

Causes and effects of ebonics term paper

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



Introduction

Over the years, educators, psychologists, researchers and politicians have been arguing about the use Ebonics in both public and private schools especially its impacts to the African American students' performance. The research has shown that for a long time there has been a large difference between the performance of the Caucasian and African American students in test scores as a result of the use Ebonics in schools. Due to these differences in performances, many African American students have been put in special classes where they can be helped to improve their performance in the Standard English language. The effects of Ebonics have not only been felt in schools, but also in the public and in the whole society. Dialects are common in public places such as public offices, hospitals and in many day to day transactions of the Africans Americans. A lot of research has been done about the impacts of Ebonics in the daily life of the African Americans but more study need to be done on this area to establish the exact impacts of the use of dialect in public places. This will help the government, educators and other policymakers to come up with the measures to reduce the negative impacts of the use of dialect in public. As this study reveals, the use of dialect in public has greater impacts to the American English learners and to the public in general.

Background

Initially, Ebonics was used to refer to the language of the black Africans who were captured from the Caribbean, West Africa and northern America (Williams, 1997). In regard to this, Ebonics has been referred to as the

vernacular English of the African American which differ from the standard or normal American English. Little was known about Ebonics until 1996 when the language was popularized through incorporation in the school curriculum and then hot debate about its use started among scholars, educators and politicians on its use in public. In addition, scholars have been arguing whether Ebonics is a dialect or a language. Conventionally, a true language ought to have words whose pronunciations and their combination can be clearly understood by a given community. Scholars and linguists who support the view that Ebonics is an English dialect claim that the language use the same words as the standard American English and therefore it should not been taken as different language altogether. However, some linguistics contends that Ebonics is a different language from the American English since it has a different grammatical structure (Smitherman, 1997). Their view is based on the fact that language can only be determined through grammatical structure and not by the use of similar vocabularies. They support their argument using Portuguese and Spanish languages which share many words but they are different languages.

a) In schools

One of the areas that have been serious affected by the use of Ebonics is in public and private schools that have African American students. The performance of African American students is quite different from that of other students who does not use Ebonics. Many English tests in the past have shown poor performance among the African American students compared with other students. African American students recorded low performance in tests for reading skills, cognitive ability and in oral and

written language (Smith, 1998). This difference in performance can be attributed to the cultural and language differences between African American students and the other students who come from different cultures and languages. According to Mc Nicol (1998), Ebonics affects student's performance in comprehension, intelligence and communication in general. Grammatical differences between standardized English and Ebonics contributed greatly to the proficiency problems among English learners. For example, African American students tend to misunderstand some English words due to the fact that they are pronounced differently in Ebonics and in American English. As result of phonological differences between some letters such as " f" and " th" and many others, African American students can easily confuse some words in oral and written English. African American English learners easily confuse pronunciation of words like mild and mile just because they are pronounced differently in dialect and in American English. This will affect the way they read, understand and answer questions during tests thus recording low performance in such tests.

Most of the African American students do not have problems with comprehension reading and understanding but they get confused when it comes to vocabulary use. Many English exams go beyond testing literal meaning and test ability of the student to come up with inferences. For the students to draw inferences, they need to apply background knowledge they have gained from the use of the language. This means that Ebonics speakers will base their inferences on the wrong sources since they will do so using Ebonics language rather than the American English. On the other hand, other students draw their inferences from the American English which makes it so

easy for them to understand and use different vocabularies. This difference between the two classes of students is then reflected in their performance where African American students perform poorly due to their inability to answer questions. Since students are given standard assessments, it becomes difficult for African American students to equally compete with other students. Ebonics language is very different from the Standard English and it is therefore unfair for African American students' answers to be marked wrong even when they can be explained to give the same meaning with Standard English. As Mc Nicol (1998) argues, the students' proficiency in English is not fairly tested by linking understanding, comprehension and intelligence together in one written test. This is because at the end of the day, the score does not reflect what was intended in the test. In fact, the use of this test to identify those students who will be taken to the special classes is mistaken since it is not based on the level of intelligence but instead on the Ebonics language influences. Increased difference between the language students use in their daily life and the standard language tested in schools will have negative impacts on tests meant to measure the students' language proficiency.

Thus, it is important for educators to adopt a test that is free from cultural and linguistic biases if they intend to measure proficiency of the students in the English language in a fair manner. Perhaps, translators for Ebonics language may also be included in the setting and marking of standardized English proficiency assessments. This will enhance communication between examiners and students especially when marking the tests. Language teachers should also learn Ebonics language to facilitate their

communication with their students. They should also be sensitive and conscious of cultural differences and their influences to the language of African American students. This will help to reduce language barriers between the students and their teachers and hence improve the performance of Ebonics speakers during tests for American English. Teachers may also need to learn how to incorporate Ebonics when they are teaching the Standard English in their classroom.

b) In society

Since the time slave trade was abolished, Caucasian-Americans have continued to discriminate afro-American society in many ways. These has forced these people to live in poverty and to continue living separately in terms of their culture both language and social wise. The wealth of America is unevenly distributed between the black-Americans and the rest of Americans. However, Americans are now more conscious about racial issues and people from different races are holding discussions to see how they can address their differences. Equality among all people despite their cultural and racial background is gaining momentum in the American society resulting to more confrontation between the racists and anti-racist groups. Racists groups claim that English language is being ruined by the black-Americans since most of them do not have ability to speak proper English. The fear of ‘ bad English’ is used by racist groups to propagate their racism ideology in the name of language protection. Again, in the American society people view Ebonics from two different perspectives. There are those who view Ebonics language as a language that should be promoted while others argue that Ebonics language should be abolished. The advocates for the

Ebonics language base their arguments on equal and just society where culture of all American's communities ought to be treated with respect they deserve as provided in the constitution. They claim that every citizen has a right to express himself or herself using the language of his or her choice. This view is mainly advocated by anti-racist scholars and movements. They promote the use of Ebonics in schools and other public places.

On the other hand there are those groups that feel that advocating the use Ebonics is another way of bring back or reversing racial discrimination that was dominant in the American society sometime in the past. This in turn will mentally take afro-Americans back to those days of oppression, poverty and discriminations of all kinds. These groups believe that the best way to end racism in the American society is through creation and use of standard language that is universally accepted and in this case standardized American English. These movements argue that the use of Ebonics language will enhance separation as different people live and communicate differently due to the cultural and language demarcation.

In general, the use of Ebonics leads to more isolation and discrimination in the society where afro-Americans are forced to live in a culture that is separated from the rest of the population. Many Caucasian-Americans do not understand Ebonics language and therefore the use of the language in public by the afro-Americans will alienate them and thus creating more cultural differences between them. This creates more cultural differences in the American societies as each group continues to use their language separately rather than to use universal language that is standard and understood by all Americans.

c) In corporate world

Ebonics issue is not only important to the educators, but also to the corporate world and more specifically to the marketers who have to take their products to the African-American consumers. Ebonics is part and parcel of the afro-American culture and therefore it has a lot of influence on the behaviors of the consumers from this cultural background. Marketers have to understand the perceptions and the behaviours of the people who use Ebonics to understand the right approach to use to persuade them to buy their products. Initially, the debate over the issue of Ebonics was left to the researchers, psychologists, linguists and politicians especially after the board of Oakland incorporated it in the school curriculum. However, the debate has also attracted the attention of corporate in the recent past due to the large afro-American population that has to be targeted by different companies due to the large market this population offer.

According to Williams (1997), race is an important factor in many retail/ sales encounter and many black consumers have reported some kind of treatment that can be attributed to their racial differences. For instances there are several cases where black salesmen have been required to identify themselves more than whites in their sales encounters, at times they have been followed by the security guards when shopping in the stores and many other behaviors. Thus it is very important for marketers to carry out a thorough assessment of differential behaviors and their impacts to the choice of their consumers to enable them identify the most appropriate strategy to use.

Another crucial concern for the marketers is the use of Ebonics as a base for

segmentation to reach afro-American consumers. In fact, many advertising companies have seen Ebonics as separate and potential segments for their products. In regard to this, these advertising companies have used black slang to capture the attention of the black Americans in their adverts. Some adverts have also gone for extra mile to use black actors as a way of appealing to the black consumers. However, all the adverts are based on the wrong assumption that all black are the same and they have common preferences. In addition, the use of slang language or presentations that have stereotypes to win black consumers may be risky on the side of the marketers since it may have negative impacts when the consumers realizes that they are being manipulated or patronized. The main challenge facing advertisers who are using slang in their advert is that they are not sure of the extent of Ebonics that black consumers use in their day to day communication and also the feeling of black consumers towards the use of slang or black actors in different adverts. This is mainly because not all the afro-American use Black English in their daily transactions. Research shows that only 80 percent of the afro-Americans use this language though the level of degree depend on the gender, age, class, region among other factors. Again, in some industries such as music industry, Ebonics has been spread through hip-hop and rap that has attracted great crowd. These types of songs have also attracted more non-blacks than the black audience. Thus marketers have to be aware of the use of Ebonics in music and its ability to attract more consumers particularly non-blacks. Thus, the use of Ebonics has great implications in the market and companies have come with ways to help them sell their products to afro-Americans.

d) Ebonics in work place

The effects of Ebonics are also evident in work place where it is associated with some form of discrimination against those who use that language. According to Boyce (1996), the purpose of education is to prepare students to function and fit in the community outside school. The move to incorporate Ebonics in the school curriculum has affected black students negatively even when they go in the work places. Many employees have considered black jobseekers to be less qualified compared to other jobseekers just because of their English which is seen as inferior English compared to the Standard English that is used by other Americans. Some Black employees also find it difficult to communicate effectively with other employees in the workplace, which sometimes may affect their performance when they cannot access necessary information from their supervisors, or fellow employees. This happens when the supervisors or workmates are not in a position to understand and communicate effectively using Ebonics used to by the black employees. This has also been used as a base for discrimination in the work place where black employees are less equally treated compared to other employees. Promotions and hiring of the black employees is limited in many work places on the basis of their communication language. Many afro-Americans have been denied promotion opportunities since their language of communication is seen as less inferior and which does not represent the image of the company as expected. In fact some companies view their black employees as less qualified and competent compared to non black employees. This has enhanced some form of discrimination in the companies when it comes to job assignment, compensation, performance evaluation

and recognition. Due to the belief that black employees are not equally skilled and qualified like non black employees, they are less paid and their work not well recognized like that of other employees. This has affected their relationship with non black employees who at times mistreat and harass them just because the racial differences. The working environment may not end up being favorable to black employees which will consequently affect their productivity.

Again, the opportunities for black employees in the work place are also limited compared to those of non black employees. Black students are not equally treated with other students in schools and at times they are put in separate class where they may receive inferior education compared to other students. This will affect their abilities even when they go to compete with other students in the work place.

Conclusion

Though many scholars do not agree on whether Ebonics is a language or a dialect, the effects of using it has been felt in public places. The language was incorporated in the school curriculum in 1996 and since then, it has affected the performance of afro-American students in their English proficiency test. In the work place the use of Ebonics has led to the discrimination of black employees and limiting their promotion opportunities. The language has also been adopted in corporate and the whole society in general which affected the daily lives of the people using it. Thus the effects of Ebonics have cut across the whole American society.

References

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