

International Linguistic Association

Monthly Lecture Series

Saturday, March 5, 2022. 11 AM - 12 PM (EST)

Dr. René Blake

New York University

'Talk to (and with) the hand': African American Language, gestures and the Black body

Abstract

John R. Rickford and Angela E. Rickford's (1976) work on "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise," describe a visual and oral gesture, respectively, as cultural talk within Black Diasporic communities across West Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. Three decades after this seminal work, there have been few sociolinguistic studies on African American expression regarding embodied styling of speech and related indexical meanings (Barrett 1999, Goodwin and Alim 2010). In this talk, I expand on this work in embodied sociolinguistics and present analyses of Black gestural embodiment in United States contexts. I focus on gestures as "central to the production, perception, and social interpretation of language." (Bucholtz and Hall 2016). I analyze embodied cultural and linguistic practices in Black communities via new forms of data made available through advances in computer mediated communication. And I offer a community-based approach to the body that includes the Black ASL community. This work highlights the possibilities of conflict or oppositionality in face-to-face interactions, but also reveals critical elements of communitas.

- Barrett, Rusty. 1999. "Indexing Polyphonous Identity in the Speech of African American Drag Queens." In *Indexing polyphonous identity in the speech of African American drag queens*, by Mary Bucholtz, A.C. Liang and Laurel A Sutton, 313-331. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bucholtz, Mary, and Kira Hall. 2016. "Embodied Sociolinguistics." In *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*, 173-198. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, Marjorie Harness, and H. Samy Alim. 2010. "'Whatever (Neck Roll, Eye Roll, Teeth Suck)': The Situated Coproduction of Social Categories and Identities through Stancetaking and Transmodal Stylization." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20 (1): 179-194.
- Rickford, John R., and Angela E. Rickford. 1976. "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise." *The Journal of American Folklore* (American Folklore Society) 89 (353): 294-309.

ZOOM LINK: <https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/82580942527>

Meeting ID: 825 8094 2527

We have an amazing line-up of speakers.

Visit our ILA website: <https://www.ilaword.org/index.aspx>

Renée Blake

Associate Professor of Linguistics and Social & Cultural Analysis, NYU



Renée Blake is Associate Professor in the Departments of Linguistics and Social & Cultural Analysis at New York University with affiliations in The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) and Department of Anthropology. She is a founding member of the Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora. She is an Associate Producer of and contributor to the EMMY winning film, *Talking Black in America*, and serves as a Producer for the upcoming *Talking Black in America: Roots*. Her research examines language contact, race, ethnicity, and class with a focus on African American English, Caribbean Creole English, and New York City English. Her work has been published in several professional journal and books and she regularly does public-interfacing around language in society. She has served as a consultant to many programs and organizations including Disney and the Ford Foundation. Professor Blake is a recipient of several grants including the National Science Foundation, Social Science Research Council, and Fulbright and she is a NYU's Martin Luther King Jr. Faculty Award recipient. Renée is the co-founder of the diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging firm, United Solutions Consultancy Group.