. As a result, the student experiences tension between his societal and personal positions. Although the societal pressures and the views of others do not solely establish self-identity, they are extremely powerful and therefore create an unceasing dialogical process that causes an individual to consider which influence he will accept and which he will reject.

Dialogical imbalance causes power imbalance. Various social positions established by various groups lead to an uneven distribution of power—some groups have an advantage to establish power over other groups (Hermans, 2001). For example, the societal position of teacher dominates the societal position of students. This dominance places strain on relationships and is intrinsic to the dialogical process. “Dominance relations organize and constrain not only the interactions within societies or groups, but also the interactions between different cultural groups” (Hermans, 2001, p. 265).

Essentially, the dialogical self is an internal mental process, shaped by space and time, involving verbal communication. The dialogical self is a compilation of individual and collective voices. Both voices are knitted by the tension of a give-and-take process—a process that establishes social dominance (Hermans, 2001).
As asserted by sociocultural theories of learning, students are social beings whose understanding and use of language is mediated by social interaction. According to social identity theory, students categorize themselves into social groups, as well as categorized by others. Social categorization establishes the learner profile of students (e.g., speaker of NMAE, minority, poor reader). Learners use labels and categorizations to evaluate and establish identity. For this reason, students who speak NMAE are poor readers or at risk for cognitive dissonance because of the conflict generated by group appreciation and group depreciation (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998). Cognitive dissonance lends itself to the development of a deflated self-esteem and identity.

Furthermore, having a particular social identity means that an individual shares similar qualities or perspectives with others within a group; whereas the role an individual has within his social categorization shapes his self-identity (or the dialogical self). The dialogical self allows an individual to feel particularly close to, or distant from, his social identity based on the role he plays at a particular time. For example, the similarities a speaker of NMAE has with other speakers of NMAE shape his social. Although NMAE is a part of his social identity, the connection or role he plays within a social category may wane over time. The speaker of NMAE may feel distant from the group in the presence of SAE speakers. Thus, uniformity, the shared group experience, shapes his social identity, and differences between categorizations (e.g., NMAE vs. SAE) shape his personal identity. Due to the comparative nature of social identity, aspects of power and equity are likely to surface, making it imperative to include the tenets of critical theory in a conversation of language framed by sociocultural theory.
Critical Theory

As mentioned previously in this chapter, literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write. Literacy is a broader category that encompasses sociocultural and political factors (Norton, 2007). Seminal psychological perspectives characterize literacy as the acquisition of cognitive strategies and linguistic processing skills; however, recent findings from ethnographies and cultural studies indicate that literacy is not only a skill, but also a socially constructed and moderated process (Luke, 1997). Therefore, consideration of the context of societal institutions, such as the home, school, or society, leads to the greatest understanding of the acquisition of literacy (Fairclough, 1992; Heath, 1983; Kendrick, 2003; Norton, 2007).

Inequitable access to social, economic, and political power typically characterize the literacy practices of institutions within society (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hornberger, 2003; Kramsch, 2002; Norton, 2007). The ways in which families, communities, and schools differ in their literacy practices provide insight into the variance in learning, teaching, and access to literacy in both the school and outside of school setting (Auerbach, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Norton, 2007).

Critical theory aims to explain and change the circumstances that oppress or exploit humans. Systems and situations within society moderate the circumstances that dominate instances of inequity; therefore, inequity is a social phenomenon, and consequently, critical theorists use social inquiry as a fulcrum for change (Bohman, 2002). Social inquiry aims to decrease dominance and increase freedom.
In addition to the use of social inquiry, critical theorists seek to explain the occurrence of human oppression from theories that are representative of diverse historical situations, rather than relying on a single theory. Social inquiry can be used in both a theoretical and practical manner (Bohman, 2002). Practical application of critical theory requires the use of critical reflection. A prerequisite to implementing social inquiry is establishing a pretheoretical understanding of self before engaging in social criticism (Bohman, 1999). Individuals can reflect as participants and observers. For example, as outsiders, speakers of SAE are able to reflect on the linguistic experiences of speakers of NMAE. Conversely, as participants, speakers of NMAE are able to reflect on their own linguistic experiences. In each case, reflection guides social inquiry.

Critical theorist Paulo Freire (1970) advocated for a practical use of critical theory through critical pedagogy, which refers to the use of positive action for change in response to the identification of an educational problem. This study has called attention to the reading failure for speakers of NMAE. It would be negligent to end this conversation without identifying the actions necessary to find solutions for this problem. Therefore, for the purposes of this work, critical theory served as a framework for action and solutions.

Freire (1970) wrote extensively about critical reflection and societal transformation guided by dialogical processes, characterized by learning that takes place through communicating with others, engaging in discourse with various theorists. The learning that arises from dialogue is then used to extend or refute an established body of understanding. Societal injustice can be experienced at all microlevels of society, “such
as race, class, gender, culture, language, and ethnicity” (Freire, 1970, p. 15). However, Freire (1970) identified socioeconomic status as the best starting place for critical inquiry. Subsequently, a comprehensive understanding of class informs the understanding of societal injustices. Engaging in dialogue with those stifled by economic disparity establishes a critical reflection of class.

Dialogue enables learning and understanding reciprocated between the insider and outsider. Speakers of NMAE are usually within minority groups (Terry & Scarborough, 2011), and minority groups are typically associated with having low socioeconomic status (Terry et al., 2012). Furthermore, speakers of NMAE often receive the label as subordinate to speakers of MAE because MAE is the established language of instruction (Terry et al., 2012). Therefore, a conversation about MAE and NMAE is not only a conversation of language variety, but also a discussion of economic disparity.

A difference in language use has the potential to facilitate discord within teacher-student and peer relationships (Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2009; Delpit, 2008). In an effort to assuage the contentious interplay of socioeconomic status and language variety within the classroom, teachers and students need to engage in dialogical conversation.

Critical dialogue. Critical dialogue is a byproduct of epistemological curiosity (Freire, 1970). A desire to learn and know is a desire to develop a sense of truth. The purpose of dialogue is to increase an individual’s capability to understand a phenomenon fully. Such curiosities lead to an exploration of the historical perspectives, relationships, language, and experiences that frame a particular phenomenon. The dialogue takes place
between individuals who are inside and outside of the circumstance under consideration. In other words, both those affected by and those not affected by the phenomenon are encouraged to learn from and teach one another.

Use of the dialogical is the fulcrum of problem-posing pedagogy. The problem posing method stimulates transformation through critical reflection and dialogue (Freire, 1970). As individuals involved in the educational process—administrators, teachers, curriculum workers, students, and others—begin to reflect upon correspondences, they are called to action, and their action leads to change. Therefore, communication is the catalyst for change. In fact, Freire (1970) pointed out, “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (pp. 92-93).

In order for communication to occur, teachers must understand that authentic education is a praxis that occurs not for (or in the peripheral of students), but with students. Dialogue should occur as a reciprocal interchange within the teacher-student relationship. As teachers reflect upon the unfavorable experiences of their students, it is important that they include students in facilitation of the solution. Furthermore, solutions are unattainable without teacher engagement. Transformation is only possible when the advantaged party (e.g., the teacher) submerges himself in the experience of the subservient party (e.g., the student). Therefore, one must be a part of a group that he wants to advocate for if advocacy is to be effective. Essentially problem-posing pedagogy is critical in changing maladaptive educational practices and biased phenomena that exist, particularly when those practices and phenomena affect marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
Problem-posing pedagogy. The world does not exist in the absence of humans, and neither can humans exist in the absence of the world. The same is true for the relationship between language, culture, and the classroom—the classroom does not exist apart from language or culture and vice versa (Freire, 1970). In fact, these elements are in constant interaction, and the teacher-student relationship mediates the interaction. Both teacher and student are a part of their individual worlds, and their world experiences affect the manner in which their use of language, learning, and cultural practices unfold. For example, the role of a teacher is to facilitate a student’s mastery of academic content. The use of MAE frames instruction and learning. It is then plausible to suppose that this predetermined use of MAE colors a teacher’s attitudes and beliefs surrounding other’s use of MAE (or the lack thereof). Likewise, a student’s world experiences shape his use of MAE or NMAE. As a teacher and student’s worlds collide in the classroom, so does the personal and background experiences of each party. In light of this amalgamation of experiences, it is imperative that teachers are aware of how their identity, bias, and instructional decisions influence the literacy achievement of their students. Teacher bias has the potential to affect instruction and student outcomes (Jussim, 1989).

A critical reflection: The classroom. Research substantiates the relationship between use of NMAE and poor literacy achievement (Charity et al., 2004; Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Rickford & Rickford, 1995; Terry & Scarborough, 2011). A complex network of occurrences, such as social and cultural factors, identity, and unequal access to resources, frames this relationship. So far, the conversation within this study has lent itself to a discussion of the macrolevel systems that shape literacy for
speakers of NMAE. The exploration of sociocultural theory, social identity theory, and dialogical self theory serves as the critical reflection stage of implementing problem-posing pedagogy. To align the problem with solutions, it is important to explore the manner in which the effects of these social and cultural systems manifest in the classroom.

Researchers have identified various reasons for the interference caused by the use of NMAE. For example, teacher bias is a causative factor of reading failure among speakers of NMAE (Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). An educator’s rejection of a student’s use of NMAE illustrates teacher bias. This rejection interferes with a student’s acquisition of literacy skills and leads to a deflated linguistic aptitude (Shields, 1979).

*Teacher bias.* Teacher bias leads to a *banking* implementation of education. A *banking* application of education refers to the use of education as oppression (Freire, 1970). Utilization of the banking method leads to a contradictory relationship between teacher and student. In the banking method, the teacher is established as the knowledgeable other, whose sole purpose is to make *deposits* into students. This deposit is in the form of instruction that is rigid and detached from the student’s worldview. As a result, the student feels alienated and subjugated by this contentious relationship.

Teacher bias leads to subpar instruction (Charity et al., 2004; Terry et al., 2010) and expectancy confirmation (Charity, 2004; Labov, 1995; Pearson et al., 2013). Research substantiates the effect speech has on impressions that teachers develop of their students (Charity et al., 2004; Seligman, Tucker, & Lambert, 1972). A student’s choice of dialect has the ability to shape the opinion a teacher makes about his intelligence,
academic aptitude, and personality. Furthermore, teachers typically regard speakers of MAE more favorably in the aforementioned categories than speakers of NMAE (Charity et al., 2004). Negative perceptions of NMAE lead to substandard instruction. A teacher’s linguistic bias affects instructional decisions. If a teacher suspects that speakers of NMAE have a weakened proclivity for academic success, this can lead to poor instruction. Poor student performance follows poor instruction, consequently confirming the teacher’s expectation.

*Expectancy confirmation.* Expectancy confirmation performance is determined by expectation and perceived ability (Jussim, 1989). The three sources of expectancy confirmation are self-fulfilling prophecy, perceptual bias, and accuracy (Jussim, 1989). Self-fulfilling prophecies occur when a teacher’s projection of negative expectations results in poor student performance. In other words, if a teacher expects the student to perform poorly, then he does. Perceptual bias is a mediating factor between the teacher’s expectation and the student’s failure. A teacher projects poor expectation onto the student; hence, the student internalizes the expectation and experiences failure. In this example, poor performance is a result of teacher expectation rather than student aptitude. Accuracy occurs when the student’s performance validates the teacher’s prediction of performance. In the case of accuracy, the occurrence of failure happens in the absence of perceptual bias; poor instruction, rather than teacher expectation, attributes to failure (Jussim, 1989).

The implications of a teacher’s linguistic bias are long lasting. It is plausible to assert that teachers who have perceptual biases are more likely to provide speakers of
NMAE with insufficient reading instruction because they perceive NMAE speakers as unsuitable candidates for rigorous instruction. Children who receive inadequate reading instruction are less likely to acquire proficient reading skills—making possible the correlational relationship between reading achievement and dialect differences (Charity et al., 2004).

In an effort to overcome teacher bias, a teacher must possess epistemological curiosity. For example, he must ask, “What are the implications of my student’s use of NMAE? Is use of NMAE a reflection of intellect or cultural experiences?” Epistemological curiosity compels a teacher to explore the way that his student’s culture manifests in the classroom, the relationship established between himself and his students, and his attitudes towards the phenomenon under consideration.

Critical reflection should follow epistemological curiosity. Reflection has the power to expose the shared, rather than divisive, nature of the teacher-student relationship. For example, suppose a teacher has the opinion that use of NMAE in a classroom setting is a poor choice. How can he make the wrong right if he does not completely comprehend the phenomenon? Namely, it is imperative that a teacher fully understands a student’s use of NMAE and its connection to the student’s home environment. As noted in an earlier discussion of sociocultural theory, caretakers and environment frame an infant’s first experience with language; therefore, a student’s use of NMAE is a reflection of his cultural and environmental experiences. This is because home language is a tool of communication between individuals in significant relationships. Home language creates a sense of belongingness among family members;
therefore, to reject a student’s use of NMAE is to reject the essence of their being and membership within their community at large. As the teacher reflects critically, he will be compelled to engage in conversations with his students to develop a better understanding of what NMAE is and the nature of experiences surrounding its use.

Dialogue is subsequent to critical reflection. Communication between teacher and student is also necessary to create an interconnected relationship between the teacher and student. Camaraderie develops as the teacher engages in communication with the student. In this new relationship, the teacher is open to teaching and being taught (Freire, 1970). Through critical reflection, the teacher also realizes that, as the speaker of MAE, he is a contributing factor of the student’s experience as a speaker of NMAE. A teacher’s use of MAE and correction of NMAE project a particular attitude towards use of NMAE—particularly when the teacher offers correction with no specific discussion of the need for correction. Engaging in dialogue has the ability to prompt teacher realization that students often internalize academic corrections as correction of self or character. Acknowledgment of his contribution causes the teacher to realize that he is in the “here and now” (Freire, 1970, p. 85) of his student’s experience—it is from that point that the teacher becomes aware of the contrary yet complimentary nature of the teacher-student relationship and feels compelled to intervene.

Action paves the way for transformation. Change is possible because of critical reflection and dialogue. The needs of students are met because the dialogical solution reflects authenticity. The three-step process of reflection, dialogue, and action is grounded by an epistemology, ontology, and axiology that genuinely reflect a student-
centered instruction. A teacher who passes through the stages of problem-posing pedagogy creates the ability to intervene effectively while being undeterred by a systemic phenomenon, such as the reading failure experienced by speakers of NMAE.

The Lock of Language

One of the most common and oldest locks used in the United States is the knob lock. Knob locks are internal parts of doorknob; therefore, they prevent unauthorized entry into rooms, buildings, or closed spaces. Although knob locks are typically accessible to all, the contents or space behind the knob lock is not (they are privately owned). The public and privatized nature of knob locks is similar to the relationship between linguistic style and linguistic awareness. Linguistic style is a public display that is contingent upon a person’s linguistic awareness. In exploring the tenets of sociocultural theory, social identity, and critical theory as they relate to dialect variation and reading, it is essential to use a conceptual model that supports all of these components. Establishing a conceptual understanding of dialect variation amplifies its role in the literacy acquisition for speakers of NMAE.

In order to connect the bridge between theory and practice, it is important to discuss the manner in which sociocultural, identity, and critical factors inform the process of literacy acquisition. The discussion begins with the structural and the cultural and social structures of reading. The conversation ends with a conceptual explanation of dialect variation as it relates to linguistic style.
Reading

Although language is regarded as an innate ability, the acts of reading and writing are not; instead, they are regarded as secondary facilities. Sakai (2005) indicated that reading and writing is typically learned through school-based instruction. In fact, the ability to read and write “may be influenced by culture rather than biological factors” (Sakai, 2005, p. 816).

Pinker (1995) characterized human language as a separate and distinct system that uses combinations of smaller elements to create meaning. The process of reading illustrates this quality. Students rely on the combination of phonemes—the smallest units of sounds in the English language—to create words, which combine to create sentences. Such an understanding of language is the premise of bottom-up reading instruction, which refers to prompting a reader to progress from the smallest parts (letters) of text to the whole (sentences/paragraphs) to establish comprehension (Lovrich, 2007).

The Components of Reading

Despite varying opinions of reading instruction, the five components of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) are widely accepted. The five components include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The whole of reading instruction is greater than its individual parts; therefore, the synergy of the five components of reading instruction produces proficient readers. Various researchers have discussed the critical nature of each of these components across the field of education.
Phonics and phonemic awareness. Phonics refers to the relationship between sound and print. Readers with proficient phonics skills are able to recognize, manipulate, and produce phonemes, the smallest unit of sounds in written English. Furthermore, proficient readers have adequate phonemic awareness; they recognize that words consist of individual sounds, as well as letter-sound combinations. Therefore, they are capable of blending and pulling apart smaller sounds (decoding) within words.

Fluency and vocabulary. Fluency refers to a reader’s ability to read accurately and with prosody. Fluency directly correlates to a reader’s ability to engage in rapid naming of vocabulary. Readers are more apt to make sense of vocabulary in written texts when those vocabulary words exist in their oral language (National Reading Panel, 2000). Subsequently, rapid-naming ability increases rates of fluency and is the strongest predictor of phonological awareness abilities (Landerl & Wimmer, 2008). Furthermore, prosody (a reader’s ability to read aloud with expression) is an indication that a reader has mastered fluency and comprehension (Adlof, Catts, & Little, 2006).

Comprehension. Reading comprehension encompasses the thinking process that occurs when a reader engages with a text. Comprehension is the goal of reading instruction, and the four prior components of reading instruction make comprehension possible. In fact, studies have shown that comprehension is not possible until a reader is able to identify both printed and oral representations of the vast majority of words presented in a given text (Vellutino, Tunmer, Jaccard, & Chen, 2007). This assertion is parallel to the findings revealed by Sesma, Mahone, Levine, Eason, and Cutting (2009): that verbal working memory and executive functioning are necessary in establishing
reading comprehension. In other words, a reader’s ability to identify and manipulate both printed and oral representations of words directly correlates to the reader’s ability to establish comprehension.

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness refers to an individual’s “ability to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate the sounds of language” (Anthony & Francis, 2005, p. 256). Therefore, phonological awareness encompasses the skills included in phonemic awareness. Although a single ability characterizes phonological awareness, this ability manifests in a variety of skills throughout various stages of development, with the onset of this skill beginning in preschool and early elementary school years (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Sesma et al. (2009) identified decoding skills as a significant contributor to a reader’s ability to master single word identification. Therefore, phonological skills are crucial to a student’s ability to apply bottom-up processing during reading instruction. Poor phonological skills are a causal factor of poor reading comprehension in students in later stages (Vellutino et al., 2007). Landerl and Wimmer (2008) also identified a link between deficient phonological skills and problems with orthographic spelling in later stages of reading. Phonological awareness is a critical component of literacy acquisition.

Metalinguistic Awareness

Metalinguistic awareness refers to an individual’s ability to obtain personal distance from language to recognize that language is a tool for communication (Mertz & Yovel, 2003). The five components of reading are moderated metalinguistic awareness. In fact, phonological and phonemic awareness are a type of metalinguistic awareness
(Yuill, 1998). Metalinguistic awareness also consists of the awareness that the meaning of language extends beyond the printed page, linguistic meaning develops from social constructs (pragmatic meaning), and the structure of language can be manipulated to establish semantic meaning.

The use of metalinguistic skills requires that an individual pay conscious attention to the semantic and pragmatic meaning of language (Pawtowska, Robinson, & Seddoh, 2014; Varghese & Venkatesh, 2012). Pragmatic awareness refers to the conscious understanding of inferred or social meaning of language (Alcon & Safont, 2008). In other words, pragmatics is “how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, p. 68). Semantics awareness refers to an understanding of functions and structural components of language (Rego & Bryant, 1993).

The use of these skills demonstrates metalinguistic awareness, for the presence of metalinguistic awareness indicates an ability to engage in metacognition, the ability to think about your thinking. This ability to think about and objectify language is a critical aspect to the development of reading comprehension (Yuill, 1998). As readers engage with texts, they are required to monitor their comprehension of what they read. Comprehension develops when a reader is able to think flexibly about the meaning of each word. The reader must also recognize the relationship between words and sentences, sentences and paragraphs, and paragraphs and complete texts. Being able to reflect upon the contextual relationship between the printed word and intended meaning is crucial to the development of reading (Yuill, 1998).
Research on Language Variation

In addition to reading, language variation is an important component of this study. Therefore, this discussion lends itself to exploration of the current state of research in the area of language variation as it relates to reading achievement. As illustrated by the sociocultural and sociocultural cognitive theories, social interactions ground the acquisition of language. As children engage in social interactions and cognitive development, they acquire language from their environment. Language becomes symbolic of their language community membership and representational of their cognitive propensities (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). The cognitive development of children differs across cultures, as does the use and manifestation of language—such variations of language is known as dialect (Terry & Scarborough, 2011).

Dialect is the byproduct of linguistic division and/or merging. Dialects form as speakers of languages amend, mix, and delete the grammatical form and content of a particular language. Regional, geographical, social, and cultural pressures also shape dialect (Terry & Scarborough, 2011). Overlapping in definition of language, dialect reflects the hierarchical relationship between the two concepts. Dialect is subordinate to the construct of language. “Hence every dialect is a language, but not every language is a dialect” (Haugen, 1966, p. 923).

Mainstream or Mainstream American English (MAE/MAE) refers to the dialect of English used across ethnicities in both formal and informal settings, such as education, government, and the marketplace (Terry & Scarborough, 2011). The use of different dialects of English is often in interchanges of conversation that are more colloquial.
These dialects, known as Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE), differ from MAE in context, prosody, and rate of phonological, morphological, and grammatical features. Although there are differences between MAE and NMAE, speakers of MAE are capable of understanding speakers of NMAE and vice versa; this is due to the phonological, morphological, and pragmatic features shared between the two. The major difference between MAE and NMAE is variation in complexity rather than the lack or presence of complexity. Contrary to popular belief, NMAE is not a deficient expression of SAE; instead, it is an alternative variation of language governed by intricate, grammatical structures (Haugen, 1966; Labov, 1964; Terry & Scarborough, 2011; Terry, Thomas-Tate, & Love, 2010).

Research on language variation highlights several dialects used in American classrooms: Creole English, Appalachian English, Latino English, Southern American English, and African American English (Terry & Scarborough, 2011). For the purposes of this study, African American English (AAE) and Southern American English (SoAE) illustrate the nuances of NMAE.

The debate whether African American English (AAE) is a dialect or a language variety is ongoing (Terry et al., 2010). Nevertheless, many authors define AAE as a language variety of MAE, primarily used by African Americans (Pearson et al., 2013). A complex system of morphology and phonology govern the AAE variety (Connor & Craig, 2006; Pearson et al., 2013). Although there are many morphological and phonological elements shared between MAE and AAE, there are elements of AAE that
differ in frequency, context, and prosody (Labov, 1995; Terry et al., 2010). Terry and colleagues (2010) identified the prominent features of AAE:

Vowel changes and r-lessness and includes changes to diphthong vowels (e.g., oil pronounced as oal), fricative stopping before nasals (e.g., isn’t pronounced as idn), metathesis of final /s/ stops (e.g., asked pronounced as aksed), using done to mark past tense (e.g. I told you yesterday produced as I done told you), and use of double modals (e.g. I could do it produced as I might could do it). (p. 128)

The aforementioned features are also commonly in SoAE. The overlapping features between AAE and SoAE are indicative of the geographical history shared between African Americans and Whites in the southeastern states of the United States (Terry et al., 2010). Although several features overlap, several features of AAE are not expressed in SoAE, such as “deletion of final nasals (e.g., pronouncing join as joy), substitution of /k/ for /t/ in /str/ clusters (e.g., pronouncing street as skreet), and loss of /y/ after specific consonants (e.g., pronouncing computer as compooter)” (Terry et al., 2010, p. 128).

Research on Language Variation and Reading

Various researchers highlight the link between oral language aptitude and acquisition of literacy skills (Charity et al., 2004; Craig, Kolenic, & Hensel, 2014; Craig & Washington, 2000; Craig et al., 2009; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). Charity et al. (2004) and Terry et al. (2010) provided evidence for the inverse relationship between NMAE use and literacy acquisition. Results of their research show that students (n = 617) who speak NMAE typically have “weaker language and literacy skills” (Terry et al., 2010, p. 2) than students who speak MAE more
frequently. Consequently, as a student’s use of NMAE increases, their acquisition of literacy skills decreases ($p < .001$).

Terry et al. (2012) posited that literacy skills acquisition is contingent upon a student’s ability to “think about, manipulate, understand, and use language in a purposeful and effective manner” (p. 13). Therefore, if they are to acquire adequate literacy skills, it is imperative that students are able to understand and manipulate the language of instruction (MAE).

Theories of Dialect

Although the correlational relationship between dialect and literacy is apparent to most, research does not establish a causal relationship. Connor and Craig (2006) delineated three major theories proposed to explain the relationship between NMAE and poor reading outcomes. The following theories describe the linguistic interference that occurs when a student uses NMAE during the early stages of literacy acquisition: The teacher-bias hypothesis, mismatch theory, and dialect awareness/shifting hypothesis.

Teacher bias. For the past 40 years, research has substantiated the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance (Beez, 1968; Meichenbaum, Bower, & Ross, 1969; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The teacher-bias hypothesis describes the relationship between teacher perception and literacy acquisition among students who use NMAE. Research that provides evidence for teacher bias affirms the negative effects of bias towards speakers of NMAE (Delpit, 2008; Labov, 1995; Seligman et al., 1972). In 1979, the case of Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children et al. v. Ann Arbor School District introduced the effects of teacher bias
on student achievement to a national platform (Labov, 1995; Pearson et al., 2013). The courts declared the school district guilty of failing to deliver adequate instruction to low socioeconomic Black students. In addition, failure to consider the home language of students was a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Subsequently, teachers received professional development regarding the historical nature of AAE to encourage positive attitudes toward AAE speakers (Labov, 1995).

Seligman and colleagues (1972) explored the effects of teacher perception on student achievement. The researchers provided 11 teachers with photographs, 11 teachers with speech samples, nine teachers with drawings, and 16 teachers with writing samples from 36 third-grade boys. All teachers in this experiment were female student teachers. Researchers prompted teachers to evaluate the submissions based on intelligence, enthusiasm, self-confidence, and gentleness. The results of six separate three-way analyses of variance with repeated measures indicated that voice and visual representations of students affected teachers’ evaluation of intelligence and personal characteristics in a significant manner ($p < 0.05$). The findings support the teacher-bias hypothesis (Seligman et al., 1972).

Findings from Holt, Jacewicz, and Fox (2015) emphasized the potential effects that misunderstanding of language variation can have on the outcomes of speech and language assessments. Researchers investigated variation in vowel production in 64 men ($n = 32$) and women ($n = 32$). Thirty-two individuals were speakers of AAE, and 32 individuals were speakers of MAE. Results indicated that vowel production among speakers of AAE was significantly longer ($p < .001$). The findings indicated that
speakers of AAE should produce longer vowel sounds relative to their White speakers, who share the same geographic region (Holt et al., 2015). The findings have clinical importance in guiding accurate assessment of speech disorders among speakers of AAE.

Godley, Reasar, and Moore (2015) also studied the effects of teacher perception of NMAE. The researchers examined the perception of 24 preservice English teachers (PST) toward dialect diversity \((n = 24)\). The group consisted of 16 White women and 8 White men. Approximately half of the teachers were currently teaching in urban schools where the majority of the student population was low-income Blacks.

The PSTs completed an online minicourse on critical language awareness over the course of four weeks. Teachers received prompts to engage in discussions regarding how they would respond to language variation, ideologies, and linguistic discrimination. Results of the study indicated that the PSTs had an understanding and appreciation for language variation. Godley et al. (2015) reported that the PSTs had a desire to teach critical aspects of language; however, PSTs were uncomfortable in acknowledging their own privilege as Whites who spoke MAE \((p < .001)\).

The teacher-bias hypothesis also posits that negative perceptions of NMAE leads to subpar reading instruction, which in turn leads to weaker literacy skills in students of said teachers. Users of MAE, teachers, and society in general typically associate speakers of NMAE with lower cognitive abilities and social status by (Charity et al., 2004). Negative perceptions lead to decreased quality and quantity of reading instruction, which results in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure (Charity et al., 2004).
Teachers assume students possess deficient aptitudes and provide them with inadequate instruction. Thus, students do not acquire sufficient reading skills.

Although researchers have provided evidence for the effects of teacher-bias, teacher-bias is not the sole cause for reading difficulties experienced by speakers of NMAE (Terry et al., 2012). Researchers such as Cecil (1988) investigated the effects of teacher expectation on AAE and subsequently contended that the mismatch between the syntax phonological structures of NMAE, specifically AAE, increases the difficulty of literacy acquisition of NMAE speakers.

Mismatch theory. The mismatch theory describes the relationship between orthography and spoken language. Orthography is a system of writing, standardized by a set of rules that govern letters, punctuation, and pronunciation (Seifart, 2006). Phonology, which refers to the system of sounds in spoken language, mediates the relationship between orthography and spoken language.

Poor phonological skills identified in early stages of reading development is a causal factor of poor reading comprehension in students in later stages (Vellutino et al., 2007). Phonological awareness is a critical component of reading acquisition because novice readers must frame their existing knowledge of spoken sounds by printed words. Therefore, beginning readers are at a disadvantage because of the mismatch between their background knowledge and printed texts (Terry & Scarborough, 2011).

Mismatch theorists state that students who use NMAE experience problems when the print they encounter in text differs from their schema of spoken language. Such a mismatch hampers a student’s literacy acquisition (Connor & Craig, 2006). A mismatch
in spoken language and written text is common amongst beginning readers due to the lack of familiarity a student has with the orthography of language. Nevertheless, the frequency of mismatch increases for a speaker of NMAE (Labov, 1995; Terry, 2014). In addition to mismatch amongst written and verbal language, students are susceptible to experiencing stifled motivation and affect. The mismatch induces confusion, which can potentially cause a student to become unreceptive to reading instruction or disinterested in reading in general (Charity et al., 2004).

Investigation of the mismatch theory is grounded in the seminal synthesis of sociolinguistic studies of AAE published by Labov (1995). Labov (1995) purported that the difference between written and spoken language were much greater for speakers of AAE than for any other speaker of NMAE.

Charity et al. (2004) investigated Labov’s (1995) assertions. The researchers assessed the reading skills of 217 African American students, kindergarten through second grade (n = 217). Results indicated that reading achievement correlates with a student’s familiarity with MAE (p < .0001). Charity et al. (2004) concluded that their results were consistent with the mismatch hypothesis.

Craig and Washington (2004) led a similar investigation. The researchers assessed rates of AAE in 400 preschool through fifth-grade students (n = 400). The researchers compared rates of AAE between grade levels. Results of the research indicated no significant difference in rates of AAE between grade levels; however, rates of AAE decreased for first-grade students (p = .24). Additionally, students who
evidenced dialect shifting outperformed their nonshifting peers on reading and standardized assessments (Craig & Washington, 2004).

As illustrated above, the task of acquiring literacy skills requires students to map printed words onto their speech. Therefore, their spoken production of NMAE places emerging readers at a disadvantage because NMAE differs from MAE printed in texts (Terry, 2014). The significance of interference between speech and print provides a plausible cause for the dialect awareness/shifting hypothesis.

Dialect awareness/shifting hypothesis. The dialect awareness/shifting hypothesis illustrates the advantageous nature of a student’s ability to shift from NMAE to MAE during early stages of reading acquisition (Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al., 2009; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). Students who are capable of shifting from NMAE to MAE in the classroom setting have stronger metalinguistic knowledge and pragmatic awareness than students who do not code switch (Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al., 2014; Terry, 2014; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). According to the hypothesis, students who produce high rates of NMAE in the classroom setting are not cognizant of the fact that academic settings typically do not utilize colloquial registers (Terry, 2014). Such contextual inflexibility typically indicates a lack of sensitivity to language variation. Linguistic inflexibility reflects poor metalinguistic insight, which in turn is indicative of a lesser ability to determine how speech maps onto print (Terry, 2014). Therefore, according to this view, the use of NMAE does not lead to reading difficulties; instead, weakened metalinguistic skills interfere with a student’s ability to be sensitive to dialect difference and language-based contextual cues (Terry, 2014).
Connor and Craig (2006) explored the relationship between the use of AAE and literacy skills in 63 African American preschool students (n = 63). Using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), the researchers discovered a significant U-shaped relationship between rates of AAE and literacy skills (p < .001). Students who had greater use of AAE had stronger measures of phonological awareness than students who used AAE at moderate rates (p < .001). Nevertheless, Connor and Craig (2006) observed fewer AAE features in sentence imitation tasks (a task in which the students were prompted to imitate MAE), suggesting that an explicit expectation of MAE caused students to style-shift and resulted in increased metalinguistic awareness.

Findings from Terry et al. (2010) also revealed a U-shaped relationship between reading scores and rate of NMAE. The researchers investigated the relationship between NMAE, literacy skills, and school environment in 617 first-grade students (n = 617). The researchers used the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-ST) to calculate rates of NMAE. Terry et al. (2010) also found a negative and nonlinear relationship between use of NMAE and vocabulary that varied by school socioeconomic status (p < .001).

Craig and colleagues (2009) also examined the relationship between style-shifting and reading achievement. The researchers assessed the dialect density measure (DDM) of 165 first- through fifth-grade students (n = 165). DDM is the ratio of AAE features to total production of words (Craig & Washington, 2000). Structural equation modeling (SEM) revealed an inverse relationship between reading achievement and frequency of
AAE \( (p < .001) \). The findings also revealed a decrease in AAE over time (Craig et al., 2009).

Similarly, in 2012, Terry and colleagues established an inverse relationship between style shifting and reading achievement. The researchers investigated the relationship between style shifting and increased reading outcomes in 49 first- and second-grade students \((n = 49)\). The researchers used a longitudinal design to assess students’ use of NMAE at the beginning, middle, and end of first and second grade. Results of the study indicated that while students maintained their rate of MAE during second grade, students increased their use of MAE in first grade \((p = .005)\). Additionally, increased use of MAE by first-grade students resulted in greater reading gains (Terry et al., 2012).

Terry et al. (2012) explained, “The acquisition of literacy skills is dependent not only on children’s ability to think about language to manipulate it purposefully but also on their ability to understand and use language to communicate effectively” (p. 65). Therefore, metalinguistic awareness is a critical component of the dialect shifting theory. Consequently, there is a correlational relationship between consistent use of NMAE and poor reading skills, and deficient metalinguistic awareness mediates that correlational relationship.

Cultural Implications of Dialect Variation

Speakers of NMAE not only experience reading difficulties, but they also are susceptible to receiving negative feedback from their peers and teachers (Terry et al., 2010). Speakers of NMAE, such as AAE and SoAE, experience marginalization due to
their linguistic divergence from MAE. Although evaluation of speakers of NMAE occurs typically within the confines of social stigma, there is variation in the way they realize or experience that stigma. For instance, SoAE is often accepted as an endearing or sentimental expression, whereas AAE is appraised as deficient or imbecilic (Terry et al., 2010).

In an effort to explore the social repercussions of divergent language, it is necessary to examine dialect variation and reading failure through the lens of sociocultural and critical theory. Albeit, the theoretical lock is only one of the interlocking latches in the lots of locks of reading achievement. Unlatching the lock of theory gives access to the lock of conceptual and practical implications of language variation; therefore, the tenets of the speech model (Labov, 1966) and the communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1987) guide the next phase of the discussion.

A Conceptual Understanding of Language Variation

The core findings of the relationship between style shifting and reading achievement emphasize the inverse correlational relationship between style shifting and reading achievement (see Table 1). The established findings inadvertently accentuate the lack of student voice in the existing body of literature (see Table 1). As one of the major aims of this study is to bring voices to speakers of NMAE, the attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and the communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1987) served as conceptual frameworks to elicit student voice.

Labov’s (1966) attention to speech model highlighted the importance that metalinguistic skills play in the process of style shifting. He contended that the ability to
notice the characteristics of personal speech determine an individual’s style. Furthermore, the choice of style is dependent on a specific context or environment. Giles et al.’s (1987) communication accommodation theory (CAT) builds upon social identity theory. According to this theory, speech is a way to express group membership, and the accommodation of communication emphasizes and strengthens group identity (Giles et al., 1987).

Attention to Speech Model

Labov (1966) asserted that changes in a speaker’s style are a direct reflection of the amount the speaker attends to the nuances of his own speech. A speaker’s range of style shifting falls within a matrix of formal/informal and unselfconscious/self-conscious speech (Giles et al., 1987). Table 1 presents a synthesis of Labov’s model of attention to speech.

Table 1

*Synthesis of Labov’s Model of Attention to Speech*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unselfconscious</td>
<td>NMAE</td>
<td>Not supported by model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-conscious</td>
<td>NMAE</td>
<td>MAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(by choice)</td>
<td>(by choice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labov (1981) provided 10 guidelines for implementing sociolinguistic interviews related to style shifting. Labov (1981) asserted:

- the researcher should record interviews;
records should include demographic information
participants should be asked value-laden and personal questions;
topics of interest of the participant should be encouraged;
patterns of communication among other members of the participant’s communication should be traced;
an overt attitude toward language should be assessed;
participants should be prompted to read texts and word lists; and
field experiments should be carried out to confirm participant perceptions.

Communication Accommodation Theory

The notion of style accommodation was first established as the speech accommodation theory (Giles, 1973). Giles (1973) contended that Labov’s (1966) attention to speech model was lacking in its explanation of style shifting. Giles (1973) posited that interpersonal accommodation processes mediate attention to speech; therefore, the communication accommodation theory (CAT) addresses the social consequences (e.g. perceptions, attitudes), ideological factors, group membership, and individual factors of style shifting (Giles et al., 1987).

CAT describes the underlying conditions for style shifting through the lens of group membership and social identity (Giles et al., 1987). The CAT explains style shifting in terms of two methods of accommodation: convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to the act of matching one’s style of speech to the style of a speech partner (Giles et al., 1987). As explained by the social identity theory, individuals consistently engage in social evaluation and comparison. Consequently, the speaker
develops specific attitudes or perceptions toward the style of speech used by his speech partner. If the evaluation is favorable, the speaker will converge upon the style of his speech partner in an effort to receive approval from the speech partner, which in turn establishes a positive social identity. Evidence of convergence is the matching of rates of speech, information density, self-disclosure, jokes, gestures, posture, facial expressions, and frequency of pauses (Giles et al., 1987).

Divergence is the opposite of convergence and refers to a speaker’s attempt to increase interpersonal space between self and the speech partner by amplifying the speech and nonverbal differences within any given exchange of communication. The purpose of divergence is to maintain group identity. For example, a student may choose to use NMAE despite having awareness that his speech partner is using MAE. Furthermore, divergence occurs when a speaker is proud to be a member of a group with a particular style of dialect anchoring his identity; therefore, the speaker will continue in a particular style to establish both inter- and intragroup membership (Giles et al., 1987).

In sum, a thorough analysis of style shifting includes aspects of metalinguistic awareness and sociocultural factors. Students who style shift are more likely to have greater metalinguistic skills than those possessed by their nonshifting peers (Craig et al., 2014; Terry et al. 2010). Nevertheless, students who do not code switch may choose to engage in divergence because of self-conscious awareness (Giles et al., 1987; Labov, 1966).
Summary of the Research

The reading achievement gap is a harsh reality among minority and low SES populations. In fact, efforts at the national level to address the achievement gap date back to 1983 with the Reagan administration’s release of *A Nation at Risk*; a report that enumerated the ways in which the American education system failed to meet the needs of its students. Despite the report and the efforts of educators at large, little has changed (NCES, 2011).

The relationship between teacher expectations and student performance has been substantiated (Seligman et al., 1972). Research also provides evidence for interference that created by a mismatch between speech and print (Charity et al., 2004; Terry, 2014). In addition to teacher-bias and mismatch interference, researchers have corroborated evidence for a statistically significant, correlational relationship between metalinguistic skills, use of NMAE, and reading achievement (Craig et al., 2014; Terry et al., 2010). Research also validates the dialect shifting/awareness hypothesis (Craig et al., 2009; Connor & Craig, 2006; Terry et al., 2012).

The ability to code switch is a critical component of literacy acquisition for speakers of NMAE; therefore, it is imperative that students acquire this ability. Terry et al. (2010) noted that psycholinguists hypothesize that three processes are involved in the acquisition of a second dialect: noticing the differences between dialects, comparing the dialects, and integrating the use of both dialects in communication activities. Students need to be able to notice the difference between their spoken dialect and the dialect of instruction, compare the dialects, and integrate use of both dialects if they are to master
the act of code switching (Terry et al., 2010). In order for students to make the shift successfully, they must be situated in communicative environments that foster the use of MAE. Students situated in linguistically diverse environments experience improved metalinguistic awareness because they have more opportunities to recognize the differences amongst language varieties and practice code switching (Terry et al., 2012). It is very likely that students who shift from use of NMAE to MAE in the classroom experience improved reading skills (Terry et al., 2012).

In an effort to identify the missing link in the interplay of metalinguistic skills, use of NMAE, and literacy acquisition, it is imperative to include individual experiences with style shifting in the conversation. Research has established that children have dialect shifting abilities (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015), but research has failed to examine the experiential process of linguistic style and style shifting. Furthermore, the quantitative findings of NMAE and reading are much more robust than its qualitative findings. Additionally, qualitative studies pertaining to language variation have been established using older participants. Consequently, this warrants closer and qualitative examinations of students’ shift towards MAE or change in NMAE (Terry et al., 2012).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Locks present as both simple and complex systems. Padlocks, deadbolts, and knob locks house structures that are simple in comparison to the systems housed inside of combination or digital locks. The imagery of a mass of locks illustrates the paradoxical relationship between the systems that frame reading for speakers of Non-Mainstream American English (NMAE). Just as each individual lock contains its own system, so does the lock of context, theory, and language. The degree to which the systems of context, theory, and language shape the experience of reading failure is fluid and variant—different pieces of the puzzle come into play at different times, and each individual experiences them differently.

The lock of context houses systems of social histories, access to social and capital resources, social status, and cultural practices. The lock of theory houses structural systems that frame the phenomenon of reading failure. Sociocultural theory provides a framework for the social nature of language acquisition and language use. Identity theories provide structural manifestations of the individual and collective identities of speakers of NMAE. Critical theory establishes the structure for to develop solutions for the problem of reading failure. Finally, the lock of language houses systems of expression and use of linguistic style. The sum of these systems colors the whole of the experience of reading failure for speakers of NMAE.
To examine the latent factors of metalinguistic awareness as it relates to reading achievement in second-grade students, this study investigated the sociocultural (e.g. home language environment, socioeconomic status), literary (e.g. reading comprehension), and metalinguistic factors (e.g. awareness of style) that characterize the potential relationship between dialect and reading outcomes. To investigate this relationship, the researcher implemented a mixed methods study of an exploratory design, more specifically, the follow-up explanations model.

This chapter presents the methodology and design of this study. The Design and Rationale section provides a rationale for the use of an explanatory design of mixed method of inquiry. The Participant, Setting, and Sample Strategy section offers a contextual description of the participants and their perspective communities, as well a description and rationale for participant selection. The Data Collection and Instrumentation section of this chapter delineates the data collection process and a description and rationale for the instruments used to collect data. The Data Analysis section explains the data analysis methodology and the steps taken to ensure data analysis validation. The Dependability and Credibility section describes the standard practices the researcher committed to ensure the dependability and credibility of research findings and the employment of those strategies to ensure the dependability and credibility of this study. Finally, the Ethical Safeguards section provides a discussion of the steps taken by the researcher to ensure the anonymity of the study’s participants and the confidentiality of their responses. In addition, the researcher details the measures taken to establish the
internal validity/credibility, external validity/transferability, reliability/dependability, and objectivity/confirmability of this study.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The purpose of the explanatory design was to build upon initial quantitative data with the use of qualitative data (Creswell, Plano, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). The use of the follow-up explanations model allowed the researcher to examine the outcomes and implications of the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-S) and Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Third Edition (WJ-III) in greater detail. The researcher used a multiple case study approach to investigate additional explanations of the relationship between dialect variation, metalinguistic awareness, and poor reading. Quantitative data, specifically dialect variation and reading achievement scores, served to identify students who participated in the second phase of inquiry. The second phase of inquiry helped explain the importance or existence of certain significance found in the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano, 2006).

Considered the most uncomplicated and easy to understand of all mixed method designs, explanatory designs have several strengths of explanatory designs (Creswell & Plano, 2006). The model is straightforward because it requires the researcher to engage in separate phases of collection and data analysis, which increases the manageability of a mixed methods study, for one single researcher, rather than a team, can conduct the study (Creswell & Plano, 2006). Other benefits relate to reporting findings of the study. The research can write the final report in separate phases, which develops a clear picture of
the findings for the reader. Finally, the multiphase nature of investigation establishes the thoroughness of findings (Creswell & Plano, 2006).

Despite these strengths, there are challenges in conducting an explanatory design. For example, mixed method studies can be time consuming. Although the quantitative phase requires less time, the qualitative phase is substantially more time consuming (Creswell & Plano, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher is required to use judgment sampling in selecting participants for qualitative follow-up. In that, the researcher has to specify criteria for the selection of participants for the qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano, 2006).

Sequential explanatory designs have a long history in educational research (Creswell et al., 2003). Furthermore, the follow-up explanation model, in particular, is the best fit for this study due to the nature of the research questions:

1. What is the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and mainstream English variation for students with very limited reading abilities?
2. How do students with very limited reading abilities differentiate semantic and pragmatic meaning of language?
3. How do students with very limited reading abilities accommodate, by divergence and convergence, different language styles and environments?

The broad research question (RQ1) probed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between metalinguistic awareness, dialect variation, and poor reading proficiency. The first subquestion (RQ2) probed for students’ understanding of the grammatical and social meaning implications of language. The second subquestion
(RQ3) probed for students’ linguistic awareness of others and their speech
environment(s).

The qualitative phase of the study brought awareness to the metalinguistic
experiences of participants. Contextual and metalinguistic implications of dialect
variation are paramount to deciphering the relationship between language variation and
reading difficulties (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015; Terry, 2014; Terry, Thomas-Tate, & Love,
2010). Essentially, the qualitative phase of the study assisted in explaining the
metalinguistic components of the descriptive data established in the quantitative phase.

Participants, Setting, and Sample Strategy

The sample consisted of 10 second-grade students enrolled at the Agape Youth
and Family Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The researcher chose second graders due to the
nature of the relationship between dialect variation and reading comprehension (Terry,
2014). Furthermore, students do not begin to move from learning to read to reading to
learn until second grade (Terry, Connor, Petscher, & Conlin, 2012). Additionally, the
second-grade year is a critical year for students with reading difficulties, for it is
imperative that students make significant progress during second grade to decrease the
likelihood of falling too far behind (Terry et al., 2012). Therefore, a second-grade
population was best for investigating the relationship between dialect variation,
metalinguistic awareness, and reading comprehension. Assessing reading comprehension
abilities is a valuable addition to the existing body of research, whereas investigation of
phonological awareness skills (the building block of reading comprehension) is more
prevalent than investigation of reading comprehension specifically (Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015).

The researcher recruited as many participants who were willing to participate. The researcher selected the subsample, or group of students used for the qualitative phase, from the sample population at large, with selection based on extreme or outlier rates of dialect variation and reading comprehension scores. Maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy, was used in an effort to understand how the phenomenon of dialect variation and poor reading proficiency is shaped by metalinguistic awareness. Therefore, the researcher identified the four students who scored within the very limited reading proficiency range as pertinent individuals to follow-up with qualitative interviewing because of the variance of dialect variation among students who scored at this particular reading proficiency level.

The quantitative data were used for selection purposes; therefore, establishing sufficient statistical power was not a concern. Furthermore, the researcher’s aim was to gather participants who use a wide range of dialect variation. Establishing a range increased the likelihood of outlier or extreme scores of dialect variation and reading achievement.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Upon receiving IRB approval, the data collection began in the fall of 2016 with quantitative measures. Using the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-S), the researcher assessed each participant’s rate of dialect variation individually for approximately 20 minutes. Data from the DELV-S identified
the rate at which each participant used MAE or NMAE (Terry et al., 2012). The researcher then used the subsets of Letter-Word and Passage Comprehension of the Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) to assess the overall reading skills for each student. The Letter-Word subtest required students to read increasingly unfamiliar words. The Passage Comprehension subtest required students to read increasingly difficult sentences and passages, while simultaneously identifying the appropriate missing words throughout the text.

Qualitative inquiry followed the quantitative phase of the study. The researcher invited students who scored in the very limited range of reading proficiency to engage in in-depth interviews (see Appendix D). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test

The researcher used the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-S) to assess dialect variation (Seymour, Roeper, & de Villiers, 2003). Nonclinical and clinical groups of 1,014 children were used to establish standardization of the DELV-S (Seymour et al., 2003). Part One of the DELV-S, which requires students to describe or respond to questions about action pictures, differentiated participants who speak Mainstream American English (MAE) and those who speak a variation of MAE. The researcher scored responses and assigned scores according to classifications in adherence to the test norms, as strong, some, or no variation from MAE (Seymour et al., 2003).
Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Third Edition

The researcher next used the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Third Edition (WJ-III) to measure reading proficiency (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001). Terry et al. (2012) declared that the Letter-Word Identification and the Passage Comprehension subtests are an “omnibus measure of reading achievement” (p. 57). Therefore, the subtests measured students’ overall reading skills. The Letter-Word subtest required students to read increasingly unfamiliar words. The Passage Comprehension subtest required students to read increasingly difficult sentences and passages while simultaneously choosing missing words throughout the text.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics guided the initial phase of data analysis. Extreme cases were determined by examining the occurrence of variance of dialect variation within a particular range of reading proficiency. The researcher identified students whose reading comprehension fell within the very limited range as the best fit for in-depth qualitative analysis.

The researcher utilized the Colaizzi process of phenomenological data analysis to ground data analysis (Shosha, 2012). Use of this method required implementation of a seven-step process. First, the researcher drafted and read each transcript thoroughly to establish general awareness. Second, the researcher used a separate document to transpose direct quotes that referenced metalinguistic awareness (e.g., pragmatic and semantic meaning, linguistic awareness). Next, the researcher identified explicit and implicit meanings within each quote. The researcher then looked for statements that
supported each theme and color-coded them manually. Following this, the researcher grouped themes by commonalities. In step six, “all emergent themes were defined into an exhaustive description” (Shosha, 2012, p. 41). Finally, the researcher used follow-up interviews and triangulation to establish validity of the findings that arose from the researcher’s interpretation(s).

Triangulation, which involves the use of different sources of data, corroborated evidence and validated the data (Creswell, 2013). Triangulations employed the use of multiple sources of data (quantitative data, interviews, and post interviews), peer review, bracketing, and member checking. Peers reviewed the data and posed questions regarding methods and interpretations. In addition, because the researcher analyzed the data under the consideration of explicit recognition of researcher-bias, participants reviewed the findings to confirm accuracy of interpretations, analyses, and conclusions.

Role of the Researcher

This investigation of dialect and reading emerged from personal experience. As a reading teacher, the researcher realized it was evident that speakers of NMAE are in dire need of reading intervention. The researcher encountered several students who desired to learn to read and appeared to have the appropriate prerequisites for learning to read, but despite their efforts, they experienced failure. This failure occurred at the phonemic level. Students had difficulty with the pronunciation and enunciation of phonemes, the smallest sounds of the English language. For example, students would pronounce the word *get* as *git*. After the researcher modeled the MAE pronunciation of the word, these
students would still read the word as *git*; in fact, they would insist that their pronunciation of the word matched the MAE pronunciation.

In the face of failed attempts to remedy reading failure, the researcher began to ask questions and search for solutions. The researcher asked questions such as, “What are the linguistic perceptions, instructional decisions, and evaluative practices that support or hinders a student’s acquisition of reading comprehension? With a secondary education framed by psychology, the researcher developed an appreciation for findings that are rich with empirical evidence and tempered by theoretical constructs; therefore, the researcher focused on research-based and seminal artifacts.

**Researcher Bias**

The researcher believed that she had the propensity to bring cultural and confirmation bias into this study. Although, she typically used less than moderate rates of NMAE, the researcher was familiar with the components of NMAE. As a Black woman, the researcher viewed the metalinguistic experience of speakers of NMAE with a particular cultural lens. She believed that language variation should be reflective of contexts and settings. The cultural experiences she potentially shared with participants increased the likelihood of confirmation bias. She did not intentionally dismiss any findings that did not support my hypothesis; however, there is often a natural tendency to filter information based on expectations. Use of triangulation was paramount in preventing both confirmation and cultural bias.
Dependability and Credibility

The researcher was committed to establishing the internal validity/credibility, external validity/transferability, reliability/dependability, and objectivity/confirmability of this study. She established internal validity by using a follow-up explanations model of an explanatory design, often used by researchers when qualitative data are necessary to explain quantitative results (Creswell et al., 2003). In the case of this study, the relationship between dialect variation and reading skills has already been established; however, qualitative analysis of the role of metalinguistic awareness was missing from the existing body of research. The researcher’s use of a mixed methods design appropriately measured the concepts that were under study.

To establish internal validity, the researcher also established “familiarity with the culture of [the] participating organization before the first data collection dialogues [took] place” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). In other words, after obtaining consent for participation, the researcher introduced herself to participants, explained what they could expect during the study, and answered any questions that had prior to the start of the study. As stated previously, the researcher also used triangulation (e.g., member checking, follow-up interviews) to establish internal validity.

Although the latter part of this study was qualitative, the researcher employed appropriate measures to establish external validity. The researcher established external validity through explicit articulation of the context, confines, and limitation of this study. Providing such information allows other researchers to replicate or make transferable inferences (Shenton, 2004).
The researcher established dependability by reporting in detail the process of the study, so that future researchers can repeat the study if they have the desire to do so (Shenton, 2004). The research design, data collection and analysis, and findings sections established dependability. Finally, the researcher maintained objectivity through triangulation and acknowledgment of researcher-bias. The limitations section of Chapter 5 addresses the concerns or happenings that transpired during the course of the study.

Ethical Safeguards

The researcher protected the rights of the participants by obtaining informed consent and voluntary participation. The parents or guardians of the participants received and signed an informed consent document. The document explained the purpose of the research, described the timeframe and requirements of the child, related the benefits of participation, delineated the steps taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, provided a contact number for follow-up questions, and informed participants and parents of their right to discontinue the study at any time (see Appendix B). The participants signed an informed assent form that explained the study and its procedures in student-friendly language (see Appendix C).
CHAPTER 4
UNLATCHING THE LOCKS: ANALYSIS OF DATA

*Questions provide the key to unlocking our unlimited potential.*
- *Anthony Robbins*

The key and lock relationship is a contested, yet codependent one. The lock retains its position of exclusion until the correctly matched and aligned key breaks down its guarded secret. When the right key slides into a pin-and-tumbler lock, the pointed teeth and notches on the blade of the key allow the spring-loaded pins to move up and down until they line up with a track called the shear line. When the pins align the shear line, the cylinder can turn and the lock will open. The final step in unlatching the locks of reading failure for speakers of NMAE is capturing the voice of the lived experience; lining up the notches of the key (their personal lived and linguistic experiences) with the shear line track of the key (their individual school experiences).

The process of unlatching the shackles of language, identity, and culture has provided access to the connections of the sociocultural factors that shape reading failure for speakers of NMAE. However, the inquiry must extend beyond mere identification of these circumstances. It is important to examine the influence of these sociocultural factors. It is therefore imperative that there is a consideration for the personal experiences of the individual. Bringing voice to the lived metalinguistic and linguistic experiences of students provides access to the personal and social identities housed in the
body of the lock. To actualize consideration of the lived experience, four second-grade students shared their literary and linguistic experiences.

This chapter presents the findings of this study through the lens of sociocultural theory, social identity theory, dialogical self theory, critical theory, the communication accommodation theory, and the attention to speech model. Chapter 2 provided a rationale for pursuing this investigation and an in-depth discussion of the theories that frame the experience of reading failure. Chapter 3 provided a rationale for the methodology used to conduct this study. Using a mixed methods explanatory design, this researcher explored the lived literary and linguistic experiences of four second-grade students to establish a comprehensive understanding of how their social and cultural environment affects their identity, linguistic style, and acquisition of literacy.

This chapter reports descriptive data and provides the reader with an analysis of data gathered from qualitative interviews. The analysis is a four-part presentation. The first component is descriptive data. Descriptive data include demographic information, language variation scores achieved by the participants during the quantitative phase of inquiry. Following this is a restatement of the research questions at hand, which is the second component. The third component of the analysis is contextual background information regarding the environmental and social context of the participants and their families. The fourth component consists of an analysis of the qualitative data and a discussion of the three themes evidenced in the data: linguistic awareness, semantic meaning, and pragmatic meaning. Further analysis of the data is in terms of the
conceptual frameworks of the attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and communication accommodation theory (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987).

Data analysis is the process by which answers to the research question(s) are identified. The steps of data analysis include identification of the problem, evaluation of the data, interpretation of the data, and data reporting (Creswell, 2009, 2013). The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the collected evidence. Merely collecting data is not useful to the researcher, nor is it a useful addition to the body of established research with analysis. The implications of data are revealed during the data analysis process; therefore, it is necessary to examine participant responses through the lens of theory and the conceptual frameworks that frame the reading failure experienced by these students. Without an appropriate analysis, the responses are merely an artifact of dialogue.

The analysis of data actualizes the use of critical theory and sociocultural definitions of literature. Literacy extends beyond the act of reading and writing in that it is a socially constructed and moderated process (Luke, 1997; Vygotsky, 1930/1978). Critical theory emphasizes the importance of social inquiry. Social inquiry uses critical reflection to initiate the dialogue necessary to identify a problem and create a plan of action (Freire, 1970). Analysis of the participant responses revealed a participatory account of reading failure. The participants interviewed in this study were able to give a first-hand account of reading failure and linguistic variance. The dialogue between the participants and the researcher established learning and understanding that is reciprocated
between the insider and outsiders of the occurrence of reading failure because of linguistic variance.

Data Presentation

To examine the latent factors of dialect variation as it relates to reading achievement in second-grade students, the researcher implemented an explanatory design of mixed methods. In an effort to explore this relationship, this study investigated the literary (e.g. reading comprehension) and metalinguistic skills (e.g. style awareness) that characterizes the relationship between dialect and poor reading outcomes.

The researcher selected the subsample, or group of students, used for the qualitative phase from the sample population at large, with selection based on extreme or outlier rates of dialect variation and reading comprehension scores. Part One of the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation-Screening Test (DELV-ST), developed by Seymour, Roeper, and de Villers (2003), captured the dialect variation of students as they described or responded to questions about action pictures. Student responses to the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Third Edition (WJ-III) of Woodcock, McGrew, and Mather (2001) generated comprehension scores.

Terry, Connor, Petscher, and Conlin (2012) referred to the Letter-Word Identification and the Passage Comprehension subtests of the WJ-III as an “omnibus measure of reading achievement” (p. 57). Therefore, the researcher used these subtests to measure determine the students’ reading skills. In the Letter-Word Identification subtest, students attempted to read progressively unknown words. In the Passage Comprehension
subtest, students provided answers to fill in the blanks in passages that increased in
difficulty as students progressed through the assessment.

To identify participants, the researcher sought approval from the local
Institutional Review Board (IRB). Ten second-grade students from two different Atlanta
public elementary schools volunteered to participate. The researcher contacted students
who attended an afterschool program at Reading Ally. Next, the researcher attended a
parent meeting at the community center, presenting the research study briefly and
requesting consent for each student to participate.

During the initial phase of the presentation, the researcher confirmed informed
consent for those individuals who responded. In the initial phase of testing, the
researcher collected assent forms from students. Table 2 presents a list of participants.
Assigned pseudonyms maintained participants’ anonymity.
Table 2

List of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaylor</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernie</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emory</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although age and gender were evenly distributed across the sample group, scores of dialect variation and reading comprehension were not. Of the sample, 40% of the sample had very limited reading abilities, 40% had limited reading abilities, and 20% had limited to average or better reading abilities.

The distribution in dialect variation was similar to the distribution of reading scores. Sixty percent of the participants used Mainstream American English (MAE),
20% used some variation of MAE, and 20% used a strong variation from MAE. Table 3 displays the reading and dialect variation scores.

Table 3

*List of Reading and Dialect Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Limited</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Limited to Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream American English (MAE)</td>
<td>Ernie</td>
<td>Emory</td>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>Katie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Variation from MAE</td>
<td>Joe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Variation from MAE</td>
<td>Gaylor</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher used maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy, in an effort to understand how the phenomenon of metalinguistic awareness shapes dialect variation. The guiding question of this study was:

1. What is the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and mainstream English variation for students with very limited reading abilities?

This question generated two subquestions:

2. How do students with very limited reading abilities differentiate semantic and pragmatic meaning of language?

3. How do students with very limited reading abilities accommodate, by divergence and convergence, different language styles and environments?
The research questions probed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading proficiency and dialect awareness. As the investigation was underway, the questions changed. The initial question focused on the relationship between reading comprehension, metalinguistic skills, and dialect variation among second-grade students. An initial collection of reading scores prompted a redefinition of the scope of the question. The categorical scores of reading performance, according to the WJ-III, are extremely limited, very limited, limited, limited to average, average, average to advanced, advanced, and very advanced. The indicators of linguistic variance, according to the DELV-ST, are Mainstream American English (MAE), some variation from MAE, and strong variation from MAE. In an effort to establish a comprehensive understanding of the effects of linguistic variance on reading achievement, it was necessary to conduct conversations with participants with a range of linguistic variance. The participants with the greatest degree of linguistic variance earned the score of very limited reading ability. Therefore, the scope of inquiry was adjusted to explore the relationship between dialect variation and reading within the confines of very limited reading abilities.

The subquestions refined the scope of the inquiry at hand. Metalinguistic awareness is characterized as having an ability to objectify language in terms of grammar and social meaning. The first subquestion made possible the quantifiable measurement of metalinguistic awareness.

The aim of the second subquestion was to capture the occurrence and use of dialect variation. The conceptual components (e.g., divergence and convergence) of the communication accommodation theory and the conceptual component (e.g.,
accommodation) of the attention to speech model served as measures of linguistic awareness. The subquestions, in tandem, made possible an analysis of the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and use of dialect variation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Relationship between main research question and subquestions

Qualitative interviewing identified answers to these questions, bringing awareness to the metalinguistic experiences of the participants.

Following data collection, the researcher analyzed the data utilizing the seven-step Colaizzi process of phenomenological data analysis (Shosha, 2012).

1. First, the researcher described each of the participants to establish a sense of the participants.
2. Second, the researcher drafted and read transcripts of the dialogue between participants and the researcher thoroughly to establish general awareness.

3. Third, the researcher utilized a separate document to transpose direct quotes referencing metalinguistic awareness explicitly.

4. Fourth, the researcher identified explicit and implicit meanings within each quote and examined the responses of each participant in terms of the three locks of reading failure for minority students: context, theory, and linguistic awareness. The researcher color-coded themes manually, looking for statements that supported each lock.

5. Fifth, the researcher grouped those meanings by commonalities and used the overall findings from the study to develop an in-depth description of the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and Mainstream American English (MAE) variation.

6. Sixth, the participants, in follow-up interviews, established validity of the findings through their review of the researcher’s interpretations.

7. Finally, the researcher utilized triangulation, which involves the use of different sources of data to corroborate evidence, to validate data (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation employed the use of multiple sources of data (quantitative data, interviews, and postinterviews), peer review, bracketing, and member checking. During this process, peers reviewed the data and posed questions regarding methods and interpretations.
To understand fully the manifestation of dialect variation, metalinguistic awareness, and reading outcomes among the participants, it is important to establish their contextual environment. Therefore, this discussion begins with a description of the participant’s contextual (socioeconomic) environment.

The Contextual Lock: Bound by Circumstance

A causal relationship between use of NMAE and reading failure has been difficult to establish; however, the inverse relationship between dialect variation and reading achievement has been substantiated (Terry, Connor, Johnson, Stuckey, & Tani, 2016). Presumably, a causal relationship has yet to be established because of the complex nature of reading acquisition. Sociocultural, identity, linguistic, and critical factors shape the acquisition of reading skills for speakers of NMAE.

The most general explanation for reading failure experienced by minorities is low socioeconomic status. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2013) reported African American and Hispanic students are more likely to live in poverty-stricken environments than their White peers are.

Student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also captured the relationship between poverty and reading achievement. In 2011, fourth-grade students eligible for free lunches scored 29 points lower, and students who were eligible for reduced-price lunch scored 17 points lower than their noneligible peers scored (NCES, 2011). Furthermore, speakers of NMAE are usually situated within minority groups (Terry & Scarborough, 2011) and minority groups are typically associated with having low socioeconomic status (Terry et al., 2012).
The substantiation of the effects of systemic poverty on literacy practices is an undeniable fact. Typically, unequal access to social, economic, and political power characterize institutional literacy practices (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hornberger, 2003; Kramsch, 2002; Norton, 2007). The differences in the literacy practices of families, communities, and schools provide proof for learning, teaching, and access to literacy discrepancies in and out of school (Auerbach, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Norton, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the occurrence of linguistic variance in terms of economic inequity.

Participants

Participants of this study attended daily afterschool programming at Reading Ally, a nonprofit organization that serves more than 2,000 children from underserved families. At the time of this study, the center was located in northwest Atlanta, a part of the greater metropolitan area largely characterized by both rich and poor neighborhoods. Fifty-seven percent of the occupants within the center’s zip code were renters. The renting percentage, Black race population, length of stay since moving, and number of college students were above the stage average in this area. The average adjusted gross income was $56,872; however, 25% of the population received government assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The unemployment rate for this area was a 17.2 percent.

Participants resided in the Bolton and Buckhead neighborhoods, comprised of smaller communities or neighborhoods characterized by juxtaposed displays of socioeconomic status. In the Bolton neighborhood, for example, 18.4% of the population
lived below the poverty level; however, 18.1% of students attended private schools. Additionally, 6.2% of the population spoke English not well or not at all, which is 4.4% greater than the amount of individuals categorized in this manner in Atlanta. The dissemination of social capital was jarring and imbalanced within the Buckhead community. Only 8.4% of the population lived below the poverty level, whereas 79% of students attended private schools, which was 60.3% more than the amount of students whom attended private school in the greater Atlanta area.

The afterschool program provided by Reading Ally offered tutoring, mentoring, recreational activities, and dinner for students. Eighty-three percent of the students in the program were Latino and 17% were African American; 100% of the students received free or reduced lunch at their perspective school. All programs provided by Reading Ally were free of charge, and students received free, daily doorstep transportation to and from the center.

Reading Ally also supported the families of the served children. Reading Ally workers monitored the academic progress of each student by reviewing report cards and progress reports, as well as providing assistance for establishing the educational goals of students who received special education services. Additionally, parents received transportation to and from Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meetings for their child.

The four participants, second-grade students of color, lived in the surrounding neighborhoods of the community center. The socioeconomic environment of the participants evidenced inequitable access to social and cultural capital, which predisposed
them to situational factors that lead to reading failure. The next section offers a thick, rich description of the familial, literary, and linguistic experiences as told by each participant. The four participants who interviewed for the study received pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Peter

Peter, a Georgia native, presented as an animated Latino male. Peter lived with his extended family, his mother, grandmother, and uncle. Peter described himself as a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish and related his process of language acquisition was a form of osmosis or unconscious assimilation. He explained that he did not remember being taught to speak either language; it was something that just happened. Peter stated that he and his uncle were the only bilingual speakers of English and Spanish who resided in his home. He shared that he often translated for his mother the materials sent home from school. He stated that his uncle translated the important materials. Peter’s hobbies included playing soccer, bike riding, and cooking with his grandmother. As Peter described his hobby of cooking, he explained that he helped his grandmother prepare large dinners so that there was enough food for the adults in the home to take to work the next day. Peter stated that he did not take leftovers to school because he was able to eat free. Peter’s had limited access to literacy materials in his home setting—the only literary materials that he referred to were his uncle’s car magazines. Peter stated that his uncle was a mechanic who kept tons of books with pictures of car parts on the living room table.
Gaylor

Gaylor, born in Mexico, presented as a conscientious and studious Latino male. He described his process of English acquisition as manifold. He stated that he used Spanish in purely social contexts (to communicate with family or friends) and used English for both social and academic means of communication (whereas he was unable to write or read in Spanish). Gaylor stated that he had two Moms and neither of them spoke English. An older cousin, whom the family depended on to translate materials written in English, lived next door. Gaylor shared salient memories of peers teasing him because of his unconventional use of the English language. During the interview process, Gaylor often inquired about the time and frequently asked if I was planning to talk to other students at the community center. He appeared to be apprehensive about missing playtime and the degree to which his stories would be kept confidential.

Joe

Joe, a Georgia native who lived in a single parent household, presented as a brawny, yet docile Latino male. He described himself as a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish. Joe stated that although he spoke, wrote, and understood English proficiently, he had yet to achieve mastery of the Spanish language. He stated that he enjoyed reading and borrowed books from the school library mostly, but also enjoyed reading the books that he has at home. Joe’s favorite book series was Captain Underpants. He stated that he enjoyed this series because of the large amount of pictures, speech bubbles, and jokes present throughout the text. Joe stated that what he liked the most about school was being able to go to Reading Ally afterwards because they
offered good food and the community workers helped him complete his homework. When asked to qualify “good food”, Joe explained that the food served at the community center tasted better than the food served at school. Joe was unaware of this, but he, too, received free food. When asked if he chose what to buy for school lunch, he explained that he did not need to buy food because no one buys food. He stated that it was free and you just eat it.

Ernie

Ernie, a Georgia native who lived in a two-parent household with his twin sister, presented as an athletic and verbose Latino male. Although Ernie’s parents spoke Spanish, Ernie described himself as a monolingual speaker of English. He described his attitude toward reading as favorable. He described his process of acquisition of literacy as heavily influenced by parental involvement. Ernie stated that his sister was a better reader, and he was a better mathematician. He stated that his father told him often that reading is for girls and math is for boys. Ernie stated that his mother expresses concern regarding his reading abilities. He believed that he attended Reading Ally because his mother wanted him to get help with reading. Ernie said that he enjoyed math much more than reading because he did not have to sound out anything in math. Ernie did admit that math word problems were sometimes challenging. Ernie also explained that although his father and mother helped him complete his homework, they had been unable to figure out his reading. He stated both of his parents told him that they wished reading could be as easy for him as it was for his twin sister.
Theme 1: Linguistic Awareness

An individual’s conscious ability to manipulate language often characterizes metalinguistic awareness (Connor, 2008). Metalinguistic skills necessitates that the speaker pay conscious attention to the semantic and pragmatic meaning of language (Pawtowska, Robinson, & Seddoh, 2014; Varghese & Venkatesh, 2012). The first level of this sort of consciousness is linguistic awareness, which refers to the ability to consciously and explicitly think about and manipulate phonemes, letter patterns, syntax, and the rules of grammar (Apel, Masterson, & Brimo, 2011). Therefore, to probe the complex nature of metalinguistic awareness, the researcher coded each participant’s responses for two components of linguistic awareness: awareness of others and awareness of speech environment.

Awareness of Others

The researcher asked participants to describe the way in which they vary their style of language depending upon their audience. The question posed was, “Do you change your style of speaking (e.g., vocabulary, volume, or tone) to match your audience (e.g., friends, family, adults)” The degree of MAE used by each participant influenced the levels of awareness. Peter, who scored in the strong variation of MAE range, initially stated that he was unclear of the initial question; therefore, he received the following example:

The researcher asked, “So, do you think that grown-ups talk different from little people?”

Peter replied, “Mmmm, I don’t know.”
The researcher clarified, “What I mean is, do grown-ups use the same words or volume with kids that they use with other adults? Like, do you think your teacher talks to you and your classmates in the same way she would talk to your principal, music teacher, or parents?”

Peter said, “I don’t know.”

The researcher explained,

Let me give you an example. When I greet my students in the morning, I say things like, “Good morning class, welcome. Come in and have a seat. Let’s get ready to start your morning work”, but when I’m home, know what I say?

Peter asked, “What?”

The researcher said, “‘Yo, what’s good? What’s happening?’ Do you see the difference? Do you ever do anything like that?”

Peter replied, “No.”

Gaylor, who also used a strong variation of MAE, responded similarly. When asked if he ever changes the way that he speaks when speaking to adults versus speaking to children, he explained, “No, I am the same. I don’t ever use bad words because I don’t want to get in trouble. My friends say bad words sometimes, but I do not do that.”

As shown in Gaylor’s response, differences in vocabulary, specifically profanity, shaped his interpretation of linguistic variance. Despite the explanation of style variance provided by the researcher, he was unable to differentiate between the use of profanity and change of linguistic style. Neither Peter nor Gaylor indicated an awareness of
linguistic variance; neither did they indicate that they engaged in the act of changing their speech in response to the needs of an audience.

Joe, on the other hand, indicated an awareness of linguistic difference, but he did not evidence the use of linguistic awareness. Joe indicated his awareness of others as speakers when he received the same example of linguistic awareness given to Peter:

Joe replied, “Because there are more kids at school than your house.”

The researcher said, “Right. So why do you think I change the way I speak at work versus at home?”

Joe said, “More kids at the school.”

The researcher asked, “Do I have to use certain words with kids that I don’t use with adults?”

Joe said, “Mmmhmmm.”

The researcher replied, “Ah, that’s a good point. Um, so what about you? Are there things that you may say at home that you don’t say at school?”

Joe said, “Mmm, no.”

Similar to Joe, Ernie demonstrated awareness of others when speaking, but unlike the other participants, he also evidenced the use of linguistic variance in response to various audiences. For example, the researcher asked, “Do you speak the same way that other boys speak?”

Ernie responded, “Yeah.”

The researcher asked, “Do you speak the same way that girls speak?”

Ernie: [no response].
The researcher asked, “Do boys and girls talk the same?”

Ernie replied, “No.”

The researcher asked, “No? Do you think that adults talk to children the same way that they talk to other adults?”

Ernie said, “No.”

The researcher asked, “How do they change the way that they speak?”

Ernie responded, “Because they have different voice.”

The researcher asked, “Do you talk to your friends the same way that you talk to adults?”

Ernie said, “No.”

Essentially the participants’ awareness of linguistic variance in response to others increased as their level of dialect variation decreased, as displayed in Figure 2.

![Diagram showing relationship between awareness of others and linguistic variation](image)

**Figure 2.** Relationship between awareness of others and linguistic variation

Awareness of Speech Environment

The researcher asked participants to describe the ways in which they change the way that they speak depending upon where they are (e.g., school, home, restaurant). All
four participants had varying degrees of awareness of their speech environments. Participants who fell in the categories of strong and some variation from MAE discussed changes in environment in terms of language choice. The responses of Peter and Joe were similar. The researcher asked, “Do you change the way that you talk at home versus the way that you talk at school?”

Peter replied, “I talk at home in English and Spanish. With my friends and sister, I talk English.” Peter also described differences in his choice of vocabulary in response to his speech environment: “I say what’s up?”

The researcher asked, “You say what’s up all the time?”

Peter said, “No, sometimes.”

The researcher asked, “Do you say what’s up at school?”

Peter: [nonverbal no].

The researcher asked, “Well when do you say what’s up?”

Peter said, “Oh, home, yes.”

Although Ernie did not describe his awareness of environment in terms of language choice, he described his awareness in terms of volume of voice. The researcher asked, “Do you speak the same way that you talk in a restaurant the same way that you speak in a classroom?”

Ernie: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher asked, “Yeah? What about if you were in the library versus a restaurant would it be the same?”

Ernie: [nonverbal no].
The researcher asked, “What would be different?”

Ernie replied, “I might be loud at the library. You talk soft when you’re indoors and when you’re outdoors you can talk kind of loud.”

Although the degree to which each participant evidenced an awareness of speech environments varied, all the participants demonstrated an environmental awareness (see Figure 3).

![Diagram of speech environment awareness]

*Figure 3. Relationship between awareness of speech environment and linguistic variation*

Theme 2: Semantic Meaning

Students’ awareness of letter sound and patterns and the structure of words influences literacy acquisition; therefore, it is equally important to explore semantic meaning as a component of metalinguistic awareness (Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). Semantics skills determine how well children understand the context of written language (Rego & Bryant, 1993). Subsequently, the researcher asked participants to comment on what they know about the rules of the English language.
Phoneme Patterns

The researcher asked participants how they engage word attack to read and spell unfamiliar words. Awareness of phoneme patterns increased as the level of variation away from MAE decreased. Participants with strong variation responded to the inquiry with uncertainty. For example, Peter said, “I know how to spell some words, but some big words I don’t know.”

The researcher asked, “In English do you think that words are spelled the way that they sound?”

Peter replied, “I don’t know.”

The researcher asked, “Why do you think spelling is hard?”

Peter: [shrugs shoulders].

The participant with some variation away from MAE evidenced awareness of letter-sound correspondence, silent letters, and diphthongs. For instance, the researcher asked, “Is there ever a time when the sounds that you need to make don’t match the letters on the page?”

Joe responded, “If there are two vowels.”

The researcher asked, “What about if there are two vowels?”

Joe said, “The other one makes is louder.”

The researcher said, “When two vowels go walking . . . do you know that saying?”

Joe: [no response].

The researcher prompted, “The first one does the?”
Joe responded, “Does the um, um, um.”

The researcher asked, “The talking?”

Joe said, “And the last one doesn’t. It’s silent.”

The researcher said, “Right, it’s silent. Is that ever confusing?”

Joe replied, “No.”

The participant who spoke MAE demonstrated the greatest depth of knowledge for phoneme patterns. This participant evidenced awareness of letter-sound correspondence, oddball letter sounds, spelling rules, silent letters, and diphthongs. For example, the researcher asked, “What happens if you see a word that you don’t know? What do you have to do?”

Ernie said, “Sound it out.”

The researcher asked, “What about spelling? How do you know how to spell words?”

Ernie stated, “That’s a hard one.”

The researcher asked, “Is spelling hard?”

Ernie replied, “Kind of.”

The researcher asked, “What makes it hard?”

Ernie explained, “Some of the letters make different sounds.”

The researcher said, “Yes, you’re right. And some of the letters you can’t hear at all, right?”

Ernie said, “Yea because of magic e.”

The researcher asked, “When two vowels go walking?”
Ernie said, “The first one does the talking.”

In addition to commenting on phoneme patterns, the researcher invited participants to revisit some of the tasks they completed during the DELV-ST administration. The initial task for the DELV-ST required students to produce a target word. For example, the researcher showed each participant a picture of a girl brushing her teeth. Each participant received the sentence prompt, “I see a girl brushing her”, after which the researcher prompted the participants to say the word that would complete the sentence. During the interview phase, participants received the same sentence prompts, but this time, the researcher provided two choices of words to complete the sentence. For instance, with the sentence prompt “I see a girl brushing her”, participants received the options of *teeth* or *teef*.

The degree to which participants’ responses deviated from their original choice, when provided with choices, varied. For example, Peter, who originally chose answers that categorized as NMAE, chose MAE responses when provided with options. The researcher said, “You are missing (points to teeth). What are these?”

Peter replied, “Teebs.”

The researcher asked, “Are they called teebs, teeth, or teef?”

Peter said, “Teeth.”

The researcher pointed to a picture of a bath and asked, “What about this? Is is a bath or baf?”

Peter stated, “Bath.”

The researcher, pointing to a table, asked, “Is this smooth or smoove?”
Peter replied, “Smoothv.”

However, Joe, the participant with some variation away from MAE, did not change his NMAE answers when provided with choices. The researcher said, “Let’s look at what we did the last time that were together. Oh, these right here (shows picture of teeth). Do you think that the proper way to say this word is teef or teeth?”

Joe answered, “Teef.”

The researcher asked, “Which one?”

Joe replied, “Teef.”

The researcher said, “Okay, what about if I said the table is, is it smooth or smoove?”

Joe replied, “Smoove.”

The researcher asked, “Smoove?”

Joe said, “Yes, smoove.”

The researcher asked, “What about bath or baf?”

Joe said, “Baf.”

The researcher also prompted participants to complete a phonological awareness activity to demonstrate their ability to manipulate individual sounds. As the participant’s level of variation away from MAE decreased, there was a shift from requiring thinking time to complete the task to completing the task with automaticity. Gaylor, who scored in the strong variation range, required thinking time to complete the task. The researcher asked, “What’s the first sound in swing?”

Gaylor replied, “/s/.”
The researcher asked, “So, if you take that first sound off, what is the new word?”

Gaylor replied, “Swing?”

The researcher said, “Mmmhmmm, take the /s/ away. What are you left with?”

Gaylor said, (thinking time) “Wing?”

The researcher said, “Nice, let’s try another one.”

Joe, the participant who scored in the some variation range, had a similar experience. Unlike Gaylor and Joe, Ernie performed the task with automaticity. The researcher asked, “What is the first sound in the word swing?”

Ernie said, “/s/.”

The researcher said, “Okay, can you take that sound off and make a new word?”

Ernie said, “Wing.”

The researcher said, “Good. If I gave you the word clock, take the first sound off. What’s the new word?”

Ernie responded, “Lock.”

The researcher said, “Nice. If I gave you the word clip what would be the new word?”

Ernie replied, “Lip.”

The depth of phonemic awareness increased as the participants’ use of NMAE decreased; therefore, as variation away from MAE decreased awareness of phonemes increased (see Figure 4).
Knowledge of Structure

Structure refers to a student’s knowledge of the grammatical make-up of a sentence. Knowledge of sentence structure is important because the “sentence structure is part of what gives meaning to the sentence” (Johnson, 2004, p. 58). The researcher asked participants to comment on their ability to understand the structure of their own language and the structure of the speech of others. The researcher also prompted participants to review subject-verb agreement tasks that they completed previously during the administration of the DELV-ST. Participants received sentence starters, such as “I see sleeping bags. I see a bed. The boys always sleep in the sleeping bags, but the girls always”. The researcher then prompted participants to complete the sentence with the correct verb, such as *sleep* or *sleeps*.

Participants who scored in the strong variation and some variation range of dialect variation demonstrated an awareness of subject verb agreement but differed in their ability to support their claims. For instance, Gaylor demonstrated an awareness of grammatical structure, but he could not explain the rule that governed his decision. Although he demonstrated awareness, it was apparent that his knowledge of grammatical
structure was subject to misconceptions, as evidenced by his incorrect choices. The researcher asked, “What about if I said something like, ‘The boys always sleep in sleeping bags, but the girl always’. Is it sleep or sleeps?”

Gaylor replied, “Sleep.”

The researcher asked, “Sleep? How do you know that is it sleep?”

Gaylor responded, “Because sleeped is not a word.”

The researcher said, “No, like sleep or sleeps. Should I have a /s/ on it or take the /s/ off?”

Gaylor said, “Take the /s/ off.”

The researcher asked, “Take the /s/ off? Um, what about if I said, ‘The girls always ride horses but the boy always’. Is it ride or rides?”

Gaylor said, “Ride.”

The researcher asked, “Ride? Why should there not be an s?”

Gaylor replied, “Because it doesn’t make any sense.”

Peter performed similarly to Gaylor. Misconceptions also influenced his knowledge of grammatical structure, and he was ambivalent about his ability to explain his choices. For instance, the researcher said, “Okay, let’s look at some of the things you read. Do you remember doing this? One of the sentences was, ‘The girls always ride horses, but the boy always’. Is it ride or rides a bike?”

Peter said, “Rides. No, ride.”

The researcher asked, “Why is it ride and not rides?”

Peter said, “No rides. Rides.”
The researcher asked, “Which one?”

Peter replied, “Rides.”

The researcher asked, “How do you know?”

Peter said, “Ride. Rides.”

The researcher laughs and asks, “So, you’re going to keep going back and forth?”

Peter replied, “Uh, ride?”

The researcher said, “It’s confusing, right?”

Peter said, “I know. I know. If it’s one person ride, if it’s two people it’s rides.”

The researcher said, “Oooh, say that again.”

Peter asked, “What?”

The researcher said, “You said if there is one person it’s ride, and if there are two people it’s rides?”

Peter: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher asked, “How do you know that?”

Peter responded, “My teacher told me.”

Similarly, Joe (the student who scored in the some variation range) demonstrated pragmatic awareness. However, his awareness was free of misconceptions and he was able to support his choices with value-added judgements. For example, the researcher asked, “What about if I gave you the sentence, ‘The boys always wash the plates but the girl always.’ Is it wash or washes?”

Joe replied, “Washes.”
The researcher said, “Washes, okay. What about ‘The girls always push the wagon but the mom always’. Is it push or pushes?”

Joe said, “Pushes the wagon.”

The researcher said, “Okay, so those are great answers. How did you know which word to choose?”

Joe responded, “Because it’s better.”

The researcher asked, “Because it’s better? How do you know that it’s better?”

Joe said, “Because it’s more like it.”

The researcher said, “Ooh, so it’s more like what’s right?”

Joe said, “Mmmmmmm.”

Unlike the trend in the other categories of linguistic awareness and semantic meaning, the participant who spoke MAE did not out perform his peers in regards to his knowledge of structure. In fact, he evidenced knowledge of grammatical structure informed by misconceptions. Nevertheless, Ernie too provided value-added judgement to support his word choices. The researcher asked, “What about if I said that ‘boys always sleep in sleeping bags, but the girl always’. Is it sleep or sleeps?”

Ernie replied, “Sleep.”

The researcher said, “Sleep? Okay. ‘The boys always wash the plates, but the girl always’. Is it wash or washes?”

Ernie said, “Wash.”

The researcher said, “Okay, what do you like to do for fun?”

Ernie said, “Play.”
The researcher said, “Ok, if I said the girl. Is it play or plays?”

Ernie said, “Play.”

The researcher asked, “What about the girls? Is it play or plays?”

Ernie replied, “Play.”

The researcher asked, “How do you know which word to choose?”

Ernie said, “Because the other words sound weird.”

There was no directional relationship between knowledge of structure of linguistic variation. All participants demonstrated some knowledge of structure, but their knowledge was not free of misconceptions. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between knowledge of structure and linguistic variation. The size of the circles represents the degree to which misconceptions shaped the participant’s knowledge of semantic structure—the larger the circle, the greater the misconception.
Figure 5. Relationship between knowledge of structure and linguistic variation

Theme 3: Pragmatic Meaning

Pragmatic competence is the final component of metalinguistic awareness. Alcon and Safont (2008) described pragmatic awareness as the perceived comprehension of the implicit or societal meaning of language. Therefore, the researcher prompted participants to disclose how they came to know what Bardovi-Harlig (2013) called “how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (p. 68).

Social Communication

The researcher prompted participants to think about the ways that they have internalized rules of social communication. This involved asking participants to revisit the target word task completed during the administration of the DELV-ST. The researcher specifically asked participants, “How do you know that your word choice is
right or wrong?” The responses from the participants ranged from uncertainty to receiving instruction by a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

Meaning and MKOs shaped the pragmatic awareness of the participants who scored in the strong variation range. When the researcher asked Gaylor to express how he knew to pronounce teeth as *teef*, instead he stated, “It’s still the same. *Teef* and teeth.” He based his decision on the interchangeableness of meaning, despite variance in pronunciation.

Peter, on the other hand, based his decision on what his teacher taught him. Although misconceptions shaped Peter’s understanding of grammar, when asked to comment on how he came to his understanding of subject verb agreement, he stated that he knew because his teacher told him. The researcher said, “You said that ‘if there is one person, it’s ride and if there are two people it’s ride’.”

Peter: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher asked, “How did you know that?”

Peter replied, “My teacher.”

Joe, the participant with some variation, was unable to articulate how he has come to know which pronunciation of the word *bath* is acceptable. Joe said, “Baf.”

The researcher asked, “Baf? Cool. Um, how did you know which one is right?”

Joe responded, “I don’t know.”

The researcher asked, “You don’t know? So, you take a guess? Do you guess based on what you hear other people say? Or did your teacher tell you that’s how to pronounce it?”
Joe: [shrugs shoulders].

Ernie, the participant who spoke MAE, based his understanding of subject-verb agreement on his internationalization of what sounds correct. For example, the researcher asked, “Okay, what do you do for fun?”

Ernie replied, “Play.”

The researcher said, “If I said ‘the girl’. Is it play or plays?”

Ernie responded, “Play.”

The researcher asked, “What about ‘the girls’? Is it play or plays?”

Ernie said, “Play.”

The researcher asked, “How do you know which word to choose?”

Ernie said, “Because the other word sounds weird.”

Although the ways of being aware of social communication differed, each participant evidenced awareness (see Figure 6).

*Figure 6. Relationship between awareness of social communication and linguistic variation*
Knowledge of Meaning

To understand further the development of the participants’ pragmatic awareness, the researcher asked the participants to comment on their knowledge of meaning of language variation. The researcher asked them to state their opinion of whether or not language variance changes the meaning of words. Participants who spoke with the most variation of MAE were more likely to state that the meaning of a word remains constant, despite its pronunciation, as supported by previous examples.

Joe, the participant who spoke with some variation of MAE, often chose NMAE versions of target words as the correct option, but he was uncertain whether the meaning of the word changed in light of the variance of pronunciation. He appeared to be perplexed and seemed to wonder how one option could be deemed correct in terms of pronunciation, while both options could be viable in terms of meaning.

Despite Ernie’s use of MAE, he expressed an awareness of NMAE. Even so, he implied that, in fact, language variance changed meaning. The researcher asked, “If I said ‘you’re taking a’. Is is bath or baf?”

Ernie said, “Bath.”

The researcher asked, “How do you know that it’s bath, smooth, and teeth?”

Ernie replied, “I don’t know.”

The researcher asked, “Have you ever heard anyone speak that way? Like ‘baf’ or ‘I have to brush my teef’?”

Ernie: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher said, “Yeah? Are those the same words? Teeth and teef?”
Ernie: [nonverbal no].

As the participants’ variation away from MAE decreased, their knowledge of pragmatic meaning increased (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7. Relationship between knowledge of meaning and linguistic variation](image)

**Figure 7.** Relationship between knowledge of meaning and linguistic variation

Further Analysis: Accommodation by Means of Divergence and Convergence

In addition to coding participants’ responses in terms of linguistic awareness, semantic meaning, and pragmatic meaning, the researcher coded responses for acts of accommodation through the means of divergence and convergence. The ability to code switch is a critical component of literacy acquisition for speakers of NMAE; therefore, it is imperative that students acquire the ability to code switch (Terry, 2010). In order for students to develop the skill of code switching, they must employ the use of metalinguistic skills. Furthermore, moving between linguistic styles is contingent upon a student’s ability to notice characteristic of personal speech (Labov, 1966).

To probe for the propensity to code switch, the researcher used the attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1987) to analyze the responses of participants. The attention to speech model framed
participants’ unselfconscious and self-conscious awareness of linguistic style. Communication accommodation theory provided depth to participant conscientiousness of linguistic style. The participants’ responses were framed within the context of divergence, which is the intentional use of NMAE or MAE to increase interpersonal space and to establish inter- and intragroup membership (Giles et al., 1987). The researcher also analyzed responses in terms of convergence, which is the act of matching personal style of speech to the style of speech of a speech partner in effort to receive approval and to establish positive social identity (Giles et al., 1987).

Attention to Speech

To be expected, the speaker of MAE was self-conscious of the formal language he used. Ernie evidenced an awareness of his speech and the speech of others in the following exchange.

The researcher asked, “How do you know which word to choose?”

Ernie responded, “Because the other word sounds weird.”

The researcher replied, “Yeah, so it sounds strange, that’s a good point. Do you think that you speak the same way that other boys speak?”

Ernie said, “Yeah.”

The researcher asked, “Do boys and girls talk the same?”

Ernie replied, “No.”

The researcher said, “No? Do you think that adults talk to children the same way that they talk to other adults?”

Ernie said, “No.”
The researcher asked, “How do they change the way that they speak?”

Ernie stated, “Because they have a different voice.”

The researcher asked, “Do you talk to your friends the same way that you talk to adults?”

Ernie said, “No.”

On the other hand, the participants, who were speakers of NMAE, were both self-conscious and unselfconscious of their linguistic style. Gaylor, the participant who spoke with strong variation, used NMAE self-consciously. Despite his use of NMAE, he evidenced an awareness of the difference between NMAE and MAE. For example, the researcher asked, “Do you remember a time or even now that someone has made fun of you because of the way that you speak English?”

Gaylor replied, “Yeah, they made fun of me.”

The researcher asked, “What did you do about them making fun of you?”

Gaylor said, “I hit them.”

The researcher asked, “Have other kids ever called you a name because of the way that you speak English?”

Gaylor said, “They called me stupid.”

The other two speakers of NMAE evidenced an unselfconscious use of NMAE. Joe, for instance, was unaware of the difference in his speech and the speech of the researcher. The researcher asked, “Have I used any words that you’ve never heard before?”

Joe said, “No.”
The researcher said, “No? Um, the way that I pronounce. Do you know what it means to pronounce something?”

Joe: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher asked, “Do I pronounce words differently than you do?”

Joe replied, “No.”

Peter also evidenced an unselfconscious awareness of his use of NMAE. For example, the researcher asked, “Do you ever notice that your English is maybe different from other people’s English?”

Peter asked, “Why?”

The researcher clarified, “I’m asking if you ever noticed that.”

Peter replied, “No.”

The researcher said, “No? Do you sound like all of your friends?”

Peter responded, “Yes.”

Divergent Accommodation

One of the speakers of NMAE evidenced use of divergent accommodation. Although Gaylor demonstrated a self-conscious linguistic awareness, he demonstrated no change in his own linguistic style to match the style of a speech partner. For example, the researcher asked, “Are there some words that you would say at home that you wouldn’t say at school?”

Gaylor asked, “Bad words?”

The researcher responded,
Not like bad words or anything. I mean like for an example, as a teacher I say, “Good morning class, come in and get stated on your morning work”, but when I’m with friends at home I say, “Yo, what’s good?” But, I don’t talk to my students like that. I use different words when I’m home than when I’m in my classroom. So, do you ever do anything like that?

Gaylor said, “No, I am the same. I don’t ever use bad words because I don’t want to get in trouble. My friends say bad words sometimes, but I do not do that.”

Convergent Accommodation

The speaker of MAE provided responses that suggest he had the ability to match his style of speech to that of a speech partner. Ernie did not use NMAE, but he provided evidence for awareness that certain environments warrant style matching. For example, the researcher asked, “Thinking about the way that you speak, is there a difference in the way that you talk at home versus the way that you speak at school?”

Ernie relied, “Not really.”

The researcher asked, “Do you change the way that you speak or do you just stay the same?”

Ernie said, “Stay the same.”

The researcher asked, “Do you speak the same way that you talk in a restaurant that you speak in a classroom?”

Ernie: [nonverbal yes].

The researcher said, “Yeah? What about if you were in the library versus a restaurant would it be the same?”
Ernie: [nonverbal no].

Although situational, Joe and Peter evidenced the use of convergent accommodation. Joe used NMAE in an unselfconscious manner; therefore, his act of convergence was not in regards to that of dialect variation, but that of language variation. Joe transitioned between English and Spanish depending upon his audience and environment. For example, the researcher asked, “The way that you speak at home and the way that you speak a school, do you think that it’s different?”

Joe replied, “Mmmhmmm.”

The researcher asked, “Yes? How is it different?”

Joe explained, “Because I speak English more at school that at home.”

Peter’s act of convergence was similar in that he also chose which language to communicate with depending upon his audience and environment. For example, the researcher asked, “Do you change the way that you talk at home versus the way that you talk at school?”

Peter replied, “I talk at home in English and Spanish. With my friends and sister, I talk English.”

Despite the level of conscientiousness of each participant, the majority of the participants demonstrated an ability to converge upon the style or language of others (see Table 4).
Table 4

Summary of Participants’ Style of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unselfconscious</td>
<td>Joe (Convergent)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter (Convergent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-conscious</td>
<td>Gaylor (Divergent)</td>
<td>Ernie (Convergent)</td>
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Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present significant responses of the participants in this study as they pertained to the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and MAE for students with very limited reading abilities. The manifestation of metalinguistic awareness is a complex occurrence, shaped by many moving pieces. The first component of metalinguistic awareness examined was semantic and pragmatic meaning of language. Conscientious awareness mediates access to semantic and pragmatic meaning; therefore, the researcher examined the metalinguistic awareness of the participants.

Sociocultural Perspective of Linguistic Awareness

Sociocultural theory frames the social nature of language acquisition. Children acquire language as they engage with their caretakers. Initially learned through the imitative learning, instructional learning of language follows. Children use the language they acquire through mimicking and direct instruction to engage in the collaborative
learning of language (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993). The act of collaboration affirms or challenges children’s linguistic schemas.

This process of language acquisition is particularly relative to the acquisition of NMAE. Teachers do not teach dialects of standard English in the classroom; therefore, the acquisition of dialects are solely dependent on learning led by MKOs in a child’s home or community. The collaborative nature of language acquisition is critical to the experience of NMAE speaker. Children who speak NMAE are often in the presence of others who use MAE while in the classroom setting; therefore, students’ use of NMAE is more likely to be challenged or accentuated as different. To that end, it is important for students to be aware of their linguistic difference so that they are capable of monitoring its use appropriately. The likelihood that students who use NMAE will not recognize the difference between NMAE and MAE increases because acquisition of the language typically occurs outside of the classroom. It is therefore likely that a student’s linguistic awareness will increase as his use of NMAE decreases. The responses of participants evidenced this occurrence. Evidence for the critical role of MKOs in the acquisition of language was also present.

The participants’ awareness of linguistic variation in response to others increased as their level of dialect variation decreased. The participants’ ability to consciously think about and manipulate phonemes and grammatical structure shaped their linguistic awareness. The participants’ awareness of phoneme patterns increased as their level of variation away from MAE decreased. In regards to grammar, participants who scored in the strong variation and some variation range of dialect variation demonstrated an
awareness of subject-verb agreement, but they differed in their ability to provide supporting evidence for their awareness. Essentially, the way that they explained how they came to know what they know varied. The responses from the participants ranged from uncertainty to learning from an MKO. Meaning and MKOs shaped the pragmatic awareness of participants who scored in the strong variation range. Participants who spoke with the most variation of MAE were more likely to state that the meaning of a word remains constant despite its pronunciation. Misconceptions shaped the knowledge of grammatical structure of the participant who spoke MAE’s; nevertheless, he identified value-added judgment as the core of his awareness.

Linguistic Awareness and Identity

A person’s identity is established as he internalizes what is learned about language. The internalization process of learning unfolds in a four-step process. Humans are social beings; therefore, they seek group membership. Essentially, each individual seeks to be a part of a group of individuals that share commonalities. As social groups form, members assess their roles within their group. If an individual deems a role as important, the individual will deem group membership important. Thus, the group will be important and will influence the individual’s behavior and identity. After the establishment of group membership, the group member uses social comparison to compare his group to other groups, which leads to an evaluation of self and others. The outcomes of the evaluation shape social identity (Trepte, 2006). Social identity theory posits that desire to establish self-enhancement, which fuels the desire for positive self-esteem, drives humans (Tajfel, 1981).
Within social identity, individuals are capable of establishing personal identity. Dialogical self theory posits that an individual is capable of taking on individual roles in response to social categorizations (Hermans, 2001). Therefore, individuals are capable of experiencing different levels of belongingness at various times. In other words, an individual’s connection to a group can feel particularly immediate or distant. In spite of the occurrence of immediacy or distance, the individual maintains membership within the group.

Personal and social identities shape linguistic awareness and code switching. Speakers of NMAE assert a particular personal identity with the mere production of their dialect. Speakers who are aware of their use of NMAE are also able to monitor their social identities. This means that speakers of NMAE can maintain their use of NMAE or switch to MAE to accommodate various speech partners and environments. The choice is dependent upon a desire to assert personal or social identity. The responses recorded from participants offered proof of this occurrence.

A Conceptual Understanding: Attention to Speech Model

In examining the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and dialect variation, the second component explored was the participants’ use of dialect variation and manifestation of linguistic style. Framed by the attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) and communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1987), the researcher examined participants’ responses for their ability to think about linguistic style consciously and accommodate the style of others. The speaker of MAE presented as a self-conscious user of his linguistic style. The speaker of MAE also provided responses
that suggested an ability to match his style of speech to that of his speech partners. On the other hand, the participants who used NMAE were both self-conscious and unselfconscious of their linguistic style. Despite the level of conscientiousness of each participant, the majority of the knowledge of grammatical structure demonstrated an ability to converge upon the style or the language of others.

Current research provides supporting evidence for an inverse relationship between dialect variation and reading achievement (Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig, Kolenic, & Hensel, 2014; Craig & Washington, 2000; Terry, 2014; Terry, Connor, Petscher, & Conlin, 2012; Terry, Thomas-Tate, & Love, 2010). The less NMAE an individual uses, the more likely he is to establish reading proficiency. However, in light of the current findings, the question remains, “Despite variability in dialect variation and ability to accommodate linguistic style why is there a shared outcome of poor reading proficiency for this group of students?” Chapter 5 addresses the conclusions, implications, and recommendations that can be drawn from this occurrence.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating.
Education is the premise of progress,
in every society, in every family.

—Kofi Annan

This unlatching of each lock contained in the mass of locks, which characterizes reading failure for minorities, takes a certain level of stick-to-it-iveness. This is because reading for speakers of NMAE is a complex phenomenon that requires a multifaceted lens of context and theory to identify viable solutions. Now that the shackles of locks of reading failure are unlatched and access has been granted to the body of the lock through the means of qualitative interviewing, there is cause for interpretation. Making sense of the lived experiences of the students is helpful in identifying appropriate solutions to the problem of reading failure for speakers of NMAE. The tenets of critical theory frame the reported findings, conclusions, and implications of this study.

The use of language is within the context of social histories, defined by membership within a particular group, based on gender, social class, race, or geographical region (Siegel, 2010). Group membership, established by means of divergence or convergence, establishes personal and social identity. Therefore, individuals use language to claim group membership, as well as to assert (lock in) or refute (lock out) the approval of the sociocultural factors of identity (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) because language has the power to communicate the attitudes, values,
and perceptions of a particular social group. Throughout this study, the researcher explored this intricate relationship between language and identity. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the latent factors of dialect variation as they relate to reading achievement for second-grade students.

The themes that surfaced as a result of this study are indicative of the three locks that frame reading achievement for users of dialect variation: context, theory, and linguistic awareness. This chapter provides a summary of the following findings:

- **Finding 1**: Linguistic awareness increases as variation away from Mainstream American English (MAE) decreases.
- **Finding 2**: Semantic awareness is not solely shaped by linguistic variation.
- **Finding 3**: Pragmatic awareness is not solely shaped by linguistic variation.
- **Finding 4**: Conscientiousness of linguistic style and the ability to accommodate the speech styles of others by means of convergence increases as variation away from MAE decreases.

**Summary of the Study**

A survey of the literature highlighted the practicality of the dialect shifting/awareness hypothesis. The negative effect of using NMAE during the window of literacy acquisition was a problem evoking concern; therefore, the need for shifting between NMAE and MAE became quite apparent. This is not to say that the teacher bias hypothesis and mismatch theory are not valid. Teacher perception of a student’s aptitude has the power to affect student achievement in positive and negative manners. It is plausible to assume that if a teacher holds a negative perception of a student’s use of
NMAE, those negative projections will affect a student’s performance negatively. Furthermore, it is probable that a speaker of NMAE will experience a mismatch between his speech and printed text. Nevertheless, within both frames of reference, the student’s inability to shift between MAE and NMAE is the core of the dilemma.

As echoed by several of the researchers discussed in Chapter 2, use of NMAE is not the concern; however, trepidation lies in the inability to shift between MAE and NMAE—code switching is essential. Due to the critical nature of an individual’s ability to shift between MAE and NMAE, the researcher used this study to explore the foundational components of dialect variation. Hypothetically, dissecting the nature of linguistic variation establishes a frame for the identification of intervention(s) for speakers of NMAE who experience reading failure.

The question that this investigation sought to answer was: What is relationship between metalinguistic awareness and mainstream English variation for students with very limited reading abilities? Two additional subquestions: How do students with very limited reading abilities differentiate semantic and pragmatic meaning of language? and How do students with very limited reading abilities accommodate, by divergence and convergence, different language styles and environments? guided the depth of this inquiry.

To actualize answers to this inquiry, the researcher invited second-grade students, who used various degrees of NMAE and MAE and shared experience of reading failure, to engage in conversations regarding their experience with language, linguistic style, and reading. The initial sample population consisted of 10 students who attended afterschool
programming at Reading Ally. The researcher identified participants for qualitative interviewing using maximum variation sampling. To accomplish this, the researcher looked for the most extreme scores obtained on the DELV-ST and WJ-III. The researcher identified four students who scored within the very limited reading proficiency range as pertinent individuals to follow-up with qualitative interviewing. The researcher chose these students because of the variance of dialect variation displayed among students who scored at this particular reading level.

The researcher used qualitative interviewing to ascertain the conscious pragmatic and semantic awareness of each participant. The researcher also probed for awareness of the participants’ personal linguistic style and the style of others. The researcher sought to affirm or refute Terry’s (2014) assertion that students who produce high rates of NMAE in the classroom setting are not cognizant of the fact that colloquial registers are not utilized in academic settings.

Additionally, the researcher wanted to establish the link between linguistic inflexibility and metalinguistic skills. Students who project linguistic inflexibility usually lack metalinguistic insight, which hampers the ability to ascertain how speech maps onto print (Terry, 2014). Finally, the researcher used qualitative interviewing to probe for the social nature of each participant’s use of language because students are social beings whose understanding and use of language is mediated by social interaction (Leontiev, 1981; Werstch, 1994).
Discussion

This section provides a discussion of the major findings of this study. These include *Linguistic Awareness, Semantic Meaning, Pragmatic Meaning*, and *Divergent and Convergent Accommodation*. Although the presentation of these findings is in numerical format, all findings are of equal status and importance.

**Finding 1: Linguistic Awareness**

The degree by which each participant used NMAE resulted in varying levels of linguistic awareness. Participants who used greater amounts of NMAE were less likely to indicate an awareness of linguistic variance. They were also less likely to engage in the act of changing their speech in response to the needs of their audience or environment. The inability of users of NMAE to recognize linguistic awareness and engage in style matching is indicative of the absence of style shifting, which, to some degree, validates the poor reading achievement experienced by these speakers of NMAE. Current research, which states that there is an inverse relationship between style shifting and reading achievement, supports this assertion (Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009; Terry, Connor, Petscher, & Conlin., 2012; Terry, Thomas-Tate, & Love, 2010).

The speaker of MAE, Ernie, indicated an awareness of others and evidenced use of linguistic variance in response to the needs of his speech environment. Ernie’s linguistic awareness predisposed him for the development of adequate phonemic awareness, which is essential for proficient reading development. Despite the presence of linguistic awareness, Ernie had experienced poor reading outcomes; therefore, the query
that remains is, if not the lack of linguistic awareness, which factors frame the reading failure experienced by this student?

Finding 2: Semantic Meaning

Despite the presence of various degrees of dialect variation, all of the participants indicated an awareness of semantic meaning; however, participants’ level of linguistic awareness shaped their semantic awareness. Just as the linguistic awareness of participants increased as the level of NMAE decreased, so did the level of semantic awareness. Essentially, the participants’ awareness of phoneme patterns increased as their level of variation away from MAE decreased. Participants who spoke with greater variation from MAE required more thinking to complete phonological awareness tasks. The participant who spoke MAE was able to perform phonological awareness tasks with automaticity.

The reading difficulties experienced by Peter, Gaylor, and Joe are to be expected because of their poor phonemic awareness. A weak understanding of sound and strategies to separate smaller sounds within words leads to mismatch between print and sound. The frequency of mismatch increases for speakers of NMAE (Labov, 1995; Terry, 2014). This mismatch causes confusion for the reader and can lead to a disinterest in reading or reading instruction (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004).

Contrary to expectation, Ernie, the speaker of MAE, did not outperform his peers in regards to his knowledge of grammatical structure. In fact, he evidenced an understanding of grammar shaped by misconceptions. Ernie’s misconceptions could be a cause for the difficulty that he experiences with reading comprehension. Deficits in
sentence structure are problematic because sentence structure imparts meaning of written text (Johnson, 2004). It is probable to hypothesize that Ernie’s comprehension does not remain intact while reading because of his lack of semantic awareness.

Finding 3: Pragmatic Meaning

The process by which students learn how to say what to whom and when is made possible through socialization (Alcon & Safont, 2008). Children internalize the cultural tools passed down by the adults in their lives; therefore, More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) are essential to their cognitive development. Children acquire knowledge they engage in cooperative and collaborative dialogue with MKOs (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). Identity is also a byproduct of this internalization of language. In that, the manifestation of identity is a reflection of a child’s world or environment (Hermans, 2001). The dependency of identity on cultural and environmental factors makes possible the change in identity, which occurs in response to change in the environment. As external factors (e.g. environment, people) shift and change, so does the manifestation of an individual’s identity. As children make sense of their world and social identity, they evaluate and establish their identity and self-esteem through the means of social categorization and social comparison (Tajfel, 1981).

The responses of participants in this study evidenced the importance of MKOs in the development of pragmatic meaning. When asked, “How do you know that your word choice is right or wrong?”, the responses from the participants ranged from uncertainty to having been taught by an MKO. Meaning and MKOs shaped the pragmatic awareness of the participants who scored in the strong variation range. Participants who spoke with
the most variation of MAE were more likely to state that the meaning of a word remains constant despite its pronunciation. Thus, as variation away from MAE increased, so did the likelihood that a participant stated that linguistic variance does not change the meaning of a word. Such an occurrence is confounding in that a student’s ability to establish shared meaning between SAE and NMAE is indicative of an ability to understand phonological, morphological, and pragmatic complexity. This is because the major difference between SAE and NMAE is variation in complexity, rather than the lack of presence of complexity (Haugen, 1966; Labov, 1964; Terry & Scarborough, 2011; Terry et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, a superficial awareness is not sufficient. Literacy skills acquisition is contingent upon a student’s ability to not only think about and understand language, but also contingent upon a student’s ability to manipulate and use language in a purposeful and effective manner (Terry et al., 2012). The manipulation of language is imperative. In fact, research shows that students who speak NMAE typically have weaker literacy skills than students who speak MAE more frequently (Craig & Washington, 2000; Charity et al., 2004; Craig, Kolenic, & Hensel, 2014; Craig et al., 2009; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that students are able to understand and manipulate the language of instruction (MAE), if they are to acquire adequate literacy skills.

Finding 4: Divergent and Convergent Accommodation

Research suggests that students who are capable of shifting from NMAE to MAE, in the classroom settings, have stronger metalinguistic knowledge and pragmatic
awareness than students who do not code switch (Connor & Craig, 2006; Craig et al., 2014; Terry, 2014; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). According to this hypothesis, students who speak NMAE with great frequency in the classroom are unaware that academic settings do not generally use colloquial registers (Terry, 2014).

Such incognizance of context is generally indicative of a failure to detect variances in language and deficiency in metalinguistic comprehension, which means an even greater inability to realize how speech relates to print (Terry, 2014). Thus, the use of NMAE does not lead to reading problems; instead it is poor metalinguistic skills that which interfere with a student’s ability to be sensitive to dialect differences and language-based contextual cues (Terry, 2014). Therefore, the researcher assessed participants for their sensitivity to dialect difference and their ability to accommodate differences by means of divergence and convergence. This scrutiny revealed that conscientiousness of linguistic style and the ability to accommodate the speech styles of others by means of convergence increased as variation away from MAE decreased. However, convergence was situational and categorized by linguistic variance, rather than dialect variance.

Ernie was self-conscious of the MAE he used. On the other hand, the participants who spoke NMAE were both self-conscious and unselfconscious of their linguistic style. According to Labov (1966), self-conscious awareness leads to the use of NMAE or MAE by choice, and unselfconscious awareness leads to the use of NMAE by happenstance, which is shaped by environmental and cultural factors. The attention to speech model (Labov, 1966) highlights the importance that metalinguistic skills play in the process of
style shifting. The accommodation styles of the participants were both supportive and unsupportive of the attention to speech model.

For example, Peter’s unselfconscious use of NMAE was indicative of his poor metalinguistic skills. Not supported by the attention to speech model was Peter’s ability to accommodate the linguistic style of others through the means of convergence, in which an individual matches personal speech to a partner’s speech style (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987). Furthermore, convergence is an indicator of linguistic awareness. Therefore, Peter’s ability to accommodate through the means of convergence confounded the weak linguistic awareness that Peter demonstrated throughout the study.

Ernie, the speaker of MAE, also provided responses that indicated an ability to converge upon the style of his speech partners. Nevertheless, Ernie used MAE self-consciously. Therefore, his level of conscientious linguistic awareness supported his ability to converge.

On the other hand, Gaylor, a self-conscious user of NMAE, employed accommodation by the means of divergence. Gaylor’s conscious awareness of linguistic style was an indicator of linguistic awareness, which predisposed him to the development of proficient metalinguistic skills. Nevertheless, despite the presence of linguistic awareness, Gaylor lacked appropriate semantic and pragmatic awareness, which lessened his predisposition toward proficient metalinguistic skills. When considering Tajfel’s (1981) contention that children make judgments of their intragroup and intergroup relationships in an effort understand their world and social identity in terms of Gaylor’s conscientious use of NMAE and act of divergence, it is probable to surmise his use of
NMAE as an act to increase the interpersonal space between him and his speech partners. In this way, Gaylor maintained his intragroup identity.

Despite the level of conscientiousness of each participant, the majority demonstrated an ability to converge upon the style or language of others. Nevertheless, the participants’ use of convergence was situational. For example, Joe and Peter both discussed convergence in terms of speaking Spanish or English. MAE was the language of instruction for these students; therefore, their ability to employ convergent accommodation in response to linguistic variance may not be a pertinent skill in establishing solid literacy acquisition. The linguistic demands of a standard American classroom do not include multilingualism; for that reason, this sort of situational convergence is not helpful in helping a speaker of NMAE navigate the nuances of MAE. Therefore, Joe and Peter are at risk for poor reading outcomes due to their inability to employ convergent accommodation in the presence of SAE (Terry et al., 2010).

Conclusions

An inverse relationship exists between metalinguistic awareness and MAE for students with very limited reading abilities. Findings from this study support the inverse relationship established between metalinguistic awareness and the use of MAE for students at large (Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2014; Craig & Washington, 2000; Craig et al., 2009; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Terry et al., 2012; Terry et al., 2010). The more a student uses MAE, the stronger his metalinguistic skills are.

Even though there was an inverse relationship between metalinguistic awareness and MAE, this relationship did not extend to a student’s ability to differentiate semantic
and pragmatic meaning. The students were unable to differentiate the two. The students either had pragmatic or semantic awareness—neither occurred simultaneously. In fact, the occurrence of pragmatic awareness was more frequent than the occurrence of semantic awareness. The speaker of MAE and both students who displayed a strong variation away from MAE only evidenced pragmatic awareness, whereas the student who used some variation away from MAE evidenced purely a semantic awareness.

The act of accommodation for this group further supports the significance of a conscious awareness of language and ability to manipulate language in the production of MAE (Charity et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2014; Craig & Washington, 2000; Terry et al., 2010). The student who accommodated by means of divergence did so self-consciously. This occurrence was hypothesized in that divergence is the intentional act of asserting one’s identity linguistically (Giles et al., 1987). On the other hand, the ability to accommodate self-consciously through convergence increased as variation away from MAE decreased. The participants who fell into the strong variation and some variation away from MAE range converged in an unselfconscious manner, whereas the speaker of MAE converged self-consciously.

Each of the participants of this study evidenced various degrees of linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic awareness. Nevertheless, they shared the lock of experience with reading failure. The reading failure experienced by each of these participants prompts significant implications.
Implications

In light of the responses and experiences of the participants of this study, three implications are important for the field of curriculum and instruction: culturally responsive pedagogy, explicit instruction for linguistic awareness, and rigorous literacy instruction. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach that considers every student’s cultural experiences and strengths. The cultural differences, such as linguistic style, are nurtured and celebrated, which leads to increased achievement and sense of wellbeing among students. Explicit instruction for linguistic awareness increases awareness of linguistic styles and the implications of the difference among students and teachers. Rigorous literacy instruction will increase the metalinguistic awareness of students.

One of the most salient dilemmas is the reading failure experienced by the speaker of MAE. The participant presented as a conscientious user of MAE who was able to use convergent accommodation to satisfy the demands of his speech environment. This participant also evidenced intact phonemic and pragmatic awareness. Seemingly, the only deficit that the participant displayed was his semantic awareness. He, like other students, had strengths that outnumbered his weakness, but he was unable to attain levels of reading mastery or proficiency. This occurrence presupposes the need for rigorous literacy instruction. The outcomes for this individual participant, as well as the reading outcomes for students who attended his elementary school and possessed similar characteristics, support this statement. Ernie attended a Title I Atlanta Public School that served Hispanic students who did not meet either the state or subgroup performance
target areas for English language arts during the 2015-2016 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). The stated outcome is in contrast to the outcome experienced by his White peers who attended the same school. The White population of students met the state performance target and subgroup performance target rate during the 2015-2016 school year. The cooccurrence of juxtaposed contrast indicates that reading instructional decisions and strategies are effective for certain groups of students and ineffective for others. It is therefore feasible to propose the need for a particular type or framework for instruction: culturally responsive teaching.

The experiences and outcomes of the other participants in this study also support the need for culturally responsive pedagogy. The manifestation of pragmatic awareness was greater than semantic awareness among the participants. This happening is indicative of the significance of social and cultural factors for these students. This observation warrants teaching that includes cultural and social references. When students engage in worthwhile, relevant, and culturally appropriate literacy task, reliable literacy acquisition occurs (Clay & Cazden, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; McNamee, 1990; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Zebroski, 1994). Therefore, it is imperative that these students have access to books, discourse, and other literary materials that reflect their cultural and social experiences.

In addition to culturally responsive teaching, the responses of participants reveal the need for intentional and explicit instruction for linguistic awareness and dialect differences. The unselfconscious use of NMAE shows the need for heightened linguistic awareness. In order for speakers of NMAE to establish an ability to code switch, they
must first establish linguistic awareness. They must broaden their ability to think about language consciously and expand their ability to manipulate language. Students who do not engage in code switching organically are in need of explicit instruction on how to do so. Furthermore, students like Gaylor, who self-consciously choose to accommodate by divergence, need support in their decision to maintain use of NMAE. Additionally, explicit instruction has the propensity to eliminate or decrease the cognitive dissonance or confusion experienced by unselfconscious users of NMAE. For example, Joe appeared to be perplexed and seemed to wonder how one spoken form of a word (e.g., teeth) could be deemed correct in terms of pronunciation and how two different spoken forms of the word (e.g., teeth vs. teef) could satisfy definitional requirements (e.g., teef and teeth both refer to the plural form of tooth).

Explicit instruction for linguistic variance has the power to launch problem-posing pedagogy. Conversation between teacher and students regarding their opinions of linguistic variance and experience with linguistic variance is inevitable. The dialogue that will occur because of explicit instruction increases teacher capacity to understand the occurrence of linguistic variance. The empathy that arises from the said conversations has the power to eliminate any teacher bias or negative perceptions toward the use of NMAE. This is important because teacher bias has the potential to affect instruction and student outcomes (Jussim, 1989). Consequently, it is important that teachers are aware of how their identity, bias, and instructional decisions influence their students. A teacher’s ability to be transparent about biases and accepting of contrasting points of view shapes the ability to foster lasting interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the likelihood that
students accept teacher expectations (e.g. use of MAE in the classroom) increases. This is important because explicit expectation of MAE has the ability to cause students to style shift, resulting in increased metalinguistic awareness (Connor & Craig, 2006). Although there are real implications that can be inferred as a result of the findings of this study, the findings are notwithstanding methodological, statistical, and researcher limitations.

Limitations of the Study

This inquiry was confined to the experience of four participants. Therefore, the sample size deflates the generalizability of the findings. Although the findings of this study may be transferable in that there may be a connection between the experience of the participants and that of the reader of this research, the findings are not generalizable to the population at large due to the small sample size. Furthermore, the lack of prior research studies that are qualitative in nature prevents use of a priori body of knowledge in interpreting findings and establishing implications that arose from this study.

Additionally, the researcher’s access to speakers of NMAE was limited. Although not by design, the speakers of NMAE were all bilingual; therefore, their ability to differentiate linguistic variance from variance in linguistic style may have been compromised. Finally, reliance on the self-reported experience with metalinguistic awareness for second-grade students poses a possible limitation. The age and development stage of second-grade students may decrease their ability to provide self-reported data that is accurate, comprehensive, and free of exaggeration or bias. The aforementioned limitations are an indication of what steps are necessary in future research of reading outcomes for speakers of NMAE.
Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should extend upon a qualitative vein of inquiry whereas quantitative evidence of the relationship between dialect variation and reading outcomes is robust. An inverse relationship has been established, but what has not is the experience of these speakers. In extending the body of research that captures the experience of speakers of NMAE, it is also important to set stricter parameters for the inquiry. This would involve extinguishing or accounting for confounding variables, such as bilingualism or second-language acquisition, to establish an accurate analysis of dialect variation. Additionally, it would be helpful to facilitate qualitative inquiry among older students who can meet the linguistic demands of metacognitive conversations. Finally, it may be helpful to conduct qualitative interviews with students who code switch regularly. Research has established the usefulness of code switching, thus warranting inquiry regarding best practices for fostering the act of code switching.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
11-Jul-2016

Ms. Adriana Smith
Mercer University
Tift College of Education - Atlanta
3001 Mercer University Dr.
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Unlocking the Code: Matters of Agency, Metalinguistics and Literacy Achievement for Speakers of Non-Mainstream American English (H106163)

Dear Ms. Smith:

Your application entitled: Unlocking the Code: Matters of Agency, Metalinguistics and Literacy Achievement for Speakers of Non-Mainstream American English (H106163) was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research in accordance with Federal Regulations 45CFR46.110(b) and 45CFR46.110(k) (for expedited review) and was approved under Category 6, 7 per 45CFR46.103(a).

Your application was approved for one year of study on 31-May-2013. The protocol expires 30-May-2017. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
New application for mixed methods design specifically using a follow-up explorations model targeting second grade students within Metro-Atlanta area. Use of audio recordings during interviews. Approved under 45CFR46 Subpart D for research involving children. Approved study sites are Agape, Addies Garden Hills, and Andrew P. Stewart.

Please complete the survey for the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance. To access the survey, click on the following link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KQCTBB

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ana Chamb里斯-Richardson, M.Ed., CRP, CM
Member
Institutional Review Board
Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone (478) 301-4101
Fax (478) 301-2328
OFC Mercer/3/Mercer, Rl

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(478) 301-4101 | FAX (478) 301-2329
APPENDIX B

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Unlocking the Code: Matters of Agency, Metalinguistic Skills, and Literacy Achievement for Speakers of Non-Mainstream American English

Parent or Guardian
Informed Consent Form

Your child has been asked to participate in a research study entitled Unlocking the Code: Matters of Agency, Metalinguistic Skills, and Literacy Achievement for Speakers of Non-Mainstream American English. The study is being conducted by Adrina O. Smith, (678) 977-4672, Adrina.O.Smith@live.mercer.edu; (678) 574-6582, scottsimm_wa@mercer.edu. The results will be used to further my understanding of the relationship between reading comprehension and dialect variation. Your son’s/daughter’s participation is voluntary. A decision to participate in the research will not affect his/her relationship with the community center his/her relationship with teachers, or his/her academic standing.

I. The purpose of my study is to explore:

This research study is designed to investigate the relationship between reading comprehension and dialect variation. The data from this research will be used to report findings in the form of a dissertation. Completion of the study will contribute to my completion of a PhD in curriculum and instruction.

II. Procedures:
If you allow your child to volunteer for this study, your child will be asked to complete two tests: The Woodcock Johnson III (WJ3) and the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation—Screening Test (DELV-ST). The WJ3 will test your child’s overall reading skills. The DELV-ST will assess your child’s style of language—it will tell me how different their style is in comparison to standard American English. Your participation will take approximately 15 minutes 1-2 times over a 2-month period. I will ask you questions about your educational background and questions about how often you read to your child at home. Your responses will be recorded in writing but will not be audio recorded. Your child will be asked to assent to participate in this research. (Assent means that your child will be asked to voluntarily participate in this research.) Your child will tell me that they want to participate by answering yes or no after I verbally read to your child what the research is about and what s/he will be asked to do.
What will happen is that I will give your child two tests during the summer. One test gives me an idea of how much s/he understands what s/he reads and the other will give
me an idea of what style of language you child uses when you talk to friends, family, and teachers. I will give your child the language test again during the fall to see if there were any changes in the way that s/he speaks since moving from summer break to back to the start of school. Your child may or may not be asked to answer some questions about how s/he feels about reading. If your child participates in an interview, the interview will be audio recorded. In order to keep everything your child does during testing, your child’s name will not be used on the forms I collect from him/her. His/her name will be replaced with made up identification numbers on your Reading Test and Language test.

Parent/guardians who allow student to participate must:
- Read and complete consent form
- Give permission for your son or daughter to participate

Completion of the consent process will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Consent forms will be provided to you in person at your perspective community center. You are welcome to ask any outstanding questions during the time of consent.

III. Potential benefits to students and/or society
There are some potential benefits for students and society. Findings from this study will help teachers gain awareness about language variation. Educators will know how to address any potential negative affects of language variation on reading achievement. Additionally the findings will help in the effort of educators, parents, and policy makers to close the reading achievement gap between minorities and the majority.

IV. Potential Risks/Discomfort
There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. Nevertheless, at the very least your child may experience testing anxiety but will be reassured that performance on the test will not be recorded on his/her academic record. There is no cost associated with this research. Most important, your child has the right to discontinue participation in any part of the study, either temporary or permanently.

V. Withdrawal of Participation
Your child's participation is voluntary. Your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits that he/she are otherwise entitled to if you decide that your child will not participate in this research project.

If your child decides to participate in this project, he/she may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received.

VI. Payment for Participation
Students will not be paid for their participation. There is no financial obligation for participants.
VII. Confidentiality
Yours and your child’s confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Testing forms will be assigned random identification numbers. If your child participates in interview sessions they will be recorded; however their names will not be audio recorded. Furthermore for reporting purposes they will be assigned pseudonyms (a fictitious name). You, as the parent, will also be assigned a pseudonym. Data that are recorded on forms (e.g. reading and language tests) will be stored in Dr. Scott-Simmons’ office (the overseeing professor of this project). The list connecting participant numbers and names will also be kept in separate locked cabinets. She (Dr. Scott-Simmons) and I (Adrina O. Smith) are the only persons who will have access to the data. The data will be stored at Mercer University for at least 3 years after completion of the study. Your child’s individual responses will not be shared with other parents or other adults.

Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Adrina O Smith. If you have questions later, you may contact Adrina O. Smith, (678) 977-4672, Adrina.O.Smith@live.mercer.edu; or Dr. Scott-Simons (678) 574-6582, scottsimm_wa@mercer.edu.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. If you do agree to allow your child to participate in this research, please complete the information below:

I, ________________________________, do want _____________________ to participate in this research study.

____________________________       _________
Participant’s Name (Print)        Date

_____________________________           ______
Parent/Guardian’s Name            Parent Guardian’s Signature        Date

Please return to Adrina O. Smith as soon as possible.

In order to conduct this research, this project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you believe there is any infringement upon your child’s rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Chair at (478) 301-4101. The IRBs are the governing bodies that are set in place to ensure responsible and safe conduct of research investigations.
APPENDIX C

STUDENT INFORMED ASSENT FORM
Unlocking the Code: Matters of Agency, Metalinguistic Skills, and Literacy Achievement for Speakers of Non-Mainstream American English

Hello, my name is Adrina O. Smith and I am a researcher at Mercer University who is trying to learn how dialect variation affects reading achievement scores.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of dialect variation on reading achievement.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your comments, opinions, and experiences are important and will help me help teachers learn what is most helpful for all students.

I will be the person in charge of this study and it will take place at your community center, Agape. I will meet with you for approximately 1-2 hours 3-4 times during the fall semester of the 2016-2017 school year.

What will happen is, I will give you two tests during our first meeting. One test gives me an idea of how much you understand what you read and the other will give me an idea of what style of language you use when you talk to your friends, family, and teachers. I will give you the language test again during the end of the fall semester. You may or may not be asked to answer some questions about how you feel about reading in addition to the second language test. If you participate in the question asking session, the interview will be tape-recorded. In order to keep everything you write or say private, your name will not be used on the forms I collect from you. Your name will also be replaced with made up identification numbers on your Reading Test and Language test.

Your parent(s) have said that it is okay for you to be in this research study. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want. You can change your mind at any time by telling your Mom, Dad, or the Researcher.

_____ No, I do not want to be in this study. _____ Yes, I want to be in this study.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant ______________________________ Date

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent ______________________________ Date

Rev. 8/31/2016
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS
Interview Questions

Questions for parents

What’s the highest degree that you have?

How often do you read to your child?

Does your family have a designated time for reading at home?

Do you ever correct your child’s grammar when they speak to you or other?

Questions for students

Audience

Teacher-Student Communication

1. Have you ever been confused by the directions given by a teacher?

2. Have you ever not understood what your teacher asked you to do?

3. Have you ever been confused by the eye contact, hand-signals, or facial expressions a teacher has made when given directions?

4. Have you ever not understood what your teacher means by the eye-contact, hand signals, or facial expressions that s/he gives to tell you what to do?

Peer-Peer Student Communication

1. Have you ever been confused by something that a friend was trying to tell you do?

2. Have you ever not understood what your friend asked you to do?
3. Have you ever been confused by the eye contact, hand-signals, or facial
eexpressions a friend has made when trying to tell you something without using
words?

4. Have you eve not understood what your friend means by the eye contact, hand
signals, or facial expressions that s/he gives to tell you what they are thinking?

General Questions

1. Do you change the way you talk when you are talking to your teacher? Family?
   Friends? Why or why not?

Identity: Dvergence and Convergence

1. When you are confused or don’t understand what is being said to you how does
that make you feel?

2. How do you feel when you are unsure of what your teacher is asking you to do?
   How do you feel when you are unsure of his/her expectations?

3. How do you feel when you are unsure of what your friend is asking you to do?

4. Do you tell your teacher that you don’t understand? If so how?

5. Do you tell your friends when you don’t understand? If so how?

6. What do you think about the way you talk?

7. Do you sound like the rest of your friends?

8. Do you talk the same way as your family? teacher?

9. What do you think about the way black people talk? Do you talk the way other
   black people talk?

10. What do you think about the way white people talk? Do you talk the way other
    white people talk?
11. What do you think about the way Spanish people talk? Do you talk the way other Spanish people talk?

12. What do you think about the way boys talk? The way girls talk?

13. Do you talk the way other boys talk? Do you talk the way other girls talk?

**Style**

*Prompts to elicit casual conversation*

1. Identify an area of interest of the student (e.g. favorite game, celebrity, book, etc.)

2. Have you ever been blamed for something that you didn’t do?

*Prompts to elicit formal conversation*

**Reading Attitudes**

1. What do you think about reading? Do like it? Dislike?

2. What do you like about reading? What do you dislike about it?

3. Have you ever not understood a picture in a book? Or a phrase?

4. What do you think about spelling?

5. DO you think that the correct way to spell words make sense? Are most words spelled the way that they sound?