

Reading in order to Hear: Accented Transcriptions and Compulsory Racialization in Reading “Ain’t I a Woman?”

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Abstract:

This essay explores the complexities and challenges of reading, hearing, and comprehending transcripts that feature “nonstandard” speech, particularly through the use of descriptive markers that convey the speaker’s accent. While scholars have critiqued biases in transcriptions, there has been relatively little focus on how readers engage with these texts. I focus on Sojourner Truth’s speech, “Ain’t I a Woman?”, delivered in 1851, which has become one of the most notable public addresses in U.S. history. Interestingly, its most recognized transcript showcases Truth’s English as influenced by her Dutch accent and Southern dialect. In theorizing the reader’s experience prompted by this transcript—especially for individuals who themselves speak “nonstandard” English—I investigate the entrenched mechanisms of racialization and Othering that emerge as readers navigate unfamiliar vocabulary and contextual framing. I argue that the text encourages readers to actively engage with racializing practices that reflect colonial, white, middle-upper-class societal values, discriminating against those who do not adhere to a “standard” mode of speech. Yet, through self-reflection, readers gain insights into oppressive power structures. I conclude by urging scholars and activists to refrain from proposing “fixes” to the text and instead to follow the examined reading experience, meta-framing the speech to foster critical readings.

Keywords: Transcription; accent; reading; language standardization; Sojourner Truth; racialization; orality; the written word; Othering; glottophobia

Introduction

Transcriptions and the practice of documenting individuals’ speeches are deeply rooted in the Western tradition, which emphasizes the importance of written texts for preservation and accuracy. Archives, anthologies, scholarly articles, and various documents have long been regarded as vital instruments for safeguarding historical events as well as artistic and public expressions. Even oral and auditory voices are frequently captured through the written word, typically viewed through a white or Western lens that reflects specific auditory expectations and values. Within this framework, transcribers—whether they are journalists, police officers, lawyers, archivists, researchers, teachers,

or writers—have assumed the responsibility of “capturing” significant voices for future reference. They meticulously take notes, edit them, and ultimately present their findings on paper, aiming to create a final, unaltered representation of direct speech.

In such a culture steeped in reading (those documents), it is essential to consider how to approach a written voice marked as diverging from the sound, style, and manner of “standard” voices in society. How can/should one navigate the need to accurately write, read, circulate, archive, and rely on written texts that convey voices that do not conform to, or benefit from, such practices? In this essay, I examine the biases inherent in transcribing voices that are often dismissed as illegitimate by the dominant group, as well as the readings and interpretations these biases can elicit. By this, I do not necessarily treat transcribed voices as “narrow” texts, but as ones that also transmit traditional, elite cultural values (Bourdieu 1985/1993; Reeser & Spalding 2002).

I specifically focus on the critical and unique case of Sojourner Truth’s renowned 1851 speech, commonly known as “Ain’t I a Woman?” This address is widely regarded as one of the most significant in U.S. history. Transcribed with inherited biases concerning her manner of speaking, it serves as a unique and insightful case study for our discussion. The speech showcases Truth’s use of “nonstandard English,” reflecting a Southern dialect, despite her residence in the Northern United States. It also highlights her Dutch accent, which is believed to have originated from her early years as a child enslaved by a Dutch owner. As a prominent Black speaker, a formerly enslaved woman who sought freedom, as well as an abolitionist, feminist, and religious leader, Truth was celebrated in the 19th century for her powerful oratory. However, in her quest for social justice across various fronts and in recounting her own life story, she had to depend on white allies to amplify her voice, since enslaved individuals in the United States were prohibited from learning to read and write and did not have easy access to media and public platforms.

Extensive scholarly research has been conducted on Truth and the often biased, inaccurate depictions of her within the broader public discourse (Aronis, Shrikant & Arthur 2025; Campbell 1986, 2005; Haraway 2013; Irvin Painter 1994, 1996; Klimek, Painter, & Greenlee 2024; Mandziuk 2014; Phillips-Anderson 2012; Poirot 2014). Additionally, numerous scholars have explored transcription biases that racialize and marginalize specific voices in society (e.g., Bucholtz 2000, 2007; Green et al. 1997; Macaulay 1991; Linell 1982; Rickford & King 2016; Roberts 1997). However, there has been comparatively little investigation into the reading experience of these transcripts and portrayals, the realizations they provoke in readers, and the negotiation process they foster between readers and the marginalized voices conveyed, as well as the other voices present within the text.

In the following, I explore how contemporary readers engage with texts that represent “nonstandard” English.¹ I begin by reflecting on my personal experience of first encountering Sojourner Truth’s speech in a textbook in 2018, particularly as an immigrant navigating my own relationship with “nonstandard” English or “accent.” I then examine and theorize various aspects of the reading relationship between audiences and the transcribed speech of Truth. Drawing on scholarly research that explores this speech, as well as studies in rhetoric, transcription, racial bias, accents, and dialects, I investigate how this speech is read and understood, especially by readers who carry their own “accents” or “dialects.”

Drawing on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Roland Barthes, bell hooks, Philippe Blanchet, and others, I position reading as a cultural practice that engages with the values and ideologies of a particular society. This approach grants attention to the reader's own understanding of elite texts and their voices. It also encourages an exploration of the differences experienced between readers' voices, sounds, speech, culture, and worldviews as they "meet" with those of authors of the read texts and other voices and media platforms used.

I examine the operational dynamics of reading marked language transcripts (such as the need to perform or read aloud to enhance auditory comprehension) and how socio-political power structures and processes of racialization manifest through the readers themselves. In particular, for speakers of "nonstandard" English, the reading experience could foster the actual practice of racism, mocking those who do not sound like the expected dominant upper-middle class, and favoring nativism. However, the multi-level reading can also promote self-reflection and empathy towards both Truth and one's own identities, communities, and struggles, as well as a nuanced awareness of the racist, xenophobic, and oppressive practices and structures that have shaped both the past and the present.

I contend that the experiences of speakers and readers of "nonstandard" English offer a crucial perspective on how to approach, present, and contextualize such texts. This approach enables us to acknowledge the power structures and biases present in society, particularly concerning written texts and transcriptions, rather than obscuring them. Building on the work of Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur (2025), which examined the white racialization of Truth's speech through biased transcription practices, I aim to explore further what they defined as the intersectional boundaries of identity, experience, and the ethics of transcription.

In this essay, my focus is on how we *read* and *engage* with the voices of Black women and other non-white or non-dominant groups in a contemporary society that marks such voices. I encourage scholars and activists to refrain from offering "fixes" to the text; instead, to invite readers to engage with the experience of compulsive racialization that the text elicits and to assist them in comprehending the complexities inherent in the pursuit of justice. Thus, I advocate for a meta-framing of the speech that promotes critical reading about the emergence and perpetuation of marked language transcripts and their connection to broader oppressive societal structures.

The Emerging Transcript of "Ain't I a Woman?" and Markers of Accent

In the nineteenth-century United States, public addresses among the white middle and upper classes typically consisted of prepared written speeches rather than spontaneous or heartfelt remarks. This trend predominantly involved literate individuals considered influential, as they were often invited to events in advance, allowing them the time to prepare their comments. However, within white abolitionist and feminist circles of the time, there was also a significant effort to help freed enslaved people articulate their life stories for publication, thereby bringing their voices into the public arena (Nayar 2016; Painter 1994, 1996).

The historical transcript of the speech known as "Ain't I a Woman?" must be viewed within the

power dynamics that privilege the written word by white individuals over the spoken word of Black individuals. Transcription often reinforces the racism and marginalization present in society today (Aronis, Shrikant, & Arthur 2025; Bucholtz 2000; Duranti 2006). In the nineteenth century, Black individuals, frequently denied access to reading and writing, faced significant disadvantages in engaging with a public sphere defined by the values of the white middle and upper classes (Nayar 2016).

In 1851, Sojourner Truth delivered an impromptu speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. This address has since become one of the most significant in U.S. history, primarily due to its transcription by two audience members: Marius Robinson, a white male journalist and editor, and Dana Gage, a white female poet and the conference organizer. Gage was instrumental in granting Truth the opportunity to take the stage despite lacking prior invitation or preparation. Furthermore, the enthusiastic response from the audience, along with the subsequent publication of the transcripts in newspapers and anthologies, played a vital role in cementing the speech’s enduring legacy.

An examination of the transcripts by Gage and Robinson reveals that both made modifications and choices concerning Truth’s wording, dialect, and tone (Aronis, Shrikant, & Arthur 2025; Walker 2021) (Figure 1). Each transcriber also provided insights into Truth’s performance and the audience’s response. Gage’s version, which gained higher popularity and continues to be circulated today under the title “Ain’t I a Woman?”, refined Truth’s original spoken words in a poetic form to align with the feminist and abolitionist movements of the era, seemingly tailored to meet the expectations of white audiences. Additionally, Gage’s transcript reflected Truth’s perceived Dutch accent and elements of a Southern dialect.

Frances Dana Gage – <i>National Anti-Slavery Standard</i> – 1863	
1	“Well, chillen, what dar’s so much racket dar must be som’ting out o’kilter. I tink dat, ’twixt de
2	n—s of de South and de women at de Norf, all a-talking ’bout rights, de white men will be in a
3	fix pretty soon. But what’s all this here talking ’bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to
4	be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place eberywhar. Nobody
5	eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gives me any best place,”; and, raising
6	herself to her full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, “And ar’n’t I a
7	woman? Look at me. Look at my arm,” and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing its
8	tremendous muscular power. “I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man
9	could head me—and ar’n’t I a woman? I could work as much as eat as much as a man (when I
10	could get it) and bear de lash as well—and ar’n’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen chillen, and
11	seen ’em mos’, all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with a mother’s grief, none but Jesus
12	heard—and ar’n’t I a woman? Den dey talks ’bout dis ting in de head. What dis dey call it?”
13	“Intellect,” whispered some one near. “Dat’s it, honey. What’s dat got to do with woman’s rights
14	or n—s’ rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint, and youm holds a quart, wouldn’t ye be mean
15	not to let me have my little half-measure full?” and she pointed her significant finger and set a
16	keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud. “Den
17	dat little man in black dar, he say woman can’t have as much rights as man ’cause Christ
18	wa’n’n’t a woman. <i>Whar did your Christ come from?</i> ”
19	Rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd, as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she
20	stood there with outstretched arms and eyes of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she
21	repeated,—
22	“Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had not’ing to do with
23	him.” Oh, what a rebuke she gave the little man. Turning again to another objector, she took up
24	the defense of Mother Eve. I cannot follow her through it all. It was pointed and witty and
25	solemn, eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause, and she ended by asserting: “that
26	if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all her one
27	lone, all dese togeder,” and she glanced her eye over us, “ought to be able to turn it back, and git
28	it right side up again, and now dey is asking to, de men better let ’em.” (long and continued
29	cheering). “Bleeged to ye for hearin’ on me, and now ole Sojourner ha’n’t got nothin’ more to
30	say.”

Figure 1. “Ain’t I a Woman?”, Gage’s first published version (1863), as appeared in Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur (2025). See the original piece featured here: Sojourner Truth’s Most Famous Speech (Walker 2021).

Sojourner Truth's distinct dialect and accent underscore a practice of Othering, setting her apart from her peers. Unlike her contemporaries, Truth's words were often published in a biased manner (see Aronis, Shrikant, & Arthur 2025). Nell Irvin Painter has argued that these representations distort the complexities of Truth's perspectives on race, gender, and equality (1994, 1996, forthcoming; Klimek, Painter, & Greenlee 2024). Additionally, scholars have examined the racist transcription of her speech, context, and appearance, providing varied interpretations of her work (Campbell 1986, 2005; Foner & Branham 1998; Haraway 2013; Mandziuk 2014; Phillips-Anderson 2012; Poirot 2014).

For over 170 years, the transcript of this influential speech, historically known as "Ar'n't," "A'n't," or "Aren't I a woman?" has been read by a diverse audience, including students, scholars, activists, performers, and everyday readers. However, it has faced considerable criticism for its perceived bias against Truth and Black voices, prompting multiple revisions by various scholars and international writers. These alterations have resulted in changes to its wording and accent, with some instances involving the complete removal of the accent (e.g., Campbell 2005; Gage 1863, 1881, Linthwaite 1987/1990, Poirot 2014, Walker 2021, Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz 2017 2019).

In the context of this essay, it is essential to recognize that Truth herself felt exploited due to her illiteracy, as others transcribed her speeches using "incorrect" English, exaggerated expressions, and Southern dialect (Pullon Fitch 1993). An article from the Kalamazoo Telegraph (1879), which Truth preserved in her scrapbook, noted that,

Sojourner also prides herself on a fairly correct English, which is in all senses a foreign tongue to her, she having spent her early years among people speaking "Low Dutch." People who report her often exaggerate her expressions, putting into her mouth the most marked [S]outhern dialect, which Sojourner feels is rather taking unfair advantage of her (1879, p. 1 in Pullon Fitch 1993).

Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur (2025) illustrate how transcribers infused their own perspectives into the transcription process, shaping the speech to reflect their interpretations of Black spoken language, as well as their biases and intentions in addressing specific audiences. By manipulating Truth's original speech, persona, and context, transcribers associated with her various forms of English, including accented, dialectal, and "standard" variations, also envisioning Truth as employing a "slave dialect." These practices position the transcribers as gatekeepers, not only allowing Truth to enter the public sphere—whether at conferences or through newspapers and books—but also determining the conditions under which her words would be presented, including whether to seek her approval.

The Politics of Transcription: Linguistic Representation of Voices that Differ from "Ours"

Transcription is a technological and communicative practice that transforms ephemeral spoken events into a permanent, visual format through writing, preserved today in both printed and digital media. This process entails deconstructing vocal sounds into letters and various graphical elements, capturing essential spoken content for future reference. Transcribers carefully listen to the speaker and document their words, as well as the surrounding context, and often edit for accuracy. Those who

transcribe in real-time without recordings face challenges in capturing every word and conveying the speaker's environment, ambiance, and body language, as noted by Robinson (1851) and Gage (1863, 1881).

Nonetheless, driven by the desire to capture, remember, analyze, utilize, and evaluate speech long after it has taken place, transcriptions have been widely utilized since the advent and popularization of writing materials. They serve a diverse array of professionals, including journalists, historians, anthropologists, social activists, detectives, law enforcement officials, legal courts, medical practitioners, linguists, and various other scholars. Transcripts preserve the essence of spoken communication and reflect a deep admiration for both spoken and written language.

While numerous scholars have identified tools that enhance transcription and improve the resulting transcripts, the practice of transcription itself is seldom critically examined. However, several researchers have highlighted various biases and issues related to representation and accuracy in this field. Mary Bucholtz (2007) argued that we should view transcription not merely as a tool for studying and preserving language, but as a sociocultural practice that represents discourse and encompasses sociopolitical dimensions. While transcripts strive to capture the essence of a speaker's direct speech, they are ultimately produced and documented by another individual—the transcriber—who operates within the sphere of indirect speech. This often results in the transcriber being perceived as a transparent entity (Macaulay 1991; Linell 1982), yet, excluding the speaker from the opportunity to verify the transcriber's interpretations. Consequently, this process can diminish the speakers' agency, reducing them to objects controlled by others (Bucholtz 2000).

Numerous scholars have emphasized the political dimensions of transcriptions, which often either reflect or contest the ideologies surrounding minoritized populations (Bucholtz 2000; Green et al. 1997; Rickford & King 2016; Roberts 1997). Importantly, transcribers carry their own biases and interests into the transcription process, shaping how the final transcript is created and its subsequent functions. Additionally, white transcribers often evaluate non-white speech by comparing it to their own dialect, viewing their speech as the “standard.” This leads to the characterization of non-white or minoritized dialects as exotic, which then justifies the use of specialized spelling and phonetic representations to highlight deviations from “standard” language (Bucholtz 2000; Preston 1982; Roberts 1997).² These biases contribute to the reinforcement and normalization of whiteness, illuminating how race and racism function.

Transcriptions and transcripts carry important analytical and political implications, as highlighted by Bucholtz (2000). She emphasizes that transcription is intertwined with power relations, involving interpretive decisions about what to include or exclude and how to format the text. She illustrates how transcription can manifest stylistic choices that may perpetuate stereotypes or distort the original discourse. Ultimately, the identity and biases of the transcriber play a significant role in the creation and use of transcripts.

Transcribing the voices of marginalized communities, particularly those whose tone, dialect, style, or accent differ from that of the transcriber or the dominant group, presents unique challenges.

In his article, “Coz It Izny Spelt When They Say It: Displaying Dialect in Writing,” Ronald K. S. Macaulay (1991) discusses how some writers intentionally use “nonstandard” forms of English in their fictional works for various purposes. On the other hand, others employ “nonstandard” segmental features to capture the “natural discourse” they encounter. As Cole (1986, cited in Macaulay) points out, this situation creates what is termed “code noise.” These are words that are not always clearly articulated and require readers to develop skills for interpreting the “noise.”

The social construct of “standard” and “nonstandard” language is never neutral, but rather political, and reveals power structures (Walsh 2021; Blanchet 2016; Weirich 2022; Tracy & Robles 2013). The “Standard” dialect, defined by society as free of “accent” and considered “correct” and “superior,” is predominantly spoken by elites and represents the expected form of proficient communication (Tracy & Robles 2013). Individuals learn which types of language to aspire to or avoid, while “accents” often signal a lower social status, leading to stereotypes of incompetence. Consequently, verbal expression has become a key aspect of identity, marking who belongs to the dominant group and who does not.

Rosa and Flores (2017) assert that language and race have been “co-naturalized” to support colonial projects (p. 622). Traditionally, the languages of white/European colonizers have been deemed prestigious and official, while the languages spoken by colonized populations—particularly those of Black and Indigenous communities in the U.S.—have been perceived as simplistic and uneducated. In present-day interactions, institutional policies and the broader public sphere often regard “standard” English as the prestigious mode of communication, thereby devaluing other languages and dialects (Alim et al. 2016; Fought 2006; Lippi-Green 2012). Black vernacular, in particular, has faced criticism as being “dangerous” and/or “uneducated” (Rickford & King 2016). The use of nonstandard orthography, which includes dialect or colloquial spellings, can evoke negative stereotypes about speakers and reflect the transcriber’s own dialect as the unmarked norm, resulting in “inequitable transcription practices for different dialects” (Bucholtz 2000) and render it exotic or alien.

In fact, all transcripts are inadequate and promote certain interpretations, favoring specific speakers, and are tailored to a particular purpose and audience (Macaulay 1991). Yet, readers must rely on the transcribers’ ear and judgment, as well as their creative choices. What does this reveal about the intended readers and audience? What kind of (critical) reading is anticipated from individuals engaging with the “Ain’t I a Woman?” transcript? In Truth’s case, these actions, roles, and privileges were shaped, for instance, by white middle- and upper-class individuals both at the time of her speech and in later readings and interpretations.

Reading Truth’s Speech Today

Several years ago, after completing my PhD in another country and spending time in the United States, I received an invitation to teach a course at a local university in Colorado. The course focused on Gender and Communication and was my first experience in the American academic

environment. As an international scholar who did not grow up in an English-speaking setting, I spoke (and continue to speak) with a noticeable “accent.” However, I was not particularly concerned about this, as I had learned that my speech did not impede others’ understanding, and my colleagues welcomed me warmly at that time.

While preparing to teach a unit on the feminist waves in the United States, I came across something striking in the course textbook. First wave of the women’s movement, which was mentioned as spanning from the mid-19th century to the 1920s and emerged from the abolition movement, primarily focused in the textbook on the histories of several (white) feminist figures and their efforts to secure voting rights for (white) women. However, on one page, distinctively set apart in a gray-framed box, was a brief section titled “Exploring Gendered Lives: A’n’t I a Woman?” (see Figure 2). This segment included an introduction to a speech with which I was previously unfamiliar, along with an excerpt of the speech as it had been re-edited for an 1882 anthology on women’s rights.

As I attempted to read the excerpt of the speech, I found the wording quite strange; I struggled to grasp their meaning. The excerpt included words in English that I either did not recognize or recognized but slowly noticed were marked with an “accent” (I wondered to myself, “Is this actually reflecting my *own* accent?”). The numerous errors and typos made comprehension challenging. I found myself rereading the short passage, attempting to decipher the “noise” created by the marked “accent.” Eventually, I identified the Southern dialect, and as I read aloud, I began to “hear” the words for the first time.

Upon rereading the context preceding the excerpt, I discovered that the authors provided an explanation of the speech that includes details about Sojourner Truth. However, many of them seem to focus on less significant or biased perspectives regarding her. Initially, I noted that the contextual text begins by reminding readers of her original name, which she later changed and preferred not to use. The text emphasized that she chose the name “Sojourner of God’s Truth,” yet it failed to mention that the name she commonly used in her later life was simply “Sojourner Truth.” I found myself questioning the relevance of the details about her name as an introduction to the text.

In this contextualized introduction, the authors of the textbook characterized Truth as having been born a “slave,” suggesting that this status fundamentally defines her rather than emphasizing the brutality of enslavement itself. It is noted that she was emancipated, but in reality, she freed herself by escaping from her owner. The introduction also recounts her participation in a meeting (not a convention) where she stood up to speak. However, this portrayal is misleading, as the original transcripts specify that Truth asked for permission to address the audience. According to Gage’s account, during the convention, some women expressed resistance and hesitancy about featuring Truth, likely due to concerns that the message of abolition might overshadow feminist issues.

Furthermore, the authors of the textbook have framed the speech as specifically addressing white women at the convention, which was somewhat misleading. Truth viewed her struggle as an act of solidarity with white women rather than in opposition to them. In her address, she primarily directed her remarks to the white men and clergy present, articulating the reasons why all women should be granted

rights. As a Black woman, a former enslaved person, and someone with a profound faith and connection to God, she challenged the validity of the arguments men used to deny women the right to vote.

While the speech received significant acclaim from the audience at the time, this contextual nuance is overlooked in the textbook's introduction. Additionally, the transcript itself inaccurately portrays Truth with a Southern dialect, despite her Northern roots, as well as various intrinsic biases and inconsistencies that have been identified in the transcript over the years. For example, it erroneously states that Truth had thirteen children, when in fact she had five, one of whom was sold into slavery, and she regained that child through legal means.

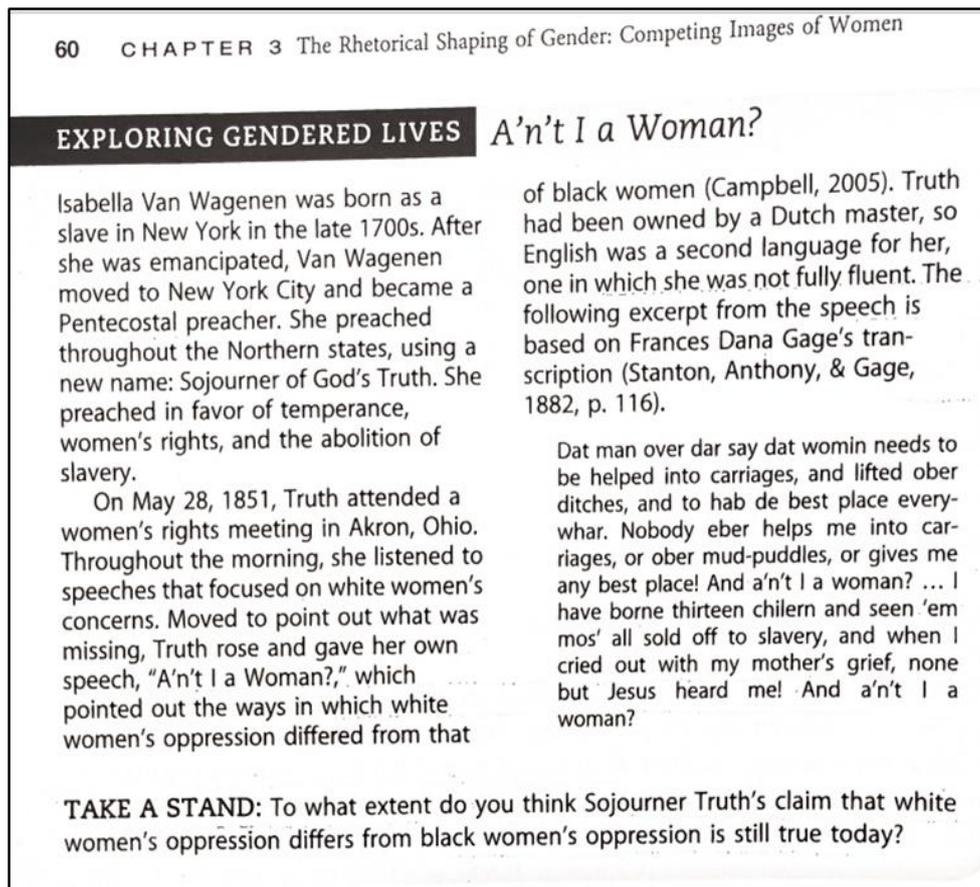


Figure 2: introducing Sojourner Truth's speech within the textbook, "Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture (12th edition)" (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz 2017).

To clarify the challenging nature of the text, the authors seemed to emphasize that "Truth had been owned by a Dutch master, making English a second language for her—one in which she was not fully fluent." I wondered at the time whether these words provided the appropriate context for the excerpted transcript of her speech. Is there a deeper reason behind Gage's characterization of her manner of speaking as "strange"? I later discovered that Robinson, the other transcriber, did not mention the Southern dialect or the Dutch accent. Does it matter that the context of the speech (and the broader textbook) is presented in "polished," "standard" English?

I have often contemplated the palpable sense of celebratory relief that arises when Black

American women performers and activists deliver the speech on platforms like YouTube—articulating it for audiences rather than merely reading it aloud (see, for instance, Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman” Performed by Kerry Washington, and Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman”: Nkechi at TEDxFiDiWomen, among many others.) While there are numerous avenues to explore this exposition of Truth and her speech, as included in Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz (2017) it is important to note that this example is merely one of many instances where the speech has been presented and contextualized, inviting audiences to engage with a particular reading and reflection.

Theorizing the Reading Experience with “Noise” of “Accent” Markers

In the essay “Death of the Author” (1967), Roland Barthes shifts the classical focus from the author as the authoritative figure of the text—who defines its meaning and limits—to the reader. He argues that texts should be liberated by *readers*, who bring their own reading and experiences as they navigate the intricate web of the text, its cultural contexts, and its fabric of quotations. Barthes asserts that it is the reader, not the writer, who holds the unity of the text in the present moment; the author is always absent, positioned in the past of the text, and the “unity of a text is not in its origin, but it is in its destination.” Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of treating readers as beings whose corporeal presence within a reading context significantly influences the act of reading (Reeser & Spalding 2002).

In the following, I examine the experience of reading, including the corporeality of one’s own vocal voice alongside various modes of reading. I conceptualize the reader as a site where the text performs and coalesces (Barthes *ibid*). By focusing on the *reading* of “Ain’t I a Woman?” and examining its language, multiple authors, citations, corresponding voices, and embedded texts and framings, I seek to shift the emphasis from the authors to the practices and experiences of reading. Drawing on Bourdieu’s framework of reading (e.g., Bourdieu & Chartier 1993), I theorize the diverse interpretations that a text invites and the plurality of meanings that emerge. By highlighting the different ways and levels of reading as outlined by Bourdieu, I not only illuminate the reality of readers but also provide an analytical tool that enhances our understanding of reading as a cultural practice.

In this exploration, I analyze the marked-speech transcript alongside its textual context, raising questions about what the text offers its readers. Bourdieu (1993) encourages a reevaluation of the reading practice, emphasizing the importance of not only decoding the actual words but also examining how readers interpret the cultural practices present in the text. This leads us to consider the intended social purpose behind the creation and publication of a particular work, prompting a reassessment of its aims and desired readings. Was it crafted to be engaged in the manner we approach the text today, or was it perhaps designed for didactic purposes, instructing readers on appropriate behavior and actions? Nonetheless, reading experiences offer a different perspective and negotiation with the original text and its author.

I explore the reading experience of “Ain’t I a Woman?” focusing on its distinctive speech patterns and the meanings they convey. I focus on what insights the transcript provides to readers,

particularly in our contemporary context, as they engage with its language and cultural practices. I employ the concept of affordances as a framework for this examination, which positions the relationship between the transcript and the reader. As discussed by Don Norman (2013), an affordance emerges from the interaction between the properties of an object (in this case, the transcript) and the capabilities of the agent (the reader), determining how the object or transcript can be utilized.³ Hence, I pose the question: What does the interaction between a reader and a marked transcript afford? Since affordances are jointly determined by both the qualities of the object and the abilities of the interacting agent, it is crucial to consider how these elements influence one another. I begin with self-reflection on my reading experience of the speech in the textbook and develop it into a broader theoretical framework.

1. Efforts to Hear the Written Word, and Revelation of Power Dynamics

You find yourself stumbling upon a word that you do not recognize. Is it a new addition missing from your vocabulary, one might wonder? Then you encounter another, and yet another? Words like “dat,” “dar,” “womin,” “eber,” “hab,” or “chilern.” The reader is encouraged to pronounce these unfamiliar words, first without understanding their meaning, and then to recognize their distinct pronunciation, which, in essence, highlights common words articulated in an unusual, marked style. For example, realizing that the words above are actually “that,” “there,” “women,” “ever,” “have,” and “children.” Perhaps the reader will find themselves re-reading the text once more, now making a concerted effort to pronounce these newly unrecognized words as they are written.

As I engage with the text, I find myself pondering: Am I inadvertently mocking Sojourner Truth and her unique speaking style as I articulate these words? By imitating her delivery in front of the audience and considering how this speech has been presented in various written formats, I also question my own role. And then, I wonder, am I perhaps being mocked myself by the transcriber and the textbook authors? Some of the “accented” words resonate with my own way of speaking, leading me to a deeper self-reflection.

Utilizing Bourdieu’s framework, I am interested in how a reader interprets the cultural practices embedded within the text and the intended social purpose of the transcript. What motivations guided Gage’s work as a transcriber, and how do Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz (2017) contribute to this narrative—or potentially offer an alternative perspective—as the textbook authors? Furthermore, how does the “graphic symbolism” of writing underscore the significance of the message being conveyed, urging readers to “pay attention” and manipulating their interpretation (Bourdieu 1985/1993)? Does this enhance the reader’s understanding of the text’s objectives?

The text reveals multiple voices to the reader upon delving into different levels of the text. The reader becomes aware of the power structure that the text reveals. The multiplicity and diversity of voices and languages within a single text, which Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) argues about, appear clearly in “Ain’t I a Woman?” and the exposition of the textbook to it. These voices, as Bakhtin asserts, shed light on how texts carry meanings, values, and authorial intentions within these included voices. The act of writing reflects the speaker or author’s positionality, even through their choice of dialect.

Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and the interconnectedness of discourses points to the linguistic repertoire of various forms of expression within texts.

In this context, the speech within the textbook reveals (at least) (1) Gage as a speaker/convention organizer addressing the responses of the audience during the talk, as well as Gage as the transcriber who brings Truth's voice to the written text; (2) Truth as the main speaker who responds to the discriminatory discourse prevalent among men at the time, while also engaging with the perspectives of the white women in the audience of the movement. Truth's address relates to the discourse of the clergy and the broader semantic field of Christianity. (3) The text was re-edited and included in a particular anthology by multiple authors (Stanton, Anthony, and Gage) in 1881/1882, and it continued to be utilized by (4) many others. This ultimately led (5) Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz (2017) to incorporate it into their textbook on gender and communication, creating a new text that draws on the work of various scholars. (6) Also, the audiences that are mentioned as responding to Truth, and the potential ones that the transcript/text should address, could be echoed voices as well.

This composition of authoritative voices and discourses, drawing from historical contexts such as 1851, 1881, and 2017, reveals to the reader the power structures within society. The transmission of Truth's words and occurrence are not merely facilitated through white platforms, white writers, and white gatekeepers; they are further affirmed by the preferences of white audiences and the potential interest of white readers in these narratives. This dynamic reveals to the reader the racist structure inherent in the voices of "elites," who often speak on behalf of Black, non-white, less privileged, and "nonstandard" speakers.

Influential thinkers such as bell hooks (2015), Linda Martín Alcoff (1991/1996), Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996/2009), Nellie Y. McKay (2005), and Long et al. (2005) highlight these issues of speaking for others. hooks (2015) argues that this practice extends to white women, who frequently silence and censor the voices and activism of Black women, thereby acting as gatekeepers to their participation. This tendency is reflected in the historical roles of white women as suffragists and activists, who often perceive themselves as saviors needing to mediate communication between racial communities, all while perpetuating racism, classism, and educational elitism.

The examination of Truth's transcription across various platforms, particularly in the textbook discussed, highlights the power dynamics that allowed her voice from the mid-19th century to be integrated into a 21st-century academic context, especially within the somewhat elitist field of communication studies. This integration occurs alongside a tendency to dismiss and marginalize her contributions and legacy. On one hand, we witness a formerly enslaved woman of color, who was not allowed and unable to read or write, gaining access to a university classroom she would never have been able to enter during her lifetime. On the other hand, her "strange" or "funny" manner of speaking is pointed out, even in a textbook published in 2017, which often seeks to address discourses outside of the choices Truth intended.

Anna-Christine Weirich (2022) highlights the need for marginalized communities' voices to

earn *access*, among them those who speak with “accents,” “dialects,” or other “nonstandard” forms of communication. Given their often marginalized status, they usually face challenges in being recognized as legitimate speakers. The access that Truth earned, including her place in these academic texts, is revealed as needing to endure a myriad of discriminatory practices, political challenges, and degradation. As hooks (2015) articulates specifically about Black women, their voices are typically acknowledged only when they conform to the standards set by whiteness (see also Martin Alcoff 2008). Was the framing of the speech and the manner of its language a matter of conformity to American whiteness?

2. Reading and Racializing Truth, Others, and Self

Focusing excessively on the form of speech, labeling it as incorrect and Othered, not only challenges the audience to perceive Truth—albeit through various discourses, authorities, and power structures—but also acts as a meta-linguistic speech act (Austin 2006; Searle 1969/2012). This dual function highlights a deviation from traditional American public rhetorical deliveries, which may also reflect one’s personal language. The speech transcript performs a face-threatening speech act (Brown & Levinson 1987; Tracy & Robles 2013), where Truth, rather than being celebrated for her significant address, is portrayed as deviating from an established norm. This critique contrasts sharply with the literary treatment of most other public (white) speakers in U.S. history, and even particularly within the feminist movements.

This practice fosters a potential atmosphere of “teasing,” “mocking,” and even “bullying,” as explained by Tracy & Robles (2013, 83-84). The use of marked language suggests (even if unconsciously) that Truth does not belong in U.S. society, despite being born in and having served the country. The marked language seems to aim to unveil—much like teasing and mocking often do (Tracy & Robles 2013)—a particular “truth” about Truth as well as the identities and backgrounds of other transcribers and scholars. One might wonder if this occurs due to the authority of the transcriber—a 19th century white, educated, upper-middle-class woman, and the convention organizer—while the textbook authors (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz 2017) also exert a sense of authority over how historical reality should be perceived and how movements, individuals, and situations should be understood, all framed through the lens of “standard” English.

The “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech and its framing and introduction remind us of what Philippe Blanchet (2016) coins as “Glottophobia,” describing linguistic or speech discrimination based on the way individuals speak.⁴ Situating this concept within broader frameworks for examining oppression and discrimination in society, Blanchet highlights how people may be denied rights or opportunities due to their accent or the language they speak or use. This phenomenon reaffirms the political standardization of the dominant society’s language. Such standardization seeks to distance language from everyday speech and maintain educational and linguistic authoritative power among elites. As a result, certain hegemonic speech norms are reconstructed and accepted by society as natural and unquestionable, particularly as they are reinforced through education and the media. In such an environment, individuals are encouraged to police others into conforming to a “standardized” version of the so-called “desired” language.

The reading of the speech and the emphasis on Truth's accent and way of talking resituate for the reader the "standard" expected English, then and now, and how English should perform within a specific grammar, sound, and manner. Realizing, as explained Weirich (2022), that linguistic and non-linguistic privileges and ideologies significantly shape the conditions under which individuals are heard. Furthermore, as Blanchet (2016) asserts, denying someone the right to express themselves in their own way equates to denying their humanity. Through the reading, one might wonder—did Truth still carry and was perceived through her humanity? Could she truly be heard?

Drawing on the work of Dell Hymes (1996) and the insights of Weirich (2022), one could argue that a fundamental requirement for a voice to exist truly is the act of being listened to, as speakers are always subject to the perceptions of their listeners (or readers). Thus, analyzing instances of voice must take into account the audience, the interlocutor, and the ideologies, values, and attitudes that shape the interaction. The readings of the text reflect multiple levels (Bourdieu, Barthes), not only uncovering different voices (Bakhtin 1981), but also suggesting that readers who themselves possess a "nonstandard" manner of communication or who are immersed in such an environment may be better equipped to hear Truth beyond the marked language, and beyond the "carriers" or gatekeepers of her voice (Aronis, Shrikant, & Arthur 2025).

In many respects, the readings extend beyond merely learning and hearing Truth and other past or absent voices within the text. For readers who communicate in what may be considered "nonstandard" English, this marked language often reflects their own identities, serving as a representation of their speech and the cultural production of language. The nuances of this marked language reveal for them a hidden voice of criticism and insult, underscoring the recognition that they—along with possible those they hold dear—express themselves in a manner akin to the way Truth is articulated through these markings. Indirectly, they are taught to evaluate their own speech and pronunciation, objectify them, and mark them.

Hence, it is not only the realization of oppressive power dynamics that Truth suffers from, but also over the reader, highlighting the divergence and the ongoing necessity to interpret what are deemed "disordered" utterances. When expressed publicly, Truth becomes subject to scrutiny and racialization (see also Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur 2025). For the individual reader, this serves as a more personal and private indication that their own "accent," "dialect," or mode of speaking is viewed as out of place and unfit, reinforcing the idea that they are different and should be deemed as unusual, marked in some way. Therefore, in this process of reading, it is not only Truth who is being racialized, as argued by several scholars who studied the speech, but it is also the "nonstandard" reader.

The "nonstandard" reading—often unrecognized, overlooked, or even eradicated—emerges from the interaction between lay or popular audiences and "high-brow" or "elite" literature (Bourdieu, p. 670). Bourdieu asserts that the reinforcement of desired and expected high culture "leaves people sadly deprived between two cultures." He explains that individuals are caught between an original, ordinary culture that has been suppressed and a learned ("high") culture that is acquired just sufficiently to render them unable to discuss even mundane topics like the weather,

knowing precisely what to avoid saying, yet finding themselves with little to express. This effect of the educational system is rarely acknowledged.

The recognized omission of “nonstandard” or “nonelite” cultures, discourses, and readings—an omission that an attentive reader might identify—can serve as a crucial avenue for fostering an understanding of racism and marginalization in society. It underscores the importance of routinely questioning the authority of authors, transcribers, and contributors whose works populate our anthologies, newspapers, and textbooks.

3. Reading as a Pathway to Empathy toward Truth, Self, and Revelation of Racism

The reading experience, characterized by frequently stumbling over words and the necessity to vocalize them for full comprehension, reveals to both general and scholarly readers the practices of Othering and the exclusion of specific modes of expression. Readers engage in the racialization of Truth through the perspectives of the dominant culture, reflecting the biases inherent in white eyes, ears, and agency. If readers have not already developed some level of linguistic insecurity and self-awareness regarding their own speech, this awareness may emerge through their reading of the transcript. Additionally, they might adopt (new) criteria for judging others, thus contributing to a cultural or national glottophobia.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2014) describe the United States as fundamentally structured by a racial formation—a system composed of racial meanings, stereotypes, and ideologies. This formation operates through interpretive codes that shape our interactions in everyday life, serving both as an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics and as a mechanism for reorganizing and redistributing resources along specific racial lines. In that regard, the speech transcript of “Ain’t I a Woman?”, its included symbolic practices along with the process of becoming, and its broader context, invite readers to recognize the historical racial formation that Truth and Black women of her time experienced, and are still so deeply embedded in U.S. culture.

These codes and meanings, integral to the social order, significantly shape individuals’ perceptions of race and dictate appropriate behaviors toward others (Omi & Winant 2014). Although Gage, along with other writers, editors, activists, and scholars, likely approached Truth’s voice and speech with intentions of social justice, they nonetheless operated within the established and hegemonic racial frameworks of their culture. Contemporary readers can observe that similar practices continue in the present-day contextualization and utilization of the transcript. Consequently, the original, edited, modified, and circulated transcript illustrates how racial meanings arise through processes of marking, categorization, cultural representation, and the establishment of social hierarchies.

Reading “Ain’t I a Woman?”—whether in the past or today—fosters an awareness of a hegemonic epistemology that defines “correct” or “superior” English, instilling a sense of “desired” pride in the language of England as the historical colonial power, particularly in contrast to the (possibly inferior) Dutch colonists and, even more so, in relation to non-dominant and non-privileged cultures, societies, and other countries of origin. Through this reading experience, one gains a lens to examine the racism of the past that has evolved into present circumstances.

Furthermore, this case may illustrate to readers that nativism—the commonly unchallenged belief in the superiority of native-born citizens, along with the fear of foreign cultures that often justifies expansive political and racial agendas—was, in fact, too elite and too white for Truth to be acknowledged within the diverse population born in the United States. The way Truth was treated throughout her life highlights that she, born in the US, was native to the country, yet represented the colonial power and brutality that enslaved her, resulting in her being regarded as less than human. Even the oppressive framework of nativism did not extend to her. She was not afforded the same rhetorical recognition as her white peers who were also born in the US. Additionally, even after the advancement of women's rights in the US, it would take much longer for Black women to gain their rights.

The issue of marking the speech of a native-born individual delves even deeper than that of an immigrant, highlighting essential societal distinctions. As Omi and Winant (2014) argue, racial beliefs and myths are so deeply embedded in our culture and thought processes that they are perceived as part of the U.S. social order—an unquestioned 'common sense.' Drawing on Kent A. Ono's (2012) insights regarding borders and fences, this transcript can be interpreted as a representation of a "restrictive entry"—both "figuratively and conceptually 'in words' and 'on bodies'"—since borders are constantly shifting and are solidified through application and practice. Ono describes the "bodily border" as one that the marked voice conveys, which is inherently linked to Truth's or others' racialized identities and persists wherever the body travels or is represented. Such bordering practices serve to distinguish between those who are included in society and those who are excluded, functioning as mechanisms for control, elimination, or ejection, and thereby determining one's (un)worthiness as a living being.

Additionally, in Sara Ahmed's (2000) words, the "stranger" is identified as "the body out of place" and viewed as the source of danger. Such individuals are subjected to what Ahmed terms a "visual economy," which encompasses "ways of seeing the difference between familiar and strange others as they are (re)presented to the subject, [...] differentiating between others based on how they 'appear'" (p. 25). In this context, it involves not only "ways of seeing" but also "ways of making seeing." A transcript, as a written account, presents a challenge: the speaker's physical presence is absent, yet it must convey the occurrence of a speech event for future reference. This dynamic allows for a certain 'hiding' of the typically racialized, marked body within society. The way Truth's words are transcribed, along with the "boxing" of her speech outside the narrative of the first wave as illustrated in the examined textbook, serves to re-establish the markings associated with her body and voice, actively distancing her through the imposition of both material and symbolic signs. This teaches readers about the entrenched "system" of racial meanings, stereotypes, and ideology in the United States (Omi & Winant 2014).

It is this plurality of readings and meanings, different from the inscribed meaning by the official authors (Bourdieu, 1985/1993), that offers ways to reveal the embedded racial formation and to develop a personal, mundane resistance. Readers, particularly those with "nonstandard" accents, dialects, or styles, may be driven through their own concerns, pain, and sensitivity, to the opportunity to cultivate a deeper connection and empathy toward Truth, as well as toward others in society and themselves. The feelings of confusion, offense, or discomfort that may be provoked by this realization

may serve as a subtle means of resisting established structures of domination, both in language and beyond. Additionally, this may inspire new ways of thinking or intentions to challenge the coercive forces of standardization and foster identities that stand against such a system (Walsh 2021).

The Power of Reflecting and Critique: A Suggested Solution

This essay presents a theoretical exploration and critique of the experience of reading dialectal and accented transcripts, highlighting the “invitation” to engage with practices of racialization while yet earning a recognition of racial formation in society. I propose using this unique reading experience as a means to reframe the renowned speech in its written format. In her study of the politics of transcription, Bucholtz (2000) argues that transcripts and the processes of creating, using, and presenting them should never be regarded as neutral. Instead, she advocates for developing new practices grounded in accountability and responsibility. She emphasizes that transcribers must remain conscious of their role and the impact of the transcript on representing speakers, making their choices transparent and discussing the limitations that arise. She asserts that standardization sidesteps accountability.

Over the years, numerous scholars and activists have “playfully” edited and altered Gage’s original versions of the speech, including in the 2019 edition of the referenced textbook (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz 2019) (see Figure 3). Although these efforts aimed to honor Truth better, they have inadvertently kept reinforcing existing racial power structures. Standardizing language or omitting its original markers does not address the core issue that the transcript deals with. Such revisions have missed the opportunity to offer readers a more direct invitation to reflect on and critique racial systems in the U.S.

In this context, I propose that rather than attempting to “fix” the language once again, we should leverage the unique opportunity we have as authors and presenters of texts to add critical commentary on how racist practices have influenced the Gage period, the feminist movement of that time, and other interests later on, to mark Truth’s words as differing from her peers (Weirich 2022). I encourage us to frame the speech as an invitation to “tour” the heteroglossia of authoritative and marginalized voices, various white platforms, and practices of glottophobia. This approach can provide essential insights into the voices of Black women and others in the U.S., as well as the oppressive and challenging journeys they have faced—if they have even been granted a “journey” at all.⁵

Rather than treating transcribers and additional authors as transparent (Macaulay 1991; Linell 1982) and treating the transcribed speakers as stripped of agency—rendered as objects controlled by others (Bucholtz 2000)—it would be highly beneficial to critique the underlying issues we encounter. I propose that we include a critical commentary on the actual power structures that influenced this transcription and how they were represented. This approach would invite readers and learners to grasp the linguistic ideologies that silence, demean, and marginalize non-privileged speakers. More specifically, instead of solely focusing on Truth and her speech (as illustrated, for instance, in Figure 3), it would be advantageous for readers to be prompted to unpack the racialized and alienating “noise” within the text. This reflection should engage them with various racializing practices and

other biases in transcription, encouraging them to negotiate their own methods of reading, speaking, and understanding.

EXPLORING GENDERED LIVES

Aren't I a Woman?

Isabella Van Wagenen was born as a slave in New York in the late 1700s. After she was emancipated, Van Wagenen moved to New York City and became a Pentecostal preacher. She preached throughout the Northern states, using a new name: Sojourner of God's Truth. She preached in favor of temperance, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery.

On May 28, 1851, Truth attended a women's rights meeting in Akron, Ohio. Throughout the morning, she listened to speeches that focused on white women's concerns. Moved to point out what was missing, Truth rose and gave her own speech, "Aren't I a Woman?" which pointed out the ways in which white women's oppression differed

from that of black women (Campbell, 2005). The following excerpt from the speech is edited by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and includes Frances Dana Gage's commentary (Ritchie & Ronald, 2001).

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles or gives me any best place (*and raising herself to her full height and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked*), and aren't I a woman? That man over there says that ... I have borne thirteen children and seen them almost all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard—and aren't I a woman?

TAKE A STAND: To what extent do you think Sojourner Truth's claim that white women's oppression differs from black women's oppression is still true today?

Figure 3: A revised introduction of Sojourner Truth's speech within the textbook, "Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture (13th edition)" (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz 2019)

In "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Martin Alcoff (2008) critically examines the intricate ethical and epistemological challenges that arise when individuals speak on behalf of others, particularly when there are differences in privilege and social location. Alcoff advocates for a thorough self-examination and analysis of the tangible, discursive and material effects of such speech to assess its political and ethical legitimacy. She argues that completely withdrawing from the practice compromises political efficacy. Therefore, it is essential to engage with the various lenses, tools, and practices involved rather than avoid them. This approach not only acknowledges often overlooked limitations but also resists the perpetuation of historical and oppressive contemporary practices.

Bourdieu (1985/1993, 665) asserts that reading is shaped by the conditions under which one has been cultivated as a reader. Recognizing these conditions may be the only opportunity to mitigate their effects. This understanding provides an epistemological purpose for any reflection on reading. In line with the perspectives of scholars such as Blanchet (2016), Weirich (2022), Walsh (2021), and Bucholtz (2000, 2007), I urge educators and advocates to help readers identify harmful linguistic ideologies embedded in the reading process and to foster a reflexive and critical attitude toward them.

It is essential to challenge traditional hierarchies and expectations, redefining what constitutes a “legitimate” variety, as suggested by Walsh (2021). Readers should be invited not only to engage with texts but also to reflect on how they read and negotiate specific texts, identify interconnections, and reflect on their place within societal structures and ideologies.

Permit readers to experience frustration. Allow them to recognize the complexities of racial formation and the profound distances that are insurmountable. This encompasses not only the temporal distance from past events but also the challenge of understanding the historical context in which those events occurred. It reflects the moral distance associated with taking the right actions—or failing to do so—for Truth, as well as the current impossibility of doing what is right in the present moment. Moreover, it encourages a slow realization of the difficulties inherent in bridging cultural, national, and interpersonal divides, which often involve language barriers and differences in pronunciation. It underscores the impossibility of undoing the legacies of colonialism, slavery, social disadvantages, and systemic inequalities.

Readers may gain a deeper understanding of the historical Black woman who escaped slavery and endured profound abuse as both an enslaved child and adult. They might make a deeper meaning of how she faced multiple displacements among various owners and had to learn and adapt to different languages and cultural norms of dominant societies in order to navigate and influence her surroundings. Despite being unable to read or write, she found the courage to speak profoundly before an often hostile audience. However, she was aware that she had to rely on white transcribers, platforms, and audiences to convey her words, a process that inevitably distorted her messages.

Endnotes:

1. I employ the term “nonstandard” (in reference to English or language) within quotation marks to underscore the social construct surrounding what is deemed “standard.” Likewise, I use quotation marks for “accent” and “dialect” to highlight the socially constructed nature of speech and communication styles. Typically, “standard” corresponds to what is accepted, desired, and considered appropriate, whereas “nonstandard,” “accent,” and “dialect” are often perceived as incorrect forms of expression that deviate from what is regarded as “normal.” This classification can suggest a certain notion of “disorder,” prompting the need to label and differentiate such speech. For further exploration of these concepts, one can refer to the works of Blanchet (2016), Bucholtz (2000), Macaulay (1991), Walsh (2021), and Weirich (2022), which provide critical insights into the treatment, introduction, and framing of such texts, allowing us to recognize the power structures and biases present in society.
2. For instance, Jones et al. (2019) show how court reporters often lack an understanding of African American English, resulting in inaccuracies in their transcriptions that can alter the intended meanings of testimonies (see also Rickford & King 2016).
3. Norman (2013) uses the concept of affordance as the relationship between a physical object, tool, or technology, and an agent—be it a person, animal, or even a machine. In this regard, I treat transcription and its use of symbols to mark language as the “object” that affords specific relationships and functions.
4. Blanchet refers specifically to the French society, but glottophobia as a term and practice aligns with the US society as well. The author thanks Louise Sampagnay, Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle for the introduction to the term.

5. See Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur (2025) about “speech journeys.”

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Acknowledgements

This essay represents a new development stemming from a larger project undertaken by the author in collaboration with Natasha Shrikant and Tori Omega Arthur, focusing on the evolution of white transcriptions of the "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. For reference, see Aronis, Shrikant, and Arthur (2025). The author wishes to express gratitude and acknowledge Natasha Shrikant for her contribution to the section concerning the politics of transcription.