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# Black English, Myth Or Reality?

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# BLACK ENGLISH - MYTH OR REALITY?

by

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# VITA

The author, Janet L. Fletcher, is the daughter of Charles M. and Ona (Webb) Fletcher. She was born September 12, 1955, in Chicago, Illinois.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The topic of the existence or non-existence of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English has generated a great deal of controversy in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, dialectology and education for over thirty years. The issue of Black English remains an important one because it touches on the controversy over the 'language-culture-behavior' relationship and the 'culture or race' issue which is inherent in the study of Black American culture.

When anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf developed their idea that language imposes constraints on thought, experience and behavior, racists were able to twist this view to argue that since Black Americans possessed no culture or language, they therefore possessed no unique thoughts or ideas, thus Blacks were thought to be mentally and physically inferior to whites. The racist view remained dominant in the social sciences until the 1940's when Melville Herskovits and Lorenzo Turner began to argue that Black Americans did possess a unique culture and language of their own which had its origin in Africa. Since then many scholars have asserted that Black English has allowed

Blacks to create a 'culture of survival' which enabled them to withstand a world of slavery and oppression.

Although the question of the legitimacy of Black English involves many facets such as cultural, historical, educational as well as linguistic, this thesis maintains that any study of the importance of language in Black American culture must start with a linguistic analysis of the unique features of Black English because only this can provide the necessary evidence upon which all other arguments can be based. Without the linguistic data to prove conclusively that Black English is a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English, all other cultural, historical or educational arguments will be based only upon personal opinion. Without the concrete linguistic evidence to prove that Black English is a separate dialect of Standard American English, some scholars can argue that Black Americans do not have a unique language of their own and thus do not possess a distinctive culture. What then can the speech forms and behavior patterns of Black Americans be attributed to? With the information provided by a linguistic study however other scholars can point to the undeniable linguistic facts as the proof necessary to win their arguments that Black American culture is unique and deserves the recognition it has long been denied.

The purpose of this thesis is three-fold: First to review and analyze the research literature concerning Black

English. Secondly, to test the following hypothesis: If Black English is a separate dialect of Standard American English, then it must have a set of distinct linguistic features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical which are unique to it. And finally, to use this review and analysis of the research literature concerning Black English to determine if there is enough conclusive evidence in the literature to prove the hypothesis, namely that Black English has a set of distinct linguistic features which are unique to it thus establishing it as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English.

After a brief review of the related literature, the thesis will present a more detailed summary and analysis of the important research conducted in the field of Black English. The thesis will examine such aspects as the historical background of the topic, the scientific arguments for and against the acceptance of Black English as a legitimate dialect and finally the policy implications of Black English.

The most important phase of the thesis will be the testing of the hypothesis involving an examination and critical evaluation of the evidence presented by the two groups in order to determine whether or not there is enough conclusive evidence in the literature to qualify Black English as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard

American English.

Because so much of the controversy in the field of linguistics concerning the existence of Black English centers on whether or not it is a separate dialect of Standard American English, some linguistic terms must be carefully defined before any review of the literature can be attempted.

(1) Phonology

Phonology is the systematic study of the sound patterns of language, either language in general in terms of "universal" phonology or of an individual language (Dillard,1972:302). Thus the phonology of the language includes the inventory of basic 'phonemes' (those segments which are used to differentiate between the meanings of words) and the permissible sequences of these units. The relationship between the phonemic representations of words and the phonetic representation is determined by general phonological rules (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:93-94).

(2) Morphology

Language involves the production of sentences with meaning, thus the study of linguistic meaning is called 'semantics'. The most basic units of meaning in a language are 'morphemes' which are combined to form words.

Traditionally the combination of morphemes in the construction of words has been called 'morphology'. A linguist who studies the morphology of a language must define all morphemes, their pronounciations, their meanings and how they may be combined (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:30).

(3) Grammar and Syntax

The grammar of a language represents the speaker's linguistic knowledge including his knowledge of 'phonetics' (the sounds of the language), 'phonology' (the sound system of the language) and 'semantics' (the meanings of morphemes, words and sentences). The syntactical rules of the language determine what morphemes are combined into larger grammatical units to get intended meanings and how these morphemes are to be combined (Fromkin and Rodman, 1974:136-137).

(4) Dialects

According to Fromkin and Rodman, the language of a group of people may show regular variations apart from individual speech differences or 'idiolects' from that used by other groups. Thus English spoken in different geographical regions and different social groups shows 'systematic' differences and such groups are said to speak different dialects of the same language (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:257-258).

The study of regional or geographical dialects is called 'Linguistic Geography' in which dialects in the United States are mapped according to phonological and morphological differences and similarities. The study of social dialects or 'Urban Dialectology' investigates linguistic differences within a speech community which may act as indicators of social class or ethnic identity (Eastman,1975:121).

McDavid (1971) feels that a great deal of nonsense has been written about American dialects, all of which in his view, could have been avoided if one simple fact were recognized, namely that one can expect differences in the environment to be reflected in those differences of speech called dialects. McDavid asserts that the belief that there is some 'mystical standard' devoid of all regional association is representative of some of the inaccurate and nonsensical statements made by some linguists.

McDavid points out that even today there are some people who think that a dialect is something archaic and strange. McDavid defines a dialect simply as being a habitual variety of a language, either regional or social, which is set off from all other habitual varieties by a unique combination of language features: words and meanings, grammatical forms, phrase structures, pronounciations and patterns of stress and intonation.

McDavid stresses that no dialect is simply 'good' or 'bad' in itself; its prestige comes only from the prestige of the people who speak it and not from any inherent superiority. Every dialect is in itself a legitimate form of the language and is thus worthy of serious study (McDavid, 1971:205-225).

Dillard (1972) defines 'dialect' to be the collective linguistic patterns of a sub-group of the speakers of a language. Dillard however disagrees with dialectologists like McDavid who claim that 'dialect' refers to a set of linguistic features which are delimited geographically. Thus Dillard feels that the 'regional approach' of many dialectologists which stresses the geographic factor in language variation is too restrictive (Dillard,1972:300).

Smitherman (1977) argues that all languages have variations which are properly called dialects and as such are not to be considered as inferior or substandard. Thus since everyone speaks a variation of 'the language', everybody can be said to be speaking a dialect. According to Smitherman, what is termed the 'real' language exists only in the abstract. Linguists can only refer to or observe the "specific manifestations of speakers, all of whom represent varying and legitimate dialects of English" (Smitherman,1977:191-192).

Smitherman states that the number of dialects and subdialects varies depending on the language and method of classification, for example by geographical groupings representing the different regions of the United States or by social or ethnic groupings. However Smitherman makes it clear that "all English dialect groups and subgroups represent varying and legitimate dialects of the English language" and that all of "the speakers can be said to be speaking the 'real' English language" (Smitherman,1977: 192-193).

To help explain the question of how these different English dialect groups communicate with and understand each other, Smitherman uses the modern linguistic concepts of 'deep' and 'surface' structure. All languages may be said to consist of both deep and surface structures. The idea of deep structure is "an abstract, intuitive concept" that is your most basic level of understanding of what someone says and is based on your understanding and knowledge of your native language (Smitherman,1977:193). Through ordered linguistic rules, the deep structures of a language are transformed into surface structures. Because all speakers share these deep structures, they are able to understand each other and communication is possible. As Smitherman explains, "shared deep structures is what helps us to understand one another even when surface structure does not indicate precisely what people mean" (Smitherman,

1977:193; Fromkin and Rodman,1974:160).

Since all languages consist of dialect variations and since the 'real' language is an abstraction, Smitherman attempts to answer the question: Where does the idea of a national standard language come from? She argues that one particular dialect of a language may become elevated over the other variations due to an arbitrary decision by the speakers of the language. The decision may not be truly 'arbitrary' however since the dialect that becomes the standard is usually the same dialect which is spoken by those with economic and political power.

Because one of the most important linguistic principles states that every language is systematic and represents rule-governed behavior on the part of its speakers and since dialects are the real, concrete reflections of the abstract language, it follows that all dialect variations represent rules and patterned regularities of speakers (Smitherman,1977:195).

For the purpose of this thesis, a dialect will be said to be separate from the standard language form if it has a set of distinct linguistic features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical which are unique to it.

(5) Standard American English

Even though every language is a composite of dialects, many people still view language as if it were a well-defined, fixed system with various dialects diverging from this norm. A particular dialect of a language may enjoy such prestige that it eventually becomes falsely equated with the language itself and thus becomes the 'standard dialect' (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:257; and Smitherman,1977:188-189).

William Stewart claims that language undergoes in the history of many cultures, a process of 'standardization', defined as the "codification and acceptance within a community of users of a formal set of norms defining correct usage", and it usually finds expression in a so-called standard dialect or accent (Stewart,1968:531-545).

Some linguists suggest that the prestige speech style or 'standard' gained acceptance as the most pleasing form of the language simply because of cultural norms. The 'Imposed Norm Hypothesis' claims that a 'standard' code attains its prestige from the status of the social group which happens to speak in this manner. As Fishman (1972) points out, the formal acceptance of such a standard variety of a language is usually encouraged by such agencies as the government, the educational system and the mass media.

Therefore, because of social pressures upon people to emulate the 'standard', it has come to be regarded as the superior form of the language. According to this argument, the emergence of a particular variety of speech or language as 'standard' is arbitrary and does not indicate linguistic superiority over other forms (Giles and Powesland,1975:11-12).

Thus a 'standard dialect' is in no linguistic way superior to any other dialect. The standard dialect may have social functions but it is not more expressive, logical, complex or more regular than any other dialect in the language (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:258).

The traditional linguistic view, as expressed by Fries (1971:313-316), defines Standard American English as the set of language habits originally derived from an older London English but differentiated from it by its independent development in the United States. Standard American English is 'standard' not because it is more correct or more beautiful than other varieties of English, but only because it is the particular type of English which is used to conduct the important affairs of American life and because it is used by the 'socially acceptable' groups of important American communities.

Francis (1971) also reflects the more traditional

view of Standard American English with his division of American English into three categories: (1) Educated or Standard English, (2) Vernacular English and (3) Uneducated English. These classifications of English are based upon the social and educational levels of the particular users of the language (Francis,1971:326-335).

In recent years, however, many linguists have challenged the traditional views regarding Standard American English. Stephenson (1977:211-218) and Meyers (1977:219-224) claim that Standard American English does not exist; it is impossible to describe and thus should be discarded. Meyers feels that the traditional definition of Standard American English which asserts that it is the language used by 'educated' people, that it commands respect and esteem and that it provides social and professional prestige, is inaccurate and misleading. Meyers argues that the only definition of Standard American English which makes sense is: "Standard American English consists of those parts of phonology, syntax and vocabulary that all dialects hold in common" (Meyers,1977:219-224).

Many linguists now feel that there is no one definition of Standard American English but rather that the language is comprised of a variety of forms. Thus a 'non-standard' dialect form is not at all 'sub-standard' but

is merely a different variety of the language, having its own complex and equally rich rule system (Baratz,1969:116; Stewart,1970:351-379; and Smitherman,1977:185-191).

From the descriptions given above, it must be clear that the terms 'dialect' and 'Standard American English' cannot be defined conclusively since among linguists there is no consensus regarding their true meaning. However, for the purpose of this thesis, 'dialect' will be defined as the habitual, collective linguistic patterns of a group of speakers which has a unique combination of language features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical. 'Standard American English' will be defined as the variety of English which has achieved official recognition in terms of having written, grammatical descriptions both in dictionaries as well as printed works.

(6) Pidgin

A pidgin language is a 'marginal language' in which specific features of two languages are used by different cultural groups in order to communicate with one another. The two groups will develop a rudimentary language with a few lexical items and simple, clear-cut grammatical rules. The distinguishing characteristic of pidgin languages is that no one learns them as native speakers (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:266-269).

(7) Creole

A creole language is a pidgin which is learned by a speaker as a first language. A creole develops when a speech community comes to rely entirely upon a pidgin, using it exclusively and passing it on to their children (Fromkin and Rodman,1974:266-269).

# CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Because the thesis will examine in detail the available evidence regarding the linguistic uniqueness of Black English, this section will provide only a brief review of the related literature in order to provide an overview of the research done in the field of Black English.

During the first part of the twentieth century, many scholars supported the view that American Blacks possessed no culture, that as a group with 'inferior' mental and physical characteristics, they were forced to copy both the culture and language of Whites. Racists such as Gonzales (1922), Dowd (1926) and Tillinghast (1902) argued that because of "clumsy tongues", "thick lips", "laziness" and "childlike mentalities", Blacks could never hope to master the 'superior' Standard American English.

Unfortunately, the inevitable hypothesis of the genetic 'inferiority' of Blacks was not abandoned by all modern scholars since Arthur Jensen (1969) continues to argue that the failure of school programs to teach Black children to read resulted from the children's basic genetic inferiority and not from a 'culturally deprived' environment

as Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) had proposed.

Because the study of Black-White speech differences was often associated with racist views, some scholars who hoped to emphasize the positive potential of Black Americans chose to minimize or deny altogether the existence of Black English. However many scholars and liberal educators found themselves supporting the doctrine of the 'mental deficiency' of Blacks as a result of their denial of any cultural differences between Blacks and Whites. In the name of equality and integration, many scholars were forced to accept the mental and cultural deficiency stigma placed upon Black Americans by the racists.

The work of linguists Hans Kurath (1949) and G. P. Krapp (1924) refuted claims that Black Americans had made any significant contributions to the development of American English. Because these two scholars denied the possibility that Black American speech was influenced by African languages, they placed Blacks in the role of imitators of Whites, thus any differences in the speech forms of Blacks and Whites was attributed to the deficiencies of Blacks. When such scholars downplayed the role of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Black Americans, their only alternative was to view the speech of Black Americans as being the result of mental and cultural 'deficiencies'.

Basil Bernstein (1962,1964,1970,1971) and Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) influenced many of the school programs of the early sixties which were designed to provide the Black children of inner city schools with the verbal stimulation it was felt they lacked at home. These scholars believed that Black children possessed no language at all thus it was the job of the school system to replace all previous speech behavior with Standard American English.

The possibility of Black-White speech differences has also been a charged issue for linguists who are interested in American English dialects. The implications of the issue of Black English for linguists have nothing to do with the physical or mental characteristics of Blacks but rather with the dynamics of social and cultural patterns which affect speech. Research conducted by McDavid and McDavid (1951), Williamson (1970,1971), Davis (1969) and Dunlap (1977) denies the existence of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English. These dialectologists believe that the speech of Blacks is more regional and Southern than 'racial'. They argue that no particular language form is used exclusively by Black Americans.

After the 1951 article by McDavid and McDavid was published denying the existence of Black-White speech differences, little research was done on the topic of Black

English until the 1960's when three linguists with strong backgrounds in Creole languages began to criticize the traditional view of dialectology. Bailey (1968,1971), Stewart (1968,1970,1971a,1971b) and Dillard (1968,1971, 1972,1975) argued that Black English was originally derived from a creole language which was similar to some of the Creoles spoken in the Caribbean Islands.

Because of the pioneering work of Bailey, Stewart and Dillard, other linguists have furthered the investigation of the origin and uniqueness of Black English. Linguists such as Labov (1968,1972), Loflin (1971), Wolfram (1969), Fasold (1969,1972), Fasold and Wolfram (1970), Turner (1949,1971a,1971b), Dalby (1971, 1972) and Smitherman (1977) have recognized the uniqueness of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English. They have also recognized: (1) the African influence on the present speech forms of Black Americans, (2) the pidgin and creole origin of Black English, (3) the influence of Black English on Standard American English, (4) the gradual de-creolization of Black English and (5) the unique phonological, morphological and grammatical features of Black English.

The importance of Black English extends for beyond the confines of pure linguistics since it reflects not only the linguistic heritage of Black Americans but

their cultural history in Africa and the New World as well. Authors such as West (1975), Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956) recognize the constraints language imposes on thought and experience however their views were often twisted by racists who sought to prove that Blacks lacked any distinctive culture or language and thus were mentally and physically inferior to Whites. However other scholars such as Myrdal (1944), Stampp (1956), Glazer and Moynihan (1963) and E. Franklin Frazier (1957) were not racist but nonetheless through their insistence that Black Americans lacked any distinctive culture or language of their own, deprived Blacks of their African heritage.

During the 1940's a few scholars began to recognize the importance of oral life in Black America and the survival qualities developed in Black English to cope with a world of slavery and oppression. Herskovits (1936,1941) led the way towards a new understanding and appreciation of the African heritage of Black American culture and language, followed by Keil (1966), Dalby (1972), Brown (1972), Hannerz (1972), Holt (1972), Haskins and Butts (1973), Smitherman (1977), Williams (1976), Kochman (1972), Mitchell-Kernan (1972), Abrahams (1962,1964,1972,1974) and Burling (1973).

Black English has also been accepted by many scholars as well as parents because of a growing concern

over the education of Black children in public schools. Many Black children have been labeled as 'learning-disabled' or 'mentally-retarded' because of their difficulty in learning Standard American English. Scholars such as Smitherman (1977), Stewart (1971a), Labov (1970), Baratz (1973), Baratz and Baratz (1972), Baratz and Shuy (1969) and Fasold and Shuy (1970) argue that the Black children's inability to learn Standard American English has nothing to do with either mental or physical deficiencies but with the negative attitude of their teachers towards their use of Black English. These linguists do not mean to suggest that all Black children speak Black English but only that those who do are speaking a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English and thus should not be ridiculed as speaking 'inferior or bad' English. The issue is now how to overcome this negative attitude on the part of teachers towards the use of Black English and how to use the children's knowledge of Black English to help them to learn the basics of Standard American English.

# CHAPTER III

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BLACK ENGLISH CONTROVERSY

The historical background of the topic of the existence or non-existence of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English must inevitably reflect the basic racist views of the many scholars who deny that Black Americans have either a unique language or culture of their own.

Typical of the racist view toward the speech of Black Americans is this quote by Gonzales (1922):

> Slovenly and careless of speech, they (Negroes) seized upon the peasant English used by some of the early settlers...wrapped their clumsy tongues about it as well as they could and it issued through their flat noses and their thick lips as so workable a form of speech that it was gradually adopted by other slaves... with characteristic laziness, these Gullah Negroes took short cuts to the ears of their auditors, using as few words as possible, sometimes making a gender serve for three, one tense for several and totally disregarding singular and plural numbers.
>
> (Gonzales,1922:10)

As McDavid and McDavid (1951:3-17) have shown, scholars who attempt to study Black American speech must first abandon two widely held superstitions: (1) one must indicate that there is no speech form identifiable as of

Black origin solely on the basis of Black physical characteristics and (2) one must show that it is probable that some speech forms of Blacks -- even of Whites -- may be derived from an African cultural background by the normal processes of cultural transmission.

The necessity of refuting such racist beliefs is usually not required for the study of other American minority group's use of English. For such groups it is generally assumed by the public that all linguistic patterns are culturally transmitted. Thus where a group with a foreign language background has been speaking a divergent variety of English for several generations in an overwhelmingly English-speaking area there is nothing in their speech which cannot be explained on the basis of the culture contacts between the speakers of the two languages.

However in forming judgments concerning the speech of Black Americans, the process has been reversed. Thus the cultural transmission of speech forms of African origin has been denied by some scholars and the explanation of Black dialects has been given in terms of a "simple child-like mind" or of "physical inability" to pronounce the sounds of "socially-approved English".

The most widely publicized arguments for the

allegedly "child-like mentality" of Blacks and their general racial inferiority are those of Jerome Dowd (1926), J. A. Tillinghast (1902) and Howard Odum (1910). Odum writes:

> Back of the child and affecting him both directly and indirectly, are the characteristics of the race. The Negro has little home conscience or love of home... He has no pride of ancestry... has few ideals... little conception of the meaning of virtue, truth, honor, manhood, integrity. He is shiftless, untidy and indolent... the migratory or roving tendency seems to be a natural one to him... The Negro shirks details and difficult tasks.. He does not know the value of his word or the meaning of words in general... The Negro is improvident and extravagant... he lacks initiative; he is often dishonest and untruthful. He is over-religious and superstitious... his mind does not conceive of faith in humanity - he does not comprehend it.
>
> (Odum,1910:224)

The linguistic heritage attributed to Blacks in the United States by racists was that of a slave transplanted from Africa who was physically and mentally capable of only speaking an unintelligible, babyish gibberish. In order to adapt to his new home, the slave slowly began to learn a semi-civilized method of communication. His child-like mentality however prevented him from learning 'proper' English. Authors like Dowd, Tillinghast and Odum concluded that "the murderous attempt to articulate the refinements of the English phonological system through thick lips and oversized tongues, coupled with the inability to deal with the sophistication of the grammatical system, engendered a

strangely strangled brand of English" (Dunn,1976:105).

Lest anyone think that the 'inevitable hypothesis' of Black genetic inferiority has been abandoned by modern scholars, Arthur Jensen in the Harvard Educational Review (1969) proves otherwise. Jensen believes that the 'verbal-cultural deprivation' theorists such as Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) who attempt to teach Black school children to read Standard American English fail miserably simply because such children are incapable of learning. Jensen concludes that "the preponderance of the evidence is... less consistent with a strictly environmental hypothesis than with the genetic hypothesis" (Jensen,1969: 82). Thus Jensen asserts that racism, the belief in the genetic inferiority of Blacks, is the most correct view in light of the present 'evidence' regarding the intellectual abilities of Blacks. In Jensen's view, preschool programs such as those of Bereiter and Engelmann designed to improve reading skills are doomed to failure.

Jensen argues that the middle class population is differentiated from the working class White and Black population in the ability for 'cognitive or conceptual learning', which Jensen calls Level II intelligence as against mere 'associative learning' or Level I intelligence:

> ...certain neural structures must also be available for Level II abilities to develop and these are conceived

> of as being different from the neural structures underlying Level I. The genetic factors involved in each of these types of ability are presumed to become differentially distributed in the population as a function of social class, since Level II has been most important for scholastic performance under the traditional methods of instruction.
>
> (Jensen,1969:114)

Jensen (1969) classified Black children who fail in school as 'slow learners' and 'mentally retarded' and urged that we find out how much of their 'retardation' is due to environmental factors and how much is due to more basic biological factors.

Thus the historical background of the topic of Black English reveals that a group of racist scholars headed by Dowd (1926), Tillinghast (1902), Odum (1910) and Jensen (1969) deny the existence of Black English on the basis that Blacks in general do not even have culture. The racist view that Blacks are mentally and physically inferior to Whites and that the speech form of Blacks is merely a sub-standard version of 'proper' White English was to exert enormous influence upon the scientific investigation of Black English. Many scholars failed to fully explore the historical development of Black English because of their belief that Black Americans contributed nothing to the linguistic heritage of the United States. This "scientific blindspot" prevented such linguists from viewing the

significant African influence upon not only the speech of Black but White Americans as well.

# CHAPTER IV

## SCIENTIFIC ARGUMENTS

The possibility of 'ethnic correlates' of speech behavior has always been an issue charged with emotion and great controversy. For some non-linguists and linguists alike, the possibility of Black-White speech differences has often been interpreted to have a direct relation to the physical and mental characteristics of Blacks; the admission of speech differences meant that Blacks had certain 'inherent' difficulties in learning Standard American English. Because of the correlation of speech differences with racist views, those who wanted to emphasize the positive potential of Black Americans chose to minimize any differences that might exist between Black and White speech. This group felt that any apparent Black-White speech differences could be attributed to unequal opportunities for Blacks to learn Standard American English in American society.

The possibility of Black-White speech differences has also been a charged issue for linguists who are interested in American English dialects. The implications of the issue on this level have nothing to do with the physical or mental characteristics of Blacks but with the

historical origin of varieties of English used in the United States and with the dynamics of cultural and social patterns which affect speech. Linguists agree that the particular speech variety which is acquired by an ethnic group has nothing to do with the mental or physical attributes of the group; furthermore all language varieties are highly structural and systematic. Thus as Wolfram points out, the "question for the linguist is whether language usage in Black culture is sufficiently different from other American groups so as to result in a language variety quite distinct from any other American English dialect "(Wolfram,1971:139-140).

The scientific linguistic arguments concerning the existence or non-existence of Black English as a separate, legitimate dialect of Standard American English center on the identification of distinct linguistic features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical which are unique to it. The arguments fall into two categories: A) Linguists Who Deny the Existence of Black English and B) Linguists Who Support the Existence of Black English.

A) Linguists Who Deny the Existence of Black English

Among linguists, the dialectologists were the first to seriously consider the possibility of Black-White speech

differences and on the whole, their position was to deny that such differences existed (Wolfram,1971:140). According to Dillard, accurate linguistic data concerning Black English was not available until the early 1960's because traditional dialectologists were concerned exclusively with patterns of migration from the British Isles and with the spread of British regional features throughout the United States (Dillard,1972:3).

Many recent scholars charge that the work of the early dialectologists concerning Black language and communication is limited in perspective and reveals either a deliberate omission or ignorance of Black cultural norms (Baratz and Baratz,1972:3-16; Holt,1972a:152-159; Smitherman,1977).

The major controversy in the field of Black English exists between the group of traditional regional dialectologists such as Kurath, McDavid and Williamson and linguists such as Stewart, Bailey and Dillard. Those dialectologists who are associated with the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, (Kurath,1936) principally Kurath and the McDavids, prefer to speak of statistical differences in the speech of Blacks rather than inherent, structural differences. This group encourages linguists who support the existence of Black English to study the regional

evidence in the Linguistic Atlas materials and closely related projects. They argue that in the Linguistic Atlas, all 'forty features' which are said to be unique to Black English can also be documented from American White speech (Shores,1977:178).

Hans Kurath rejects the idea of a separate dialect called Black English:

> By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language of the White man of his locality or area and of his education... As far as the speech of uneducated Negroes is concerned, it differs little from that of the illiterate White; that is, it exhibits the same regional and local varieties as that of the simple White folk.
>
> (Kurath,1949:6)

Kurath and Krapp state that Blacks did not make any significant contributions to the development of English in America. According to the Kurath-Krapp hypothesis, all traces of African influence upon the speech of Black Americans disappeared once the 'low culture' of the slaves came into contact with the 'higher culture' of the Whites (Krapp,1924; and Kurath,1949).

The most careful investigation of Black-White speech relationships by a dialectologist was done by Raven and Virginia McDavid:

> First the overwhelming bulk of the material of American Negro speech--- in vocabulary as well as in grammar and phonology--- is as one would expect, borrowed from the speech of White groups with which Negroes come in

> contact. Sometimes these contacts have been such that Negroes simply speak the local variety of Standard English. It is also likely that many relic forms from English dialects are better preserved in the speech of some American Negro groups than in American White speech... after all, the preservation of relic forms is made possible by geographical and cultural isolation.
>
> (McDavid and McDavid,1951:1)

The views of Kurath and McDavid can be summarized in the work of Juanita Williamson who believes that the speech of Blacks does not differ substantially from that of White Americans of the same economic and educational level (Williamson,1971a:583-595).

Williamson argues that "Black English is more regional than racial and more Southern than Black" and that the so-called forty distinctive features of Black English proposed by Fasold and Wolfram (1970) are "neither Black nor White, just American" (Williamson,1971b:173).

According to Dillard, Williamson is "a hypersensitive Black academic trained in dialect geography ... who was incensed by statements about Black English (or Nonstandard Negro English) from the very beginning" (Dillard,1975:176-177).

Dillard believes that when Williamson realized that the records of the Linguistic Atlas did not disprove the existence of a specifically Black-correlated dialect, she

set about to collect such materials from White Southerners.

Williamson's most famous article, "Selected Features of Speech: Black and White" (1970:420-423) was a rebuttal to an article published by Beryl Loftman Bailey called "Towards a New Perspective in Negro Dialectology" (1971:421-427; originally published in 1965). In this article Bailey strongly attacks dialectologists like the McDavids as being very unenlightened in their denial of the unique Black speech forms. Bailey suggests that the Southern Negro dialect differs from other Southern speech because its "deep structure" is different, having its origins in some proto-creole grammatical structure. Bailey analyzes a literary text, The Cool World by Warren Miller (1959) for the unique Black English speech features of its main character "Dude".

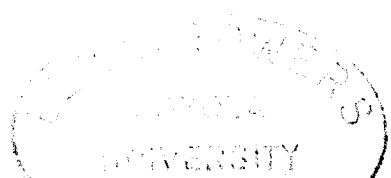
Williamson does not believe that the speech of Whites and Blacks differ, thus she strongly disagrees with Bailey and attempts in her article to compare the Black Southern speech of "Dude", the character analyzed by Bailey (1971) with that of "Paul Valentine", a White Southern Ku Klux Klan member as detailed in an article published in 1968 entitled, "Look Out Liberals, Wallace Power Gonna Get You".

Williamson analyzes the four linguistic features claimed to be unique to Black English in the Bailey article

(1971): (1) zero copula, (2) the marked forms which are "past and future", (3) the use of ain't and don't as negative markers and (4) the occurrence of there and their as they.

Williamson concludes that the Southern speech patterns of Blacks and Whites are similar but she does not go into the question of how these speech patterns became similar, in other words, who influenced whom? Dillard, in his criticisms of Williamson's conclusions feels that her materials, contrary to her original intentions, corroborate "the influence of Black English (especially nineteenth century Plantation creole) on Southern White English", but that many of her examples are meaningless since "they reveal the not very surprising fact that White as well as Black nonstandard speakers use ain't and don't" (Dillard,1975:176-177).

Lawrence Davis, a linguist who was not directly associated with the Linguistic Atlas yet who based his criticism upon it, published an article in 1969 entitled "Dialect Research: Mythology and Reality". This article greatly criticizes linguists such as Beryl Loftman Bailey and William Stewart who support the existence of Black English. Davis believes that they conducted research and arrived at conclusions which are not based upon reliable



testing and analysis. Davis strongly opposes linguists such as Bailey and Stewart who propose that Black English has a creole substratum which gives it a different underlying structure from that of dialects spoken by Whites.

Davis admits that the creolization process did occur on the islands off the coast of Georgia and the Carolinas with Blacks who speak the Gullah dialect; however Davis questions whether all the dialects spoken by American Blacks went through such a process.

In a review of the work of Bailey (1971) and Stewart (1971b), Davis summarizes some of the proposed unique linguistic features of Black English:

(1) clear /l/ in prevocalic position

(2) bilabial aspirants, /ɸ/ and /β/ replaced by /v/ and /f/ respectively

(3) /b/, /d/ and /g/ as fully voiced imploded stops

(4) neutralization of final /m/ and /n/ with a resulting nasalization of the preceding vowel

(5) /f/ and /v/ as bilabial spirants

(6) absence of the copula (the verb to be)

(7) absence of the possessive morpheme

(8) was used for the completed past and been for the past, up to and including the present

(9) be for durative aspect or future and gonna for the conditional future

(10) they and you for their and you, respectively

Davis claims that, according to the Linguistic Atlas data, many of these features are present in the speech of Whites and Blacks alike. Thus Davis concludes that linguists like Bailey and Stewart have taken the linguistic facts of Black speech out of context in order to show divergences; they tend to place undue emphasis on differences, while ignoring areas of similarity (Davis, 1969:332-337).

The work done by dialectologists like Kurath, the McDavids, Williamson and Davis on Black speech forms was criticized in 1956 by Glenna Ruth Pickford in an article entitled, "American Linguistic Geography: A Sociological Appraisal" (Pickford,1975:37-56).

Pickford argues that "the surveys of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada and related studies are not on the highest level of scientific research. They lack significance, validity and reliability"(Pickford, 1975:53). Pickford also states that the surveys of linguistic geography "distort the picture of American speech by selecting communities, informants and data which magnify the degree, and the importance, of regional variations" and thus "expended vast energies in order to supply answers to unimportant, if not non-existent questions" (Pickford,1975: 43;38).

Thus Pickford criticizes the way in which the Linguistic Atlas dialectologists deal with the populations studied and the way in which they overlook complex American migratory patterns and their consequences.

Many linguists have questioned the work of dialectologists like Kurath, Williamson and Davis because of their faulty theoretical positions as well as their poor sampling procedures. Such dialectologists overemphasized geographic differences at the expense of the many other factors involved in language variation (Dillard,1975:159). These scholars view the speech of Black Americans within the narrow framework which assumes that British dialects migrated to the New World, became American dialects and in turn distributed their features regionally throughout the country.

Another linguist who denies the existence of Black English is Howard Dunlap who published an article entitled, "Some Methodological Problems in Recent Investigations of the Ø Copula and Invariant Be" (1977:151-160). Dunlap discusses some of the many sociolinguistic studies done of American English which have "focused upon a few selected features of phonology, morphology and syntax in the speech of Northern urban dwellers of African ancestry" (Dunlap, 1977:151) and criticizes the fact that a number of writers such as Dillard (1972) and Labov, et al (1968) have

identified Black English as a social dialect which differs not only radically but consistently from Standard English and as a dialect which is restricted in its use exclusively by Blacks.

Dunlap cautions against the danger of absolute statements which "attempt to establish Black English as a variety of language distinctively and totally separate from White English" (Dunlap,1977:152).

Dunlap seeks to illustrate some problems which he feels are apparent in some recent sociolinguistic research in Black English, by considering data collected in ninety-six interviews with native Atlanta fifth grade speakers (half Black, half White) in the Atlanta, Georgia public schools. The six schools at which the interviews were taped represent upper middle class, lower middle class and lower class neighborhoods, with one Black and one White school at each socio-economic level.

One aspect of the speech of "uneducated Blacks" which Dunlap focuses upon in his criticism is their characteristic use of the verb Be:

(1) the omission of the copula in the present tense (My daddy Ø a janitor; He Ø not at home right now)

(2) the use of the so-called 'invariant be' for repeated occurrence (When I get home from school each day, my mama be at work)

Dunlap states that, based upon his own research, there are three basic disagreements which he has with most of the recent literature concerning the speech of Blacks.

The first disagreement concerns the work done on the use of the verb /Be/ in the speech of Blacks by William Labov. In A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City, Labov formulated his theory of the inherent variability of the English copula: "Wherever Standard English can contract, Non-Standard Negro English can delete /is/ and /are/ and vice-versa; wherever Standard English cannot contract, Non-Standard Negro English cannot delete /is/ and /are/ and vice-versa"(Labov, et al,1968:185).

Dunlap feels that Labov's definition of 'contraction' as the "removal of an initial schwa before a lone consonant as in /am/, /is/, /are/" (Labov, et al, 1968:188), presents problems for an analysis of the fifth grade native Atlanta children's speech. In Dunlap's view, if the three parallel utterances: /"I am here"/, /"He is here"/, /"You are here"/, are produced in a normal conversational manner, the parallel results in the speech of the Atlanta informants are usually, "I'm /am/ here", "He's /hiz/ here" and "You're /juəjuə / here". Dunlap asserts that according to Labov's definition of contraction and his ordered rules, only the first two of these examples

are true contractions. The third example, with the vocalization of /r/, is not a contraction but an altered full form. Dunlap argues that "Labov's contracted form /jur/ is not typical of the speech, Black or White, of the Atlanta fifth graders who were interviewed" (Dunlap,1977: 153). Thus because for most of these speakers the full form of /are/ is /ɑəɑ /, without /r/ and therefore without the possibility of contraction according to Labov's rules, Dunlap replaces the term contraction with the term 'reduced form' in the analysis of data from the Atlanta study (Dunlap,1977:153).

The second disagreement concerns William Labov's classification regarding Black English: the treatment of the forms /Is / (it's); /ðæs / (that's); /dæs / (that's), and /hʍs / (what's). According to Labov's rules, the forms /Is / (it's) and /ðæs / (that's) are not contracted forms parallel to /Its / (it's) and /ðæts / (that's) in which the /t/ has been assimilated to the /s/; rather they represent deletion of the verb.

Dunlap asserts that the Atlanta data does not support Labov in his finding that this assimilation (which Labov regards as deletion) is almost categorical among lower class Black speakers. Thus Dunlap claims that "Labov's classification of /Is / (it's) and /ðæs/ (that's) as deleted forms parallel to /Ø/, as in /"It my

daddy"/ and /"That my daddy"/, does violence to the native speaker's intuitive feelings about language" (Dunlap,1977: 155).

The third disagreement concerns the treatment of the so-called 'invariant be'. Dunlap quotes Fasold and Wolfram (1970):

> The use of the invariant be in Negro dialect has two explanations: deleted will or would and distributive be ... with a meaning something like object or event distributed intermittently in time.
>
> (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:66-67)

Dunlap claims that data from the Atlanta study "provide numerous instances that call into question the accuracy of Fasold's and Wolfram's limited definition of 'invariant be'"(Dunlap,1977:155). It is asserted that the 'invariant be' form is used not only for repetitive action and for the future or conditional occurrences with /will/ or /would/ omitted as Fasold states, but also for the present moment and for a past occurrence. Dunlap stresses the point that the Atlanta data shows that the 'invariant be' has wider use than has formerly been acknowledged but that its use is not categorically required as a simple present tense or non-tense form in the speech of Black children.

Dunlap states that linguists such as Labov , Fasold and Wolfram should refrain from making exclusive statements

which in his opinion "are unsupported by large quantities of facts from observed data" (Dunlap,1977:157).

### B) Linguists Who Support the Existence of Black English

According to Dillard, significant research on Black English is almost entirely a product of the 1960's. In this decade, a group of linguists freed of preconceptions about the geographic origin of American dialects, have shown that Black English "is different in grammar (syntax) from the Standard American English of the mainstream White culture". This group of linguists, many of whom have strong backgrounds in Creole languages, maintain that "there are sources for varieties of English elsewhere than in the British regional dialects" (Dillard,1972:6).

Walter Wolfram suggests three possible reasons, in addition to those already suggested by Pickford (1975), for the failure on the part of the traditional dialectologists to observe Black-White speech differences.

First, the traditional dialectologists may have failed to observe Black-White speech differences because the focus of dialect research in the United States has traditionally been upon the homogeneity of geographical regions as they related to settlement history. The emphasis

therefore was on similarities rather than differences between informants in a given locale.

A second reason can be attributed to the general design of American dialectology questionnaires which have tended to focus on vocabulary and phonological differences, the areas in which Black and White speech are most similar (although not identical). The analytical method of dialectologists also concentrated on single items for the purpose of charting isoglasses rather than the elicitation of items for descriptive purposes, a practice which would greatly affect the interpretation of data. For example, if the focus of a survey is only on the existence of copula absence among Southern Blacks and Whites, it is very simple to overlook the subtle but important ways in which it operates differently for the two groups. In Wolfram's view, only studies which examine the consequences of surface forms in terms of a detailed and adequate description of the entire system can reveal some of these Black-White speech differences.

Finally, the type of informants chosen by the dialectologists must be considered as a contributing factor to their failure to recognize Black-White speech differences. An ideal informant, from the view of the dialect geographer, is an older lifetime resident of a particular locale. However some features which are unique to Black English are

predominantly found among the children. It appears that as Blacks and Whites grow older, their speech is more likely to converge (Wolfram,1971:155-156).

After the 1951 article by Raven and Virginia McDavid was published denying the existence of Black English, very little research was done on the topic until the early 1960's when three linguists, with strong backgrounds in Creole languages, began to harshly criticize the traditional view of dialectology. Beryl Loftman Bailey (1968,1971), William Stewart (1968,1970,1971a,1971b) and J. L. Dillard (1968,1971,1972,1975) insist that the speech of American Blacks shows more of a relationship with some Caribbean Creoles than it does with English dialects. Thus these three linguists have opened up the dispute again over Black-White speech differences since they argue that so-called Black English was originally derived from a creole language which was similar to some of the creoles spoken in the Caribbean Islands.

Beryl Loftman Bailey, in two articles, "Toward a New Perspective in Negro Dialectology" (1971;originally published 1965) and "Some Aspects of the Impact of Linguistics on Language Teaching in Disadvantaged Communities" (1968:570-577), maintains that "Southern Negro dialect differs from other Southern speech because its deep structure is different" and that it has its origin in some

Proto-Creole grammatical structure (Bailey,1971:422).

Bailey strongly attacks Raven McDavid's version of Black speech as being "unenlightened" as well as "completely nonstructural and linguistically naive". Bailey asserts that "the American Negro dialect has not until recently been granted the autonomy which structuralism so freely accorded to exotic languages and dialects in other parts of the world... it has remained the stigmatized and unwanted 'poor brother' of Standard English". Thus it is maintained that only "blind ethnocentrism" has prevented dialectologists from looking further for the real facts underlying the grammatical structure of Black dialect (Bailey,1971:422).

In Bailey's article (1971) the Black Southern speech represented in the character "Dude" in the novel The Cool World by Warren Miller (1959), is examined in relation to the typological characteristics of some Caribbean creoles.

Bailey argues that regardless of the surface resemblances of Black dialect to other dialects of English, one must look into the system itself for "an explanation of seeming confusion of persons and tenses" which dialectologists like the McDavids (1951) attribute to the simplicity or peculiarity of Blacks (Bailey,1971:422-423).

An analysis of "Dude's" Southern Black dialect reveals:

(1) an absence of copulas

(2) marked forms which are past and future

(3) the use of ain't and don't as negation markers

(4) there and their appear as they

(1) The Absence of Copula in Southern Black Dialect Occurred:

a) Before adjectives

"I sure they aroun"

"I glad he gone"

"Lu Ann fast asleep in the big bed"

b) Before Nominals

"She a big woman not skinny like my mother"

"He one of us all right"

"Here come Duke Custis. He a cold killer"

c) Before Adverbs and Prepositional Phrases

"I in a big hurry"

"I with you Duke man, he say"

"It a place where you can go when you in trouble"

d) After the Filler Subjects "There" and "It"

"It black dark and I can't hear only they breathin and the shuffelen of shoes"

"It the truth, she say"

"They a lot of people on this street have stomach trouble"

Bailey provides a simple comparison of the phrase structure rules of non-verbal prediction (those predications which do not make use of a verb) in (1) English (2) Jamaican Creole and (3) Cool World Southern Black dialect:

| ENGLISH | JAMAICAN CREOLE | COOL WORLD BLACK DIALECT |
|---|---|---|
| P→be + {adj. / nom. / loc.} | P→{Ø + adj. / a + nom. / (de) + loc.} | P→Ø + {adj. / nom. / loc.} |

The rules summarized in the diagram may be stated in the following manner:

1) English requires some form of /Be/ in all non-verbal predications.

2) In the Cool World Southern Black dialect, predicates are used without any copula.

3) In Jamaican Creole, zero copula occurs before adjectives, there is an obligatory /a/ before nominals and a /de/ is often deleted before locatives.

Although Bailey claims that a deep structure relationship exists between Jamaican Creole and Southern

Black dialect, she admits that there has not been an identical development of the two systems (Bailey,1971: 424-425).

(2) The Marked Forms Which are "Past" and "Future" - Tense Markers "Been" ("Was") and "Be" ("Gonna")

Bailey's analysis of "Dude's" speech also reveals that the Southern Black dialect system seems to have an unmarked form of the verb which is noncommittal as to time orientation but that there are certain marked forms which are past and future. It appears that /was/ is reserved for events which are completely in the past while /been/ extends from the past up to and even including the present moment. Be is a simple future, with /gonna/ the intentional future. Examples include:

1) "... you just end up scared like you was walkin down an empty street at night"

2) "I going to see him soon Rod. I been busy with some other little things"

3) "You be back"

4) "Things gonna be a lot different aroun here now Duke in command"

(Bailey,1971:425)

(3) The Negation Markers Don't and Ain't

Bailey also reveals that the American Black dialect system has a curious deployment of the negative markers

/don't/ and /ain't/. Ain't is used consistently in non-verbal predications and before the tense markers. It also seems to be the form preferred before the progressive /-in/ form of the verb. Examples include:

1) "That piece ain't been worth no fifteen dollars since you was a little boy Priest"

2) "He ain't comin back"

3) "They don't come back ain't no point comin back"

4) "I don't know why he done it"

(4) Treatment of the Possessive "Their"

Bailey also maintains that in the American Black dialect system, the form /they/ serves for the possessive pronoun /their/, but she is unsure whether the explanation for this change is phonological or morphological. Examples include:

1) "Everybody look down at they feet"

2) "They jus ain't no place in a gang for girls"

3) "They must have over a 100 books in they apartment"

4) "In the day time those places full of kids and they mothers"

(Bailey,1971:426)

Bailey concludes that native speakers of Southern Black dialect should become trained linguists so that "their intuitions (can) ... throw light on those issues which are

bound to remain unsolved". Bailey feels that through her analysis of a literary text, The Cool World (1959), she has been able to show that "sub-systems can be abstracted --- sub-systems which are so ordered as to make it possible to ignore certain categories which are basic in English" (Bailey,1971:426).

William Stewart in four articles, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the History of American Negro Dialects" (1971b), "Continuity and Change in American Negro Dialects" (1971a), "Toward a History of American Negro Dialect" (1970) and "A Sociolinguistic Typology for Describing National Multilingualism" (1968), develops the hypothesis that Black speech has developed from a creole origin.

Stewart's documentation is taken from literary attestations of Black speakers in the literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. He suggests that the current varieties of Black English were derived through a process of 'de-creolization' in which some of the original creole features were lost. Through contact with British-derived dialects, the creole variety spoken by 17th and 18th century Blacks merged with the other dialects of English. However the merging process was neither instantaneous nor complete:

> Indeed the non-standard speech of present-day American Negroes still seems to exhibit structural traces of a

> creole predecessor and this is probably a reason why it is in some way more deviant from standard speech than even the most uneducated White's.
>
> (Stewart,1971a:454-455)

Thus 'Negro' patterns as 'zero copula', the 'zero possessive' or 'undifferentiated pronouns' should not be ascribed to greater carelessness, laziness or stupidity on the part of Blacks but rather should be treated as language patterns which have been in existence for generations and which their present users have learned through a perfectly normal kind of language-learning process (Stewart,1971a: 455).

Stewart presents a linguistic history of Black English in the United States which was reconstructed from the many literary attestations of the English used by American Blacks for the past two hundred and fifty years. Stewart asserts that:

> Of those Africans who fell victim to the Atlantic slave trade and were brought to the New World, many found it necessary to learn some kind of English. With very few exceptions, the form of English which they acquired was a pidginized one and this kind of English became so well established as the principal medium of communication between Negro slaves in the British colonies, that it was passed on as a creole language to succeeding generations of the New World Negroes, for whom it was their native tongue.
>
> (Stewart,1971b:447-448)

For an analysis of 'New World Negro English' in the early stages, Stewart uses the speech of a fourteen year old

Negro boy, given by Daniel DeFoe in The Family Instructor (1715). To Stewart, it is significant that the Negro boy named Toby in the book speaks a pidginized form of English even though he states that he was born in the New World:

Toby: Me be born at Barbadoes.

Boy: Who lives there, Toby?

Toby: There lives white mans, white womans, negree mans, negree womans, just so as live here.

Boy: What and not know God?

Toby: Yes, the white mans say God prayers -- no much know God.

Boy: And what do they the black mans do?

Toby: They much work, much work -- no say God prayers, not at all.

Boy: What work do they do, Toby?

Toby: Makee the sugar, makee the ginger -- much great work, weary work, all day, all night.

Even though the boy master's English is slightly non-standard (e.g. black mans), it is still, in Stewart's view, quite different from the speech of the Negro boy Toby (Stewart,1971b:448-449).

In Stewart's view, one of the more important changes which has occurred in American Black dialect during the past century is the almost complete de-creolization of both the functional and lexical vocabulary so that now most Black-White speech differences exist mainly in syntax (i.e.

grammatical patterns and categories) rather than in word forms. Stewart believes that the process of de-creolization began long before the Civil War but that the breakdown of the plantation system apparently accelerated it. Thus in the process, overt creolisms which were so common in the early attestations of slave speech became quite rare in even the more non-standard speech of Negroes born after the Emancipation. Examples of such lost creolisms include:

1) Been for making past action (with no basic distinction between preterite and perfect)

2) Undifferentiated pronouns for subject and object (e.g. me, him, and dem also as subject pronouns and we also as an object pronoun)

3) A single pronoun form (usually him or he) for masculine, feminine and neuter in the third person singular

4) -um (or -am) as a general third person (all genders and numbers) object suffix

5) no as a verbal negator

6) for as an infinitive marker

(Stewart,1971a:456)

However the speed and thoroughness with which the plantation field hand dialects were thus made more 'proper' varied according to the region and social characteristics of the speakers themselves. Because people learn most of their language forms from others, Stewart suggests that the speech change took place more rapidly and completely in areas where speakers (White or Black) of more or less

standard varieties of English were present in numbers than it did in areas with a high concentration of field laborers. However because children are generally more affected by the language usage of other children than by that of adults and because lower-class peer groups tend to remain rather isolated from the 'stylistic innovations of adult discourse', Stewart believes that the change took place more slowly and less thoroughly in the speech of young children than it did in that of adolescents and adults. Thus Stewart maintains that:

> The result of this uneven 'correction' of the older plantation dialects was that, while they seemed to have died out by the end of the 19th century, juvenile versions of them actually continued to survive in many Negro speech communities as 'baby talk'. That is, the older, non-standard (and sometimes even creole-like) dialect features remained in use principally by younger children in Negro speech communities -- being learned from other young children, to be given up in life when 'small-boy talk' was no longer appropriate to a more mature status. Even though adult dialects which these child dialects were ontogenetically given up for were also structurally non-standard and identifiably Negro in most cases, they were still more standard.
>
> (Stewart,1971a:456-458)

Stewart feels that the abundance of evidence of Black-White speech differences indicate that at least some of the particular syntactic features of Black English are "neither skewings nor extentions of White dialect patterns" but are structural vestiges of an earlier plantation creole and ultimately of the original slave trade pidgin English which gave rise to it. Thus a complete reassessment

of the relationship between British dialects, White American dialects, Black American dialects and the pidgin and creole English of Africa and the Caribbean, is needed. Stewart maintains that as the grammatical study of Black English progresses, many more differences will be found between Black and White speech patterns and that perhaps some of these will be traceable to a creole English, pidgin English or African language source. Stewart feels that regardless of whether White liberals or Black educators feel that such Black-White speech differences will "be a help or hinderance to integration, good or bad for the Black's racial image", the dedicated scholar should "welcome the discovery and formulation of such ethnically correlated dialect differences as they do exist" (Stewart,1971a:465-467).

J. L. Dillard has written four major books and articles on the topic of Black English: "Nonstandard Negro Dialects -- Convergence or Divergence" (1968); "The Creolist and the Study of Negro Nonstandard Dialects in the Continental United States" (1971); Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States (1972); and All American English (1975).

Dillard believes that "Black English is very different from other dialects of American English" and that "recognition of the independent nature of Black English is

only part of a general recognition that American English is not nearly so homogeneous as had once been thought" (Dillard,1972:4-5).

In Dillard's view, the most notable group of people who differ from the mainstream in both language and culture are the American Blacks. After more than three hundred years in America, and after a long period of mutual influence and "of a narrowing of the culture and language gaps", the language and culture of the vast majority of Blacks remain distinct from those of any large group of Whites (Dillard,1972:5).

Thus Dillard maintains that American Black English is distinct from other dialects of English and that it "can be traced to a creolized version of English based upon a pidgin spoken by slaves -- probably originating in West Africa" but certainly not directly from Great Britain (Dillard,1972:6).

Dillard believes that the differences between the grammar of Standard English and Black English are minor in nature but that "these seemingly minor differences ... become increasingly greater as we consider their systematic implications and their cumulative effect" (Dillard,1972:55). In Dillard's view, "it is because of the lack of these exotic, striking individual grammatical differences that

teachers, laymen, and dialect geographers -- all of them inclined to treat language a word at a time -- have failed to see the great difference" (Dillard,1972:56).

Dillard refutes any claims that Black English is "an amalgam of non-standard features, identical to non-prestige features of White dialect" or that it is only a "high density of otherwise widely occurring non-standard forms" or that Blacks have a "kind of affinity for non-standard forms". He especially denies the claims that Black English grammatical structures are the result of 'conceptual' difficulty on the part of Blacks (Dillard, 1972:60-61).

Unfortunately Dillard presents no precise definition of the structure of Black English, although he devotes an entire chapter (1972) on the subject in one of his books. Dillard seems to prefer to describe, in non-linguistic terms, what Black English is not rather than what it is thus his books and articles are far more valuable for their information on the history of Black language forms in the New World than for their linguistic data. In Dillard's view, for over two hundred years there were three language groups among the Black slaves in America:

1) Those who learned the English of their masters. Most of these were either house servants or the mechanics who were allowed to work in the towns. The language

of the freedmen and their descendents was more or less of this type.

2) The great mass of native-born field workers who spoke Plantation Creole.

3) Recent imports from Africa some of whom brought Pidgin English with them to the New World.

Dillard claims that after the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation, "the field slave simply became the agricultural worker and sharecropper", thus the social conditions under which Plantation Creole was maintained did not change very much. According to Dillard, the language forms present in the slave population in the Americas were passed down from generation to generation so that present-day Black Americans use a dialect which is distinct from White dialects and which has an ordered system of linguistic rules dating back to the original pidgin (Dillard,1972:108).

The recognition of the importance of African influence on the speech forms of American Blacks is due in part to the work of two men: Lorenzo Turner and David Dalby.

Lorenzo Turner published three important works on Gullah: "Problems Confronting the Investigator of Gullah" (1971a); Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (1949) and "Notes on the Sounds and Vocabulary of Gullah" (1971b).

According to Dillard, Turner was able to obtain hard evidence of the persistence of a mass of forms of African

origin thus disproving earlier writers who had "naively dismissed Gullah as just the sort of 'bad English' one would expect such (i.e. inferior) people to have" (Dillard, 1971:393-394).

Thus Turner was one of the first linguists to attempt to deal with the theoretical and practical problems of investigating possible Black-White speech differences. Turner focuses upon Gullah or Geechee which is generally recognized as a creole language spoken by Blacks who live on the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and the contiguous mainland. As an expert on African cultures and the African languages spoken in those areas from which the slaves were brought to the New World, Turner attempts to analyze how African languages affected the speech forms of the Gullah dialect.

Turner asserts that many African words were used by the Gullah Blacks but that researchers, with no knowledge of African languages, assumed that every strange Gullah word which they encountered was an English word which the Gullah speakers were unable to pronounce intelligibly. For example, one of the Gullah words for "tooth' is /ban/. Many non-professional investigators assumed that this was merely the Gullah speaker's pronounciation of the English word "bone". Research however has shown that in the Wolof language of Senegal and Gambia, from which thousands of slaves were

captured to be brought to Charleston, South Carolina, the word for "tooth" is /ban/. Many such examples presented by Turner reveal that many Gullah words and expressions were African in origin, yet were misunderstood and consequently misrepresented by non-professional investigators.

Turner maintains that many syntactical features of the African languages have influenced Gullah:

(1) The employment of compound words

(2) The comparison of adjectives in the use of verbal adjectives

(3) The frequent repetition of words and phrases throughout sentences

An understanding of the role of Gullah as it relates to varieties of English spoken by mainland Blacks is essential for the investigation of Black-White speech differences. Some investigations claim that Gullah should be considered as an anomaly among Black speech varieties in the United States because of a unique case of geographical and social isolation.

However both Turner and Dillard disagree with this view and argue that Gullah is a "bridge which connects non-creolized varieties of English spoken by some mainland Blacks and creolized varieties of English spoken in the Caribbean" (Wolfram and Clarke,1971:x). Gullah has been

known for a long time and according to Dillard, it was this very contact with, not isolation from Standard English, which enabled Gullah speakers to engage in code-switching in order to fool non-professional investigators who came to their islands (Dillard,1971:394).

Turner believes that the study of the Gullah dialect is relevant to the study of Black Southern dialects since Gullahs "are and have been continually moving westward and northward" carrying their speech habits with them . Thus linguists who wish to investigate the Black speech forms in Alabama, Mississippi and elsewhere should become familiar with both African languages and Gullah (Turner,1971a:12).

David Dalby in two articles "Black Through White: Patterns of Communication in Africa and the New World" (1971), and "The African Element in American English" (1972), also supports the creole origin of Black English arguing that African languages exerted a great lexical impact upon American English through the use of Afro-Americans.

Dalby believes that varieties of Black English are found throughout various parts of the world today and that Black American English is but one of the varieties. Dalby traces the probable geographical and chronological development of Black English in the following manner:

Black Portuguese developed along the West African

coast as a result of the Portuguese commercial domination of this area during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Black English began to replace Black Portuguese as the main trade language of the coast probably at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The earliest English footholds in West Africa were at the mouth of the Gambia from 1618 and on the Gold Coast from 1631; these are the most likely points from which Black English subsequently spread to other parts of West Africa to the Caribbean. The development of Black English on the Gambia and Gold Coast was affected by a sustained contact with Black Portuguese as well as by the background of local African languages (including Mandingo and Wolof on the Gambia and Akan on the Gold Coast). At this very early stage the development of Black English was probably very homogeneous but its arrival in the New World meant that a variety of distinct regional forms became established.

The use of Black English as the native language of large slave populations in the New World and of mulatto Englishmen in West Africa resulted in the expansion of its vocabulary, previously limited to trade and basic social discourse and more extensive loaning from African languages. According to Dalby, Black American English has retained fewer structural and lexical Africanisms than other forms of Black English mainly because of its greater exposure to White speech but nevertheless it has been able

to preserve it's " distinctive character within the closed circuit of the rural South and urban ghetto". This distinctiveness however is being gradually eroded as the barriers between Black and White communities are gradually removed, although some apparently older, so-called creole grammatical features are still sometimes found in the speech of Black children. Dalby also considers it to be probable that lexical survivals from African languages may have lingered on in the extensive 'slang' vocabulary of Black American Ebglish (Dalby,1971:99-138).

Dalby (1972) also advances the argument that African cultures have had a much greater influence on the culture of Afro-Americans than was ever before recognized. He attributes the failure to recognize the full contribution of African languages to Black English and of Black English to Standard American English to three factors:

(1) The sheer multiplicity of African languages

(2) The myth that Black Americans lost almost all of their linguistic and cultural heritage after their arrival in the New World

(3) The relative lack of historical documentation of Black English in all of its forms

Some examples of Africanisms in American English which Dalby cites are:

(1) <u>bad</u> (especially in the emphatic form <u>baad</u>):

- as used in the sense of "very good, extremely good"; similarly mean, as used in the sense of "satisfying, fine, attractive"; and wicked, as used in the sense of "excellent, capable". Cf. frequent use of negative terms (often pronounced emphatically) to describe positive extremes in African languages, e.g. Mandingo (Bambara) a ka nyi ko-jugu, "it's very good" (Literally, "it is good badly").

(2) banjo:

- "stringed musical instrument". Cf. Kimbundu mbanza, "stringed musical instrument". Convergence with bandore, the name of a European stringed instrument.

(3) boogie (-woogie):

"fast blues music" and boog, "to dance". Cf. Hausa buga (bugi before a noun object) and Mandingo bugo, "to beat", including to beat drums; (boogie = eight beats to the bar); also Black West African bogi, "to dance".

(4) okay

- "all right". Cf. widespread use in the languages of West Africa of kay and similar forms, as a confirmatory marker, especially after words meaning "yes"; e.g. Wolof, waw kay: Mandingo o-ke.

(5) tote

- "to carry". Cf. similar forms in a number of

western Bantu languages including Kikonga tota, "to pick up"; also Black West African English tot and tut, "to carry".

(Dalby,1972:177-185)

One of the most extensive studies of the origins of Black English has been done by linguist Geneva Smitherman in her book Talkin and Testifyin (1977). Like Turner and Dalby, Smitherman has recognized the importance of African influence on the speech forms of American Blacks. To Smitherman, Black English is "an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America's linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America" (Smitherman,1977:2).

Smitherman believes that the dialect of Black English "is used by eighty to ninety percent of American Blacks at least some of the time" and that it has "allowed Blacks to create a culture of survival in an alien land". Her book asserts that Black English is "a language mixture, adapted to the conditions of slavery and discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with and inextricable from Afro-American culture" (Smitherman,1977: 2-13).

Smitherman traces the origins of Black English in America to 1619 when the first African slaves were brought

to Jamestown aboard a Dutch vessel. Because there are no actual direct speech samples of early Black American English, linguists must rely on "reconstructions of Black speech based on indirect evidence such as representations of Black Dialect in White and Black American literature, written reproductions of dialect in journals, letters, and diaries by Whites and generalized commentary about slave speech, also usually from Whites". In addition to these sources, analogies of Black American speech characteristics with those of other English-based pidgins and creoles found in the Caribbean and in parts of Africa also provide another extremely important source of information on the origins of Black English. In Smitherman's view, language systems such as Jamaican Creole or Nigerian Pidgin English, which are still in use today, provide a kind of linguistic mirror image of Black American English in its early stages of development (Smitherman,1977:5).

Smitherman believes that African slaves in America initially developed a pidgin which was a language of transition used for communication between themselves and Whites. As the pidgin gradually became more widespread among the slaves, it evolved into a creole which involved the substitution of English for West African words but within the same basic structure and idiom that characterized West African language patterns (Smitherman,1977:5).

The formation of Black American English demonstrates the fact that while in the learning of a new language the sound system and vocabulary may be fairly easy to learn, the syntactical and idiomatic rules are much more difficult and require a great deal of time and practice to master. Smitherman also points out that the one item of a language that will remain relatively rigid and fixed over time is its structure. In trying to learn the English of their masters, early African slaves "attempted to fit the words and sound of the new language into the basic idiomatic mold and structure of their native tongue" (Smitherman,1977:6). To illustrate this process, Smitherman offers a few West African language rules that were grafted onto early Black English and which still operate today:

| GRAMMAR AND STRUCTURE RULE IN WEST AFRICAN LANGUAGES | BLACK ENGLISH |
|---|---|
| (1) Repetition of noun subject with pronoun | My father, he work there |
| (2) Question patterns without do | What it come to? |
| (3) Same form of noun for singular and plural | one boy; five boy |
| (4) No tense indicated in the verb; emphasis on manner or character of action | I know it good when he ask me |
| (5) Same verb form for all subjects | I know; you know; he know; we know; they know |

| SOUND RULE IN WEST AFRICAN LANGUAGES | BLACK ENGLISH |
|---|---|
| (1) No consonant pairs | jus (for just); men (for mend) |
| (2) Few long vowels or two part vowels (diphthongs) | rat or raht (for right); tahm (for time) |
| (3) No /r/ round | mow (for more) |
| (4) No /th/ sound | Black English speaker substitutes /d/ or /f/ for /th/; thus souf (for south) and dis (for this) |

(Smitherman,1977:6-7).

While the slave's use of his intuitive knowledge of West African language rules to English allowed him to communicate with his master, they were still faced with the problem of communicating with each other. Since it was the practice of slavers to mix up Africans of different tribes, in any given slave community there would be various tribal dialects such as Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa which shared general structural elements. However since the tribal dialects differed in vocabulary, slaves were forced to use the same English-African language mixture among themselves which had been so successful in communication with the masters (Smitherman,1977:77).

Smitherman believes that the newly arrived Africans were at first bilingual, being able to use both their native African language and the English pidgin as well.

However since there was little opportunity to speak among themselves and thus reinforce their native languages and as new generations of slaves were born in the New World, the native African speech was used less and less. The English pidgin and creole varieties became more and more common.

Unfortunately there is little empirical evidence of the growth of early Black English from the period of the arrival of the first slaves in 1619 up until the Revolutionary War in 1776. The first actual recorded sample of Black American speech from a Black comes from the comedy Trial of Atticus Before Justice Beau for a Rape written in 1771. In this play, a Massachusetts negro named Caesar is given a small part in which he says:

> Yesa Master, he tell me that Atticus he went to bus (kiss) 'em one day and a shilde (child) cry and so he let 'em alone ... Cause Master, I bus him myself.

In Smitherman's view, this speech is striking for its parallel to modern day Black speech forms such as the lack of -s on the verb in he tell and the repetition of the subject in Atticus he. Contemporary Black English forms are found in sentences like "The teacher, he say I can't go" and "My brother, he know how to fix it" (Smitherman, 1977:7-8).

Smitherman, like Turner and Dalby, argues that the

main structural components of Black English are adaptations based on African language rules. To show the continuity of Africanisms in Black English throughout time and space, Smitherman analyzes just one aspect of Black English structure from the early 17th century to the present. She offers the following summary illustration of 'zero copula' in Black English (sentence patterns with no form of the verb to be):

He tell me he God --- Barbados,1692

Me bell well (I am very well) --- Surinam,1718

Me massa name Cunney Tomsee (My Master's name is Colonel Thompson) --- United States,1776

Me den very grad (I am then very glad) --- United States,1784

You da deble (You are the devil) --- United States,1792

He worse than ebber now --- United States,1821

What dis in heah? (What is this in here?) --- United States,1859

But what de matter with Jasper? (But what is the matter with Jasper?) --- United States,1882

Don't kere, he somethin' t' other wif dis here Draftin' Bo'd (I don't care, he is something or other with this Draft Board) --- United States,1926

'E mean tid' dat (He is mean to do that) --- Gullah Creole, from the Sea Island,United States,1949

Di kaafi kuol (The coffee is cold) --- Jamaica,1966

They some rowdy kids --- United States,1968

A siki (He sick) --- Surinam,1972

This my mother --- United States,1975

(Smitherman,1977:9-10).

Smitherman believes that while it is true that a number of early Black American English forms have survived until the present, it is also true that the distance between contemporary Black and White American English is not as great as it once was. She argues that the answer to the question of how time and circumstance has affected the African element in Black American English lies in the impact of the mainstream American language and culture on Black America and in the sheer fact of the smaller ratio of Blacks to Whites in the United States. Thus with such close linguistic-cultural contact, the influence of the majority culture and language on minorities will be powerful; minorities will be pressured to assimilate and adopt the culture and language of the majority.

Smitherman sees the 'push-pull syndrome' as being an important factor in the historical development of Black English in America: the push of Black English toward Americanization being counterbalanced by the pull of retaining its Africanization. The de-creolization of Black English began as more and more slaves became more American and less African and thus Black English Creole also became less Africanized, a process which probably became more intense during the Abolitionist period and following

Emancipation. Smitherman asserts that the Abolitionists who hoped to prove that Blacks were equal to Whites and thus deserving of freedom, pressured the Blacks to speak 'proper' American English.

However since Blacks never felt that they were actually viewed or treated as equals, they rejected White American culture and English. Thus in Smitherman's view, the process of de-creolization remains unfinished today as a result of the 'push-pull syndrome' --- Blacks became resigned to a future in the New World and assumed many aspects of White American culture such as religion, customs and language in order to become successful (the 'push') but at the same time rebelled against the oppressiveness of White culture (the 'pull') (Smitherman,1977:10-11).

Smitherman maintains that the dynamics of the 'push-pull syndrome' helps to explain the complex sociolinguistic situation that continues to exist in Black America, namely that while some Blacks speak very Black English, there are others who speak very standard English and still others who are fluent in both linguistic systems. Historically Black speech has been demanded of those who wish to remain close to the Black community as a sign of solidarity. The exclusive use of Standard American English would therefore mean total ostracism from the community. At the same time however White America insisted on the use

of White English to gain access to its economic and social mainstream.

Historically there was a social pattern in early Black America where status as a freeman depended to a great extent on competence in 'White English'. Yet then as now, circumstance and pyschology propelled Blacks toward Black English (the 'pull') and required that any Black speaker of 'White English' be fluent in Black English as well ('push' and 'pull') (Smitherman,1977:11-12).

Walter Wolfram, Ralph Fasold, William Labov, Marvin Loflin and Geneva Smitherman have made extensive and detailed investigations into the unique linguistic features of Black English: A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech (Wolfram,1969); "Some Linguistic Features of Negro Dialect" (Fasold and Wolfram,1970); Tense Marking in Black English (Fasold,1972); A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City (Labov, et al,1968); Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular (Labov,1972); "On the Structure of the Verb in a Dialect of American Negro English" (Loflin, 1971) and Talkin and Testifyin (Smitherman,1977).

Contrary to the statements made by some linguists and educators who claimed that supporters of Black English acted as though all Black Americans spoke Black English

(Shores,1977:184), the majority of linguists state very clearly that not all Blacks speak Black English but that those who do are speaking a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English. Since language is learned through culture, there are many Black Americans whose speech is indistinguishable from others of the same region and social class because they have never learned Black English (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:41).

In answer to the claims of dialect geographers like the McDavids, Kurath, Williamson and Dunlap, linguists who support the existence of Black English make it very clear that Black English shares many features with other kinds of English. However the distinctiveness of Black English lies in the fact that it has a number of pronounciation and grammatical features which are not shared by other dialects. All of these linguists assert that it is very important to realize that Black English is a fully formed linguistic system in its own right, with its own grammar and pronounciation rules, thus it cannot be dismissed as merely an inferior version of Standard English (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:42).

The position of the linguists who support the existence of Black English is that there are two possible reasons for the distinctiveness of Black English, the first being the fact that the linguistic history of the dialect

is partly independent from the history of the rest of American English. It has been postulated that several of the features of Black English are traceable, not to English dialects, but to African languages via the Caribbean Creole languages (Bailey,1971; Stewart,1971a,1971b; Dillard,1972). In addition, the persistent segregation patterns of American society are also factors in helping the Black dialect develop its own character since dialects develop when speakers of a common language are separated from each other, either by geographical or social distance. Thus the linguists who support Black English argue that the social distance between White and Black Americans must be cited as a contributing factor to the maintenance and development of distinct dialect features (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:42).

The most extensive and concise explanation of the unique linguistic features of Black English has been done by Fasold and Wolfram (1970). Since Fasold and Wolfram's research encompasses that done by the other cited linguists, their definition of Black English will be summarized here.

The unique linguistic features of Black English which will be discussed are separated under two categories: Phonology (Pronounciation) and Grammar.

PHONOLOGY (PRONOUNCIATION)

Wolfram, Fasold, Labov, Loflin and Smitherman point out that it is very important to keep separate the two kinds of differences between Standard English and Black English. Some of these features, like the pronounciation of then as den, are the result of differences in the pronounciation systems of the two dialects; other differences, like the use of multiple negatives, are grammatical in nature. However sometimes it is not obvious which kind of feature is involved, so one must be very careful before making any kind of judgement.

(A) Word-Final Consonant Clusters

1) General

Standard English words ending in a consonant cluster or blend often have the final member of the cluster absent in Black English. The reduction of some clusters which are formed by the addition of the /-s/ suffix can be attributed to a grammatical difference between Standard English and Black English, however other types of cluster reductions do not result from grammatical differences but are caused by pronounciation differences in final consonant clusters.

In Black English words such as /test/, /desk/, /hand/ and /build/ are pronounced as /tes'/, /des'/, /han'/ and /buil'/. Because of this, pairs of words such as

/build/ and /bill/; /coal/ and /cold/; and /west/ and /Wes/ have identical pronounciations in Black English.

Two basic types of clusters which are affected by this sort of reduction can be distinguished. First, clusters in which both members of the cluster belong to the same 'base word' can be reduced, as in /tes'/, /des'/, /han'/ and /buil'/. But reduction also affects final /t/ or /d/ which results when the suffix /-ed/ is added to the 'base word'. In all varieties of English, the /-ed/ has several different phonetic forms depending on how the base word ends. In Black English, when the addition of the /-ed/ suffix results in either a voiced or voiceless cluster, the cluster may be reduced by removing the final member of the cluster. This affects /-ed/ when it functions as a past tense marker (e.g. Yesterday he move' away); a participle (e.g. The boy was mess' up); or an adjective (e.g. He had a scratch' arm), although its association with the past tense is the most frequent.

It is asserted that concerning the social significance of consonant cluster reduction, that Black English is very similar to Standard English when the following word begins with a consonant, therefore a reduction of the cluster has little social significance in this context. However when the following word is not followed by a consonant, the reduction of the cluster is

socially stigmatized. Absence of the cluster is most stigmatized when a suffix beginning with a vowel is added (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:43-49).

(B) The /th/ Sounds

1) General

In Standard American English, the letters /th/ actually represent two different types of sound. First, they represent the voiced sound in words such as /the/, /they/ and /that/ (i.e. a voiced interdental fricative). Second, they represent the voiceless sound in words like /thought/, /thin/ and /think/ (a voiceless interdental fricative). In Black English the regular pronounciation rules for the sounds represented by /th/ are very different. The particular sounds which /th/ represents are mainly dependent on where the /th/ occurs, in other words, the sounds of /th/ are dependent on where the /th/ might occur in a word and/or what sounds occur next to it.

2) Word-Initial

At the beginning of a word the /th/ in /the/ is frequently pronounced as a /d/ in Black English so that words such as /the/, /they/ and /that/ are pronounced /de/, /dey/ and /dat/. Although a limited amount of /d/ for /th/ is also characteristic of Standard American English in the most casual or informal style, in Black English it is much

more frequent so that the pronounciation /de/ for /the/ is the regular pronounciation. It is important to realize that the pronounciation of /d/ for /th/ in Black English is not simply an error in pronounciation but is the result of a regular and patterned rule.

3) Within a Word

In the middle of a word there are many different pronounciations for /th/ in Black English. For the voiceless sound as in /nothing/, /author/ or /ether/, are pronounced as /f/. Thus /nothing/, /author/ and /ether/ are pronounced as /nuf'n/, /ahfuh/ and /eefuh/. For the voiced sound as in /brother/, /rather/ or /bathing/, /th/ is pronounced as /v/ in some varieties of Black English so that these words are pronounced as /bruvah/, /ravah/ and /bavin'/.

In addition to the /f/ and /v/ for /th/ in the middle of a word, several other pronounciations may occur. When /th/ is followed by a nasal sound such as /m/ or /n/, it may be pronounced as /t/. Thus /'ritmetic/ for /arithmetic/, /nut'n/ for /nothing/ or /montly/ for /monthly/, are patterns frequently used in Black English. There are also several items in which no consonant at all is found. For example, /mother/ may be pronounced as /muh/ and /brother/ as /bruh/. This pattern however is relatively infrequent and only takes place when the vowel sounds

preceding and following /th/ are similar.

4) Word-Final

At the end of a word, /f/ is the predominant pronounciation of /th/ in words such as /Ruth/, /tooth/ and /south/, which are pronounced as /Ruf/, /toof/ and /souf/. While most speakers alternate between the pronounciation of /f/ and /th/ in the middle of the word, some speakers exclusively use /f/ and /v/ at the ends of these words. In addition to /f/ and /v/ at the ends of these words, several other sounds may be represented by /th/ depending on the sounds which precede it. When the preceding sound is the nasal /n/, /t/ may occur so that /tenth/ and /month/ are pronounced as /tent'/ and /mont'/. The stop /t/ or /d/ may also be used with the preposition /with/, so that it is pronounced as /wit/ or /wid/. Next to the nasal /n/, it is also possible to have no consonant at all present. Thus /month/ and /tenth/ may be pronounced as /mon'/ and /ten'/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:49-51).

(C) /r/ and /l/

1) After Vowels

The pronounciation rule for /r/ and /l/ in Black English operates in a very similar way to White speech in certain areas of the South. At the beginning of a word, /r/ and /l/ are always pronounced as in /run/, /lip/, /rub/

or /lamp/. In other positions however /r/ and /l/ are sometimes reduced to a vowel-like quality pronounced something like /uh/. The most important context to recognize in discussing the 'loss' of /r/ and /l/ is when they follow a vowel (called post-vocalic). In such items as /steal/, /sister/, /nickel/ or /bear/, only a 'phonetic vestige' of /r/ or /l/ is pronounced so that these words are pronounced as /steauh/, /sistuh/, /nickuh/ and /beauh/. Preceding a consonant in a word (e.g. wart, tart) some speakers do not have any 'phonetic vestige' of /r/ or /l/; this means that /help/ and /hep/ and /taught/ and /torte/ may be pronounced identically by these speakers. In some areas of the South, Black English may also reveal no vestige of /r/ following the vowels /o/ or /u/. For these speakers /door/ and /doe/, /four/ and /foe/ and /sure/ and /show/ may be pronounced alike.

2) Between Vowels

Not only may /r/ or /l/ be absent when followed by another word beginning with a vowel but /r/ absence is occasionally observed between two vowels within a word. Thus it is possible to get /Ca'ol/, /sto'y/ or /ma'y/ for /Carol/, /story/ or /marry/.

3) Effect on Vocabulary and Grammar

The consistent absence of /r/ at the end of a word

has led to several 'mergers' of vocabulary items, in other words because of the similarity of two words after a particular pronounciation rule has taken place, one word has assumed the function of what was originally two words. For example, when the phonetic vestige which replaces the /r/ is removed, there is only a small difference which separates /they/ from /their/ or /you/ from /your/. The forms /they/ and /you/ can be used as in /It is you book/ or /It is they book/ in Black English as a result of this merging process.

Like /r/, the loss of /l/ may have important implications for grammatical functions. The most crucial of these deals with the loss of /l/ on a contracted form of the future modal /will/. Thus sentences such as /Tommorrow I bring the thing/ (Standard English form = Tommorrow I'll bring the thing), occur where /will/ becomes /'ll/ and then is lost completely. This pronounciation accounts for the use of /be/ in Black English as an indicator of future time, as in /He be here in a few minutes/. The pronounciation rule for the loss of the contracted form of /l/ takes place most frequently when the following word begins with /b/, /m/, or /w/ (i.e. labial sounds).

4) After Initial Consonants

In certain words in Black English, /r/ may be absent when it follows a consonant. Two main types of contexts can be cited to account for this. First, /r/ may be absent when the following vowel is either /o/ or /u/, so that /th'ow/ for /throw/ and /th'ough/ for /through/ occurs. Second, /r/ may be absent in unstressed syllables so that /protect/ and /professor/ are pronounced as /p'otect/ and /p'ofessuh/.

(Fasold and Wolfram,1970:51-53).

(D) Final /b/, /d/ and /g/

1) Devoicing

At the end of a syllable, the voiced stops /b/, /d/ and /g/ (and to a lesser extent all voiced consonants except nasals /r/, /l/, /w/ and /y/) are often pronounced as the corresponding voiceless stops /p/, /t/ and /k/. Thus such words as /pig/, /bud/ and /cab/ end in /k/, /t/ and /p/. However such words as /pig/ and /pick/; /bud/ and /butt/ are not pronounced identically since they are still distinguished by the length of the vowel.

In some varieties of Standard American English, devoicing can take place in an unstressed syllable so that words like /salat/ for /salad/; /hundret/ for /hundred/ or /acit/ for /acid/ occur. Black English not only has the

rule for devoicing in unstressed syllables but stressed so that /mut/ for /mud/; /goot/ for /good/ and /loat/ for /load/, occur.

2) Deletion of /d/

In addition to the devoicing rule there are some speakers who may have the complete absence of the stop /d/ although this is not as frequent as devoicing. This results in pronounciations such as /goo' man/ and /ba' soldier/. The rule for the absence of /d/ occurs more frequently when /d/ is followed by a consonant than when followed by a vowel; /d/ is most common before /s/ or /z/. For this reason the addition of an /s/ suffix often results in pronounciations such as /kiz/ for /kids/ and /boahz/ for /boards/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:53-54).

(E) Nasalization

There are three different aspects of the nasals /m/, /n/ and /ng/ which apply to Black English; some of these are very characteristic of all non-standard English dialects, others are characteristic of Southern standard as well as non-standard dialects and still others are unique to Black English.

1) The /ing/ Suffix

The use of the /-in/ suffix for /-ing/ (e.g.

singin', buyin' and swimin') is a feature which is characteristic of all socially stigmatized varieties of English. Because of the spelling of /ŋ/ as /ng/ this is sometimes referred to as "droppings of the /g/". Although /-in/ in such words as /singin'/, /comin'/ and /doin'/ occurs in all socially stigmatized varieties of American English, its frequency is somewhat greater in Black English than in other non-standard dialects. This form is one of the most stereotyped phonological features of non-standard speech in the American language.

2) Nasalized Vowels

Another feature which is found in Black English is the use of a nasalized vowel instead of the nasal consonant. Generally this occurs only at the end of a syllable. In words like /man/, /bun/ or /bum/ the final consonant is sometimes not pronounced but a nasalization of the preceding vowel is found similar to the type of nasalization of vowels that is found in a language such as French. This means that words such as /rum/, /run/ and /rung/ might all sound alike in Black English. This feature does not occur categorically in Black English thus there is always fluctuation between the use of the nasalized vowel and the nasal consonant (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:54-56).

(F) Vowel Glides

In some parts of the South, the vowel glides

represented as /ay/ (e.g. side, time) and /oy/ (e.g. boy, toy) are generally pronounced without the glide. Thus /side/ and /time/ may be pronounced as /sahd/ and /tahm/ and /boy/ and /toy/ as /boah/ and /toah/. This feature of some Southern standard as well as non-standard dialects has been adopted as an integral part of Black English. The absence of the glide is much more frequent when it is followed by a voiced sound or pause than it is when followed by a voiceless sound. Thus the absence of a glide is much more likely to occur in words such as /side/, /time/ or /toy/ than it is in /kite/, /bright/ or /fight/. Because the rule for vowel glides is found among middle class speakers in the South, its social significance is limited to Northern areas (Fasold and Wolfram,1970: 56).

(G) Indefinite Articles -a- and -an-

In Standard English, when the following word begins with a vowel, the indefinite article -an- is used as in /an apple/ or /an egg/; when it is followed by a word beginning with a consonant, -a- occurs as in /a boy/ or /a dog/. In Black English, as in some varieties of White Southern speech, the article /a/ is used regardless of how the following word begins. With a selected group of words of more than one syllable, which may begin with a vowel similar to /a/, the article may also be completely absent

(or at least merge with the vowel). This results in sentences such as /He had eraser/ or /He had erecter set/. Less frequently and mostly among young children, this article may be absent in other types of constructions (e.g. I have pencil) but this type of absence seems to be a grammatical rather than a pronounciation feature (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:57).

(H) Stress

Stress or accent in Black English operates very much like the stress patterns of Standard English but with several exceptions. One exception can be found when Standard English words of more than one syllable have their stress on the second syllable rather than the first. In Black English some of these words may be stressed on the first rather than the second syllable. This only affects a small subset of words such as /políce/, /hotél/ or /Julý/, which in Black English are pronounced as /pólice/, /hótel/ and /Júly/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:57).

(I) Other Pronounciation Features

In addition to the systematic patterns already mentioned, there are several features in Black English which are very restricted. For example, sometimes the pronounciation of /ask/ as /ax/, so that it sounds like /axe/. This feature which is quite prominent in some

speakers of Black English can be related to an Old English pronounciation which has been preserved in Black English as well as White Appalachian speech.

Another restricted feature is the absence of /s/ in a word which ends in /x/. This pattern results in the pronounciation of /box/ as /bok/ and /six/ as /sik/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:57-58).

GRAMMAR

Other features of Black English are due to the fact that some of the grammatical rules are quite different from the grammatical rules of Standard American English. These rules deal with the verb system; with negatives; with noun suffixes; with question formation and with pronouns.

(1) VERBS

Many of the most significant features of Black English are found in its verb system. The differences in the verb structure of Black English as compared to Standard American English are mainly found in the tense systems of the two dialects and in their treatment of the verb to be.

a) Past Forms

1) The -ed Suffix

The /-ed/ suffix which marks past tense and past

participle forms as well as derived adjectives, is sometimes not pronounced in Black English because of pronounciation rules. When /-ed-/ is added to a verb base ending in a consonant, as in /missed/, it can be removed by application of the consonant cluster reduction rule. When /-ed/ is added to a verbal base which ends in a vowel, it can be removed by the rule for the deletion of syllable-final /d/. Since the /d/ deletion rule applies much less often than the consonant cluster reduction rule, the /-ed/ is much more frequently absent from bases ending in a consonant which is not /t/ or /d/ than from bases ending in a vowel.

2) Irregular Verbs

Verbs which form their past tenses in an irregular way distinguish present and past forms in the majority of cases in Black English. Some verbs which have irregular past forms in Standard English have the same form for past and present tenses in Black English (Fasold and Wolfram, 1970:59-60).

b) Perfective Constructions

1) Omission of Forms of have

In Standard American English, the present tense forms of auxiliary /have/ can be contracted to /'ve/ and

/'s/, resulting in sentences like /I've been here for hours/ and /He's gone home already/. In Black English the contracted forms /'ve/ and /'s/ can be removed, resulting in /I been here for hours/ and /He gone home already/.

2) The Past Participle

While it is very clear that the tenses formed grammatically with /have/ and /had/ are part of Black English, it is less clear whether or not there are past participles in its grammar. In Standard American English most past participles are formed with the /-ed/ suffix and so are identical with the past tense form. But there are many semi-regular and irregular verbs for which the past participle and past tense are formally distinguished (e.g. came versus has come; ate versus has eaten). In Black English however it seems that there may not be any irregular verbs for which the past tense and past participle are distinct. It is possible that the Black English equivalents of the present and past perfect tenses are not formed with forms of /have/ plus the past participle but rather with a form of /have/ plus a general past form.

3) The completive aspect with done

Whereas Standard American English has only two aspectual contrasts of the perfective type, Black English

has four. With Standard English, Black English has perfective tense (or aspect) constructions with /have/ and /had/. In addition Black English has a completive construction and a remote time construction. The completive aspect is formed from the verb /done/ plus a past form of the verb. But because of the uncertain status of the past participle in the grammar of Black English, it is difficult to judge whether this form is the past participle or not. This construction occurs in sentences like: /I done tried hard all I know how/ and /I done forgot what you call it/.

4) The remote time construction with been

A similar construction with /been/ indicates that the speaker conceives of the action as having taken place in the distant past. The remote aspect is used in /I been had it there for about three or four years/ and /You won't get your dues that you been paid/ (Fasold and Wolfram, 1970:60-63).

c) The Third Person Singular Present Tense Marker

In Standard American English the suffix /-s/ (or -es-) is used to identify the present tense of a verb if the subject of that verb is in the third person singular. In Standard American English:

| Singular | Plural |
|---|---|
| I walk | we walk |
| you walk | you walk |
| he walks, the man walks | they walk; the men walk |

In Black English:

| Singular | Plural |
|---|---|
| I walk | we walk |
| you walk | you walk |
| he walk; the man walk | they walk; the men walk |

It is important to realize that the /-s-/ suffix is not carelessly 'left off' by speakers of Black English, this suffix is just not a part of the grammar of the dialect.

1) Auxiliary don't

The verb /do/ is used as an auxiliary in negative and other kinds of sentences. In Black English, the /-s-/ suffix is absent from the auxiliary /don't/ in the present tense when the subject is in the third person singular, just as it is from other third person singular present tense verbs. The equivalent of the Standard English sentence /He doesn't go/ then is /He don't go/. The use of /don't/ for /doesn't/ in Black English does not apply only to auxiliary /don't/, but is part of a general

pattern involving all present tense verbs with subjects in the third person singular.

2) Have and do

The verb /have/ in Standard American English is unique in that the combination of /have/ and the /-s-/ suffix results in /has/ rather than /haves/. Similarly when the /-s-/ suffix is added to /do/, the vowel quality changes and the result is /does/ not /dos/. Since the /-s-/ suffix does not exist in the verb system of Black English, the verbs remain /have/ and /do/ with third person singular subjects in the present tense. For this reason sentences like: /He have a bike/; /He always do silly things/; and /I don't know if he like you but I think he do/ occur.

3) Hypercorrect forms

The absence of the /-s-/ suffix in Black English causes a real language learning problem when Black English speakers come into contact with Standard American English. They observe that speakers of Standard English have a suffix /-s-/ on some present tense verbs. But the grammatical rules restricting its use to sentences with third person singular subjects is just like a rule in the grammar of a foreign language. Thus Black English speakers must learn to use this feature but they do not

restrict its use according to the rules of the new dialect. The result is that the /-s-/ subject is sporadically used with present tense verbs with subjects other than third person singular. Thus sentences like /I walks/, /You walks/ and /The children walks/, occur as well as Standard American English sentences like /He walks/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:63-65).

d) Future

1) Gonna

A frequent future indicator in Black English, as in other dialects of English, is the use of /gonna/. The rule for deleting /is/ and /are/ operates very frequently when /gonna/ follows, producing sentences like: /He gonna go/ and /You gonna get in trouble/.

2) Will

The use of /will/ to indicate future time reference is also part of both Black English and Standard American English. As in the case of /has/ and /have/, /will/ can be contracted (to 'll). This contracted form, like /'ve/ and /s/, can be eliminated, especially if the next word begins with a labial consonant as in: /He miss you tomorrow/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:65-66).

e) Invariant Be

When the verb /to be/ is used as a main verb in Standard American English, it appears as one of the five variant inflected forms: /is/, /are/, /am/, /was/ or /were/, depending on the verb tense and the person and number of the subject. In Black English, the form /be/ can be used as a main verb regardless of the subject of the sentence as in: /I be here this afternoon/ and /Sometimes he be busy/. This use of invariant /be/ in Black English has two explanations: deleted /will/ or /would/ and distributive /be/ (Fasold and Wolfram, 1970:66-67).

f) Absence of forms of To Be

When the /is/ or /are/ forms of /to be/ are expected in Standard English, Black English may have no form at all. When the subject is /I/ and the expected Standard English form is /am/ however, /am/ or its contraction /'m/ is almost always present. For most varieties of Black English, the forms of /to be/ represents the elimination of the contracted forms /'s/ and /'re/ of /is/ and /are/, much as the contractions of /have/, /has/, /will/ and /would/ are removed (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:67-69).

(2) NEGATION

a) The use of ain't

Because of a series of phonetic changes in the history of English, the negative forms of /is/, /are/, /am/ and auxiliary /have/ and /has/ became /ain't/. The use of /ain't/ is one of the clearest and most universal markers of non-standard speech of all kinds. In varieties of Black English, /ain't/ also corresponds to Standard English /didn't/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:69-70).

b) Multiple negations

'Double negatives' or multiple negation is a very common feature of non-standard dialects. In a sentence such as /He doesn't know nothing/ there is only one negative but it is expressed in more than one place in the sentence (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:70).

(3) -S SUFFIXES

a) Possessive

1) With common nouns

Where the /'s/ possessive appears in Standard American English, in Black English the possessive is indicated by the order of words. The phrase /The boy hat/

corresponds to /The boy's hat/ in the standard dialect.

2) With personal names

Because the position of the /-s-/ possessive is unstable in the grammar of Black English, some speakers use the/'s/ suffix inappropriately with personal names when attempting to speak Standard American English. In Standard English, the rule is that the /'s/ suffix is attached to the surname when the possessor is identified by his full name: /Jack Johnson's car/. Occasionally a Black English speaker will attach the /-s-/ suffix to both names: /Jack's Johnson's car/ or to the first name: /Jack's Johnson car/. This feature is not a part of the grammar of Black English but is a hypercorrection in attempting to use Standard English.

3) Mines

Some speakers of Black English use the form /mines/ for /mine/ in the absolute possessive construction producing sentences like /This mines/. This is a regularization in Black English of the absolute possessive form of the first person pronoun to conform to other pronoun forms which end in /s/ (his, hers, its, yours, ours, theirs) (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:76-77).

b) Plurals

1) Absence of the plural suffix

The /-s-/ (or -es) suffixes which mark most plurals in Standard American English are occasionally absent in the speech of Black English speakers. This results in sentences like: /He took five book/ and /The other teacher, they'll yell at you/.

2) Double Plurals

Where Standard English forms plurals irregularly, Black English may add the /-s-/ to the irregular plural (peoples, childrens, mens) (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:77-79).

(4) QUESTIONS

a) Inversion

The form which questions take in Standard English depends on whether the question is direct or indirect. If the question is direct, word-order takes place but if the question is indirect, the basic word order is retained. Inversion affects the questioned element, if any, and the verbal auxiliary or copula, transferring them to the beginning of the sentence. In Black English the inverted form of the question is used for both direct and indirect questions and the words /if/ and /whether/ are not used to form indirect yes-no questions. The direct questions for

/He went somewhere/ are the same as in Standard American English but indirect questions would be formed as /I want to know where did he go/ and /I want to know did he go somewhere/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:79-80).

(5) PRONOUNS

a) Existential It

Where Standard American English uses /there/ in an existential or expletive function, Black English has /it/. This results in sentences like: /It's a boy in my room name Robert/ and /Is it a Main Street in this town?/ (Fasold and Wolfram,1970:81-82).

# CHAPTER V

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The issue of the existence or non-existence of Black English as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English involves not only questions of linguistics but also has serious policy implications regarding the cultural and academic education of Black American children.

The academic debate over the legitimacy of Black English affects much more than the careers of a few linguists who too often become entangled in their own narrow perspectives. The debate affects the lives of millions of Americans who must deal on a day to day basis with the reality of the rejection of both their language and culture by those who have political, economic and social power over them.

To deny the reality of Black English is to deny the uniqueness of the Black cultural experience in the United States, to ignore a very important aspect of a highly verbal culture. Black Americans have had to use the force of the spoken word to gain some of the power and control over their lives which has too often been denied them.

Culture has been defined as "the sum of transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought characteristics of a community or population" (West,1975:171). These characteristics are all transmitted by language, they are not inherited through the genes. Because language is a part of culture, the recognition of the legitimacy of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English provides the necessary proof to establish the unique cultural heritage of Black Americans. Without this linguistic data, all other cultural, historical or education arguments regarding the validity of Black American culture cannot be won.

Anthropologists have always been interested in the relationship between language, ideas and behavior. Emile Durkheim, a pioneer in sociology, considered language to be a social function which exerts great control over the speaker. Thus a person's language is a social instrument, passed on to him by his culture. In Durkheim's view, a person's language does not merely project his thoughts but helps to form them (West,1975:155).

Anthropologist Edward Sapir has also suggested that language is able to mold thought and that our thinking is regulated by our language. Thus with our language learned

from being a member of a community, we also receive a set of interpretations of the things which we experience (West, 1975:155; Sapir,1921).

Benjamin Whorf, a student of Sapir, developed his own ideas stemming from Sapir's belief that language imposes constraints on thought and experience. Whorf developed what is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or the Principle of Linguistic Relativity which relates thought and conduct to language. The controversial hypothesis states that a person's perception of the world and his ways of thinking about it are greatly influenced by the structure of the language he speaks (West,1975:155, 242; Whorf,1956).

Racists who believed that Black Americans possessed no culture and therefore no language exerted great influence in the United States upon the fields of anthropology and dialectology. The views of scientists such as Durkheim, Sapir and Whorf were often twisted by racists who argued that since Blacks possessed no language and no culture, they were also mentally and physically inferior to Whites. If language helped to mold thought, Negroes without language possessed no thoughts. Thus race rather than culture was used to explain the different speech and behavior patterns of Black Americans. Racists were able to rationalize the treatment of Black Americans

to the point that they claimed that such treatment was actually 'good' for Blacks since they were allowed to learn some of the 'superior' White cultural norms.

During the 1940's and 1950's, the view that American Blacks lacked any distinctive culture of their own, that they were Americans and nothing else, became almost a dogma of liberal social science. Gunnar Myrdal's study, An American Dilemma (1944) set the tone for this view. In Myrdal's book there is virtually no information on Black American culture. Myrdal's statements that the Negro "is an exaggerated American" and that his values are "pathological" limitations of general American values were widely quoted by many scholars for several decades (Blauner,1970:348; Myrdal,1944:927-930).

Kenneth Stampp, an historian, argued in his book, The Peculiar Institution (1956) that Negroes are "white men with black skins" even though information in his own book cast doubt on this assertion (Blauner,1970:348; Stampp,1956:vii).

In 1963 Glazer and Moynihan also argued that "the Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect" (Glazer and Moynihan,1963:53; Blauner,1970:348).

The view that American Blacks possessed no unique

culture of their own was not confined to White scientists. E. Franklin Frazier was almost as influential as Myrdal in gaining acceptance for this view. In The Negro in the United States (1957), Frazier argues that:

> As a racial or cultural minority the Negro occupies a unique position. He has been in the United States longer than any other racial or cultural minority with the exception, of course, of the American Indian. Although the Negro is distinguised from other minorities by his physical characteristics, unlike other racial or cultural minorities the Negro is not distinguished by culture from the dominant group. Having completely lost his ancestral culture, he speaks the same language, practices the same religion and accepts the same values and political ideas as the dominant group. Consequently, when one speaks of Negro culture in the United States, one can only refer to the folk culture of the rural Southern Negro or the traditional forms of behavior and values which have grown out of the Negroe's social and mental isolation.
>
> Since the institutions, and social stratification of the Negro minority are essentially the same as those of the larger community, it is not strange that the Negro minority belongs to the assimilationist rather than the pluralist, secessionist or militant minorities. It is seldom that one finds Negroes who think of themselves as possessing a different culture from whites and that their peculiar culture should be preserved.
>
> (Frazier,1957:680-681).

When anthropologist Charles Keil's book Urban Blues was published in 1966, using the blues singer and his audience to outline the distinctive characteristics of Black American culture, it was strongly attacked by some scholars who supported "the Myrdal position". Keil believed that the core of Black American culture was the

"soul" ideology which suggested that "Negroes have a dearly bought experiential wisdom, a 'perspective by incongruity'" that provides Black Americans with a unique outlook on life that cannot be shared by Whites (Keil,1966:170; Blauner, 1970:349). Keil was criticized by such scholars as sociologist Bennett Berger (1967) for romanticizing Black life and for refusing to admit that 'Black culture' was only an American Negro version of lower class culture (Blauner,1970:349).

Thus during the 1940's and 1950's many social scientists believed that Black Americans possessed no unique culture of their own and that any different customs among Blacks were simply inferior versions of White American customs, or southern or lower class (Blauner,1970: 349). Some scholars felt that Black Americans possessed no unique culture or language because of their basic racist feelings towards Blacks however many scholars who were not racist also denied the existence of a separate Black culture because they hoped to minimize Black-White differences and thus encourage equality and integration.

Standing almost alone against the view that the Negro in America had no unique culture or language was Melville Herskovits who wrote The Myth of the Negro Past (1941) and Suriname Folklore (1936). Herskovits fought

the assumption made by many scholars that the only peculiar elements in Black speech were the few borrowings from lower class Whites and the retentions of archaic forms of English.

Herskovits defined the myth of the Negro past, which validates the idea of Black inferiority, as follows:

1) Negroes are naturally of a childlike character and adjust easily to the most unsatisfactory social situations, which they accept readily and even happily, in contrast to the American Indians who preferred extinction to slavery

2) Only the poorer stock of Africa was enslaved, the more intelligent members of the African communities raided having been clever enough to elude the slaver's nets

3) Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke diverse languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom and as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal identity, no least common denominator of understanding or behavior could have possibly been worked out by them

4) Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters, would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve

5) The Negro is thus a man without a past

(Herskovits,1941:1-2)

In Herskovit's view, the myth of the Negro past is

one of the main supports of race prejudice in the United States (Herskovits,1941:1-2). He argues that there are African origins to many, if not most, Black American social and cultural patterns. Herskovits asserts that Negro cultures in Africa and the New World are highly complex and sophisticated. Far from meekly accepting their bondage, Negroes refused to accept their fate and protested in many diverse ways both individually as well as in groups. Since most slaves came from the coastal belt area of West Africa and the Congo, slaves were able to understand each other's languages and customs to a certain degree. Herskovits asserts that "an adequate basis for communication came into existence when the slaves learned words from the language of their masters and poured these into African speech molds, thus creating linguistic forms that in structure not only resemble the aboriginal tongues but are also similar to one another no matter what the European vehicle - English or French or Spanish or Portuguese" (Herskovits,1941:295-296).

Thus Herskovits argues that Black American culture and language has its origins in Africa and that the failure to recognize this stems largely from the ignorance inherent in a racist point of view.

In David Dalby's view, White ignorance of Black American language and linguistic culture results not only

from traditional racial prejudice but also from "the fact that one of the main applications of Black language has been to strengthen the in-group solidarity of Black Americans to the specific exclusion of Whites and to deceive, confuse and conceal information from White people in general" (Dalby,1972:172). Thus an in-group Black expression will be dropped or changed in meaning once it becomes widely known among non-Blacks.

In the view of Claude Brown, "the language of soul or as it might be called 'spoken Soul' or 'Colored English', is simply an honest vocal portrayal of Black America... the roots of it are more than three hundred years old". Before the Civil War, numerous restrictions were placed upon the speech of Blacks. The newly arrived Africans had the problem of learning to speak a new language while slave-masters and overseers placed inhibitions on the topics of the slave's conversations. Thus the slaves made up songs to inform each other of important events which they were not allowed to openly talk about, for example, the underground railroad's activity. When the slaves sang the song 'Steal Away', they were planning to steal away not to heaven but to the North. Because slaves who dared to speak of rebellion or freedom were severely punished, slaves were compelled to create a semi-clandestine vernacular (Brown,1972:135; Hannerz,1972:306-322).

Grace Sims Holt believes that Black English represents one of the ways in which a powerless minority group can protect its individual and cultural identity against the powerful class definitions imposed upon them by the dominant culture within the larger society.

Holt accepts the view that "the total culture of a people is composed not only of its art and philosophy but also its tools, work habits and survival patterns". Thus slavery in America dictated that Blacks "behave circumspectly and timorously if they were to survive with some degree of integrity". In order to adapt to a harsh system, slaves were forced to create a special form of communication interaction between slave and master. For Blacks, there were two clearly limited responses to their status as slaves: submission and subversion, since overt aggression was punishable by death. In Holt's opinion, "White verbalization defined Blacks as inferior; Whites rewarded only Black responses acceptable to them" (Holt, 1972a:153).

Thus Blacks developed their own ways of conveying resistance by using "The Man's language against him as a defense against sub-human categorization". The socio-cultural context formed the basis for the development of a linguistic survival process called inversion, which was

a positive and valuable adaptive response pattern -- "the slaves turned the language as it was presented to them to their own purposes, in fact to the precise purpose which their owners sought to prevent" (Holt,1972a:153).

Holt asserts that the phenomena of inversion is a practical necessity for people in subordinate positions. Because the socio-historical progression of slavery went from "physical restraint to legal restraint, followed by a de facto restraint and succeeded by a psychological restraint... superordinate language was designed to maintain, reinforce and perpetuate the... existing restraints". Thus language becomes the "major vehicle for perpetuating the legitimization of the subsequent stages of oppression -- the function of White verbal behavior toward Blacks was to define, force acceptance of and control the existing level of restraints" (Holt,1972a:153).

Holt argues that Blacks realize that to master the language of Whites is in effect to consent to be mastered by it through the White definition of class built into "the semantic/social system". Inversion therefore became the defense mechanism which enabled Blacks to fight linguistic and thereby psychological entrapment. In the process of inversion, words and phrases are given reverse meanings and functions changed, enabling Blacks to deceive

and manipulate Whites without fear of penalty (Holt,1972a: 152-159; and Haskins and Butts,1973:12-14).

To many scholars therefore Black English represents the Black community's committment to a sense of cultural identity separate from that imposed upon them by the larger dominant White society, in other words, to identify the uniqueness of the Black experience in America.

However linguist Geneva Smitherman points out that an ambivalence toward Black English exists in the Black community as reflected in what she calls the "push-pull syndrome" (Smitherman,1977:170). According to Smitherman, during the early period of American history, the African experience was very immediate and real to the slaves and that many had dreams of escaping back to Africa. However as time progressed, the African slaves began to give up the dream of returning home and thus began to resign themselves to a life in the New World. They began to accept "the ways of White folks" --- their culture, religion and language. At the same time though many Blacks resisted enslavement and what they regarded as "the oppressive ways of White folks". Thus from the very beginning, in Smitherman's view, the "push-pull syndrome" began in Black America: a pushing towards White American culture as well as a pulling away from it (Smitherman,

1977:10-11).

Historically Black English has been viewed negatively by White America; its use was associated with plantation figures like Uncle Remus and Uncle Tom. Today Black English is often negatively associated exclusively with Black urban 'ghetto' types, a view which makes many scholars such as Ronald Williams uneasy since it tends to promote a very limited definition of Blackness (Williams, 1976:9-24). Black English has also been consistently labeled as being 'poor English'. In Smitherman's view, upward mobility for Black Americans since the Civil War has often come to mean the gradual elimination of Black language (and Black culture) and the acceptance of the linguistic norms of the White middle class. Smitherman maintains that the recent campaign for the acceptance of bi-dialectalism (fluency in both Black and Standard American English) reflects a growing awareness of the need to stop the total rejection of Black language but that it does not really solve the linguistic dilemma (Smitherman,1977:172-173).

Smitherman asserts that "it continues to be the painful and trying task of the Black consciousness movement to destroy the ambivalence about Black language and culture" and to replace the old negative association

with new positive ones. Throughout the 1960's and on into the seventies, Smitherman argues that "the call of Black politicians, artists and leaders has been ethnic, their style revolutionary and their language Black" and that this trend has been in recognition of the fact that "language is interwoven with culture and psychic being... thus to deny the legitimacy of Africanized English is to deny the legitimacy of Black culture and the Black experience" (Smitherman,1977:175).

Smitherman's support for the role of Black English in Black cultural identity is linked to her conviction that in Black America, the "oral tradition has served as a fundamental vehicle for gittin ovuh --- for survival in the White world of oppression". Thus the oral tradition preserves the Afro-American heritage and lessons about life and survival are learned through song, story, folk sayings and rich verbal interplay among people (Smitherman,1977: 73).

Up until the present, Black Americans relied on 'word-of-mouth' for its "rituals of cultural preservation" but Smitherman argues that this was more than sufficient because the underlying elements of the oral tradition remain relatively intact even as each new generation makes its own changes in its language and style. In order to

understand the complexity and scope of Black communication patterns, one must have a clear understanding of the oral tradition and the world view that forms the basis of that tradition (Smitherman,1977:73).

According to Smitherman, the Black communication system is actualized in different ways, depending on the socio-cultural context but the basic underlying structures of this communication network are basically similar because they're founded in the traditional African world view, a view which refers to basic thought patterns, belief sets & values that are shared by all traditional Africans. In the traditional African world view, there is a fundamental unity between the spiritual and the material aspects of existence. Although both the material and the spiritual are necessary, it is the spiritual realm of life which is the most important.

In this world view, the universe is hierarchical in nature, with God at the head followed by lesser deities, the 'living dead' (ancestral spirits), people, animals and plants. Harmony in nature and the universe is provided by the complementary and interdependent interaction between the spiritual and the material. Thus there exists a paradigm for the way in which opposites function, which are the interdependent, interacting forces which are necessary

for producing a given reality.

Similarly communities of people are modeled after the interdependent rhythms of the universe with individual participation being necessary for community survival. Balance in the community, as in the universe, consists of maintaining these interdependent relationships.

The African world view maintains that the universe moves in a rhythmical and cyclical way as opposed to linear progression and that progression occurs into the past world of the spirits. Thus the 'future' is the past. In the community then, one's sense of time is based on participation in and observation of nature's rhythms and community events (Smitherman,1977:75; Mbiti,1969:19-23; Busia,1964:146-151).

Because Black Americans have had to cope with slavery and Euro-American culture, they have not been able to practice the traditional African world view in its totality but elements of this view still persist in the Black American oral tradition (Smitherman,1977:76). In Smitherman's view, even though Blacks have accepted English as their native language, the African cultural set still persists so that "there is a predisposition to imbue the English word with the same sense of value and committment accorded to the 'Word' in African culture" (Smitherman,

1977:79). Thus Afro-America's emphasis on oral communication and belief in the power of 'the rap' has produced a style and idiom totally unlike that of Whites, while paradoxically using Standard English words (Smitherman,1977:79; Kochman,1972:242).

Smitherman argues that in the Black experience, verbal performance becomes both a way of establishing an individual's reputation as well as a teaching and socializing force. This verbal performance is shown in the narration of myths, folk stories and the semi-serious tradition of 'lying' in general; in Black sermons; in the telling of jokes; in proverbs and folk sayings; in street corner and other casual 'rap' scenes; in signifying, 'capping', 'testifying', 'toasting' and other verbal arts. Smitherman believes that through these 'raps' of various kinds, Black people are acculturated into the Black value system. Thus Black speech is "a functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about life and the world and a vehicle for achieving group approval and recognition" (Smitherman,1977:79-80).

Smitherman believes that Black English is vital in maintaining a sense of Black cultural identity for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the unity of the sacred and the secular in the Black American oral tradition and in

the traditional African world view. Each discourse mode is manifested in Black American culture on a sacred-secular continuum. Secondly, since the traditional African world view emphasizes the synthesis of dualities to achieve balance and harmony in the universe and in the community of men and women, "the rituals of Black English, although maintaining an overall formulaic structure, also challenges individuals to do what they can within the traditional mold". Centuries old group norms are balanced by individualized habits. Thus "by virtue of unique contributions to the group-approved communicative structure, the individual can actualize his or her sense of self within the confines of the group" (Smitherman,1977: 103-104).

Black modes of discourse can be classified into four basic categories: (a) call-response (b) signification (c) tonal semantics and (d) narrative sequencing.

(a) Call-Response

The call-response is an African derived form of communication which involves "the spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements ("calls") are punctuated by expressions ("responses") from the listener". In the traditional Black church, call-response is often

referred to as the congregation's way of "talking back" to the preacher (Smitherman,1977:104; Holt,1972b:198).

Although call-response has been most carefully preserved in the church, it is still a basic organizing principle of Black American culture generally because it enables Blacks to achieve a unified state of balance which is vital to the traditional African world view. Because this traditional view does not separate life into sacred and secular spheres, call-responses will be found on the street as well as in the church (Smitherman,1977:106).

Examples of call-responses include:

In Church

| | |
|---|---|
| Preacher ("caller") | My theme for today is waiting on the Lord. |
| Congregation ("responders") | Take 'yo time, take 'yo time. Fix it up, Reb! Preach it, Reb! |
| Testifier ("caller", speaking from her seat) | Giving Honor to God, Who is the Head of our lives, to His Son, Jesus, the Man from Galilee, who set me free! |
| Congregation ("responders") | Go 'head, go 'head, tell about it! Watch you self, now, you fittin to start somethin. Yessuh, Yessuh! |

(Smitherman,1977:104)

Some calls and responses will be limited to either

the church or the street however what is important is the process of communication, not the subject matter. Responses in Black discourse may include:

Dig it!
Amen!
Say so!
Tell it!
Speak on it!
Yeah!
Yessuh!
Un-huh!
oh, you mean nigger!
Look out!
Lord, ha' mercy!
I hear you!
Tell the truth!

Verbal comments made to people near you, yelling at the same time the speaker is talking to affirm approval of what the speaker says, are not considered as being discourteous or rude behavior in Black American culture (Smitherman,1977:104-106).

Responses can be categorized according to the purpose accomplished or the effect achieved:

(1) Co-signing: (affirming, agreeing with the speaker)
Examples: Amen; Well; Yes; Un-huh; I hear you

(2) Encouraging: (urging speaker to continue in direction he has started)
Examples: Take yo time; Come on up; You on the case; Watch yoself.

(3) Repetition: (using the same words the speaker uses)

Examples: Speaker says: "Some folk ain't got no mother wit".

Response is: "No mother wit! That's right, no mother wit!"

(4) Completer: (completing speaker's statement, sometimes in response to "request" from speaker, sometimes in spontaneous talking with speaker)

Examples: Speaker says: "And what did the Lord say about His time, what did He say, church?

Response is: "Yassuh, He may not come when you want Him, but He's right on time"

Preacher: "And Job said, of my annoited time, when gon wait..."

Congregation: (spontaneously joins in here): "till my change shall come".

(5) On T: (an extremely powerful co-signing response, acknowledging that something the speaker has just said is dead on time, that is, "psychological time'):

Examples: Shonuff; Yassuh; Ooooo-weeeee!; Gon wit you bad self.

(Smitherman,1977:107)

According to Smitherman, calling-responding; stating and counter-stating; acting and reacting, are a natural part of Black communication, so much so that many Blacks do it unconsciously when speaking with other Blacks. However that which furthers understanding among Blacks, can often create confusion in Black-White

communication. Because the call-reponse is not part of a White person's cultural heritage, he will not engage in the response process when the Black person is speaking. The Black speaker may then believe that because of the White person's seeming lack of involvement, he is not listening. The Black speaker may then begin to punctuate the "call" with questions, such as: "Are you listening to me?" or "Did you hear me?". Such repeated questioning may then begin to irritate the White listener who says: "Yes of course I'm listening". When the White person begins to take over the "call", the Black person, as is customary, begins to respond with such expressions as "Dig it!", "Tell it!", etc. The White speaker however may interpret these 'responses' as interference, feeling that the Black person is not listening. Thus full and meaningful communication is thwarted (Smitherman,1977:118).

(b) Signification

Signification refers to the verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about or needles the listener. Signifying is sometimes used in order to make a point or just for fun. Signification has the status of a customary ritual that is accepted at face value, thus no one who is 'signified on' is supposed to take it to heart. It is a culturally approved method of

talking about someone - usually through verbal indirection. Because the signifier uses humor, the 'put-down' is easier to accept and gives the recipient a socially acceptable way out. An example of signification is as follows:

Sherry: I sho am hongy. Dog!

Reginald: That's all you think 'bout, eating all the time.

John (Sherry's brother): Man, that's why she so big.

Sherry: Aw, y'all shut up!

John: Come on, Sherry, we got to go. We'll catch later, man.

Reginald (to John): Goodnight.
Sleep tight.
Don't let Sherry
Eat you up tonight.

(Smitherman,1977:119)

Signification is characterized by the exploitation of the unexpected and quick verbal surprises; it may also be both 'light' and 'heavy'. It can be used for fun but it can also be used as a way to teach a message without preaching or lecturing. The purpose of signifying is to 'put somebody in check', to make them think about and hopefully correct their behavior. The characteristics of signification include: indirection; circumlocation; humor; irony; rhythmic fluency and sound; a play on words; the introduction of the unexpected; and is always directed

at a person or persons present (Smitherman,1977:121; Mitchell-Kernan,1972; Kochman,1972; Abrahams,1964,1974).

'The Dozens' is a form of signification but it has its own rules and rituals and is found only in secular contexts. In 'The Dozens', a person signifies on another's family, usually the mother, instead of on the person directly. The player can extend the 'put-down' by analogy to include other immediate relatives or even ancestors. The object of 'The Dozens' is to better your opponent with more caustic and humorous insults thus it is a "competitive oral test of linguistic ingenuity and verbal fluency" and the winner, determined by the audience's responses, becomes a culture hero (Smitherman, 1977:131; Abrahams,1962,1972,1974; Burling,1973).

(c) Tonal Semantics

Tonal Semantics refers to the use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning in Black communication. In using the semantics of tone, the voice is used as a musical instrument and the rhythm pattern "becomes a kind of acoustical phonetic alphabet and gives Black speech its songified or musical quality" (Smitherman, 1977:134). According to Smitherman, Black speakers use word sound to touch the hearts of their listeners much the same way a musician will use the magic of his song to

touch the 'soul' of his listeners. The speech rhythms and tonal inflections of Black English are impossible to convey through the written word but are captured in the music of James Brown and Aretha Franklin; in the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson; and in the comedy routines of Richard Pryor and Flip Wilson (Smitherman,1977:134-135).

The key to understanding Black tonal semantics is to recognize that the sound of what is being said is just as important as 'sense' -- thus strict semantic meaning is combined with lyrical balance, cadence and melodious voice rhythm to convey a message. According to Smitherman, these "songified patterns of speech reach down to the 'deep structure' of life, that common level of shared human experience which words alone cannot convey" (Smitherman,1977:135). Tonal semantics has many representations in Black speech: talk-singing, repetition, alliterative word play, intonational contouring and rhyme (Smitherman,1977:135-147).

(d) Narrative Sequencing

Along with the more ritualized forms of story telling such as Toasting and plantation tales, narrative speech is an important part of Black communication. Black English speakers will tell of their general, abstract

views concerning life, love and people in the form of a concrete narrative. Thus the relating of events, "becomes a Black rhetorical strategy to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing views to one's own point of view" (Smitherman,1977:147-148).

Storytellers in effect become the words they convey -- they use voice, body and movement as tools to create a living tale. Examples of narrative sequencing include: preaching and testifying; folk stories; 'tall-tales'; and toasts (Smitherman,1977:149).

Roger Abrahams asserts that "Blacks do indeed speak differently from Whites" but his interest is not so much in the phonological or morphological differences but in the "ways in which Blacks use talk as part of their daily lives". Abrahams believes that "Afro-Americans in the United States do constitute a separate speech community" since they are unique in the varieties of speech which they use and in the ways in which they use these varieties in performing "the ritual dimension of their personal interactions" (Abrahams,1974:240).

Abrahams argues that the best indication of the distinctiveness of the Black speech community lies in the use of speech "in the pursuit of public playing and a parallel use of silence or other verbal restrictions in

the more private sectors of the community" (Abrahams,1974: 241). Because no group will allow unchannelled aggression, methods will be developed to permit aggression in play or contest situations (Smitherman,1977:41). Attitudes toward work and play differ in Afro and Euro-American communities. Abrahams asserts that in Black communities, work is essentially a private matter which is part of home life but play is considered to be inappropriate in the home and is regarded as a public kind of phenomena. Playing is an important way to distinguish oneself in public, with witty verbal exchanges as one important way of playing. Abrahams has distinguished between house talk and street talk, especially regarding the kinds of relationships pursued and the varieties of communication used. The home is seen as being the place where the mother exerts her full authority. The street is the place where male friendships are created by maintaining the possibility of playing at all times (Abrahams,1974:241-242).

Abrahams believes that folklore is play in its broadest sense since it involves people either in "the play world of the game or in the play world of the fictive experience". Folklore offers two basic ways of 'playing out' aggression: through the symbolic movements of games and players or through the vicarious dramatic expression of the narrative world (Abrahams,1964:41).

Through verbal performances, friendships as well as reputations are established. The importance of 'talk' is reflected in the larger number of terms describing the varieties of such 'talk' such as: (1) signifying (term referring to a wide variety of verbal techniques united by the single strategy of verbal manipulation through indirection); (2) rapping (terms for casual talk used for providing information to someone , talking to a woman or for conning someone); (3) to hip (to provide valid information); (4) talking shit (to engage in talk to elicit more talk); (5) put-down (to best one's verbal opponent); (6) put-on (implied deceit); and (7)hoorawing (an active contest of wits in which everyone may join) (Abrahams,1974:243,255-262).

Thus Abrahams argues that one of the most dominant features of the lifestyle in most Afro-American communities is the continuing reliance on oral expression. In Black American culture, great social value is placed on verbal abilities, often expressed in verbal contests(Abrahams, 1972:216).

One of the most important areas in the Black English controversy is the issue of the education of Black students in the public school system. The basic problem is to find a way to encourage Black students who speak Black English to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage while at the same time learn the Standard American English being taught in the public schools.

As Dunn (1976) has pointed out, the influence of racist ideas concerning the physical and mental capacities of Black Americans ironically led many White liberals and Black educators to support the racist view of Black 'mental deficiency' regarding speech forms thinking that they were actually "doing Blacks a favor". This rather unusual situation has its origin in the late 1920's. The misconception that the varieties of English spoken by Blacks, particularly in America, were void of any African survivals or influence was very popular among some scholars. Black 'versions' of English were considered to be no different from that of Whites, each varying according to both geographical and educational background. This misconception was initially proposed for obvious

racist motives but ironically its survival resulted from its acceptance by liberals and Black educators who opposed racism yet accepted, in the name of equality and integration, the 'mental and cultural deficiency' stigma placed upon Blacks by the racists (Dunn,1976:106-108).

This situation arose when during the late 1920's the idea that Black speech was void of any African influence was utilized by scholars such as Hans Kurath (1971) and G.P. Krapp (1924) to refute any claims that Blacks had made any significant contributions to the development of English in the United States. According to Kurath and Krapp, the native African dialects were completely lost. This loss was attributed to "Krapp's Law" which stated that "whenever two languages come into contact where one represented a high level of culture and sophistication and the other a low level, the latter yielded and adapted to the speech patterns of the former. Little or nothing happened in the reverse direction" (Krapp,1924:190-195).

Thus according to Dunn, the propogation of this myth, not allowing for the possibility of African influence, delegated Blacks to the simple role of

imitator and not contributor in acquiring language. Beyond this, the minimizing of Africanisms in Black speech patterns allowed scholars to account for any differences in Black speech as being 'inappropriate' and 'incorrect'. The speech of Blacks was considered to be archaic and that Black speakers retained these 'archaic' speech patterns because of their "social backwardness", a definite racist view (Dunn,1976:107).

Dillard argues that the idea that there were no African influences on the speech of Black Americans was false and was used mainly in an attempt to support "a shaky and untenable concept known as the East Anglian theory". This theory proposed that Blacks originally learned archaic dialects spoken in some of the remote localities of Northern England. It was also suggested that Blacks remained in a "perpetual state of archaism" being unable to "bridge the linguistic gap separating them from Whites". Dillard feels that this concept was "one of the harshest, if not the most racist theory promulgated upon the Black man" since one could only conclude that such inability to learn 'proper White English' was the result of mental deficiency (Dillard,1972:187).

Ironically some liberals gave their support to the doctrine of 'mental deficiency' since they claimed that there were no Black-White speech differences due to cultural differences. This group felt that the minimizing of cultural differences would hasten the processes of integration and thus establish equality between Blacks and Whites in the United States. Both Blacks and Whites played down the differences of culture, language and other modes of behavior apparently without realizing that what they were asking for was the denial by Blacks of their cultural heritage (Dunn,1976:107).

Thus even though many White liberals and Black educators sought to deny the existence of any cultural-behavioral differences between Blacks and Whites in an effort to hasten equality and integration, their support for the doctrine of 'deficiency and deprivation' did not bring Blacks into the mainstream of American culture but in Dunn's view, "the argument came full circle and turned upon Blacks in a manner reminiscent of the original authors" (Dunn,1976:107). The Kurath-Krapp Hypothesis, which refuted the idea of an African substratum surviving in the dominant American culture,

was used to help perpetuate the myth that "the use of Black English beyond a certain point of maturation indicated a low barometer level of achievement capability" (Dunn,1976:107).

Scholars were able to postulate such evils as "cultural deprivation" and "social deficiencies" for the failure of some Black children to master the sophisticated grammatical structures of Standard American English. Further research singled out such 'social deficiencies' as : a lack of strong family structure and the resultant poor motivation; under-developed linguistic and cognitive capacities; as well as an illiterate, non-verbal environmental background (Dunn,1976:108).

As a consequence of the denial of Black-White cultural differences which would have affected speech patterns, sociolinguists and educators began to formulate theories which went so far as to propose that the 'deficiencies' in Black American culture be viewed as 'a pathological phenomena'. Thus the linguistic skills of Black children were to be seen as "an illness to be cured" (Baratz and Baratz,1972:

3-16; and Dunn,1976:108). Such views seemed plausible at the time because White liberals, Black educators and racist linguists had destroyed the possibility of explaining the low reading scores of some Black children as the result of cultural differences reflected in the school system so the only other explanations which seemed likely were 'physical or mental inferiority' or cultural deprivation .

In the 1960's, Black students who spoke Black English were bombarded with a wide range of language studies and remediation programs for the 'disadvantaged' and the 'culturally deprived'. The ultimate goal of these and other such 'compensatory education' reforms was to narrow the disparity between Black and White income. It was argued that since education correlates with economic and social success in America, the way out of the Black ghetto was through enhanced educational achievement. While a few remedial programs spoke of cognitive linguistic 'deficiency' in Black students, others referred to cognitive-linguistic differences. However both the 'deficient' and the 'difference' models are conceptualized within the framework of Black 'pathology' in which Black children are viewed

as being culturally and linguistically inferior to White middle class children (Smitherman,1977:201-202; Baratz and Baratz,1972; Stewart,1971a; Fasold and Shuy,1970; Bereiter and Engelmann,1966; Bernstein, 1962,1964,1970,1971).

One of the most extreme views in the 'cultural deprivation' group belongs to Basil Bernstein, namely that lower class Black children have no language at all. Bernstein believed that much of the lower class language consisted of a kind of incidental 'emotional' accompaniment to action here and now. Bernstein's views were filtered through a strong bias against all forms of working class behavior so that middle class language was seen as being superior in every respect, as being more abstract, flexible, detailed and subtle (Bernstein,1962,1964,1970,1971).

Bereiter and Engelmann devised a program for an academically oriented preschool which was based on the premise that "Negro children must have a language with which they can learn and the empirical finding is that these children come to school without such a language" (Bereiter and Engelmann,1966:113).

Bereiter argues that the communication of Black children is accomplished through the use of gestures, single words and a series of badly connected words or phrases such as /They mine/ and /Me got juice/. Bereiter concludes that the Black children's speech forms are nothing more than a series of emotional cries and that they must be treated as if they had no language at all.

Bereiter identifies the Black children's speech with his interpretation of Bernstein's 'restricted code': "the language of culturally deprived children... is not merely an underdeveloped version of Standard American English but is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behavior" (Bereiter, et al,1966:112-113). The basic program of Bereiter's preschool is to teach Black children a new language created by Engelmann which consists of a limited series of questions and answers (Bereiter and Engelmann,1966:113).

Thus ironically many liberals and Black educators because of their fear of racist stereotypes, concern for racial equality or integration in education,

suppport an essentially racist view which suggests that the low scholastic performances of some Black children are not the result of cultural differences intensified in the public school system but the result of mental and cultural 'deficiencies' on the part of Black children. Such a proposal encouraged many racist educators such as Jensen (1969) to find alternative explanations and solutions to the 'problem' of Black education, all of which served to hold back the drive towards equality and integration.

According to linguist Geneva Smitherman, both the 'difference' and 'deficit' language programs were concerned with the "sociolinguistic etiquette and the norms of the White middle class" and were not designed to instill pride in Black language or culture. Smitherman argues that the ideology of these programs is directed towards promoting "the values of the dominant society and eliminating the cultural distinctiveness of Black America" (Smitherman,1977: 203).

Many educational psychologists in the 1960's attempted to account for the poor performance of some Black students in the inner city schools by discovering

what 'disadvantage' or 'defect' the children were suffering from (Labov,1970:153; Baratz and Baratz,1972). Such 'cognitive-deficit' theorists labeled Blacks with 'verbal deprivation' and attributed it to inferior intelligence due either to genetic inheritance or environmental factors. These crucial 'deficiencies' in Black speech and thought were regarded as indicating language 'retardation' and 'impoverishment' and consequently these theorists advocated the total eradication of what they considered to be the 'inferior' Black speech. Black English was "viewed as an under-developed version of Standard American English and a non-logical mode of expressive behavior, lacking the formal properties necessary for the formulation of cognitive concepts"(Smitherman,1977:205; Labov,1970: 153; Baratz,1973; Baratz and Baratz,1972).

Unfortunately these ideas were based on the work of educational psychologists who, in the opinion of William Labov, know very little about language and even less about Black children. Labov argues that "the concept of verbal deprivation has no basis in social reality" since Black children in the inner city or in ghettos receive a great deal of verbal

stimulation and participate fully in a highly verbal culture. Black children also have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning and use the same logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English (Labov,1970:153).

The idea of verbal deprivation is a part of the modern mythology of educational psychology and is typical of the unfounded ideas which tend to come out of the American educational system. According to Labov, linguists have been as guilty as others in promoting such "intellectual fashions" at the expense of both teachers and students. But the myth of verbal deprivation is dangerous because it "diverts attention from real defects in our educational system to imaginary defects of the child... it leads inevitably to the hypothesis of the genetic inferiority of Black children that it was originally designed to avoid" (Labov,1970:154).

Another larger group of educators, psychologists and linguists view Black language and culture not as being deficient but simply as 'different' however these differences do not emerge as being equal and valid but as inferior and insufficient, as deviances

from the norm. Black children are viewed as being 'culturally deprived', thus their world needs to be 'culturally enriched' (Smitherman,1977:206; Baratz and Baratz,1972; Stewart,1971a; Baratz and Shuy,1969).

The 'difference' theorists partially accept the speech of Blacks, arguing that it is linguistically systematic however they also point out that the "social world demands linguistic conformity of Blacks" (Smitherman,1977:206). Smitherman argues that these 'difference' theorists promote a bi-dialectal model which in effect says that "since the White middle class either cannot or will not accept the dialect of Blacks, then Blacks must accept and learn to use the dialect of the White middle class" (Smitherman, 1977:207).

According to Smitherman, the bi-dialectal theorists, like the 'deficit' theorists, fail to understand the interaction between language, school and the larger political reality. In her view, schools, curricula, language teaching policies and classroom politics are "interrelated with and governed by the pervasive political and economic ideology

of America" (Smitherman,1977:207). The history of Black people in the United States has shown that the ability to speak Standard American English does not in any way guarentee economic and social success thus in Smitherman's view, for educators and linguists "to push that notion off on kids is to deal them a gross lie" (Smitherman,1977:207). Thus meaningful and successful education of Black children can only occur with major changes in educational, social and economic policy.

Since Smitherman believes that it is still individual teachers in their individual settings that are the single most important factor in the educational process, then the negative attitudes and behavior of many teachers towards their students who speak Black English must be replaced with a genuine kind of teacher warmth if Black students are going to improve their academic performance. Teachers must learn to accept the inherent legitimacy of the many varieties of English and to respect the power of both written and oral communication styles (Smitherman,1977:219).

In the sixties and early seventies many Black

parents and educators refused to accept Black English as a legitimate dialect of Standard American English because of their concern with the education of Black children in the public school system. They were afraid that an acceptance of Black English would encourage their children to continue what they called "sloppy talk" or "poor English" and thus be at a disadvantage in the job market (Seymour,1974; and Shores,1977).

Many Black parents insisted that their children learn Standard American English in school but were frustrated when their children consistently failed to learn how to read and were thus labeled by the schools as being 'learning-disabled'. According to Smitherman, such parents eventually realized that the real barrier to their children learning to read in public schools was the negative attitude of teachers towards the use of Black English. Through often painful re-analysis of their views, many Black parents have begun to believe that in order for their children to learn Standard American English, Black English must first be recognized as a legitimate dialect of Standard English and to this end many have gone to court to prove their case. If Black English is established as

a separate dialect of Standard American English and some of the stigma is removed from speaking it, many teachers may begin to learn the basics of Black English and in this way be more prepared to promote a positive attitude in the classroom. This positive attitude may enable Black children to more readily use their knowledge of Black English to learn the fundementals of Standard American English (Smitherman,1977:219-241). The issue today for many linguists and educators centers on the development of reading programs in the schools which will enable speakers of Black English to understand the basics of Standard American English.

## CHAPTER VI

## TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of the thesis is to first of all review and analyze the research material concerning Black English in order to test whether or not there is enough conclusive evidence in the literature to prove the following hypothesis: If Black English is a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English, then it must have a set of distinct linguistic features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical which are unique to it.

A review of the research literature reveals the existence of two groups who are sharply divided over the issue of the validity of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English with distinct linguistic features :

(1) The No Group

(a) The Racists

The Racist group of scholars such as Gonzales (1922), Tillinghast (1902), Odum (1910) and Jensen (1969) believe in the racial inferiority of Black Americans. This thesis strongly rejects the position

of this group which accepts the notion of race rather than culture to explain the speech and behavioral patterns of Black Americans. The idea that one particular group of people is racially inferior to all others is repugnant to anthropology which strives to explain the diversity of Man by citing the unique cultural and historical traditions of each individual group. The racist view that Black Americans possess no culture and no language is disproven by the many anthropological and linguistic studies done during the last forty years.

### (b) Authors Who Deny the Existence of Black English for Extra-Scientific Reasons

The thesis also rejects the evidence presented by the second group which denies the existence of Black English for a variety of extra-scientific reasons. During the late 1920's Kurath (1971) and Krapp (1924) formulated the position which states that Black American speech was void of any African influence and thus Black Americans made no significant contributions to the development of English in the United States.

According to Krapp's Law, whenever two languages come into contact, with one being inferior (i.e. African

languages) and one superior (i.e. Anglo-American languages), the inferior language always gives way to the superior one. Krapp and Kurath believed that since the language of the original slave population was so obviously 'inferior', it naturally disappeared in favor of the more 'superior' Standard American English. It followed that this group would also believe that because of the 'deficiencies' of Black Americans, they were unable to master fully the 'superior' English language - and thus they continued to speak 'poor' English.

Dunn (1976), Seymour (1974), Dillard (1972) and Shores (1977) have shown that educators, liberals and many parents accepted the idea that Black Americans possessed no unique culture or language because they wanted to emphasize the positive potential of Blacks and to encourage equality and integration. Many people in this group truly believed that to deny a unique Black American culture and language would prevent racism however they were caught in a Catch-22 situation since the 'inferior' speech of Blacks could not be explained in terms of cultural differences, it was explained in terms of 'mental and cultural deficiency'. By denying the unique culture, language and behavior

patterns of Black Americans, this group was actually asking for the denial by Blacks of their cultural and historical heritage.

The acceptance of the doctrine of Black American cultural 'deficiency and deprivation' led many educators such as Bernstein (1962;1964;1970;1971) and Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) to believe that young Black students came from 'pathological' backgrounds and thus needed special training to make up for such deficiencies. Such arguments must be rejected since they originate from the false proposition that Black students possess no culture and no language. These scholars failed to see the unique cultural and linguistic patterns in Black American culture and thus relegated the behavior of Black children to an 'inferior' status. Black children learned the language which was spoken at home which was not 'pathological' or 'inferior' in any way but merely unique since it reflected an African influence on the language patterns developed after contact with Standard American English.

The thesis must reject the arguments presented by this second group which denies the existence of Black English for personal reasons, either for fear of racist stereotypes, concern for racial equality

or integration in education. This group ironically supports an essentially racist view which suggests that the low scholastic performances of some Black children are not the result of cultural differences intensified in the public school system but the result of mental and cultural deficiencies on the part of Black children which must be eliminated.

### (c) Dialectologists Who Deny the Existence of Black English on Linguistic Grounds

The thesis rejects the evidence presented by the third group consisting of dialectologists who deny the existence of Black English on linguistic grounds. Dialectologists such as Kurath (1949;1971), Krapp (1924), the McDavids (1951), Williamson (1970;1971), Davis (1969) and Dunlap (1977) argue that there is no African influence on the speech of Black Americans nor on the development of English in the United States. This group flatly denies that Black Americans possess any unique language thus they view Black speech as being : (1) regional - Southern (2) archaic English or (3) simply 'inferior' English.

The thesis rejects the linguistic evidence proposed by dialectologists such as Williamson (1970;

1971), Davis (1969) and Dunlap (1977) who argue that the unique phonological and grammatical features described by the supporters of Black English are false :

(1) Phonology

(a) clear /l/ in prevocalic position

(b) bilabial aspirants /ð/ and /θ/ replaced by /v/ and /f/ respectively

(c) /b/, /d/ and /g/ as fully voiced imploded stops

(d) neutralization of final /m/and /n/ with a resulting nasalization of the preceding vowel

(e) /f/ and /v/ as bilabial spirants

(2) Grammar

(a) zero copula

(b) use of invariant be

(c) absence of the possessive

(d) marked forms for past and future (was, been, be, gonna)

(e) the use of ain't and don't as negative markers

(f) the occurrence of there and their as they

The thesis agrees with Pickford (1975) who attacked the linguistic work done by dialectologists associated with the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada since they lack significance, scientific validity and reliability.

(2) The Yes Group

The thesis accepts the evidence presented by the authors who support the existence of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English.

(a) Authors Who Support the Existence of Black English on Linguistic Grounds

The thesis accepts the evidence of linguists such as Bailey (1968;1971), Stewart (1968;1970;1971a; 1971b), Dillard (1968;1971;1972;1975), Dalby (1971; 1972), Turner (1949;1971a;1971b) and Smitherman (1977) who argue that Krapp (1924), Kurath (1949;1971) and the McDavids (1951) are wrong and that African languages have had a very definite influence on Black American speech. These authors argue that Black English was originally derived from a pidgin and then a creole language which gradually combined aspects of the native African langauges with Standard American English.

Turner, Dalby and Smitherman also assert that African languages and Black English have influenced the development of English in the United States thus opposing the dialectologists who claim that Blacks are merely imitators and not contributors in acquiring language.

Because of the overwhelming evidence regarding the unique phonological, morphological and grammatical linguistic features of Black English, the thesis accepts the position of linguists who view Black English as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English. The thesis argues that the hypothesis has been proven since there is undeniable, conclusive evidence in the research literature which proves that Black English possesses unique linguistic features. The thesis accepts the following summary definition of Black English :

(1) Black English is learned as a result of normal cultural processes

(2) Black English is not 'racial' in any sense- not all Black Americans will speak it

(3) Black English consists of definite linguistic rules but it also reflects variation

(4) Black English is an Africanized form of Standard American English which reflects the linguistic and cultural African heritage of Black America; it is Euro-American speech with an Afro-American meaning, nuance and tone

The unique phonology, morphology-semantics and grammar-syntax of Black English may be summarized as follows :

A) PHONOLOGY

An examination of the linguistic literature establishes the fact that the phonological system of Black English utilizes the same number of sounds as Standard American English (ranging from forty-five to forty-eight sounds counting stress and intonation patterns) but that these sounds exist in a few different patterns of distribution. It must be realized that Black English sounds tend to be generally similar to those of Standard American English speakers of any given region of the country. As Smitherman (1977) points out, there is no national standard of pronounciation since the different regional dialects of the country all have their own individual

standards. The real distinctiveness in the Black English sound system lies in those features which do not lend themselves easily to concrete documentation, such as speech rhythms, voice inflections, and tonal patterns however the following list indicates the few different pronounciations in Black English that are used by large numbers of Black speakers :

(1) initial /th/ = /d/

Examples : them = dem; then = den

(2) final /th/ = /f/

Examples : south = souf; mouth = mouf

(3) deletion of middle and final /r/

Examples : during = doing; more = mow

(4) deletion of middle and final /l/

Examples : help = hep; will = wi

(When the contracted form of will is used /'ll/, you get a kind of /ah/ sound as : Iah be there in a minute for I'll be there in a minute)

(5) deletion of most final consonants

Examples : hood = hoo; bed = be;
test = tes; wasp = was

(Pluralized forms ending in such double consonants add /es/, thus tests = tesses; wasps = wasses . One important exception to this rule involves words ending in /s/, such as the proper name Wes. Here the /s/ is not deleted)

(6) vowel plus /ng/ in thing, ring, sing rendered as /ang/

Examples : thing = thang; ring = rang

(7) contraction of going to rendered as gon. Here the to is omitted altogether and the nasal sound at the end is shortened, producing a sound that is somewhat like an abbreviated form of gone.

Example : He was gon tell his momma good-by.

(8) primary stress on the first syllable and front shifting

Examples : police = PO-lice; Detroit = DEE-troit

(9) simple vowels

Examples : nice = nahc; boy = boah

(Smitherman,1977:17-18; Wolfram,1969; Fasold and Wolfram, 1970; Fasold,1969,1972; Labov,et al,1968;1972; Loflin, 1971; and Burling,1973).

B) GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX

According to Smitherman (1977) and Fasold and Wolfram (1970), the greatest differences between contemporary Black English and Standard American English are on the level of grammatical structure. Grammar is the most rigid and fixed aspect of speech; it is the part of any language which is least likely to change over time. In addition, it has only been in recent years that any substantial pressure has been brought to bear upon Black Americans to conform to the language standards of White America thus it is logical that the grammatical patterns of Black English have been the last component to change in the direction of

Standard American English. Black speakers of Black English throughout the United States share certain grammatical structures despite the region of the country which they are from and in some instances despite the social class level (Smitherman,1977:18-19).

(1) Invariant Be

The use of /be/ as a finite form has been cited in many linguistic studies of Black English and it is one of the most important areas where there is a significant difference between Black English and Standard American English.

The patterns using /be/ (sometimes written and pronounced bees or be's) are mainly used to indicate a condition that occurs habitually, thus /be/ is omitted if the condition or event is not one that is repeated or recurring. For example, /The coffee bees cold/ means that everyday the coffee is cold which is very different from /The coffee cold/ which means that today the coffee is cold. The be/non-be rule operates with systematic regularity in the Black English speaking community.

Be is also used in combination with /do/

to convey habitual conditions expressed in question form and for emphasis: /Do they be playing all day?/ (Standard English form = Do they play all day ?/ and /Yeah the boys do be messing around a lot/ (Standard English form = Yeah the boys do mess around a lot).

In addition to the use of /be/ for habitual events, the Black English speaker can also use /be/ to convey a sense of future time, as in /The boy be here soon/ and /They family be gone Friday/. These subtle distinctions in the meaning and use of /be/ depend heavily on context thus the listener must pay attention to the contextual clues in order to decode the speaker's meaning properly (Smitherman,1977: 19-20; Bailey,1971; Stewart,1971b; Loflin,1971; Fasold,1969,1972; Wolfram,1969; Fasold and Wolfram, 1970; Labov,et al,1968,1972; and Burling,1973).

Future /be/ may appear in combination with the contracted form of /will/ = /'ll/. Due to the Black English sound rule of /l/ deletion, speakers use a /ah/ sound for the letters /'ll/. Thus you will hear: /He be looking for you next week/ as well as /He-ah be looking for you next week/. The explanation

for both forms being used lies in the transition from a more Africanized Black English towards a more Americanized Black English. In the early stages of Black English, probably only /be/ by itself was used to denote future time. Then with the change in time and the replacement of Black English structures with those of Standard American English, Black English speakers began to indicate future time also with the use of /will/ pronounced according to Black English sound rules. However since the process of language change is an ongoing one, both ways of expressing future time are found in the Black community and indeed within the speech of any one individual speaker of Black English (Smitherman,1977:20-21; Bailey,1971; Wolfram,1969; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; Fasold,1969,1972; Labov,et al, 1968,1972; and Loflin,1971).

In Black English, forms of /be/ but not /be/ itself appear in places where they are needed for meaning as in the past tense and in questions tacked onto sentences. For example: /He was my English teacher last year/ is found rather than an ambiguous sentence such as /He my English teacher last year/ (Smitherman,1977: 21; Bailey,1971; Wolfram,1969; Fasold and Wolfram,1970;

Fasold,1969,1972; Labov, et al,1968,1972; Loflin,1971; and Burling,1973).

When the forms of /be/ are used, they are simplified so that /is/ and /was/ usually serve for all subjects of sentences, whether the subjects are singular or plural or refer to /I/, /you/ or /we/, etc. For example, /You ain't sick, is you?/ as well as /They was acting up and going on/. The contracted form /'s/ may also be used: /We's doing our work and every-thang when she start calling on us/ (Smitherman,1977: 21; Wolfram,1969; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; Fasold,1969, 1972; Labov, et al,1968,1972; and Loflin,1971).

Since the Black English speaker omits /be/ when referring to conditions that are fixed in time and to events that do not repeat themselves, there is also an abesence of /be/ before nouns: /He a hippie now/; before adjectives: /He too tall for me/; before adverbs: /They shoes right there/ ; before prepositional phrases: /My momma in the hospital/; and auxiliary constructions: /They talking about school now/ (Smitherman,1977:21; Wolfram,1969; and Fasold and Wolfram,1970).

Black English speakers use /been/ to express past action that has recently been completed. "Recently"

here depends much more upon the particular words in the sentence that express time, rather than the actual amount of time itself. For example: /She been tardy twice this semester/. As a general rule, where Black English speakers use /been/ , speakers of Standard American English use /have/, /has/ or /had/ plus /been/ (Smitherman,1977:21-22).

Been is also used in combination with other verb forms to indicate past action, which might be recently completed or more distantly completed action. For example: /He been gone a year/ but also /He been gone a day/. The Standard English equivalents would be a form of /have/ plus /been/ plus the verb (Smitherman,1977:22).

Sometimes however /been/ is used to show emphasis, regardless of the time that has elapsed since an action took place. /She been there/, uttered with stress on /BEEN/ means that the speaker wants to emphasize the fact that the individual has been wherever she is for a long enough period of time that it is an established fact(Smitherman,1977:23; Fasold and Wolfram,1970).

In similar fashion , /been/ patterns with

other verb forms to suggest emphatic assertion. For example, the sentence /He BEEN gone/ means that the speaker is certain of the fact of his leaving (Smitherman,1977:23).

(2) Use of Done

The use of /done/ by itself indicates past action, either recently completed or completed in the distant past. For example: /I done my homework today/ and /I done my homework yesterday/ are both correct Black English statements. Standard American English equivalents would be : /I did my homework today/ and /I did my homework yesterday/. When used in combination with another verb, /done/ usually indicates only recently completed action, for example: /I done finish my work/.

In Black English /done/ can be found in combination with /been/. In such sentences /done/ functions like the Standard English /have/. For example: /He done been gone all night/ (Standard English form = He has been gone all night).

The Black English use of /done/ also makes possible a tense that has pretty much gone out of use in Standard American English - the future perfect.

In Standard American English, such sentences as : /He will have left by the time we get there/, used to be very common. Now however it is far more likely to hear : /He will be gone by the time we get there/. Black English speakers create the future perfect tense by using /be/ plus /done/ plus the verb: /He be done left by the time we get there/. This usage is still very popular with Black English speakers and is found in the very common expression: /I be done _____ before you know it/. Speakers simply fill in whatever verb they want to use, according to context (Smitherman,1977:23-26).

(3) Use of Context to Signal Time

Black English relies on either the context of the immediate sentence or the context of an entire conversation to signal conditions of time. There is no /-ed/ in either past tense or past participle constructions, for example: /This guy I know name Junior/ and /I look for him last night/. Using context to signal time, the same verb form serves for both present and past tense, as in: /The bus pass me up last week/, but also /The bus pass me up everyday/. The words /last week/ and /everday/ signal the time

of these statements rather than a change in the verb form (Smitherman,1977:26).

(4) The Subject and Number of the Verb

Most Black English verbs are not marked for person. The same verb serves for all subjects, whether singular or plural. The subject and number of the verb are marked by the context of the sentence or by some word in the sentence. For example: /She have us say it/. In this example, the singular subject is indicated by /she/, with no change in the verb /have/ (Smitherman,1977:26-28; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; and Burling,1973).

(5) Plurality and Possession

Black English has the concepts of plurality and possession but they are not indicated by the addition of /-s/ or apostrophes with /-s/. In the sentence: /Two boy just left/, /two/ indicates that /boy/ is plural. In the sentence: /That was Mr. Johnson store got burn down/, the position of the noun /Mr. Johnson/ signals who owns the store (Smitherman,1977:28; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; and Burling,1973).

(6) Hypercorrection

As a result of trying to conform Africanized patterns to Americanized ones, and doing so without the benefit of formal language training, Blacks created in Black English a number of overly correct or hypercorrect forms such as the addition of /-s/ to already pluralized forms, as in /It's three childrens in my family/ and /The peoples shouldn't do that/. Forms such as /they does/ are also found in Black English. Such hypercorrections are due to insufficient knowledge and instruction in the erratic rules of Standard American English (Smitherman,1977:28; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; and Burling,1973).

(7) Repetition of Subjects

Black English speakers place stress on the subjects of sentences. In Standard American English this might be labeled the "double subject" but rather than being a duplicate subject as such, the Black English repetition of the subject in some other form is used for emphasis. For example: /My son, he have a new car/ and /The boy who left, he my friend/. This feature of Black English is not a mandatory one, sometimes it is used, at other times it is not

(Smitherman,1977:28-29; Turner,1971a).

(8) Personal Pronoun System

The personal pronoun system of Black English is not as highly differentiated as that of Standard American English. Thus for example, with the third person plural pronoun /they/ , the same form serves for subject, possessive and the so-called reflexive as in /The expressway bought they house/ and /They should do it theyselves/. In the case of the third person singular pronoun /he/, forms such as /He gone/ and /Him cool/ and in the reflexive /He did it all hisself/, will be found. At an earlier stage in the development of Black English, forms like /He book/ (for his book) and /She house/ (for her house) were common but these have gradually disappeared.

The pronoun /it/ is used to refer to things and objects as in Standard American English but Black English adds additional function for the pronoun. It can be used to introduce statements and as such has no real meaning. For example: /It's four boy and two girl in the family/ and /It was a man died/. Black English may also use the introductory /it/ in question form: /Is it anybody home?/ (the Standard English form = Is there anybody home?)

(Smitherman,1977:29; Bailey,1971; and Fasold and Wolfram, 1970).

(9) Adverbs

As an adverbial demonstrative /here/ or /there/ plus /go/ is used instead of here/there plus is/are. For example: /There go my brother in the first row/ and /Here go my momma right there/. The speaker also has the option of expressing these two statements with /it/ as an introduction, for example: /It's my brother in the first row/ and /It's my momma right there/.

As with the deletion of final consonants in many Black English sounds, the dialect omits the final /-s/ in adverbs, for example: /Sometime they do that/ and /He alway be here/ (Smitherman,1977:30; Fasold and Wolfram, 1970).

(10) Triple and Quadruple Negatives

Whereas Standard American English uses the double negative, only Black English uses the triple and quadruple negatives. For example: /Don't nobody never help me do my work/; /Can't nobody do nothin in Mr. Smith class/; /Don't nobody pay no attention to no nigguh that ain crazy/. It should be noted that these statements are not questions despite the reverse word order. The rule for

forming negatives in Black English is complex : If the negative statement is composed of only one sentence, then every negatable item in the statement must be negated. If however the negative statement involves two or more sentences combined together as one, a different rule operates - all negatives indicate 'positives' and all negatives plus one positive indicates 'negative'.

To explain more clearly the negation rule, if the negative statement is composed of only one sentence, then every negatable item in the sentence must be negated therefore the example: /Don't nobody never help me do my work/ which consists of only one sentence, has a negative in every possible place in the sentence. The Standard American English translation is: /No one ever helps me do my work/.

If however there are two or more sentences combined together as one, then a different rule operates. If every negatable item in the statement is negated, the Standard American English translation would be a statement in the 'positive'. If however the statement contains all negatives plus one positive, the Standard American English translation would be a statement in the 'negative'. In the example: /Don't nobody pay no attention

to no nigguh that ain crazy/ there are two sentences combined into one statement and every item in the statement is negated, leaving the Standard English translation: /If you are a crazy nigger, you will get attention/. Now if the speaker wants to convey the opposite meaning (If you are a crazy nigger, you will not get any attention), the correct Black English expression would contain all negatives plus one positive, for example: /Don't nobody pay no attention to no niggah that's crazy!/.

Another distinctive Black English negation pattern occurs in statements which are only partly negative. These statements pattern with /but/ as in /Don't but one person go out at a time/ and /Don't nobody but God know when that day gon be/ (Smitherman, 1977:30-31; Bailey,1971; Fasold and Wolfram,1970; Burling,1973).

The related literature concerning the issue of Black English has thus revealed that an understanding of the distinctive Black English sound and structure patterns can help to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap between Blacks and Whites and thus further communication however linguists caution us that we must

not expect all Black English speakers to use all these patterns all the time (Smitherman,1977:31).

C) MORPHOLOGY AND SEMANTICS

The study of the unique morphology or semantics of Black English encompasses the totality of idioms, terms and expressions that are commonly used by Black Americans. Thus although many of the words and concepts in Black English grew out of the conflict and tension of White oppression of Blacks, many aspects of Black verbal behavior are Africanized adaptations which can be seen as logical cultural consequences rather than as strictly racially based linguistic terms reflecting Black reactions to White culture. In the Black community the vocabulary of "soul" crosses generational and class lines and is grounded in the common linguistic and cultural history of Black people (Smitherman,1977: 42-43).

The Black Semantic language and verbal concepts draw upon four traditions:

(1) West African language background

(2) Servitude and oppression

(3) Music and "Cool Talk"

(4) The traditional Black church

The Black Semantic language and verbal concepts which are derived from a West African language background are of three types: (a) words of direct African origin , (b) words that are loan-translations and (c) inflated vocabulary.

Lorenzo Turner (1949,1971a) and David Dalby (1971,1972) have investigated the African origin of American words with excellent results. Turner, in his fifteen year study of the coastal region speech of South Carolina and Georgia, discovered nearly six thousand English words of African origin. Dalby has added substantially to Turner's list by citing over eighty words of general American use that were borrowings from African languages, for example: tote, gorilla, elephant, jazz, oasis, sorcery, tater, goober, banana and banjo (Dalby,172:173,177-186; Smitherman,1977:43-45).

In Black English many words exist which are loan-translations (calques) in which the literal meaning of the African phrase is retained although not always the exact word itself. Examples of such

loan-translations are: (1) dig : to understand or appreciate, from Wolof /dega/, literally 'to understand' and (2) okay : both in the sense of 'all right' and in the sense of 'after that', connecting sentences in a narrative sequence, from the West African language form /kay/ meaning 'yes', 'of course', as in Wolof /waw kay/, /waw ke/, and Mandingo /o-ke/ (Smitherman, 1977:44-45; Dalby,1972:173,179,183).

The third level of Black English semantics which reflects an African language background is the kind of verbal posturing which provides the speaker with inflated word choices for ordinary situations. The use of over-elegant vocabulary is common in African speech and has survived in Black America in the form of exaggerated language or "High Talk". An example of "High Talk" in Black America is found in a book by Robert Pharr called Book of Numbers (1969) where Blueboy shows his appreciation for the surprise gift of whiskey that his host has given him:

> Mine dearest host... it does this old heart good to meet a boniface who demands good service for his guests. My friend Emily says never to tip your wealthy host so whatever change there is you give it to the sable child of beauty who told you we were dying of thirst.
>
> (Smitherman,1977:47).

The condition of servitude and oppression contributed to the necessity for coding or disguising English from Whites. Since slaves were forced to communicate in English, they began to devise ways of speaking which were powerful and meaningful to the Black listener but appeared to be harmless and meaningless to any Whites who may have overheard them. Many favorite slave song lyrics and spirituals also had this double-edged meaning. For example, the following stanza from an old Black folk song:

> You mought be Carroll from Carrollton
> Arrive here night afo' Lawd made creation
> But you can't keep the World from moverin' around
> And not turn her back from the gaining ground
>
> (Smitherman,1977:47).

The phrase "<u>not turn her</u>" in the last line of the song is a concealed reference to preacher-revolutionary Nat Turner. The tradition of slavery and discrimination almost by necessity made an important contribution to the development of Black Semantics because it forced Blacks to use the language of their oppressors to their own advantage. Because slaves were politically and economically powerless, they turned to the only real weapon they had to survive:

their language.

The tradition of a coded dialect of English whose meaning was hidden from Whites persisted even after slavery was abolished and can be seen as the basis for urban Black "Cool Talk". The historical realities of servitude and oppression explain why this aspect of Black Semantics changes so often and so rapidly, since once a word gains widespread use in the White American mainstream, a new term must be created (Smitherman,1977:49).

Music and "Cool Talk" provide a third source of Black Semantics. The music world's basic semantic contribution consists of two types: (1) musical expressions from the Black folk tradition and (2) the terms and expressions coined and used by the musicians themselves, either in their lyrics or in their general speech (Smitherman,1977:50-55).

The fourth tradition that helped to create Black Semantics is that of the traditional Black church. Because of the profound influence of the Black religious tradition on Black American culture, many expressions and semantic concepts in the Black English vocabulary

have a religious base. The traditional Black church remains an important source of African survivals and the manifestation of the traditional African world view. Essential to this view is the precedence of the spiritual over the material world, the reign of the soul over the body but also the need for the body to connect with the soul for true human balance (Smitherman,1977:55-56; Holt,1972b).

As Smitherman (1977) points out, whichever of the four traditions a term in the Black English vocabulary comes from, what is basic is the fact that Black Semantics represents Black America's long-standing historical tendency to appropriate English for themselves and their purposes. Any previously all-White activity or field that Blacks enter is colored by a Black conceptual approach and terminology. Smitherman refers to six principles which describe the general characteristics of contemporary Black Semantics:

(1) When White English words are given a Black Semantic interpretation, their range of referents increase

(2) Many Black Semantic terms refer to Afro-

American physical characteristics and Black-White interactional conflict and are used in this way almost exclusively by Blacks

(3) Many Black Semantic concepts enter the American cultural mainstream and serve to enrich the general language of all Americans

(4) Black Semantics exists in a dynamic state

(5) Black Semantics is highly metaphorical and imagistic

(6) Black Semantics has fluid social and generational boundaries

(Smitherman,1977:58-72).

(b) Authors Who Support the Existence of Black English Because of Their Concern With Black Cultural Identity

The thesis accepts the evidence presented by the anthropologists and linguists who support the existence of Black English because of their concern with Black cultural identity.

Anthropologists like Sapir (1921) and Whorf

(1956) have shown how important the relationship between language, ideas and culture is. During the 1940's and 1950's many authors such as Myrdal (1944), Stampp (1956), Glazer and Moynihan (1963) and E. Franklin Frazier (1957) denied that Black Americans possessed any unique culture or language at all.

The thesis accepts the evidence of such noted anthropologists as Herskovits (1936,1941), Keil (1966), Dalby (1971,1972), Hannerz (1972), Holt (1972), Smitherman (1977), Kochman (1972), Mitchell-Kernan (1972) and Abrahams (1962,1964,1972,1974) that Black American culture and language has its origins in Africa and that the development of a unique linguistic style has enabled Black Americans to create a culture for survival. Black English has created a bond of solidarity in the Black American community, reflecting the importance of the verbal-oral element in the everyday life of the people. The thesis accepts the position that to deny the legitimacy of Black English is to deny the legitimacy of Black culture and the Black experience.

### (c) Authors Who Support the Existence of Black English Because of Their Concern With the Education of Black Children

The thesis accepts the evidence proposed by Smitherman (1977), Stewart (1971a), Baratz (1973), Baratz and Shuy (1969), Fasold and Shuy (1970), Baratz and Baratz (1972) and Labov (1970) that the acceptance of Black English as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English will end the practice of punishing Black children who speak Black English by labeling them 'learning-disabled' or 'mentally-retarded'. The acceptance of Black English by teachers will eliminate the negative attitude towards the use of Black English and will hopefully stimulate the process of teaching Black English speakers the basics of Standard American English using the children's knowledge and skill in their own dialect. The issue today is the development of viable reading programs which will enable the speakers of Black English to use their own linguistic skills to master Standard American English.

# CHAPTER VII

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The issue of the existence or non-existence of Black English as a legitimate, separate dialect of Standard American English has created a great deal of controversy in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, dialectology and education for many years because it touches on the complex concepts of the relationship between language, culture and behavior as well as culture versus race. Anthropologists view language as being an integral part of culture which may help to shape the thoughts and behavior of its speakers. Because of the experience of slavery in the New World, the unique culture and language of Black Americans was often denied by some scholars who viewed Blacks as racially inferior to Whites. They reasoned that because of inherent 'deficiencies' , Blacks were unable to master the 'superior' Standard American English. Thus without the benefits of either culture or language, Blacks were doomed to remain imitators and not contributors to the mainstream of American life. This thesis maintains that an acceptance of the uniqueness of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English is an affirmation of the uniqueness and viability of Black American culture.

The purpose of the thesis was to review and analyze the research literature concerning Black English in order to test the following hypothesis: If Black English is a separate dialect of Standard American English, then it must have a set of distinct linguistic features, either phonological, morphological or grammatical which are unique to it. The review and analysis of the research literature was to determine if there was enough conclusive evidence in the literature to prove the hypothesis, thus establishing Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English.

A review of the literature reveals the existence of two groups who are sharply divided over the issue of the validity of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard English with unique linguistic features: The No Group and the Yes Group. The thesis rejects the evidence presented by the No Group because:

(1) The linguistic evidence is inadequate terms of theory, research and presentation

(2) It confirms an essentially racist view which ignores the unique cultural and historical heritage of Black Americans

(3) It accepts the racial rather than cultural explanation for the speech and behavioral patterns of Black Americans

The thesis accepts the overwhelming and undeniable evidence proposed by the Yes Group because it reflects a deep understanding of the cultural implications of Black English and impeccable, scientific scholarship. The thesis supports the existence of Black English as a separate dialect of Standard American English and maintains that :

(1) It is learned as a result of normal cultural processess

(2) It is not racial in any sense - not all Black Americans will speak Black English

(3) It is an Africanized form of Standard American English which reflects the linguistic and cultural African heritage of Black America; it is Euro-American with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone and gesture

The unique phonology, grammar-syntax and morphology-semantics of Black English may be summarized as follows :

(1) PHONOLOGY

(a) initial /th/ = /d/

(b) final /th/ = /f/

(c) deletion of middle and final /r/

(d) deletion of middle and final /l/

(e) deletion of most final consonants

(f) vowel plus /ng/ rendered as /ang/

(g) contraction of /going to/ as /gon/

(h) primary stress on the first syllables and front shifting

(i) simple vowels

(2) GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX

(a) invariant be

(b) use of done

(c) use of context to signal time

(d) the subject and number of the verb

(e) plurality and possession

(f) hypercorrection

(g) personal pronoun system

(h) repetition of subjects

(i) adverbs

(j) triple and quadruple negatives

(3) MORPHOLOGY AND SEMANTICS

Four Traditions :

(a) West African Language Background

(1) Words of direct African origin

(2) Loan Translations

(3) Inflated Vocabulary

(b) Servitude and Oppression

(1) Slave songs

(2) Spirituals

(c) Music and Cool Talk

(1) Musical expressions from the Black folk tradition; Cool Talk

(2) Expressions from musicians

(d) Traditional Black Church

The work of such linguists and anthropologists as Bailey, Stewart, Labov,Dillard and Smitherman has opened the way for the search for new truths concerning the language of Black America. These scholars have turned away from the past history of racism and look at Black English in terms of culture and history. To these scholars, the issue of Black English has nothing to do with the physical or mental characteristics of Blacks but rather with the dynamics of the social and cultural patterns which affect speech.

Their purpose is to look at the historical and cultural origin of Black English not to downgrade the culture of Black Americans but in order to accord it the legitimate recognition it has long been denied by some scholars.

Recent researchers have continued the investigation of the legitimacy of Black English not only in terms of its linguistic uniqueness as a dialect of Standard

American English but also as an extremely important factor in the cultural and educational life of Black Americans.

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# APPENDIX A

PHONOLOGY

(a) Word Final Consonant Clusters

1) General

(b) The /th/ Sounds

1) General
2) Word-initial
3) Within a word
4) Word-final

(c) /r/ and /l/

1) After vowels
2) Between vowels
3) Effect on vocabulary and grammar
4) After initial consonants

(d) Final /b/, /d/, and /g/

1) Devoicing
2) Deletion of /d/

(e) Nasalization

1) The /ing/ suffix
2) Nasalized vowels

(f) Vowel Glides

(g) Indefinite Articles -a- and -an-

(h) Stress

(i) Other Pronounciation Features

GRAMMAR

(1) VERBS

(a) Past forms

1) The -ed- suffix
2) Irregular verbs

(b) Perfective constructions

1) Omission of forms of have
2) The past participle
3) The completive aspect with done
4) The remote time construction with been

(c) The third person singular present tense marker

1) Auxiliary don't
2) Have and do
3) Hypercorrect forms

(d) Future

1) Gonna
2) Will

(e) Invariant be

(f) Absence of forms to be

(2) NEGATION

(a) The use of ain't
(b) Multiple negations

(3) -S SUFFIXES

(a) Possessives

1) With common nouns
2) With personal names
3) Mines

(b) Plurals

1) Absence of plural suffix
2) Double plurals

(4) QUESTIONS

(a) Inversion

(5) PRONOUNS

(a) Existential it

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Janet L. Fletcher has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts .

April 15, 1981
Date

Amparo B. Ojeda
Director's Signature