Language, Discourse and Power
in African American Culture

African American language is central to the teaching of linguistics and language in the United States, and this book, in the series Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language, is aimed specifically at upper-level undergraduates and graduates. It covers the entire field – grammar, speech and verbal genres – and it also discusses the various historical strands that need to be identified in order to understand the development of African American English. The book deals with the social and cultural history of the American South, urban and Northern black popular culture as well as policy issues. Morgan examines the language within the context of the changing and complex African American and general American speech communities, and their culture, politics, art and institutions. She also covers the current heated political and educational debates about the status of the African American dialect.

Marcyliena Morgan is Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University and Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research has focused on language, culture and identity, hip hop and rap, sociolinguistics, and discourse and interaction. She is the editor of Language and the Social Construction of Identity in Creole Situations (1994).
Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socioculturally grounded “meanings” and “functions” of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explicate the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic data, whether spontaneously occurring or experimentally induced, whether normative or variational, whether synchronic or diachronic. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to the debate over the sociocultural-function and structural-formal nature of language, and will represent the concerns of scholars in the sociology and anthropology of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socioculturally informed psycholinguistics.

Editors
Judith T. Irvine
Bambi Schieffelin

Editorial Advisers
Marjorie Goodwin
Joel Kuipers
Don Kulick
John Lucy
Elinor Ochs
Michael Silverstein
Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture

Marcyliena Morgan

University of California, Los Angeles
To Lawrence Douglas Bobo
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of maps, figures and tables</th>
<th>page x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes on the transcriptions</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Introduction
1. The African American speech community: culture, language ideology and social face 10
2. Forms of speech: verbal styles, discourse and interaction 35
3. Language norms and practices 62
4. When women speak: how and why we enter 84
5. Urban youth language: black by popular demand 111
6. Language, discourse and power: outing schools 132

Notes 153
References 164
Index 181
Maps, figures and tables

Maps
Maps 1–4   Expansion of the slave population in the United States, 1790–1860  page 21

Figures
1   Speaker and audience in African American culture  46
2   Goodwin’s four-stage accusation pattern  89
3   Copula absence and identity in hip hop  130
4   “Speak Out Against Ebonics,” Ketchum Advertising  146

Tables
1   Expansion of the slave population in the United States, 1790–1860  20
2   Duality in speech  43
3   Contrast between GE and AAE single-dialect speakers  69
4   AAE reduction, deletions and alternatives  77
5   Artists and recordings  119
6   Percentage usage of got(s)/ha and have to  128
7   Copula absence in hip hop  129
8   Major criteria of prestige discovered in sixteen empirical studies  148
Acknowledgments

Throughout the writing of this book I have been influenced by the insight of many. And I cannot conceive of having completed this project without their support and generosity. First I would like to thank the women and youth who directed me to people and locations in Chicago and Mississippi and whose warmth, wariness and wisdom fueled this project. They include Juliette Morgan, Ruth Skinner, Ruth Murray, Mary Ann Corley, Stephen DeBerry, Anderine Jones, Diann Washington and Donna Moore. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all those who worked with me in Philadelphia, especially Deborah White, who will always be in my heart. My work at Project Blowed would not have been possible without the generous support and friendship from Ben Caldwell.

A number of research assistants worked on this project and many of their ideas and concerns are included. They are: Devery Rodgers, Lanita Jacobs-Huey, Kesha Fikes, Uma Thambiyaya, Sumeeya Chishhy Mujahid, Lauren Ferguson, Danielle Beurteaux, Jenigh Garret, Jessica Norwood, Stephen DeBerry, Tarek Captan, Brendesha Tynes and Dionne Bennett. Ben Caldwell, Geneva Smitherman, John Rickford and John Baugh have provided valuable comments on this project. Funding for the research and writing of this book have been provided by the Humanities Institute of the University of California, the Ford Foundation, Harvard University Graduate School of Education and the DuBois Institute at Harvard University.

The UCLA DIRE (Discourse Identity and Representation) Collective Patricia Baquedano–Lopez, Dionne Bennett, Kesha Fikes, Lanita Jacobs-Huey, Soy Kim, Adrienne Lo, and Steve Ropp provided a space to present these ideas and receive feedback from some of the brightest scholars I know. I am forever grateful for their support. Over the years, I have been fortunate to receive comments and support from numerous scholars including Olga Rubio, Salikoko Mufwene, Dell Hymes, Gillian Sankoff, William Labov, Elinor Ochs, Alessandro Duranti, Marjorie Goodwin, Lorene Cary, Paul Kroskirty, Shirley Heath, Valerie Smith, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Ana Celia Zentella, Judith Irvine and Bambi Schieffelin.

© Cambridge University Press  www.cambridge.org
Acknowledgments

Colleagues in numerous places and associations have also assisted me in completing this volume. They include Gerlin Bean, Stella Dadzie, Lorene Cary, Dorinne Kondo, Linda Dessner, Nancy Sander-Best, Irene Maksymujk, Deborah Wafer, Brenda Sykes, Sophia Gael-Valenzuela, Abel Valenzuela and Frank Funk.

Dionne Bennett has been instrumental in my completing this project and has inspired me with her love of black culture and her critical and persistent engagement of ideas. I thank my husband, Larry Bobo, for his vision of me successfully completing this project, his unfaltering love and support, and amazing intellect. Finally, I thank all the wonderful men and women in the African American community who have shared a culture and history that they have held so close to their heart for so long. Yours is truly a love supreme.


Notes on the transcriptions

CAPITAL LETTERS indicate some form of emphasis which may be signaled by changes in pitch or amplitude. BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS indicate loud-talking. *Italics* indicate a change in the quality of speech.

. A period indicates a stopping fall in tone, not necessarily the end of a sentence.

, A comma indicates a continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences.

: Colons indicate that the sound just before the colon has been lengthened.

↑ An upward arrow indicates a rising inflection.

! An exclamation mark indicates an animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation.

— A single dash can indicate (1) a short untimed pause, (2) halting, abrupt cutoff, or, when multiple dashes hyphenate the syllables of a word or connect strings of words, the stream of talk so marked has (3) a stammering quality.

[ All overlapping utterances, including those which start simultaneously are marked with a single left bracket.

] The point where overlap stops is marked with a single right bracket.

= When there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first, the utterances are linked together with equal signs. They are also used to link different parts of a single speaker’s utterance when those parts constitute a continuous flow of speech that has been carried over to another line to accommodate an intervening interruption.

(,) A period within parentheses indicates a one-second pause.
Notes on the transcriptions

( ) When intervals in the stream of talk occur, they are timed in tenths of a second and inserted within parentheses either within an utterance or between.

(0) Double parentheses provide description of quality of talk and activity related to talk.