Ways of Examining Speech Acts in Young African American Children Considering Inside-out and Outside-in Approaches

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

To develop a framework for further study of pragmatic behavior in young children from African American English (AAE) speaking backgrounds, one aspect of pragmatic behavior is explored in this article, specifically, speech acts. The aims of this article are to (1) examine examples of how external taxonomies (i.e., an “etic” or “outside-in” approach) have been applied to the speech act behavior of AAE child speakers and to note that etic approaches alone do not identify cultural characteristics that influence the presentation of speech acts in this population; (2) conceptualize a culture-sensitive framework where components of AAE speech act behaviors can be identified as gleaned from existing linguistic research; and (3) explain the utility of analyses of speech act behavior using taxonomies that have emerged from the cultural language style of AAE speakers, that is, an “emic” or “inside-out” approach. Key words: communicative functions, English speakers, language behavior, pragmatic behavior, speech acts, young African American

F OR YEARS, research regarding the use of African American English (AAE) in child speakers has centered on the structural aspects of this variety of American English (Craig & Washington, 2002, 2004; Green, 2002; Jackson & Roberts, 2001; Newkirk-Turner, Oetting, & Stockman, 2014; Oetting & McDonald, 2002; Oetting et al., 2010; Roy, Oetting, & Moland, 2013; Seymour & Roeper, 1999; Seymour & Seymour, 1981; Stockman, 2010; Stockman, Guillery, Seibert, & Boult, 2013; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010). However, within the last 30 years, the pragmatic aspects of language, spoken by AAE child speakers have come into greater focus in the extant literature as well (Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, & Moleski, 2007; Stockman, 1996; Stockman, Karasinski, & Guillory, 2008; Wyatt, 1995). The modicum of research on speech act pragmatic behavior in young AAE child speakers has employed an “etic” approach, in which taxonomies found in the studies of child
speakers of general American English (GAE)\(^1\) have been applied to AAE child speakers. This article raises concern that the etic approach is not showing a one-to-one correspondence between etic classified speech acts and actual speech acts performance by young AAE child speakers. Thus there is a need to describe the cultural nuances that influence the speech acts behavior of young AAE child speakers so that culture-sensitive taxonomies may be developed to aid the research and clinical efforts with this population.

As Rivers, Hyter, and DeJarnette (2012) and other scholars (Stockman, 2010; Stockman et al., 2008) have asserted, research on the development and mastery of pragmatic language behaviors in young children is of great importance when one is exploring the cultural aspects of a linguistic system, including, but not limited to, how it is acquired and transmitted (Battle, 1996; Van Keulen, Weddington & DeBose, 1998; Reeder, 1981; Stockman, 2010; Wyatt, 1995). Such investigations can inform researchers and clinicians about how the development of pragmatic language behavior in AAE child speakers (typical and atypical) compares to what has been described for this population in terms of morphosyntactic and phonological patterns and behaviors (Garrity & Oetting, 2010; Renn & Terry, 2009; Stockman et al., 2013; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010).

Pragmatic language has several clinically relevant components including context (deixis, physical setting and the linguistic, social, and epistemic activities occurring in that physical setting [Levinson, 2004; Roberts, 2004]), implicature (relevance, adequacy and appropriateness of an utterance [Carston, 2002, 2004; Horn, 2004]), presupposition (listener and speaker assumptions based on shared knowledge [Cummings, 2005; Van Rooij, 2010]), and speech acts (encoded intentions of communication capturing the fact that the language used at any given time is related to both linguistic and nonlinguistic parameters of interactions [Clark, 2004; Sadock, 2004]). It is beyond the scope of this article to address all of the clinically relevant components of pragmatic language in AAE child speakers. Rather, the focus will be on speech acts.

**SPEECH ACTS DEFINED**

John Austin (1962, 1975) coined the term “speech acts” to denote that utterances perform functions as part of interpersonal communication. In other words, speech acts are “the speaker’s use of utterances with certain intentions in mind and the effect the utterance has on a listener in a given context” (Rivers et al., 2012, p. 2). Moreover, any given speech act is “a unit of meaningful social and linguistic action” (Garvey, 1984, p. 22). Classifications of speech acts started with Austin’s (1962, 1975) discussion of perlocutionary (listener’s interpretation of speaker’s intent), illocutionary (the attitude and intention accompanying the speaker’s proposition), and locutionary (propositions) acts.

Typifying intentions is a difficult task in that a speaker’s goals might not be clear or made overt. Searle (1976), however, identified five primary types of intentions that are encoded in speech acts. They are (1) representatives (intention to show degree of sincerity about a proposition, e.g., joking); (2) directives (intention to get someone to do something, e.g., direct or indirect command); (3) commissives (intention to show speaker’s commitment to act on something, e.g., promises); (4) expressives (intention to share an attitude about something, e.g., disdain); and (5) declaratives (intention to make something change just by making a statement, e.g., declaration—“I quit”) (Searle, 1976). Multiple taxonomies of speech acts exist in the literature today.

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\(^1\)GAE is used throughout this article to refer to what has traditionally been labeled as “Mainstream” American English (MAE) based on the work of Green (2002) and Morgan (2002). “GAE” represents a neutral reference to a linguistic system that minimizes socio-political stigmatization of other linguistic systems that may be compared to GAE, which may include sources from the United Kingdom (e.g., Tough, 1977).
CROSS-REFERENCING TAXONOMIES OF SPEECH ACTS

The observation of pragmatic language behavior in children and subsequent taxonomies generated from such study have focused on children who were speakers of mainstream forms of English (American or British) (Bates, 1976; Dore, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978; Halliday, 1975; Moerk, 1975; Tough, 1977). These taxonomies continue to be used by researchers and clinicians as they conduct language sampling analyses to examine pragmatic skills in children (MacWhinney, 2000; Miller, 1981; Miller & Iglesias, 2008; Retherford, 2007).

Labels used to characterize and categorize speech acts have differed across taxonomies (see MacWhinney, 2000; Miller, 1981; Miller & Iglesias, 2008; Retherford, 2007), sometimes fostering confusion among researchers and clinicians as they examine and describe pragmatic language behaviors in child speakers. For example, Dore’s (1974) primitive speech act of “requesting” captures what Tough (1977) labeled as “directing” in her classification system (see Supplemental Digital Content, at http://links.lww.com/TLD/A39). These differing taxonomies have likely developed from diverse theoretical frameworks and, to some degree, because researchers (1) have attempted to capture speech act performance at different developmental periods, for example, prelinguistic (primitive speech acts) versus developing language (preschool and beyond) (Retherford, 2007); (2) have tried to examine a different level of intentionality, such as what comprises Tough’s (1977) coding convention that generates labels to get at the cognitive underpinnings for communicative functions, such as, “prediction”; or (3) have tried to identify illocutionary force in the interaction of children with their primary caregivers (Ninio et al., 1994). Nevertheless, a unifying theory as well as a cross-listing that facilitates consistent referencing of speech acts is needed so that researchers and clinicians can have a uniform way of explaining pragmatic language behaviors in child speakers. To that end, we have begun developing a unifying theoretical framework of speech acts and provide here a preliminary cross-listing (adapted from the work of DeJarnette (2006, 2008, 2009)) of the speech act classifications commonly presented in the literature. This listing cross-references child speech acts (Dore, 1974, 1975, 1978; Halliday, 1975; Moerk, 1975; Tough, 1977), child-caregiver speech acts (Ninio et al., 1994), and communicative functions (Lahey, 1988). (This cross-listing is available with this article as Supplemental Digital Content, available at http://links.lww.com/TLD/A39).

“ETIC” APPLICATION OF GAE TAXONOMIES TO THE LANGUAGE OF AAE CHILD SPEAKERS

Following a close review of the literature, we determined that most, if not all, of the taxonomies presented in the cross-reference listing were derived from limited observations of speech acts in GAE child speakers (Retherford, 2007). Yet, researchers have used these taxonomies on the basis of GAE to examine the speech acts of young AAE child speakers (Stockman et al., 2008). This is known as an “etic” approach to data collection and analysis. An etic approach is a method of research in which existing classifications are used to make observations of any given behavior or attribute. Etic research is conducted across a variety of disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics) (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). The “etic units and classifications, based on prior broad sampling or surveys . . . may be available before one begins the analysis of a further particular language or culture” (Pike, 1967, pp. 37–38). Thus, for the purposes of this article, the etic approach is one in which speech act classifications based on evidence from speakers of GAE are imposed on the speech act behavior from speakers of AAE as well. Following an extensive search of the literature (Hytter, Rivers, & DeJarnette, 2014—this issue of Topics in Language Disorders), fewer than 10 studies of speech
acts in young African American (AA) children were found, and several of these were unpublished dissertations. Three published articles examining speech acts in young African American children are reported below as examples of the etic approach (Hwa-Froelich, Kasambira, & Moleski, 2007; Stockman, 1996; Stockman et al., 2008).

Stockman (1996) conducted a study of eight AA child speakers, aged 33- to 36 months. Seven of them displayed typical language development, and one displayed a language delay. The purpose of this pilot study was to explore pragmatic, semantic, and morphosyntactic linguistic features that might constitute core competency across dialects, which Stockman termed the Minimal Competency Core (MCC). Two-hour language samples were collected across 2 events, including playing with cars on a racetrack and describing pictures from a book as pages were turned sequentially. Specifically, the subjects engaged in play and talked about a picture book of their own choosing with other familiar participants. To determine the MCC for pragmatic language behaviors in the young child speakers of AAE, Stockman (1996) used an etic approach, by starting with 11 speech acts identified in the literature for GAE and seeking examples of them in the language samples. Whereas there was no mention of the exact taxonomy employed in the study, the items and references suggest that Lahey’s (1988) list was used, which is outlined in the Supplemental Digital Content, available at http://links.lww.com/TLD/A39. The typically developing AAE child speakers produced the following speech acts that constituted a pragmatic MCC: (1) commenting on objects or events/labeling, (2) requesting information, (3) requesting objects, (4) imitating, (5) answering questions, (6) negating or affirming, (7) initiating repairs, and (8) responding to request for repairs. Thus, using an etic approach, typically performing AAE child speakers were found to use all of the GAE speech acts examined productively, with the exception of three. Productivity was defined as when the child displayed four exemplars of a pragmatic function (at minimum). The pragmatic function had to occur in “at least two different situations or events” (Stockman, 1996, p. 360). The three that were not considered part of the criterion referenced pragmatic MCC, were (1) reports, (2) requests for cessation, and (3) verbal routines.

Although the overall number of utterances produced by the child with delay was comparable to, and even greater than, that of one of his typical peers, he tended to use fewer speech acts than his cohort (Stockman, 1996). The child with delay productively used only four of the eight pragmatic MCC (comments, answering questions, imitating, and initiating repairs). Stockman noted that the minimal core, based on etic classification, identified the child with delay. She, however, cautioned that a larger pool of typical AAE child speakers would be needed to verify the MCC findings in her study. She also hinted that the etic approach might not be sufficient to identify the MCC, pragmatic or otherwise, for AAE child speakers. She cautioned that the clinician must consider the linguistic community influences on variables such as context and sampling task. In addition, Stockman encouraged clinicians to cultivate, “an investigative mindset and the ethnographic research skills necessary to reveal the cultural and linguistic patterns of the local communities they serve” (1996, p. 365).

Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) also used an etic approach to observe speech acts in child speakers of AAE. Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) investigated the cognitive-communicative functions of 16 young speakers, of AAE ranging in age from 3 to 5 years old (M = 3.94), making this group older than those in Stockman’s study. Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) collected spontaneous language samples in one of two prescribed play areas in the daycare setting where children interacted with peers. They looked for evidence of three of the speech acts as studied by Stockman (1996) (i.e., obligated responses, responding to requests for repairs, and verbal routines), along with examples from overarching categories obtained from Tough’s (1977) (Functions of Language)
classification system (i.e., self-maintaining, directing, reporting, reasoning, predicting, projecting, and imagining). Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) found that, of the 10 pragmatic speech acts studied, young AAE child speakers displayed significantly more of the following five speech acts than any of the other ones: (1) directing (telling someone to do something or direct request—e.g., “Gimme that.”); (2) imagining (talking as though something that happens in real life is occurring during play—e.g., “My momma car parked here.”); (3) reporting (talk that describes/labels, e.g., “That a mailbox.” or provides an account of something, e.g., “That boy so tall.”); (4) self-maintaining (talk that expresses self-need or self-desire, e.g., “I need some of that.” or for self-protection, e.g., “I gotta do my own.”); and (5) obligated responses (answering with yes/no—e.g., “Nope”).

In their study, Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) found gender differences such that girls demonstrated a greater variety of speech acts, whereas boys produced more obligated responses that were negative. A finding that did not reach statistical significance, but may be clinically significant, is that a gender difference was noted for the directive speech act behavior. Specifically, girls used directive speech acts to control others (telling others what to do) more frequently than did boys. Boys tended to be self-directive (i.e., talking about what they were going to do or needed to do) than others-directive (i.e., telling others what to do). In addition, when boys used directive speech acts that were aimed at directing others, they tended more often than girls to use directives that were collaborative in nature (i.e., recruiting/directing others to work on something together).

Both the studies conducted by Hwa-Froelich et al. (2007) and Stockman (1996) provide an example of how the etic approach is used such that classifications ascribed to young speakers of GAE are being applied to young speakers of AAE. Moreover, it is worth noting that in both studies the young AAE child speakers used some of the etically identified speech acts productively whereas others were less productively used or not used at all.

In a larger study, Stockman et al. (2008) collected and analyzed the language samples of 120 young speakers of AAE. The purpose of their study was to examine repair behavior in 3-year-old AAE speakers. Stockman et al. (2008) discussed repairs as “communicative acts that make unclearly communicated messages better understood” (p. 461), thus assigning a level of intention that reflects a speech act. Lending support to this view of repair, Lahey (1988) included “discourse” as a “communicative function,” with repair as an aspect of it (see Supplemental Digital Content, available at http://links.lww.com/TLD/A39).

With this definition it seems that, in addition to being a discourse strategy, repair can be treated as an intentional speech act whose purpose is to clarify a proposition. Thus, Stockman et al.’s (2008) study is considered in our discussion of speech acts. The two research questions raised in that study were: (1) Do African American 3 year olds make repairs when conversing? and (2) Do repair strategies change with variables such as location geographically, nonlinguistic cognitive ability, speech and language ability? Participants were 72 girls and 48 boys who had no physical, social-emotional, cognitive, sensory (e.g., sight, hearing), or other impairment. They were from urban cohorts, one located in a northern region and the other in a southern region of the country. Both regional cohorts were divided into groups on the basis of (1) their performance on standardized speech and language tests and (2) whether or not they had been referred for clinical services (n = 93 typical; n = 27 clinical). Language samples were uniformly collected from each subject during his/her interaction with an adult during three events (i.e., playing with a toy car, perusing a multiethnic action picture book, playing with a doll).

Using an etic approach to analyze the language samples, Stockman et al. (2008) employed two broad classification schemes for making repairs. They were (1) elicited or initiated repairs and (2) responses or answers.
to repair requests. To be defined as an “elicited repair,” the child had to have requested that the conversational partner clarify, or repair, his/her production—e.g., the child said, “What?” or “Huh?” in response to the adult’s utterance. To be defined as an “initiated repair,” the child had to have tried to clarify an utterance without being asked to do so by the conversational partner, that is, by simply realizing that the adult had missed the message. To be defined as “responses/answer to repair request,” the child had to have tried to clarify when asked to provide a repair by the adult.

A priori to the analysis, Stockman et al. (2008) were aware that the southern cohort had a higher dialect use rate compared to the northern cohort and this was attributed to low population density in the north suggesting more outside influences on the dialect community. Analysis of the sample data showed that there was a significant effect for region in terms of the Southern AA adult interacting with children in the South compared to both AA and European American adults interacting with children in the north. Adults used more direct questions and children tended not to make request repairs. However, regardless of region, all AAE child speakers used at least four repairs. There was no significant difference between the subgroup of children referred for clinical services and the typical subgroup when data were examined within and across regions. There was a significant difference for region in that the northern region showed a larger percentage of children meeting the criterion for eliciting repairs and responding to repairs than did the southern region. In addition, there was a significant regional difference in terms of the frequency of different types of repairs such that the AA child speakers in the northern region tended to use at least one strategy with significantly greater frequency than did the AA child speakers in the southern region.

Despite regional differences, the finding of this study suggests that young AA child speakers demonstrate conversational repair in their language corpus, and they produced the same repairs that have been noted in the literature for GAE child speakers. Although there was variability in use of both elicited and responding repairs, part of the variance was attributed to familiarity, that is, the child’s comfort level with making requests for repairs with the adult speakers. An etic approach was used to conduct this study, but Stockman et al. (2008) suggested that cultural linguistic factors were at work that went beyond what could be accounted for by the etic analysis. This led the researchers to conclude that cultural differences may affect repair behavior in African American children in two ways that need attention. One way is that when child and adult interlocutors interact, each brings cultural assumptions to that interaction that impact repair used by the child. The second is that repair behavior in African American children may be affected by regional cultural differences within the AAE speech community. (Stockman et al., 2008).

To summarize, although limited research exists, the “etic” approach has allowed researchers to look from the “outside in” at what typically developing young AAE child speakers produce with regard to speech acts. Researchers have used this approach to identify difference versus impairment (MCC) and to note the noncontrastive (shared) aspects of AAE and GAE speech acts in young children. Through the “etic” lens, we see that young AAE speaking children show age-appropriate acquisition of speech acts for some, though not all, features or types of speech acts noted by GAE classification systems.

Clearly, more data are needed to clarify what constitutes speech acts in the pragmatic language behaviors of AAE child speakers. The admonition by Stockman (1996) and Stockman et al. (2008) that clinicians must consider the cultural linguistic speaking communities that young AAE child speakers come from cannot be overstated. This is especially true if clinicians are going to be effective in identifying and describing this population’s pragmatic language behaviors. The etic approach, by its very nature, is inadequate to reveal this kind of information. This conclusion
leads us to recommend an emic approach, which is the focus of the remainder of this article.

**“EMIC” VIEW OF SPEECH ACT BEHAVIORS IN AAE CHILD SPEAKERS**

**Using an emic approach**

DeJarnette (2009) proposed that, in addition to using an “etic” comparative (intercultural) approach, a culture-sensitive perspective, that is, an “emic” introspective (intracultural) approach, is needed. An emic approach is an “inside-out” approach that allows researchers and clinicians to discover the unique characteristics and behaviors of a particular culture. That is, an emic approach constitutes an intracultural examination. It contrasts in this way from an etic approach, which allows known data from one culture to be used as a comparative base for another culture, an intercultural examination (LeVine, 1974; Morris et al., 1999; Pike, 1954; Pike & McKinney, 1996).

The concept of culture is difficult to narrow to one definition (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006). Weiten (2011) offered the definition that “culture refers to the widely shared customs, beliefs, values, norms, institutions, and other products of a community that are transmitted socially across generations” (p. 25). With this definition in mind, we consider the social cognition hypothesis proposed by Herrmann, Call, Hernández-Lloreda, Hare, and Tomasello (2007) and Moll & Tomasello (2007). The social cognition hypothesis suggests that humans have the unique cognitive capacity to create social systems that are constructs of collective mood, will, and reality. In this article, we take this proposition a step further to suggest that the convergence of collective mood and reality on the collective will result in cultural values.

For the AAE speech community, communicative/language behaviors have been identified as either sacred or secular expressions of cultural values (Davis, 1987; Mitchell, 1970, 1975; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1975, 1977, 2000; Wharry, 2003). Smitherman (2000) stated the following:

Black verbal style exists on a sacred-secular continuum . . . The sacred style is rural and Southern. It is the style of the black preacher and that associated with the black church tradition. . . . It tends to be more emotive and highly charged than the secular. The secular style is urban and Northern, but it probably had its beginnings in black folk tales and proverbs, its roots are Southern and rural. This is the street culture style. . . . It tends to be more cool, more emotionally restrained than the sacred style (pp. 63–64).

Thus, we assert that cultural values are the generator of mores, both sacred and secular, and that, from these mores, cultural institutions are determined. Community cultural institutions fall broadly under spiritual systems (e.g., church, family), social systems (e.g., community, polity, business, workplace, and school), and communication systems (i.e., AAE child and adult speakers). Rickford and Rickford (2000) and Smitherman (2000) advanced that the communication systems are an outgrowth of both the spiritual and social systems. They have linguistic (content, form, and function), extralinguistic (tonal and rhythmic style), gestural (use of facial expression, body limbs, and joints), musical (portrayal of soulful tones through voice or instrument), and motor behavioral (posturing and locomotive finesse) components that may reflect either the sacred/spiritual or secular/social aspects of cultural values (Hinson, 2000; Mitchell, 1970, 1975; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000; Wharry, 2003).

The community cultural institutions noted above reflect, protect, and sustain African American cultural values, and communication and language are among these institutions (Green, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000; Wharry, 2003).

Language behaviors are simultaneously linguistic and sociocultural events (Ochs, 1991; Morgan, 2002). Furthermore, cultural intelligence (Herrmann et al., 2007; Moll & Tomasello, 2007) is foundational to AAE, with the accompanying cultural functions,
Cultural functions of language in African American English (AAE) illustrated in Figure 1. First among them is self and collective identity which defines and assigns the speaker “social standing and cultural membership” (Kendall & Wolfram, 2009; Morgan, 2002, p.39).

Additionally, African American English speech acts serve as a tool for thinking and perspective taking. This function captures the idea that one must demonstrate mental agility, creativity, and stealth to develop and respond to quips while simultaneously considering the effect on an audience (Smitherman, 1977) (see Table 1 for examples of each function). Being in control of one’s world is a function of AAE speech acts to exert oneself or the collective culture in a fashion that overcomes oppression and allows for braggadocio, bravado, or strength (Percelay et al., 1994; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Portraying emotion is a function of AAE speech acts that suggests the degree to which one is maintaining cultural status by remaining “cool” or losing status by “acting a fool” (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002). Logging facts is a function of AAE speech acts where the speaker may address a target directly or indirectly to share significant information (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002). The “use of sound for power” function of AAE is how the prosody, cadence, or vocalizations are produced for emphasis (Green, 2002; Kochman, 1981; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977, 2000). Finally, “use of gesture for power” is a function assisting in the display of illocutionary force (attitude and commitment regarding intention) (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 2000).

Several speech acts originating from within the AAE speaking community have been identified in literature that focuses on the sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and historical roots of AAE (Green, 2002; Hyter, 2000; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, 1973; Morgan, 1996, 1998, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 1976; Smitherman, 1975, 1977, 1994, 2000). These speech acts are described in Table 2 and include call and response, signifyin’, rappin’, playin’ the dozens, be-said-sbe-said, readin’, markin’, ignorin’, instigatin’, sermonizin’, testifyin’, loud-talkin’, suck teeth’, and non-verbal gestures (e.g., cut eye, neck-roll, givin’ skin).

According to Smitherman (2000), these acts have been shaped, passed on, and maintained through “historical memories” of African language and culture as well as the traditional Black Church, Black music, and a history of “servitude and oppression.” One example is the act of “call-response” where, “The speaker makes a statement (the ‘call’), with an
Table 1. Components of conceptual framework for AAE speech acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideological identity (Kendall &amp; Wolfram, 2009; Morgan, 2002)</td>
<td>Self and/or collective pride</td>
<td>Context: Males talking about friends “Dats my homie!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for thinking / Perspective taking (Smitherman, 2000)</td>
<td>Demonstrate mental agility, creativity and stealth to develop and respond to quips while simultaneously considering the effect on an audience</td>
<td>Context: Females talking together. Girl you oughta quit. “Why, just cause you ‘on know how to start?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controlling one’s world (Percelay et al., 1994)</td>
<td>Exert oneself or the collective culture in a fashion that overcomes oppression and allows for braggadocio, bravado, strength</td>
<td>Context: Audience “Uhm so chill, Mr. Freeze need a coat round me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portraying emotions (Morgan, 2002)</td>
<td>Degree to which one is maintaining cultural status by remaining ‘cool’ or losing status by ‘acting a fool’</td>
<td>Context: Audience When friendly bantering occurs, the parties try to keep tempers in check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logging facts (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002)</td>
<td>Speaker may address a target directly or indirectly to share significant information</td>
<td>Audience: Talking around the target person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging in social exchange (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002)</td>
<td>In general, interaction with others and environment</td>
<td>Audience: Verbal on Non-verbal gestures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using sound for power (Rickford &amp; Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977, 2000)</td>
<td>Prosody, cadence, or vocalizations are produced for emphasis</td>
<td>Context: Any occasion Loudtalk and pitch shift for emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using gesture for power (Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002 Smitherman, 2000)</td>
<td>Display of illocutionary force (attitude/commitment regarding intention)</td>
<td>Context: Audience Special handshake</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. *The functions associated with the conceptual framework. [Original work of the authors].

The *call-response* speech act is used by AAE speakers in both sacred and secular contexts and it fulfills the cultural functions of ideological identity, a tool for thinking, portraying emotion, using sound for power, and using gesture for power.

**Emic-based speech acts in young AAE child speakers**

The role of young children in the socialization process is critical to any discussion of language development, including speech acts produced by young AAE child speakers. This role can be explained by the cultural
Table 2. Description of AAE Speech acts Noted in Ethnographic Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech Act</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call and response</td>
<td>Speaker makes a proposition and looks for affirmation from the listener who</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Smitherman, 1977, 2000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>is obligated to respond verbally or non-verbally</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Signifyin’ (Snappin’,</td>
<td>Verbal put down (insult) to send a message to the target</td>
<td>Kochman, 1981; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, 1973, 1989; Morgan, 2002;</td>
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<td>cappin, joanin,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rickford &amp; Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>’soundin’, dissin’,</td>
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<tr>
<td>bustin’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Rappin’</td>
<td>Telling it like it is, often in rhythmic fashion</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Rickford &amp; Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1977, 2000</td>
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<td>“Playin’ the Dozens</td>
<td>Often male verbal jousts talking about another’s mother/family in a</td>
<td>Smitherman, 1977; Percelay et al., 1994</td>
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<td></td>
<td>dishonoring fashion; parties involved know that mothers are to be revered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and the game is to outwit each other in the insults</td>
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<td>He said-she said</td>
<td>Often female game of gossip, rumor and getting to the facts</td>
<td>Goodwin, 1991; Morgan, 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readin’</td>
<td>Verbal defensive or corrective retort that puts someone down or in his/her</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>place when that someone tries to hide the truth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Markin’</td>
<td>Mocking another by imitating verbal, vocal and gestural behaviors</td>
<td>Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ignorin’</td>
<td>Purposeful disregard of another in a communicative interaction</td>
<td>Hyter, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instigatin’</td>
<td>Verbal initiative to stir up confrontation between a target and someone</td>
<td>Kochman, 1972; Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>else</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sermonizin’ (preachin’,</td>
<td>Preacher style verbalization with prosodic features</td>
<td>Rickford &amp; Rickford, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>testifyin’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Loud-Talkin’ (markin’)</td>
<td>Verbally address a target so that others hear and with higher volume and</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Morgan, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prosodic features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suck Teeth</td>
<td>Affrication made by anterior tongue compression against the front teeth</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Rickford &amp; Rickford, 1976; Smitherman, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to indicate disbelief or disgust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cut Eye, “neck-roll</td>
<td>Nonverbal gestures to indicate readin’ signifyin’—Eye and neck gesticulation</td>
<td>Green, 2002; Rickford &amp; Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hands on hip(s), finger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waggin’/snappin’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Givin’ skin, givin’ dap</td>
<td>Gesture of solidarity and affirmation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Speech acts that have been observed in young preschool AAE speakers (DeJarnette et al., 2012, 2013; Hyter, 2000; Wyatt, 1995).
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intelligence hypothesis as previously dis-
cussed (Herrmann et al., 2007; Moll &
Tomasello, 2007). Indeed, this hypothesis
considers that young AAE child speakers
possess the cognitive wherewithal to capture
the cultural values transmitted to them
through the communicative/language insti-
tutions of the African American culture. This
has been shown clearly for the structural
aspects of language (Craig & Washington,
2002, 2004; Green, 2002; Jackson & Roberts,
2001; Newkirk-Turner et al., 2014; Oetting
& McDonald, 2002; Oetting et al., 2010; Roy
et al., 2013; Seymour & Roepere, 1999;
Seymour & Seymour, 1981; Stockman, 2010;
Stockman et al., 2013; Van Hofwegen &

For the pragmatic aspects of AAE, evi-
dence for the transmission of several of the
emic-based (contrastive) speech acts noted in
Table 2 can be found in the research lit-
erature regarding preschool AAE speakers
(DeJarnette, Hyter, Rivers, & Wyatt, 2012;
Hyter, 2000, 2007; Wyatt, 1995). Wyatt
(1995) identified rappin’ and playin’ the
dozens, whereas Hyter (2000) noted ignorin’
(e.g., “where one communication partner
A attempts to engage in conversation, but
communication partner B fails to reciprocate
because partner B perceives some ‘slight’
(insult or belittlement) received from com-
munication partner A’) and markin’ (e.g.,
“... preschool girl... having a conversation
on a play telephone, but her body embo
ded the physical mannerisms (e.g., hands on hips,
neck movement), prosody (e.g., vowel elonga-
tions during production of words such as
‘girl, in which the colon signals elongation), and
facial expressions that evoked a female
adult in her community”; 2007, p. 139).

In videotaped data from 3- to 5-year-old
preschoolers, DeJarnette, Hyter, Rivers, and
Wyatt (2012, 2013) identified loud talkin’
(e.g., a 3-year-old girl talking to a boy loudly
with the intention to have others take no-
tice), signifyin’ (e.g., verbal insult or needling,
a 3-year-old girl tells a boy, “I ‘ont wanna
look at yo’ ol’ raggly stuff”), rappin’ (e.g., a
group of boys chant, “Tell me why—oooh
baby” and one 4-year-old boy starts rappin’,
“Dial my baby on the phone—Gotta get her—
all alone—to dial my heart...”), sermonizin’
(e.g., a 4-year-old boy in preacher style talk-
ing with vocal mimicry of pastor rhythmic
speech talks about selling, “Hot Tamales, hot
tamales—gimme one—gimme one o’ dem hot
tamales—cuz y’know hot tamales is good fo’
yuh and you know you don’t eat hot tamales at
home...”) and cut eye’ (particularly a female
activity where the eyes are used to signal clear
disapproval with the eyes darting to the target
and staying fixed like a doll’s eyes as the head
moves in the direction toward or away from
the target of the gaze) and neck rollin’ (e.g.,
a 3-year-old girl uses head rollin’ and retorts,
“Dat’s her name you ‘on know dat’s what I call
my baby name at home,” when another girl in-
ists that the 3-year-old’s baby has a different
name). In these observations of 3- to 5-year-
old AAE child speakers, all of the cultural func-
tions and nine of the 14 speech acts described
in this article were noted (see Table 2). In-
deed, the speech act behaviors of AAE child
speakers, like those of mature AAE users are
punctuated by the extralinguistic (tonal and
rhythmic style), gestural (use of facial limbs,
body limbs, and joints), and motor behavioral
(posturing and locomotive finesse) aspects of
communication, as much as by the linguistic
components (Green, 2002; Rickford & Rick-
ford, 2000; Smitherman, 2000; Wharry, 2003).

CONCLUSIONS

Using the etic approach, researchers have
found that young AAE child speakers pro-
duce some though not all (or not with the
same frequency) of the speech acts, or
communicative functions, as have been de-
scribed for young GAE child speakers (Blake,
1994; Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007; Stockman,
1996; Stockman et al., 2008). Noncontrastive
speech acts produced by young AAE child
speakers include the following: (1) comment-
ing on objects or events or labeling, (2)
requesting information, (3) requesting object,
(4) imitating, (5) answering questions, (6)
negating or affirming, (7) initiating repairs
(Stockman, 1996), (8) responding to re-
quest for repairs (Stockman, 1996; Stockman
et al., 2008), (9) directing, (10) imagining, (11) self-maintaining, and (12) obligatory responses (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007). In addition, from the etic approach, the following speech acts appear to be contrastive: (1) predicting, (2) projecting (Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007), and (3) verbal routines (Stockman, 1996; Hwa-Froelich et al., 2007).

Albeit that the preliminary, and primarily anecdotal, findings made using an emic approach await verification through systematic research, these preexperimental observations suggest that the emic approach promises to supplement etic approaches in the identification of contrastive and noncontrastive speech acts and other pragmatic behaviors in young AAE child speakers. Adding an emic approach to research efforts will allow a better understanding of typical versus atypical speech act behavior in young AAE child speakers as members of the AAE speaking community. Moreover, using emic augmentation to the etic approach will assist researchers and clinicians to obtain clearer identification of differences (nonshared and thus contrastive) versus (shared and thus noncontrastive) similarities in speech act performances for young AAE child speakers when compared to young GAE child speakers.

As both clinicians and researchers attempt to identify contrastive and noncontrastive speech acts as one area of pragmatic performance in young AAE child speakers, there is a need to have uniform reference to speech acts behavior. In an attempt to address this concern, this article has provided a cross-referenced listing for speech acts as they have been discussed in the literature regarding young GAE child speakers (see Supplemental Digital Content, available at http://links.lww.com/TLD/A39).

In addition, we have shared components for conceptualizing communication and language as an outgrowth of cultural values that themselves are a product of cognitive foundations. Moreover, we discussed cultural functions that are specific to the AAE speech community based on an emic analysis. These include culture-specific speech acts (e.g., sermonizin’, signifyin’, and playin’ the dozens), which fulfill these functions to varied degrees as outgrowths of sacred/spiritual and secular/social cultural values.

These ways of classifying culture-specific speech acts may prove useful clinically, particularly as AAE speech acts are further researched and their functions better clarified. As clinicians and researchers examine the critical junctures at which AAE develops, changes as a result of interaction with GAE and other American English varieties, and maintains its cultural expression throughout the lifespan, it is important to consider the issues as broached in this article.

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