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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).

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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.

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To Lawrence Douglas Bobo

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“The Death of Emmett Till”: lyrics reprinted by kind permission of the Bob Dylan Music Company, New York.

“Speak Out Against Ebonics,” Ketchum Advertising. *New York Times*, October 9, 1998, A19 (National Edition). Reprinted by kind permission of Lee St. James.

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.

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