

Review:

***Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African-American Literacy* by Vershawn Ashanti Young, Rusty Barrett, Y'Shanda Young-Rivera, and Kim Brian Lovejoy.**

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O*ther People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African-American Literacy* deals heavily with code-meshing, code-switching, and the role these concepts play in African American literacy. The book builds off the work of scholars such as John Rickford, Geneva Smitherman, Suresh Canagarajah, Lisa Delpit, and Keith Gilyard in their research on African-American English (AAE). Young, Barrett, Young-Rivera, and Lovejoy each implement their own perspectives on code-switching—the act of switching multiple languages to use them separately—and code-meshing—the blending of multiple languages together. The authors encourage instructors to incorporate languages such as AAE and Spanglish into an English teaching curriculum, and they promote code-meshing while viewing code-switching as detrimental to a student's perspective on their home language.

In the preface, Vershawn Ashanti Young states that the purpose of the book is to inform educators of how meshing AAE and Standard English (SE) is more beneficial than keeping the languages separated. Meshing the languages together allows instructors to advocate for helping students improve self-esteem and appreciation for their home languages. Young concludes the book by stating that the authors' hope is to "reduce language prejudice and promote the power of language as opposed to the codes of power" (Young et al. 2014, 156). The authors' inspiration for writing their respective parts (each part contains three chapters) stems from years of research on AAE, code-switching, and how code-switching has provided teachers with a negative perception of African-American and Hispanic literacy. Filling this gap is significant to teaching instructors how to address AAE in a constructive and uplifting manner. This work comes as follow-up research that dispels literature from scholars such as John Rickford, Rebecca Wheeler, and Rachel Swords, who argue for using code-switching to close the writing achievement gap.

Due to rap music having a major impact on the African-American and Hispanic communities, the timing of this book's release also works to highlight code-meshing in rap lyrics in parts three and four of the book. Y'Shanda Young-Rivera shares how one of the students from her eighth-grade ethnographic study brought in an example of code-meshing that used the following lyric from rappers Jay Z and Kanye West: "We ain't even 'po be here" (Young et al. 2014, 99). Like Young-Rivera, Kim Brian Lovejoy provides examples of students who wrote their own rap lyrics to exhibit understanding of code-meshing during a self-directed activity he gave them. These examples each demonstrate *kairos* by focusing on topics that are relevant to students, providing a space where students feel comfortable practicing code-meshing, and considering the audience when initiating their respective activities.

This discussion of teaching code-meshing over code-switching draws a connection between the fields of linguistics and rhetoric and composition. Each author argues that undermining rules of a language could lead to improper use and misrepresenting a form of speech, which Rusty Barnett highlights in the first chapter with an incorrect example of AAE from Kathryn Stockett's book, *The*

Help. Other People's English works to display effective methods for incorporating code-meshing into the classroom. These examples help to counter previous research on AAE and code-switching that promotes AAE as acceptable only in certain settings.

Each author offers a compelling case for code-meshing as a tool for teaching students how to understand multiple languages. In Part One, Barnett discusses linguistic tips and approaches for using AAE to teach SE, including “Rules for Using Invariant Be” (Young et al. 2014, 16), “The Interruption Method” (Young et al. 2014, 38), “The African American Artful Approach,” and “The Linguistically Informed Approach.” These concepts came about from archival research of studies done by Rickford, Piestrup, and Labov. These tips also work to demonstrate the versatility AAVE possesses, which shows why AAVE should be taken more seriously as a language. Each example also demonstrates the need for understanding how to approach a student’s delivery of speech, which is the last of the five canons of rhetoric. If instructors have a negative perception of an AAVE-speaking student’s language delivery, then the instructor may disregard the student’s message.

Young relies heavily on archival and observational research to prove his points about linguistic double consciousness, the cost of code-switching, and prominent examples of code-meshing. One example involves President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. Young explains how the Obamas’ ability to successfully code-mesh contributes to their ability to appeal to multiple groups of people. For example, Young references how Michelle has jokingly referred to Barack as her “baby daddy” at times and once said that there “ain’t no black people in Iowa” (Young et al. 2014, 64). Young also uses this information to discuss how AAE and code-meshing are more widespread than people think.

In Part Three, Young-Rivera reflects on how conversations with her brother, Vershawn Young, helped convince her of code-meshing’s importance. She then discusses how she conducted observational research through an ethnographic study of how receptive elementary and middle school students are to code-meshing. Her research includes pre-and post-surveys, daily lessons, and separate analysis

of the elementary students and the middle-school students. Her methodology allowed her to see following:

1. Students who felt free to write and express themselves, using words of their own choosing.
2. Students who had no inhibitions and weren't fearful that what they wrote would be wrong.
3. Students who felt empowered, so much so that I even think some of them were deliberately using their dialect speech patterns, just because they could (Young et al. 2014, 111).

Young-Rivera clarifies how to aid students in becoming more comfortable with code-meshing, helping readers, specifically educators, to understand how to go about familiarizing themselves and their students with how code-meshing works.

In Part Four, Lovejoy focuses on using pedagogy, along with observational research, to determine how to effectively teach students about AAE and code-meshing. Lovejoy initially dealt with some backlash when attempting to teach his college-level English Composition I students about AAE, including opposition from other professors. One of Lovejoy's colleagues said, "you're teaching them about a language that many of them can't identify with. They're not from the ghetto" (Young et al. 2014, 123). Lovejoy was able to defend his ideals by showing how his students' writing improved after being exposed to AAE, code-meshing, and other related concepts. Lovejoy boasts his success with using self-directed writing activities to create a community with his students, which allowed them to become more comfortable fusing SE with their home language to express themselves.

Other People's English is a must-read because it provides innovative approaches to teaching students about using multiple languages together to create messages that demonstrate an understanding of each language being used. This book is a new development in an old debate on how to embrace unfamiliar languages, and it will challenge teachers to reconsider their perceptions of students who write and speak in their home languages in the classroom. Educators need to take a deeper look at how embracing code-meshing can help students better learn and understand SE. Since code-meshing blends multiple

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languages together, this book can teach educators how to help show students learn to use AAVE both separately and together with SE.

Overall, this is a book that can truly work to shift the culture of teaching English on all levels, and I plan to be a part of that much-needed change.

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