Jordan’s Jargon Essay, Research Paper

June Jordan is a profound writer and spokesperson for Black Americans. Her views on the dialect called Black English , however, are quite arrogant and egotistical. Granted, the acknowledgment of other dialects in the United States is beneficial. Her views that it should be taught as separate English and possibly recognized as another standard English language, is far too impractical and selfish. Much like white teenagers have their own jargon, Black English is just another informal way of communication amongst peers.

Standard English has been in practice for an extremely long time. It could be still debated as to the reasons that the proper way to speak English is considered proper and why Black English is not considered an acceptable formal and taught language. My own opinion is two-fold. One, when slaves were brought to America, they had no formal training in the English language. They picked up only slight phrases from their owners and just learned as best as they possibly could, given the circumstances. My second opinion is that possibly, in order to rebel against the whites who treated blacks as terribly as they did, they came up with their own jargon that broke a number of standard English rules.

June Jordan, I am sure would agree that it is more the second of my two opinions. She never gets into the origin of Black English in her piece. However, she does recognize the fact that standard English has been in practice for a long period of time. She complains that white standards of English persist, supreme and unquestioned, in these United States . (274) In her mind, Jordan would like Black English to be the alternative to the Standard English that exists now. I feel she does not want Standard English to be alleviated, just for it to not be the absolute language of the United States.

She goes on further to say that [d]espite our multi-lingual population, and despite the deepening Black and white cleavage within that conglomerate, white standard control our official and popular judgements of verbal proficiency . (274) This comment sounds almost hateful to the white population. Granted, there is a tad bit of resentment toward whites due to the slavery issue, but has not slavery been outlawed for many years? How many traditions and customs must whites break in order to make black people more welcome here?

It is protocol that Standard English be used in every formal occasion in the United States. A job interview, a thesis, a newspaper article, and public announcements are all done in Standard English. This is not because whites see it as a way to feel powerful or supreme to blacks. It is because everyone who speaks any form of English can understand what is being said to them when Standard English is used. Jordan herself wrote her essay in Standard English. Did she do this because she wanted to make a point? No. It would have been far more effective to all people who do not speak Black English to read a powerful essay in Black English. She even proves this fact in her paper when a class of all black students who clearly speak Black English had to read Alice Walker s The Color Purple. This book is mostly written in Black English and is a prize winning accomplishment of Black literature that white readers across the country had selected as a best seller . (275) Her students dumped on the book criticized the language (even though there was) similarities between their casual speech pattern and Alice Walker s written version of Black English . (275)

This unusual reaction only proves my point further. Black English as it stands today is a specific jargon that exists in a primarily black community. When required to read it on paper it is confusing and often hard to follow. To teach students how to speak this other language would further complicate the already difficult rules English speakers have to follow. I know from experience that white teenagers have a dialect of their own. The persistent use of the word like and uh and so are very apparent in any conversation. However, these teenagers do not go up on a soapbox and profess to the world that we need to recognize this as a proper way to speak. Why? Because it is not!

Jordan is fighting a losing battle when she cannot even find a group of twenty black students who speak Black English regularly, who have trouble reading their own spoken language. I myself would have trouble reading a conversation full of my own teenager jargon.

In her futile effort to teach students how to write like they speak, she came up with a list of rules to follow in order to write Black English. I not only found them amusing but also very disturbing. Obviously, since Jordan wrote her paper in Standard English, she recognizes the importance of correct grammatical construction in formal papers. By telling students it is OK to write [a]in nobody sing like Tina or [h]e have him wallet then he lose it (280) tells them how to write incorrectly. What irritates me the most is that if Jordan, being the highly educated female that she is, knows that standard English IS protocol and IS required to get that job or to get your point across, then why is she accentuating the importance of something that just cannot help students in the long run? This is the egotistical part of Jordan. Call it efficacy but one female professor is not going to change the world. Unfortunately, we are so set in our traditional customs and ways that it is not possible for the country to change in that manner.

I think it is important to mention here that when I was typing the Black English quotes above, I was looking at the Jordan essay and typing freely what I read on the paper. However, when I re-read what I had written, I had used Standard English in both sentences subconsciously. This helps to prove that it is not because anyone has a hatred for Black Americans in general or their lingo, it is a matter of tradition and custom that is drilled into our heads since pre-school.

So what if we are taught in pre-school Black English? It sounds like a remedy, however there are more complications than meets the eyes. Since Standard English and Black English are so closely related, would not the student become confused as to which English to use at the proper time? Jordan would think that they could be used simultaneously. Unfortunately, our society is built on being correct and incorrect. Saying [r]ule no 4: Forget about the spelling. Let the syntax carry you (278) would confuse people. There is either a correct spelling or an incorrect spelling of every word. If we could do either, would there be a reason to have rules? Take for instance the word stair . If spelling did not matter, stair could become stare considering, phonetically, stare looks correct? However, they mean completely different things.

My personal favorite rule of Black English is [d]o not hesitate to play with words, sometimes inventing them: e.g. astropotomous means huge like a hippo plus astronomical and, therefore, signifies real big . (281) Now can I not only re-spell words, forget grammatical structure of sentences, but I can come up with my own words! I am certain people will surely understand me now!

I feel a deep hatred and resentment coming from Jordan. I understand her views completely and can see where she is coming from. The problem is, we cannot change what has already been set as the way of life. We can mature, evolve and manipulate what we have but something that has 333,746,000 people, for whom this thing called English serves as native tongue (274) cannot be changed. Custom is hard to break. Americans strive for conformity and tradition. Thanksgiving, evening prayers, Sunday Bingo, weddings, lighting of candles, talks about the birds and the bees are some of the many traditions ALL Americans hold. Will Black Americans start complaining about those also because they are white-originated? No, they have them too. They enjoy them and employ in them also. Why is using standard English such a bad thing then after all?

The fact remains that everyone has their own form of talking, of communicating, of shooting the breeze. It is different for all Americans no matter their color, race, origin or whatnot. It just so happens that Standard English originated from white origins and that it became the proper way to formally communicate. To say that black people have a right to their own form of English would mean that I, because I wear blue sweatshirts should have more own form of English too. A patented lingo that includes standing on your head with your finger up your nose while pulling dental floss through your dogs whiskers. Such a selfish, egotistical, ridiculous idea! Why change what already works? Especially when it has been universally accepted.