Ebonics Essay, Research Paper

EBONICS

Ebonics, also known as Black English, is a nonstandard dialect spoken in many homes in the inner cities of America. This nonstandard language is often looked upon as low-class or lazy talk. This is not the case, however. Due to consistencies found in the dialect, there seems to be an order. It has been found that, when learning English, African-Americans adapted the language using some of the structure and rules of their own native tongue. This Black English has carried on through slavery and then freedom for hundreds of years. Although there is a coexistence of more than two dialects in our society, those in power forget the flexibility of our language and see no other way than the use of Standard English.

Although many Americans tend to scorn any careless variation of the Standard English, flexibility of the language is, perhaps, a main reason for its survival. In 1905, a Danish scholar and great authority on English, Otto Jespersen, wrote:

English is like an English park, which is laid out seemingly without any

definite plan, and which you are allowed to walk everywhere according

to your own fancy without having a fear a stern keeper enforcing rigorous

regulations. (MacNeil 141)

This freedom has created the English we speak today. Although a little behind the times, Oxford changes the rules as to what is correct English due to what is being spoken. In English Belongs to Everybody, Robert MacNeil, feels that English has prospered and grown because it was able to accept and absorb change (140). So change in the English language helps it grow, yet the dialect of the inner city blacks in our country is looked upon as a problem. To those in charge, there is no more room for growth.

It is apparent that there are many types of dialect within American English. The coexisting of two or more languages, either serving together in the same area or servicing different areas, is as old as language itself (Pei 106). This has happened throughout time and appears to be inevitable. It is impossible to believe an entire country could conform to one language, and then only one dialect of that language. Throughout history societies have survived for some time using different languages until these language barriers tore territories apart. It is apparent how, in America, barriers between dialects separate black men from white men even more than physical conditions. Coexistence is unwanted, unthinkable. The right to speak as they wish, in their own dialect, is thought of as an incorrect form of speech and limits their possibilities in our society.

Power tends to determine language. The white man has been in power in America for over 500 years. Standard English has been accepted by most all immigrants of Europe and their ancestors. Yet African-Americans do not tend to practice the Standard English in their homes. Segregation forces races apart. This separation kept blacks with blacks, away from whites. They were not thought of as equal. This may have angered many blacks and led to a bitterness towards whites. Conforming to the white speech was not appealing. Language reinforces feelings of social superiority or inferiority; it creates insiders and outsiders (MacNeil 140). The blacks were the outsiders. English is a difficult language to learn, with rules which may have not made much sense to early African-Americans. Since they were not to associate with whites, why should they learn their language the way that the whites wanted them to? They created their own dialect to use amongst themselves, which was incorrect to the whites, but a generated dialect passed on through the years in the majority of black households in America. The people in power dont seem to recognize this variation as an acceptable dialect.

Ebonics is spoken by many in America. It has been used by those people of the inner cities: black, white, Hispanic and Asian. It is separate from the Standard. While it is looked at as careless speech, it has a significant background and role in the development of America. It does not so much as tear our country apart, as it is another difference keeping us apart – keeping us segregated. Many want to do away with this type of talk to get America speaking the same dialect. Standard English is the language for those in power. To those with this power it is improper to have loose speech. American children learn family traditions, which includes culture and language. They also learn Standard English in schools to successfully survive amongst the powerful. If power were to shift hands, there is no doubt language would also shift positions. The flexibility of English would surely be tested. While the standard must be taught and learned, the many dialects in our society must be recognized and no longer scorned.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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