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Date: May 30th, 2016

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SO/16/02: To what extent do you think it might be justifiable to suggest that a *diglossic* situation (i.e. where a 'High' code and a 'Low' code co-exist within one society) reflects the oppression of one speech community by another? Discuss, with reference to relevant literature and to (a) specific society/societies and language(s).

1. Introduction

This paper will examine how diglossia, a situation in which a 'High' (H) code and a 'Low' (L) code co-exist within one society, represents social inequality and linguistic oppression of one speech community by another. 'The dialects of a diglossia relationship are not of equal status' (Ogbu, 1999: 151). Section 2 will discuss in detail the meaning of diglossia, along with its functions and its features. Then section 3 will study certain speech communities in which diglossia is pervasive: African-American Vernacular English and Standard American English, Haitian Creole and Standard French. In these particular speech communities it will become clear that the H and L codes co-exist within the same society, albeit as opposing forces. As Winford (1985: 350) states: '…power and formality on the one hand, solidarity and spontaneity on the other'. To conclude, section 4 will explore some of the negative consequences of diglossia and how it may result in oppression.

2. What is diglossia?

2.1. Definition of diglossia

Diglossia represents the relationship between two codes that are used for different purposes within the same speech community (Ogbu 1999). While one code is used for more formal purposes, the (H)igh variety, the other is used for more informal purposes, the (L)ow variety. Members within this language community recognize and accept their separate functions.

Ferguson was the first to introduce the term *diglossia* into the English language. The full definition of the term is described as follows:

> Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complete) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (Ferguson, 1959: 336).

There has been much debate about the exact meaning of diglossia (Winford 1985). Initially, Ferguson's (1959: 325) definition of the term makes reference to a society 'where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play'. Today, however, the meaning has been further extended to include a society in which not only 'situational switching between dialects of a language' occurs, but also the switching 'between distinct languages' (Holmes, 2013: 260). In the following sections, it will become clearer that the separation of roles between the H and the L shows the extent to which diglossia has become representative of inequality and oppression.

2.2. H(igh) variety and L(ow) variety: separation of functions and perceived identities

The relationship of the two codes is complicated in a diglossic situation. As such, the two varieties are kept separate in their functions and are used in an opposing manner. H is more formal, is highly restricted, and is the literary standard; L is less formal, is not restricted, and in some cases does not even exist as a written form (ibid.: 28). Fishman (1967: 33) speaks of 'an upper and a lower class, each with a language appropriate to its own restricted concerns'. Not only is the relationship of the two codes complex and contradictory, but also one of unequal status.

The 'attitudes towards the two codes in a diglossia situation are complicated' (Holmes, 2013: 29). The H form has been assigned with higher status or prestige, and as such influences the judgment of the language user, judgments disposed to false ideas of correctness (ibid.: 49). Whereas the H variety is admired even if people cannot understand it or speak it, the L form is rated lowly and is generally not worth describing (ibid.: 29). Ferguson (1959: 330) states:

‘Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real and L is reported “not to exist”’. The L form is used locally, in the home, and in conversations with friends and family.

2.3. Features of diglossia

There are many characteristics which distinguish a diglossic speech community, some of which have already been mentioned in section 2.2. In Ferguson (1959), the features of diglossia initially proposed by him have been since divided into two separate groups in order to ‘present in sharp focus the patterns of social and functional variation which characterize all speech communities’ (Winford, 1985: 346). Winford’s (1985) reorganization of Ferguson’s (1959) features of diglossia can be seen below in table 1.

TABLE 1: *Distinctive features of diglossia*

	I. Linguistic features
(a) Genetic relationship	Two or more varieties which belong to the same language.
(b) Stability	Diglossia is a stable situation which can persist for several centuries.
(c) Lexicon	Most of the vocabulary of H and L is shared, although there are variations in form and differences of use and meaning.
(d) Grammar	The grammatical structure of H is more complex than that of L; the L variety is simpler.
(e) Phonology	The phonological structure of H and L can be anywhere from nearly similar to very different; the L phonology is considered the basic system.
	II. Sociocultural features
(a) Specialization of functions	The functions of H and L remain separate and each variety is used for a different situation.
(b) Prestige	H is regarded as superior to L, and has the status of prestige.
(c) Literary heritage	There is a sizable body of written literature in H, held in high esteem.
(d) Standardization	H is codified; L is not.
(e) Acquisition	L is the native language of all speakers. H is not native to anyone and is acquired only through formal education.

Winford (1985: 347).

Most of the features initially proposed by Ferguson (1959) have remained effective in their original definition and have not been further modified. Nevertheless, the meaning of the genetic relationship of diglossia has been since further extended to include the use of two or more codes, both dialects of the same language or entirely separate languages. By reorganizing these features of diglossia, the importance of both linguistic and sociocultural characteristics are stressed (Winford 1985).

3. The features of diglossia within a speech community

3.1. The speech communities under investigation

In this section, two separate speech communities will be considered in order to establish the roles each variety plays in society, the likely origins of their diglossia, and their eventual loss of identity. The first speech community examines speakers of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard American English (SAE). The second speech community under investigation focuses on speakers of Haitian Creole (HC) and Standard French (SF). AAVE and SAE are two different dialects of the same language (Holmes 2013), which means they are distinguishable in their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation (Collins English Dictionary 2015). HC and SF are two completely different languages (Wardaugh 2009). Although AAVE and HC have co-existed with their H variety in the same community for generations, it will become clear that their relationship is above all conflictual and 'not of equal status' (Ogbu, 1999: 151).

3.1.1. African-American Vernacular English and Standard American English

The two dialects under investigation used in the United States are SAE, the prestigious H variety, and AAVE, the L variety. AAVE is the native language of many African-Americans and is acquired at home '*before* they learn proper English' (ibid.: 166). SAE is known and used by most members of the American speech community, mainly White, and as the prestigious H variety,

speaking SAE can offer considerable wealth and power to its speakers (Holmes 2013 and Ogbu 1999).

AAVE is used in less formal situations, such as in everyday communication with family and friends. Many AAVE speakers state that they 'feel more comfortable' when they use their native dialect (Ogbu, 1999: 163). SAE is used in formal situations, such as at school and in the workplace. AAVE speakers prefer to use SAE 'when communicating with "outsiders," especially at school and other White controlled institutions' (ibid.: 164). Although speakers of AAVE usually know the rules of dialect switching (ibid.: 164) and are aware of the necessity to learn SAE, by speaking it they would jeopardize 'their slang English identity, *their bona fide* membership in their community' (ibid: 168). In other words, certain unspoken social rules exist that AAVE speakers are expected to follow.

Some AAVE speakers may avoid speaking SAE altogether, thereby inhibiting their participation in formal situations. This has been confirmed in Ogbu (1999), where some members of the Black community were interviewed following the Oakland Ebonics controversy of 1996. 'Parents encounter problems in communicating with teachers because of dialect differences' (ibid.: 167). For that reason, certain AAVE parents may find it difficult to participate in their children's education. Parent 33L says the following in regards to teachers and White people: 'But it's just – they're used to using that big vocabulary. And I have a problem [with] school dialect, because – they use a lot of – letters' (ibid.: 167). AAVE speakers may feel inferior because some 'believe that society equates their slang English with ignorance' (ibid.: 167). Not only are the two dialects kept separate in their functions, but also the two communities appear divided.

3.1.2. Haitian Creole and Standard French

The two languages under investigation in Haiti are HC, the L variety, and SF, the prestigious H variety. HC is the native language of all Haitians, whereas SF is known by less than 10 percent of the elite population (Dejean 1983). Strangely, it was only in 1987 that Haitian Creole was recognized as an official language, 'a status which it shares with the French variety spoken by a small number of people' (Valdez, 2015: 4). Even if HC is the native language of all Haitians,

many people 'still regard French, the H variety, as the only real language of the country' (Holmes, 2013: 29).

In Férère (1977: 52), a survey that was 'submitted to 50 bilingual Haitian natives' identifies the linguistic functions in Haiti. The results of this survey are similar to table 2 here below.

TABLE 2: *Functions of the H (SF) and L (HC) varieties*

	H(igh) variety	L(ow) variety
Religion (sermon, prayers)	H	
Literature (novels, non-fiction)	H	
Newspaper (editorial)	H	
Broadcasting: TV news	H	
Education (written materials, lectures)	H	
Education (lesson discussion)		L
Broadcasting: radio		L
Shopping		L
Gossiping		L

Holmes (2013: 48).

Even if Férère's survey only identifies the bilingual Haitian elite's opinion, the results coincide with Holmes' (2013) account of diglossic functions within Haiti. For example, it is noted that SF is the preferred language 'wherever there was a certain degree of formality' (Férère, 1977: 54). In addition, SF is the preferred language for religion: 'most Catholic priests are French' and the Church 'has never been interested in Creole' (ibid.: 54). Although SF is the language of choice in Haiti for written materials in education and literature, lesson discussions in Haiti occur in HC (Férère 1977). According to Férère's (1977) survey, while SF is the language of choice in TV broadcasting, HC is preferred for radio broadcasting. This can be expected in Haiti, as HC speakers, 'because of their poverty…are not expected to have a television set' (ibid.: 54). Of course, HC remains the preferred language for informal situations, such as in everyday conversation with family and friends (ibid.: 54). Interestingly, both HC and SF are used during political campaigns, however 'politicians do not delay in assuming their French…as soon as they

are elected' (ibid.: 56). Therefore, as Holmes (2013) has demonstrated, HC speakers will therefore be excluded from the formal situation of politics and the economy.

Haiti is in a very complex situation as the society is 'divided into the oppressors and the oppressed' (Dejean, 1983: 211). Power and authority remain with the 'bilingual francophone and creolophone dominant minority in conflict with a monolingual creolophone mass' (ibid: 212). For that reason, the elites dominate and 'capitalize on linguistic differences in order to advance nationalist discourses and sociocultural hierarchies' (Valdez, 2015: 1).

3.2. The origin of diglossia and the loss of identity

The two speech communities under investigation here are the result of the horrific events of colonization and slavery. Certain diglossic speech communities originate from 'colonization, conquest, or enslavement, whereby the superior power imposes its language and communication pattern on the subordinate population' (Ogbu, 1999: 151). When White European colonial powers invaded and enslaved Black Africans, 'they imposed the English language on Blacks' (ibid.: 151), who then found themselves 'under increasing pressure to adopt the language of the dominant group' (Holmes, 2013: 57).

The real origins of HC and AAVE remain debatable (Wardaugh 2009). It has been suggested that Black Americans developed their dialect of AAVE after being deprived of their original languages (Ogbu 1999). As for Haitians, it is said that 'the creole languages developed on plantations from the forced contacts between the European masters and their African slaves' (Charlier Doucet and Schieffelin, 1994: 189). Another possible theory suggests that the need for slaves to communicate with each other, as well as the influences of European languages, West African languages, and newly-formed pidgins and creoles, may have formed varieties such as HC and AAVE (Wardaugh 2009).

Identity is formed from shared historical experiences (Wardaugh 2009 and Ogbu 1999). African-Americans and Haitians became a part of something against their own will through colonization and slavery. They were forced to surrender their language and identity, thereby developing a new sense of self. AAVE and HC are both a 'product of colonialism' (Valdez, 2015: 1). For that reason, an opposition has grown against the H variety, as Parent 25L2 states:

> I think… [for] a lot [of] Black people who are Black it is literally insane and stuff [to] see Black people who pretend to be White… [We] get very angry [when someone pretends] to be White by talkin' proper… Very angry… Angry… Because… they're proud of their being Black. And to see somebody else who's Black actually put it down and try to hide it… Because I feel that way [i.e., angry] too. It's… [like you're] feeling that bad about being Black that you want to hide it. (Ogbu, 1999; 172).

For L speakers to accommodate the H variety, their new sense of identity and language would be threatened (Ogbu 1999). Nevertheless, it seems that the languages and dialects within these diglossic communities have developed as an expression of identity and as a reflection of historical experience.

4. Diglossia as a reflection of social and linguistic oppression of one speech community by another

4.1. The possible negative connotations of the word '*standard*'

The word *standard* tends to have quite a bit of significance. The Collins English dictionary defines the adjective as 'an accepted or approved example of something against which others are judged or measured; a level of excellence or quality; of recognized authority, competence, or excellence (2015: 1921). That is to say, a variety that is assigned as the *standard* can be recognized for its authority and high level of excellence. Accordingly, the *standard* becomes the language of choice all language users 'should aspire to speak' (Ogbu, 1999: 162) and against which all other varieties will be systematically judged. Student 420 perceives SAE as an aspiration: '…I think if Black people would, like, speak better or speak with a better vocabulary, then we would relate to what White people are talkin' about' (ibid.: 163).

While many different varieties or dialects exist within one language, only one of these will actually attain the status of *standard*. The standard language is selected through the social and linguistic processes of selection, codification, elaboration of function and acceptance (Haugen 1966). The standard language tends to emerge because it is 'the instrument of an authority, such as a government' that is able to 'offer its users material rewards in the form of power and

position' (ibid.: 933). Dejean (1983: 212) states the following: 'Standardization is thus supposed to take an elitist direction'.

The adjective *nonstandard* is defined as something 'that is not regarded as correct and acceptable by educated native speakers of a language; deviating from a given standard' (Collins English Dictionary, 2015: 1347). It may be deduced, therefore, that the *nonstandard* form is merely an irregularity of the true *standard* form. The L varieties under investigation in this paper are both considered to be the nonstandard form of their prestigious H variety. AAVE and HC have neither authority, nor excellence, and are constantly judged and compared to the H, which may then lead to a state of oppression.

4.2. The consequences of diglossia

Speakers within diglossic communities may form false judgments based on language use, such as a person's wealth, education, intelligence, social status, and even their social group. Many speakers of the L variety are unable to participate in formal situations, politics, the economy and school, due to their inability to speak the H variety. The French language remains 'in the highest strata of Haitian society, limiting the access of the Creolophone masses to information, education and their society's decision making process' (Valdez, 2015: 7). Similarly, many AAVE speakers cannot participate in the 'formal, legal economy' which then 'leads directly to participation in the informal, illegal economy' (Labov, 2010: 21), as can be seen below in figure 1. Unfortunately, L varieties, particularly AAVE according to Labov (2010: 20), remain trapped in a vicious cycle which he refers to as 'residential segregation': poor education and underfunded schools may provoke reading failure, which in turn may cause unemployment, poverty, and no economic base for marriage, which then may result in high crime rates (Labov 2010).

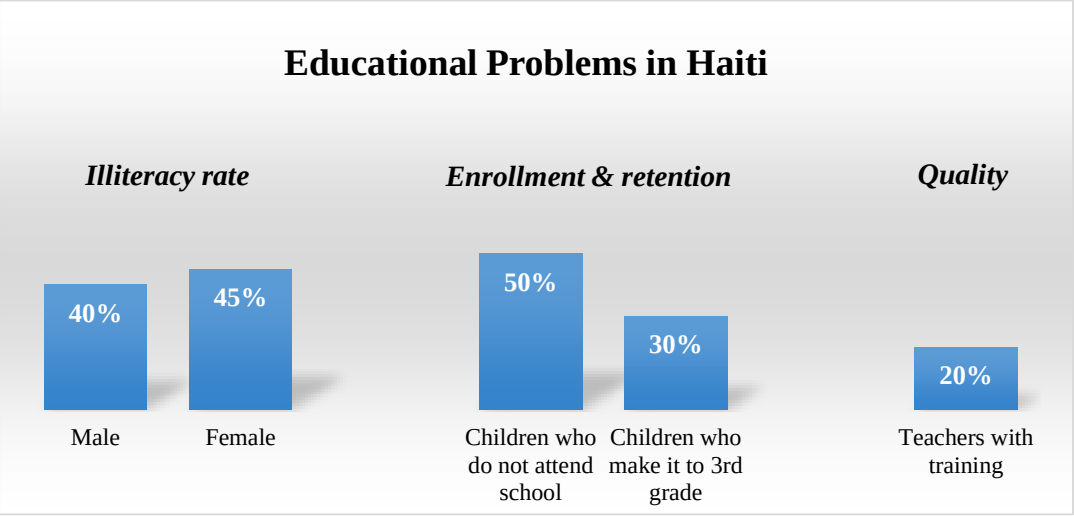
FIGURE 1: *Exclusion from Formal Situations*

Labov (2010: 21).

4.2.1. Educational problems: illiteracy and low-literacy levels within diglossic speech communities

The H variety is recognized as the symbol of education and knowledge (Ogbu 1999). Within diglossic communities, major educational problems exist which unfortunately reinforce the power of H and widen the social gap between the H and L. Illiteracy is one of these problems, and in Haiti illiteracy rates are particularly high (Férère 1977). The monolingual peasant population represents more than 90 percent of the entire population and has barely any contact with the French language; the remainder of the population is the bilingual elite, or educated class (Holmes 2013). Figure 2 below highlights only a few major educational problems in Haiti. As can be seen, illiteracy rates tend to be higher amongst female adults than male adults. In addition, enrollment and retention rates in primary schools are very low, with only 30 percent of children who actually make it to the 3rd grade. Finally, the quality of education is poor: only 20 percent of teachers are trained.

FIGURE 2: *Educational problems within Haiti*



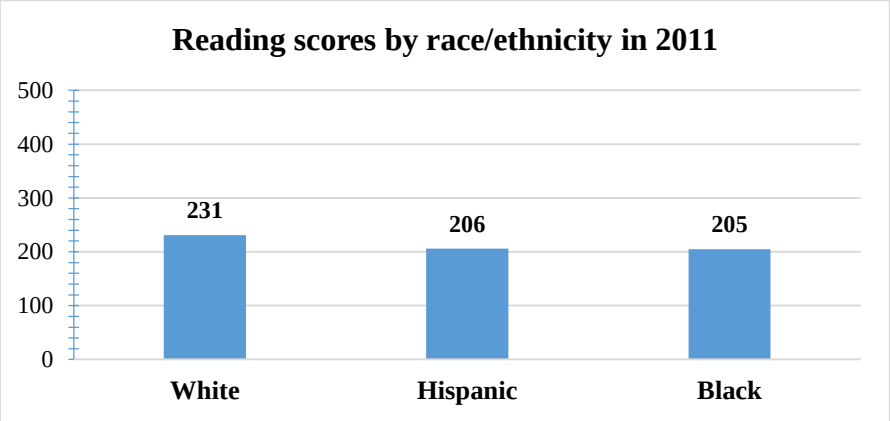
Haiti Partners (2016).

In the United States, there is an immense problem with reading levels of minority children. 'The seriousness of the problem for the life chances of the children involved cannot be overestimated' (Labov, 2003: 129). Labov (2003) has shown the extent to which minority children in the inner city struggle with reading. Their reading levels are 'no higher than those of dyslexics in the suburbs', however it is unlikely that they suffer from the same condition (ibid.: 129). Education is the gateway in the United States; it is the 'chief avenue of social mobility' (ibid.: 129). 'White-American proper English (i.e., the standard English) is the *high dialect* which is approved for education' (Ogbu, 1999: 151). Indeed, minority reading levels are so disastrous in the United States that the gap of social inequality between standard and non-standard speakers continues to widen, and the vicious cycle of 'poverty, unemployment, and crime' (Labov, 2010: 22) is reinforced by these low literacy rates, as seen above in Figure 1.

By 2010, it was noted that 'only a small proportion of African-American fourth graders, 13 percent, are rated as proficient' in reading (ibid.: 19). Figure 3 below represents the reading scores by race and ethnicity in the United States in primary school. White students scored the highest, whereas Hispanic and Black students attained the lowest scores. What is quite worrying is that Hispanic students are slightly more competent than Blacks in reading, even if Hispanics speak a different language altogether. This conclusion illustrates the state of oppression that

persists between the two speech communities: the reserve of many AAVE speakers to participate in society, as well as the racial tensions that subsist (Holmes 2013).

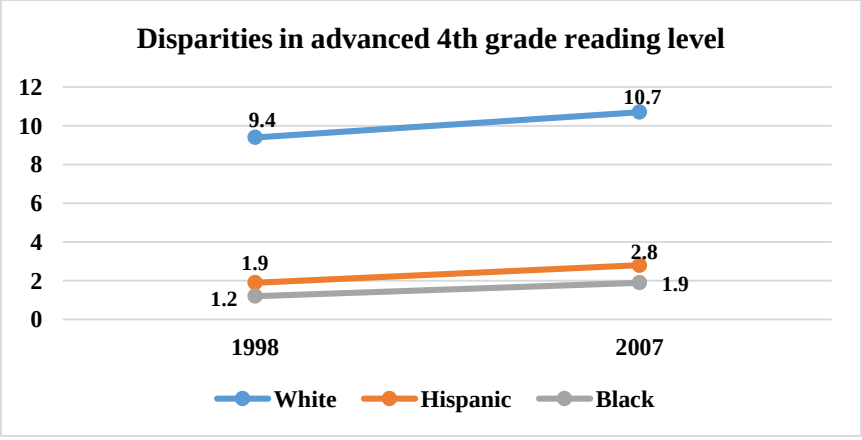
FIGURE 3: *Low literacy levels of AAVE speakers*



American Psychological Association (2012: 15).

In figure 4 below, where the differences in advanced 4th grade reading levels are shown by race and ethnicity, White students once again scored the highest though this time the gap is disturbingly large. This conclusion shows that it is nearly impossible for minority students to attain advanced reading levels.

FIGURE 4: *Disparities in advanced 4th grade reading levels*



American Psychological Association (2012: 72).

These educational problems reinforce the authority and prestige of the standard language and widen the gap of social inequality between the H and L. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult for L speakers to participate in formal situations.

4.2.2. Linguistic insecurities

H speakers may perceive the nonstandard variety as the degenerate form, which may then cause AAVE and HC speakers to regard themselves in a negative way. Linguistic insecurity, a term coined by Labov (1972: 117), is the negative self-image a speaker has of their speech and it describes their 'conscious striving for correctness'. In Ogbu (1999: 163), Student 10 is convinced that society regards the AAVE dialect as ignorant: 'Black people use slang. And they use incorrect English. White people do the same thing except it's not considered slang'. Many AAVE speakers are even 'hesitant and ashamed to talk to speakers of proper English' (ibid.: 167). Moreover, HC speakers may develop insecurities from the biased assumption that their language is inferior to the French language (Wardaugh 2009). Regrettably, such negative perceptions towards L varieties may develop into the devaluation of one's own L language.

When certain speakers experience insecurity, they may try to compensate by hypercorrecting. Hypercorrection is 'a mistaken correction to text or speech made through a desire to avoid nonstandard pronunciation or grammar' (Collin's English Dictionary, 2015: 957). Some speakers have a tendency to overcompensate their speech so as not to make a mistake, though in doing so they make more errors. The misusage of the –s is an example of hypercorrection amongst certain AAVE speakers.

> A good many blacks have been drilled in the doctrine that "good" English requires the third singular –s, but because they have no basis in their natural speech for knowing a third singular verb when they come to it, they have difficulty limiting their use of the –s to the third singular alone. They overgeneralize and begin to add –s where no teacher intended them to. This is an example of a process known as "hypercorrection", which occurs when a speaker tries to correct his speech but goes too far.
> (Burling, 1973: 49).

In addition, the misusage of front-rounded vowels is an example of hypercorrection amongst certain HC speakers, as can be noted in table 3 here below. 'To pronounce an unrounded vowel

when a rounded vowel is expected is to make a mistake' (Charlier Doucet and Schieffelin, 1994: 189).

TABLE 3: *HC hypercorrection in front-rounded vowel usage*

HC		**French**	**English**
front-rounded	*front unrounded*	*front-rounded*	
duri	diri	du riz	rice
suk	sik	sucre	sugar
bleu	ble	bleu	blue
meuzu	mezi	mesure	measure
pèu	pè	peur	fear
bèu	bè	beurre	butter
lundi	lendi	lundi	Monday
pafun	pafen	parfum	perfume

Charlier Doucet and Schieffelin (1994: 189).

Front-rounded vowels are 'associated with educated classes, good manners, and harmonious sounds' (ibid.: 189), whereas front unrounded vowels are 'associated with popular usage, rough manners, strident, and even vulgar sounds' (ibid.: 189).

4.2.3. Credibility

Credibility is linked to success in all aspects of life, such as work and education (Billings 2005). L speakers know that by speaking the H variety they have more chances to 'succeed in school and to get good jobs' (Ogbu, 1999: 153). Unfortunately, the H variety remains so prestigious that the majority of L speakers either do not speak it well enough or do not speak it at all, and are therefore perceived as anything but credible. In Billings (2005), 261 Black and White participants were interviewed in order to determine their perception of speakers of SAE and AAVE in relation to the term *credibility*. As can been noted in table 4, there seems to be a connection between dialect and credibility (Billings 2005).

TABLE 4: *Results of perception of credibility*

	Race of Speaker	*B*	*B*	*B*	*B*
	Dialect	*SAE*	*SAE*	*AAVE*	*AAVE*
	Race of Participant	*W*	*B*	*W*	*B*
Competence					
1. Intelligent		X			
2. Stupid					X
3. Educated			X		
4. Uneducated					X
5. Qualified			X		
6. Unqualified				X	

Billings (2005: 75).

Whereas Billings' (2005) initial table contains scale ratings ranging from 1.00 to 7.00, table 4 reveals the same results but with Xs instead. The blue Xs indicate the following: Whites perceived Black speakers of SAE to be the most intelligent, and Blacks perceived Black speakers of SAE to be the most educated and qualified. White speakers of SAE were omitted entirely in this paper, as opposed to Billings' initial table where they were neither preferred nor disliked on all accounts. Ironically, Black speakers of SAE were preferred over White speakers of SAE because most participants had wrongly presumed that a Black person would speak only AAVE, therefore 'causing them to rate Blacks more favorably when they instead spoke SAE' (ibid.: 74).

The orange Xs indicate that participants of both races perceived AAVE speakers as less credible than SAE speakers. Whites perceived AAVE speakers as the most unqualified; Blacks perceived AAVE speakers as the most unintelligent and uneducated. This finding suggests that 'Black participants were much harsher critics', which implies a 'repudiation of the perceived connection between Blacks and the use of [AAVE]' (ibid.: 77). It would be fair then to deduce that success, whether it be by measuring credibility or individual competence, may have a direct correlation to the H variety.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the meaning of diglossia, along with its functions and its features, have been discussed in detail. The diglossic speech communities under investigation, AAVE and SAE, and HC and SF, co-exist as opposing forces and, as a result, the inequality and oppression endured by these L speakers is revealed. Educational problems, linguistic insecurities and credibility are but a few examples of the many negative consequences that exist within these diglossic speech communities. As Labov (2010: 20) demonstrates in figure 1, L speakers remain trapped in the vicious cycle of 'residential segregation', which may then result in the exclusion from formal situations. In other words, the social gap between the H and the L speakers continues to widen, with the H speakers succeeding and the L speakers failing. These diglossic speech communities are 'not of equal status' (Ogbu, 1999: 151), and as such have been 'divided into the oppressors and the oppressed' (Dejean, 1983: 211).

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