PART TWO:

DISCOURSE, GRAMMAR, AND VARIATION

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S LANGUAGE:
GIRL AS A DISCOURSE MARKER

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[erratum corrected to /ɡɹl/]

Introduction

The concern of this chapter is African American Women's Language (AAWL) within the context of an emergent theory of African American language communication practices (Spears, 1998, 2001, 2006, 2007, 2009).[1] The plan of the chapter is as follows. First, I discuss ten key notions in the study of African American communicative practices, in other words, how African Americans use African American Language (AAL) to conduct their social affairs. Devised for the study of African American communicative practices (or language use) generally, these notions, or principles as I call them, are thus relevant for the study of AAWL. After laying out these speech principles and their interrelationships, I discuss an AAWL discourse marker, which I write GIRL (cf. Troutman 2001). This is, it should be stressed, only one of the GIRL discourse markers in AAWL, GIRL 1. It occurs in sentences such as *Giiirrrlll, guess who I saw with Dorothy's husband today!* Its pronunciation is drawn out with rising pitch, and the comma in this example represents a slight pause before (usually) continuing with the rest of the sentence. As distinguished in my framework, it occurs clause-initially only. Another GIRL, which we can call GIRL 2, is that occurring in *Girl you crazy*. GIRL 2 is not lengthened and has level pitch. My claim, not argued in this chapter, is that these two and other GIRLs each have different meanings and functions. In this chapter, I discuss only GIRL 1 in

detail, and call on the linguistic notion of mood, which provides a useful conceptual tool for grappling with its meaning. In the section treating it, I enter some observations concerning its meaning and how it relates to general AAL speech principles.

In dealing with African American language use, I draw on the pioneering work of Smitherman (1977), discussing her four metadiscursive speech principles (my term). By *metadiscursive speech principles,* I mean principles that inform and structure most, if not all, of AAL. These principles, in other words, account for the "flavor" of Black speech. Smitherman's four principles are signification, prosodic semantics (instead of Smitherman's *tonal*, I use *prosodic* since it is in line with linguistic terminology, which reserves *tonal* to refer to phonemic pitch distinctions), call-response, and narrative sequencing. To these four, I add Morgan's (2002) principle of indirection and five more from me: directness, augmentation, semantic license, performativity, and improvisation (Spears, 1998, 2001, 2007). Typically, several, or even all, of these speech principles may be manifest in one and the same utterance, as pointed out with some of the examples below. *Directness* refers to the propensity for incisive, candid, unmollified utterances, content-wise concise, but often rhetorically embellished. These ten principles, all interconnected, are in turn situated within a theory of AAL and African American communication having as its two key notions directness and camouflage (Spears, 1982, 2009), both implicated in grammatical structure and communicative practices. *Directness* is hyponymous: it is operative at the level of language use and on the more inclusive level of grammar and use. The bulk of the presentation defines and exemplifies these principles and is intended to provide a roadmap for future conceptualizing and researching dealing with AAL and more specifically AAWL. A preliminary analysis of the AAWL discourse marker *girl* is presented to show how these principles can be invoked in the study of AAL generally and specific varieties of AAL such as AAWL.

Ten Metadiscursive Speech Principles in AAL

As noted, AAL metadiscursive speech principles (my term) characterize much, but not all, of AAL use. Smitherman (1977) establishes four AAL speech principles. **Signification** (also signifying) is the use of intermediaries, figurative language, and/or semantic license (see below) to make negative remarks about parties within hearing distance, without naming them specifically. Thus, it involves **indirection** (Morgan, 2002), which has to do with speech for an in-group, which is coded, elliptical,

semantically opaque, and ironic. Directness, in contrast, references incisive, unmollified utterances, content-wise often concise, but often rhetorically embellished. Direct utterances usually appear harsh to nonmembers of the African American community of language practice. Thus, indirection is not the opposite of directness. Mitchell-Kernan (1972) provides and analyzes a useful example of signification:

> (1)   I saw a woman the other day in a pair of stretch pants; she must have weighed 300 pounds. If she knew how she looked she would burn those things (Mitchell-Kernan, 1972, p. 167). [Said about someone present who is overweight.]

This example also shows indirection: instead of naming or making explicit whom she is really speaking about, she uses "a woman [I saw] the other day" to make a point about someone present. It is, consequently, coded for an in-group, semantically opaque, and elliptical. The example also illustrates directness: it is to the point, an unmollified criticism. Observe that the speaker could have said something such as, "A full-bodied women should perhaps think first before wearing something unflattering," or even, "A full-bodied woman has to think carefully about what she wears." Reading further will make it clear that some of the other principles are also at work in this illustration.

Narrative sequencing, the propensity to tell a story or present another kind of narrative in order to illustrate a point, is conspicuous in preaching, testifying, folktales and toasts. **Call-response** is the back and forth between speaker (or singer) and audience or back-up interlocutors (or singers). Observe that "calls" are not necessarily questions or requests from a "caller" for a group response. Calls are any vocalization that elicits a response; cultural knowledge informs responders when a response is appropriate. **Prosodic semantics** refers to the use of prosody in conveying meaning or enhancing a message in some way (see Smitherman, 1977, p. 134, on "tonal" semantics). The implication is not, of course, that only AAL, among language varieties, shows prosodic semantics (or any of the other speech principles discussed in this chapter), but that it has a high level role and is conspicuous in AAL, notably relative to other American varieties. Prosodic semantics includes both semantic, stable and invariant, and pragmatic, context-dependent and variant, types of meaning. Perhaps the most striking example of prosodic semantics is in the talk-singing of the traditional African American preacher. (These speech principles are illustrated in examples below). Talk-singing typically occurs during the climax of a sermon, invoking in the congregation and emphasizing in the sermon the heightened, fervent devotional consciousness shared by all

present. Talk-singing, when properly done, displays rhythmic, melodic, paralinguistic, and intonational virtuosity. (Paralanguage refers to sounds that are not part of language; note *hunh* in the example below.)

These four principles of Smitherman and that of Morgan, in addition to my five (below) are interconnected (ten in total). For example, in narrative sequencing, one may witness call-response, prosodic semantics, and signification. The speech principle that I have discussed most, directness (Spears, 2001), is related to Smitherman's four principles. Some of these ties are illustrated below.

My five additional speech principles are directness, semantic license, augmentation, performativity, and improvisation (Spears, 2007)—all intertwined with one another in speech, as they are with the five principles already discussed. Directness, as camouflage, is a higher-order term in a theory of AAL that informs and structures much of not only AAL grammar, but also the use of AAL in speech. To the extent that it shapes use, this term pertains to the level of language analysis focusing on use, or communicative practices. Directness is also encoded in AAL grammar via disapproval markers (Spears, 1982, 2007, 2008) and other grammatical features that distinguish AAL from other varieties of English. **Directness**, or direct speech, is identified on the basis of

- form (sounds, words, etc.)
- content (literal meaning as well as intended function and actual function, i.e., its perlocutionary force)
- subject matter
- context of utterance, which is necessary to determine whether directness occurs and, if so, what it means.

Directness is characterized by one or some combination of the following: strong goal orientation, candor, emotional or expressive rawness, and aggressiveness, all often used consciously in the creation of interpersonal drama. The use of directness frequently involves a **performance** (hence performativity, returned to below), with an audience and with nonverbal behavior often associated with performance.

It is important to note the practical impossibility of speaking of directness without using culturally loaded, biased language, which may impart a negative cast to directness. Directness can actually have a number of functions, ranging from positive (e.g., compliments, encouragement, praise, gratitude, teaching, mentoring) to negative (e.g., upbraiding, vilification, and insults). Direct speech requires contextualization for correct interpretation. Members of the speech community alone are qualified to interpret it. Direct speech has the full range of functions and interpretations that nondirect speech has, nondirect speech being the

opposite and unmarked type of speech contrasting with direct speech. (Direct speech, as used in this writing is different from Morgan's (2002) "directed" speech, which is more literal and explicit in terms of intended audience and interpretation.)

Semantic license (similar to poetic license) refers to the freedom AAL speakers exercise in creating *neologisms*, or new words. It has to do with cases where words are made subject to their speakers' wills. Literal dictionary meanings may be stripped off at the speaker's discretion, and entirely new forms (morphs) with their own meaning may be created (e.g., *vambosculated* 'nonplussed'). Semantic license may involve new formal variants of existing words, for example *buhbusiness* (cp. *business*)*,* not used in the sense of commerce or exchange and not clearly having its own meaning: *Cain't use it in my buhbusiness*, roughly 'lifestyle'. The speaker was basically indicating that he was not interested in an individual pointed out to him in a nightclub. Perhaps the utterance can be analyzed as a nonce idiom, *(NP$_i$) can't use NP$_j$ in POSSESSIVE PRONOUN$_i$ buhbusiness* 'to not be interested'. *Buhbusiness* is also an example of an augmented word. (See below.)

Augmentation (Spears, 1998, 2007) may occur on the phonological, morphological, and/or syntactic levels. (The treatment of augmentation and semantic license in this chapter constitutes a further refinement of that in Spears, 2007.) It involves the expansion, or augmentation, of words by means of adding segments or syllables in the process of inventing new allomorphs (or new word variants, composed of two or more morphemes) or entirely new words (a **word** being the union of form and meaning). Examples of sound augmented words are *edumacation* 'education', *yoogly* 'ugly', *teenainsy* [tina nsi] 'very tiny', and *giiiiiiiiirrrrrrrrllll!*, which have phonetic segments augmented by extra syllables or more phonetically salient vowels (e.g., lengthened, tensed, diphthongized). *Edumacation* is a new variant of the word *education*, though one that has been around for some time (African Americans born before 1900 used it). It retains the meaning of the older variant *education*. Thus, the (augmented) form-meaning combination that constitutes the word remains—with the addition of irony. *Edumacation* is largely the same word as *education.* It is slightly different, though, in regard to meaning. Indeed, augmentation of a word generally adds some "flava" to it—irony and/or intensity in most cases. In this case, the original variant (or form) has been altered, producing the new one. Consequently, *edumacation* shows augmentation, but it is not a case of semantic license (unlike like *buhbusiness*, mentioned above) because it represents a new variant of the form of the word combined with essentially the same meaning. Hence, it is the same word, but augmented.

Yoogly 'ugly' is like *edumacation* in that it is the same word as *ugly* (form plus meaning combination), but augmented. Augmentation in this instance adds intensity.

When James Brown sang, "I just feel so unnecessary," 'I just feel so insignificant/belittled', he is taking semantic license, using an existing form with a new, idiosyncratic meaning. This is an example of semantic license—old form given a new meaning, without augmentation. The word *emusculation* 'impressively muscled', discussed below, is also an example of semantic license; however, in this case, it is a newly created form (very similar to an existing one—*emasculation*) with its own meaning. It is not a new variant of a previously existing word.

Observe that augmentation can also refer to the expansion of phrases and clauses through the addition of entire words. The words added may or may not carry their usual meaning. In the following example, *-ass*, a bound morpheme, does not refer to the body but is an expressive morpheme with its own semantic function (Collins et al., 2008; Spears, 1998, 2007). In cases where a phrase or clause has been augmented, an augmentation of individual words within those constituents may also occur. In the following example, compare the plain (unaugmented) version (2a) and the augmented one (2b):

(2) a. I saw him.
     b. I saw his trifling (lazy), ugly-ass self.

[Augmentation of phrases and clauses is not always obvious in examining the augmented string of speech alone, unlike what happens with augmented words such as *buhbusiness*, where there is a conventional word without augmentation to compare the augmented word with. The second of the examples in (2) shows how augmentation of (2a) *might* be carried out. (2b) is an example of the *propensity* of AAL speakers to augment. Augmentation is fundamentally about a propensity in speech behavior, more specifically a propensity to add evaluative (negative or positive) material into utterances, rather than leaving them "plain."]

The augmentation of words may involve semantic license, so the two grammatical notions are related. Semantic license, though, does not necessarily involve augmentation since an existing form, or new variant of the form, may be given a new meaning. Also, as noted, augmentation does not necessarily involve semantic license.

Among the types of new words created by semantic license are **resemanticized words**, in which

1.   new meanings have been attached to pre-existing morphs (i.e., a form without meaning attached) (e.g., *solid* and *fierce*, general terms of positive evaluation, and
2.   new meanings have been attached to new formal variants of a pre-existing word (*buhbusiness*)

These resemanticized words may be

1.   **nonce words** (words or larger constituents), i.e., a new form (with its own meaning, e.g., *emusculation* 'impressive musculature') created for the moment, not used repeatedly. Some constituents that start out as nonce ones go on to become established new expressions (see below). Words such as *emusculation* can also be labeled as **elegantisms**, forms observed in a number of African and Afro-Diaspora speech genres. These forms are words that are seen as more elegant, impressive, and special and are inserted into speech when an ordinary word would seem inadequate for the occasion (Smitherman, 1977, p. 45; Dillard, 1972).
2.   **established new expressions**, those that have stayed in existence for a while in some community (e.g., *edumacation* 'education') that has been around at least during the twentieth century.

Performativity references the introduction of performance into talk. Performance here is contrasted with **presentation,** as in presenting an identity or the "presentation of self." Performance and presentation lie at two ends of a continuum, with performance occupying the more self-conscious end. **Improvisation** is the manipulation of speech in line with aesthetic ideals, metadiscursive speech principles, and desired outcomes. It is involved, for example, in semantic license and augmentation.

"Black style" and "the Black aesthetic" are two other expressions that writers have used in attempts to capture what performativity is about. Performativity is a thread in Black American culture that also runs through various forms of Black music—jazz, gospel, and rhythm and blues—all of which have made great use of basic Black cultural strands such as improvisation, call-response, etc., in expressing deep cultural attitudes and stylistic constants. Indeed, the metadiscursive speech principles discussed here can be seen for the most part as general cultural metastylistic principles. Sometimes, once these cultural forms are formally institutionalized (e.g., jazz music in university music programs), they may

lose some of the traits that tie them into general Black culture because they have been divorced from the sociocultural contexts that produced them. They cease to have an organic, dialectic relationship with the society and culture in which they originated.

Indeed, recent writings have extended our understanding of Black cultural strands to sport, with significant attention paid to the currently pre-eminent Black sport, basketball, and to a lesser extent football. What has caused the cultural Blackening of basketball is not only Black players dominating the game numerically, but also their doing so stylistically by injecting general Black cultural elements (especially performativity, as exemplified by high-fives and jump-chest-bumping) into the game—to an extent that they have become identified with the game and in some cases incorporated into its rules. Writers on basketball seem to agree that the injection of the Black aesthetic into basketball has helped it to replace baseball as the quintessential American sport—for after all, any activity that is quintessentially American is significantly Black in respect to cultural traits. These strands or features are all connected in such a way that one automatically references several of them in mentioning one.

Below I use part of an exchange between pastor and congregation, recreated from many such exchanges that I have heard, to provide examples of some of the principles discussed above:

> (3) Pastor: Do you know who Jesus is?
> Congregation: Jesus/Yep/I know/ Yes, indeed/ Oh yes, I know [response, following the "call," immediately preceding]
> Pastor: Do you KNOW who Jesus is? You know, some folks done got all **edumacated** [augmentation, discussed below, in this case involving stretching out a word], and they done forgot all about Jesus [signification, which always involves indirection; note the "some folks," instead of, say, "some members of this congregation" or "Brother Dr. Jones"].
> Congregation: You know it/ Yes…Jesus/ Jesus/ Praise his name/ Yes, Lord [response again, to the pastor's call]
> Pastor: I'm talking about JEEE-ZAHS, hunh! [prosodic semantics, the use of prosody to enhance a message; *hunh* is an element often used expressively in preaching, e.g., to enhance the rhythmic structure of an utterance] You know, there's only one JEE-ZAHS, hunh! [prosodic semantics] If somebody told you there were two or three of them, that was the Devil talking; you know the Devil'll tell you any kind of lie. I don't care whose lips are moving,

that's the DEVIL talking. Every time you hear a lie, the Devil is up in it SOMEWHERE, hunh! [prosodic semantics again]

Congregation: Oh, the Devil/ Just like somebody I know [possibly signification]/ JEE-ZAHS/ A liar is dirty and low-down [directness, possibly signification]/ The only one/ Precious Lord [various responses of the congregation to what the pastor has just said]

Pastor: (Walking back and forth on the podium energetically) [performativity] I was walking down the street yesterday and heard TEN lies before I got to the corner [narrative sequencing, i.e., telling a little story] (stops; dips and straightens up in one fluid, jerking movement; and turns back to the congregation [performativity])—and I was minding my own BID-ness [= *business*; conspicuous AAVE pronunciation for effect; performativity] (laughs from the congregation)

Improvisation, used in its normal sense, is shown throughout this example. The pastor is improvising as he goes along—not the entire sermon of course, but parts of it, as he receives feedback from the congregation.

Girl

In this section, I deal with an AAWL discourse marker GIRL 1, or simply GIRL, since I discuss only one. **Discourse markers** serve in language to clarify and establish details of the speech setting, event, and participants, as well as their interrelationships; and, they structure the subparts of narratives, conversations, and other communicative events. These markers thus serve to metacommunicate about the utterances in which they occur—clauses, sentences, and text passages, whether spoken or written. For example, the discourse marker *well* often signals hedging, as in *Well, she left around 5—as far as I know—but I don't know for sure 'cause I wasn't there*. Like *well*, many discourse markers metacommunicate, expressing the cognitive stance or attitude of the speaker about something said by her/himself or others. Note also the following: ***Damn,** these Buffalo wings are good!*, where *damn* intensifies ("I really mean what I'm saying!). Just as there is more than one GIRL, there are at least two DAMNs, each with its own meaning and function. Another DAMN expresses consternation/anger: ***Damn, I hit my finger with the hammer!***

    Properties of discourse markers relevant for this discussion are that (1) they "can exhibit more than one function," and "the same function may be realized by more than one discourse marker" and (2) they can be used to establish textual and interpersonal relations (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 1997, p. 94). I can add, in line with my analysis, that discourse markers may express meanings deriving from their (segmental) phonemic shape and from their **intonation**, defined as "the systematic patterning of prosodic features" "such as pitch, pitch movement, loudness and length" (Coulthard, 1985, p. 96).

    Used as metacommunicators, discourse markers have much in common with grammatical items in language that express mood. Grammatical mood is normally connected to function (or grammatical) words or affixes, usually but not always occurring in the verbal phrase. These grammatical items convey, among other notions, subjunctivity, indicativeness—both of which can be broken down into subnotions—surprise, doubt, epistemic evaluation and status, emotivity, and so forth. Indeed, a number of meanings conveyed by grammatical mood markers contextually are also conveyed by discourse markers. Thus, e.g., the subjunctive mood in a number of languages is used to express hedging and doubt, just as *well*, the discourse marker. Consequently, mood notions and functions provide a promising starting point for studying the semantics of discourse markers such as GIRL.

    Girl is referred to by Denise Troutman as a "culturally-toned diminutive, a term including *sistah, sistah friend, honey, honey child, child, baby, baby girl, precious, mah'dear….* "[G]*irl* … is a highly visible and popular word used by many African American females to show solidarity in all spheres…public and private, and in all age groups" (Troutman, 2001, p. 217). I would add, though I will not argue the point here, that these "culturally-toned diminutives," which I refer to as discourse markers, have as their most important phonological characteristic their intonation as opposed to their phonemic shape (which does not involve intonation per se). The same phonemic shape, i.e., or word (or phrase), can be distributed over several intonational patterns, creating different discourse markers, each with its own intonational meaning. I use *intonational meaning* specifically in the sense of the invariant meaning (i.e., not context-dependent) conveyed by a particular intonation occurring in particular positions in the clause, sentence, or discourse. Consequently, there are several discourse markers GIRL (i.e., several discourse markers with the phonemic shape /gɻl/). Conversely, several different phonemic shapes can be filled into the same intonation pattern, as in (4), in which each example has the same meaning, and all of

the discourse markers have the same intonation pattern shown in Figure 1 (in this case, lengthening and rising pitch are its key aspects).

    (4)   a. Girl, you won't believe who I saw today!
            b. Child [usually *chile*]…

Figure 1: GIRL (e.g., " Girl, you won't believe who I saw today!")

g   i   i   i   i   i   r   r   r   l
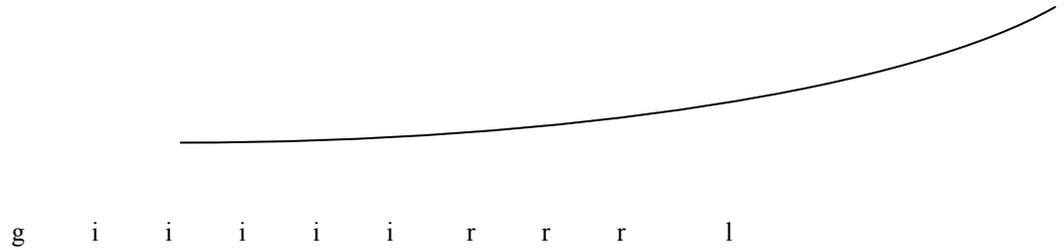
Although there are several variants of GIRL used in AAWL, I will focus on one: it is clause-initial and has a long, stretched, rising intonational curve, with *girl* spread over the whole curve, as shown in Figure 1. Worth noting is that it is a free discourse marker: it may occur alone, without other material in the utterance (see the example below). Both when part of an utterance and when standing alone, the forms convey a specific meaning to members of the community of practice.

GIRL, as other discourse markers, allows AAWL speakers to perform or present (see the discussion of these terms above) solidarity and to perform or present identity. In using GIRL, they also mark their discourse as AAWL, i.e., as African American women talking in AAWL. (Henceforth, I will speak of presenting, it being understood that in some cases performing is in effect.) Its use presents identity. Note that it would not normally be used talking to men. Using it presents solidarity; speakers talking to those who are not close as a result of kinship or friendship would not normally used it, and it would not typically be used in formal situations, e.g., when an employer is interviewing a prospective employee. But there are exceptions to this last situation, as most situations, for example, in a case where the prospective employer wants to signal that she is Black-identified and is willing to offer solidarity to the prospective employee. GIRL and other discourse markers in AAL generally can also be used for self identification on the telephone, in order to state, approximately, "I'm Black; let's invoke some solidarity." The solidarity invoked may be Black generally or African American more particularly.

I make several claims concerning GIRL 1:

1.   it, as other GIRLs, expresses mood meanings of an evaluative (positive-negative scale) or epistemic-deontic nature, discussed below)—evaluative specifically with this marker; **mood** expresses the speaker's cognitive stance, or attitude, toward some situation (i.e., an event or state of affairs);

2.   its "intonational" meaning is based on the prosodic pattern into which it fits, not its phonemic shape; however, its phonemic shape accounts for the "dictionary" meaning that it does retain, namely, 'female'; I can note in passing that *girl* can mean any female or, more restrictively, a non-adult female;

3.   it can be used declaratively only, i.e., not for questions, hence the ungrammaticality of *Giiiiiiiirrrrllll, what are you doing?*;

4.   GIRL is a free discourse marker (it may occur alone, without other material in the utterance);

5.   GIRL 1, as the other GIRLs, has a vocative function, referring to the person being addressed.

GIRL 1 illustrates well the metadiscursive speech principles, for example,

1.   augmentation, which is particularly notable in the lengthening (along with rising) of GIRL 1

2.   call-and-response: it often punctuates call-response patterns; for example, it may constitute the response:

(5)   a: Hey y'all, what y'all doin? You know Jack came home last night and Bob was over there [at Jack and Natasha's house]

b: (chorus): *Giiiirrrrlll!*

3.   narrative sequencing: as this item structures call-response, it also facilitates and structures narratives

4.   prosodic semantics: the distinction among different discourse markers of the same phonemic shape is signaled prosodically.

Mood

GIRL expresses mood in the sense noted above that it expresses the speaker's cognitive stance, or attitude, toward some situation (i.e., an event or state of affairs), either explicit in the conversation or implicit. By *speaker's cognitive stance*, I refer to evaluation, questioning, ordering, emotion (e.g., surprise), etc. (see Palmer, 2001).

To reiterate, the prosodic pattern establishes intonational meaning. This intonational meaning is semantic in the sense that it is invariant:

spoken with the indicated prosody specifically, the intonational meaning is fixed (context-independent, i.e., invariant). As noted above, the dictionary meaning (expressed segmentally—i.e., not prosodically) remains. Thus, items like GIRL 1 have full meanings that combine intonational and segmental (dictionary) meanings.

As noted, discourse markers of several phonemic shapes can fit into the intonation pattern that GIRL 1 has. The intonational meaning of GIRL, and other AAWL discourse markers alluded to, is semantic, i.e., context-independent and evaluative. Evaluation may be on a positive-negative scale (good on a continuum with bad) with respect to various concepts, for example, approval-disapproval, cp. disapproval markers (Spears, 1982, 1990, 2008, 2009). With GIRL, evaluation is in terms of different kinds of priority, all of which are high-level priority. I label this evaluative meaning (in caps) as HIGH PRIORITY, which includes at least three pragmatic sub-meanings, which are contextually dependent: HOT NEWS, DIRE WARNING, WEIGHTY PRONOUNCEMENT. Some examples:

(6) a. GIRL, you won't believe who I saw today! (HOT NEWS)
b.   GIRL, Betty got mad, threw his clothes in a pile in the back yard, and burnt 'em up! (HOT NEWS)
c.   GIRL, Sheila gone kill somebody! (HOT NEWS, DIRE WARNING)
d.   GIRL, Billy gone go crazy if he finds out! (DIRE WARNING)
e.   GIRL, get outta here before Harry comes home! (Harry found out Robert's been coming over to your house while Harry is at work) (DIRE WARNING)
f.   GIRL, everybody was in that meeting, it really looked funny that you weren't there. (WEIGHTY PRONOUNCEMENT)
g.   GIRL, you need a man! (WEIGHTY PRONOUNCEMENT)

Conclusion

My principal objective in writing this chapter has been to demonstrate that some discourse markers combine intonational and segmental information. The intonation part of the combination (e.g., the prosodic contour of GIRL 1) has its own meaning, which is combined with the meaning of the "word" (*girl*) as realized by segmental phonemes. More than one word can be plugged into the intonational contour. *Chile,* for example, can be plugged into the contour discussed above. For communicative purposes, the intonational meaning established by prosody

is primary in the case of these discourse markers. But, to repeat, the dictionary meaning of the word remains. This accounts for the fact that a word such as *man* cannot be plugged into the prosodic pattern discussed in connection with GIRL 1. This finding is not as startling as it might be since intonational patterns or contours have long been associated with specific meanings and as unattached to specific linguistic forms, note for example question intonation (without subject-verb inversion), which occurs in English dialects.

One reason that the study of AAWL and other AAL discourse markers is so important is that their study provides an entry into the highly important but little studied area of AAL intonation. Smitherman (1977) is not the only scholar who has noted particularities of AAL intonation (see, e.g., Wolfram & Thomas, 2002), but Smitherman is among the very few linguists who have attempted to talk about it in terms of communicative patterns, viz., through her notion of prosodic semantics. I have attempted to push forward our understanding of AAL prosody and language use in laying out one (mood-based) framework for specifying the meaning of one of many AAWL discourse markers and in relating the communicative functions of this marker to speech principles of general application in African American communicative practices.

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