
Recognizing the importance of the socio-cultural context: An analysis of code-switching between African American English and Standard English in the United States

Auteur : Fickers, Milena

Promoteur(s) : Herbillon, Marie

Faculté : Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres

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Université de Liège

Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres
Département Médias, Culture et Communication

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Mémoire présenté par Fickers, Milena en vue de
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1. INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis addresses the phenomenon of code-switching, on the one hand, in general linguistic terms and, on the other, in a socio-cultural context. In this sense, it takes a closer look at the causes and effects of code-switching on African American people living in the United States, who switch between African American English and Standard English in their daily lives.

Before I start with my analysis, I will summarize the contexts in which code-switching has been analyzed to date and what the main focus of these explanations has been. The phenomenon of code-switching has been known for a long time and has probably been practiced for centuries – as long as bilingualism has existed – even though the linguistic field has only been dealing with this topic since the mid-20th century.¹ When the term was used for the first times (either by Einar Haugen, or by Hans Vogt, there is no consensus), it described the simple fact of language alternation, which means the “mixing of two or more languages, or dialects.”² The phenomenon has been analyzed by scientists of different fields, including linguistics and sociology: while the former were interested in when it happened, the latter wanted to know the reason for it.³ From the 1970s onwards, code-switching has been increasingly studied, although researchers had previously discovered that speakers switch from one language to another when they studied language contact.⁴ At this time, the switching was considered to be an error caused by social or psychological factors (e.g., lack of education, laziness, or incompetence) coming from the outside, which means that it did not need to be analyzed linguistically and was considered only temporary.⁵ This neglect of the code-switching phenomenon is evidence for the fact that during a long time, the field of linguistics was characterized by a monolingual approach.⁶ One reason for this is that the discipline started to develop in the early 19th century, a time in which the nation-state was the predominant form of rule in which the ‘one nation-one language’ ideology played an important role (i.e., neglecting multilingual language use completely but including kinds of language contact).⁷ Due to phenomena like transnationalism,

¹ Peter Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone, and Paul E. Kerswill, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 452.

² Ida Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It,” *Yes! Magazine*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2019/12/17/culture-code-switching>.

³ Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It.”

⁴ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

⁵ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

⁶ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

⁷ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

globalization, or migration, these monolingual ideologies have become more and more unrealistic over the years, leading to much linguistic research on code-switching as well as other related practices over the last four decades.⁸ Nowadays, multilingual practices take place every day all over the world, including “the European nation-states which hitherto considered themselves to be monolingual.”⁹

As the lack of consensus on the first use of the term already shows, there is still much debate in this field, and there is not even a generally accepted terminology after all the research that has been conducted. However, most researchers agree on the fact that we have to distinguish between “bilingualism as the mental ability to speak two languages, and the practice of doing so.”¹⁰ The latter is referred to as bilingual talk, which means a talk in which the speaker’s bilingualism becomes a tangible social and interactional fact because the two languages that the speaker knows are used.¹¹ When elements of the one language and of the other language appear side by side in the process of linking small linguistic elements to form a larger unit, this is referred to as code-switching/mixing.¹²

Other characteristics of bilingual talk, for example the appearance of a phonological element and/or a prosodic characteristic of one language in a word from another language, also known as interferences, are not considered as being part of code-switching/mixing.¹³ Another disagreement lies in the fact whether code-switching can occur within a word or not. While some researchers have argued against this, for others it is possible, and some researchers even argued that using a foreign sound or shifting the prosody are also functional qualities of code-switching.¹⁴ It should be noted that this broad definition of the phenomenon has not been used generally in linguistics.¹⁵

In fact, code-switching can be divided into two distinct types, namely one that is based on language, and the other that is based on culture.¹⁶ The former indicates that a person switches

⁸ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

⁹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

¹⁰ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

¹¹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 452.

¹² Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 453.

¹³ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 453.

¹⁴ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 453.

¹⁵ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 453.

¹⁶ Taylyn Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?,” *Health*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.health.com/mind-body/health-diversity-inclusion/code-switching>.

between two or more languages while speaking, whereas the latter refers to switches not only in language use, but also in other cultural expressions such as dress style, behavior, hairstyle, etc.¹⁷ While language-based code-switching has been analyzed for decades by linguists and researchers from other fields of study, cultural-based code-switching has been neglected and failed to receive much attention. This is the reason why, in this thesis, I will put the focus on cultural-based code-switching. Indeed, I will argue that in today's world, which is characterized by globalization, migration, transnationalism, and unfortunately also a lot of racism, the socio-cultural aspect of code-switching must be taken into account in order to fully understand why and when people feel the urge to code-switch. This means that code-switching is more than just switching between two (or more) languages, and that there are various factors that cannot be explained linguistically but still have a lot of influence on a person's choice to code-switch or not.

In the 1970s, code-switching was especially analyzed in African American contexts, in order to describe the relationship between colonizers and colonized, specifically Black people.¹⁸ Linguist George B. Ray explained in his book *Language and Interracial Communication in the United States: Speaking in Black and White* that code-switching is for African Americans a necessary skill to be successful in institutional and/or professional contexts.¹⁹ Some African Americans even argue that code-switching is necessary for them to survive.²⁰ In view of this, I will focus in this dissertation on African American people in the United States since they still have to face a lot of racism, either in school, at work or elsewhere, which is the reason why the practice of code-switching seems to be very important for these people.

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to examine the extent to which the socio-cultural context in which code-switching between African American English and Standard English by African American occurs plays an important role and the impact it has on the understanding of the phenomenon. I will hypothesize that this socio-cultural context plays a key role because the external factors that characterize a certain socio-cultural context have an influence on the African American person's decision to code-switch or not. Taking into consideration only the linguistic features of the phenomenon would mean that only one part would be explained while the part that largely explains why African Americans still code-switch today is completely

¹⁷ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

¹⁸ Harris, "Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It's Surviving It."

¹⁹ Harris, "Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It's Surviving It."

²⁰ Harris, "Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It's Surviving It."

neglected. Moreover, adopting a much broader definition of code-switching (i.e., including changes in behaviors, dress style, etc.) will allow us to understand the phenomenon in a much better way than if only the switch between two or more language varieties is considered. This means that I will postulate that to fully understand code-switching, both types, the language-based and the culture-based, have to be considered because in reality, one cannot be explained without the other.

Even though code-switching is not inherently bad since everyone does it to a certain degree in order to adapt to specific situations, it can also be harmful if it is demanded and forced.²¹ Once the external reasons and factors that have an influence on the choice whether to code-switch or not are detected, it is possible to change the environments that force African Americans to do so in order to help them be truly themselves without fearing to be discriminated against in all respects. Code-switching would then again be something natural, an action that African Americans instinctively perform without realizing it, just as other people do, rather than feeling that without it they will not be accepted or will have less success in school or the workplace. These days, code-switching is not only regarded as having benefits for African Americans, but many state that it is a survival practice without which they cannot normally live their lives.²² This shows that even though slavery was abandoned more than 150 years in the United States (in 1865, the 13th amendment officially abolished the practice in the whole country)²³, people of color, especially Black Americans, still suffer from the consequences, and racism is still very prominent in American society. This leads to the fact that African Americans often suppress their real identity, which has negative consequences for their (mental) health.²⁴ In order to allow African Americans to live freely without having to constantly change their personality and/or behaviors, the external reasons for code-switching have to be detected and taken into account, which is the reason why I will also include an analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of code-switching.

To write this thesis, I put into relation different existing theories about code-switching and added a more recent approach in order to make the analysis as comprehensive as possible. First of all, I have compiled a general body of literature about code-switching, ranging from linguistic

²¹ Kyaïen O. Conner, "What is Code-Switching?," *Psychology Today*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202012/what-is-code-switching>.

²² Harris, "Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It's Surviving It."

²³ "13th Amendment," *history.com*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/thirteenth-amendment>.

²⁴ Conner, "What is Code-Switching?"

analyses to personal accounts of African Americans in the United States. Afterwards, I have analyzed the linguistic descriptions of code-switching in depth – as this is the classic way in which the phenomenon has been analyzed – in order to understand what it really consists of and how it manifests itself. After having read many chapters the about linguistic analysis of code-switching, I decided to incorporate three main theories from three different researchers (John Joseph Gumperz, Carol Myers-Scotton and Peter Auer) that would allow me to present the topic from a linguistic perspective and show why code-switching is an important phenomenon that needs to be linguistically analyzed. I chose these three different theories because they seemed to me the most important ones for my thesis because they are quite different, which allows me to explain the topic from different angles to have as comprehensive an explanation of the concept as possible. In a second step, I analyzed a body of articles, often written by African Americans themselves, which showed that code-switching implies for them much more than just switching between two languages and includes switching one’s whole personality in order to adapt to a certain situation and make a positive impression on the surrounding people. I discovered that many of the factors that these people pinpointed as having an influence on their choice to code-switch were not taken into account by linguists. The latter only included strictly linguistic features in their analysis, without realizing that a person changes not only his/her language, but also their whole behavior, depending on the context or situation, including social class, social hierarchies, ethnic and racial membership and much more. I realized that not many works include the linguistic and the socio-cultural aspects of code-switching, which is the reason why I wanted to do so. The corpus showed that the linguistic analysis had, for the most part, been carried out in the 1990s, while the socio-cultural analysis consisted of articles that had been written much more recently, especially from the 2010s onwards, which suggests that it is only recently that people put their focus on this aspect of code-switching. It might have to do with the fact that these days, many people want to point out the still on-going racial discrimination practices in the United States, as well as elsewhere, which is one of the reasons why African Americans feel the urge to code-switch. This was another reason why I think the traditional perspective of code-switching has to be adapted to the current context and situation we are living in, and why culture-based code-switching should also be focused on. This means that the linguistic descriptions of code-switching that have long dominated the analysis of the phenomenon are important to understand what code-switching is about and how it manifests itself, but they are simply not enough to fully explain code-switching between African American English and Standard English by African American people in the United States as they do not include the socio-cultural context in its whole in their analysis. This dissertation

will therefore not only focus on the linguistic descriptions, but also on the socio-cultural factors that play a role in African Americans' language choice and will show that they are pivotal in order to understand why these people (have to) code-switch in their daily lives.

I will now provide a brief outlook on the structure of the dissertation and the different topics I will deal with in the body of my text. In the first part of this thesis, I will engage with the phenomenon of code-switching from a linguistic perspective. First of all, I will explain what I understand by African American English, where it comes from, what it is characterized by and what the difference is between Standard and Vernacular African American English. In a next step, I will give a definition of Standard English in order to be able to distinguish it from African American English. In this section, I will also show that in fact, there is no single Standard English but several ones, depending on the geographic region. After providing a basic definition of the two language varieties that are important for this thesis, I will begin to explain code-switching linguistically. Starting with a definition of the phenomenon, I will then go over and illustrate the three linguistic theories that I chose for this dissertation. The first one will be John Joseph Gumperz' definition of code-switching and his distinction between the so-called 'we-code' and 'they-code'. I will proceed with Carol Myers-Scotton's 'markedness theory' before I explain the sequential analysis of code-switching developed by Peter Auer. This illustration of three linguistic theories will be followed by a description of the link between code-switching and identity. In order to do so, I will first of all explain what I understand by identity since there are several possible explanations. Then, the distinction between monolingualism and multilingualism will be described so that afterwards, the relation between code-switching and identity can be focused on. I will end this section by explaining what role multilingualism plays in our society nowadays, since it has become more and more important these days. In the second part of this thesis, I will put the focus on codeswitching as a socio-cultural phenomenon, thus the culture-based type of code-switching. To do so, there will be first a definition of racial discrimination, as well as examples of situations in which African Americans have been discriminated against. This will be followed by the illustration of general attitudes towards African American English, including its general acceptance in the United States and the relationship between this language variety and employment. These attitudes will also be demonstrated by two different studies I will discuss in this section and that show relatively similar results. In the final section of this dissertation, I will then eventually explain why it is important to adopt a broader definition of code-switching than just the linguistic one in order to fully understand the phenomenon. I will show that African American people use the practice of code-switching to adapt to the white society in which they are living because it is difficult

for them to succeed in school and in the workplace without doing so. In the last part, I will propose different suggestions to improve the situation of African Americans in the United States so that they do not feel the urge to suppress their identity and to have to code-switch in many situations to be accepted. This will include improvements in the workplace, at school and in society in general, much has to be done before all people are accepted as they really are. In the conclusion, I will then explain if my thesis has been confirmed and whether the goal of this thesis has been achieved or not.

This dissertation is written within the master in Multilingual Communication, specialized in intercultural communication and communication of international organizations at the University of Liège. The master's objective is to teach students about the challenges and uses of multilingualism in the communication and media education sector while maintaining an in-depth approach to languages and literature.²⁵ It consists of obligatory classes such as communication of the European institutions, public relations practice, comparative linguistics, and civilization classes, but the specialization in intercultural communication and communication of international organizations also enables students to take classes on migration and integration, international relations and communication of cultural organizations. Especially the subjects seen in the classes Introduction to Migration and Integration studies, postcolonial literatures from the Americas and English French comparative linguistics during Master 1 enabled me to think more about multilingualism in the United States, particularly about the varieties spoken by African American people. Instead of putting my focus on multilingualism in the communication sector, I focused on multilingual communication as such, since it has become a prominent phenomenon during the last decades as a result of increasing migration numbers and mobility in general around the world. After much research, I encountered the concept of code-switching, in which not only linguistic notions play an important role, but also socio-cultural factors that determine the context in which it takes place, as I will demonstrate with this thesis. This means that this thesis has enabled me not only to work on a linguistic concept that has attracted much attention during the last decades in the linguistic field, but also to focus on the outside factors that have an influence on one's speech and the historical events that led to the context in which African American code-switch in the United States these days.

²⁵ "Communication multilingue, à finalité," Université de Liège, accessed on June 4, 2022, <https://www.programmes.uliege.be/cocoon/20212022/formations/bref/P2UCMU01.html>.

2. CODE-SWITCHING AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

As mentioned in the introduction, in this first part I will examine code-switching as it has been analyzed as a linguistic phenomenon. Since this is the classic angle from which code-switching has generally been analyzed so far, it was very important for me to start with this examination because it allows me to explain what the phenomenon consists of and how scientists have understood the practice over a long period of time. I am particularly interested in code-switching between African American English and Standard English, two languages that have coexisted for such a long time. For this reason, I start with an analysis of both languages in order to clarify what exactly is meant by these languages and into which subcategories they can be divided. From their definition to their origins to differences with other varieties - I will cover all of this in the following part. This will then enable me to address the issue of code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon in detail by providing an explanation of the concept and explaining three main theories developed by John Joseph Gumperz, Carol Myers-Scotton, and Peter Auer. With their theories, they have deeply influenced the linguistic research on the topic and gave justified explanations and reasons for why people code-switch in certain situations. After having explained these theories, I will go over and explain the relationship between code-switching and identity work, since these two fields are deeply connected. To do so, the term 'identity' has to be clarified, as there are several approaches towards this concept. Before I can examine the relation between code-switching and identity, attitudes towards monolingualism and multilingualism have to be developed because being raised in a monolingual environment may lead to a different identity than being raised in a multilingual one. It follows an explanation of how the act of code-switching is at the same time an act of negotiating identities and how the act of using different languages can reveal more about a person's identity. In a last point, I will examine the status multilingualism has in society and how it should be taken into account when people switch between two languages, especially African American people.

2.1 African American English

2.1.1. Definition

African American English (AAE) can be defined as “a variety of American English spoken chiefly by African Americans.”²⁶ In the literature of linguistics, it is also known as ‘Negro

²⁶ “African American English,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/African%20American%20English>.

Dialect’, ‘Black English’, ‘African American Language’ or ‘Negro English’, among others.²⁷ During the last sixty years, AAE has been the most scrutinized variety of American English since sociolinguists have tried to learn more about its origins, structure, development, usage, role in education, and relationship to other varieties.²⁸ It is important to note that AAE is a systematic, rule-governed language variety that is not only deeply rooted in the history but also the culture of mainly African Americans.²⁹ The Atlantic slave trade played an important role in its creation since it brought about the language contact between British English, spoken by the settlers, and African languages, spoken by the slaves.³⁰ Nowadays, it remains a “vibrant symbol of African American kinship, creativity, and survival”³¹ but it is also worth noting that in the United States, it remains one of the most discredited varieties spoken in the country, thus constituting linguistic evidence of the “racial discrimination and stereotyping that African Americans have endured.”³²

2.1.2. Origins

To this day, scientists have not reached a consensus regarding the origins and development of African American English, or the influence of Creoles on it.³³ A Creole can be defined as a language that is primarily spoken in a certain place and has evolved from a combination of several other languages.³⁴ It must be distinguished from the so-called Pidgin languages, a simple version of a variety used by speakers having different mother tongues for basic communication, but not representing a person’s first language.³⁵ There exist different hypotheses concerning the emergence of AAE, which I will explain in this section. First of all, it is essential to go back to the first descriptions of AAE in order to understand the development of the hypotheses. The early accounts of AAE were non-linguistic ones and attributed the characteristic features of this

²⁷ Tracey L. Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139021531.001>.

²⁸ Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, 2.

²⁹ Weldon, 1.

³⁰ Weldon, 1.

³¹ Weldon, 1.

³² Weldon, 1.

³³ Weldon, 19.

³⁴ “Creole,” Collins dictionary, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/creole>.

³⁵ “Pidgin,” Collins dictionary, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/pidgin>.

variety to a physiological and linguistic ‘incompetence’, said to prevent African Americans from perfectly acquiring English.³⁶ In the early 1900s, dialectologists, to destroy such racist and, most importantly, linguistically unfounded myths, declared that the variety spoken by African Americans was not inferior, but the same language as that used by Whites who came from a similar socioeconomic and regional milieu.³⁷

The first hypothesis, the Dialectologist or Anglicist Hypothesis, was founded on the basis of the arguments of the dialectologists in the early 1900s.³⁸ It proposes that African American English is directly descended from British English, like other varieties, but has evolved differently since then.³⁹ While other varieties of American English have lost certain features of the English spoken in colonial times (e.g., the absence of the ‘-s’ in the third person), African American English has retained them and is therefore distinct from the other varieties.⁴⁰ This means that this hypothesis, on the one hand, legitimates AAE, but, on the other hand, denies the influence of African languages, which is the reason why it has been challenged by several scientists, who noticed that African features were still be found in African American’s language and culture.⁴¹

The second hypothesis, the Creolist Hypothesis, views AAE as a derivation from a Creole, as the name already indicates.⁴² According to this theory, the Atlantic slave trade brought together speakers of West African languages (i.e. slaves) and British English (i.e. settlers), which led to the creation of a Pidgin English that later developed into a Creole spoken by slaves on the North American plantations.⁴³ In the course of time, the African American varieties then, in a certain way, were decreolized because of the direct contact with other English varieties present in the continent.⁴⁴ This was possible only after the Civil War and the end of the plantation system, because from that moment on, Black slaves had contact not only with people

³⁶ Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, 19.

³⁷ Weldon, 15.

³⁸ Weldon, 16.

³⁹ Weldon, 16.

⁴⁰ Weldon, 16.

⁴¹ Weldon, 16.

⁴² Weldon, 16.

⁴³ Weldon, 16.

⁴⁴ Weldon, 17.

on the farm, but also with people who spoke other English varieties and they started to have access to education.⁴⁵

The third hypothesis, the Divergence Hypothesis, contradicts the idea that circulated for a while, namely that AAE originated as a Creole but has been decreolized to such a point that its grammar is the same as that of other English varieties.⁴⁶ Instead, it states that the increased segregation and isolation of speakers of AAE and of English led to the divergence of these two languages.⁴⁷ It has to be made clear that when slavery was abolished in the United States, several laws, enacted in the 18th and 19th century, made segregation official policy, which means that society was clearly divided into White people and people of color, especially places of residence, public services, and schools.⁴⁸ However, this hypothesis has also been criticized by some scientists saying that there is not enough linguistic evidence for this proposal and that not all social factors (e.g., education level, employment, etc.) that could be involved were considered.⁴⁹

The most recent hypothesis, the Neo-Anglicist Hypothesis, states that some characteristics of AAE, especially in the TMA (tense, mood, aspect) system of it, were developed during the twentieth century and reflect the social and economic gap that is still growing between European and African American speakers.⁵⁰ However, this hypothesis is far from definite and remains highly debated.⁵¹

2.1.3. African American Vernacular English vs. Standard African American English

There exist many definitions and focuses in the research of African American English, but I will regard AAE as being separable into African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Standard African American English (SAAE).

⁴⁵ Weldon, 17.

⁴⁶ Weldon, 17.

⁴⁷ Weldon, 17.

⁴⁸ "Segregation in the United States," history.com, January 18, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/segregation-united-states>.

⁴⁹ Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, 17.

⁵⁰ Weldon, 19.

⁵¹ Weldon, 19.

AAVE, the variety that has most often been scrutinized, can be defined as “the nonstandard varieties used by African Americans as their everyday vernacular.”⁵² It has been observed that the varieties that compose AAVE share much of their grammar and vocabulary even if they vary not only depending on the region and social class, but also according to age and other characteristics.⁵³ The foundation of AAVE was laid especially in the southern United States during the first century of British colonization and it derived from the dialects that the British settlers brought with them during colonial times.⁵⁴

SAAE (also known as ‘Standard Black English’) was defined by Orlando Taylor as the speech of African Americans who primarily use standard grammatical constructions in combination with “Black rhetorical style, prosodic features, and idioms.”⁵⁵ As Salikoko Mufwene notes, the fact that not only vernacular language is taken into account and that AAE is divided into different subvarieties makes the research more comprehensive and also better reflects the reality of “talking Black.”⁵⁶ In his work, he states that

There are very large proportions of African Americans whose day-to-day speech does not include the kinds of styles used in ritual insults or Hip-Hop lyrics. There are many who are often constrained by their professions from using some of the non-standard features associated with AAVE, even in their more relaxed modes of communication such as in the privacy of their homes or in the intimate settings of their friends’ company. Yet all such individuals would be recognized as “talking Black” among African Americans.⁵⁷

In the following sections, I will use the term African American English to refer to all the different varieties of English spoken mainly by and among African American people, which thus includes Standard and Vernacular African American English. As did Tracey L. Weldon, I adopt my definition from Salikoko Mufwene, who sees AAE as a variety that differs from other English varieties, “including those of the African diaspora, such as Caribbean English Creoles

⁵² Donald Winford, “The Origins of African American Vernacular English,” in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Language*, ed. Jennifer Bloomquist, Lisa J. Green, and Sonja L. Lanehart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 85, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199795390.001.0001.

⁵³ Winford, “The Origins of African American Vernacular English,” 85.

⁵⁴ Winford, 86.

⁵⁵ Orlando Taylor, “Black English: An agenda for the 1980’s,” in *Black English: Educational Equity and the Law*, ed. John Chambers Jr. (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1983), 153, quoted in Tracey L. Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.

⁵⁶ Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, 4.

⁵⁷ Salikoko Mufwene, “What is African American English?,” in *Sociocultural and Historical Contexts of African American English*, ed. Sonja Lanehart, (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2001), 35, quoted in Tracey L. Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 4.

(CECs) and second-language varieties of English spoken by African immigrants residing in the United States.”⁵⁸

However, there are two things that should be noted in this definition before I continue my consideration. The first thing is the fact that AAE is spoken mainly by and among American people of African descent, but not exclusively.⁵⁹ On the one hand, this is due to the fact that language is a social construct, which means that persons belonging to other racial/ethnic groups, often those who socialize, work or live mainly with AAE speakers, may also learn this language and speak it fluently.⁶⁰ On the other hand, there is the so-called linguistic appropriation, a phenomenon that consists in borrowing, especially vocabulary, from AAE or other racial/ethnic groups to sound in a certain way (for example ‘cool’).⁶¹ The second fact that should be highlighted is that AAE is not spoken by all African Americans because some who work, socialize, and identify mostly with people who speak the nonvernacular may use nearly none of the characteristic features of (vernacular) AAE.⁶²

2.2 Standard English

2.2.1. Definition

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Standard English can be defined as

the English that with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform though not devoid of regional differences, that is well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated, and that is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood.⁶³

However, if we look at the language in a purely linguistic way, there exists not only one Standard English.⁶⁴ In fact, due to the large number of countries where English is spoken, many different varieties have evolved, which differ in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation,

⁵⁸ Weldon, *Middle-Class African American English*, 20.

⁵⁹ Weldon, 20.

⁶⁰ Weldon, 20.

⁶¹ Weldon, 20.

⁶² Weldon 21.

⁶³ “Standard English,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Standard%20English>.

⁶⁴ Eline Laperre, “There’s no such thing as Standard English,” Cambridge University Press, February 4, 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/02/24/no-such-thing-as-standard-english/>.

etc.⁶⁵ These differences have led to the establishment of different standard forms for some varieties, depending on the region in which they are spoken – for example, Standard British English, Standard Scottish English, or General Australian.⁶⁶ Even if there are many Standard Englishes, these varieties are not spoken by many people since there are a lot of dialects, and, depending on the country or region, people have different accents, differing often very much from the Standard accent.⁶⁷ A dialect of English, on the one hand, can be understood as a regional variety of the English language that has different features of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation than other regional varieties, which all together constitute the English language.⁶⁸ An accent, on the other hand, concerns the manner a speaker pronounces the language, which typically changes from region to region,⁶⁹ and each Standard English has also its own standard accent.⁷⁰

As in the case of African American English, there also exists a vernacular English that stands in opposition to Standard English. The vernacular can be defined as the “nonstandard language or dialect of a place, region, or country”⁷¹ that is especially naturally used in informal situations by a group of speakers.⁷² In the following sections, I will use the term Standard English to refer to the English variety that is considered to be the Standard in the United States because it is the most accepted and regulated form of English in this country, making it easier to compare with African American Vernacular English.

2.2.2. Origins

The 15th and 16th centuries were crucial for the development of the first Standard English in England that was based on the London and East Midlands dialects concerning grammar and

⁶⁵ Laperre, “There’s no such thing as Standard English.”

⁶⁶ Laperre, “There’s no such thing as Standard English.”

⁶⁷ Laperre, “There’s no such thing as Standard English.”

⁶⁸ “Dialect,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dialect>.

⁶⁹ “Accent,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accnt>.

⁷⁰ Laperre, “There’s no such thing as Standard English.”

⁷¹ “Vernacular,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular>.

⁷² “Vernacular,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed on March 22, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/vernacular>.

spelling while for pronunciation, it was based on the London high society accent.⁷³ After a period in which this variety was just used by the government, it soon developed into the standard variety for the upper class and finally became the standard language of science, education, literature, and politics.⁷⁴ This means that, in contrast to dialects that develop naturally, Standard Englishes had to be created by government officials and academics who chose the pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary from different dialects regarded as being part of the higher society which would then form the new Standard English.⁷⁵

2.2.3. Standard English vs African American Vernacular English

This first part of the dissertation is about the linguistic act of code-switching between Standard English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Here, I speak of the vernacular variety of African American English because it shows more differences from Standard English than the standard form of the variety. In order to be able to understand such code-switching, it is important to examine the most frequent and obvious features that differ between these two varieties. Research on AAVE has especially centered around morphological and syntactic features even if there are also many phonological and phonetic ones that differ from Standard English.⁷⁶ Morphology and syntax are concerned with the study of words, either their process of construction (the combination of a stem and pre-/or suffixes)⁷⁷ or the way they can be combined in order to form larger units (clauses or sentences)⁷⁸, while phonology and phonetics are concerned with the study of sounds, either the speech sounds in general or of a particular language and the laws they follow⁷⁹, or the speech processes in which humans produce, perceive or analyze speech sounds.⁸⁰ Traits such as the invariant be (*I be home*), copula

⁷³ Laperre, "There's no such thing as Standard English."

⁷⁴ Laperre, "There's no such thing as Standard English."

⁷⁵ Laperre, "There's no such thing as Standard English."

⁷⁶ Erik R. Thomas, "Phonological and Phonetic Characteristics of African American Vernacular English," *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1, no. 5 (2007), 450, <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2007.00029.x>.

⁷⁷ "Morphology," Collins dictionary, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/morphology>.

⁷⁸ "Syntax," Merriam-Webster, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syntax>.

⁷⁹ "Phonology," Merriam-Webster, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phonology>.

⁸⁰ "Phonetics," Collins dictionary, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/phonetics>.

deletion (*I home*), the absence of the third-person singular -s (*He come soon*) or the use of ‘ain’t’ instead of ‘didn’t’ (*He ain’t come now*) are all part of distinctive AAVE morphological and syntactic features.⁸¹ The substitution of /θ/ (*think*) and /ð/ (*that*) by /tθ/, /t/, or /f/ and /d /, /d/, or [v] respectively as well as the simplification of so-called consonant clusters with the second consonant being a stop (e.g. pas’ for past, des’ for desk) are phonological and phonetic features of AAEV that stand in opposition to the realizations of Standard English.⁸²

2.3 Three important theories of code-switching

2.3.1. Definition of code-switching

There are various definitions of the phenomenon of *code-switching*, all meaning more or less the same thing. Joseph Gafaranga, for example, defines code-switching as “the use of two languages within the same conversation.”⁸³ This is a rather simplistic definition, which in my view does not encompass the whole meaning of the linguistic phenomenon in question. This is the reason why I prefer the definition of Peter Auer, who states that this verbal action needs to be taken as a ‘conversational event’ since this phenomenon is about the “alternating use of two or more ‘codes’ within one conversational episode.”⁸⁴ This definition is broader since it includes not only two languages in the verbal action but also more and it uses the word ‘code’ instead of ‘language’, which allows us to consider code-switching between different systems of communication that don’t have to be necessarily languages, but also posture, gestures, among others. Before we continue with the main theories about code-switching, we have to clarify the meaning of ‘code’. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘code’ as “a system of signals or symbols for communication”⁸⁵ while the Cambridge Dictionary states that it is just “a language or dialect.”⁸⁶ Even if the definitions differ, they both encompass the meaning that a ‘code’ is used to communicate, whether only verbally as in the latter definition or including both verbal and non-verbal communication as in the former definition. As Auer explains, it is not always

⁸¹ Thomas, “Phonological and Phonetic Characteristics of African American Vernacular English,” 450.

⁸² Thomas, 454.

⁸³ Joseph Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” in *Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication*, ed. Peter Auer and Li Wei (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 279.

⁸⁴ Peter Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

⁸⁵ “Code,” Merriam-Webster, accessed on March 23, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/code>.

⁸⁶ “Code,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed on March 23, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/code>.

easy to determine what can be considered as a code because the two varieties in question need to be understood as ‘code A’ and ‘code B’ by the participants and not necessarily by the linguists.⁸⁷ This implies that sometimes, members of a community use two systems during a conversation that seem to be very similar for the scientists but are completely different for the participants (or vice versa).⁸⁸ The task of the linguist lies in the demonstration that “the switching between this set and another is employed in a meaningful way in bilingual conversation.”⁸⁹ If this is the case, then we can talk of code-switching, according to Auer.⁹⁰

With this definition in mind, I will now develop three theories by important linguists that played a significant role in the research on code-switching.

2.3.2. John Joseph Gumperz: ‘we-’ and ‘they-’code

John Joseph Gumperz (born in Germany as Hans-Josef Gumperz) was an American linguist and anthropologist and one of the founders of modern linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics,⁹¹ which refers to “the study of the sociological aspects of language.”⁹² Even though Gumperz is famous for his theory of Interactional Sociolinguistics, he worked on many different subjects concerning the relation between language and social structure.⁹³ In his research, Gumperz combined ethnographic and linguistic empirical research with social theory.⁹⁴ He carried out one of his most famous studies with Jan-Petter Blom, a Norwegian anthropologist and professor, in a village in the North of Norway.⁹⁵ In this study of verbal behavior, they looked at two dialects spoken in this village and compared their use to the use of dialects in the North of India.⁹⁶ The comparison showed that the dialects were used more or less the same way so that Gumperz concluded that the verbal repertoire is not only determinable

⁸⁷ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 13.

⁸⁸ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 13.

⁸⁹ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 13.

⁹⁰ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 13.

⁹¹ Steven C. Levinson, “John Joseph Gumperz,” *American Anthropologist* 117, no. 1 (2015): 212, https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_2078926_6/component/file_2087770/content.

⁹² “Sociolinguistics,” *Britannica*, accessed on March 23, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/science/sociolinguistics>.

⁹³ Levinson, “John Joseph Gumperz,” 213.

⁹⁴ Levinson, 213.

⁹⁵ Chad Nilep, “‘Code Switching’ in Sociocultural Linguistics,” *Colorado Research in Linguistics* 19, no. 1 (2006): 7, <https://doi.org/10.25810/hnq4-jv62>.

⁹⁶ Nilep, “‘Code Switching’ in Sociocultural Linguistics,” 7.

in social, but also in linguistic terms.⁹⁷ Blom and Gumperz later applied their analysis to the phenomenon of code-switching since they referred to the studied dialects in Norway as different codes (not languages).⁹⁸ These codes differ not only in lexical, morphological, and phonological terms, but also in that the two varieties are different for the speakers and must be kept separate.⁹⁹ Their assumption was thus that social factors lead to the segregation of these two varieties that are only slightly different in the eyes of the linguists.¹⁰⁰

With regard to code-switching, Gumperz was the initiator of the functional and interactional perspective of this phenomenon with his study on social dialectology in Asia, India.¹⁰¹ Gumperz works with the notion of code-switching as a conversational phenomenon, as was put forward by Roman Jakobson, but he has, in addition, a psychological basis in his perspective of code-switching that was already present in one of his earlier papers.¹⁰² In his psychological view of the phenomenon, the following claim stands out the most: “dialect convergence may lead to individuals sharing the ‘allophonic content’ while not sharing ‘phonemic inventories’, as it implicitly questions the categorization of speech material from highly diverse speech communities into discrete languages.”¹⁰³ In his research, Gumperz also emphasizes the necessity to take the social functions of language alternation into account and in one of his other works, Gumperz not only develops the theory that “standard grammatical rules may be applied to diverse data from multilingual ‘stylistic continuum’,”¹⁰⁴ but he also uses for the first time the concept of ‘code-switching style’, which would be one of those data sets that can be subjected to a standardized grammatical description.¹⁰⁵

In another paper (“Types of Linguistic Communities”), Gumperz introduces the notion of ‘communication matrix’, which refers to the “totality of communication roles within a

⁹⁷ Níleip, 7.

⁹⁸ Níleip, 7.

⁹⁹ Níleip, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Níleip, 7.

¹⁰¹ Celso Alvarez-Cáccamo, “From ‘switching code’ to ‘code-switching’: Towards a reconceptualisation of communicative codes,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 33.

¹⁰² Alvarez-Cáccamo, “From ‘switching code’ to ‘code-switching: Towards a reconceptualisation of communicative codes,’” 33.

¹⁰³ Alvarez-Cáccamo, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Alvarez-Cáccamo, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Alvarez-Cáccamo, 33-34

society.”¹⁰⁶ He further explains that each of these communication roles can be associated with a certain code or subcode (i.e., the code functions as a linguistic diacritic), which constitutes the model for role behavior.¹⁰⁷ In the end, he uses the term ‘code matrix’ to refer to the “set of codes and subcodes functionally related to the communication matrix.”¹⁰⁸

As previously indicated, Gumperz pioneered the study of Interactional Sociolinguistics because his interest centered above all on face-to-face verbal communication (in contrast to Joshua Fishman, another important sociolinguist, who was more interested in the configuration of language in society).¹⁰⁹ First of all, he starts with an explanation of the notion of ‘communication’, which he defines as follows: “communication is a social activity requiring the coordinated efforts of two or more individuals. Mere talk to produce sentences, no matter how well formed or elegant the outcome, does not by itself constitute communication.”¹¹⁰ In this definition of communication, as a coordinated action, the negotiating of meaning between two or more speakers plays a central role since the linguistic forms do not necessarily carry the actual meaning.¹¹¹

In his Interactional Sociolinguistics theory, Gumperz wanted to explain two main things: on the one hand, how speakers successfully communicate during an interaction, and, on the other, that even if people speak the same language (i.e., a lexico-grammatical system), they do not necessarily understand each other.¹¹² Gumperz’ answer to these two aspects of communication are the ‘contextualization cues,’ which are responsible for the success or failure of communication.¹¹³ In the following quotation, Gumperz explains what he understands as contextualization cues: “any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling [*sic*] of contextual presuppositions”¹¹⁴ These contextualization cues may be of phonetic, lexical, syntactic, or stylistic nature and include formulaic expressions and routines, speech delivery

¹⁰⁶ John J. Gumperz, “Types of Linguistic Communities,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (1962): 31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30022343>.

¹⁰⁷ Gumperz, “Types of Linguistic Communities,” 31.

¹⁰⁸ Gumperz, “Types of Linguistic Communities,” 31.

¹⁰⁹ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 283.

¹¹⁰ John J. Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611834>.

¹¹¹ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 283.

¹¹² Gafaranga, 284.

¹¹³ Gafaranga, 284.

¹¹⁴ Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, 131.

features (e.g. prosody), discourse routines (e.g. openings or closings) and, of course, language alternation.¹¹⁵ According to the American linguist, these cues are conventional, which means that from one culture to another, their meaning and use can differ, which implies that the interpretation is clear and not put into question when the cues are known by each participant but may vary or even be false when the contextualization cues are not shared by everyone participating in the interaction.¹¹⁶

We have seen that Gumperz was interested in face-to-face communication but now we have to take a look at how code switching or language alternation (Gumperz' name for the phenomenon) fits into this theory. As stated before, language alternation works in the eyes of Gumperz as a contextualization cue, as he makes explicit in the following quote:

Code switching signals contextual information equivalent to what in monolingual settings is conveyed through prosody or other syntactic or lexical processes. It generates the presuppositions in terms of which the content of what is said is decoded.¹¹⁷

In the following passage, we will see how Gumperz understands language alternation in bilingual communities in which diverse identities and values are associated with different languages.¹¹⁸ In his works, he uses the notions of 'we-code' and 'they-code' to refer to this phenomenon:

The tendency is for the ethnically specific, minority language to be regarded as the 'we-code' and become associated with in-group and informal activities, and for the majority language to serve at the 'they-code' associated with the more formal, stiffer and less personal out-group relations.¹¹⁹

When speakers follow certain systems of language choice, then these links are made between social values and language varieties, as described before, and these associations also lead to the co-selectivity between language varieties and not only the contexts they are commonly used in, but also the associated identities and the communicated values.¹²⁰ Gumperz' notions of 'we-'/ 'they-code', later used by several other researchers, were introduced by him in the study of code-switching, while the notion of *identity* (which I will discuss later) is often

¹¹⁵ Gafaranga, "Code-switching as a conversational strategy," 284.

¹¹⁶ Gafaranga, 284.

¹¹⁷ Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, 98.

¹¹⁸ Gafaranga, "Code-switching as a conversational strategy," 284.

¹¹⁹ Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, 66.

¹²⁰ Gafaranga, "Code-switching as a conversational strategy," 284.

mentioned at the same time.¹²¹ Most of the researchers used these concepts of ‘we-’/ ‘they-code’ to refer to a society in which there exists an ethnic language that is the variety spoken by a bilingual community (‘we-code’), most often the minority, and another language spoken by the mainstream, majority part of the society (‘they-code’).¹²² This opposition thus implies that the monolingual and bilingual communities have a certain relationship to each other and that inside the minority community, certain kinds of social relationships exist.¹²³ As mentioned before, the notions of ‘we-code’ and ‘they-code’ have been used by many researchers later on to describe the phenomenon of code-switching, but it is important to say that other researchers did not use them because they saw a problem in this formulation¹²⁴, as for example Auer points out in the following quote:

The often invoked characterization of languages as a ‘they-code’ and a ‘we-code’ tends to be used as an a priori schema imposed on code alternation data from outside. It is also too gross and too far away from participants’ situated, local practices in order to be able to capture the final shades of social meaning attributed to the languages in a bilingual repertoire.¹²⁵

However, Gumperz himself already said that his intention was not to establish a direct link between the content of a statement and the language used to make this statement, as it gets clear in the following quote: “[b]ut it must be emphasized that, in situations such as those discussed here, this association between communicative style and group identity is a symbolic one: it does not directly predict actual usage.”¹²⁶ There are several problems with the identification of the ‘we’ and ‘they’ in Gumperz’ theory: apart from the fact that this association does not necessarily predict actual use (as explained in the previous quote), the distinction between ‘we’ versus ‘they’ is not as significant in some bilingual communities as it may be in others.¹²⁷ Another

¹²¹ Mark Sebba and Tony Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 262.

¹²² Sebba and Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” 262.

¹²³ Sebba and Wootton, 262.

¹²⁴ Sebba and Wootton, 262.

¹²⁵ Peter Auer, “Bilingualism in/ as social action: a sequential approach to code-switching,” in *Papers for the Symposium on Code-switching in Bilingual Studies: Theory, Significance and Perspectives*, (Strasbourg: European Science Foundation, Network on Code-Switching and Language Contact, 1991), 333, quoted in Mark Sebba and Tony Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 262.

¹²⁶ Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, 66

¹²⁷ Sebba and Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” 263.

problem is the identification of the minority group inside the mainstream society: some are easy to determine (due to external criteria or their own attribution) while others are more difficult to identify and, in addition, the ‘we-code’ and the ‘they-code’ cannot be regarded as granted in a certain situation since not only the relationship between the minority group and the wider society is complex, but also the link between the different languages in use.¹²⁸

Language alternation can thus be considered as a conversational strategy that has two different uses.¹²⁹ Gumperz refers to the first use as ‘situational code-switching’, which allows to bring about a change in the speech situation thanks to the co-selectivity between social contexts and language varieties.¹³⁰ That is to say that bilingual speakers use this type of code-switching during a conversation as a conversational strategy to negotiate a modification in relation to the contextual aspects (e.g., the topic or the speakers’ identities).¹³¹ Briefly, according to Gumperz, this switching is brought about by a change in the situation and is based on the assumption that for a given situation, only one of the two (or more) language varieties is suitable and that the change in situation will cause the speaker to adjust his or her language choice in order to continue using the appropriate language.¹³²

‘Metaphorical code-switching’ is the name of the second employment of language alternation as a conversational strategy and refers to cases of switching in which the situation remains the same but the speaker nevertheless changes his or her language choice.¹³³ Both types of code-switching as defined by Gumperz, as already stated, are based on the co-selectivity of social contexts and language varieties but there is one main difference between them: while the first one applies this co-selectivity directly,¹³⁴ the latter is based on the “violation of co-occurrence expectations.”¹³⁵ Gafaranga refers to this type of code-switching as a “deviance from the norm.”¹³⁶ In order to understand metaphorical code-switching, we can assume that there are two stages: the first stage consists in the fact that the deviance from the norm can be considered

¹²⁸ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 263.

¹²⁹ Gafaranga, 286.

¹³⁰ Gafaranga, 286.

¹³¹ Gafaranga, 286.

¹³² Li Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 156.

¹³³ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 156.

¹³⁴ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 287.

¹³⁵ Gumperz, *Discourse strategies*, 98.

¹³⁶ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 287.

a signal that tells the other participant that something is communicated that is not part of the expected content; then, at the second stage, a possible interpretation is indicated by the shift.¹³⁷ If metaphorical code-switching takes place in this way, then the code switch has a somehow semantic value and is directional:

The semantic effect of metaphorical code switching depends on the existence of a regular relationship between variables and social situations [...]. The context in which one of a set of alternates is regularly used becomes part of its meaning so that when this form is then employed in a context where it is not normal, it brings in some of the flavour of this original setting.¹³⁸

It should be noted, however, that metaphorical code-switching is not always directional because, as Gumperz notes, the choice of the code also sometimes forces an interpretation in certain conversational contexts (i.e., there is no stage two in these cases).¹³⁹ Another problem is the fact that before the speaker (or linguist) could come to an interpretation of the deviant choice, it must be clear which of the two (or more) languages would be the appropriate one in this specific situation.¹⁴⁰

2.3.3. Carol Myers-Scotton: The ‘markedness’ theory of code-switching

Carol Myers-Scotton is an American Linguist who worked in the disciplines of morphology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis but focused her research on bilingualism in a general way, especially on code-switching.¹⁴¹ However, she also wrote different papers about language contact phenomena concerning language production, socio-pragmatics, morpheme classification and bilingualism.¹⁴² In this section, I will discuss and explain her ‘markedness’ model of code-switching as it seems important to me for the further understanding of code-switching.

The ‘markedness’ theory of code-switching is, according to Li Wei (a British linguist), “arguably the most influential theoretical model of social and pragmatic aspects of code-

¹³⁷ Gafaranga, 287.

¹³⁸ Jan-Petter Blom and John J. Gumperz, “Social meaning in linguistic structure: Code-switching in Norway,” in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, ed. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 425, quoted in Joseph Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” in *Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication*, ed. Peter Auer and Li Wei (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 287.

¹³⁹ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 287.

¹⁴⁰ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 156.

¹⁴¹ “Carol Myers-Scotton,” The Pennsylvania State University, accessed on April 5, 2022, <https://cls.la.psu.edu/people/carol-myers-scotton/>.

¹⁴² The Pennsylvania State University, “Carol Myers-Scotton.”

switching that has been proposed since Gumperz' situational versus metaphorical switching distinction."¹⁴³ The emphasis in this theory rests on the analyst's perspective on bilingual conversation and how he or she interprets the intention of the participants of such conversations, as well as on the rejection of the concept that the meaning of linguistic selection may be locally created.¹⁴⁴ This theory stands in great contrast to another theory, the so-called conversation-analysis approach (which will be discussed later on), in which the participants perspective plays a key role.¹⁴⁵ Carol Myers-Scotton, the author of the 'markedness' theory, makes clear that the explanation of the social motivation behind code-switching is the main objective of her theory that can be applied in all multilingual and bilingual environments since it has universal and predictive validity.¹⁴⁶ Myers-Scotton has concentrated her research mostly on code-switching (particularly in Africa), but she emphasizes that her desire is that her theory is applicable to all cases in which linguistic choice is a key factor, not just to code-switching.¹⁴⁷ After the appearance on the market of her monograph in 1993, several critiques concerning this theory have developed, some of which I will deal with in the following pages.¹⁴⁸

To elaborate her 'markedness' model of code-switching, Myers-Scotton draws on several other theories, which will be explained in the following section, in order to completely understand her model. In a later work with Bolonyai from 2001, Myers-Scotton refers to her model as the 'rational choice model', but in this dissertation, I will work with the first version of the theory since it is more detailed.¹⁴⁹

Firstly, she draws on the Social Exchange Theory that is part of Social Psychology and consists of taking a social action and explaining it in terms of a balance of costs and benefits, which can either be material or symbolic.¹⁵⁰ The following quote shows that Myers-Scotton was influenced by the Social Exchange Theory when she described the phenomenon of language selection in social interactions: "I argue that a major motivation for using one variety rather

¹⁴³ Wei, "The 'why' and 'how' questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching," 157.

¹⁴⁴ Wei, 157.

¹⁴⁵ Wei, 157.

¹⁴⁶ Wei, 158.

¹⁴⁷ Wei, 158.

¹⁴⁸ Wei, 158.

¹⁴⁹ Gafaranga, "Code-switching as a conversational strategy," 289.

¹⁵⁰ Gafaranga, 289.

than another as a medium of interaction is the extent to which this choice minimizes costs and maximizes rewards for the speaker.”¹⁵¹

Secondly, she draws on the Markedness theory whose concept of ‘markedness’ was elaborated by the Prague School of Linguistics in order to explain phonological contrasts such as voiced and voiceless.¹⁵² In this theory, the voiced element (i.e., with the feature) is said to be marked while the voiceless element (i.e., without the feature) is unmarked and, in addition, it is considered to be the most usual and natural one.¹⁵³ This concept of markedness, as described above, was later used in various fields of linguistics, such as semantics, syntax, or morphology, whereas Myers-Scotton takes this idea and applies it to the study of language choice in bilingual communication¹⁵⁴, as the following quote shows:

The markedness model claims that, for any interaction type and the participants involved, and among available linguistic varieties, there is an ‘unmarked choice’. [...] Discourses including CS are no different, they also show an ‘unmarked choice’.¹⁵⁵

In her ‘markedness’ theory, the notion of ‘conventionalized exchange’ plays a central role since it explains how interactions in different speech communities take place:

A conventionalized exchange is any interaction for which speech community members have a general sense of ‘script’. That is, the linguistic variety used (for example, informal, middle, or formal style in some cases, but different languages or dialects in other cases), the discourse format, and even specific phonological and syntactic patterns as well as lexical items predictable in terms of expected frequencies. In most speech communities service exchanges, doctor-patient or certain other interviews, and various peer-to-peer talks are examples of conventionalized exchanges.¹⁵⁶

Normally, in such a conventionalized exchange, language selection and the rights and obligations set that exists between the participants do match and if they do fit, then language choice is considered to be unmarked, but if they are not congruent, then it is regarded as marked.¹⁵⁷ I will explain the concept of the rights and obligations set in detail later in this paper.

¹⁵¹ Carol Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 100.

¹⁵² Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 289-290.

¹⁵³ Gafaranga, 290.

¹⁵⁴ Gafaranga, 290.

¹⁵⁵ Carol Myers-Scotton, “Code-Switching,” in *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Florian Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1997), 231.

¹⁵⁶ Carol Myers-Scotton and Janice Bernsten, “Natural Conversations as a Model for Textbook Dialogue,” *Applied Linguistics* 9, no. 4 (1988): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/9.4.372>.

¹⁵⁷ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 290.

Thirdly, Myers-Scotton has recourse to the ethnography of communication in which the notion of ‘communicative competence’ is one of the key elements.¹⁵⁸ This competence of a speaker is defined by Gumperz as follows: “[C]ommunicative competence describes his ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters.”¹⁵⁹ In her work, Myers-Scotton, instead of speaking of communicative competence, refers to the so-called ‘markedness metric’, an idea that will be explained afterwards.¹⁶⁰

Eventually, a last influence came from the philosopher Paul Grice and his pragmatics because in one of his theories, he explains how meaning is produced in a conversation (i.e., an interaction between speakers).¹⁶¹ A conversation, according to Grice, relies on the ‘co-operation principle’ that expresses the following idea: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”¹⁶² This principle gives rise to four maxims, specifically quality, manner, quantity, and relevance, which, in a conversation, can either be followed or rejected, both of which lead to the creation of meaning, but if they are rejected, then Grice refers to it as a ‘conversational implicature’.¹⁶³ Myers-Scotton, finally, sees her own theory as an extension of the Gricean principle and adds a new one, namely the ‘Negotiation Principle’:

[...] in addition to relying on a cooperation principle, its associated maxims, and the conversational implicatures which they generate in understanding what is said (Grice, 1975), speakers use a complementary negotiation principle to arrive at the relational import of a conversation. The negotiation principle directs the speakers to choose the form of your conversational contribution such that it symbolizes the set of rights and obligations which you wish to be in force between speaker and addressee for the current exchange.¹⁶⁴

After having explained the theories on which Myers-Scotton based her ‘markedness’ model of code-switching, I will now explain her model in detail. As previously mentioned, she says that the choice of one code over another indexes the rights and obligations sets (from now on

¹⁵⁸ Gafaranga, 290.

¹⁵⁹ John J. Gumperz, “Sociolinguistics and Communication in Small Groups,” (Working Paper no.33, Language-Behavior Research Laboratory, Berkeley: University California, 1970), 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 290.

¹⁶¹ Gafaranga, 291.

¹⁶² H. Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” in *Syntax and Semantics*, vol.3: Speech Acts, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 45.

¹⁶³ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 291.

¹⁶⁴ Carol Myers-Scotton, “Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiation,” in *The Bilingualism Reader*, ed. Li Wei, (London: Routledge, 2000), 127.

referred to as RO sets) that exist between participants in a certain conversation type.¹⁶⁵ This RO set is defined as “an abstract construct, derived from situational factors.”¹⁶⁶ She argues that all the different communities have conventionalized nearly all interaction types and that schemata exist that index the role relations and standards for suitable social behavior (in which linguistic behavior is included) and are considered to be the unmarked RO set in a specific type of interaction.¹⁶⁷ The indexicality of the different linguistic varieties that exist in one speech community and the union of this community are brought about by the “knowledge of the unmarked RO set for each interaction type”¹⁶⁸ that functions as a normative device.

In the following quote, Myers-Scotton makes her conception of the knowledge of RO sets and interaction types as well as indexicality and the markedness metric (i.e., communicative competence) clear:

Speakers have a tacit knowledge of this indexicality as part of their communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). They have a natural theory of markedness. The result is that all speakers have mental representations of a matching between code choices and rights and obligation sets. That is, they know that for a particular conventionalized exchange, a certain choice will be the unmarked realization of an expected rights and obligations set between participants.¹⁶⁹

Bilingual speakers have, according to Myers-Scotton’s interpretation, several possibilities to use language alternation strategically: first of all, she makes a distinction, as the name of her model already indicates, between unmarked and marked code-switching.¹⁷⁰ The unmarked language alternation, on the one hand, is divided into ‘sequential unmarked codeswitching’ and ‘codeswitching itself as an unmarked choice’.¹⁷¹ The first one takes place when the speaker switches from one unmarked variety to another because he/she wants to bargain a change in the RO set that exists between him/her and the other speaker(s).¹⁷² This means that we can speak of this type when there is “some change in factors external to the ongoing speech event when there is a shift from one unmarked choice to another; the topic changes, or new participants are

¹⁶⁵ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 158.

¹⁶⁶ Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 158.

¹⁶⁸ Wei, 158.

¹⁶⁹ Myers-Scotton, “Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiation,” 128.

¹⁷⁰ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 293.

¹⁷¹ Gafaranga, 293.

¹⁷² Gafaranga, 293.

introduced, or new information about the identity of participants which is salient in the exchange becomes available, etc.”¹⁷³

Codeswitching itself as an unmarked choice takes place when participants

[...] are not satisfied with *either* the identity associated with speaking [one language] alone *or* that associated with speaking [the other] alone when they converse with each other. Rather, they see the rewards in indexing both identities for themselves. [...] Thus, CS itself becomes their unmarked choice for making salient simultaneously two or more positively evaluated identities.¹⁷⁴

The marked language alternation, on the other hand, takes places when participants make a marked decision by adopting a variety that in the normal case would not be indexical of the RO set that exists in this moment between the participants¹⁷⁵, as explained in the following quotation:

Switching away from the unmarked choice in a conventionalized exchange signals that the speaker is trying to negotiate a different rights and obligations balance as salient in place of the unmarked one, given the situational features.¹⁷⁶

However, it is not that clear how one can distinguish between marked code-switching and unmarked sequential code-switching since a lot of examples given by Myers-Scotton can be analyzed in both ways and even the linguist herself has problems making a distinction between them.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Myers-Scotton’s ‘markedness’ model of code-switching played an important role in the redevelopment of code-switching in the linguistic behavior of bilingual speakers.¹⁷⁸ It can be associated to Gumperz’ theory because he also distinguishes between two types of switching (situational versus metaphorical), and another similarity between these two models is the mono-directionality of the creation and interpretation of the meaning of language alternation.¹⁷⁹ However, it must be made clear that the model still has some problems and has even raised criticism in the literature of code-switching, as will show the following passages.

¹⁷³ Myers-Scotton, “Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiation,” 145.

¹⁷⁴ Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*, 122.

¹⁷⁵ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 295.

¹⁷⁶ Myers-Scotton, “Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiation,” 139.

¹⁷⁷ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 295.

¹⁷⁸ Gafaranga, 294.

¹⁷⁹ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 158-159.

The first problem, as pointed out earlier, is the distinction between marked code-switching and unmarked sequential code-switching. According to Michael Meeuwis and Jan Blommaert, the conventionalization of interactions is the problem here since it implies that a certain speech situation already exists before the language selection is made.¹⁸⁰ However, if we have a more dynamic perspective of a speech situation, then we realize that a speech situation is in fact defined among other things by the choice of the language (that is why Gumperz speaks of a contextualization cue)¹⁸¹:

[T]he correspondence of unmarked RO sets to conventionalized interaction types, the indexical values of linguistic codes, and the overall social meaning of code-switching strategies in a specific community, are all a-priori given factors that are simply brought into a conversation where they are exploited to fulfil communicative need. [...] The normative indexical values of codes, as well as the normative rules for appropriate codeswitching production and interpretation are constant elements in a theory in which intention and contextual conditions are the variables. In this sense, code selection is a predictable matter. [...] Interaction merely consists of the reproduction or reification of pre-existing social meaning, and is itself not creative.¹⁸²

A second problem, according to Li Wei, lies in the notion of ‘indexicality’.¹⁸³ The analyst may use it as a means to predict language choice and give a certain case of code-switching a particular social meaning, but the speakers of a conversation may not negotiate meaning or understand the language choice of the co-participant in this way.¹⁸⁴ In a bilingual or monolingual conversation, the situation is often simply not clearly defined, and the current situation cannot always be compared to a similar case by the participants.¹⁸⁵ In addition, even when the case is clear, there is simply no time for the participants to compare the current situation with a precedent and look for similarities.¹⁸⁶ The focus will lie on the new situation and the new acts of the other speaker(s).¹⁸⁷

A third problem is that there are several examples of code-switching in which it is rather unlikely that the speakers “are trying to ‘index’ some predetermined, extra-linguistic RO sets,

¹⁸⁰ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 295.

¹⁸¹ Gafaranga, 295.

¹⁸² Michael Meeuwis and Jan Blommaert, “The ‘Markedness Model’ and the absence of society: Remarks on codeswitching,” *Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 13, no.4 (1994): 399-400.

¹⁸³ Wei, “The ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in the analysis of conversational code-switching,” 159.

¹⁸⁴ Wei, 159.

¹⁸⁵ Wei, 159.

¹⁸⁶ Wei, 159.

¹⁸⁷ Wei, 159.

even if these RO sets could be empirically defined.”¹⁸⁸ Instead, what can be observed is that the interaction, which might be abandoned otherwise, is restarted thanks to the switch from one code into another by a speaker.¹⁸⁹ Myers-Scotton’s markedness theory fails here since a certain language is not necessarily used exclusively to indicate a speech activity (e.g., the restart of a conversation or the introduction of a new subject) in a bilingual (or multilingual) speech community, but these speech activities might be realized by many different languages.¹⁹⁰ The predictability of language choice will, according to Wei, always be only probable, even in situations in which one activity is often realized in the same language, and she states that the phenomenon of code-switching itself already has meaning since it is different from the ‘normal’ language use.¹⁹¹ Bilingual speakers thus switch languages during an interaction because the change already indicates to the opposite person how their speech should be interpreted in this case and not because one particular language has a certain external value.¹⁹²

A last critique is that in the ‘markedness’ theory of code-switching, the analyst’s view is the most important one and that no interactional significance is attributed to the phenomenon itself.¹⁹³ According to Wei, this leads to “a static, and mistaken, view of the indexicality of code-switching in particular and of the sociolinguistic behavior of speakers in general. In order that the meaning of code-switching is studied adequately, code-switching itself must be taken seriously as a conversational activity.”¹⁹⁴

The following section discusses an approach that uses exactly this approach to code-switching.

2.3.4. Peter Auer: the ‘sequential analysis of language alternation’

Peter Auer teaches Germanic philology at the University of Freiburg.¹⁹⁵ He studied not only general and German linguistics, but also sociology and psychology, having thus a broad

¹⁸⁸ Wei, 161.

¹⁸⁹ Wei, 161.

¹⁹⁰ Wei, 161.

¹⁹¹ Wei, 161.

¹⁹² Wei, 161.

¹⁹³ Wei, 162.

¹⁹⁴ Wei, 162.

¹⁹⁵ “Prof. Dr. Peter Auer”, Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, accessed on March 25, 2022, https://www.frias.uni-freiburg.de/de/das-institut/archiv-frias/school-of-lili/fellows/auer_lili.

background.¹⁹⁶ To this day, he has written many monographs, journal issues, edited books, and research articles in which he focuses on bilingualism (including code-switching), interaction analysis, syntax of spoken language, sociolinguistics, dialectology, prosody, and phonology.¹⁹⁷

According to the German linguistics professor, research on code-switching has shown that in certain bilingual speech communities, group membership and code-switching are related and that the regularities of this alternation may be very different from one speech community to another.¹⁹⁸ Even though it is a widespread phenomenon, code-switching cannot be found in each bilingual community or speaker since the manner in which linguistic behavior becomes significant and even normative in the formation of social groups is regulated by different language ideologies that exist in the different speech communities.¹⁹⁹ In bilingual talk, we have the same approach: for one thing, in an environment with a monolingual language ideology, bilingual talk is often judged as being something negative, then again, if one regards environments outside of this monolingual standard ideology, code-switching may be considered as being part of the educational and social elites.²⁰⁰ In this ‘elitist’ code-switching, the prestige comes from the bilingual speakers and the fact that not all people have access to the different linguistic resources due to the constraints of the educational system.²⁰¹ This implies that the same phenomenon occurring at the lower end of the social rank is not prestigious since the speakers themselves lack prestige.²⁰²

In sum, we can say that the meaning and social function of code-switching depends on many interacting dimensions, including, in addition to the prestige, ideology, and accessibility aspects, the dimension of the social powers that control the linguistic market and “the specific constellations of majority/ minorities (or center/periphery) within a society that relate to these forms of power.”²⁰³

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the main research on code-switching was conducted either from a linguistic or from a social point of view. However, Auer declares that

¹⁹⁶ Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, “Prof. Dr. Peter Auer.”

¹⁹⁷ Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, “Prof. Dr. Peter Auer”.

¹⁹⁸ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 3.

¹⁹⁹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 455.

²⁰⁰ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 455.

²⁰¹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 455.

²⁰² Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 455.

²⁰³ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 455.

neither approach takes into account all regularities observed in bilingual talk, which is the reason why he proposes a conversational analysis of code-switching that will be explained in the following sections.²⁰⁴

In several of his publications, Peter Auer pioneered the ‘sequential analysis of language alternation’ that is highly influenced by the Conversational Analysis (CA) approach.²⁰⁵ This is an approach to “the study of social interaction and talk-in-interaction that [...] has exerted significant influence across the humanities and social sciences including linguistics.”²⁰⁶ Its aim is to explain that the arranging of speech itself is a practical social action, and the discipline is characterized by viewing the speech as an activity in itself, taking an emic point of view (i.e., from an internal position, rather than from the outside) in which the organization of the conversation is observed from the participant’s perspective, and practicing a sequential analysis.²⁰⁷ In his works, Auer makes it explicit that he is influenced by the CA approach, and this can also be seen in some of his statements.²⁰⁸ In the following quote we see that it is very important for him to take an emic perspective in his research:

[...] the procedures we aim to describe are supposed to be those used by participants in actual interaction, i.e. that they are supposed to be interactionally relevant and ‘real’, not just as a scientific construct designed to ‘fit the data’. So there is an analytic interest in *members’* methods (or procedures), as opposed to an interest in external procedures derived from a scientific theory. In short, our purpose is to analyze *members’ procedures to arrive at local interpretations of language alternation.*²⁰⁹

As discussed before, Auer developed the sequential analysis of language alternation and in the following quote he explains why there is a real need to adopt this approach in the study of language alternation:

[...] any theory of conversational code alternation is bound to fail if it does not take into account that the meaning of code-alternation depends in many ways on its ‘sequential environment’. This is given, in the first place by a conversational turn immediately preceding it, to which code-alternation may respond in various ways.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Peter Auer, *Bilingual Conversation*, (Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 1.

²⁰⁵ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 300.

²⁰⁶ Jack Sidnell, “Conversation Analysis,” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics, March 3, 2016, <https://oxfordre.com/linguistics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-40>.

²⁰⁷ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 297.

²⁰⁸ Gafaranga, 297.

²⁰⁹ Auer, *Bilingual Conversation*, 3.

²¹⁰ Peter Auer, “The pragmatics of code-switching: A sequential approach,” in *One Speaker, Two Languages*, ed. Lesley Milroy and Pieter Muysken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620867>.

In his approach, Auer takes the notion of ‘preference’, one of the key elements in CA, which points in this approach to the structural properties of conversational organization and applies it to bilingual speakers’ language choices and refers to it as a preference for using the same language in a conversation.²¹¹ This means that when two bilingual participants are talking in one language and then the conversational turn ends, they must decide in which language they are going to proceed and, according to Auer, the participants then prefer to use the same language instead of changing it mid-conversation.²¹²

If we take a closer look at Auer’s explanation of language choice, then we can conclude two things. On the one hand, his interpretation implies that language alternation is an undesirable occurrence for the speakers in a conversation.²¹³ On the other hand, language alternation can be seen as a deviance from the speakers’ preference for keeping one language during a conversation, as Auer explains with the following words: “code-switching from this perspective is conceptualized as a divergence from the language of the prior turn or turn constructional unit [...]”.²¹⁴ This implies that code-switching can be detected and given a meaning thanks to this preference for just one conversational language.²¹⁵

Now we can have a closer look at how Auer analyzes code-switching itself in bilingual talk. In his approach, Auer defines code-switching as “the juxtaposition of two codes (languages) [that is] perceived and interpreted as a locally meaningful event by participants.”²¹⁶ According to this approach, code-switching thus has certain characteristics: (a) the identification of the language-of-interaction and the switch is possible because speakers generally prefer one language at a time; (b) code-switching brings about a modification of ‘footing’ because it shows that the next contextual frame will be different from the present one; (c) even if code-switching can have various interactional meanings, the process by which code-switching produces meaning will be the same for each community; (d) in terms of style, it can be a personal or a group one (not yet a variety);²¹⁷ (e) in most of the cases, code-switching occurs at the clausal or

²¹¹ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 299.

²¹² Gafaranga, 299.

²¹³ Gafaranga, 299.

²¹⁴ Peter Auer, “Why should we and how can we determine the base language of a bilingual conversation?” *Estudios de Sociolingüística* 1, no. 1 (2000): 137.

²¹⁵ Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 299.

²¹⁶ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 458.

²¹⁷ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 459.

sentence level; (f) being fluent in both languages is not a prerequisite for code-switching because a limited knowledge of one language is already sufficient to practice it.²¹⁸

Auer distinguishes two main and one periphery types of code-switching, namely discourse-related code-switching (also known as conversational code-switching) versus participant-related code switching (also known as preference related code-switching) and incompetence-related code-switching.²¹⁹ Discourse-related code-switching consists in switching in order to “mark different interactional frames/footings, such as main sequence/topic vs aside, or varying constellations of participants.”²²⁰ By doing this, the conversation will be organized since the switching leads to a re-contextualization of the interaction.²²¹ Discourse-related code-switching can have different functions, including repair work, marking quotations, preference marking, reiteration for emphasis, etc.²²² This type with different functions is commonly used by many bilingual speakers and an example can be the switch from language A to language B when the co-speaker does not react to the first utterance in language A.²²³

Preference-related code-switching instead indexes extra-conversational knowledge.²²⁴ In this type, ‘language negotiating sequences’ play an important role, i.e., sequences in which the participants of a conversation debate about the language being used during the interaction that already takes place (thus a re-negotiating of the language) or is just beginning.²²⁵ In addition, this type of switching may have a discourse-related meaning.²²⁶

A last type of code-switching is the so-called incompetence-related code-switching. As the name already indicates, these switches show that the speaker is less competent in one language than in another since bilingual speakers are not always equally proficient in both languages.²²⁷ If they are not, then they make bilingual competence a visible issue because they show to the

²¹⁸ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 459.

²¹⁹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 460-461.

²²⁰ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 460.

²²¹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 460.

²²² Gafaranga, “Code-switching as a conversational strategy,” 300.

²²³ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 4.

²²⁴ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 7.

²²⁵ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 461.

²²⁶ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 461.

²²⁷ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 461.

other participant their competence in one language in comparison to another.²²⁸ If this is done through code-switching, then we have a link to face-work: the act of switching into the stronger language of the co-participant can either be regarded as willing to be helpful or as condescending, while switching into one's own stronger language can be seen as a simple demand for help from the other speaker.²²⁹

In his study, Auer, in addition, makes a distinction between code-switching and transfer, another linguistic phenomenon that can also give rise to participant- or discourse-related changes, as in language alternation.²³⁰ So how do we know now if we are dealing with code-switching or transfer? The answer is the following: we can talk of code-switching if the language-of-interaction changes while transfer implies that only a recognizable part of speech is realized in another language.²³¹

According to Auer, a distinction has also to be made between code-switching and code-mixing because while both are part of the so-called bilingual styles, code-switching is first and foremost a "stylistic-rhetorical practice"²³² and code-mixing a practice that most often occurs within "self-contained syntactic units."²³³ Unlike code-switching, the speaker must have a good command of both languages to be able to mix them and you can distinguish between alternational (at the level of language production) and insertional (deeper linguistic processing level) mixing.²³⁴ The first one consists in the fact that one and the same sentence starts in one language (language A) and finishes in another (language B) while it is not clear which of the two languages is the matrix one, but one observed constriction is that the two grammars in question form a homologous structure at the point, where mixing occurs.²³⁵ As already said, mixing occurs most often within self-contained syntactic units and it even happens between units forming one larger speaking turn in which they are independent sentences and may include cohesion markers (adverbials, ellipses, etc.) and/or be semantically coherent.²³⁶ This type of

²²⁸ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 461.

²²⁹ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 461.

²³⁰ Gafaranga, "Code-switching as a conversational strategy," 302.

²³¹ Gafaranga, 302.

²³² Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 462.

²³³ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 462.

²³⁴ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 462.

²³⁵ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 462.

²³⁶ Auer, "Code-switching/mixing," 462.

alternation has to be distinguished from insertions in which the units in different languages are not independent but form one single unit.²³⁷ This means that in insertional mixing, the main syntactic units are in one language (matrix language) which are separated by inserted elements in another language.²³⁸ However, the inserted elements need to follow the principles of the matrix language, i.e., “the morpheme order must be that of the matrix language [and] certain system morphemes must come from the matrix language.”²³⁹

In another book (*Handbook of Multilingualism and Multilingual Communication*), Auer comments that code-mixing is one of the occurrences of language contact that bilingual speakers do not consider as the juxtaposition of two codes, while linguists do.²⁴⁰ Code-mixing can lead to the emergence of a *mixed code* which, from the linguists’ perspective, includes a lot of single language alternations, but for bilingual speakers, these alternations do not have any meaning in terms of language choice.²⁴¹ In order to understand how code-mixing might lead to a mixed code, I will take Auer’s explanation of a possible continuum.²⁴² We start with the regular case of code-alternation in which speakers generally prefer one language-of-interaction over another and the language in question is at first accepted, but then language negotiation sequences may develop, or the ‘footing’ of the interaction will be changed by discourse-related code-switching, both developments will result in the change of the language-of-interaction.²⁴³ If this state of affairs is dissolved by discourse-related code-switching that does not result in language alternation, then the speakers’ preference for one single language during the interaction is left behind, which is the first step towards a mixed code.²⁴⁴ The second step consists in the regular use of (nonce) borrowings (frequently content words, e.g., nouns), which may lead to the incorporation of elements around these borrowings from the other language and the last step of the establishment of a mixed code takes place when elements of language B are used instead of the equivalent elements of language A (e.g., in many East African environments,

²³⁷ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 463.

²³⁸ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 463.

²³⁹ Auer, “Code-switching/mixing,” 463.

²⁴⁰ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 15.

²⁴¹ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 15-16.

²⁴² Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 16.

²⁴³ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 16.

²⁴⁴ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 16.

bilinguals use exclusively English numbers in their conversations).²⁴⁵ An ambiguous case of a single word borrowing is the use of discourse markers of language B in language A because it is not clear whether this use can be considered code-alternation, but whether it is not more plausible that a mixed code was established to which language B contributed metapragmatic structures, including discourse markers.²⁴⁶

2.4 Code-switching and identity

2.4.1. Introduction

In the following sections, I will explain how code-switching and identity work are related. This will especially be important for the second half of this dissertation, which will deal with code-switching as a socio-cultural phenome.

First of all, it is important to say that, according to Benjamin Bailey, “language is our primary semiotic tool for representing and negotiating social reality, including social identity categories.”²⁴⁷ Language, as well as gesture, clothing, posture, etc. (i.e., different symbolic systems) has the ability to distinguish one speaker from another because it indicates that the speaker belongs to a particular group using the same or similar language or symbolic system.²⁴⁸ During a conversation, we have to place ourselves in relation to the other speakers, communicative activities we are involved in, and aspects of the world such as social identity categories (including their value).²⁴⁹ This means that through language, we can negotiate our identities, some of these negotiations are referentially explicit, intentional, and conscious, but the majority is not and even in the briefest, and perhaps regarded as trivial encounters are aspects of social identities not only established, but also contested and reproduced.²⁵⁰ It should be noted that not only speech, but also the absence of it positions a speaker during a conversation because as Bailey explains, “[to] speak – or even not to speak – in a social

²⁴⁵ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 17.

²⁴⁶ Auer, “Introduction: *Bilingual Conversation* revisited,” 19.

²⁴⁷ Benjamin Bailey, “Multilingual Forms of Talk and Identity Work,” in *Handbook of multilingualism and multilingual communication*, ed. Peter Auer and Li Wei (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 341.

²⁴⁸ Rita Franceschini, “Code-switching and the notion of code in linguistics,” in *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, ed. Peter Auer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 63.

²⁴⁹ Bailey, “Multilingual Forms of Talk and Identity Work,” 341.

²⁵⁰ Bailey, 341.

encounter is always an act of identity.”²⁵¹ In this case, multilingual speakers have an advantage over monolingual ones since they have access to more linguistic resources to position themselves and others since they can rely on two or more languages and sometimes even hybrid forms that develop due to language contact.²⁵²

According to Bailey, in most cases, “speakers exploit non-referential social associations of ways of speaking to position themselves and others.”²⁵³ Linguistic forms include not only prepositional meaning, but also a social association dimension, which leads to the fact that some types of speaking will be associated with a particular socio-economic status, geographic region, vocation or gender, among others, and if the context changes, then these associations are much more likely to vary than prepositional meanings.²⁵⁴

Auer explains that during an interaction, the active social associations are ‘brought along’ (i.e., social associations of some (sub)codes are existent prior to the interaction itself) and ‘brought about’ (one code can have various social associations and speakers may make creative use of certain associations depending on the situation).²⁵⁵ Major historical and social processes (such as acculturation, social stratification, or racial formation) can be linked to meaning-making procedures in conversations at the local level through social identity negotiations since they carry not only received, but also negotiated meanings.²⁵⁶ Generally, we can analyze, through the lens of identity work, the confrontation of individual social actors, on the one side, and structures and meanings that have been historically created, on the other.²⁵⁷ Through language, speakers resist but also reproduce these meanings and structures, which means that identity work can be used to look at how present society is constituted.²⁵⁸

As I already mentioned, language can be used to position oneself during a conversation and differentiate oneself from others and code-switching, as a linguistic product, has the same function.²⁵⁹ The speaker’s use of one linguistic element instead of another gives the interlocuter

²⁵¹ Bailey, 341.

²⁵² Bailey, 342.

²⁵³ Bailey, 343.

²⁵⁴ Bailey, 343.

²⁵⁵ Peter Auer, “Introduction: John Gumperz’ Approach to Contextualization,” in *The Contextualization of Language*, ed. Peter Auer and Aldo Di Luzio (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1992), 26.

²⁵⁶ Bailey, “Multilingual Forms of Talk and Identity Work,” 343-344.

²⁵⁷ Bailey, 344.

²⁵⁸ Bailey, 344.

²⁵⁹ Franceschini, “Code-switching and the notion of code in linguistics,” 63.

an indication of the group to which he/she belongs or wishes to belong to: using the same language as the interlocutor, or a similar one, conveys a feeling of cohesion and confidence while the use of another language or variety conveys a sense of ambivalence and dissociation and often involves the association with foreignness.²⁶⁰

In the following sections, I will discuss in detail what can be understood as identity, the difference between monolingualism and multilingualism, multilingualism as a social construct, and, of course, the relation between code-switching and identity.

2.4.2. Identity: a definition

The term ‘identity’ has many different definitions and has been described by several research fields, including psychology and biology.²⁶¹ In psychology, identity is defined as the subjective perception an individual has of him-/herself, a sense that is seen as being part of the individual because it is a permanent quality of the human being.²⁶² In biology, in contrast, it is considered to allude to important behavioral, phenotypic, and social qualities that overlap each other and seem to be heritable and fixed (e.g., race or ethnicity).²⁶³ The similarity between these two approaches is the fact that identity is seen as “relatively fixed, as located in the individual, and as an analytical prime that affects or explains social behavior and meanings.”²⁶⁴

The social constructionist theory, however, offers a completely different perspective and has dominated the interpretive social sciences and the humanities since the 1970s.²⁶⁵ According to this perspective, social identities are a function of “on-going processes of social differentiation,”²⁶⁶ rather than of static characteristics of an individual (or a group).²⁶⁷ A change in time and space can lead to a change in the meaning or configuration of a social identity category, which demonstrates that these social identity categories are a social construction and are not reflecting the nature of individuals.²⁶⁸ The same applies to racial categories, which are thus also a function of place and time, instead of being rooted in biology (i.e., fixed) and being

²⁶⁰ Franceschini, 63.

²⁶¹ Bailey, “Multilingual forms of talk and identity work,” 344.

²⁶² Bailey, 344.

²⁶³ Bailey, 344.

²⁶⁴ Bailey, 344.

²⁶⁵ Bailey, 344.

²⁶⁶ Bailey, 344.

²⁶⁷ Bailey, 344.

²⁶⁸ Bailey, 344.

characteristic of an individual or a group, which means that from an analytical point of view, social identity indicates what one is *judged as* at a particular moment and place rather than what one really *is*.²⁶⁹

Social identities are constituted through two different subjective processes called “self-ascription” and “ascription by other.”²⁷⁰ The first one points to the way an individual defines him-/herself while the latter refers to the way an individual is defined by others.²⁷¹ In many different academic fields, these processes (sometimes called in different ways) are at the heart of the definition of the term (social) identity.²⁷²

To ascribe an identity to other individuals (often of the same group), human beings often refer to empirical characteristics of them, but it should be noted that the entirety of the objective differences and similitudes between individuals (or groups) do not make up the membership categories.²⁷³ In addition, groups can take little features either to differentiate themselves from others or to indicate that they are similar, while individuals can be radically different and still be part of the same group.²⁷⁴ However, even though the concept of identity is represented in this approach as being subjective and contingent, it is important to say that only certain parameters allow the construction of an identity.²⁷⁵ As Bailey explains, “[i]ndividuals only ascribe identities to themselves, for example, that are imaginable and available in a particular social and historical context, and they are only ratified in identities (through other-ascription) that social history makes available to them.”²⁷⁶

In the following sections, if I talk about ‘identity’, then I refer to the term as defined by the social constructionist perspective instead of the popular biological or psychological one.

2.4.3. Monolingualism versus Multilingualism

Franceschini points out that a problem with many linguistic theories is the fact that a monolingual speaker who stays forever in his/ her place of birth and lives among a majority of

²⁶⁹ Bailey, 344-345.

²⁷⁰ Frederik Barth, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Frederik Barth (Illinois: Boston: Waveland Press Incorporate, 1989) 13.

²⁷¹ Bailey, “Multilingual forms of talk and identity work,” 345.

²⁷² Bailey, 345.

²⁷³ Bailey, 345.

²⁷⁴ Bailey, 345.

²⁷⁵ Bailey, 345.

²⁷⁶ Bailey, 345.

monolingual speakers is the point of departure.²⁷⁷ However, in reality, nearly fifty percent of the people living on earth speak two or more languages in their daily lives, i.e., multilingualism is quite common among individuals.²⁷⁸ In this sense, people have a lot to do with language contact and code-switching is one of the possible results, next to Creoles, Pidgins and interlanguages.²⁷⁹

As we have seen above, according to the functional perspective of identity work, we use language to position ourselves among others, and multilingual speech (including code-switching) has the same function. In his work, Gumperz talked about the ‘we-’code and the ‘they-’code but according to Mark Sebba and Tony Wootton, it is not possible to know before the conversation which is the ‘we-’code and which the ‘they-’code even though speakers distinguish both codes in their conversation because the function of a code can change from one situation to another and thus has to be analyzed in each and every situation all over again.²⁸⁰ In addition, there can generally be found a notion of group, individual or social identity, either explicitly or implicitly.²⁸¹ While Gumperz talks in this sense of an “association between communicative styles and group identity,”²⁸² Robert B. Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller speak of “acts of identity”²⁸³ when they explain the behavior of a speaker. The latter explain that a speaker shows his/her identity through ‘shifts of identity’ that are involved in the linguistic behavior of an individual and they state that individuals who identify themselves (or not) with a certain group at one moment construct like this the different social groups.²⁸⁴ When a speaker shifts his identity during a conversation, then this means that he/she wants to show that he or she is part (or not) of a particular group with which the speaker associates a specific kind of linguistic behavior.²⁸⁵ For Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, the act of identifying oneself with a particular group is done either linguistically (selection of grammar, lexis, etc.) or by

²⁷⁷ Franceschini, “Code-switching and the notion of code in linguistics,” 52.

²⁷⁸ Franceschini, 52.

²⁷⁹ Franceschini, 63.

²⁸⁰ Sebba and Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” 275.

²⁸¹ Sebba and Wootton, 275.

²⁸² Sebba and Wootton, 276.

²⁸³ Robert B. Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity: Creole-based approaches to language and ethnicity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14.

²⁸⁴ Sebba and Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” 275.

²⁸⁵ Sebba and Wootton, 275.

language choice and their work was focused on multilingual speakers, but monolinguals are also able to carry out ‘acts of identity’ by talking, they just use other resources.²⁸⁶

Charles Antaki, Susan Condor and Mark Levine define social identity as a “flexible resource in conversational interaction,”²⁸⁷ which means that at a given moment, one single identity is assumed or attributed to a certain speaker, but during a dynamic interaction, various identities will be activated.²⁸⁸ Examples of their study of monolingual speech in English show that monolinguals use different social identities in their talk and that multilinguals do the same thing; the only difference is that they have access to more resources (linguistic and extralinguistic ones) when they create those identities.²⁸⁹

2.4.4. Code-switching and identity

In the following lines I will discuss an example of monolingual interaction (a conversation between Korean American adolescents), in which identity negotiations play an important role and some principles of the relation between language use and identities are shown, which can either be found in monolingual or multilingual situations.²⁹⁰ Among these principles, one can find the constitution of identities through talk, the interactionality of identity work, the importance of the indexical aspect of linguistic forms for the constitution of an identity, and the fact that constituted identities are shifting, multiple, contingent, and partial.²⁹¹

In this conversation, one young Korean American uses a phrase (‘keep it real’) and a specific grammatical structure (the zero-copula structure) that are often linked with African American identities to speak and characterize the group of White Americans, however, this does not mean that the speaker is claiming to be African American, but he is trying to show that he shares views about White Americans with African Americans.²⁹² The speaker uses these forms usually linked to African American English thus in a non-referential indexical way, which means that these usages are context-specific since the forms he uses can have many

²⁸⁶ Sebba and Wootton, 275-276.

²⁸⁷ Charles Antaki, Susan Condor, and Mark Levine, “Social identities in talk: Speakers’ own orientations,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no. 4 (1996): 473, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1996.tb01109.x>.

²⁸⁸ Sebba and Wootton, “We, they and Identity: Sequential versus identity-related explanation in code-switching,” 277.

²⁸⁹ Sebba and Wootton, 277.

²⁹⁰ Bailey, “Multilingual forms of talk and identity work,” 346.

²⁹¹ Bailey, 346.

²⁹² Bailey, 347.

different connotations (e.g., they can be used to make fun of African Americans).²⁹³ At another point in the conversation, another speaker refers to a White American as a ‘whitey’, a contemptuous word that is sometimes used by African Americans to refer to their White co-habitants as well as to their higher social position in society.²⁹⁴ By using these terms, the speakers show that they share some of the African American’s experiences since they are both non-Whites in a society that is organized according to race.²⁹⁵ Yet not only the opposition between White and Black identities is made clear in this interaction, but also indications of age and gender: the interlocuters use African American youth language, which is adopted much more by teenagers or young adults than by older adults, and is used mainly by male speakers (to show masculinity).²⁹⁶ It can thus be concluded that various social categories play a role when we claim a certain identity, including age, ethnicity, race, class, and gender and that the understanding of an indexical meaning depends very much on the context and form, but also on the subject position of the interpreter.²⁹⁷

As described in the previous section, code-switching can have different functions and local meanings that have been highlighted in research on the phenomenon and that can be grouped into three main categories: situational switching, discourse contextualization switching and metaphorical switching.²⁹⁸ As Bailey explains, many cases of code-switching can be classified into more than one of these categories and they “should not be understood as representing discrete or manifest types.”²⁹⁹ Situational switching consists in switching the code when there is a change (or various changes) in the situation (e.g., the language is changed when a monolingual individual joins the conversation) while in discourse contextualization switching, there are not necessarily changes in the situation that provoke a change in the code, but speakers use the switch as a contextualization cue to indicate different things, including quotations, repair sequences or subject changes.³⁰⁰ While multilinguals can use code-switching to indicate this,

²⁹³ Bailey, 347.

²⁹⁴ Bailey, 347.

²⁹⁵ Bailey, 347.

²⁹⁶ Bailey, 347.

²⁹⁷ Bailey, 348.

²⁹⁸ Bailey, 348.

²⁹⁹ Bailey, 348.

³⁰⁰ Bailey, 349.

monolinguals generally use prosody, visual cues, and words.³⁰¹ In these cases, code-switching, as a linguistic resource to indicate a change (like body language or prosody), has for the speakers no other metaphorical meaning “related to identities than the corresponding monolingual change of footing would have.”³⁰² Situational code-switching and discourse contextualization switching do not necessarily have locally significant consequences for the identity since they can also simply be used to speak adequately to other people.³⁰³ Metaphorical switching, in contrast, is said to “partially violate conventionalized associations between codes and context, activity, or participants.”³⁰⁴ If a speaker switches into a particular code, then he/she might want to activate or make present a certain element of the situation, a participant, a perspective, or an activity that is conventionally linked with that code but not already available in this conversation.³⁰⁵ These code switches can thus offer a different cultural framework for the interpretation of experiences and the construction of social reality.³⁰⁶ Metaphorical switches can produce meanings about perspectives, identities as well as sociocultural frameworks for the understanding of the world that would be produced differently if the speech continued in one language only.³⁰⁷

Code-switching is also often used to indicate a quotation and many researchers found out that the code of the quotation is not necessarily the same as that used by the original speaker.³⁰⁸ Even though Gumperz speaks of ‘we-code’ and ‘they-code’, “situated language reveals no such stable dichotomy, as social meanings and identity associations of particular forms are constituted in specific local contexts.”³⁰⁹

The following quote by Bailey explains how we should consider the constitution of social identities:

[they] are constituted through meaningful opposition to other identities, so it is through the highlighting of boundaries - through naming and disparaging of an Other or exaggerating of

³⁰¹ Bailey, 349.

³⁰² Bailey, 349.

³⁰³ Bailey, 349.

³⁰⁴ Bailey, 350.

³⁰⁵ Bailey, 350.

³⁰⁶ Bailey, 350.

³⁰⁷ Bailey, 350.

³⁰⁸ Bailey, 354.

³⁰⁹ Bailey, 355.

linguistic features seen as emblematic of other identities - that one's own identities and associated ways of speaking are constituted as distinct and discrete.³¹⁰

These boundaries can also be highlighted through code-switching, a phenomenon that mainly bilingual, but not only, speakers use in their talk to differentiate themselves from others.

2.4.5. Multilingualism and society

According to Bailey, Western ideologies reinforce the theory that there must be a link between language and identity because in these ideologies, language, nation, and race are considered to form one unity, even though this is not always the case.³¹¹ An example to illustrate this is the fact that Western countries have a tendency to see “*being ethnically French, speaking French and inhabiting a French nation-state* as more or less the same thing,”³¹² but persons who do not fit in all three of these categories do not count as being ‘just French’.³¹³ These Western ideologies were especially used by European countries in the last centuries during the nation-building projects in which the essentialization and naturalization of the association between nation, language, and identity played a crucial role.³¹⁴ As stated before, this monolingual ideology is the point of departure in many of the academic and popular research on multilingualism. The fact that there are so many books and papers on multilingualism in general and special phenomena of it (e.g., code-switching) show that linguists paid a lot of attention to the functions and meanings of multilingual phenomena, while the corresponding monolingual speech has received relatively little attention.³¹⁵ This is evidence of the fact that the monolingual ideology is still at the heart of many linguistic theories since multilingualism is still regarded as something unnatural that needs to be explained.³¹⁶

Dominant groups of Western societies generally consider the different languages of multilingual environments as being distinct, but this is not necessarily the case for multilingual speakers who live in these contexts and sometimes treat the languages as being similar or not being so different.³¹⁷ More and more scientists since the 1980s have published works in which

³¹⁰ Bailey, 355.

³¹¹ Bailey, 355.

³¹² Bailey, 356.

³¹³ Bailey, 356.

³¹⁴ Bailey, 356.

³¹⁵ Bailey, 358.

³¹⁶ Bailey, 356.

³¹⁷ Bailey, 358.

they question the theory that in code-switching, the used languages are distinct and that there are always social meanings conveyed through this process that would not be transmitted in monolingual speech.³¹⁸ However, there is one type of code-switching, the intrasentential one, that can be used to prove these assumed distinctions between the languages used in code-switching, and it has been attested in many Western societies and African contexts among children whose parents were international labor migrants.³¹⁹

Bailey explains that there are two main options in the function of code-switching: on the one hand, it can reinforce the assumption that the used languages are different and that there is a unity between a language and an identity when it has the function of a discourse mode,³²⁰ and, on the other hand, when a language is not categorized and strictly linked with a particular domain, then looking for the function of a certain alternation would be the same as trying to find the reason why a monolingual speaker uses one word instead of another with the same meaning.³²¹

In some local environments, multilingual speakers do not distinguish anymore between two or more languages, but it should be noted that in most nation-states of the West, monolingualism is seen to be the norm implying that multilingualism is always seen as significant and in need of explanation (whereas monolingual talk does not need any).³²² The analytical perspective and the subject position of the individual play an important role in the interpretation of the meaning of code-switching.³²³ In the beginning, code-switching was regarded as a phenomenon of people who were not able to speak properly in one language but since the 1970s, there has been a change in mindset since academics have started to celebrate “the linguistic sophistication displayed in code switching and this social ‘strategies’ that some forms of it imply.”³²⁴

Some linguistic studies and research on multilingualism have not taken into account the political and social history of the phenomenon, which in reality plays an important role in the understanding of it: the political and social circumstances (e.g., migration or social classes) enable not only the co-existence of various languages at the same time, but also the inequality

³¹⁸ Bailey, 358.

³¹⁹ Bailey, 358.

³²⁰ Bailey, 358.

³²¹ Bailey, 358.

³²² Bailey, 359.

³²³ Bailey, 359.

³²⁴ Bailey, 359.

and establishment of differences between social groups.³²⁵ Immigrants that came to Western countries brought (and still do so) with them their language, which resulted then in the existence of multilingual environments in these countries in which the immigrants are generally at the lower end of the social hierarchy.³²⁶ In addition, the dominant group often devalues the immigrants' culture, language, phenotypes, and religion, which means that if the latter want to express their identity, they must first and foremost demonstrate that it is worthy.³²⁷ To conclude, we can say that "identity categories and language choice and attitudes are inseparable from power hierarchies and related ideologies about the relative value of identity categories and ways of speaking."³²⁸

We can ask ourselves the question why multilingualism and the negotiations of identity play a more and more important role in Western urban centers and the answer is simple: during the last century, goods, peoples, and ideas have started to circulate faster and faster.³²⁹ Dominant groups in more or less stable linguistic and social environments of monolingualism favor some linguistic and social categories over others, which is seen to be normal due to processes of domination and hegemony.³³⁰ At the same time, the speakers themselves often do not know that their way of speaking is such an indication of identity.³³¹ Their identity is considered to be an essential and natural one (instead of being the result of a social negotiation) when the speaker is part of an ethnic group and uses the variety generally linked with that particular ethnic group.³³² In more changing social environments, however, the characteristic identity work does not reinforce the assumption that there is a unity between nation, language, and identity.³³³

Another criticism voiced by Bailey is the fact that many definitions of multilingualism do not take into account the whole collection of meanings, functions and practices that can be part of it, but should be since multilingual speech can vary much in its occurrence, distribution, form

³²⁵ Bailey, 359.

³²⁶ Bailey, 359.

³²⁷ Bailey, 360.

³²⁸ Bailey, 360.

³²⁹ Bailey, 360.

³³⁰ Bailey, 360.

³³¹ Bailey, 360.

³³² Bailey, 360.

³³³ Bailey, 360.

or meaning, depending on the community, situation and interaction.³³⁴ This variation follows particular patterns that are related to power relations and the establishment of social differences and we can thus say that the functions and meanings of multilingual speech at the local level can be associated with greater sociohistorical questions.³³⁵

In this sense, another linguist argues that larger historical and political economic situations can also be linked with some code-switching practices and ideologies, which implies that similarities in the meanings and practices of code-switching can be found within groups that occupy a relatively similar position in the social hierarchy of the world system (e.g., children of labor migrants in industrialized countries of the West).³³⁶ Bailey explains that in fact, “the implications of multilingual talk for identity negotiations are thus a function of the history that gives rise to constellations of differently valued identity options and infuses ways of speaking with social meanings and perspectives.”³³⁷

An example of the fact that politics and history are important for the social meaning of a language is the importance and endurance of the distinction between African American English and other kinds of American English in the United States because even though speakers from both varieties have been in close contact for centuries now, the distinctions still continue to exist.³³⁸ In the United States, (historical) social relations (e.g., slavery, segregation, economic and social inequality) are unjust as well as coercive, which leads to the fact that both varieties are seen as being distinctive and make African American English an important social marker.³³⁹ When we take the case of inequality, including discrimination (such as the case of Black people in the US), then the fact of speaking differently will be an indication of social identity, but, in contrast, in cases where there is (more or less) equality, the assimilation between the manner of speaking and the identity will take place rapidly (such as children of European immigrants in the US).³⁴⁰

Many academics have put forward the idea that identity categories (e.g., ethnicity and race) should be analyzed as being socially constructed, but with multilingualism, the same thing

³³⁴ Bailey, 360.

³³⁵ Bailey, 360.

³³⁶ Bailey, 361.

³³⁷ Bailey, 361.

³³⁸ Bailey, 361.

³³⁹ Bailey, 361-362.

³⁴⁰ Bailey, 361.

failed to happen.³⁴¹ In the following section, I will analyze multilingualism as a social construction.

One could now say that taking multilingualism and explaining that it is in fact a social construction could lead to the minimization of its social implications. To resist this assumption, I will take Bailey's example of a social identity category: "the fact that Black-White race in the United States is a social construction, for example, does not make race an illusion or socially insignificant."³⁴² In the United States, race constitutes a principle to organize society as well as to establish and rationalize the social inequality in the country, but if we take race now as a social construction, then we see that in fact, it is about social history and not about differences in the biology of individuals, as the phenomenon has been explained generally.³⁴³ What is important about the concept of race for society are not the different skin colors, hair types, etc. but the history that goes with it, a history of inequality and coercion.³⁴⁴ The social constructionist perspective focuses on the political and historical contexts that played a role in the constitution of race and its importance in the US.³⁴⁵

The same happens if we consider multilingualism (and monolingualism) to be a social construct: their social power in terms of lived experience does not change, but it is shown that social power is "not a function of formal, or inherent linguistic differences among what count as languages."³⁴⁶ Certain political and social histories led to the fact that multilingual speech is said to be a mode of speaking with a specific meaning, not the nature of the linguistic forms and the society can thus be understood by taking a closer look at the identity work in multilingual speech because of the political and social character of languages.³⁴⁷ Thus, if we analyze identity negotiations in multilingual speech, then what is important to see are not the differences between linguistic forms, but the political and social processes and meanings that are implied in this talk.³⁴⁸

³⁴¹ Bailey, 362.

³⁴² Bailey, 362.

³⁴³ Bailey, 362.

³⁴⁴ Bailey, 362.

³⁴⁵ Bailey, 362.

³⁴⁶ Bailey, 362.

³⁴⁷ Bailey, 363.

³⁴⁸ Bailey, 363.

3. CODE-SWITCHING AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENON

In this section, I will analyze in depth the phenomenon of code-switching as a sociocultural concept to show that the context in which it occurs plays a major role. This means that the focus will be put onto the cultural-based code-switching, instead of the language-based one. As already explained, there are many linguistic reasons why people tend to code-switch, including African Americans living in the United States and switching between African American English and Standard English. Now, I will further examine the factors outside the linguistic field that have an impact on African American people and that cause them to switch in certain contexts.

However, in order to do this, I will first of all explain the current context of discrimination in the United States because it has a major impact on African Americans' experience since they have to deal with discrimination, in different forms, nearly every day. Racial discrimination can be found in nearly all levels of general society, but I will focus here on the discrimination that can be found in schools, the workplace, and healthcare and what impact this has on the mental and physical health of African Americans in the United States. It is important to understand which effects this discrimination has on African American children and adults because it is a significant factor in the choice to code-switch or not. The discrimination encountered in the school environment has an impact on the development of the children and their later behavior at work and in society as a whole. They will try to adapt themselves to the society, largely white, in order to avoid being discriminated against. One way to adapt to the majorly white society is to code-switch, as we will see in the following sections.

After having explained the general context of discrimination in which African Americans live in the United States, I will discuss the issue of attitudes towards African American English. I will start with a general introduction and then I will discuss in detail two studies carried out in order to show what people, white and black, think about African American English and how the use of it has an influence on the general perception by other people. The general perception of the language variety they speak, just like the discrimination they encounter, has an influence on African American's choice to whether they use it in certain situations or not, as will show this section.

In the last part of this dissertation, I will then explain that code-switching is in fact more than just switching between two languages and includes switching one's style dress, hair style and behavior in general. To illustrate this, I will show that African Americans use it to adapt to the white society and I will give various examples that will demonstrate it. In a last paragraph, I will shortly refer to all the things that can be done in order to improve their situation.

3.1 Definition and examples of racial discrimination

In the first article of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* from the United Nations, the term racial discrimination is defined as follows:

Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.³⁴⁹

The United States of America (US) is also a member of the United Nations, whose objectives include combating racial discrimination as we can see above, but the traditional social and political systems in the US led and still lead to the marginalization of African American people, among others.³⁵⁰ The limited access to economic resources, social capital and/or political power can thereby be the result of racial discrimination, as defined by the quote above.³⁵¹ In the following pages, I will demonstrate this fact and give several examples of racial discrimination against African Americans in the United States.

3.1.1. School

First of all, I will look at racial discrimination in the school environment, which thus concerns, first and foremost, children and adolescents. Before we take a closer look at the matter of discrimination, it should be noted that “adolescence is marked by identity exploration, where young people consider who they are in relation to the world around them.”³⁵² During this exploration, the personal identity as well as the beliefs of the youngsters are refined, which will have an influence on their decision making and ways of acting in the future.³⁵³ In the formation of their identity, various parameters play an important role, including their family, culture, school, friends, and general history.³⁵⁴ Culture and history are important since the political, economic, and social circumstances they encompass have an influence not only on the social

³⁴⁹ “Racial discrimination,” European Commission, accessed on April 12, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/racial-discrimination_en.

³⁵⁰ Elan C. Hope, Alexandra B. Skoog, and Robert J. Jagers, “‘It’ll Never Be the White Kids, It’ll Always Be Us’: Black High School Students’ Evolving Critical Analysis of Racial Discrimination and Inequity in School,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 30, no.1 (2015), 84.

³⁵¹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, “‘It’ll Never Be the White Kids, It’ll Always Be Us’: Black High School Students’ Evolving Critical Analysis of Racial Discrimination and Inequity in School,” 84.

³⁵² Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵³ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵⁴ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

and educational development of the adolescent, but also the emotional.³⁵⁵ In addition, the critical perspective of young people will develop during this time as their political and social identities are expanded and refined.³⁵⁶ This is especially important for African Americans living in the US since the country has a “complex history of social, economic, cultural, and political marginalization of Blacks.”³⁵⁷ At this point, it is possible that adolescents do not yet completely understand the institutional and historical contexts of the socio-political embedding of racism.³⁵⁸

Research during the last years shows that young people of color experience racial discrimination in schools as well as other public settings due to the many negative stereotypes in which African Americans are said to be a threat to the society.³⁵⁹ To experience discrimination at school is especially difficult to deal with since children spend a lot of time there.³⁶⁰ Racial discrimination in school includes unjustified or abusive psychological, physical, and verbal treatment by their fellow students while teachers have already been accused to give Black adolescents lower grades and treat them with harsher disciplinary measures than their White fellows.³⁶¹ It is clear that these experiences have a pernicious effect on these youngsters, as for example the deterioration of their academic performances (often when they are discriminated by their teachers) or psychological adjustment problems (often when their peers discriminated them).³⁶² As Elan C. Hope, Alexandra B. Skoog and Robert J. Jagers indicate in their paper, previous research has shown that the interaction between students and teachers is very important in the establishment of social competence and performance and teachers play a very important role in one’s familiarization with race issues in the school environment because in these interactions between teachers and students, the latter learn what it means to be a student with African American descent.³⁶³

The school climate consists of many different dimensions and aspects, including the “individual perceptions of the academic and social culture of the school, as well as structural

³⁵⁵ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵⁶ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵⁷ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵⁸ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 84.

³⁵⁹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 85.

³⁶⁰ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 85.

³⁶¹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 85.

³⁶² Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 85.

³⁶³ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 94.

and organizational elements of classrooms, schools, and school districts.”³⁶⁴ An important aspect that normally runs through all these dimensions is the recognition of diversity and individual differences that are based on social identity markers (e.g., gender, race, or culture).³⁶⁵ In this case, we speak of identity as defined in biological terms. When adolescents are now discriminated against, then they get the feeling that they do not have the same value as others because they have a different skin color, not only in the school community, but also in society at large.³⁶⁶ In order to study discrimination in the school context, researchers have developed the concept of the ‘school racial climate’ in which the perceived values and norms of racial diversity and race in a school environment are taken into account.³⁶⁷ This concept can be divided into four dimensions: 1) interracial interactions (i.e., the quality and extent of interactions between people of different ethnic groups), 2) stereotypes (and/or attitudes or beliefs) circulating about a specific ethnic group, 3) equitable treatment versus discrimination against a particular racial group, 4) institutional assistance for a positive racial climate versus the de-emphasis of ethnic differences.³⁶⁸

A study carried out by Hope, Skoog, and Jagers focused on the perspective and experiences of African American adolescents on the social conditions that can be found in their schools, especially on situations of discrimination and racial inequality.³⁶⁹ Eight high school students, six men and two women, who identified themselves as Black and were between the age of 14 and 17 (i.e., from 9th grade to 12th grade) participated in this study.³⁷⁰ They were students at public schools and also participants of the YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) program.³⁷¹ The results of this study are discussed in the following paragraph:

First of all, the students commented on three out of four dimensions of the school racial climate as explained above, namely equitable treatment, stereotypes and the institutional assistance for a positive racial climate.³⁷² They expressed the wish that in society in general,

³⁶⁴ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 86.

³⁶⁵ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 86.

³⁶⁶ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 86.

³⁶⁷ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 86.

³⁶⁸ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 86.

³⁶⁹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 88.

³⁷⁰ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 89.

³⁷¹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 89.

³⁷² Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 103.

there should be an equitable approach to race, and they considered discrimination to be ‘immature’ and a painful experience.³⁷³ Secondly, each student reported situations of discrimination they experienced in the school or work context and the negative impact of stereotypes based on race, as well as current and future experiences of discrimination in their academic careers were taken into consideration by the students.³⁷⁴ In terms of unfair treatment in the classroom, the students, in contrast to their white peers, indicated that the teachers held obvious stereotypes about African American students (irrespective of the teacher’s race).³⁷⁵ The most common situation in which these students felt discriminated against was when they were treated as the originator of a problem in the area of classroom management, while their White classmates were seldom treated in this way.³⁷⁶ This could be because it has been shown that teachers are more likely to have a negative opinion of the classroom behavior of members of an ethnic minority group than the one of White students.³⁷⁷ These observations are in line with research indicating that Black students are much more likely to receive harsher disciplinary measures than White students even when they committed the same violation.³⁷⁸ Students even voiced the statement that at some moments, their academic ability was doubted (explicitly and implicitly).³⁷⁹ Thirdly, the participants detected in the history and social studies curriculum an inadequate treatment of the concepts of class, race, and culture.³⁸⁰ This led to the fact that the class did not treat certain subjects in detail or not at all, which is a sign that the school does not really commit itself to diversity and does not necessarily want to improve the present racial school climate.³⁸¹ There is often a lack of institutional assistance in fighting racial discrimination that could come in the form of the inclusion of certain subjects in the curriculum, institutional norms, or school-based programs, among others.³⁸² However, the students told the researchers that their parents are trying to make them familiar with race issues in order to

³⁷³ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 103.

³⁷⁴ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 103.

³⁷⁵ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁷⁶ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 94.

³⁷⁷ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 94.

³⁷⁸ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁷⁹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸⁰ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸¹ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸² Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 97.

strengthen their ability to cope with these problems, focusing on self-esteem and surpassing the racial barriers in their lives.³⁸³

To conclude, we can say that African American students are aware of the inequalities they experience based on their racial background, but it might be difficult for them to produce the change in the institutions that would lead to a better school environment.³⁸⁴ In order to achieve the goal of fighting racial oppression and discrimination in schools, people have to understand the experiences of Black students, and everyone has to get involved.³⁸⁵

3.1.2. Workplace

A similar situation of racial discrimination and oppression can be found in the workplace in the United States, as discrimination is common even though it is illegal.³⁸⁶ This discrimination can be based on the racial background, sex, or retaliation.³⁸⁷ In this section, I am interested in the racial discrimination that consists of harassment, underestimation, the refusal of access to job possibilities or other unjustified treatments. Before I will explain the racial discrimination, it should be noted that the term ‘race’, just like ‘multilingualism’, is a social construction, because, in reality, there are no genetic and/or biological differences between races.³⁸⁸

A large-scale online study of the *Gallup Center on Black Voices* carried out in November 2020 showed that one out of four Black (as well as Hispanic) workers (24%) living in the US have stated to have experienced discrimination in their workplace during the past year.³⁸⁹ More than 8,000 people participated in this study; almost half of them were White employees, a quarter were Black employees, and another quarter were Hispanic ones.³⁹⁰ The percentage of racial discrimination against African Americans (and Hispanics) was much higher than that one of White employees (15%) while there is no mayor difference between the percentage of racial

³⁸³ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸⁴ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸⁵ Hope, Skoog, and Jagers, 104.

³⁸⁶ Lilly Fernandes and Nora Hadi Q Alsaheed, “African Americans and workplace discrimination,” *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 2, no. 2 (2014): 57, <https://www.eajournals.org/journals/european-journal-of-english-language-and-literature-studies-ejells/vol-2issue-2june-2014/african-americans-workplace-discrimination/>.

³⁸⁷ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaheed, “African Americans and workplace discrimination,” 57.

³⁸⁸ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaheed, “African Americans and workplace discrimination,” 57.

³⁸⁹ Camille Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work,” Gallup, January 12, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/328394/one-four-black-workers-report-discrimination-work.aspx>.

³⁹⁰ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

discrimination against African American men (27%) and women (23%), and even less difference between workers with higher and lower income.³⁹¹ An important factor, in contrast, is the age of the workers: while 31% of African American workers under the age of 40 reported having been discriminated against in the workplace, ‘only’ 17% of the workers older than 40 reported the same experience (the study shows that only young Hispanic workers reported such similar high percentages of discrimination at work).³⁹² 75% of the African American employees that already experienced discrimination stated that the discrimination was based on their racial or ethnic background (while only 61% of the Hispanic and 42% of the White employees stated the same).³⁹³ This percentage is independent from age, gender, and income level.³⁹⁴

This study shows thus that no other ethnic or racial group is as mistreated in the workplace in the United States as African Americans (a quarter), even though ethnic discrimination is illegal in the workplace (according to federal law).³⁹⁵ Previous research from *Gallup* shows that employees are much more likely to engage themselves more in their work when they have the feeling that their employers would react in a positive way if there were discrimination concerns.³⁹⁶ The managers also play an important role since employees feel less likely to be discriminated against when they create an environment of respect and engagement.³⁹⁷ It is even more tragic to see that especially young African Americans suffer from discrimination in their workplace since these negative experiences may have an influence on their future careers and their opinions about work in general, in addition to an impact on their opportunities to stand out and feel respected in a team.³⁹⁸

As the study shows, African Americans have to face several problems in their workplace that are based on negative opinions of race as well as organizational policies. During the last century, many laws have been changed in the US to fight racist treatments, but “the basic trait of human interactions has not changed in many parts of America, and it has been prominently

³⁹¹ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹² Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹³ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹⁴ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹⁵ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹⁶ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹⁷ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

³⁹⁸ Lloyd, “One in Four Black Workers Report Discrimination at Work.”

reflected in the American lifestyle since its origin in the 17th century.”³⁹⁹ In the federal sector, prejudices (conscious or unconscious) against Black Americans are still important in the process of decision making, which means that racism is still a problem and must be combated.⁴⁰⁰ Various civil rights acts were established to assure African Americans in the US their voting right, employment, and accommodation.⁴⁰¹ A specific civil right act led to the introduction of the Affirmative action movement, the aim of which is to fight discrimination against Black Americans in institutions and to promote equality in the school system as well as economic justice for African Americans.⁴⁰²

It should be noted that African Americans experience racial discrimination not only in their workplace, but also already during the hiring process. Some companies hire Black Americans only for low job positions with low wages, regardless of their qualification or experiences in other workplaces in possibly higher positions.⁴⁰³ Barry Bluestone and Michael Piore developed the ‘dual labor market theory’ in order to explain the problem of urban poverty and underemployment in the US. According to them, there are two categories in the economy: on the one hand, there are primary kinds of jobs, and, on the other hand, there exist secondary ones.⁴⁰⁴ The first ones are high paying jobs characterized by good working conditions, relative high advancement opportunities, and relative stability, while the latter are the lower jobs (often undesirable) that are characterized by a low income, worse working conditions, relatively few advancement possibilities, and more instability.⁴⁰⁵ This theory then proposes that African Americans often begin to work in the secondary labor market, which means that it is more difficult for them to climb the social ladder.⁴⁰⁶ As Lilly Fernandes and Nora Hadi Q Alsaeed explain, “[t]he job status of African Americans and White workers differ a lot, mainly, due to discrimination in hiring and promotion.”⁴⁰⁷

³⁹⁹ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, “African Americans and workplace discrimination,” 57.

⁴⁰⁰ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 57.

⁴⁰¹ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 57.

⁴⁰² Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 57.

⁴⁰³ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

⁴⁰⁴ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

⁴⁰⁵ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

⁴⁰⁶ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

⁴⁰⁷ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

We can now ask ourselves why, apart from the negative stereotypes and images associated with African American workers, Black people do not get a job. In the labor market nowadays, the so-called soft skills (opposed to hard skills) play an important role in the hiring process and in the workplace in general and there is the widespread belief that African American men, compared to their White fellows, have fewer of these soft skills that include, for example, motivational or interactional skills.⁴⁰⁸ African American women, by contrast, are believed to be not as aggressive as their male counterparts and also easier to collaborate with.⁴⁰⁹ However, both men and women of African descent have to deal with racial prejudices, the denial of work competence from other workers or clients, and also with the “exclusion from informal social networks.”⁴¹⁰

As already said, a main problem of African American employees is the fact that they often work in minority positions, while only few work in high positions (such as managerial posts).⁴¹¹ Many men and women from African descent who work at the senior level of administration have the feeling that, in reality, they have a better qualification for the job but cannot really count on organizational support, and that they have fewer possibilities and fewer communication channels.⁴¹² In addition to lower wages and inequalities in the hiring process, African American employees have reported to be less likely to get benefits and possibilities for advancement as well as having been treated differently in interactions and having felt uncomfortable.⁴¹³

There can be several sources of racial discrimination against African Americans in the workplace; I will here explain three, namely individual, organizational, and structural sources.⁴¹⁴ The first one is when an individual has prejudices or negative perceptions of Black American people, believing them to be immoral, lazy, unwilling to work and not as smart as White workers, among others.⁴¹⁵ The second one encompasses institutional racism, which is different from individual one since it is subtler and less visible, which means that African

⁴⁰⁸ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 63.

⁴⁰⁹ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 62.

⁴¹⁰ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 63.

⁴¹¹ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 64.

⁴¹² Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 64.

⁴¹³ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 64.

⁴¹⁴ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 66.

⁴¹⁵ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 66.

Americans are discriminated against in public institutions, companies, their workplace (as already explained above), etc.⁴¹⁶ The third source plays an important role, especially in the United States. African American people make up a high percentage of the poor in the US and factors such as the discrimination found in the educational system, employment processes and house allocations makes it difficult for them to save more money.⁴¹⁷ The structural source of discrimination has its origins in the history of the country in which White men were glorified, including their masculinity and conquests, and in colonial times then, they dominated nearly every aspect of public life, including the educational system, politics, and the economy, while Africans were held as slaves and suffered a lot of oppression.⁴¹⁸ As the ‘Critical Race Theory’ explains, “racism and race is [*sic*] endemic to American social order as they serve to normalize the White power in the US, while subordinating the Blacks.”⁴¹⁹

3.1.3. Health(care)

In this section, I will first develop the racial discrimination that African American people experience in the healthcare system and afterwards, I will explain how this discrimination has a negative impact on health in general.

As the members of the rest of US society, people who are part of the healthcare system (e.g., nurses, doctors, etc.) also might have negative images and prejudices about African American people, which leads to an unequal access to healthcare and a different quality of care provided.⁴²⁰ In general, “Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)”⁴²¹ have, in the history of the United States, experienced a consistent marginalization within the healthcare system caused by racial discrimination, unequal treatment, and other difficulties to access it.⁴²² In comparison to White Americans, African Americans suffer much more from diseases that are the prime causes of death, such as strokes, kidney and heart diseases, and hypertension, and the on-going COVID-19 crisis has also shown the marginalization of BIPOC communities because

⁴¹⁶ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 66.

⁴¹⁷ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 66.

⁴¹⁸ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 66.

⁴¹⁹ Fernandes and Hadi Q Alsaeed, 67.

⁴²⁰ Diana-Lyn Baptiste et al., “Racial discrimination in health care: An “us” problem,” *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 29, no. 23-24 (2020): 4415, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15449>.

⁴²¹ Baptiste et al., “Racial discrimination in health care: An ‘us’ problem,” 4415.

⁴²² Baptiste et al., 4415.

here again, they have been more affected than Whites, including a higher mortality rate.⁴²³ In their article, Diana-Lyn Baptiste et al. point out the case of the “high maternal mortality rates among Black women”⁴²⁴ as one of the best examples of racial discrimination (being of systemic and structural nature) in the healthcare system of the United States since Black women are at three to four times higher risk of dying in childbirth than White women.⁴²⁵ While some studies tried to show that social determinants (e.g., education, poverty, and geographical place) are the risk factors for death in childbirth, other studies have demonstrated that in fact, the greatest influence on a mother’s survival or non-survival is racial discrimination, which means that especially the blatant disrespect and mistreatment of Black women during the childbirth play an important role in high mortality rates.⁴²⁶ However, not only Black women, but also Black men are discriminated against when their child is born because on many occasions, healthcare providers refer to these fathers using the term ‘baby daddies’, a “derogatory term [...] to describe a disengaged male recklessly impregnating multiple women [,]”⁴²⁷ while white fathers, on the contrary, are referred to as ‘husband’ or ‘partner’ and also directly considered to be responsible.⁴²⁸ Another study showed that the skin color of the father also played a role in the treatment of their women since White women with an African American partner experience more often mistreatment than White women with a White husband.⁴²⁹ This blatant denigration of African American fathers has negative consequences, impacting the care of mother and child as well.⁴³⁰ Moreover, chronic stress, which comes from the constant discrimination (on the basis of race and/or gender) and trauma Black mothers have to face during their whole life, is the main cause of poor health outcomes among them.⁴³¹ Other factors that have an impact on the poor maternal outcomes are risk factors before conception, including hypertension, smoking, alcohol consume, diabetes, obesity, etc.⁴³² Another factor are the financial barriers that African

⁴²³ Baptiste et al., 4415.

⁴²⁴ Baptiste et al., 4415.

⁴²⁵ Baptiste et al., 4415.

⁴²⁶ Baptiste et al., 4415-4416.

⁴²⁷ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴²⁸ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴²⁹ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³⁰ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³¹ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³² Baptiste et al., 4416.

American women have to deal with much more compared to White women, and they are often uninsured and unable to attend prenatal care.⁴³³ In the case that they do receive care, then it is often low-quality care since they get less involved in the process of decision-making, the communication with the doctors and nurses is often poor and they experience a lot of discrimination during their treatment.⁴³⁴ Baptiste et al. conclude their article with the statement that “the provision of non-discriminatory and equitable care is the responsibility of all nurses.”⁴³⁵

There are several reasons why it is so important to understand and fight against (racial) discrimination in the healthcare system.⁴³⁶ The first reason is the fact that the healthcare system has a legal as well as moral obligation to treat all patients equally, irrespective of their ethnicity, race, gender, etc.⁴³⁷ Secondly, this discrimination can lead to patients turning away from the healthcare system, which has a negative impact on future encounters as well as the patients’ health.⁴³⁸ In the end, it is nearly the only case in which the healthcare system itself can improve the situation of these people because it can do relatively little to fight against discrimination that takes place in general society.⁴³⁹

After having explained the racial discrimination that is going on against African American people in the healthcare system, I will now talk about the impact of it on the health of Black Americans since our health has an influence on our general well-being, which then influences our behavior.

Many studies found that racial discrimination has a negative impact on the physical, but especially on the mental health of the persons who have to face it and it plays an important role in the outbreak of diseases among these people.⁴⁴⁰ A systemic review of 2015 took almost 300 studies and collected their results in order to look at how African American, Asian American,

⁴³³ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³⁴ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³⁵ Baptiste et al., 4416.

⁴³⁶ Leslie R. M. Hausmann et al., “Perceived Racial Discrimination in Health Care and its Association with Patients’ Healthcare Experiences: Does the Measure Matter?,” *Ethnicity & Disease* 20, no. 1 (2010): 40, <https://www.ethndis.org/priorarchives/ethn-20-01-40.pdf>.

⁴³⁷ Hausmann et al., “Perceived Racial Discrimination in Health Care and its Association with Patients’ Healthcare Experiences: Does the Measure Matter?,” 40.

⁴³⁸ Hausmann et al., 40.

⁴³⁹ Hausmann et al., 40.

⁴⁴⁰ Hausmann et al., 40.

and Latino American people's mental and physical health is affected by racial discrimination (or racism).⁴⁴¹

The study found that even though the physical health of adults is less affected by racial discrimination, the stress that goes with it can still have long lasting effects on it since it can lead to the weakening of the immune system and the elevation of blood pressure, which increases the risk of the development of long-term health disorders.⁴⁴² The physical health can also be further compromised by specific behaviors that are often caused by this stress, i.e., that discrimination is often associated with a higher rate of alcohol consumption, unhealthy eating habits, drug use, and smoking.⁴⁴³ This unfair treatment not only has effects on the sleep of the victims, but it also increases the risk of inflammation, which might lead to chronic conditions (e.g., heart or kidney diseases).⁴⁴⁴ The structural racism that I explained above in the healthcare system also has a negative impact on the physical health of African American people since their pain is often not taken seriously and there are some beliefs about their biology that are simply wrong, for example that their skin is thicker than white one.⁴⁴⁵

Mental health, on the other side, is affected twice as often by racial discrimination as physical health, and common mental health problems are stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and emotional distress.⁴⁴⁶ Not only racism itself, but also the fear of it can already affect the (future) victims' health and it can subvert good mental health qualities, e.g., hope, motivation, and resilience.⁴⁴⁷

Not only adults, but also children and adolescents suffer from poorer health conditions due to racial discrimination.⁴⁴⁸ As already said, racism plays an important role in childbirth of African American people, and as studies have shown, mothers who experienced racism during their pregnancy often give birth to babies with a low weight, which might have consequences for the future life of the baby.⁴⁴⁹ As far as mental health is concerned, children suffer from

⁴⁴¹ Joanne Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?," *MedicalNewsToday*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/effects-of-racism>.

⁴⁴² Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴³ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁴ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁵ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁶ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁷ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁸ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

⁴⁴⁹ Lewsley, "What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?"

similar issues as their parents, even if they do not necessarily experience it themselves, but ‘only’ witness it.⁴⁵⁰ The stress that is generated by discrimination might have an influence on the development of the brain, which may lead to an intensification of negative emotions and have an impact on the memory and learning process of a child.⁴⁵¹

3.2 Attitudes towards African American English

As I have already said, African American people experience a lot of racial discrimination in the United States. This is why it might be interesting to look at how African American English, which is very often associated with this minority group, as well as the switching between Standard and African American English is perceived by other speakers and African Americans themselves. This is the reason why in the following section, I will explain the general situation and then discuss two different studies on the perception of African American English. First of all, we are going to look at the status of African American English in the United States, i.e., whether it is regarded to be a legitimate variety or not. As we have already seen, for a long time AAE has been considered to be a symbol of intellectual, verbal, or cultural deprivation, and there are still some people who are part of the lay community who maintain this idea.⁴⁵² For these people, the only legitimate variety of English is ‘educated’ English (i.e., Standard) and it is difficult for them to accept any other variety.⁴⁵³ However, it should be noted that the discussions about the legitimacy of AAE do not really involve the question of whether there is anything wrong with AAE in its essence, because they generally focus on the fact that this variety is just a deviation from the standard variety.⁴⁵⁴ Even for some African Americans themselves, referring to African American English as a legitimate variety can be a cause of embarrassment because it is often associated with the “ stigma of inferiority and the stereotype that African Americans cannot speak (or learn to speak) mainstream English.”⁴⁵⁵ They thus

⁴⁵⁰ Lewsley, “What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?”

⁴⁵¹ Lewsley, “What are the effects of racism on health and mental health?”

⁴⁵² Lisa J. Green, “Approaches, attitudes and education,” in *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*, ed. Lisa J. Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511800306.011.

⁴⁵³ Green, “Approaches, attitudes and education,” 221.

⁴⁵⁴ Green, 221.

⁴⁵⁵ Green, 221.

consider AAE to be a deviation from Standard English, which implies that these speakers are lazy and/or ignorant because they do not use the standard variety in a correct way.⁴⁵⁶

Marcyliena Morgan studied in her work “The African-American speech community: reality and sociolinguistics” in 1994 the reactions of African Americans to AAE to show that these reactions extend beyond race to incorporate class.⁴⁵⁷ Her study, and we will also see this in the two studies I will discuss later, shows that the acceptance and use of AAE is often criticized and opposed by African Americans themselves.⁴⁵⁸

If we come back to our initial question, whether AAE is regarded to be a legitimate variety or not, there are several implications if we do so. First of all, some people suggest that considering it as a unique and different language implies that African Americans are being separated from the rest of US society, which might mean that the point of view that these people are inferior, their language being only one more deficit, is shared.⁴⁵⁹ This group of people regards this variety only as a product of people who are too lazy and too unintelligent to speak mainstream English.⁴⁶⁰ However, other researchers and African Americans claim that it is important to note that African American English does not consist in a series of Standard English words that are mispronounced, but in a unique system with its own rules and standards.⁴⁶¹

As we can see, attitudes towards AAE are very diverse and a complex subject. In the (mis)characterization of this language variety, especially negative attitudes have played an important role, but linguistic descriptions were also an important factor since they often did not describe in detail the patterns and rules used by AAE speakers or the functioning of the system itself, which might have led to doubts about the legitimacy of this variety.⁴⁶² Some descriptions, for example, consisted in simple lists of features, but did not include any explanation of principles that govern their use.⁴⁶³ There thus needs to come even more detailed research on AAE to have a more accurate linguistic description of it, and even if it will be impossible to

⁴⁵⁶ Green, 221.

⁴⁵⁷ Green, 221.

⁴⁵⁸ Green, 221.

⁴⁵⁹ Green, 222.

⁴⁶⁰ Green, 222.

⁴⁶¹ Green, 222.

⁴⁶² Green, 222.

⁴⁶³ Green, 222.

eliminate all negative attitudes and stereotypes by these linguistic descriptions, they might contribute to the acceptance of AAE as a legitimate variety.⁴⁶⁴

Secondly, I will discuss the relationship between AAE and employment. There is the widespread belief that it is necessary to speak Standard English in order to get a job.⁴⁶⁵ In 1987, Oprah Winfrey said in her show that when a job candidate speaks Standard English, then this is an indication that he/she might be able to do the job while speaking in an incorrect way (i.e., speaking AAE, often referred to as slang or not using the correct English grammar) indicates that he/she might not be able to do so.⁴⁶⁶ Many people argue that for AAE speakers, the chance of employment and a better success in one's career should be the reason to master Standard English since this is the language generally used by businesses, while AAE is in these settings not an appropriate language variety.⁴⁶⁷

John Baugh took in his book *Black Street Speech* a middle-of-the-road approach because he states that, on the one hand, not speaking Standard English at work can be regarded as ineffective communication, but, on the other hand, a person who does not speak Standard English is not necessarily less intelligent than other people.⁴⁶⁸ He also says that African American English speakers should learn Standard English just because this will give them an advantage in many jobs.⁴⁶⁹ Even though speaking Standard English does not necessarily open all doors to a job for all African Americans, it already enables them to leave the language barrier behind, a good start thus, because as Nona Starks explains, they will not be rejected by an employer because they do not speak appropriately if they are able to use Standard English.⁴⁷⁰ To conclude, one can say that being able to speak Standard English is not enough, but necessary in order to get or keep a job since bilingual AAE speakers (who master AAE and Standard English) are perceived to have the professional competence to carry out the job.⁴⁷¹

This general overview of attitudes towards African American English shows that people evaluate other people on the basis of the language variety they speak and even though AAE is

⁴⁶⁴ Green, 222.

⁴⁶⁵ Green, 223.

⁴⁶⁶ Green, 223.

⁴⁶⁷ Green, 223.

⁴⁶⁸ Green, 224.

⁴⁶⁹ Green, 225.

⁴⁷⁰ Green, 225.

⁴⁷¹ Green, 225.

governed by rules, many researchers see AAE speakers only as speakers who do not always use Standard English instead of seeing them as using a systematic variety.⁴⁷² In the society of the United States, the language of power is Standard English, which is the reason why the linguistic system of African American English cannot obtain a “validity as a legitimate communicative system.”⁴⁷³ In fact, Standard English is not inherently superior to other language varieties, but it is the language of the persons in power and therefore also the language demanded in the workplace.⁴⁷⁴ Those people who have the power in the country also have the decision in their hands which language variety will be used in business and they decided that AAE is not adequate for some settings, and that speakers of African American English also have to master Standard English and be able to speak each language variety in the appropriate environment (as determined by them).⁴⁷⁵

The first study I will discuss aimed to show the perception of Standard American English and African American English using twenty measures of credibility and was conducted by Andrew C. Billings.⁴⁷⁶ Before I explain the study in detail, we have to examine the context in which it was carried out. In American society, there has been much debate about the rejection or acceptance of African American English (AAE or BE for Black English) and many studies have reported that speakers of this variety are considered to be ‘less credible’ than Standard American English speakers (SAE).⁴⁷⁷ In the beginning of the study of Black English, the social science researchers put the focus on the association between the use of AAE and language attitudes.⁴⁷⁸ An interesting discovery was made by Frederick Williams in his study on the educational system in 1976 when he found out that even “African American teachers associate negative characteristics to students who speak BE.”⁴⁷⁹ In 1996, a debate on ‘Ebonics’ started, a term created in 1973 by several Black scholars who disapproved of the negative connotations that were implied in many of the designations of the language variety spoken by African

⁴⁷² Green, 226.

⁴⁷³ Green, 226.

⁴⁷⁴ Green, 226.

⁴⁷⁵ Green, 226.

⁴⁷⁶ Andrew C. Billings, “Beyond the Ebonics Debate: Attitudes About Black and Standard American English,” *JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES* 36, no. 1 (2005): 68, DOI: 10.1177/0021934704271448.

⁴⁷⁷ Billings, “Beyond the Ebonics Debate: Attitudes About Black and Standard American English,” 68.

⁴⁷⁸ Billings, 68.

⁴⁷⁹ Billings, 68.

American people.⁴⁸⁰ Since then, there have been mixed opinions about how AAE should be treated.⁴⁸¹ In their paper in 1997, Geneva Smitherman and Sylvia Cunningham proposed that American society must receive better education regarding this issue and noted that negative statements about Ebonics indicate, on the one hand, an appalling ignorance of the issue and, on the other hand, a severe lack of knowledge.⁴⁸² T. Garner and Donald Rubin were the first researchers who established a relationship between code-switching and perceptions of credibility and demonstrated this in their study.⁴⁸³ There are several theories about the different dimensions of credibility, but the one by David K. Berlo, James B. Lemert, and Robert J. Mertz, developed in 1969, is the most accepted one and includes three dimensions, namely trustworthiness, dynamism, and competence.⁴⁸⁴

Now I am going to explain the objective and hypothesis of the research by Andrew C. Billings. He based his study on results from other research that indicated that African American English speakers are considered to be less credible and have a lower status than Standard English speakers.⁴⁸⁵ Billings uses three hypotheses in his study, namely that 1) the perceived competence of a speaker will vary according to the language variety he/she uses, 2) the perceived trustworthiness will be relatively stable regardless of the variety the speaker employs, and 3) the speaker's race plays an inferior role in the measures of social distance than the language variety that is used.⁴⁸⁶

In his study, Billings wanted to examine two variables that are not linked, namely the dialect and race of a speaker.⁴⁸⁷ In a first set of videos, an African American speaker used first AAE and then SAE and the perceived differences by the participants were then indications of differences linked to language use, while the second set, consisting of an African American and a White speaker both using SAE gave indications of differences linked to race.⁴⁸⁸ In this study, there were in total 261 students (either from college or from high school) between the ages of

⁴⁸⁰ John R. Rickford, "What is Ebonics (African American English)?," Linguistic Society of America, accessed on April 13, 2022, <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-ebonics-african-american-english>.

⁴⁸¹ Billings, "Beyond the Ebonics Debate: Attitudes About Black and Standard American English," 69.

⁴⁸² Billings, 69.

⁴⁸³ Billings, 70.

⁴⁸⁴ Billings, 70.

⁴⁸⁵ Billings, 71.

⁴⁸⁶ Billings, 71.

⁴⁸⁷ Billings, 71.

⁴⁸⁸ Billings, 71.

16 to 22, including 132 women and 129 men, of whom 123 were Black and 138 were White.⁴⁸⁹ The participants were divided into six groups containing at least 35 students and not more than 50 ones and the attractiveness and the darkness of the skin tone played a role in the selection of the AAE speaker, and he was classified in both cases as being ‘above-average’.⁴⁹⁰ Altogether, nine video clips were shot for the study: in three of them, a White speaker used SAE; in three others, an African American speaker used SAE while in the last three videos, this person spoke AAE.⁴⁹¹ All the speakers that participated were men between the age of 18 and 24 and spoke nearly at the same speed and they all delivered a more or less three-minute speech on the same topic (racially and dialectically neutral) in order not to let the topic and context influence the perception.⁴⁹² They all had a midwestern accent, so regional differences in speech were taken into account. This means that the “only discernible difference among the speeches was the use of BE and the race of the person giving the speech.”⁴⁹³ Participants only watched one set consisting of three videos, thus either a White speaker using SAE, an African American using SAE, or an African American using AAE.⁴⁹⁴ To measure the different aspects of trustworthiness and competence, Billings used the instrument of ten semantic differential scales as well as ten measures of social distance to determine whether a potential behavior would be changed by cognitive measures of credibility. In each scale (competence, trustworthiness, social distance), there were seven different options for responses.⁴⁹⁵

In the following paragraph, I will explain the results of the study on the perception of African American English and Standard American English. On the 10 scales that measured the trustworthiness and competence of a speaker, six differences could be found: firstly, participants preferred African American speakers using SAE over White speakers using it; secondly, the speaker’s rating was much lower when he spoke AAE, including the five competence measures (education, qualification, intelligence, aggression and articulation), while some of the trustworthiness measures (attractiveness, likability, and honesty) were not affected at all; thirdly, White participants gave higher ratings to the competence measuring scales and

⁴⁸⁹ Billings, 74.

⁴⁹⁰ Billings, 72.

⁴⁹¹ Billings, 72.

⁴⁹² Billings, 72.

⁴⁹³ Billings, 73.

⁴⁹⁴ Billings, 73.

⁴⁹⁵ Billings, 73.

also often preferred speakers with the same race; fourthly, African American participants considered White SAE speakers kinder, more attractive, and more articulate, and criticized AAE in a much harsher way than Whites did; fifthly, concerning the other areas (believability, qualification, etc.), however, African Americans rated African American SAE speakers much better than their White counterparts; and, finally, race, dialect and the interaction between the two nearly always led to notable differences.⁴⁹⁶ In conclusion, the study showed that “within almost all variables, the dialect used and the race of the person who is speaking can significantly alter ratings of person perception.”⁴⁹⁷ As regards the measures of desired social distance, there were three main findings: firstly, African American speakers of SAE were not rated higher than their White counterparts (as was the case with trustworthiness and competence), but their ratings diminished when there was the switch to AAE; secondly, almost in each case, the participants preferred speakers of the same race (which is important for the comprehension of race relations in the US); thirdly, there are a lot of interactions going on within the realm of social distance since dialect and race can create important differences in the rating of the perception of a person.⁴⁹⁸ All three hypothesis were thus confirmed.

To conclude, the study shows that, even though many previous studies demonstrated that African American speakers are considered to be less credible, BE speakers are not rated lower in all areas and, in addition, it also demonstrated that the race of the judging person plays an important role in the perception of another person since African Americans “rejected the competence of the dialect even more than Whites.”⁴⁹⁹ Using African American English thus has an influence on how other speakers perceive us and is often associated with rather negative ratings.⁵⁰⁰

The second study I will discuss examined how African American adults perceive the usage of Standard English (SE), Black English (BE), and the phenomenon of code-switching (CS) between these two languages and was carried out by Lisa M. Koch, Alan M. Gross, and Russell Kolts.⁵⁰¹ As with the other study, I will first start with the explanation of the background. Koch,

⁴⁹⁶ Billings, 74-77.

⁴⁹⁷ Billings, 77.

⁴⁹⁸ Billings, 77.

⁴⁹⁹ Billings, 79.

⁵⁰⁰ Billings, 79.

⁵⁰¹ Lisa M. Koch, Alan M. Gross, and Russell Kolts, “Attitudes Toward Black English and Code Switching,” *JOURNAL OF BLACK PSYCHOLOGY* 27, no. 1 (2001): 29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798401027001002>.

Gross and Kolts explain that when we meet people for the first time and form a first impression of them, then “superficial cues often are used to infer underlying dispositional attributes, such as attitudes [,]”⁵⁰² and these cues help a person to determine if the other speaker is someone he/she would like to know better, would trust, or would work with. A theoretical background for these observations is provided by the so-called balance theories that say that people tend to surround themselves with people with similar attitudes and try to avoid people with dissimilar ones because we always try to maintain a cognitive consistency.⁵⁰³ In this sense, language can be used for interpersonal judgements since it is proven that it can play an important role in the search for behavioral cues, because when we meet another person for the first time, his/her language use is often the only information we have to determine whether his/her attitudes are in line with or different from our own.⁵⁰⁴ There are thus two main possibilities: either a person speaks in a similar way and is considered to possess positive qualities, or he/she speaks in a different way, which is often linked to undesirable traits.⁵⁰⁵

African American English has generally been viewed as being held in high regard by African Americans, however, some studies in the past have illustrated that, in fact, some do appreciate this language variety, but several others have demonstrated that other African Americans prefer Standard English.⁵⁰⁶ The linguistic elements of AAE are also thought to indicate not only group identity, but also group solidarity and, as Charles Spurgeon Johnson claims in one of his works, an individual always tries to identify him-/herself with a group hoping that this will contribute to his/her prestige and status.⁵⁰⁷ In order to achieve this, using Standard English in the US seems to be the best option since it is accepted by the majority as correct, but African Americans try, on the one hand, to establish an identification with their own culture, and, on the other, to perform efficiently in the dominant culture.⁵⁰⁸ In this case, they have to deal with the fact that the dominant culture has generally considered BE to be an inferior language variety and classifies its speakers to be lazy or ignorant.⁵⁰⁹ Other studies have

⁵⁰² Koch, Gross, and Kolts, “Attitudes Toward Black English and Code Switching,” 29.

⁵⁰³ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 29-30.

⁵⁰⁴ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

⁵⁰⁵ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

⁵⁰⁶ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

⁵⁰⁷ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

⁵⁰⁸ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

⁵⁰⁹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 30.

also shown that middle-class African Americans who incorporate more and more the majority culture tend to regard African Americans who only use BE in a more negative way.⁵¹⁰

The alternating use of AAE and SE, also called code-switching, has been advocated to be the best option for African Americans with the problem that this verbal action is not accepted by all persons and there is also a lot of criticism.⁵¹¹ In this sense, there are some researchers who say that the fact that only African American students have to learn a second language is the indication of a racist tendency, while other researchers believe that code-switching is not in conflict with African American culture because in general, most people adapt their linguistic style to the situation, irrespective of their race.⁵¹² As we have seen above, there has been much research on code-switching and its reasons, and even though some grammatical rules have been found, social processes are often considered to be the main factor that regulates our talk.⁵¹³

As early as 1994, Richard C. Doss and Alan M. Gross examined the reactions of African Americans to code-switching and found that SE speakers were perceived by the participants (college students) to be more likeable than BE speakers or speakers who switched between the two languages in a similar situation.⁵¹⁴ There were, however, several problems and limitations within this study, which is the reason why Koch, Gross and Kolts wanted to “examine further African American adult’s [*sic*] perceptions of those African Americans who use BE, SE, or CS.”⁵¹⁵ In the speech samples of their study, which the participants had to evaluate, there was an African American English speaker, a Standard English speaker and a speaker who switched between these two languages.⁵¹⁶ There were two different types of code-switching, namely the appropriate one (called ACS and meaning in agreement with the social norms) and the inappropriate one (called ICS and meaning in disagreement with the social norms).⁵¹⁷ The participants of the study had to evaluate the speaker of the tape on a series of personality traits and the hypothesis was that appropriate code-switching and the use of Standard English would

⁵¹⁰ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 31.

⁵¹¹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 31.

⁵¹² Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 31.

⁵¹³ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 31.

⁵¹⁴ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 32.

⁵¹⁵ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 32.

⁵¹⁶ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 32.

⁵¹⁷ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 32.

be evaluated in a more positive way than inappropriate code-switching and the use of African American English.⁵¹⁸

102 African American undergraduates of a public university that is located in the southeastern of the United States participated in this study, including people between the age of 18 and 36.⁵¹⁹ In the study, four different audiotapes were used, in which an African American man speaks in either an informal situation, consisting of a setting in which the man talks to a friend about a future job interview (i.e., it was a monologue), or a formal situation, consisting of the job interview itself.⁵²⁰ This means that the African American man produced four different audio tapes: one in which he speaks AAE, one in which he uses SE, one in which he switches according to social norms and one in which he violates them by code-switching, each time using the language variety or switch in both (formal and informal) settings.⁵²¹

When the African American man spoke BE, then he used speech patterns considered to be typical of BE and he used voice inflection, BE vocabulary, different speech rhythm, diverse tonal patterns, and variable pronunciations.⁵²² When he spoke SE, on the contrary, he used speech patterns considered to be typical of White SE, which means that he did not show voice inflection, different speech rhythm, or a varied tonal pattern, but used standard pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.⁵²³ All the tapes were evaluated beforehand by independent judges, but the texts in BE were especially controlled for their grammar appropriateness, thus including suffix loss, multiple negation, employment of the verb ‘be’, and distinctions in asking complex questions.⁵²⁴

To evaluate the voice, the so-called Revised Speech Dialect Attitudinal Scale (SDAS) was used, which consists of twelve sets of “bipolar adjectives separated by a 7-point scale.”⁵²⁵ To rate the socio-intellectual status, the adjectives *rich/poor*, *literate/illiterate*, *high social status/low social status*, and *white collar/blue collar* were used; to evaluate aesthetic quality, the adjectives were *nice/awful*, *beautiful/ugly*, *pleasing/displeasing*, and *sweet/sour*, while the

⁵¹⁸ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 32.

⁵¹⁹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 33.

⁵²⁰ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 33.

⁵²¹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 33.

⁵²² Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 34.

⁵²³ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 34.

⁵²⁴ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 34.

⁵²⁵ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 35.

adjectives *loud/soft*, *active/passive*, *aggressive/unaggressive*, and *strong/weak* were used to rate the dynamism.⁵²⁶ After the participants thus listened to one of the four audiotapes, they had to describe their first impression of the speaker using this rating form.

The three main findings of the study were the following: firstly, the socio-intellectual status of the speaker was rated higher when he spoke either SE or code-switched according to the social norms than when he used BE or ICS; secondly, the aesthetic quality of the SE speaker was also rated higher than the BE or ICS speaker; finally, the ACS and SE speakers were the individuals the participants would like to get to know, rather than the ICS speakers and they were also the persons the participants would like to work with, rather than the BE or ICS speaker.⁵²⁷ As already said, previous studies have indicated that African American adults who speak Standard English are considered to be more competent and likeable than Black English speakers.⁵²⁸ This study, however, showed that in most cases, the SE and the ACS speaker were evaluated positively, which means that SE is not always preferred over BE, but that “it appears that BE is not seen negatively in and of itself but may be viewed negatively when it is used in situations where social norms dictate more formal language.”⁵²⁹ The participants of this study supported this proposal because they indicated that they would like to get to know the speaker who used SE and ACS rather than the ICS speaker (who violated in some way the social norms) but there was no real difference between the first speakers and the speaker of BE, which indicates that African American English in itself is not evaluated negatively.⁵³⁰ The participants’ evaluation of their desire to work with the speaker in question, however, indicated that both, BE and ICS speakers were rated more negatively, which shows that there are apparently still stereotypes about Black people in the workplace.⁵³¹ In addition, women and men rated the speaker more or less equally, which means that the gender of the speaker did not necessarily play a role in their evaluation, but the dialect of the speaker did.⁵³²

⁵²⁶ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 35.

⁵²⁷ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 39.

⁵²⁸ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 39.

⁵²⁹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 40.

⁵³⁰ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 40.

⁵³¹ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 40.

⁵³² Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 40.

To conclude, this study shows that “BE is not necessarily viewed in a negative light but is perceived negatively when used in socially inappropriate contexts.”⁵³³ It also implies that African Americans need to learn SE and/or CS in order to be able to advance in mainstream society and their own and other persons’ judgements may detain them from getting better jobs when they are not able to speak in an appropriate way in professional situations, according to the majority society.⁵³⁴ As Koch, Gross, and Kolts state, code-switching may be the solution for African Americans to be able to have success in their jobs while maintaining a relationship with African American culture.⁵³⁵

3.3 Code-switching is more than just switching between two languages

3.3.1. Broader definition of code-switching

As we have seen, code-switching can be defined as “the process of shifting from one linguistic code to another, depending on the social or conversational setting.”⁵³⁶ In the case of African Americans, this generally means to switch from African American English to Standard English in order to sound appropriate.⁵³⁷ This implies that people in general, not only African Americans, often speak differently at home than in their workplace, it is thus a common thing to do. For African American people, it has become more and more important and it is far more complex than just adapting their language.⁵³⁸ Even though the term has been developed in linguistics and also been studied mainly by linguists and sociologists, it has gotten another, more complex definition during the last years: “[t]oday, we use it much more broadly to describe the many ways we adapt our language, behavior, and actions to the dominant culture.”⁵³⁹ This means that people change not only their language to adapt to the situation and a specific cultural norm, but also their whole behavior, which includes their dress style, speech,

⁵³³ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 41.

⁵³⁴ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 41.

⁵³⁵ Koch, Gross, and Kolts, 41.

⁵³⁶ James Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People,” Medium, December 8, 2019, <https://medium.com/perceive-more/code-switching-means-survival-for-black-people-f94208971141>.

⁵³⁷ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival for Black People.”

⁵³⁸ Kimberly Gill, “What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?,” Click on Detroit, February 24, 2021, <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2021/02/24/what-is-code-switching-how-does-it-impact-the-black-community/>.

⁵³⁹ Kate Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power,” Integrative Inquiry Consulting, April 15, 2021, <https://www.integrativeinquiryllc.com/post/the-problem-with-code-switching-addressing-the-dominant-culture>.

mannerisms, and hairstyle.⁵⁴⁰ To some extent, nearly all people do this because we generally do not wear the same clothes at work as we do at home, and we speak differently to our colleagues or boss than we talk to our family or good friends.⁵⁴¹ However, some people, e.g., people of color, are generally forced to adapt to a larger degree than others to the present cultural norm determined by the dominant group of the society.⁵⁴²

This shows that the definition and approaches of code-switching have developed over time, just like many other definitions of social constructs and the newer approach has been referred to as ‘cultural code-switching’ because it implies that the cultural identity of a person who switches codes does get suppressed.⁵⁴³ Sometimes, this includes separating one’s own presentation from the racial or cultural stereotypes of the ethnic group one belongs to.⁵⁴⁴ There are several reasons why people code-switch, one being the fact that they try to improve the comfort of the surrounding people who are often not part of the same ethnic or racial group, because they hope to get treated in the same way and to obtain the same opportunities to advance as other people.⁵⁴⁵

3.3.2. Adaptation to White society

In this new sense, if I speak of code-switching in the following pages, it refers to “any member of a marginalized or underrepresented identity adapting to the dominant environment around them in any context.”⁵⁴⁶ This means that the problem lies in the fact that only one part of society (the minorities) has to assimilate into mainstream society in order to ensure the comfort and convenience of the people in power. Before I investigate the reasons and costs of this type of code-switching, I will explain what the term ‘dominant culture’ (also referred to as ‘culture of power’) alludes to. The dominant culture is the culture that has imposed, over a long period, its language, values, and behavioral patterns on other cultures thanks to its social, political, and/or economic power.⁵⁴⁷ In many cases, the dominant culture is so omnipresent that people are not

⁵⁴⁰ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁴¹ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁴² Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁴³ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁴⁴ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁴⁵ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁴⁶ Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?”

⁵⁴⁷ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

even aware of it anymore, but it can be recognized by behaviors that are described as ‘good’ or ‘normal’, which implies that there are two different ways to do something: the right way or the wrong way, determined by the dominant culture.⁵⁴⁸ There is not just one dominant culture in the world, but different ones, depending on the country, region, city, community, state, and even business and these different cultures can get along, but they do not have to.⁵⁴⁹ Important historical events and actions such as industrialization, colonization, and the globalization of the economy have led to the reinforcement of the domination of specific cultural values and norms above others, i.e., in the present world, culture is dominated by the following values: white, cis-gender, Western, English-speaking groups, male, and heteronormative.⁵⁵⁰ Now intervenes the phenomenon of code-switching since individuals who are not part of the dominant culture often have to adjust their behaviors, dress style, habits, etc. in order to assimilate into the dominant culture, but if a person’s identity is close to the dominant culture, then he/she does not need to code-switch a lot.⁵⁵¹

Many Black people state they have to code-switch in their daily life in order to adapt to the White world they live in.⁵⁵² The Pew Research Center conducted a survey to learn more about code-switching habits and found that both African and Hispanic Americans indicate that they have on some occasions the feeling to have to switch their language when they are surrounded by people having other ethnic and racial backgrounds, more often than White people feel this need.⁵⁵³ The group that most feels this urge to switch are Black college graduates under the age of 50.⁵⁵⁴ In particular, four out of ten African and Hispanic grown-ups, but only one third of White adults, have this feeling to have to change their language in these situations.⁵⁵⁵ Among Black people, the education plays a role because nearly half of the people having a four-year college degree (or more) indicate that they sometimes or often have to code-switch, while only

⁵⁴⁸ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁴⁹ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁵⁰ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁵¹ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁵² Woods, “Code-switching: Survival for Black People.”

⁵⁵³ Amina Dunn, “Younger, college-educated black Americans are most likely to feel need to ‘code-switch’,” Pew Research Center, September 24, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/24/younger-college-educated-black-americans-are-most-likely-to-feel-need-to-code-switch/>.

⁵⁵⁴ Dunn, “Younger, college-educated black Americans are most likely to feel need to ‘code-switch’.”

⁵⁵⁵ Dunn, “Younger, college-educated black Americans are most likely to feel need to ‘code-switch’.”

37% of the people without a college degree manifest this.⁵⁵⁶ Not only education, but also the age of the people having to code-switch, plays a role in the process since young African Americans feel this need more often than older Black Americans.⁵⁵⁷

In addition, an African American person with a high education rarely finds other Black people in their workplace since the higher the position (including high education and success), the fewer African American people, which is the reason why code-switching is so important for them in the workplace since they have to find their way in an increasingly White world.⁵⁵⁸ African American people are aware of the fact that African American English is different from Standard English and that not all people will understand it, and saying to them that they do not speak properly is rude since they are speaking properly, not Standard English, but African American English.⁵⁵⁹

Even though research has been conducted to find out how many people feel the urge to code-switch, the phenomenon is hugely under-reported because, on the one hand, many people do it without realizing it, thus unconsciously, and, on the other hand, the admission to doing it can lead to tensions between a person and other persons of the same cultural group.⁵⁶⁰ The *Harvard Business Review* found in 2019 that “code-switching most often occurs in environments where negative stereotypes about BIPOC individuals don’t align with what is considered normative or appropriate for that environment.”⁵⁶¹ Some argue that one of the main dilemmas African American people have to face at work is code-switching, but it should be noted that in the workplace, everyone, BIPOC and non-BIPOC people, has to adapt to the setting, since we have to conform to the expectations and culture of the workplace and do not behave in the same way as if we were at home.⁵⁶² Since everyone has to do it to some degree, there are people who argue that it is not about race, but about professionalism.⁵⁶³ However, what is professional and what is not is again (as with normal and good) determined by the dominant

⁵⁵⁶ Dunn, “Younger, college-educated black Americans are most likely to feel need to ‘code-switch’.”

⁵⁵⁷ Dunn, “Younger, college-educated black Americans are most likely to feel need to ‘code-switch’.”

⁵⁵⁸ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People.”

⁵⁵⁹ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People.”

⁵⁶⁰ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁶¹ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁶² Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁶³ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

White culture.⁵⁶⁴ This is the reason why we need to take into account the systematic racism against marginalized groups when we are talking about cultural code-switching because if these people are finally treated equally, rather than discriminated against and showed as being inferior or unintelligent by other people on the basis of their behavior, dress style, and speech, among others, then they will not feel the urge to code-switch when they are surrounded by people with other ethnic and racial backgrounds.⁵⁶⁵

In the following section, I will speak more in detail about code-switching as being, next to (racial) discrimination, the main dilemma African Americans have to face in their workplace. A study carried out by the *Harvard Business Review* showed that “code-switching is neither overly present nor overly absent from these employees’ work lives.”⁵⁶⁶ The participants said, however, that cultural code-switching used in order to avoid stereotypes, to play down their race, or to show similar interests with members of the majority group has benefits and that the degree of code-switching depends on the situation.⁵⁶⁷ In the following, I will discuss different situations that were detected by the *Harvard Business Review* in which African Americans tend to code-switch. First of all, the study shows that those African Americans who have “high career aspirations for leadership and promotion opportunities actively avoided conforming to black stereotypes to a higher degree than those with low career aspirations.”⁵⁶⁸ Secondly, African Americans downplay their race and try to show similar interest with members of the majority group when they have the impression that they suit the organization in this way.⁵⁶⁹ Thirdly, the practice of code-switching can be associated with vigilance, i.e., African American people are always trying to anticipate any possible mistreatment or discrimination.⁵⁷⁰ Finally, the workplace itself influences the degree of code-switching, depending on its racial composition and the question whether its employees have the feeling that the company tries to promote diversity or not.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁴ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁶⁵ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁵⁶⁶ Courtney L. McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 15, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>.

⁵⁶⁷ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁶⁸ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁶⁹ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁰ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷¹ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

The researchers made a surprising discovery because while it is well-known that African Americans code-switch when their representation in a company is not good, they found that they do the same thing when there is an equal representation.⁵⁷² They have several theories why this might occur: one theory is that Black racial identity has an associated stigma that affects the perception of larger groups, often when they are considered to have a low performance, which might lead these people to code-switch in order to reduce their race stigma when others are with them.⁵⁷³ The second theory is that White employees are more willing to promote common interests with people outside their own ethnic group when African Americans are equally represented, which in turn causes the latter to code-switch.⁵⁷⁴ Another surprising discovery was the fact that there is no difference if a company does not support diversity (called color-blind ideology) or strongly supports differences (called multicultural ideologies); African Americans will try to avoid Black racial identity stereotypes in both cases, which might seem to be strange, but there are explications for this behavior.⁵⁷⁵ In color-blind companies, on the one hand, African Americans code-switch to avoid stereotypes and get equal treatment, while in multicultural companies, on the other hand, the fact that the dissimilarities between groups are made more visible might lead to the belief that the members of a certain ethnic group have certain fixed and inherent qualities, which is the reason why African Americans code-switch in order to appear as individuals and not just as members of a certain group.⁵⁷⁶ To conclude, no environment can eliminate completely the practice of code-switching, whether it supports diversity or not.⁵⁷⁷ Another study conducted by *Harvard Research Review* showed that White workers considered African American people who code-switched to be more professional than those who did not and rated these behaviors in a positive way, while African Americans themselves saw the candidate who intentionally code-switched to suit the workplace as less professional and evaluated him in a negative way.⁵⁷⁸

As already said, the dominant culture is often not even visible anymore. In the same sense, many employers believe that they do not impose changes on their employees, however, this

⁵⁷² McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷³ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁴ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁵ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁶ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁷ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁷⁸ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

often happens implicitly, and staff often adopts cultural norms without them being explicitly stated.⁵⁷⁹ In every workplace, specific power dynamics are often shaped by our prejudices that distort our vision of reality.⁵⁸⁰ People changing their natural hairstyle or dress style, reducing their accent, or avoiding speaking to others because their mother tongue is another language are already signs that they feel the urge to code-switch in order to fit into the organization they work for, even though it is not necessarily demanded explicitly by the company.⁵⁸¹

There are several reasons for and also benefits of code-switching in certain situations. In the following section, I will discuss some of them in order to understand why African Americans practice it.

First of all, we are going to look at the benefits and reasons in the workplace; where “downplaying membership in a stigmatized racial group helps increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired.”⁵⁸² Another benefit is that code-switching enables them to avoid negative stereotypes that are linked to black racial identity and helps them to be viewed as a leader.⁵⁸³ A last benefit is that when they show similar interests with people of the dominant group, then they are more likely to get promoted since people tend to associate with people with similar interests.⁵⁸⁴ To conclude, it can be said that code-switching in the workplace, and thus changing one’s behavior to fit into the dominant culture, can help to get respect, some advantage (e.g., a promotion) or some level of power, which can lead to more freedom and economic privilege.⁵⁸⁵

Secondly, code-switching can be used in everyday life for several reasons and benefits. It can help, for example, to assimilate into the prevailing culture.⁵⁸⁶ In these cases, people often code-switch unconsciously because they have internalized the accounts that some behaviors, not the one they are familiar with, are better than others, which is the reason why they adopt these new behaviors in order to show that they belong to this culture.⁵⁸⁷ On some occasions,

⁵⁷⁹ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁸⁰ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁸¹ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁸² McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁸³ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁸⁴ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁵⁸⁵ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁸⁶ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

⁵⁸⁷ Stitham, “Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power.”

code-switching can even be lifesaving for African Americans, as it can help them avoid violence because they appear to be less threatening thanks to this practice.⁵⁸⁸ For instance, shifting one's accent or posture may help to reduce the threat of attack, which is especially the case for African Americans in police encounters, which shows that to not code-switch can have serious consequences for them.⁵⁸⁹ In fact, there are many inducements for a person not to express their authentic self, with which they would not conform to the prevailing culture and it should be noted that when we are talking about the reasons and benefits of code-switching, then we assume that a person inherently knows how to do it and he/she needs to know the dominant culture quite well.⁵⁹⁰ In this case, one speaks of the so-called cultural capital, merely the ability to know the rules without them being told explicitly and if a person is not able to code-switch, then this can have significant effects on career opportunities, social standing, financial stability, physical security, and much more.⁵⁹¹

All this sounds like code-switching is the perfect strategy for African Americans to be successful, not only in one's professional career, but also in everyday life.⁵⁹² However, it is also known that this practice has psychological and social consequences,⁵⁹³ especially when people are forced by others to do so.⁵⁹⁴ If a person plays down his/her membership of a certain ethnic, cultural, or racial group, then this "can lead to tensions with in-group members, leading to negative interactions with peers, being called 'white' or an 'oreo,' or claims that the people who you really care about 'don't know who you really are'."⁵⁹⁵ Code-switching is often used to avoid negative stereotypes about Black identity, and doing this consciously is really hard work; indeed, maintaining this attention at all times can be emotionally and cognitively exhausting and impairs one's performances, affecting one's health at the same time.⁵⁹⁶ The adaptation to the dominant culture requires a great deal of effort from African American people, resulting in an accumulation of daily anxiety and stress, which has in particular mayor impacts on their

⁵⁸⁸ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁸⁹ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁹⁰ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁹¹ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁹² Conner, "What is Code-Switching?"

⁵⁹³ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁵⁹⁴ Conner, "What is Code-Switching?"

⁵⁹⁵ Conner, "What is Code-Switching?"

⁵⁹⁶ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

professional productivity, satisfactions, and engagement because their preoccupation with cultural compatibility distracts them from remaining focused on their work, ideas, and perspectives.⁵⁹⁷ Not only does code-switching require a lot of energy, but the forced assimilation also means an implicit devaluation of one's own identity, implying that the customs and values of one's own culture are lost in the workplace or everyday life.⁵⁹⁸ The feeling of being devalued in the workplace also may provoke the reduction of the workers' commitment to the organization and their desire to bring their expertise to the table.⁵⁹⁹ In addition, to pretend the whole time to have something in common with colleagues "reduces authentic self-expression and contributes to burn-out."⁶⁰⁰ This means that African Americans have to face in the workplace the dilemma of whether to succeed in their career by holding back their cultural identity or to be authentically themselves and thus risk failing in their career.⁶⁰¹

Myles Durkee, "an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan who studies code-switching's mental and physiological effects"⁶⁰² found in his research that African American workers who have to code-switch frequently in their workplace are more likely to suffer workplace fatigue as well as burnout in their position.⁶⁰³ The reason for this is that they simply have to be a distinctive person by blocking out all the cultural properties that are important for them, because they notice that these cultural traits are not valued by their co-workers.⁶⁰⁴ According to Durkee, it can be very exhausting to be a whole new person in the workplace and maintaining this identity during a whole day, which is the reason why it also has consequences for the mental health of these people.⁶⁰⁵ As already mentioned, code-switching becomes a stressor for African American people if they are forced to do it and it is not coming naturally to them and it should be noticed by the employers and co-workers that forcing people from certain ethnic and racial groups to code-switch means putting additional stress on them.⁶⁰⁶

⁵⁹⁷ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace, Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁹⁸ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁵⁹⁹ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁰⁰ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁰¹ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁰² Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶⁰³ Gill, "What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?"

⁶⁰⁴ Gill, "What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?"

⁶⁰⁵ Gill, "What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?"

⁶⁰⁶ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

These days, being able to code-switch has become a skill set in the workplace, not only for African Americans but for all people, in order to advance in one's career or simply to fit in.⁶⁰⁷ According to Durkee, a person first of all has to understand the room and audience he/she has to do with and then he/she can pick up a certain identity to show that he/she behaves in similar ways.⁶⁰⁸ After that, the audience evaluates this person, and this judgement can be more negative when a person tries 'too hard' to fit in than when he/she does not do it effectively.⁶⁰⁹ At one point, the practice of code-switching becomes so inherently fixed that African American people do it unconsciously, resulting in the reduction of the risks for their mental health.⁶¹⁰ According to Durkee, code-switching is not harmful if it is done voluntarily instead of being used as either a means of advancement or, even worse, survival.⁶¹¹ As we have seen, the nature of the professional environment plays an important role in code-switching, whether it forces people of minority groups to assimilate into the dominant culture or whether it supports diversity. As Beverly Daniel Tatum explains, code-switching in itself is not harmful when it is used to find commonalities with colleagues, but it becomes harmful when they have to downplay their own cultural identity to do so.⁶¹²

In conclusion, we can say that "African Americans were brought to this country having to create their own culture and language in order to find their place."⁶¹³ In order to survive and succeed in their lives, they had to adapt themselves to the dominant culture and, in this sense, code-switching allows them to find the balance between the demands of the White, dominant culture and the needs of their own ethnic and racial cultural identity.⁶¹⁴

3.3.3. Examples of code-switching

In the following section, I will discuss several concrete examples of cultural-based code-switching experienced by African Americans in order to clarify what the practice of code-switching really means for them. A first example of it, as we have already seen, is that on some

⁶⁰⁷ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶⁰⁸ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶⁰⁹ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶¹⁰ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶¹¹ Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶¹² Washington-Harmon, "Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?"

⁶¹³ Woods, "Code-switching: Survival For Black People."

⁶¹⁴ Woods, "Code-switching: Survival For Black People."

occasions, they change from African American English to Standard English in order to fit into the dominant culture. As such, many African Americans are told from a young age to speak ‘English properly’, which means neither using slang nor colloquialisms, especially in school when they are talking to their teachers and white peers.⁶¹⁵ Ida Harris, an African American journalist, explained that when she stood in front of a White school class, her voice sounded differently, namely enthusiastic, and high-pitched instead of soft and raspy which means that by being the only Black person in the room, she unconsciously shifted her behavior and talk (by pronouncing all vowels and consonants, and stressing all syllables).⁶¹⁶ She stated that she immediately code-switched in this situation because “ [she] doubted that [her] authentic self was enough to be in the room, and that further complicated how [she] felt about [herself].”⁶¹⁷ The same happens in the workplace, since as James Woods states, there are generally few Black people present at a job, which is the reason why they have to change their language in order to fit in.⁶¹⁸ Examples of this are saying ‘how are you’ instead of ‘wassup’ or saying ‘today was a challenging work environment’ instead of ‘this place been whack and corny’ when one had a hard time at work.⁶¹⁹ Another example is to switch to Standard English when one is speaking to an African American colleague and a White colleague enters the room, e.g. they would say ‘I bought AirPods’ instead of ‘I been bought AirPods.’⁶²⁰

A second example of code-switching is the fact that many African Americans must ask themselves before they dress for school or work “whether their traditional cultural garments will be viewed as acceptable”,⁶²¹ and whether their traditional hair scarves and natural hair styles (such as braids, afro, or dreadlocks) will be considered as unprofessional or not by their co-workers, employers, or peers.⁶²² For African American women, the hair style plays an important role in their lives as shows the research done by Durkee because he discovered that Black and White women have different perceptions of African American women’s natural hairstyle: while

⁶¹⁵ Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?”

⁶¹⁶ Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It.”

⁶¹⁷ Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It.”

⁶¹⁸ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People.”

⁶¹⁹ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People.”

⁶²⁰ Woods, “Code-switching: Survival For Black People.”

⁶²¹ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶²² Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

the latter consider it to be unprofessional, the former still feel professional with this hairstyle.⁶²³ This finding is supported by the Dove CROWN Research Study, according to which “Black women are 80% more likely to change their natural hair to meet societal norms for work.”⁶²⁴ In many cases, people associate a certain visual profile with a specific ethnic or racial group and members of these groups may then try to avoid dressing in the traditional way of their religion or culture which means that, in essence, African American people try to adapt to the norm prevailing in the environment they live or work in.⁶²⁵

A third example of code-switching is the fact that African Americans try to ‘act White’ or adapt their behavior according to the situation in order to fit into White society.⁶²⁶ I mentioned already the term ‘oreo’, a term with which African Americans are familiar and which refers not to the cookie, but what it represents, namely being “Black on the outside, and White on the inside”,⁶²⁷ and thus stands for the fact that they use a ‘White voice’ or other Western, Eurocentric manners of being, speaking and engaging to conform to the dominant culture.⁶²⁸ A famous example of an adapting behavior is the one shown by Barack Obama in 2012 during a meeting with the US male Olympic basketball team because while he shakes the hands of the White players and coaches in the standard American way, the handshake with the Black player Kevin Durant includes a backslapping and appears to be much more familiar.⁶²⁹ This shows that even the president greets people differently depending on the race of the person he has to do with.⁶³⁰ Another situation in which many African Americans downplay their race and try to appear as ‘White’ as possible is in police encounters. As Durkee says, in these situations, “code-switching can be the difference between life or death.”⁶³¹ We have seen that code-switching can be used to appear less threatening, a feature that is especially important for African American men (but also women) in these situations since it can help to reduce some of the tensions and

⁶²³ Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?”

⁶²⁴ Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?”

⁶²⁵ Washington-Harmon, “Code-Switching: What Does It Mean and Why Do People Do It?”

⁶²⁶ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶²⁷ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶²⁸ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶²⁹ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶³⁰ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶³¹ Gill, “What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?”

anxiety.⁶³² In fact, guidelines even exist for Black people regarding how to act during a police encounter as they should, for example, act respectful and polite and avoid running away even when they are afraid in order to protect themselves.⁶³³ Ida Harris even considers a part of code-switching the fact that many African American parents talk to their children in order to “warn them of, and prepare them for potential encounters with law enforcement”.⁶³⁴ Again, police encounters play an important role, and these children get clear directives on how to behave in these situations, such as to turn down the music, keeping one’s hands visible, speaking properly, adjusting one’s posture, etc., since there are many African Americans who died in such situations.⁶³⁵

3.3.4. What can we do to improve the situation?

In the following section, I will talk about what companies in particular can do to alleviate the pressure from African Americans to code-switch all the time, which has negative consequences for them. First of all, companies should evaluate the culture prevailing in their organization and they must examine how this culture may pressurize members of ethnic or racial minority groups to code-switch.⁶³⁶ Even though companies encourage their employees to be authentically themselves in the workplace, African Americans often have the impression that being themselves will be regarded as unprofessional.⁶³⁷ This is the reason why companies should have critical conversations with their employees in which they debate about these topics and which should result in certain strategies for the elimination of deficiencies.⁶³⁸ Secondly, companies should take into account the equal representation of ethnic or racial minorities at all levels because one reason why African Americans feel the urge to code-switch and thus adjusting their cultural identity to the dominant culture is that they are generally underrepresented in the business environments.⁶³⁹ The underrepresentation leads to the fact that even little differences are highly noticeable, but if members of these groups are represented at all levels of the

⁶³² Gill, “What is Code-switching? How does it impact the Black community?”

⁶³³ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶³⁴ Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It.”

⁶³⁵ Harris, “Code-Switching Is Not Trying to Fit in to White Culture, It’s Surviving It.”

⁶³⁶ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶³⁷ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶³⁸ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶³⁹ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

company, even though this is difficult to achieve, then this will lead to more acceptance of their cultural identity.⁶⁴⁰ Thirdly, companies should make a difference between inclusion and diversity since they are not the same, and to encourage diversity in one's company is simply not enough to eliminate discrimination against members of minorities.⁶⁴¹ This is the reason why companies need to establish inclusive environments in which employees are not only encouraged to be authentically themselves, but they also feel comfortable to do so.⁶⁴² Inclusivity is necessary to have an equal treatment for all employees, but it is hard to establish because research has shown that African Americans code-switch less when cultural differences are denied completely by their employers, but also when they are emphasized too much.⁶⁴³ To find the balance between these two situations, employers should show interest in issues which African Americans have to face outside of the company, but still have an impact on their work experience, which shows that they value "black employees beyond their individual contributions to the bottom line."⁶⁴⁴ Fourthly, to create an inclusive environment is not only the task of the organization but should also be practiced by leaders and co-workers because they could show interest in cultural differences that exist between African American culture and White culture; they could also integrate African Americans explicitly in their networks and listen to their suggestions and ideas.⁶⁴⁵ Fifthly, colleagues and leaders could ask themselves whether they are authentically themselves in the workplace or whether they are not as well hiding some aspects of their identity.⁶⁴⁶ If some show a bit more of themselves, then this might encourage others to follow suit.⁶⁴⁷ In the same sense, when members of minority groups get to a certain level in the company, they gain at the same time power, which generally reduces their fear of discrimination, and if they then show more of their cultural identity in the workplace, then other members of this minority might feel encouraged to do the same.⁶⁴⁸ One famous example was President Barack Obama: as a strong leader, he showed his cultural identity even

⁶⁴⁰ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴¹ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴² McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴³ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴⁴ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴⁵ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴⁶ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴⁷ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁴⁸ Conner, "What is Code-Switching?"

in very formal settings, which resulted in the transformation of the prospects for all who looked up to him.⁶⁴⁹ Sixthly, people should think about the prejudices and stereotypes that might exist in their minds. On the one hand, it is important to be aware of differences between people working in the same company, but, on the other hand, it is also important not to mention them when the situation does not require it.⁶⁵⁰ If a person likes the straight hair of a Black co-worker better than her natural hair, then this person should ask him-/herself why this is the case, where this feeling comes from.⁶⁵¹ This means that instead of asking African Americans directly why there are different, we should ask ourselves where our thoughts come from and why we have certain preferences.⁶⁵² Finally, we could ask ourselves what African Americans themselves could do in order to improve the situation. In their research, the *Harvard Business Review* discovered that African Americans rated code-switching more negatively than their White workers, which is the reason why it is very important for them to code-switch “in a way that maximizes professional gains and minimizes psychological and social distress,”⁶⁵³ if they consider code-switching necessary in certain situations.⁶⁵⁴ They should thus be strategic in their code-switching: first of all, they have to understand the organization’s culture, then, they have to know what their values are and finally, they have to make decisions that are in line with both their values and the organization’s culture.⁶⁵⁵ African Americans do not have to feel guilty when they code-switch because in fact, they have not created the problem and the most important is that they care for their mental health and emotional well-being.⁶⁵⁶ Giving the advice to be strategic does not imply that African Americans have to code-switch in their workplace, instead, it should highlight that they face many issues at their work, one of them being code-switching and its included dilemmas, with which they should not be alone.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁴⁹ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶⁵⁰ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶⁵¹ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶⁵² McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶⁵³ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶⁵⁴ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

⁶⁵⁵ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶⁵⁶ Conner, “What is Code-Switching?”

⁶⁵⁷ McCluney, et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching.”

To conclude, we have to recognize that there is a dominant culture in our world that dominates our assumptions about minority groups.⁶⁵⁸ Once we have analyzed this culture and discovered what it is about, we must question our assumptions and be more open towards members of racial and ethnic minorities.⁶⁵⁹ In this process, companies can play an important role by establishing working environments in which minorities' members can succeed without having to code-switch.⁶⁶⁰ They should create environments in which cultural differences and inclusion are important values in order to help these people to live their cultural identity instead of forcing them to hide their true identity all the time.⁶⁶¹

4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this master's thesis was to shed more light on the phenomenon of code-switching between African American English and Standard English spoken by African Americans living in the United States by analyzing the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. For this purpose, it was first of all important to clarify what can be understood as African American English, since there are several possible definitions and to look closer at its origins since there is no consensus to this date on how this language variety developed. Another on-going debate is about the difference between African American Vernacular English and Standard African American English, which is the reason why I decided to take the term African American English in general to refer to all varieties spoken mainly by African American people. Afterwards, I gave a definition of Standard English, as it is accepted generally, but clarified that in reality, there is not one single Standard English in the world, but that the variety which is considered to be the standard varies from one region or country to another. Speaking of Standard English in this thesis, I referred to the variety considered to be the standard in the United States. After the clarification of the two linguistic varieties treated in this dissertation, I have taken a closer look at the classic linguistic literature on code-switching in order to understand how linguists have analyzed the phenomenon over many decades. It is important to note that there are many different theories and explanations that have changed over time as to why people switch between two languages, and to date there is no consensus on this. I have presented three theories

⁶⁵⁸ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁶⁵⁹ Stitham, "Code-Switching in the Workplace: Understanding Cultures of Power."

⁶⁶⁰ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

⁶⁶¹ McCluney, et al., "The Costs of Code-Switching."

in this dissertation, namely John Joseph Gumperz' theory of 'we-code' and 'they-code', Carol Myers-Scotton's 'markedness' model and Peter Auer's 'sequential analysis of language alteration'. They are different in many aspects as they each have a different approach, but they also have similarities, as they all distinguish between different types of code-switching. Each theory has contributed to the examination of code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon, but Auer's contribution especially is important for this thesis. Myers-Scotton's and Gumperz' models have been criticized by several other researchers since their theories lacked logic in some parts. However, Auer's seems to be the most accepted one and his sequential analysis of code-switching as well as his distinction between discourse-related, participant-related, and incompetence-related code-switching are for me the most plausible linguistic explanations as to why and when people code-switch. The analysis of identity in the relationship with code-switching, which some linguists have integrated in their work, has made it possible to learn more about the connection between the world we live in, the languages we speak and the identities we adopt. Our world has long been treated as being monolingual since there was generally the idea that one language was spoken by one nation. However, this is not the reality anymore (if it ever was), as globalization, transnationalism, and migration have led to nation-states composed of people with different cultures and languages. This multilingual context has an influence on our language use and thus also on our positioning of ourselves since we use different languages to identify with different (ethnic/racial) groups and in a conversation, we are always negotiating new identities.

Afterwards, I treated code-switching as a socio-cultural phenomenon, a newer approach that has not been taken into account by many researchers to this day. To do so, I started by giving a definition of racial discrimination, because as the accounts of African Americans showed, this phenomenon has a lot of impact on their language choice. Before I examined this impact further, I gave an in-depth explanation of the discriminatory context that African Americans encounter in schools, in the workplace and healthcare, among others, in the United States. This showed that to this date, they still have to suffer a lot from racial discrimination, which has a negative consequence for their health. Then, I discussed the topic of the status of African American English in the US and the attitudes towards this language variety, which means how other people perceive this language. In a last point, I took a closer look at accounts from African American people themselves telling us why they code-switch and how they feel doing so. All this enabled me to show the extent to which the socio-cultural context in which they live influences their decision whether or not to code-switch.

The results of the research show that the socio-cultural context is very important in analyzing the phenomenon of code-switching. The linguistic analysis done by many researchers, including Auer, Gumperz and Myers-Scotton, is a good basis to know what the phenomenon is about, what it means linguistically, and it also gives several reasons why it occurs. The linguistic analysis, however, only deals with the so-called language-based code-switching, while cultural-based code-switching is largely disregarded. However, this dissertation shows that in order to understand the phenomenon in its entirety, the socio-cultural context of code-switching people plays a major role, especially in today's world that is marked by multilingualism, even though many states still pretend to be exclusively monolingual. Many African Americans state that they often feel the urge to code-switch when they are surrounded by people having another race or ethnicity. The particular context of the United States, where the segregation and isolation of Black and White people was the dominant social structure for a long time, has strongly influenced American society to this day, where discrimination against African American people, as well as against people of color in general, can still be found in many places, including school, the workplace, healthcare and the administrative system. This context clearly impacts the lives of African Americans, as they always must fear being discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity, their language, or their appearance. One way to avoid this discrimination is to adapt not only their language, since different studies have shown that African American English is generally evaluated more negatively compared to Standard English, especially when used inappropriately in some settings, but also their whole behavior, including their hair and dress style, gestures, and posture, among others. All these adaptations should be considered as being part of the code-switching action, because as the term 'code' indicates (referring as it does to a system of signals and symbols used for communication), we communicate not only with the language we speak, but also with the clothes we wear, our hairstyle, the posture of our body, gestures, etc.

This shows that the socio-cultural context has a major impact on the language choice of people and that code-switching is not a purely linguistic concept anymore but should be analyzed as a socio-cultural one as well. This means that both types must be taken into account in order to fully understand the phenomenon. By focusing on only one aspect of code-switching, the other part is completely left out, but this also means that we cannot have a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. However, this would be very important these days, because in this study, the effects of the socio-cultural context on code-switching between African American English and Standard English by African Americans were examined and it can be concluded that racial discrimination played a significant role in this. After the abolition of

slavery and many amendments of the American law in order to reduce (racial) discrimination, it still characterizes the daily lives of African American people in the United States. The constant feeling of having to adapt their personality to a majorly White society negatively influences their mental as well as physical health. To avoid this, they change their whole behavior and, in a way, always deny their true selves. This has, however, also a negative consequence for their health, especially their mental health, as they always have to be attentive in which context they have to adopt their behavior, which includes a lot of stress for these people. This reality shows that much has to be done in order to allow African American people to be truly themselves, even when they are surrounded by people with different ethnicities and races. If we were able to detect all the concrete factors that lead to the fact that they really feel the urge to switch their behavior in some situations, then we would hopefully be able to erase them and allow African Americans to code-switch when it comes to them naturally, as every other person does.

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