

Ebonics and the english language essay sample

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



In December of 1996 a national controversy erupted when the Oakland school district suggested that “ ebonics,” which is also known as Black English, was a genetically based second language. Since Oakland California’s decision to allow the teaching of ebonics in its school system, ebonics has become a national issue and has sparked a heated debate from coast to coast. A large part of the ebonics controversy is the fact that many of today’s students do not get a good enough grasp of standard written and spoken English to compete successfully in the job market later. In this essay, I will discuss the issue of whether ebonics should be considered a second language.

The argument of ebonics advocates is that their unique programs will permit black children to excel at what critics of ebonics say they want black children to learn: regular English. This brings the comparison of regular English and ebonics into view. The English language is fluid, it is constantly expanding and contracting as new words and meanings are added while others become archaic. In Robert MacNeil’s essay, English Belongs to Everybody he wrote, “ as people evolve and do new things, their language will evolve too. They will find new ways to describe these things and their changed perspective will give them new ways of talking about old things.” English is no longer the primary language of Americans and the British. Increasingly, it is a national language taught with other languages as diverse and multilingual as south Africa, Japan, and India. The term international language is increasingly becoming a replacement for standard English. So what is ebonics?

Ebonics is derived from the words “ ebony” and “ phonics,” when they were put together, ebonics was born. It is considered “ black dialect.” It is to my

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understanding that ebonics is slang. Because when I looked the word slang up in the dictionary, the definition was: the nonstandard vocabulary of a given culture, consisting typically of arbitrary and often ephemeral coinages and figures of speech characterized by spontaneity and raciness. Personally I think of ebonics as just lower class English. I consider teaching ebonics an insult, a way of saying that most Black people speak slang and cannot understand proper English, its like saying either Black children will never be able to learn regular English, or that they are not smart enough for it. So there needs to be a new curriculum and a new plan to educate them. I think this is extremely unacceptable. Therefore it should not be taught nor considered a second language.

I think we speak the language of all Americans and everyone is very articulate in their efforts. Students need to know that educated English is a norm for all speakers of English, developed to ensure effective communication. Teachers should explain the importance of learning and using educated English in formal situations such as the classroom, the workplace, and the business environment. When Katherine Whittemore states in her essay, *Endangered Languages*, “ as more native people receive formal education, schools cannot print textbooks in every language,” it made me think of the issue of ebonics and how it is taught in schools. I think that the time, money, and effort that is being put into teaching ebonics should be used to teach foreign languages. Something that will actually benefit people.

Most people think of English as a subject in school and as a means of communication, we seldom take the time to consider its impact on whom we

are and the way we see the world. Ebonics is a language that many children speak, and it can be yet another stumbling block to their success in school. Some people call it “Black English”–the dialect, language, slang, or code of broken language spoken on the street by young African Americans. More or less, understood by everyone else. This can be shown in MacNeil’s essay when he states that “we all speak differently in different circumstances. There are very formal occasions, often requiring written English. The less formal out-in-the-world language,” which is more comfortable, “but still respectable.” And then, “There is family language, more relaxed, full of grammatical shortcuts, and there is the language of couples.”

What concerns me about ebonics is its association with African Americans and the use of slang. When in fact, slang is not only limited to black people, all nationalities have their own type of slang that they use as a way to communicate with one another. Everyone learns how to speak on a street level and how to be able to use standard English. Katherine Whitemore proves a good point in her essay when she states, “languages have been dying for as long as people have walked on the earth.” Although the teaching of ebonics is being put into school systems, it will eventually fade. Because in the real world, in the business world, it will be necessary for the choice on whether to speak ebonics or standard English will have to be made. If you choose ebonics, no one will listen.

The topic ebonics is very interesting to me because I wonder what they would teach in the classes, what the words are that would be translated into proper English. A very serious problem that I have with ebonics is I do not

want people to get the understanding that Blacks cannot speak standard English. I hope this does not cause Blacks to shortchange or limit themselves with the misconceptions that they can speak any way that they choose to and still be a very productive part of mainstream culture. One thing does remain a mystery to me, if people already have standard English, it should be taught to the highest standards. Why would anyone want to put themselves down and be taught a lower form of English? How do you encourage and inspire people to achieve who are not thought of as high achievers—particularly young Black people who are told repeatedly by society that they are not expected to achieve?

In closing, speaking as an individual involved in the education system, whom communicates with educated people on a daily basis, I think approaching ebonics as a tool or a method to teach people English is acceptable. On the other hand, if we were trying to create some romantic notion that this is a new language . . . we are somewhat deluding ourselves. Whatever category the issue of ebonics as a second language falls under, each leaves no question that it is not a dead topic. For the simple fact that it will be debated for a long time.