Cracking the Code: 
A Look at a Misinterpreted Dialect

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Rhetoric 101
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Abstract

In the study of dialects this piece of work examines the connection between a “standard” English and the dialect of African American Vernacular English. The piece addresses issues with the prestige of dialects, and the relationship with culture and education. A dialect is often viewed as the language of the uneducated and if one cannot adequately use the standard language at person is setting him or herself up for doom. Sources include Stephen Park’s Class Politics, PBS’s documentary “Do You Speak American” and Langston Hughes’s “Dig and Be Dug”. Also I will use a poll yet to be conducted closed survey to gather information on how student view dialects in American education on the U of I campus.

Questions:

1. In your opinion do you think knowing how to change your style of speech is a necessary skill to have? Why or why not?
2. What consequences (positive and negative) do you experience while speaking differently around different people?
3. Do you notice your speaking style change among different audience? What phrases or words would you commonly use around your friends that you wouldn’t use around your Parents?
4. Do you think a person can go through the University successfully without changing the style of their speech
Discovering the Path

I will attempt to address the gap in prestige between be Black English and standard English in academia. I will do this by conducting a survey, gathering information from Stephen Parks “students right to their own language”, and using other traditional and online sources for information. Also I will use examples out how dialects have enriched languages in the past though. I will do this though possibly a short story or poem. The main body piece should focus on the how Black English is viewed by those in academia and by student at the University of I Illinois. I will also critique those perspectives using information from my research.
**Cracking the Code: A Look at a Misinterpreted Dialect**

Although coined in the late 1970s the word “Ebonics” or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has grown in notoriety in the last decade—it is a term that sparks a lot of controversy and examines the issue of academic acceptance in society, but what is Ebonics and is it a legitimate language, dialect or failure to speak adequately? Ebonics should not be viewed by those in education as inadequate but instead as a legitimate dialect of English. The CCCC has acknowledged this.

A common perception of Black English is that its poor or lazy English, but Ebonics has roots just as deep as any other rhythmic English. It is a systematic and rule governed dialect, but because of hegemony and other historical events some dialects are endowed with more prestige. Such dialects are often times referred to as *standard*. Linguists have known for some time that non-standard dialects, such as Ebonics are consistent, legitimate varieties of language, with rules, conventions, and exceptions, just like *Standard English*, However they are viewed in American education as the dialect of the uneducated.

In a recent pre-survey 40 U of I students, students were asked if knowing how to change their style of speech is a necessary skill 77% said yes, and in a final survey 86%, reasoning that if they were not able to adequately use *standard* English they would not be able to succeed in a professional job interview. Students felt the dialect they normally used to communicate was unacceptable in a professional environment. Notably black student felt that AAVE was not appropriate in a professional setting when white the majority of white students felt the opposite about their dialect. These surveys show that because of the lack of information about AAVE even some who speak AAVE view it as inadequate. The misrepresentation of AAVE needs to be change through the very entity that has a problem with it, education. Without dialects English would stagnate innovation of creativity would vanish in the language.
Dialects that do not carry the prestige of standard English enrich the standard language, keeping it vibrant and constantly evolving.

I play it cool and dig all jive

That’s the reason I stay alive

My motto as I live and learn

Is to dig and be dug in return

Langston Hughes

Those in academia should want to share with their children the richness of all varieties of dialects; language variety should be discouraged. Dialects are a part of culture. Ebonics is not in separate from Black Culture it’s a vital piece of it and if we phase out and that’s view Ebonics as inadequate we would be cutting out a piece of culture and thus losing a piece of what make Black culture so unique. Ebonics is not a wrong way of speaking it is a unique and genuine dialect

America is a nation where it should be proud of it diverse culture and mainstream media need to enable the respect of diversity and view different dialects as a positive enrichment of American culture. What should be changed is the perception of “educated English” we have been thought that the English of the educated, “Standard English” has an apparent advantage in expressing thought, emotion, information or analyzing concepts. This Belief of standard English being used as the supreme means of communicating in has been challenged:

The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. (qtd. In Parks, Date Published)
I do not think that acquiring “Standard” English will guarantee success, either in school nor in the workplace. Although “Standard” English may be necessary, but it is rarely sufficient, for school and workplace success. And if our sports heroes, media celebrities, and public figures are anything to judge by, success is often achieved without Standard English. In addition, few of the success stories of first-generation immigrants to this country involve the learning of impeccable Standard English. The lack of information about Black English the problem. It is unfortunate that many employers have narrowly conceived notion about the connection between language ability and job performance. Standard English is the language used “professionally” and if you cannot adequately use Standard English you cannot enter the professional world. But it is also true that there is discrimination on account of language but people who discriminate against people who speak non-standard English usually masks other, more menacing forms of prejudice. Women and members of every ethnic and racial minority have found that mastering the mainstream varieties of English by itself will not guarantee them equal treatment. Even if ones language is flawless, if teachers, employers, or landlords want to discriminate against you, they will find another way to do so. Until these individuals are educated about the equality of dialects understanding discrimination based on language will continue.

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<th>Email to Prof</th>
<th>Text Phrases to Friends</th>
<th>Code Switching &amp; Necessary Skill</th>
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Given all this information, what now? How can one build off of this issue? I would urge everyone not just Americans but everyone not to automatically write off people who speak different dialects. All Dialects, not just Black English are beautiful educated means on communicating. Become more informed about the various dialects around you, research and learn about them. No two persons are the same and in our increasing globalized world and understanding different cultures crucial for the success on society. Going the extra step to try to get to know someone’s dialect is taking an extra step to understanding another individual’s culture. Variance in language is normal and a part of culture and should not be looked down upon despairingly. Whether you are trying to learn about different cultures or an individual—learning about a different dialect can give one new insight and a new means our deeper understanding of a world outside their own.
Works Cited
The following Bibliographic entrees relate to research done on study of Black English.


Breaks down the controversy and misinformation about Ebonics being the language of the uneducated. Shows how dialect enriches society and are not object in learning. Displays how different dialects are discriminated in employment. Exhibits how some dialects carry more prestige than others and are endowed are standard.


Shows how although necessary, knowing standard English will not guarantees success in school or the workplace.


Shows the difference in a dialect and a language and follows Ebonics on its journey to becoming categorized as a dialect.

Langston Hughes (1965). ”Dig and be Dug” retrieved from Stephen park’s class politics October 7 2009

Gives a tangible Example of how different dialects enrich and adds to what is considered “standard”. Uses a dialect that is not standard and produces a beautiful artistic poem that is in no way is uneducated.