Pragmatic Language of African American Children and Adolescents
A Systematic Synthesis of the Literature

Yvette D. Hyter, Kenyatta O. Rivers, and Glenda DeJarnette

Purpose: A systematic review and synthesis was performed on published articles and dissertations produced between 1970 and 2013 that focused on selected pragmatic language behaviors of African American children and adolescents. Methods: Electronic databases and hand searches of articles located in the databases were used to identify the published articles and dissertations. Each article or dissertation was reviewed by at least 2 of the authors to determine whether it met the criteria for inclusion in this study. Selected observations of the documents that met criteria for inclusion were recorded on the Primary Research Appraisal Tool (PRAT; DeJarnette, Hyter, & Rivers, 2012), a data gathering and analysis framework developed by the authors specifically for this systematic synthesis. Results: The literature search resulted in 92 research articles and dissertations, 37 of which were eliminated because they did not meet all of the inclusion criteria. The documents that met our inclusion criteria focused primarily on the structure and/or content of narrative discourse rather than speech acts, other forms of discourse (e.g., conversation, expository), and presupposition/perspective taking skills. Six major themes identified in the major findings are used to summarize studies reviewed for this systematic synthesis. Conclusions: We (a) explain the current state of knowledge about African American pragmatic language behaviors, (b) explain major findings and implications of the extant literature in this topical area and how it may inform speech–language pathology practice, and (c) identify directions for future research on pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents. Key words: African American, communication functions, discourse, pragmatic language, presupposition, speech acts, systematic review and synthesis, theory of mind

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Yvette D. Hyter and Kenyatta O. Rivers have no financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose. Glenda DeJarnette discloses that she has received a faculty research grant from the Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors.
disciplines, including speech-language pathology, anthropology, linguistics, neuroscience, philosophy of language, and sociology (Huang, 2012; Perkins, 2007; Xie & House, 2009). Scholars in each of these disciplines approach pragmatics from a different theoretical framework, resulting in varied conceptualizations of pragmatics. In general, however, pragmatics can be described as a vast content area that constitutes a component of social communication (Adams, Baxendale, Lloyd, & Aldred, 2005; Coggins, Timler, & Olswang, 2007; Hyter, 2007; Olswang, Coggins, & Timler, 2001).

According to Coggins et al. (2007), social communication is the ability to use language effectively to influence others and to interpret situations. Social communication is not only supported by pragmatics but also by social cognitive skills and executive functioning (EF; Olswang et al., 2001; Timler, 2008), affect regulation (the reciprocal element of EF), and working memory, which serves as the glue holding the other components of social communication together (Hyter, 2012; Hyter & Sloane, 2013). Perkins (2007) stressed the importance of approaches to pragmatics focusing, not only on the behaviors of individuals, but also on “underlying factors” (e.g., social-cultural, cognitive, and contextual) that motivate those behaviors (p. 32).

We use a holistic definition of pragmatics in this article. This holistic definition is what Huang (2012, p. 8) calls a “continental view.” It includes linguistic, nonlinguistic, and cognitive aspects of communication, as well as macrolevel contexts (e.g., community, ecological, global, economic, political, or ideological environments) that influence communicative behaviors (Hyter, 2007, 2014; van Wormer & Besthorn, 2010).

Linguistic aspects of pragmatics refer to the use of language to (1) communicate and (2) produce and regulate discourse in ways that are effective on the basis of the requirements of the communicative endeavor (de Villiers, 2004). This aspect of pragmatics includes three components, the first of which is speech acts or the communication of intentions (Austin, 1962; Scarle, 1969). The second component is the regulation and structure of discourse (such as conversation, oral and written narratives, expository, and classroom discourse), which includes turn taking and repair strategies (Spinelli & Ripich, 1985; Stockman, Karasinski, & Guillory, 2008). The third component of pragmatics is presupposition. It refers to making inferences about what communication partners know, and it includes register switching, dialect shifts, and code switching (Atlas, 2004; Roth & Spekman, 1984a, 1984b). Presupposition also requires social cognitive skills, such as perspective taking and theory of mind (Bates, 1976a, 1976b; de Villiers, 2004; Prutting & Kirchner, 1987).

Nonlinguistic aspects of pragmatics provide a bridge between language and context in that gestures and body movements, facial expressions, and prosody provide information about a communicator’s intentions (Bates, 1976a, 1976b; Kelly, 2001). These serve to facilitate the communication partner’s comprehension (Goldin-Meadow, 1999; McNeill, 1996, 2005). Cognitive aspects of pragmatics focus on the cognitive skills (e.g., implicature, inference or intention reading, perspective taking, and theory of mind) needed to interpret and comprehend what is said in a given context (Bara, 2010; Perkins, 2007; Schmid, 2012; Sperber & Wilson, 2002, 2005). One’s social cultural history and influences make up the macrolevel contexts for communicative practices, as well as determine the roles or status of interlocutors (Hyter, 2007; Rivers, Hyter, & DeJarnette, 2012; Sperber & Wilson, 2002, 2005).

Pragmatic language is important for every aspect of human interaction. It is important for communicating effectively in diverse situational contexts (Levinson, 1983), as well as with a range of communication partners (Hyter, 2007). As an aspect of social communication (Hyter, 2012; Olswang et al., 2001), pragmatics plays a role in helping communicators to see the world from others’ perspectives (Epley & Caruso, 2009) and to regulate social interaction (Weiner & Schneider, 2002). Positive social interactions facilitate prosocial behaviors, such as developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
In addition, pragmatics helps communicators make sense of social cues (Weiner, 2004) and can play a role in academic outcomes (Boudreau, 2008; Donahue, 1985; Eder, 1982; O’Neill, 2014). Presupposition and inferring others’ intentions, both components of pragmatic language, facilitate comprehension of oral and written discourse, as well as figurative language (Troya, 2011). Multiple areas of cognition support pragmatic language (Hyer, 2012; Olswang et al., 2001; Perkins, 2007), and cognitive impairments can affect pragmatic functioning (Perkins, 2007).

In addition, cultural practices are manifested through pragmatics (Hyer, 2007; Rivers et al., 2012). Culture can be defined as the assumptions, values, belief systems, and worldviews that guide daily practice of groups of people with a shared history of problem solving (Lustig & Koester, 2012; Ting-Toomey, 1999). It is an essential generator of pragmatic language, as culture determines how one interprets the contexts in which communicative interactions occur, how one changes his or her own behavior on the basis of his or her interpretation of the communicative context, and how one communicates using linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonlinguistic communicative behaviors (see DeJarnette, Rivers, & Hyter, 2015). Linguistic culture, which includes the attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that groups of people have about their own group’s and other groups’ ways of using language (Schifman, 1996), also influences beliefs and perceptions of language variations.

Pragmatic elements play a crucial role in the daily lives of all communicators. This factor motivates our advocacy for more focused study of pragmatic language behaviors of African American children and adolescents. Although the language development of African American children and adolescents has been the focus of research for decades, at least since the late 1960s, most research has concentrated on the structure (phonology, morphology, and syntax) and meaning (semantics) of African American English (AAE; e.g., the work of Craig & Washington, 1994, 1995, 2002; Dandy, 1991; Green, 2002, 2003; Newkirk-Turner, Oetting, & Stockman, 2014; Oetting et al., 2010; Roy, Oetting, & Moland, 2013; Seymour & Roeper, 1999; Smitherman, 1994; Stockman, 2010; Stockman, Guillory, Seibert, & Boult, 2013; Stockman & Vaughn-Cook, 1992; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010). In contrast, there has been limited research regarding the pragmatic components of AAE.

One reason for this may be that, to date, there has not been a unifying framework for examining the pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents (DeJarnette et al., 2015; Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, & Moleski, 2007; Rivers et al., 2012). As a consequence, much of the published research on this population consists of small data sets (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007), using inconsistent coding systems that might not reveal relevant pragmatic features (DeJarnette et al., 2015), and anecdotal accounts of language use (Battle, 1996; Bliss & McCabe, 2006, 2008; Collins, 1985; Gee, 1989a; Wyatt, 1995).

Knowledge of African American pragmatic language is particularly important for speech-language pathologists and educators, because many African American children and adolescents may exhibit pragmatic language behaviors that are culturally unique or different than their Euro American (EA) counterparts (Bliss & McCabe, 2006, 2008; DeJarnette et al., 2015; Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, & Moleski, 2007; Rivers et al., 2012). Unfortunately, in this 21st century, the pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents is still not completely understood (Green, 2002; Rivers et al., 2012). Such problems can be associated with both over- and under-referrals for speech-language services, as well as negative perceptions of the communicative abilities of African American children and adolescents (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2004; Kramer, Rivers, & Ratusnik, 2000; Rivers et al., 2012).

Based on our concerns about gaps in the knowledge base regarding the pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents, we decided to conduct a systematic and synthesized review of the literature so that clinicians, educators, and others will...
be better equipped to distinguish language differences and language disorders in classrooms and other settings. We are aware of no previous systematic and synthesized reviews of the literature on this topic. A search of the Cochrane Collaboration systematic review database in August 2014 did not reveal any published systematic reviews or meta-analyses on the pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents. Baker and McLeod (2011) discussed the importance of incorporating the methodological rigor and transparency of systematic reviews with the comprehensive coverage offered by narrative reviews or syntheses. That was our goal.

Accordingly, the purpose of this article was to review and synthesize peer-reviewed articles and dissertations produced between 1970 and 2013 regarding the pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents. The two-part goal was (1) to identify literature that has contributed to the knowledge base regarding pragmatic language of African American children and adolescents and (2) to describe information that emerged from this literature that might inform practice and future research in this area.

METHODS

A modified systematic review method was used for including and excluding articles and dissertations and for extracting and coding data from each of the included documents so that they could be synthesized. Although typical systematic reviews of the literature include only peer-reviewed articles published in journals, we decided to include dissertations as viable data because we wanted to include any empirical studies that could illuminate this underresearched topic.

Selecting primary research

Defining the time period

Although the concept of pragmatics dates back to the 1930s (Archer et al., 2012; Huang, 2007; Morris, 1938), much of the seminal work in the area of pragmatic language in speech-language pathology emerged during the late 1960s, throughout the 1970s, and into the 1980s (e.g., Austin, 1962; Bates, 1976a, 1976b; Prutting & Kirchner, 1983, 1987; Searle, 1969; Wetherby & Prutting, 1984). In the 1970s, the field of speech-language pathology was in the midst of a paradigm shift from a focus on language structure and meaning to an increasing focus on language functions. Consequently, the timeframe for the literature search for this study was set to start at 1970, because much of the 43-year period between 1970 and 2013 (i.e., from 1975 to 2000) is what Duchan (2011) referred to as the “pragmatic revolution” in the field of speech-language pathology. This is the period when the cultural and situational contexts of communication and language development began to be explored more regularly in research investigations and discussions.

The literature search

An extensive search of the extant literature produced between 1970 and 2013 was conducted using five electronic databases and eight journals. The databases were SCOPUS, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Dissertation Abstracts, each of which included multiple titles. In SCOPUS, we searched the health sciences, social sciences, and humanities subject areas, which included more than 12,000 titles. In EBSCOhost, we searched the education, health and medicine, literature and criticism, philosophy, psychology, and social sciences categories. In ProQuest, we searched the general database, which includes 53 ProQuest databases, along with the literature collections, political sciences, which included more than 150 titles from scholarly journals, and social sciences, which had more than 1,600 scholarly journals. These databases were selected because of their expansive reach across scholarly disciplines and their likelihood of containing studies on the pragmatic language abilities of African American children and adolescents.

Beyond these databases, journals examined were the *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology; Language, Speech, and
It should be noted that although the extensive search was conducted through 2013, no additional studies have appeared in the extant literature for 2014, as the authors conducted a “good faith measure” search of the literature, dissertation abstracts, and Cochran Collaboration database in August 2014.

Selected key words used to guide the literature search were based on the way we conceptualized pragmatics. These words, employed individually and in combination, were “African American,” “Black,” “dialect shifting,” “discourse,” “discourse regulation,” “intention reading,” “intentions,” “narrative,” “conversation,” “turn taking,” “repair,” “expository,” “communication functions,” “communication intentions,” “persons of color,” “perspective taking,” “pragmatics,” “presupposition,” “theory of mind,” “social cognition,” “social communication,” and “speech acts.” In addition to our search of the electronic databases, a hand search of the references in the obtained articles was also conducted. Also, during five presentations about this content area (at national conferences of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (Hyter, Rivers, & DeJarnette, 2010b, 2012b), the National Black Association for Speech-Language Hearing (NBASHLH) (Hyter, Rivers, & DeJarnette, 2010a, 2012a, 2013), the authors polled audience members who identified additional published literature that was considered for this review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria for this study were peer-reviewed, data-based articles and dissertations that (1) were published or conducted, respectively, during or after 1970 and (2) whose participant pool included at least 30% African American children or adolescents. We selected 30% as the cutoff number for African American participants, because we wanted to make sure we did not exclude studies that identified relevant outcomes for African American children and adolescents although they may have included other ethnic and racial groups in the participant pool. Conference presentations, book chapters, and master’s theses were excluded from these data as were articles that were published in languages other than English and that included populations located outside of the United States.

Data coding and analysis

The authors developed a tool, the Primary Research Appraisal Tool (PRAT; DeJarnette, Hyter, & Rivers, 2012; see Supplemental Digital Content, available at: http://links.lww.com/TLD/A40), which served as a framework for organizing our observations of the data. Each article and dissertation examined in this study was coded using the PRAT. Coding consisted of reviewing each article and dissertation and then marking “yes” or “no” to indicate the presence or absence of a particular component. We wrote in each article and dissertation’s research question(s) and/or purpose, method of data collection, findings, and implications of those findings in the appropriate sections at the end of the PRAT.

Coding reliability was established in four phases. First, each of the authors coded two articles in the data set. This was followed by a discussion about our coding decisions, so we could calibrate our coding responses. Second, each author coded one-third (i.e., 30–31 of 92) of the articles and dissertations in the data set. This second round of coding was used to determine which articles matched the inclusion criteria and which ones did not. Third, after eliminating articles that did not match the inclusion criteria, the first author recoded 100% of the remaining articles using calibration standards set in the first phase. Fourth, a random sampling of 10% of the articles in the data set was reviewed and independently coded by each of the coauthors using the PRAT. The total number of agreements of each item on the PRAT was divided by the
The total number of agreement opportunities\(^1\) to acquire an interrater agreement of 84%.

To achieve the second, more qualitative goal of this systematic synthesis, we used an inductive thematic analysis approach to determine themes that emerged from purpose statements, major findings, and implications of research findings presented in the corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Harwood & Garry, 2003; Neuman, 2006; Punch, 2014). First, research purpose statements were extracted from each article and dissertation and listed in a word document. Next, the “manifest” (i.e., overtly stated) content of each statement was identified (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 109). In other words, in the process of coding the statements, the coder is asking, “What is this purpose statement about?” (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dey, 1993). Third, the manifest content extracted from each purpose statement was assigned a code. Codes described the basic unit of meaning inherent in the manifest content of the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006). Finally, themes were constructed from the codes. Themes comprise collections of codes, and they represent the core meaning inherent within the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Neuman, 2006; Punch, 2014).

**RESULTS**

**Search of the literature**

The initial literature search yielded 92 articles and dissertations published between 1970 and 2013 that focused on some aspect of pragmatic language and reported at least 30% of the participant pool as being children and/or adolescents who are African American. Of these 92 articles and dissertations, 37 were eliminated because they did not meet all of the inclusion criteria. Specifically, 16 of the articles were theoretical or a review of the literature rather than a designed study (Ball, 2002; Barnitz, 1994; Battle, 1996; Bliss & McCabe, 2006, 2008; Collins, 1985; deVilliars, 2004; Gec, 1989a; Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993; Hyter, 2007; Johnson, 1995; McCabe, 1997; Nichols, 1989; Studler & Ward, 2005; Washington, 2001; Wyatt, 1995). One document (Hester & Langdon, 2008) was a presentation rather than an article; two (Finger, 2007; Renn, 2007) were a master’s thesis rather than a dissertation, and four (Craig & Washington, 1994, 1995, 2002; Robinson, 1992) focused on language structure rather than language use, although discourse was used to collect the samples for these studies.

Ten documents either did not meet the 30% criteria of African American participants or did not provide sufficient information to determine whether 30% of the subjects were African American (Fuste-Hermann, Silliman, Bahr, Fasnacht, & Federico, 2006; Heath, 1982; Heilmann, Miller, & Nockerts, 2010; Hill & Coufal, 2005; Howes, Sanders, & Lee, 2008; Hyter, 2003; Hyter, Rogers-Adkinson, Self, Friederich-Simmons, & Jantz, 2001; Lee, 2006; McCabe & Rosenthal Rollins, 1994; Michaels, 1981); one (Myers, Rana, & Harris, 1979) was an annotated bibliography rather than a peer-reviewed article or dissertation; one (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) was published before 1970; and two focused on a college level or adult population (Norment, 1995; Szpara & Wylie, 2007). The final corpus of 55 documents comprised 39 (71%) articles and 16 (29%) dissertations. Table 1 summarizes the key findings for these 55 investigations.

**Research purposes**

Of the 55 articles and dissertations reviewed, 36 (65%) included key research questions, but 100% of the documents included a purpose statement. The reasons scholars provided for investigating the pragmatic language of African American children, and adolescents can be divided both thematically and temporally into four groups.

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\(^1\)Opportunities for agreement included written comments as well as checked boxes; thus, for each rater, a total of 294 responses were examined for level of agreement with all other raters.
### Table 1. Selected characteristics of analyzed articles and dissertations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles and Dissertations</th>
<th>Research Purpose</th>
<th>Major Construct Investigated</th>
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</table>
| 1. Ball (1992)             | To investigate and characterize preferred patterns for organizing experiences among AA adolescents. | Discourse: Expository | 102 (44%) 45 M; 55 F Typical language School age | Noneexperimental: Descriptive Preexperimental: Static group comparison | Participant observation; written artifacts | African American adolescents reported strong preference for using vernacular-based patterns in academic writing, as they got older, although other groups preferred vernacular-based organizational patterns in informal oral exposition. | Organization of expository discourse is affected by cultural preferences and years of schooling; preference for organizational patterns can be viewed as an obstacle or a resource for successful literacy-related experiences. |}
| 2. Ball (1996)             | To share information on how some AAE speakers have successfully used their language abilities within the context of expository writing, to share principles that have been used to guide Dr. Ball's work with linguistically diverse students. | Discourse: Expository | 4 (100%) 2 M, 2 F Typical language School age Low SES | Noneexperimental: Descriptive | Field notes; observations; written artifacts; discussions; surveys | Culturally influenced discourse strategies used; two key guiding principles for evaluating AAE adolescent speakers (a) AAE literacy practices need to be accepted; (b) devices reflecting oral tradition of AAE should be considered in curricula. | Broader array of diverse voices needs to be included in the writing curriculum; need to broaden what is valued in narrative discourse. |
| 3. Blake (1984) Dissertation | To provide evidence and a description of development of language in Black children. | Speech acts | 3 (100%) 2 M, 1 F Typical language Infants (18-24 months) Low SES | Noneexperimental: Descriptive | Video/audio recording; Mother–child interactions | AAE features were not a dominant factor in children’s early language; interactive patterns of language functions reflected culture’s style of communication; changes in the relations and functions influenced the rate of increased MLU. | AA children are not deficient in language; interactive communication showed high degrees of interpersonal involvement during conversation—a potential conflict with school discourse; AAE features do not interfere with early language learning. |
| 4. Bliss, Covington, and McCabe (1999) | To describe the narrative styles of AA speakers and to distinguish narrative deficits from impaired language processing. | Discourse: Narrative | 8 (0.00%) Some M, Some F 4 Typical language; 4 Impaired language 2 Preschool; 2 School age | Noneexperimental: Descriptive | Elicited narratives | Problems with linguistic processing in both topic-centered and topic-associated narratives included word retrieval deficits, disfluencies, echolalia, and perseveration. | Guidelines presented in this article can be used to differentiate normal and impaired narration. Topic association does not indicate language impairment. | (continues)
Table 1. Selected characteristics of analyzed articles and dissertations (Continued)

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<td>5. Bloome, Katz, and Champion (2003)</td>
<td>To generate insights about narrative development by discussing the use of two different narrative styles, narratives as text, and narratives as performance.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>100 (97%) M; F equally divided Pre-school and kindergarten low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Oral and written storytelling</td>
<td>Children may be socialized in school to narrative as text; this socialization may begin early and constitute a major component of educational frameworks, schools may emphasize narrative as text and diminish the importance of narrative as performance.</td>
<td>Narratives are objectified and separated from the storyteller, storytelling, event, and social relationships; emphasis on narrative as text reduces the creative process of narrative development to a supporting role.</td>
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<td>6. Bridgeforth (1988) Dissertation</td>
<td>To extend the analysis of the meaning and forms acquisition to the functional language use patterns among 3- and 4-year-old Black working class children, including an analysis of emerging language functions across both age groups.</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td>8 (100%) 4 M, 4 F Pre-school age low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language samples in conversation and play</td>
<td>22 micro and 5 macrofunctions identified; methodological issues are transcription of data (must include contextual information) and development of coding system (need to develop a functional coding system that emerges from the data).</td>
<td>This study’s methodological issues have implications for future research designs; qualitative and quantitative analyses of this study showed several patterns of language use.</td>
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<td>7. Burns (2004) Dissertation</td>
<td>Two studies were conducted. Study 1 examined how young AAE speakers, in comparison to young GAE speakers aged 4-6 years, organized a narrative during a picture-supported task. Study 2 was a comparison of narrative organization styles of high and low AAE dialect density speakers.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>Study 1: 78 (66%) Preschool study 2. 21 (100%) School age low SES</td>
<td>Study 1: True experimental: Within-subjects design Study 2: Nonexperimental: Predictive</td>
<td>Picture elicited narrative; Assessment scores</td>
<td>AAE and GAE speakers showed equivalent and significant development in narrative skills between ages 4 and 6 years, no significant correlation between overall narrative score and age or AAE use; children mastered narrative features by 7-8 years; no correlation found between t-units for background information and AAE density.</td>
<td>Narrative features can be reliably examined in AAE and GAE speakers 4- and 5-year-olds mastered fewer critical narrative features than 6-year-olds. AAE dialect density is not a predictor of narrative organizational style. Topic association is not less well developed than topic centered, high point analysis cannot be applied to topic associative style.</td>
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<td>8. Celinska (2009)</td>
<td>This study analyzed personal and fictional narratives of culturally/ethnically diverse students with and without learning disabilities</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>82 (41%) 41 M, 41 F 41 had learning disability</td>
<td>Preexperimental: Static group comparison</td>
<td>Elicited personal narratives in conversation</td>
<td>African American and Caucasian participants with and without learning disabilities produced personal and fictional narratives that were comparable on most measures of narrative length, structural organization, and coherence. The two groups differed with respect to their use of goal-directed episodic structures. Students with learning disability tended to recount events from personal experience in the form of action sequences rather than goal-directed structures. In their fictional narratives, these students produced more goal-directed episodes than their typically achieving peers.</td>
<td>Apply multiple approaches to narrative analysis; should include both personal and fictional content; narrative abilities may not generalize across narrative genres; specific features of narratives may be associated with ethnic/cultural background or learning disability.</td>
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9. Champion *Dissertation*  
To investigate the production of narratives of AAE-speaking children  
Discourse: Narratives | 15 (100%) 5 M, 10 F Typical language School age low SES | Ethnographic | Elicited narratives from toys and story prompts | More topic-centered narratives than topic-associated narratives produced; produced a range of narrative structures; higher frequency of complete and complex structures than any others from Story Grammar Analysis; higher frequency of classic structure than any other in High Point Analysis | Some narratives constructed around moral themes; some AAE speakers use prosody as contextual links to the structure of narrative; important to be aware of prosodic patterns; Story Grammar and High Point can be applied to narratives of AAE speakers; emotional themes may produce more narratives. |
Table 1. Selected characteristics of analyzed articles and dissertations (Continued)

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<td>10. Champion (1998)</td>
<td>To examine narrative structures among AA children.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>15 (100%) 5 M, 10 F Typical language</td>
<td>Preexperimental: One group posttest design</td>
<td>Elicited narratives in conversation</td>
<td>Children can produce a range of narrative structures—in addition to high point found (1) moral centered, (b) performative, (c) dispute</td>
<td>Types of prompts and cultural background may influence narrative structures, which are valued in their community. AA children do not produce only one structure; AA children produce more topic-centered than topic-associating narratives.</td>
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<td>11. Champion, Seymour, and Camarata (1995)</td>
<td>To investigate the production of narratives of AAE-speaking children using elicitation procedures that were standard across participants.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>36 (100%) Typical language School age</td>
<td>Noneexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Elicited narratives from conversation and play; story prompts</td>
<td>AA children between 6 and 10 years of age are capable of producing complex narratives; use higher level narrative structures routinely. Important for researchers to evaluate narrative structure using a number of different conceptual frameworks to ensure child's competency is not underestimated.</td>
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<td>12. Gipson &amp; Craig (2006)</td>
<td>To determine important influences on achievement by examining links between AA students' oral language and emergent literacy skills.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>63 (100%) Typical language Preschool Low SES</td>
<td>Noneexperimental: Predictive</td>
<td>Assessment scores; bookelicted narratives; language sampling</td>
<td>Many (55) of the children used morphosyntactic AAE forms during oral narrative; if did not, preschoolers who frequently used AAE demonstrated stronger emergent literacy skills. No evidence that students using AAE with greater frequency would have more difficulty learning early literacy skills. Preschoolers did not respond to implicit cues regarding language; some preschoolers dialect shift. Students who used AAE with greatest frequency performed best on sentence imitation. Overall linguistic skill is a better predictor of reading than whether or not a child uses AAE. Dialect shifting shows emerging pragmatic awareness that language used at home may not be the language expected at school. Explicit instruction in dialect awareness may contribute to stronger literacy outcomes.</td>
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<td><strong>13. Craig and Washington (1986)</strong></td>
<td>To examine interactions between social class and linguistic phenomena as they related to the current widely accepted model of successful turn exchanges</td>
<td>Discourse: Turn-taking</td>
<td>6 (100%) 3 M, 3 F Typical language Preschool</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language sampling</td>
<td>Varied regarding number of different AAE features in discourse; most utterances were produced nonsimultaneously (89% for girls and 89.4% for boys); successful turn exchanges were facilitated by nonverbal behaviors; verbal behaviors served minor role in discourse regulation.</td>
<td>Current model for successful turn exchanges can be used with speakers whose language differs from SE. Only one child talks at a time; turn exchanges involved speaker and listener cues; turn allocation cues were primarily nonverbal.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>14. Craig and Washington (2004)</strong></td>
<td>To contribute to current understanding of sources of systematic variation in child AA English (AAE) by examining the contribution of grade for students in elementary schools.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shifting</td>
<td>400 (100%) 178 M, 222 F Typical language Preschool and school age</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental: Nonrandomized control group pretest-posttest design</td>
<td>Language sampling; Picture description</td>
<td>Grade was a source of systematic variation in AAE produced by typically developing AA students in preschool through elementary grades; sharp decline in morphological dialect density between kindergarten and first grade. Students used larger repertoire of morphosyntactic features as they progressed through elementary grades. Two periods of dialect shifting occur during early grades—one in first grade for spoken discourse; one at third grade for oral reading; students who are most linguistically advanced dialect shift; dialect shifting is best characterized as a sharp decline that occurs in a short time frame; first grade is a critical time for occurrence of dialect shifting; then third grade.</td>
<td>These findings support the dialect shifting, reading achievement hypothesis that AAE speakers who learn to use GAE in literacy tasks will outperform their peers who do not learn to use GAE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15. Craig et al. (2009)</strong></td>
<td>To evaluate the contributions of dialect shifting to reading achievement test scores of AAE-speaking students when controlling for the effect of SES, oral language abilities, and writing skills.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shifting</td>
<td>165 (100%) 'half' M; 'half' F Typical language School age</td>
<td>Ex post facto design</td>
<td>Assessment scores; language sampling; response to information requests</td>
<td>AAE production rates were inversely related to reading achievement scores and decreased significantly between oral and written narratives. Lower rates in writing predicted a substantial amount of variance in reading scores showing significant direct and indirect effects mediated by oral language comprehension.</td>
<td>These findings support the dialect shifting, reading achievement hypothesis that AAE speakers who learn to use GAE in literacy tasks will outperform their peers who do not learn to use GAE.</td>
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<td>16. Curenton (2004)</td>
<td>To investigate the relationship between narrative skills and theory of mind for low-income children</td>
<td>Presupposition: Theory of mind</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>Ex post facto</td>
<td>False belief tasks, story retell using <em>Frog Where Are You?</em> (Mayer, 1969)</td>
<td>50% of AA and 72% of EA children performed false belief tasks adequately. Older children had better narrative skills than younger children. AA children less likely to pass false belief than EA children. Coherence correlated with internal state talk. EA false belief did not account for variance in children’s narrative skills. AA who passed false believe told better stories.</td>
<td>Poor performance does not indicate child do not understand concept of false belief. AA children would be better to demonstrate their skills in a task that tapped more into narrative mode of thought rather than propositional mode of thought. AA false belief performance predicted narrative skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Curenton, Jones, Craig, and Flanigan (2008)</td>
<td>To examine how young children learn to use a sophisticated form of oral language called decontextualized discourse</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>Preschool School age</td>
<td>True experimental: Within subjects design</td>
<td>Mother-child interaction; video recordings, story generation</td>
<td>Story telling was the best opportunity for mothers to showcase discourse skills; story-creating context provided best opportunity for children to demonstrate oral language skills; similar use of decontextualized speech in story reading context. Mothers with higher literacy were more likely to use mental linguistic verbs in all 3 contexts.</td>
<td>Allow child to pretend to read to you; encourage parents to share oral stories with their children; this is where children are exposed to the most sophisticated talk. Parent-child literacy intervention should encourage dyads to interact using various forms of stories. Need to examine questioning and comment techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Curenton and Justice (2004)</td>
<td>To explore and characterize preschool children’s use of literal language features to determine whether these features were present in narratives and to determine whether usage varied as a function of age and/or ethnicity.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>Typical language Preschool low SES</td>
<td>Preexperimental: Static group comparison</td>
<td>Story generation</td>
<td>Literate language features occurred for 3- to 5-year-olds. Conjunction use is positively associated with complex elaborated noun phrases and adverbs; use of complex and simple elaborated noun phrases was inversely related; no difference in AA and EA rates, but age-related difference occurred in use of mental state verbs and conjunctions.</td>
<td>Results are particularly relevant for children from low SES, a population that is vulnerable for difficulties in literacy development (Justice &amp; Ezell, 2001). Children who do not use literate language features at the rates described here may receive targeted assistance supporting their use of these features. Promoting literate language use in the earliest stages of development, SLPs may prevent later difficulties.</td>
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<td><strong>19. Etter-Lewis (1985) Dissertation</strong></td>
<td>Presupposition: Code switching in the language of Black children in order to describe social class effects on children's use of dialect variants.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Code switching</td>
<td>88 (100)</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Conversation, picture description, play, sentence repetition</td>
<td>Different patterns of use found for participants from each SES: code switching occurred least in conversation and most in puppet play; participants from high SES used more GAE than AAE; those from low SES used more AAE than GAE; participants from low SES code switched less often than those from high SES.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>20. Ford and Milosky (2008)</strong></td>
<td>Presupposition: Emotional inference</td>
<td>32 (53%)</td>
<td>Mixed design with matched samples</td>
<td>Activated emotions with video; assessment scores; verbal response time</td>
<td>TL likely to make emotional inference in short stories; LI did not make emotional inferences; ability to make emotional inferences predicted by language measures, VRT, and social competence.</td>
<td>Making emotional inferences is related to comprehension and social competence; should be routinely assessed and targeted in language intervention. To make an inference requires word knowledge and emotional recognition.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>21. Garrett (1996) Dissertation</strong></td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>Mixed design</td>
<td>Narrative sample; audio recording</td>
<td>No significant difference in cohesive devices used by average and below average readers or by males and females; no significant interaction between reading level and gender; all participants used reference pronouns more than conjunctions as cohesive devices. Those with low reading scores showed more incomplete cohesive ties and less ambiguous ties than peers with average reading.</td>
<td>Should not only focus on linguistic aspects of cohesion, need to include nonlinguistic aspects of discourse.</td>
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<td>22. Gee (1989)</td>
<td>To provide a linguistic analysis of stories to offer a view of psycholinguistically relevant structures characteristic of spoken narratives; to outline discourse: narrative 2 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (50%) M; 2 F Typical language School age</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Story generation</td>
<td>Narrative style is associated with cultural identity and presentation of self; when AA girl told story to white male, she switched narrative styles</td>
<td>School may not understand or value the cultural style of expression; does not see its connection to culture and sense of self; does not understand implications of asking Black child to switch narrative style (lose self); does not give access to instruction that would ensure ability to switch styles.</td>
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<td>23. Gidney (1995) Dissertation</td>
<td>To present an analysis of the roles that conjunctions play in the narrative discourse of AA children.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative 22 (100%)</td>
<td>11 M; 11 F Typical language School age Low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>“and” is principal connective used and is used in a variety of ways; children aged 10-12 years still heavily rely on “and.” Use of connectives in AAE have unique aspects including “because,” being used to indicate cause as well as serve pragmatic functions; “and” used to coordinate verb structures.</td>
<td>For children who speak a dialect, the transition from oral to written is wider than for those whose home language is closer to the “standard.” Increased knowledge of verbal repertoire of AA children may help teachers and administrators to devise materials that take into account children’s home language(s).</td>
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<td>24. Goodwin (1980)</td>
<td>To analyze the cultural procedures used by female children to organize a form of gossip dispute that they call “he-said-she-said.” To show what types of utterances generate this speech event and understand how participants use their actions to rank one another.</td>
<td>Discourse: Disputes 44 (100%)</td>
<td>0 M; 44 F Typical language School age</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Third parties in he-said-she-said are important not in the confrontation but in the reporting stage; they act as instigators in setting up a confrontation at a future stage; spectators who attempt to intervene can be penalized by the principal actors in the dispute; compromises do not occur.</td>
<td>The speech of children at play, particularly talk taken to be aimless activity (Malinowski, 1959, p. 315) constitutes powerful manifestations of linguistic competence as well as social and cultural competence.</td>
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<td>25. Gorman, Fiestas, Peña, and Reynolds Clark (2011)</td>
<td>To analyze the effects of culture on the creative and stylistic features in narrative production</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>60 (33.33%)</td>
<td>Preexperimental Static group comparison</td>
<td>Picture book elicited narrative</td>
<td>Similarities and differences found between ethnic groups. No significant differences were found regarding organizational style or use of paralinguistic devices. AA children included more fantasy in their stories; Latino children included names characters more often; Caucasian children made more references to the nature of character relationships.</td>
<td>Culture influences narrative production even in a highly structured narrative task on the basis of wordless picture books. Understanding of narrative structure, creativity, and style is important to provide ecologically valid narrative assessment and intervention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Hammer and Weiss (1999)</td>
<td>Explored how AA mothers and their infants at the single-word stage of development structured their play and communicated with each other.</td>
<td>Discourse: Play interaction</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>None experimental Descriptive and predictive</td>
<td>Assessment scores; interview; participant observation; play</td>
<td>Low SES and middle SES dyads played in similar ways; there was individual variability in both SES groups regarding play and communication patterns.</td>
<td>As children grow older and complexity of language increases, differences between low and middle SES might appear, but it would not be because parents provided a deficient language learning environment. Lower language and school outcomes may result from standardized assessments of skills valued by middle SES, and interaction styles at home are different from styles the child is exposed to in school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Hester (1997)</td>
<td>Dissertation: To examine relationships between narrative style, dialect, and reading ability.</td>
<td>Dissertation: Narrative</td>
<td>56 (100%)</td>
<td>Ex post facto Factorial: Two-factor experimental design</td>
<td>Picture elicited narrative</td>
<td>Children with reading disorders regardless of dialect produced shorter stories than children with normal reading. Children with reading disorders produced fewer co-das than children with normal reading. GAE speakers used more adversatives for cohesion than AAE. All children used more literate style features in fantasy than in script story.</td>
<td>Narrative style is more closely related to reading than to dialect: story type influences narrative style features.</td>
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<td>28. Horton-Ikard (2009)</td>
<td>Explored the type and adequacy of cohesive devices produced by school-aged children who use AAE.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>33 (100%) 18 M; 15 F Typical language School age Middle/high SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language sampling</td>
<td>AAE speakers produced 5 different types of AAE referential tokens but only two (undifferentiated pronoun and pronoun extension) were used as cohesive devices. Greater proficiency in using personal reference markers. Age was a significant factor for adequacy rates of personal, demonstrative, and lexical referential cohesion but not conjunctive markers. At younger ages, the type of cohesive marker used impacts adequacy rates. Younger children use personal reference markers more efficiently than demonstrative markers. As children age and mature linguistically, their abilities to adequately use these markers will not depend on the type of reference marker.</td>
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<td>29. Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007)</td>
<td>To describe the communicative functions used by AA Head Start children during play</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td>16 (100%) 8 M; 8 F Typical language Preschool Low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Participant observation; Language sampling; Play</td>
<td>Preschoolers used 5 of the 10 Tough (1982) functions and the Stockman (1996) functions of directing, imaginings, reporting, obligated responses, self-maintaining. They did not often use prediction, presuppositions, reasoning, repair, and verbal routines. Significant gender differences were found for types of functions and types of obligated responses. No significant difference for MLU or communication functions between school and age group. Communicative functions requiring complex cognitive planning were not expressed. Boys and girls produce different communicative functions. AA children produce a variety of functions regardless of gender. Patterns of use can help teachers and SLPs discriminate between different and disordered communication performance. Linking literacy activities and play may increase use of functions requiring complex cognitive planning.</td>
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<td>30. Hyon and Sulzby (1994)</td>
<td>To assess the frequency of topic-associating narratives among AA kindergarteners.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>48 (100%) Typical language Low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Picture-elicited narrative</td>
<td>Some of the children (N = 16) told topic-associative stories; others (N = 28) told topic-centered stories. Storybook and fairy tale themes and structures were present across two narrative styles. Topic-associating narratives is not the dominant narrative style in this population. Thematic and structural characteristics of narratives are based on contexts for speech and literacy in the classroom.</td>
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<td>Hyter (1994) Dissertation</td>
<td>To characterize the lexical, prosodic, and kinesic strategies used by preadolescent speakers of AAE to denote referential cohesion in oral narratives.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>30 (100%) 15 M; 15 F Typical language School age Low SES</td>
<td>Preexperimental: One group posttest</td>
<td>Movie-elicited narrative with Prog Goes to Dinner (Mayer, Osborn, Stumer, &amp; Templeton, 1985).</td>
<td>Lexical information is primarily used to communicate referential cohesion; prosodic and kinesic cues are used to support lexical information. Vowel elongation and rise-fall contours mark characters as new. Kinesic cues accompanied lexically undifferentiated pronominal references and gave information not provided lexically. More research is needed to evaluate the interaction between lexical, prosodic, and kinesic channels during narrative discourse. Complexity of stimulus used to elicit the narrative may affect referential choices and clausal structure.</td>
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<td>Kasambira (2008)</td>
<td>To describe the cognitive–communicative functions demonstrated by preschoolers and their mothers during teaching and play interactions with focus on communicative functions.</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td>95 (35%) 44 M; 51 F Preschool 51% Low SES; 49% “non poor”</td>
<td>Mixed design with factorial: Combined experimental and ex post facto designs</td>
<td>Video recordings; play; adult–child interactions</td>
<td>Significant relationships between mother communicative functions and child communicative functions; demographic factors such as SES, gender, race/ethnicity, and mother communicative functions had strong link with child outcomes. Purposeful encouragement of child self-maintaining in boys may be useful to increase frequency of appropriate use of language to meet needs during conflict; racial ethnic difference demonstrated by AA and Latino mothers. Preschool teachers may need to adjust to students’ needs considering race/ethnicity, SES, and gender. Understanding changes in children’s behaviors when interacting with a particular gender can help teachers determine whether a same-sex dyad would be beneficial for a student or vice versa.</td>
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<td>Leaper, Tenenbaum, and Shaffer (1999)</td>
<td>To investigate gender effects on the conversational strategies used by AA children.</td>
<td>Discourse: Conversation</td>
<td>100 (100%) 60 M; 60 F Typical language School age Low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Predictive</td>
<td>Peer-to-peer interaction; play</td>
<td>Most common communication strategies for girl or boy pairs were collaboration and informing. Girl pairs were highly collaborative; boy pairs were more likely to use controlling communication acts and to engage in dominating exchanges while playing with puppets; gender differences in dominating exchanges were limited to same gender interactions and did not occur in mixed gender interactions.</td>
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<td>34. Maines, Champion, and McCabe (2002)</td>
<td>To analyze the narratives of AA preadolescents using dependency analysis. Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>16 (100%) 8 M, 8 F Typical Language School age Low and middle SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Conversation; story prompts</td>
<td>Low SES children reached a higher level of proposition than middle SES children. Girls reached a higher level of proposition than boys. Children primarily produced topic-centered narratives that consisted of 94% explicit propositions; narratives contained little reported speech. Low SES children produced more elaborate narratives than middle SES children.</td>
<td>Analyzing narratives of other diverse groups with dependency analysis may be useful because of its applicability to a variety of types of discourse and it is freed from potentially culture-bound assumptions.</td>
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<td>35. McGregor (2000)</td>
<td>Study 1: To collect local norms on narrative development. Study 2: Measure the short-term effect of peer models on preschoolers’ narration. Study 3: Explore whether the influence of peers could be used to facilitate narration. Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>Study 1: 52 (100%) Study 2: 26 (100%) Study 3: 14 (100%) Preschool Low SES</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental: Nonrandomized control group pretest-posttest design</td>
<td>Picture book-elicited narratives</td>
<td>Developmental differences in both the number of children who evidenced the use of structural and cohesive elements and the frequency with which the children used these elements. Between 3- and 5-year-olds, more children began to use setting statements, complicating actions, and codas. Cohesive elements increase with age; more children used temporal conjunctions. More structural and cohesive tokens in stories of 4 year olds than in those of 3 year olds.</td>
<td>Early intervention for narration can be effective. This study suggests the viability of a clinician-prompted peer-mediated approach to training narration. It also shows the important advantage of peer-mediated intervention because it promotes instructional congruence in the context of cultural and linguistic mismatches between clinician and client. Collection of local data allowed identification of a set of structural and cohesive elements that can be characteristically expected in book-based narratives of the particular community.</td>
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<td>36. Middleton (1992) Dissertation</td>
<td>Explores language use among working-class children interacting in various naturalistic contexts with others in their environment.</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td>4 (100%) 2 M, 2 F</td>
<td>Typical language School age Low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Video and audio recordings; language sampling</td>
<td>Three most frequently occurring micro functions appearing in language of all subjects were reporting personal facts, reporting personal feelings, and responding to personal questions. Gender differences were evident on the basis of frequency of occurrence of functions used with males using taunting, calling, indirect directives, and complaining more than females. Females used reporting personal facts, responding to personal questions, responding to information questions, responding to opinion, and responding to requests for clarification more than males. Males used more (N = 8) macro functions than females (N = 6).</td>
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<td>37. Mills, Watkins, and Washington (2013)</td>
<td>To investigate structural and dialectal narrative characteristics between fictional and personal narratives of AA children.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>43 (100%) Typical language School age 68% Low SES</td>
<td>True experimental design: Within subjects design</td>
<td>Fictional and personal narrative; wordless book; Story prompts</td>
<td>Statistically significant differences between the two types of narrative were found for both microstructures and macrostructures, but not for dialect density. No grade-related differences were found in any of those areas.</td>
<td>Expressive elaboration analysis holds promise as a culture-fair method of assessing the microstructural narrative language skills of young schoolaged AA children. In addition, wordless picture books may be the best context for elicitation of fictional narratives that display evaluative elements (continues)</td>
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<td>38. Nelson (2010)</td>
<td>To investigate changes in multilevel indicators of written language performance by AA and European American students, including changes in AAE use, as assessed in original story probes written independently in three 1-hr sessions across the school year.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>38 (47%) 18 M, 20 F of AA 9 Typical language 9 Impaired language School age Low SES</td>
<td>Preexperimental: Static group comparison</td>
<td>Written artifacts, Story prompts</td>
<td>Significant and similar increases were found for AA and European American students in story scores, total number of words, number of different words, and proportion of words spelled correctly; racial group was a significant between-group factor only for AAE and for sentence correctness measures; and almost no associations were found between rates of AAE feature codes and independent discourse and word-level measures.</td>
<td>A diverse group of students, including those with disabilities, can improve their writing abilities over the course of a single school year when given extensive, explicit instruction in how to communicate in writing.</td>
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<td>39. Peña, Gillam, Malek, Rosedale, Fiestas, and Sabel (2006)</td>
<td>To examine reliability and classification accuracy of a narration-based dynamic assessment task.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>30 (47%) 12 M, 18 F School age Low SES</td>
<td>True experimental design: Pretest-posttest control group design; within-subjects design</td>
<td>Story elicited from wordless picture books</td>
<td>The results of the first experiment indicated that narrative measures applied to stories about 2 different wordless picture books had good internal consistency. In Experiment 2, typically developing children who received mediated learning demonstrated a greater pretest to posttest change than did children in the LI and control groups.</td>
<td>The first experiment supported the use of 2 wordless picture books as stimuli materials for collecting narratives before and after mediation within a dynamic assessment paradigm. The second experiment supported the use of dynamic assessment for accurately identifying language impairments in school-aged children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Peters (1983) Dissertation</td>
<td>To examine language usage to account for the social/interactive dimension as well as cultural dimensions. Data derived from the research show how children from different SES backgrounds use speech acts to communicate ideas and feeling in changing situations.</td>
<td>Speech acts</td>
<td>8 (100%) Typical language Preschool Low and middle SES</td>
<td>Preexperimental: Static group comparison</td>
<td>Video recordings; adult-child interactions</td>
<td>LIS E participants produced as many utterances as LIS E children during interactions with mothers and strangers. Children spend 6 min more with strangers than mothers. Both groups produced more utterances with mother than with stranger, with LIS E producing 25% more than LIS E group. LIS E mothers</td>
<td>LIS E children may need more time with strangers to accomplish the same amount of language as LIS E children. This study also proposes a universal set of sentence type categories and communicative functions.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 1. Selected characteristics of analyzed articles and dissertations (Continued)

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<tr>
<td>41. Price, Roberts, and Jackson (2006)</td>
<td>To describe the story grammar elements present in children's narratives during a story retelling task; to determine whether there are differences in the numbers and types of story elements in children's narratives; to examine the relationship between children's narratives and child and family background characteristics.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>65 (100%) Typical language preschool low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Story retelling using The Bus Story Language Test (Renfrew, 1992)</td>
<td>The 4-year-olds narrated some attempts to solve the story's problem and elements of its ending. Upon entering kindergarten, participants had higher total narrative scores and included more of every type of story grammar element, except relationship.</td>
<td>The Bus Story Language Test appears to be an assessment tool that is sensitive to structural growth in AA children's narratives from 4 years to kindergarten entry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Renn (2010) Dissertation</td>
<td>To provide more insight into the linguistic behavior of youth who are learning the social ramifications of speech style.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shift</td>
<td>98 (100%) Typical language School age 71% low and 29% middle SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language sampling</td>
<td>The participants used significantly more AAE in informal situations than in formal situations. They used almost twice as many different AAE forms in the informal peer environment, indicating that the speakers possessed a varied inventory of vernacular features but chose to draw on a restricted range of these forms under formal circumstances.</td>
<td>The results revealed shifts in the overall inventory of structures used by the participants, indicating that adolescents have a growing awareness of the role of situational context in adjusting their speech. In addition, not all dialect features examined were implicated in shifting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>43. Renn and Terry (2009)</td>
<td>To investigate whether a subset of AA vernacular English features can be used to quantify stylistic variation in sixth graders.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shift</td>
<td>108 (100%) Typical language School age low and middle SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language sampling; adult-child interactions; peer interactions</td>
<td>The success of the subset measure indicated that a measure containing a small number of features can be effectively used to identify style shift in AAVE.</td>
<td>Analyses revealed that the larger Dialect Density Measures were highly correlated with the subset measure, indicating that a small number of features can be used to reliably reflect style shifting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Rivers (2001) Dissertation:</td>
<td>To investigate the influence of prompt on the structure and content of AA English narratives, as well as consider relationships of these variables to reading and expressive language.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>29 (100%) 9 M, 20 F Typical language School age low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Personal narrative; fictional narrative; story prompts</td>
<td>Personal narratives had fewer words and t-units and higher type-token ratios than fictional stories.</td>
<td>The participants displayed a range of oral and literate styles of narration, and they create linear literate-based stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Rivers, Rosa-Lugo, and Hedrick (2004)</td>
<td>To investigate the (1) performance of AA adolescent males attending an urban, high school on the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery-Revised (WLPBR) in an attempt to establish local norms and (2) relationship between the frequency of AAE features produced by AA adolescents males and their performance on the WLPBR.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>16 (100%) Typical language School age low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Predictive</td>
<td>Conversations; assessment scores</td>
<td>No significant correlation existed between participants' WLPBR clusters score and their usage of AAE features.</td>
<td>The WLPBR could potentially be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in adolescents who use non-General American English dialects, and there is a need for local norms for this instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Ross, Oetting, and Stapleton (2004)</td>
<td>To investigate whether children who speak AA English (AAE) used had + V-ed to refer to simple past tense within narratives.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narratives</td>
<td>93 (45%) Typical and impaired language School age</td>
<td>True experiment: Pretest-posttest with control group</td>
<td>Language sampling; adult-child play</td>
<td>About half of the AAE speakers (and none of the SWE speakers) produced had + V-ed as a preterite, and these forms frequently occurred in the complicating action clauses of narratives. AAE speakers' use of preterite had + V-ed also increased with age and was directly related to narrative skill.</td>
<td>There is a great deal to be learned by studying different types of language variation (i.e., normal and impaired) at the same time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>47. Schachter and Craig (2013)</td>
<td>To examine how macrostructure and microstructure features and the production of AAE features cooccur within narratives.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td>Noneexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Storytelling task</td>
<td>Young AAE-speaking students used a variety of SG narrative features to develop the plot in their oral stories.</td>
<td>Young children used both AAE and elaborative features in their narratives. Particular AAE features facilitated plot development, and the use of more elaborative features positively predicted higher narrative development scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Sperry (1991) Dissertation:</td>
<td>To illuminate the developmental pattern of conversational narration as it is converged upon by constraints forthcoming from both the individual and other persons in the social environment.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>14 (100%)</td>
<td>Noneexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Video observations; interviews</td>
<td>Socialization goals, childrearing practices (including perceptions of child abilities and desires), and sociocultural norms of narration motivate how family members jointly construct narrative interactions with their toddlers.</td>
<td>Analyses suggested that mothers socialize their daughters into a collaborative narrating style and their sons into a solo narrating style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Sperry and Sperry (1996)</td>
<td>To investigate young children’s productive competence with regard to various types of naturally occurring narrative-like conversations.</td>
<td>Discourse: Narrative</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>Ethnographic</td>
<td>Interaction with community members, video recording of observations; interviews</td>
<td>Participants produced more fictional than temporal narrative-like episodes. Fictional episodes were more complex than temporal episodes and contained more new morpheme types and events per episode; participants introduced a greater proportion of fictional than temporal episodes and morpheme types, demonstrating increased interest in fictional topics.</td>
<td>Fictional displacement may be easier than temporal displacement for this group of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Stockman et al. (2008)</td>
<td>To describe the types and frequency of conversational repairs used by AA children in relationship to their geographic locations and levels of performance on commonly used speech-language measures.</td>
<td>Discourse: Conversation</td>
<td>120 (100%)</td>
<td>Nonexperimental: Descriptive</td>
<td>Language sampling</td>
<td>African American children used the same types of conversational repair strategies that have been observed among young speakers of standard English varieties.</td>
<td>Use of conversational repairs should be included among the pragmatic behaviors expected for 3-year-old AA children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>51. Terry, Connor, Tate, and Love (2010)</td>
<td>To examine relationships between the use of nonmainstream American English dialects, literacy skills, and school environment among typically developing first graders in order to describe and better understand the difficulties many children from linguistically diverse backgrounds experience while learning to read</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shift</td>
<td>617 (48%) 50% M, 50% F 90% typical language 10% impaired language School age</td>
<td>True experimental</td>
<td>Assessment measures</td>
<td>The relationships between DVAR and literacy outcomes depended on the outcome of interest and school SES. However, children’s race did not generally affect the trajectory or strength of the relationships between outcomes and dialect variation.</td>
<td>The relationship between DVAR and literacy skills is dependent not only on the literacy skill itself but also on the age/grade level of the students and the environments in which they are educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Terry, Mills, Bingham, Mansour, and Marencin (2013)</td>
<td>The 4 purposes of this study were to describe oral narrative performance of typically developing AA prekindergarteners macro- and microstructure measures; examine concurrent and predictive relations between narrative performance, spoken dialect use, vocabulary, and story comprehension; to explore change in narrative performance during the school year</td>
<td>Discourse: Conversation</td>
<td>146 (100%) 47.4% M, 56.2% F Preschool low SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental design: Predictive</td>
<td>Story Retell using <em>Frog Where Are You?</em> (Mayer, 1969)</td>
<td>The participants in this study performed within age-appropriate expectations on each narrative measure. In general, narrative performance was correlated with and predicted by complex syntax and vocabulary skills and was not associated with spoken dialect use.</td>
<td>Findings from this study provide critical normative data on oral narrative skills of young, typically developing AA children. They may also be useful in interpreting the performance of AA children both with and without learning difficulties or language impairments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>53. Thompson, Craig, and Washington (2004)</td>
<td>To probe further a potential relationship between AAE and linguistic complexity by examining AAE and complexity in the semantic domain.</td>
<td>Presupposition: Dialect shift</td>
<td>50 (100%) 26 M; 24 F Typical language School age</td>
<td>Nonexperimental</td>
<td>Reading; written artifacts; picture description</td>
<td>A downward shift in contrastive AAE features was evident between spoken discourse and the literacy contexts. More students produced more AAE features during picture description than writing. Both morphosyntactic and phonological features characterized picture description context. Phonological features predominated in oral reading. Morphosyntactic features were dominant in writing.</td>
<td>AAE feature usage decreased from oracy to literacy contexts. Participants demonstrated distinct AAE feature profiles in oracy and literacy contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. Wallace, Roberts, and Lauder (1998)</td>
<td>Focuses on patterns of mother-infant interaction in AA mother-child dyads and the relationship between those patterns and the development of cognitive and communication discourse.</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>92 (100%) 44 M; 48 F Infants (1-year-olds) 64 Low and 28 above poverty</td>
<td>Nonexperimental</td>
<td>Predictive</td>
<td>Maternal interactive behaviors impact infant’s communication and cognitive development.</td>
<td>Maternal interactive behaviors contribute to early development; didactic interactions are strongly linked to children’s emerging cognitive and communication abilities. These correlations are weaker in impoverished dyads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. Zevenbergen (1996) Dissertation</td>
<td>To examine the narrative development of Caucasian, AA, and Latino children aged 4–6 years and investigate the relationship between various aspects of children’s narrative development.</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>138 (38%) 51% M; 49% F Typical language Preschool low and middle SES</td>
<td>Nonexperimental</td>
<td>Predictive</td>
<td>Emergent literacy program conducted in Head Start was effective in facilitating children’s development of narrative skills.</td>
<td>Narratives are likely to vary depending upon the narrative task and the stimuli used. In addition, narrative skills at the beginning of kindergarten are predictive of their later emergent literacy skills.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Note.** AA = African American; AAE = African American English; AAVE = African American Vernacular English; DVAR = dialect variation; EA = Euro American; F = female; GAE = General American English; LI = Language impaired; LSES = Low socioeconomic status; M = male; MLU = mean length of utterance; MSES = Middle socioeconomic status; NDW = Number of Different Words; SE = standard English; SSES = socioeconomic status; SG = story grammar; SWE = southern White English; TL = typical language; VRT = voice response time.
The first purpose group was identified primarily among studies conducted in the 1980s. That was an era in which researchers focused on examining and legitimizing African American pragmatic language by examining communicative functions and describing speech events that were unique to African American communities (e.g., Blake, 1984; Bridgeforth, 1988; Goodwin, 1980).

The second purpose group was identified in research that spanned the 1980s and the 1990s. At that point, the focus was on identifying whether differences in language use, such as code switching or turn taking, existed for African American children on the basis of their socioeconomic status (SES) and dialect density (e.g., Craig & Washington, 1986; Etter-Lewis, 1985; Peters, 1983).

The third purpose group is the largest one. It consists of research that was primarily conducted in the 1990s and the 2000s. It is akin to what one might call narrative explosion, a time period when researchers were focusing on various aspects of narrative development including production, style, content, macro-organizational structures, and cohesion (e.g., Bloome et al., 2003; Champion, 1995; Champion et al., 1995; Curenton et al., 2008; Curenton & Justice, 2004; Garrett, 1996; Hyon & Sulzby, 1994; Hyter, 1994).

The fourth purpose group is the smallest. It overlaps temporally with the third. This group consists of research that can be characterized as being focused on linking diverse forms of discourse with literacy and social competence by examining discourse and AAE use in relation to cognition, literacy, writing, and assessment with typically developing and language- and/or reading-impaired populations (e.g., Ball, 1996; Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009; Curenton, 2004; Nelson, 2010; Peña et al., 2006).

**Major constructs of pragmatics investigated and overlooked**

Of the 55 articles and dissertations that were examined, the majority focused on narrative discourse. Specifically, 40 (73%) of the 55 articles and dissertations focused on some form of discourse, six (11%) focused on speech acts, and nine (16%) focused on presupposition. Of the 40 articles and dissertations that focused on discourse, five (12.5%) were about conversational discourse, 31 (74%) about narrative discourse, and two (5%) were about expository discourse. Two (5%) other articles were about other forms of discourse—disputes and play interactions. Of the nine documents that focused on presupposition, the majority (seven [78%]) addressed dialect shifting or code switching, and the other two (22%) focused on Theory of Mind or emotional inferencing in relationship to narratives.

These data show that a disproportionate number of articles and dissertations were focused on narrative discourse. This can most likely be explained by a corresponding focus on the relationship of narrative discourse to the development of emergent and later literacy skills (Connor & Craig, 2006; Paul & Smith, 1993; Peterson & McCabe, 1992; Zevenbergen, 1996). Research has shown that recalling, retelling, and generating narratives serve as a link between oral and literate language use (Botting, 2002; Curenton & Justice, 2004; Heath, 1982), support the development of word meanings and relationships (Biemiller, 2006; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985), and are associated with increasingly complex syntax (Hoffman, Norris, & Monjure, 1996; Justice et al., 2006; Reilly, Losh, Bellugi, & Wulfeck, 2004). Narratives also engage social cognitive skills, such as theory of mind (Guajardo & Watson, 2002).

Narratives are important, but they are not the only form of discourse that is critical to success in school. Beginning in Grades 3 and higher, expository texts become a part of a child’s everyday life through the language demands of the school curriculum (Westby, Culatta, Lawrence, & Hall-Kenyon, 2010). Expository text is the currency used in most middle school and high school courses outside of the language arts courses (Westby & Culatta, 2010). An increased focus on typical and impaired expository text skills in African American children and ways to support success in the academic arena are an area sorely lacking in literature regarding the pragmatic language.
of African American children and adolescents, which was highlighted in this systematic review.

Another area where there is limited research is in the cognitive supports for pragmatic language, such as theory of mind and perspective taking. Only two articles (i.e., Curenton, 2004; Ford & Milosky, 2008) were identified through our systematic review process that examined theory of mind and emotional inferencing abilities in African American children. Theory of mind is an important social cognitive skill that supports a child’s ability to take the perspectives of others, infer mental and emotional states of others, understand why people may do what they do, and to understand how their own behavior may affect others (Timler, Olswang, & Coggins, 2005; Westby & Robinson, 2014).

### Sampling size and study participants

Studies that comprised the final corpus included a range of numbers of participants, from 2 (Gee, 1989b) to 617 (Terry et al., 2010). Study participants were varied and included male and female participants of different age ranges (infants and toddlers [7% of the studies], preschoolers [36%] and/or school age [62%]); and ability levels (typical [87%] and impaired [16%] in language or reading development). In addition, the studies examined pragmatic language of children and adolescents from low (44%), middle (27%), and/or high (3.6%) SES, with the majority being low income.

### Research design

Eight of the 55 studies that comprised the corpus for this article incorporated more than one type of research design. The majority \( (N = 34 [62\%]) \) used nonexperimental descriptive designs. Others used preexperimental designs \( (N = 9 [16\%]) \) to test hypotheses regarding the effect of independent variables on dependent variables but without randomization and control. A small group employed ex post facto designs \( (N = 6 [11\%]; \text{“after the fact” or retrospective examination of causal relationships where independent variables are observed rather than manipulated}) \). Two researchers used quasi-experimental designs \( (N = 2 [3.6\%]; \text{nonrandomized designs with controls but where not all confounding variables are controlled}) \). A few used true experimental designs \( (N = 6 [11\%]; \text{i.e., randomized designs where a hypothesis is tested by controlled experimentation to show relationships between independent and dependent variables}) \). Factorial designs \( (N = 2 [3.6\%]; \text{i.e., randomized designs that allow examination of the effects of multiple independent variables on the dependent variable}) \), and ethnographic designs \( (N = 2 [3.6\%]; \text{i.e., systematic qualitative studies involving rigorous observation and description of phenomena}) \).

An examination of the types of research designs produced per decade covered in this study shows that nonexperimental designs have been used throughout the 43-year period. In the 1990s, ethnographic, preexperimental, ex post facto and factorial designs began to be used. Quasi-experimental studies occurred beginning in the 2000s, and true experimental studies emerged in the years 2000 through 2013. It appears that research designs associated with higher levels of evidence (quasi-experimental, true experimental, factorial) are beginning to be used more recently in studies examining pragmatic language of African American children.

### Data-gathering procedures

Thirty-one different data-gathering methods were used within the articles and dissertations reviewed for this study (see Table 1 for data-gathering procedures implemented in each of the documents in the corpus). Consistent with the topical focus of the articles and dissertations, the majority of methods used were elicited oral or written narratives using a variety of approaches including Conversational Mapping, story generation with wordless picture books such as *Frog Where Are You* (Mayer, 1969), story prompts, story
retells with wordless books or movies, and picture-elicited narratives.

**Major research findings and implications**

We identified five common themes in the findings of the reviewed studies. These are summarized in Table 1 and discussed below. Many of the 55 articles that comprised the corpus for this study addressed several themes.

**Methodological considerations**

The findings of 11 studies incorporated methodological issues that should be considered when collecting data, assessing, and/or providing intervention to African American children and adolescents. The methodological considerations raised include the following: (a) data collection and transcription must include the context (Bridgeforth, 1988; Middleton, 1992) to capture and understand the full range of pragmatic skills being exhibited; (b) more culturally fair practices need to be employed in research methodology, such as expressive elaboration analysis (Milles, Watkins, & Washington, 2013), dependency analysis (Mainess et al., 2002), dynamic assessment (Pena et al., 2006), and Renfrew’s (1992) The Bus Story Language Test (Price et al., 2006); (c) explicit writing instruction tasks need to be considered as an independent variable in written narrative tasks; and (d) a comprehensive coding system that is appropriate for identifying and describing the communicative functions of African American children and adolescents, and that emerges from the data, is needed (Bridgeforth, 1988; Middleton, 1992). Of the four concerns for better research methodology in the study of pragmatic behavior of African American children and adolescents, the need to include context in data collection is the only one that has already been addressed in the 43-year span of research covered by this systematic synthesis of the literature. Culturally fair and explicit writing tasks as part of the research methodology still need greater consideration in research efforts. In addition, the call for a more fitting communication function coding system for African American children and adolescents continues to be a need that was voiced for more than 22 years ago, and more recently by DeJarnette et al. (2015).

**Developmental trends**

Six of the reviewed studies discussed developmental trends regarding the pragmatic language of African American children. Specifically, speakers of AAE and general American English (GAE) show similar development of narrative skills (Burns, 2004). Children from 3 to 5 years of age begin to use narrative macrostructures (e.g., setting, complicating action) and literate language features (Curenton & Justice, 2004; McGregor, 2000); however, children who are 4 and 5 years of age have not mastered as many of the “critical narrative features” (e.g., reference, temporal links, and mental state expressions) as 6-year-olds (Burns, 2004, p. 78). These and other narrative structures increase with age (McGregor, 2000) and are not affected by dialect density (Burns, 2004). Two developmental periods in which dialect shifting (reduction in the use of noncontrastive features) is significant occur at first grade for spoken discourse and at third grade for reading (Craig & Washington, 2004).

From the findings of research included in the corpus of this systematic synthesis, we know that narratives can be examined reliably beginning at 3 years of age. However, in order to tap the range of narrative abilities present in children and adolescents, researchers and clinicians are urged to use a number of different analysis tools, such as, High Point Analysis and Story Grammar Analysis (Champion et al., 1995). Overall, the findings of these studies indicate that more research of AAE child and adolescent speakers needs to examine the relationship between dialect shifting and expression of mental states, completion of theory of mind tasks, and the capacity to take other’s perspectives.

**Differentiating typical from impaired functioning**

Five studies highlighted differences between typical pragmatic functioning and impaired functioning. What is known from
these studies can be summarized in five points. First, language processing problems, such as word retrieval deficits or perseveration, will be revealed, whether a child is producing narratives in the topic centered or topic associative style (Bliss et al., 1999). Second, African American and EA students, with and without learning disabilities, produce narratives that are comparable in terms of overall structure, length, and cohesion. They differ with regard to goal-directed episodes, depending on the narrative genre, such as personal or fictional stories, suggesting the importance of using more than one approach to narrative analysis (Celinska, 2009; Champion et al., 1995). Third, AAE speakers who learn to dialect shift in literacy activities will do better than their peers who do not dialect shift (Craig et al., 2009). Fourth, children with typical language skills often make emotional inferences in narratives, but their counterparts with language impairments may not, supporting the importance of habitual assessment (and intervention if appropriate) of children’s emotional inferencing skills (Ford & Milosky, 2008). Fifth, children with reading disorders, regardless of language variation, will produce fewer codas in their stories than those with typical reading abilities (Hester, 1997). Corresponding with the implications noted previously regarding developmental trends, more research is required on emotional inferencing, theory of mind, and perspective taking in African American children and adolescents with and without language impairments.

**Importance and effects of family socialization**

Three of the reviewed articles discussed findings that addressed the effects of socialization on child outcomes. What we know from these studies can be synthesized as four main points. First, caregivers’ emotional interactive behaviors are linked to their children’s cognitive and communication abilities (Wallace et al., 1998). Second, mother–child dyads from low SES and middle SES backgrounds engage in play in similar ways (Hammer & Weiss, 1999). Third, male and female children may be socialized to organize narratives in particular ways. For example, Sperry (1991) found that female children constructed narratives more collaboratively, whereas male children constructed them more individually. Fourth, socialization has an impact on child communicative functions, and the “purposeful encouragement” of particular communicative functions may be useful in a preschool classroom (Kasambira, 2008).

**Characteristics of AAE pragmatic language behavior**

The characteristics of AAE pragmatic language behavior were described in 33 articles and/or dissertations. We have learned from these articles that African American children use a range of speech acts. Bridgeforth (1988) and Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) used similar taxonomies to examine the speech acts produced by young African American children; yet, some of the results differ between these two studies, which may be a function of the different data-gathering methods. There are gender differences in types of functions employed by African American children (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007; Leaper et al., 1999). An example is that girls are more likely to direct actions of others or request objects and actions, whereas boys are more likely to direct their own actions, collaborate with others to direct play, and call others’ attention to objects or events (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007).

African American children who are speakers of AAE have been found to demonstrate strong emergent literacy skills (Connor & Craig, 2006) as well as the same types of conversational repair strategies that GAE-speaking peers use (Stockman et al., 2008). Other findings identified through this systematic synthesis of the literature focus primarily on two areas, cognition and narration. With regard to cognition, African American children use cognitive skills to guide communicative interactions and demonstrate dialect-shifting skills (Renn, 2010; Thompson et al., 2004). In addition, African American children are more likely to demonstrate the cognitive skills of false belief and emotional inferencing through narratives rather than provide the expected
African American children produce an array of narrative genres (e.g., dispute, fictional, fantasy, personal), and their personal narratives have been found to include fewer words and T-units than their fictional/fantasy narratives (Champion, 1998; Rivers, 2001). African American children produce more fantasy or fictional episodes in their stories, which have been found to have a complex episodic structure (Gorman et al., 2011; Rivers, 2001; Sperry & Sperry, 1996). In addition, they most often produce topic-centered narratives (Champion, 1995; Gee, 1989b; Hyon & Sulzby, 1994; Mainess et al., 2002), although African American children have been shown to produce topic associative and other narrative styles. Finally, nonverbal (kinesic) and paralinguistic (prosodic) cues should be closely observed for the insights they may provide about narrative cohesion skills (Garrett, 1996; Hyter, 1994) and turn-taking behaviors (Craig & Washington, 1986). The implications of these findings are that AAE children and adolescents possess the cognitive skills to use pragmatic language to convey communicative functions and to engage in oral and written discourse.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review and synthesis of the extant literature concerning pragmatic language usage among African American children and adolescents covered a total of 55 manuscripts, all of which reported at least 30% of the participants as being African American. Ninety-two articles and dissertations were identified to focus on pragmatic language, but only 55 (60%) of these met our inclusion criteria. We recognize that this resulted in some relevant articles being excluded because the authors did not provide data about the proportion of children who were African American (e.g., Hyter, 2003; Hyter et al., 2001) or because the study participants did not meet the inclusion criteria for this study (e.g., Fuste-Hermann et al., 2006; McCabe & Rosenthal Rollins, 1994). We note that there are other articles in the extant literature, including doctoral dissertations, that were not included in this synthesis, but that may reveal additional behaviors and patterns about African American children’s and adolescents’ pragmatic language that could be useful to speech-language pathologists, educators, and others who work with this population in school settings and elsewhere.

The majority of studies that met inclusion criteria for this study focused on narrative macrostructure and microstructure, which are important skills for developing literacy and for supporting a more natural context for assessing a child’s language. It is clear from the literature that narrative production is a useful context for assessing and supporting language skills that are necessary for literacy development in children and adolescents (Hester, 1997; Schachter & Craig, 2013; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001; van Kleck, 2008). Narrative structure, however, is only one discourse type, and the gap in the literature regarding African American children’s and adolescents’ pragmatics language is notable with regard to the other equally important components of pragmatics that can affect social interactions with others, as well as successful engagement within a classroom. Those other aspects of pragmatics include speech acts (DeJarnette et al., 2015; Rivers et al., 2012) that are unique expressions of the African American child and adolescent’s socialization, as well as presupposition skills (Atlas, 2004; Bates, 1976a, 1976b; Roth & Spekman, 1984a, 1984b) and related cognitive skills, such as theory of mind, intention reading, and perspective taking.

Three broad areas need to be investigated further with regard to pragmatic language skills in African American children and adolescents. The first area focuses on
components of pragmatic language and related skills that influence pragmatic language. This area includes narratives, speech acts, presuppositions, and theory of mind. Specific research questions to address within this area include the following:

- What are evidence-based procedures and strategies for effectively evaluating the narrative processing and production skills of African American children and adolescents with and without language/literacy disorders?
- What are the effects of contextual factors, such as tasks, contexts, and demands, on the spoken and written expository and narrative productions of African American children and adolescents?
- What are comprehensive frameworks for explaining and evaluating the speech acts and presupposition skills of African American children and adolescents with and without language disorders?

A second area of recommended focus is the identification of culture sensitive (contrastive) and noncontrastive features of the full range of pragmatic language skills. Specific research questions that need to be addressed include the following:

- What are the contrastive and noncontrastive pragmatic behaviors for AAE-speaking children and adolescents relative to GAE pragmatics?
- What are the cultural markers of social skills development in AAE-speaking children and adolescents?

A third area of focus for further investigation relates to the variation, trends, and trajectories in the development of pragmatic skills to guide assessment (e.g., determining difference versus disorder) and intervention. Research questions in this area include the following:

- What are the trends and trajectories in the development of pragmatic skills for AAE child and adolescent speakers that can inform the development of assessment measures and intervention strategies that capture language use in situ?
- Are there individual variations such as age and/or gender effects in pragmatic behavior performance for AAE-speaking children and adolescents and if so, how might they be accounted for in the development of ecologically sound assessment measures and intervention practice?
- What are the pragmatic skill differences displayed by AAE-speaking children and adolescents with and without communication impairment?

In conclusion, the results of this systematic synthesis support the recommendation that the full range of pragmatic language skills of typically developing African American children and adolescents in varied social contexts and with different conversational partners needs to be further explored. For many years, studies with regard to pragmatic language in this population have focused primarily on the structural and content components of narratives. It is clear from the results of this study, however, that African American children' and adolescents' pragmatic language skills fall on a continuum. The continuum reflects that pragmatic language skills of this population are manifested in different ways and occur with a range of conversational speakers in diverse settings and under different conditions. With more knowledge and a greater understanding of these linguistic and nonlinguistic skills, speech–language pathologists, educators, and others should be better able to distinguish language/literacy differences from language/literacy disorders in African American children and adolescents.

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