

Linguist Encourages African-American Speech

BY ADAM GUSMAN
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

A linguist, professor and author told students about the need for a national policy on language Thursday in a presentation about the African-American language.

Geneva Smitherman, professor of English and director of the African-American Language and Literacy Program at Michigan State University, is the author of "Black Talk: Words and Phrases From the 'Hood to the Amen Corner."

Smitherman pointed to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, where English teachers gathered to create a national language policy.

The three languages the policy suggested studying would include the standard language spoken by Northern, middle-class whites—which Smitherman referred to as "the language of wider communication"—but also a foreign language and a form of speech native to the student's own culture or heritage.

Smitherman told an anecdote of a white female friend who visited her church, where the call-and-response tradition was practiced. Seeing other churchgoers shouting, "Go on!" and "Amen!" Smitherman's friend blurted out, "Now that's a good point!"

"That was not quite the appropriate language for that situation," Smitherman

said. She said some of the components of the African-American language that first developed as a bond of solidarity and a means of communication among slaves had come from elements in the original African languages spoken on the continent.

"It's the result of a mixture of African language patterns with English words and patterns, a combination of two linguistic traditions," she said.

The sounds "r" and "th" did not exist in some African languages, so the sounds disappeared or changed, Smitherman said. For example, more became "mo," and south became "sof."

Despite its deviation from the English

standard, Smitherman stressed that the African-American language had its own system of grammar and pronunciation.

She also pointed out some words that could be traced to their African roots. For example, jazz is a word in the Mandingo language meaning to act in an uninhibited manner, and bug was analogous to another African word for the act of annoying someone, she said.

Smitherman also stressed the power of language. "People who communicate ain't trying to please Miss Manners," she said. "They're trying to move mountains."

"There are no superior or inferior languages. Every language is sufficient for the purposes we want to use them for."

2 UNC Graduate Students Named Medical Fellows

BY CHRISTINA MASSEY
STAFF WRITER

Two UNC students recently completed a medical fellowship program sponsored by a major pharmaceutical company.

Cheryl Farmer and Wesley Schooler were among 34 participants in the 1994 Fellowship Program in Academic Medicine for Minority Students sponsored by Bristol-Meyers Squibb.

The purpose of the medical fellows program is to encourage minority medical students to pursue careers in medical research, said William Dunnett, public affairs manager for Bristol-Meyers Squibb.

"Minorities account for nearly 50 percent of the U.S. population, yet they make up only 4.1 percent of the faculty population at medical schools across the country," he said. "This program encourages minorities to enter fields of medical research in an attempt to decrease their underrepresentation in medical fields."

Farmer said she was glad she had participated in the program.

"It was an honor to participate because it is a very select program," she said. "I got to meet a lot of people in both the industry and in academics."

Schooler could not be reached for comment Thursday.

As part of the program, Farmer and Schooler each received a \$6,000 grant to use on a research project under the guidance of a biomedical researcher.

For her project, Farmer compared the cognition and brain imagery of children with Neurofibromatosis-1, a central nervous system disease, to that of their siblings who were unaffected by the disease. Children with this disorder have trouble with visual and spatial orientation.

Farmer and her mentor, Dr. Robert Greenwood, found that the children with the disorder had a difference in the levels of metabolic chemicals in the right hemisphere of their brain and the left. Their siblings did

not have this difference in metabolites.

"We found that there was a variation in expression of metabolites, and we are trying to find what these variations in expression mean," she said. "Our findings are important because we were the first to look at this."

Farmer said she, Greenwood and their colleagues were continuing their research. For his project, Schooler studied the screening of monoclonal antibodies in patients with Paget's disease, hyperparathyroidism and osteoporosis.

Both Farmer and Schooler presented the results of their research at a symposium Jan. 18.

HERO

FROM PAGE 1

"One of the things I have always taken delight in about him is that he's a thinker and an intellectual," said Athas, who has been at the University since 1968. "I learn from his experiences that I don't have."

Kenan still tends to view UNC from a student's point of view and said it was different being a teacher at his alma mater.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., he was raised by his great-aunt on a farm in Chincupin in Duplin County. He had aspirations as a child to be a scientist. He was impressed by UNC's physics department and planned to get a degree in applied science or engineering.

Although he had dreams of writing, specifically science fiction, it wasn't something he expected to become a reality. "Growing up in a rural Southern town, you don't think of writing as a possibility."

Being black played a big part, too, because he had no direct role models.

"It never occurred to me that I could actually pursue it," he said. "It took a long time after I had even studied writing officially to even think about publishing."

Everything changed for Kenan when he took his first creative writing course as a sophomore. Kenan's biggest influence was Max Steele, head of the English depart-

ment at the time and Kenan's professor. "He challenged me to think of writing as more than science fiction," he said. "He was the first person to get me looking at my cultural background as a potential source of literary inspiration."

That Christmas he was inspired and literally read book after book, his favorites being Toni Morrison, Anthony Burgess and Yukio Mishima. "That semester with Max, coupled with that intensive holiday of reading, jarred me into a new vision of what literature can do," Kenan said.

After graduating with an English degree rather than one in science, he got several New York contacts from Doris Betts, his other honors English 99 professor. He found a job at Random House Publishing as an office temp and then worked his way up at Alfred A. Knopf Publisher from receptionist to the senior editor's assistant to assistant editor.

At the time he was editing his first book, by Sharlene Baker, also a student in UNC's creative writing program, his own first novel was being published. "A Visitation of the Spirits" was published in 1989.

While working at the publishing company he had his most productive period of writing. He worked 100 hours a week for the company and then worked on his own books in his free time. Kenan remembers many nights when he never went home.

That same year, he was offered a job teaching at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, N.Y. He deliberated before taking the position but decided it would be good to leave the publishing industry to go into something less intense. He also began teaching as an adjunct creative writing professor at Columbia University in 1990.

His second book, "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead," continues the story of the imaginary town he created in his first book. The book, published in 1992, was nominated for the 1992 National Book Critics Circle Award and was the recipient of a Whiting Writer's Award.

Kenan took leave from Sarah Lawrence this year to teach in his home state. He taught last semester at Duke as a visiting professor in creative writing. Kenan has also written a young adult biography of James Baldwin as well as reviews and essays for The Nation magazine.

Professor James Seay, head of the creative writing program and one of the professors who proposed that Kenan be invited to teach here, said Kenan was impressive. Seay said he admired all that Kenan had accomplished with limited resources coming from a small town. "That kind of trajectory is phenomenal," he said. "And he's not finished yet."

Kenan draws on his own experiences for his writing. He relies on his life growing

up in small town with much storytelling for inspiration. He had a religious upbringing and was close to folk culture, both of which are prevalent themes in his writing. "First novels tend to be about a writer's self," he said. "Somewhere thereafter, the writer stops writing about himself and starts writing about the world."

Kenan's new project is a nonfiction book on African America. His goal is to pull together buried histories in context with geography and what it means to be black in the latter part of the 20th century.

"The book is a combination of interviews with people and collections of strange and unusual histories," he said.

Kenan said he had been inspired to do the project because he believed that among African Americans there was an idea of what it meant to be an "authentic Negro."

"I think it's a hurtful concept and a misleading and misled concept," he said. "It buys into the national idea of a monolithic, single-thinking African mind."

As with other writers, he is often defined by the groups he is a part of. Because he is a black, gay male, he is often asked to be a spokesman for those groups. "I can only speak for my own experience and for myself," Kenan said. "My feeling has always been that the most effective political message in fiction is the most subtle political message in fiction."

Bicentennial Video Moves Ahead With Town Funding

BY KAREN WILLIAMS
STAFF WRITER



Davis Stillson, a local television producer, will receive his request for \$4,500 to edit a tape of the town's bicentennial celebration. The Chapel Hill Town Council approved the funding for the bicentennial video at the Town Council meeting Monday night.

Stillson, who works with Lloyd Street Studios Ltd., said he was pleased the council approved his request for the funding. "I think making the tape is important because more than 200 people from the five churches who did the bicentennial celebration participated as dancers, actors or performers," Stillson said. "A lot of people put a lot of effort into the celebration and it shouldn't go undocumented."

Town Council member Joe Capowski said the council unanimously approved the funding for the video. "We had a major celebration and this allows people to buy a tape if they wish to," Capowski said. "I think it's a good idea."

Council member Lee Pavao said he thought the video was a good idea. "It is a continuation of the bicentennial," Pavao said. "And I think it would be nice to have that recorded for the town."

Pavao added that he did not think the \$4,500 price tag was too extreme. "There is an after-market for the video, and some of the money will be recovered," he said.

Town Manager Cal Horton said he had offered alternatives to the proposal made by Stillson. It was proposed on Monday that Horton have authorization to seek volunteers to make the bicentennial tape, but the council rejected this alternative.

Horton said he fully supported the decision made by council. "It is my job to report where cuts can be made or avoided, but it is ultimately the council's decision," he said.

"The town manager routinely recommended not using the money because (the council) can not foresee the future budget," Stillson said. "If I were in his position I would probably do the same thing."

Capowski said the video was a bargain for the town, and the amount of money

was little when compared to the hours Stillson would work on the video. He said the \$4,500 would come from the budget's contingency fund, a fund set aside for unforeseen costs. The council will not raise taxes or take away from any other allocated funds to pay for the video.

Stillson said most of his time spent on the video would be volunteer time. Stillson will make around \$9 an hour on the project, which is less than his regular salary. "I'm donating half of my time to this project," he said. "It wasn't going to happen if we didn't come up with an economical budget."

Chapel Hill's bicentennial celebration took place last year on April 24. Five local churches—Chapel of the Cross, University Presbyterian, University Methodist, University Baptist and Saint Paul's AME—hosted performances and readings about the history of the town.

Stillson said he planned to arrange the tape in chronological order, starting with the performances at Chapel of the Cross. He said he planned to use narration and music to bridge the gap between the various performances and to relay other historical events.

Andy Church, also of Lloyd Street Studios, will be doing the original music for the video. Stillson said he would not be able to pay a narrator because of the limited budget.

The 200 video tapes Stillson plans to produce should be finished by April 24, the town's 201st birthday. "I'll do the best I can," Stillson said. "I'll be devoting all of my free time in March to the project. If I have it edited by the last of March or the first of April, I may have the production done by April 24."

Stillson suggested that the videos sell for \$24.95, but the retail cost of the videos has not yet been set.

Black History Month Spotlight

Daisy Bates

In 1941, Daisy and L.C. Bates founded an Arkansas newspaper, "The State Press," that concerned itself with the issues of Little Rock's African-American community. The Bateses would later wholeheartedly embrace their role as social activists when they opened their home to nine African-

American youths. Under the guidance of Daisy Bates, the group known as the "Little Rock Nine" attempted to integrate Central High School in 1957. Their efforts sought to redefine the concept of leadership in the civil rights movement to include those black women and youths who comprised the front lines in the fight for justice.

Campus Calendar

FRIDAY

11 a.m. "Eyes on the Prize" video series will be shown until 1 p.m. in the BCC. Everyone is invited. 12:30 p.m. Learn more about the Peace Corps: The director of the Peace Corps will give a presentation until 2 p.m. in the Old East Library. 4 p.m. Physics and Astronomy Colloquium, 265 Phillips. Refreshments will be served in room 277 at

3:30 p.m.

5 p.m. Student Opportunities Fund applications are available in O1 Steele.

SUNDAY
NOON International Festival Day, with craft booths and food by various groups, will be held until 4 p.m. in Great Hall. The festival is free and open to the public. Park in the Bell Tower lot.

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