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Language Skills of Bidialectal and Bilingual Children

Considering a Strengths-Based Perspective

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This article examines the language and cognitive skills of bidialectal and bilingual children, focusing on African American English bidialectal speakers and Spanish-English bilingual speakers. It contributes to the discussion by considering two themes in the extant literature: (1) linguistic and cognitive strengths can be found in speaking two languages or dialects, and (2) advantages accrue when considering the groups together (or at least side-by-side) rather than separately. A strengths-based framework is proposed, whereby the goal is to identify the linguistic and cognitive strengths of these two groups that might support assessment, intervention, and culturally appropriate characterization of key language and cognitive skills. Morphosyntax, complex syntax, and narrative discourse are explored for both groups. In addition, executive function and code-switching are discussed because they relate to language and cognitive development of both bidialectal and bilingual speakers. Although some differences between the two groups are obvious, the possible similarities or intersection between the two language groups is potentially informative and may provide direction for researchers and clinicians alike. **Key words:** *African American English*, *bilingualism*, *dialect*, *language assessment*, *language impairment*

IN RECENT YEARS, the study of language development and disorders in bilingual and bidialectal children has received increased attention related to identification of language impairments. Research efforts have focused on development of culturally fair assessment approaches in order to improve accurate identification of speech and language impairments (Craig & Washington, 2000; Oetting & McDonald, 2001; Peña, Resendiz, & Gillam, 2007), and more recently, on development of appropriate interventions (Johnson, Terry, Connor, & Thomas-Tate, 2017). This work has been fundamental to enhancing knowledge of language variation in the context of development and has contributed to the ability of clinicians to diagnose language impairment with increased accuracy, even when aspects of diverse speakers' language overlap with clinical indicators of language impairment (Bedore & Peña, 2008; Oetting & McDonald, 2001).

Much of this work has been conducted with children who are bidialectal speakers of African American English (AAE) and children who are bilingual Spanish speakers. These two groups are the focus of the current study. The current review is designed to contribute to the conversation surrounding children who are bidialectal or bilingual in addressing two primary concerns: (1) there are linguistic and cognitive strengths to be found in speaking two languages or dialects, and (2) there are advantages to considering the groups together (or at least side-by-side) rather than separately.

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Related to the first point, when a primary focus is placed on distinguishing typical language development from language impairment, it may be easy to overlook the unique strengths that bilingual and bidialectal children bring to the language learning process. In the case of bilingualism, there is a robust literature focused on these strengths. In the case of bidialectal children however, the evidence base is in its infancy. Clinically, contrastive analyses are often used in both assessment and intervention to compare bilingual and bidialectal children with mainstream American English (MAE) speakers. It is not necessarily appropriate to use MAE speakers as controls or comparisons for children who are navigating two or more languages or dialects. This can result in a subtractive approach focused on what bidialectal and bilingual speakers are *not doing* compared with MAE speakers, overlooking the positive features of these children's language use *within* their respective language systems.

Related to the second point, considering bidialectal and bilingual children together may provide some advantages for clinical service delivery, especially in urban school districts where the student body is composed largely of children who speak more than one language or dialect in their homes and communities. Although no statistics are available for children who speak dialects, the percentage of English language learners in public schools in the United States ranges from more than 22% in California to 1% in West Virginia, with an overall average across the nation of 9.4% of students, representing 350 different languages during the 2014–2015 school year (McFarland et al., 2017). The shortage of bilingual speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and SLPs' lack of in-depth knowledge of various cultural and regional dialects, has the potential to impact quality of services. To improve service delivery, it has been suggested that clinicians working with linguistically diverse populations focus on commonalities across groups (Oetting, Gregory, & Riviere, 2016) rather than focusing on the vast group differences evident across the country. In short, there is clinical economy in considering groups of diverse speakers together.

In the current review, we present similarities and differences between children who are bidialectal or bilingual that have been identified in the extant literature. We encourage clinicians and researchers to view these children through a strength-based lens because it is important to encourage discourse that recognizes and celebrates the abilities that these children bring to the language learning process. The four questions guiding this exploration are:

1. What is a strengths-based perspective?
2. What do we know about the language skills of children who are bidialectal and bilingual? More specifically, what are the areas of intersection and divergence in the language of children who are bidialectal and bilingual?
3. What do we know about executive function and code-switching skills of bidialectal and bilingual children?
4. What are the overall clinical implications and future directions of this research?

WHAT IS A STRENGTHS-BASED PERSPECTIVE?

In the context of teaching and learning, a strengths-based perspective has been encouraged when working with individuals from various disorder and disability backgrounds. Under a strengths-based model, competence, abilities, and skills that the individual brings to the learning process are the focus, rather than an individual's deficits (Braun, Dunn, & Tomchek, 2017; Lopez & Louis, 2009; Smith, 2016; Steiner, 2010). Alternatively, methods that operate from a deficit perspective can lead to preoccupation with weaknesses, without consideration of how strengths can be used to enhance learning.

Braun et al. (2017) examined whether or not clinicians' predisposition to use a strengths-based perspective when documenting client data. The investigators analyzed 20

randomly selected, written diagnostic reports from four interdisciplinary teams that were providing services to individuals with autism. The findings of this study showed that the majority of reports were written using deficit-based language, which was operationalized as interpreting behavior in the context of disability, rather than ability. The authors attributed this finding in part to lack of knowledge of the strengths-based perspective on the part of team members, including how the perspective can be realized in preparing clinical practice.

Braun et al.'s (2017) findings are relevant to clinicians, as practitioners rely on scholarly work to set the tone for best practice. Thus, when researchers study individuals from various disorder or disability groups, cultural backgrounds, and social classes, it is important to foreground their strengths and unique abilities, realizing that areas of weakness do not define the individual, and that differences can themselves be considered strengths. In this view, strengths and differences are neither mutually exclusive nor synonymous. Rather, children's linguistic differences can be utilized to support, grow, and bridge their language development. When this happens, these distinctions can be conceptualized as strengths that support children's learning.

In this article, we conceptualize *strength* as a documented, enhanced aspect of language existing within—not across—populations (e.g., bidialectal, bilingual, and MAE). This contrasts with language *similarities* and *differences,* which are considered across populations. Most importantly, in this context, language *difference* does not suggest language *weakness*.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the language strengths and differences of bilingual and bidialectal populations, while also acknowledging how these strengths and differences can be used to support assessment and intervention with children in these populations. A central tenet of the strengths-based perspective is that strengths should be identified and highlighted, while being careful that legitimate weaknesses are not masked, but rather, are identified and examined relative to the child's strengths.

Bidialectalism and bilingualism

Broadly, *bilingualism* is defined as the ability to use two languages to varying degrees across contexts (Brice, 1997). This definition can extend to include *bidialectalism,* which is the ability to use two language varieties across contexts. Among clinicians and researchers, dialects and languages are realized as distinguishable from each other. The distinction between them is based on *mutual intelligibility.* That is, whereas *bidialectal* speakers of closely related dialects can understand each other with minimal or no effort (Antoniou, Grohmann, Kambanaros, & Katsos, 2016), *bilingual* speakers can be understood within, but often not across languages. In this view, dialects are considered varieties of a given language that are close in typological distance, meaning that the dialects share many structural characteristics of the parent language (e.g., they have largely the same phonology, morphosyntax, and semantics).

The term *dialect* applies linguistically to all spoken varieties of a language (Trudgill, 1999). In clinical practice, however, the term is commonly combined with modifiers, such as *nonstandard* or *nonmainstream,* and such terms are used to describe the language systems of minority or low socioeconomic status (SES) communities. As a consequence, many dialects are perceived to be low-status versions of the mainstream or standard language from which they are derived (e.g., presumably the language used in schools, spoken by politicians, and used in the mainstream media). This is true of AAE compared with MAE. African American English is a nonmainstream dialect of American English (AE). American English is frequently referred to as standard American English, even though MAE is itself a dialect of AE (Trudgill, 1999). Like most dialects, MAE and AAE share many features, and in most cases the two dialects are mutually intelligible. In the current article, we use the term

bidialectal to refer to African American speakers of AAE, a variety of AE, as well as to speakers of MAE, also a variety of American English, albeit more widely used and accepted than AAE.

In the current article, we use the term *bidialectal* to refer to children who speak both a nonmainstream dialect and the mainstream or standard dialect (to varying degrees). We use the term *bilingual* to refer to speakers of two distinct languages (e.g., English and Spanish) who either learned two or more languages at the same time (*simultaneous* bilingual) or who learned a second language after their first language was established (*sequential* or *successive* bilingual) (Bedore & Peña, 2008). In the United States, African Americans (13.3%) and Hispanics and Latinos (17.8%) are the largest minority groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and by implication, the largest language-minority groups. These demographics have undoubtedly influenced the study of child language, because much of the research on bidialectalism and bilingualism in the United States has been focused on African American English dialect speakers and Spanish-English bilingual speakers, respectively. These two groups are also largely the focus in the current article.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF BIDIALECTAL AND BILINGUAL CHILDREN?

Morphosyntax

Morphosyntactic differences have received considerable attention in the literature, largely because both bidialectal and bilingual speakers use morphosyntactic features that are distinctly different from MAE. In addition, grammatical structures in general have been a focus in child language research. Deficits in these areas are common among children with language disorders regardless of dialect status. They also characterize children with language impairments who are learning to speak a second language, having been studied in children learning Spanish, Italian, or Swedish (Bortolini, Caselli, Deevy, & Leonard, 2002; Hansson & Nettelbladt, 1995; Paradis, 2010). In the United States, studies on bilingualism and morphosyntax have focused largely on Spanish-English bilinguals (Bedore, Peña, Gillam, & Ho, 2010; Bedore, Peña, Joyner, & Macken, 2011; Gutierrez-Clellen, Restrepo, & Simon-Cereijido, 2006; Gutíerrez-Clellen & Simon-Cereijido, 2007; Gutierrez-Clellen, Simon-Cereijido, & Wagner, 2008; Restrepo, 1998). For children who are bilingual and those who are bidialectal, studies of morphosyntax overall have emphasized variation in grammatical marking as a defining aspect of language differences. Importantly, these differences have also contributed clinically to the challenge of diagnosing language impairment in both bidialectal and bilingual speakers.

Although many studies of dialect in the United States are focused primarily on AAE (e.g., Craig & Washington, 2000; Horton-Ikard & Miller, 2004; Oetting & Newkirk, 2008; Seymour, Bland-Stewart, & Green, 1998; Washington & Craig, 2004), studies of other nonmainstream dialects such as Southern White English (SWE) (Cleveland & Oetting, 2013; Oetting & McDonald, 2001; Oetting, McDonald, Seidel, & Hegarty, 2016; Roy, Oetting, & Moland, 2013) and, more recently, Gullah-Geechee (Berry & Oetting, 2017) have contributed to understanding of dialectal variation. Generally, SWE is spoken by White people in the southern regions of the United States (Oetting & McDonald, 2001) and Gullah-Geechee is spoken by African Americans along the Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida coasts (Berry & Oetting, 2017).

Studies of child speakers of AAE, Gullah-Geechee, and SWE demonstrate similarities across dialects, particularly in the way they mark grammatical morphology. In particular, *zero-marking* is a commonly used pattern of these nonmainstream dialects. This term refers to omission of grammatical morphemes in contexts where inclusion is obligatory in MAE. Zero-marking occurs with verbs that mark tense and subject-verb agreement, such

as past tense *-ed* (e.g., *She kick_ the ball*), third person *-s* (e.g., *He walk_ to the bus stop*), and copula and auxiliary BE (e.g., *She _ cute; He _ eating*). Evidence from child AAE and SWE shows that lexical content words such as nouns (e.g., *She has six dollar_*) are frequently zero-marked, even though the rate at which these features are used varies across dialects (Oetting & McDonald, 2001). For example, AAE speakers omit third person (Cleveland & Oetting, 2013) and copula and auxiliary BE (Berry & Oetting, 2017) at significantly higher rates than SWE and Gullah-Geechee speakers, respectively. In addition, some related features distinguish these dialects from each other. For example, in Gullah-Geechee, zero-marking of BE form *am* (e.g., *I _ going home*) is prevalent; however, *am* is almost always overtly marked in AAE (Berry & Oetting, 2017; Garrity & Oetting, 2010). Children who speak Gullah-Geechee also use BEEN as a substitute for *was* and *were,* which is not characteristic of either AAE or SWE (Berry & Oetting, 2017).

Bilingual Spanish-English speakers in the United States who speak English as a second language demonstrate grammatical patterns that differ systematically from MAE but overlap in many ways with the dialect differences discussed in the previous section (Paul & Norbury, 2012). Spanish-English bilinguals and AAE dialect speakers are particularly similar in their transformations of grammatical structures. Similar to AAE speakers, some grammatical morphemes are not obligatory for Spanish-English bilinguals speaking English, resulting in frequent zero-marking of certain structures (Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2008). Alternative forms of negation and use of questions are also prevalent in both AAE- and Spanish-speaking groups. For example, it is common among Spanish-speaking children to insert "no" before the verb in a negation clause (e.g., He no kick it.) or to use multiple negatives in a single clause (e.g., She don't want no more.) and to leave auxiliaries in questions uninverted (e.g., John is eating?) (Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2008). African American English dialect speakers also use multiple negatives in a single clause and frequently omit auxiliaries in questions (e.g., Why _ she making that noise?) (Green, Wyatt, & Lopez, 2007; Oetting & McDonald, 2001). Table 1 presents morphosyntactic features shared between AAE- and Spanish-speaking children.

Complex syntax

Complex syntax has been studied to a far lesser degree in both AAE- and Spanish-speaking children than morphosyntax (grammatical morphology and verb structures). However, the few studies that do exist suggest that complex syntax is a strength for AAE speakers and that production of complex syntax can be informative in assessment contexts for AAE- and Spanish-speaking children, as it is for MAE speakers. African American English speakers evidence a range of complex syntactic forms in their spontaneous discourse from the time they enter preschool or kindergarten (Craig & Washington, 1994, 1995; Oetting & Newkirk, 2008). Interestingly, two out of three studies (Craig & Washington, 1994, 1995) focused on complex syntax in AAE found that dialect interacts with production

Table 1. Shared morphosyntactic features of African American English and Spanish-influenced English

Shared Features	Examples
Multiple negation	She don't have no toys.
Noninversion of questions	Johnny is eating? This one _ yours?[a]
Substitution of *was* for *were*	They was going to the store.
Zero plural	I have twenty-five cent.
Zero regular past tense	The boy kick_ the ball.
Zero third person	They cat eat_ his food.

Note. Features included based on Gutíerrez-Clellen et al. (2008) and Oetting and McDonald (2001).

[a]African American English speakers may also omit the auxiliary and copula verbs in questions.

of complex syntactic structures in an unexpected way: specifically, dialect density and production of complex syntactic structures were positively related. This means that children with greater amounts of dialect produced greater amounts and types of complex syntax, supporting the view of dialect feature production as a strength. Clauses are relatively unimpacted by AAE. African American English features may occur within a clause, but they do not impact the structure and by implication the complexity of a sentence (Craig & Washington, 1994). In later work conducted with children ranging in age from 4 to 11 years, Craig and Washington (2000) observed that amounts and types of complex syntax in spontaneous speech differentiated AAE-speaking children with and without language impairment.

Commonly, studies focused on complex syntax in bidialectal and bilingual populations have used sentence repetition tasks in which children are asked to repeat sentences that increase in complexity. Oetting et al. (2016) reported that AAE and SWE speakers with language impairment were less accurate in their recall overall and also scored lower than their typically developing peers because sentences increased in complexity (from two to three functional categories). In a similar study of Spanish-speaking children (including those who were classified as speaking Caribbean and Mexican dialects of Spanish), Gutíerrez-Clellen et al. (2006) examined syntax using a standardized measure normed on bilingual children, which included cloze and sentence repetition items designed to assess complex forms of Spanish syntax. Overall, children 4- to 6-years old with language impairment performed below their peers, although after 6-year-olds, scores on the measure begin to converge between clinical groups, suggesting that the measure is not sensitive to detecting impairment in children older than 6 years. Measures across populations yielded fair to good sensitivity and specificity, with values ranging from 80% to 94% reported between studies. For dialect speakers, these studies focused mainly on multiclausal utterances including relatives, complements, clauses joined by conjunctions, and infinitives (see Craig & Washington, 1994, for a complete list of complex syntax structures), and for Spanish speakers complex structures included relative pronouns, conditional verbs, and clauses joined by conjunctions. Complex single utterances included semantically complex prepositional phrases studied by Craig and Washington (1995). Clinically, complex syntax is important for identifying children with language impairment regardless of the dialect or language spoken. Thus, understanding the typical patterns of complex syntax use within dialects should improve our ability to identify bidialectal children who are struggling with language acquisition.

Summary of morphosyntax and complex syntax

Data from studies on bidialectal and bilingual speakers, specifically AAE speakers and Spanish-English bilinguals, show cross-linguistic similarities in the grammatical features used by these groups. In the aforementioned studies, grammatical morphology and syntax emerge as areas of intersection for bilingual and bidialectal children. Areas of commonality that may be important to examine further for their clinical utility are (1) zero-marking of grammatical morphemes in contexts for which these morphemes are considered obligatory for monolingual, MAE speakers, and (2) use of sentence repetition measures for distinguishing between groups of diverse speakers. The studies presented in this section were largely focused on preschool and kindergarten-age children because morphosyntax and complex syntax are important indicators of impairment in this age group (Craig & Washington, 2000; Washington & Craig, 2004). One study showed, however, that in Spanish-speaking children, complex syntax is less sensitive to impairment after age 6 (Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2006).

Another commonality that appears to exist between groups is the notion that bilingualism and bidialectalism occur on a continuum.

For children who speak AAE, this continuum indicates that some children use fewer dialect features in their speech compared with their peers along the continuum toward a point at which children use a high frequency of dialect features (Oetting & McDonald, 2002; Terry, Connor, Thomas-Tate, & Love, 2010; Washington & Craig, 1994). For Spanish-speaking children, the continuum reflects children's use of Spanish and English in terms of language proficiency, defined as how well children speak either English or Spanish, and/or language dominance defined as the language of greater proficiency or the language the child hears more often (Bedore et al., 2010, 2011; Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2006, 2008). Categorical labels are often ascribed to objectively classify Spanish-speaking (e.g., Spanish-dominant, English-dominant, or balanced) and AAE dialect users (e.g., high- vs. low-dialect user). Recognizing that language variation exists along a continuum provides a context for understanding individual differences and the differential impact on language disorder that may exist depending upon where a child falls on this linguistic continuum. For clinicians, in practical terms, children whose language use differs most significantly from the language of schooling or testing may present the most challenges for assessment and intervention.

A key difference between language communities that stands out is the terminology used to refer to children along a continuum. Specifically, the terminology used in the bilingual literature is more reflective of children's language strengths. For example, *proficiency* and *dominance*, as defined earlier, are reflective of children's language competence, be it in Spanish or English or both. In comparison, the phrase *dialect density* and the understanding that it represents distance from MAE do not honor dialect speakers as competent language users. Instead, the implicit interpretation for dialectal speakers is that the term *proficiency* applies to proficiency in MAE rather than proficiency in the dialect.

Oral narrative discourse

Oral narrative discourse is another area in which a strengths perspective can contribute to rich interpretations of language development of bilingual and bidialectal children. Children's early narratives provide the foundation for later language and reading development (Gardner-Neblett & Iruka, 2015; Gardner-Neblett, Pungello, & Iruka, 2012; Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). Although the term *narrative* suggests the telling of stories, different genres of oral narrative discourse have been identified and their use and development have been described for children from preschool through adolescence (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Labov, 1972; McCabe, Bliss, Barra, & Bennett, 2008; Peterson & McCabe, 2013; Stein & Glenn, 1975; Ukrainetz et al., 2005). Importantly, many of these narrative genres have been determined to be critical for engaging in meaningful discourse in oral language and for clearly communicating ideas in written form. Among these, *personal narratives* (i.e., accounts or recollections of real, causally linked, personal events occurring presently or in the past to the speaker or someone he/she knows) and early *stories* (i.e., narratives that may be real or fictional accounts) have been identified as particularly important to consider for young children developing language (McCabe et al., 2008; Peterson & McCabe, 2013).

Studies of sociocultural influences on narrative discourse have revealed differences in the development and use of narratives cross-culturally (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2002; Raining-Bird & Vetter, 1994; Silva & McCabe, 1996; Sperry & Sperry, 1996). Most notably, researchers have identified differential organizational features in both narrative *macrostructure* (i.e., structure of the overall discourse, including the hierarchical and episodic organization) and *microstructure* (i.e., analysis of within-sentence elements that establish relations between words or discourse) (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Burns, de Villiers, Pearson, & Champion, 2012)

depending upon the sociolinguistic community from which a young speaker comes (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Mainess, Champion, & McCabe, 2002; Silva & McCabe, 1996).

For bidialectal and bilingual speakers, the impact of these sociocultural differences on the assessment of early narratives is particularly important, because narratives produced in these language communities will look significantly different from the chronological, classical narratives described by Stein and Glenn (1975). These classical narratives are characteristic of most of the books found in schools, as well as in high-stakes educational testing. Interestingly, for bidialectal and bilingual speakers, the macrostructure and the microstructure are differentially informative for identifying language impairments as well (Burns et al., 2012).

The personal narratives produced by African American children have been referred to as *topic-associated* (Hyon & Sulzby, 1994; Michaels, 1981), or *performative* (Champion, 1997; Michaels & Foster, 1985). These narratives are distinguished at the macrostructural level by their reliance upon semantic connections rather than chronological sequences for relaying personal events. Such narrative macrostructures are learned and valued in the African American language community (Champion, 1997). In an investigation of the narratives produced by a small sample ($n = 15$) of African American children aged 6 to 10 years, Champion (1997) stressed that, although these performative narratives may predominate, they are not invariant; rather, African American children produce a range of narrative structures that appear to be largely context dependent. It is important not to oversimplify or overgeneralize assumptions about cultural influences on narrative production. Narrative performance may also be impacted by SES and gender, with some types of discourse propositions and elaborations favoring low-income African American children and girls (Mainess et al., 2002). This diversity in the use of narratives across groups and within groups should be viewed as a strength. Children who master these cultural narrative styles must also learn to switch to the use of more linear mainstream narratives in the school contexts, making them flexible not only in the use of the dialect but also in the use of discourse practices.

Investigations of the microstructure of narratives produced by African American children have revealed that the microstructure does not seem to be impacted by cultural differences to the same extent as macrostructure. Burns et al. (2012) and Horton-Ikard (2009) referred to the cohesive devices investigated at this level as "dialect neutral" devices that do not appear to differ for African American children and their peers who speak MAE, making these devices good candidates for investigating impairment and development in bidialectal speakers. Furthermore, Terry, Mills, Bingham, Mansour, and Marencin (2013) found that the development of narrative skills in preschool-aged African American children was highly correlated with their complex syntax and vocabulary skills, and that their performance at both the microstructure and macrostructure levels was comparable to their mainstream peers. Similar outcomes were reported by Lucero (2015) for bilingual Spanish speakers; they found that vocabulary and grammatical complexity were critical indicators of development of narrative discourse in second language learners.

Although generalizations are often made, Silva and McCabe (1996) stressed that the structure and content of personal narratives can differ considerably for Spanish-speaking bilingual children, depending upon their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. For example, Bliss and McCabe (2008) and McCabe and Bliss (2005) reported that, for Spanish speakers of various ethnic backgrounds, narratives stress conversational flow and relating experiences, rather than placing emphasis on structural details or chronological sequence. Thus, the macrostructure of these narratives, especially episodic structure, may differ significantly from the chronological structure of classical narratives. This emphasis on relating experiences and on family also impacts the microstructure of Spanish narratives, because

children tend to use more ellipsis and pronouns that may render the narrative ambiguous for individuals outside of the child's family or community (Gutíerrez-Clellen & Heinrichs-Ramos, 1993; McCabe & Bliss, 2005).

Investigations of narratives in bidialectal speakers have focused largely on describing and analyzing narrative structure and the impact of AAE use on the outcomes of these analyses. Narrative studies of bilingual speakers, on the other hand, have focused to a larger extent on investigating the clinical potential of oral narratives for distinguishing language impairments from second language learning, as well as the promise of narrative intervention for addressing language impairments (Fiestas & Peña, 2004; Muñoz, Gillam, Peña, & Gulley-Faehnle, 2003; Peña, 2000; Peña, Gillam, & Bedore, 2014; Schoenbrodt, Kerins, & Gesell, 2003).

Summary of oral narrative discourse

Narrative assessment has been identified as potentially informative for identifying language impairments in both bidialectal and bilingual children, although the preponderance of the evidence is with bidialectal children. Among bilingual and bidialectal children, research has focused largely on the macrostructure to identify similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses. The macrostructure of narratives is sensitive to cultural differences for both groups; story structure and inclusion or exclusion of required story elements is highly variable, yet systematic within respective narrative styles. The microstructure of narratives, on the other hand, has been determined to be less variable for African American children and even has been called "dialect neutral" (Burns et al., 2012; Horton-Ikard, 2009). Similar outcomes have been reported for Spanish-speaking bilingual children, for whom the microstructure of narratives reportedly does not differ measurably from that of their English-speaking peers (Castilla-Earls, Petersen, Spencer, & Hammer, 2015). According to research with Spanish-speaking bilinguals, in order to assess narratives in bilingual children adequately, assessments need to address cross-linguistic differences between the L1 and L2 (Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2002). It is not clear whether or not this is true for bidialectal children.

Assessment of narratives is considered valuable because of the relationship of narrative performance to general academic performance and because children with language impairments often have difficulty with narration (Fey, Catts, Proctor-Williams, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2004). Of equal importance perhaps, telling stories is natural for children of all cultures, thus providing a strong, familiar naturalistic context for examining language use and development (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EXECUTIVE FUNCTION AND CODE-SWITCHING SKILLS OF BIDIALECTAL AND BILINGUAL CHILDREN?

Executive function

Executive function processes are defined in varied ways across the literature, but they are broadly defined as a set of cognitive processes that include inhibitory control, working memory, and cognitive flexibility (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007). These core executive functions manifest in the ability to filter distractions and attend to relevant information, inhibit and regulate thoughts and actions (inhibitory control), hold information in memory long enough to manipulate it (working memory), and be flexible in switching attention (cognitive flexibility). Executive control processes are central to the development of social competence and school readiness as well as language and academic achievement (Diamond & Lee, 2011; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Hammer, & Maczuga, 2015; Noble, Norman, & Farah, 2005; Raver, Gershoff, & Aber, 2007; Swanson, Valiente, & Lemery-Chalfant, 2012).

Language studies focused on assessment and intervention in early childhood have consistently linked self-regulation (a component

of inhibitory control) to vocabulary breadth (Diamond & Lee, 2011; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Hammer, et al., 2015; Noble et al., 2005; Qi & Kaiser, 2004; Schmitt, Justice, & O'Connell, 2014). Self-regulation is largely supported by vocabulary knowledge in that the more words people know, the better equipped they are to make sense of, reflect on, and rationalize experiences; this, in turn, guides their ability to regulate your actions, thoughts, and emotions (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Hammer et al., 2015; Vallotton & Ayoub, 2011). The extant literature evidences a bidirectional relationship between these factors at different points across the age span. For example, Vallotton and Ayoub (2011) found that expressive language, operationalized as talkativeness and expressive vocabulary, significantly predicted self-regulation in toddlers. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Morgan et al. (2015) reported that expressive vocabulary at 24 months significantly predicted behavioral regulation at kindergarten entry above and beyond the contribution of other confounding variables, such as income status and gender. Findings from two recent intervention articles reveal greater gains in vocabulary for children in classrooms where teachers had extensive training in behavioral management compared with the control group (Diamond & Lee, 2011) and greater vocabulary gains for children with language disorders who demonstrated higher levels of self-regulation (Schmitt et al., 2014). These two studies offer examples of the predictive nature of self-regulation on vocabulary. Although these studies were not focused on bilingual and bidialectal specifically, the studies have implications for encouraging a strength-based view of vocabulary associated with knowing more than one linguistic system.

Dynamic assessment studies focused on Spanish-English bilinguals provide supporting evidence for the relationship between executive function processes and language skills in this group of children. Several studies have shown that typically developing children and children with low language skills are differentiated in their ability to access certain learning strategies, many of which rely on executive function processes (e.g., attention, self-regulation, and planning, problem-solving, and transference of strategies or learned information) (Gutíerrez-Clellen & Peña, 2001; Lidz & Peña, 1996; Peña, 2000; Peña, Gillam, & Bedore, 2014; Peña et al., 2007). When tasked with learning new information, children with typical language ability readily access learning strategies, whereas children with low language skills employ these strategies less frequently.

Investigations of bilingual children from various language backgrounds suggest that children who speak two or more languages have advanced executive function skills compared with their monolingual speaking peers (Antoniou et al., 2016; Barac & Bialystok, 2012; Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014; Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008; HernÁNdez, Costa, Fuentes, Vivas, & SebastiÁN-GallÉS, 2010), and these advantages are evident even though bilingual children demonstrate lower language proficiency overall (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014). There is evidence to support this "bilingual advantage" in children as young as 7 months old reared in households where caregivers use two languages to communicate (Kovacs & Mehler, 2009). Using eye-tracking, Kovacs and Mehler (2009) studied infants' ability to detect changes in the location of a visual stimulus. In the control condition, over nine trials, multisyllabic nonsense words were played followed by the appearance of a puppet on one side of screen. In the experimental condition, the multisyllabic word was followed by the appearance of a puppet on the opposite side of screen, which required infants to learn to switch their attention from one side to other in order to see the puppet. In the control condition, there was no measureable difference between groups; however, in the experimental condition, infants raised in homes with bilingual caregivers showed a significant increase in correct looks compared with children reared in monolingual households, indicating that bilingual children were faster at learning to

be flexible in switching attention. Superior executive function skills of bilinguals are thought to be related to their daily experience of navigating more than one language (Bialystok, 2007; Bialystok & Martin, 2004), because these children and adults must be flexible in their language across various contexts (e.g., home, school, and work).

The "bilingual advantage" in executive control reportedly extends primarily to tasks that tap inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory. For example, Spanish-English and Chinese-English bilinguals demonstrate stronger cognitive control compared with their monolingual peers on such tasks (Bialystok, 1999; Bialystok & Martin, 2004; Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008). It has been suggested that the bilingual advantage, specifically in inhibitory control, contributes to superior performance of bilinguals on theory of mind tasks (Bialystok & Senman, 2004) and increased sociolinguistic awareness (or ability to code-switch) (Cheung, Mak, Luo, & Xiao, 2010).

Unfortunately, few studies have been conducted on potential advantages in executive control for bidialectal speakers and, those that exist have not focused on children who speak dialects of AAE. In a recent study focused on Cypriot Greek-speaking children, Antoniou et al. (2016) suggested that the bilingual advantage may extend to children who speak a nonmainstream dialect in close typological distance to the mainstream language. These researchers investigated executive control in participants ranging in age from 4 to 12 years. Children were classified into one of three groups: bidialectal children who spoke both standard modern Greek and Cypriot Greek, a nonstandard variety of modern Greek; multilingual children who spoke standard modern Greek, Cypriot Greek, and English; and monolingual children who spoke standard modern Greek only. After controlling for language ability and other important factors (i.e., SES and intelligence quotient), multilingual and bidialectal children outperformed their monolingual peers on measures of working memory and inhibitory control. The results also supported previous work with bilingual children that demonstrated that, even when these children had lower levels of language proficiency, the bilingual advantage in executive function was evident (Bialystok & Senman, 2004; Calvo & Bialystok, 2014).

The outcomes of this study provide a first look at bidialectal children and executive function, which suggests that the bilingual advantage may extend to bidialectal speakers, constituting a *bidialectal advantage* as well. Published studies focused on executive function skills in AAE speakers are lacking, but researchers have examined code-switching, a potential index of flexibility and inhibition, in African American children, as discussed below. Given the associations between bidialectalism and language proficiency and executive function skills and achievement, it will be important to explore whether the findings of Antoniou et al. (2016) extend to other bidialectal groups, in particular those reared in low SES communities.

Summary of research on executive function

A positive association between executive function and language ability is well supported in the extant literature for the general population as well as for Spanish-English bilinguals (Gutíerrez-Clellen & Peña, 2001; Lidz & Peña, 1996; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Hammer et al., 2015; Peña, 2000; Peña et al., 2007, 2014; Schmitt et al., 2014; Vallotton & Ayoub, 2011). Overall, children who are bilingual demonstrate advantages in executive control compared with their peers who are monolingual. Findings from one recent study (Antoniou et al., 2016) suggest the cognitive benefits of being a dual-language user extend to children who are bidialectal, thus indicating that the experience of navigating two or more language systems, regardless of typological distance, may give rise to enhanced cognitive control. For bidialectal children, this advantage is statistically evident only after controlling for differences in language ability.

Nonetheless, executive function is clearly an area of strength for these children.

What remains unknown, however, is how much exposure to a second language is needed to support benefits in executive function. Carlson and Meltzoff (2008) found executive function scores favoring bilinguals over English monolinguals and children who had been participating in an immersion program for 6 months. This suggests that prolonged exposure to two languages facilitates increased executive function ability. This finding has implications for dialect users residing in communities where they are less likely to gain exposure to MAE until they begin formal schooling (Craig & Washington, 1994; Washington & Craig, 1994; Washington, Craig, & Kushmaul, 1998). It will be interesting to explore whether cognitive advantages exist as a function of increased exposure to MAE for these populations. Extending this work to other dialects of English in the United States, including AAE, Gullah-Geechee, and SWE, is a critical area for future research.

Code-switching

Although it has not always been viewed in a positive light, the ability to switch adeptly from one variety of a language or from one language to another across settings and within conversations currently is accepted as a linguistic strength by the scientific community in the United States and beyond. The term *code-switching* is frequently used to reference this ability. The most widely accepted definition of code-switching is that it applies to the alternation of language varieties within a single conversation (King & Chetty, 2014; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Unamuno, 2008). Milroy and Muysken (1995) explained further that code-switching can occur across speakers and turns, between utterances within a single turn, or within a single utterance. Whereas some studies use the term *code-switching* to refer to linguistic varieties and dialects (King & Chetty, 2014), more often the term is used to refer to switching between two different languages such as Spanish and English. Milroy and Muysken (1995) identified code-switching as the central issue in bilingualism research. Other considerations relate to defining different types of code-switching largely by their grammatical structure and/or their social purpose.

The fundamental question driving most studies of code-switching among bilinguals is why code-switching occurs. Prior to the work of Gumperz and colleagues (Blom & Gumperz, 1968; Blom, Gumperz, & Hymes, 1972; Gumperz, 1964), code-switching among bilinguals was regarded as "imperfect bilingualism," such that individuals who switched or mixed languages were believed to have poor language proficiency that was manifested by alternating between the use of the two languages. Since then, this view has changed considerably. Unamuno (2008) reported that for the multilingual children in her study, code-switching served as a way to manage changes and transitions in activities or interactions in the classroom. Children switched with ease during a classroom-based project and used each language systematically to support their own work and interactions with peers with whom each child shared at least two languages, Catalan and English. Fricke and Kootstra described code-switching among bilinguals thusly: "Codeswitching not only exemplifies the wonderful flexibility and creativity of language use, it provides a unique testing ground for studying the cognitive mechanisms of bilingual language production. It is one of the most prominent natural discourse phenomena in which the co-activation of language elements is overtly reflected" (Fricke & Kootstra, 2016, p. 184).

In contrast to bilingual children, most studies of code-switching in AAE-speaking children focus on why African American children *do not* code-switch rather than why they do, suggesting once again need for a more strength-based perspective. In fact, code-switching interventions typically focus on encouraging African American children to switch from the use of their home language, AAE, to the use of the school standard, MAE (Craig, Kolenic, & Hensel, 2014; Johnson et al., 2017; Wheeler, 2010, 2008; Wheeler &

Swords, 2004). Such recommendations could lead to discouragement of the use of the student's home dialect, which could have unforeseen consequences on communicative confidence and language learning, rather than simply encouraging MAE dialect use, as intended.

Studies that do focus on African American children who speak AAE present the ability to code-switch as overwhelmingly positive, and also as imperative for bidialectal African American children if they are to succeed in academic contexts. Ample research exists that confirms that African American children who do not code-switch (which implies failure to use contrastive dialectal features and features of MAE in the same conversation) struggle to gain important linguistic skills and educational skills, such as reading and writing. In contrast, those who code-switch to the use of MAE (i.e., children who use few or no dialect features), especially in the school environment, do not struggle to the same extent (Charity et al., 2004; Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009; Terry et al., 2013; Thompson, Craig, & Washington, 2004).

Charity et al. (2004) found that greater familiarity with MAE was highly correlated with stronger reading skills, and this outcome has been confirmed by others. It is important to note that many of these investigations are disproportionately focused upon AAE use in children growing up in poverty. Low-income African American children use significant amounts of AAE and many do not learn to code-switch spontaneously (Craig, Thompson, Washington, & Potter, 2004; Washington & Craig, 1998). This begs the question of whether these low-income African American children are monolectal or bidialectal in their use of AAE versus MAE. That is, they may more accurately be characterized as *MAE learners* rather than bidialectals. As a result, the extant literature with these children is focused largely upon the *consequences* of not learning to code-switch on a range of abilities. Indeed, in addition to educational consequences, research demonstrates that there are social consequences for not learning to code-switch, including discrimination in employment, education, and housing (Koch, Gross, & Kolts, 2001; Rickford et al., 2015). There is a need for research that intentionally examines bidialectalism to answer questions that have been ignored in studies that have conceptualized dialect use as negative, and not considered skill at code-switching as positive.

Summary of code-switching

Overall, the ability to code-switch is regarded as positive for both bilingual and bidialectal children, and it is regarded as a strength for many bilingual children. Code-switching for both groups represents the ability to move in and out of two or more language or dialect systems as needed to achieve communicative goals. Among bilingual children and adults, switching codes (languages) has been determined to be advantageous to the language users, aiding critical thinking and comprehension of selected tasks and activities (Fricke & Kootstra, 2016; King & Chetty, 2014; Unamuno, 2008).

Among AAE-speaking bidialectal children, research has consistently shown that the ability to code-switch, measured as use of predominately MAE features, represents a strength for children who manage it, particularly with regard to academic achievement (Craig & Washington, 2004; Gatlin & Wanzek, 2015). What is less clear for these children is whether fluent switching between AAE and MAE can serve as a bridge or support that students can use spontaneously or naturally to move them toward the use of the classroom standard, similar to how the first language does for bilingual children. The use of AAE differs across contexts and tasks for children (Thompson et al., 2004). Explanations for this variability have not been forthcoming, but perhaps it is related to the demands or complexity of the tasks, and increased or decreased use of AAE aids the child in completion of the tasks in some way that is not yet understood. What we have learned from bilingual research is that code-switching is beneficial and helpful to the child in various contexts for very different reasons; this suggests that perhaps dialect use and dialect-switching can also be beneficial to the bidialectal child.

WHAT ARE THE OVERALL CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS?

Using a strengths-based perspective, this article aims to examine the language strengths and weaknesses of bilingual and bidialectal children, in particular Spanish-English bilinguals and AAE dialect users. Most often in research with these populations, the focus is examining best practice in assessment, because diagnosing language impairment in these populations can be particularly challenging (Bedore & Peña, 2008; Craig & Washington, 2000; Lidz & Peña, 1996; Washington & Craig, 2004). As a result, Spanish-English bilinguals and AAE dialect speakers are at increased risk of being misdiagnosed, resulting in either over- or underidentification for special education services. Language-minority children, including Spanish speakers and African Americans, tend to be underrepresented on special education caseloads in the categories of learning disabilities and speech and language impairment (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Mattison, et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2016). There is also a paucity of intervention research focused on these populations.

The language areas we chose to focus on are reflective of the dominant focus of studies on bilinguals and bidialectal children in the extant literature pertaining to Spanish and AAE. Specifically, morphosyntax, complex syntax, and narrative discourse are language areas in which both groups tend to exhibit differences from the MAE and AE, and in which both populations exhibit relative strengths as well as some weaknesses.

Another area that has received significant attention for both groups, but that was beyond the scope of this article, is vocabulary. Although vocabulary is widely studied, most studies identify this as an area of weakness for AAE and Spanish-speaking children that is consistently associated with lower performance, especially in school (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Carlo et al., 2004; Champion, 1997; Champion, Hyter, McCabe, & Bland-Stewart, 2003; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011; Roberts, Burchinal, & Durham, 1999; Thomas-Tate, Washington, Craig, & Packard, 2006; Washington & Craig, 1992, 1999). Studies have also shown, however, that vocabulary knowledge is heavily influenced by children's SES (Dollaghan et al., 1999), and this is true regardless of language group membership. For African American children, who are disproportionately poor, comparisons to middle income expectations reveal significant gaps in vocabulary performance with African American children performing more poorly. For Spanish-speaking bilingual children, this gap exists in English, although assessment of Spanish reveals more strengths, highlighting again the importance of the language of testing. In future research, the vocabulary strengths of AAE and Spanish-speaking children, while controlling for SES, do warrant further consideration.

In this article, we have pointed to some advantages in considering commonalities across bidialectal and bilingual children. Morphosyntax is an aspect of language where there appears to be some convergence between groups. AAE speakers and Spanish-English bilngual children are similar in their grammatical transformations, particularly with regard to zero-marking of grammatical morphemes in obligatory contexts (Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2008; Oetting & McDonald, 2002). These children also demonstrate similarities in the way they cue Wh-question inversion and negation (Gutíerrez-Clellen et al., 2008; Oetting & McDonald, 2002). Such similarities present opportunities to consider for developing interventions or classroom strategies to benefit both groups of speakers in classrooms or schools where both bidialectal and bilingual are enrolled. Whereas it is important to consider the unique needs of each group, the linguistic skills that overlap between them could allow clinicians and other language experts to serve both groups in a more economical and efficient manner by eliminating the need to create completely separate, targeted interventions for bilingual and bidialectal speakers.

Complex syntax and narrative discourse also represent areas of documented strength

for AAE speakers, as does narrative discourse for Spanish speakers. These areas of language can be exploited in intervention. Currently, the focus is primarily on assessment, although some studies do exist that promote narrative intervention for children who speak Spanish (Kohnert, Yim, Nett, Kan, & Duran, 2005; Schoenbrodt et al., 2003; Vaughn et al., 2006). A key component of these interventions is that bilingual children's Spanish language skills are utilized to improve and strengthen narrative skills in English. For AAE children, however studies focused on leveraging AAE to build school-based narrative skills are largely absent from the current literature base. Past studies focused on use of *dialect readers*, reading instructional materials written in AAE, attempted to leverage AAE to improve reading outcomes for AAE-speaking children (Bailey, 1970; Rickford & Rickford, 1995).

Several barriers led to abandoning this approach. According to Rickford and Rickford (1995), attempts to provide access to dialectal reading materials succumbed to lack of profitability of the readers, and parents and community leaders who resoundingly rejected the materials. The latter groups were afraid that children would be further disadvantaged by these readers. Scientists and educators alike sought to transition African American children to MAE-reading materials by beginning with their home language. We are not suggesting that we should make another attempt to introduce dialect readers, but bilingual research has confirmed repeatedly that allowing children to use their community language skills in the educational context for problem-solving and for establishing language competence is advantageous. Perhaps it would be useful to explore the use of AAE to support African American children's growth as well.

Finally, we explored executive function and code-switching as two cognitive areas that are important to consider for both bilingual and bidialectal children. These are interrelated skills. There are well-documented benefits for executive function associated with being bilingual (Barac et al., 2014), and importantly, these advantages persist in light of limited language proficiency (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014). This so-called *bilingual advantage* is conferred upon bilingual children as a result of the cognitive skills such as inhibition, working memory, and flexibility that are needed to become competent in two languages.

A remaining question is, *Is there a bidialectal advantage*? A study of bidialectal Cypriot Greek speakers suggests that children who speak a dialect of a language also experience executive function benefits from the experience of navigating two language systems, even though the typological distance between the standard language and the dialect is closer than between two completely different languages (Antoniou et al., 2016). To some degree code-switching can be considered an index of executive function because the propensity to code-switch or switch language use depending on the context and participant requirements arguably requires some level of cognitive control.

Implications for intervention

Compared with descriptive studies, there are far fewer intervention studies focused on bidialectal and bilingual children. However, the literature that exists for AAE speakers supports intervention approaches that capitalize on the differences between AAE and MAE to improve language and literacy outcomes. A recent intervention study provides a clear example of how children's knowledge of AAE morphosyntactic rules can be used to enhance language and literacy (Johnson et al., 2017). The authors conducted two experimental studies with the second through fourth graders in which the effectiveness of a dialect awareness study (DAWS) intervention on reading comprehension, writing, and oral language was investigated. Children in the DAWS condition were taught grammar rules explicitly and were engaged in discussion and activities that focused on contrasting rules of AAE with MAE and teaching contexts for which the dialects are "appropriate." Posttest performance of children in the DAWS condition was compared with two groups: one group who received intervention

that explicitly taught grammar rules and another group who received business as usual. Overall findings showed that children participating in the DAWS intervention demonstrated stronger scores in the posttest phase including measures of receptive and written morphosyntactic awareness compared with their peers in the two comparison conditions. This is one example of support for a strengths-based perspective with AAE speakers. Children in the DAWS condition benefited from the additional component of contrasting MAE grammatical structures with structures of AAE. It is important to note that the DAWS program developed by Johnson et al. (2017) is not the first of its kind. In fact, similar methods have been proposed when working with African American students (Wheeler, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004), although few researchers have tested these methods empirically.

In a similar vein, there is evidence to support intervention with bilingual children in which children are instructed in their native language and English or their native language only. According to Gutierrez-Clellen (1999), a bilingual language intervention approach has several advantages including that it is comprehensible, facilitates language growth in the first and second languages, may increase self-confidence and motivation, allows caregivers with limited proficiency in the second language to be engaged in the process, and supports language preservation. In a review of intervention studies, Gutierrez-Clellen (1999) reported that bilingual children made gains in language and literacy by participating in bilingual interventions.

A similar modified approach might be taken in providing interventions targeting the use of narrative discourse. Schoenbrodt et al. (2003) utilized a narrative-based intervention focused on the narrative macrostructure to improve communicative functioning of Spanish-speaking children. Findings suggested that narrative intervention presented in Spanish was more effective than in English. Similarly, Fiestas and Peña (2004) found that the outcomes of narrative assessments were differentially impacted by the language spoken by their young participants (aged 4–6 years). In particular, the macrostructure elements included in children's narratives depended upon the language used, with different elements evident in English than in Spanish, demonstrating the importance of considering the language of testing. Muñoz et al. (2003) encouraged scoring linguistic structures based upon the expectations and accepted productions within the child's typical language community. They found, for example, that in the scoring of narrative productions when the macrostructure elements were scored according to Spanish narrative structure, children's narratives were judged to be more complete than would have been accepted using the Berman and Slobin (1994) scoring criteria. This is consistent with the findings for bidialectal children for whom the narrative analysis used should be selected based upon its ability to characterize adequately the cultural narrative style used by African American children (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Champion, 1997, 2014).

Taken together, this work suggests that both bidialectal and bilingual children, learning a different linguistic code, can benefit from instruction that builds on their first dialect or language. There is no shortage of studies examining the language differences between AAE and MAE; however, there are few studies focused on enhancing language by building on these language differences. Research investigation targeting language enrichment and intervention strategies for bilingual and bidialectal speakers is a critical area for future research because the majority of studies on bilingual and bidialectal speakers have focused on assessment. Future research should aim to build upon the language differences of bidialectal speakers, specifically focused on enhancing metalinguistic awareness at school entry to support early literacy. The need for research to be conducted in a manner that considers strength-based possibilities is addressed in the section that follows.

Future research directions

Based on the discussions in this article, some important future research directions emerged. First, although acculturation (i.e., mastering the culture and language of the school setting) is an appropriate goal when children attend school, leveraging the language strengths that the child brings to school from his/her community might improve the ability of school-based teams to serve children from different cultural-linguistic backgrounds, as well as to improve the educational outcomes for these children.

Future research should focus on identifying the dialect-based linguistic strengths of AAE-speaking children and devising interventions that allow educators and clinicians to leverage these strengths to improve their reading and language outcomes. We can learn from the methods utilized with Spanish-speaking children in this vein. Second, development of common interventions that can be used with both bilingual and bidialectal children should be explored. Spanish-influenced English resembles many features of AAE at the surface level. Future research should explore these points of intersection for their potential to lead to mutually beneficial interventions for both AAE and Spanish-speaking children in American schools.

Finally, code-switching and other executive functions appear to be important skills for dual-language and dual-dialect learners. More research is needed that is focused on the mechanisms that trigger code-switching in AAE dialect speakers. Such studies could inform assessment, intervention, learning, and teaching practices, as has occurred for bilingual Spanish-speaking children. Overall, improving our understanding of language, executive function, and code-switching in both groups should provide important evidence needed to guide future educational and clinical decision-making.

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