Black English and reading: a review of the literature

Patricia Harris
BLACK ENGLISH AND READING
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

by
Patricia Harris

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Sister Marie Colette
(Advisor)

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

'How old are they, Roxy?'
'Bofe de same age, sir--five months. Dawn de fust o' Febr'uary.'
'They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too.'
'Bless yo' soul, Mistu Wilson, it's pow'ful nice o' you to say dat, 'ca'se one of 'em ain't on'y a nigger. Mighty prime little nigger, I al'ays says, but dat's 'ca'se it's mine, o'course.'

In 1894, Mark Twain recognized that he could establish the race difference between two characters in his book *Pudd'n-head Wilson* through the use of conversation. The recording of the character Roxy's words in such a way as to reflect her dialect, whether an accurate reproduction or not, set her apart as a black from his white character, Pudd'nhead Wilson. From a further look at the arts of the 1800's, it would appear that other writers and people working on the stage recognized that a

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unique Black dialect existed and that it could be used effectively to delineate Black from White in the minds of audiences; however, the academic community at this time was not influenced by these perceptions and did not recognize the existence of a unique Black dialect.¹ As late as 1933, Courat maintained in the Linguistic Atlas of the U.S. and Canada that dialect was primarily the result of geographic factors which supported the idea that regional dialects existed but not social class or race-related dialects, and it wasn't until the 1960's that the academic community began to consider that dialects could be related to social and cultural factors as well as to geographic factors.²

It is against the background of only recent change in academic opinion concerning dialect that one can see the origin of the often reported statement that the Black urban child is deficient in language. His dialect had not been generally recognized as a variant of English and so his manner of speaking was considered by many to be "pathological, disordered, 'lazy speech.'"³ Others,

¹J. L. Dillard, "Black English" (Talk presented at University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, January 24, 1974).

²Ibid.

in particular Bereiter and Engelman, said that the language deficiency of Black children reflected a language development level that was inadequate for performing higher level cognitive tasks. Still others maintained that the deficiency was caused by harsh punishment and by the methods used to raise the child, poor diet, and excessive noise in the environment. With the advent of study of the language forms of the Black child many linguists have recognized Black Dialect as a language form that is not a substandard form of standard English but is rather a distinct variety of English that is a valid form for communication and that has a definite structure and order. The linguists' view of dialect as a different form of English rather than a deficient use of standard English has not met with general acceptance in the schools and a negative attitude towards the use of dialect still persists. Baratz and Baratz suggest that the separate, systematic nature of the dialect is not recognized because of the dialect's "superficial similarity" to

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standard English and because feelings of fear and superiority exist in the majority group.¹

Definition of Terms

Some of the terms that will be used in this paper are discussed below.

Dialect has been defined by Malstrom as follows:

Dialect means a variety of language spoken by a distinct group of people in a definite place. A dialect varies in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar from other varieties of the same language. ... Often the line between a dialect and a language is hard to draw. A dialect is enough like another form of speech to be understandable to speakers of the latter.²

The dialect spoken by urban Black children has been called by various names with Negro Nonstandard English and Black English being the most usually-used terms. The author of this paper will use the term Black English except when some other term has been used by a particular source. The various terms should be taken to refer to that dialect generally spoken by Black urban children.

The term standard English is not a well defined term. Goodman says that "there is by no means agreement


on what standard American English is."¹ It is possibly best defined as that form of English which "the school, text or teacher treats as standard"² or the accepted middle-class white speech patterns of a particular region.

The term interference "refers to the tendency of individuals to make a foreign language conform to the sound and structure of their native language . . . . (and) also operates when speakers of one dialect of a particular language learn another dialect of that language."³

Statement and Limitations of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to present in a concise form a review of the literature concerning the relationship of the language pattern of Black urban children to reading achievement. To this end, it was necessary to review the difference between Black English and standard English, to consider what effect, if any, these differences have on reading achievement and to review the programs


²Ibid.

suggested for use in reading instruction for Black urban children that are based on a consideration of the child's language pattern.

The writer of this paper was concerned with the literature most recently published in the area of study and thus included only literature published in the last six years unless the material was considered to be particularly significant to the topic development.

A justification for this study is seen in the following quote of Ruterford from Reading Goals for the Disadvantaged:

Reading specialists and linguists, especially the linguists, have discovered and made available a wealth of information that relates to the teaching of reading to dialectically different children. Even though this knowledge has not been organized into a single, unified system, it is available and it is incumbent on inservice teachers to seek it out and use it.¹

A Look at Black English

... it may be difficult to imagine how great are the pressures against the recognition, description, or even mention of black speech patterns. For various reasons, many teachers, principals, and civil rights leaders wish to deny that the existence of patterns of black speech is a linguistic and social reality in the United States today. The most careful statement of the situation as it actually exists might read as follows: Many features of pronunciation, grammar, and lexicon are closely associated with black speakers, so closely as to identify the great majority of black people in the northern cities by their speech alone.¹

The specific characteristics of Black English that have been identified are not used by all Negroes nor are all of the specific characteristics used exclusively by Negroes but rather it is necessary to think of Black English as a system or pattern of language norms that are used by Black Americans.²


With the drive to have Black English recognized as a legitimate form of the English language and to define the characteristics of Black English which set it off from standard English, there arose a need to develop a summary of the historical background of the formation of Black English. While several linguists, especially Dillard, Labov, Laffley and Malstrom, have contributed to the development of this historical background, Steward published a concise summary in 1967. In line with the ideas of these and other linguists, he saw the development of Black English as paralleling the development of the English-African slave trade and the system of slavery as pursued on New World plantations:

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.¹

One factor affecting the acquisition of pidginized and later Creole English was the "colonial policy of mixing slaves of various tribal origins"² that required the development


²Ibid., p. 3.
of a common communication channel on the plantation. The system of slavery on the plantation further created a differentiation between field hands and house servants that allowed selected slaves a chance to imitate the speech of their white masters while the field hands retained their creole form. Stewart continues to sum up the historical development in the following quote:

After the Civil War, with the abolition of slavery, the breakdown of the plantation system, and the steady increase in education for poor as well as affluent Negroes, the older field-hand creole English began to lose many of its creole characteristics, and take on more and more of the features of the local white language. . . .

Over the last two centuries, the proportion of American Negroes who speak a perfectly standard variety of English has risen from a small group of privileged house slaves and free Negroes to persons numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and perhaps even millions. Yet there is still a sizeable number of American Negroes—whose speech may be radically nonstandard. The non-standard features in the speech of such persons may be due in part to the influence of the nonstandard dialects of whites with whom they or their ancestors have come in contact, but they also may be due to the survival of creolisms from the older Negro field-hand speech of the plantations.

Labov lends further support for the creole influence on the development of Black English when he contrasts the language patterns of northern urban Negroes with southern regional patterns which generally marked Negro contact with white speech. He says that many southern

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1 Ibid., p. 4.

2 Ibid.
pronunciation patterns are not used by urban Negroes, that consonant cluster and other simplifications in Black English suggest different underlying grammatical forms and rules and that there are Black English features reflecting a different organization of the tense and aspect system that is more characteristic of the creole heritage.¹

Although there are several ways in which one linguistic system can vary from another, in particular, "by a unique combination of language features: words and meanings, grammatical forms, phrase-structures, pronunciations, patterns of stress and intonation,"² the characteristics of Black English that are most considered in the literature can be grouped into two categories: phonological variables and grammatical variables. The area of phonological variables includes those differences that are related to the sound patterns in language whereas grammatical variables include those differences that are reflected in the structural patterns.

The major initial work on delineating the characteristics of Black English was done by Labov and has since

¹Labov, Language in the Inner City, pp. 8-9.
been amplified by other linguists. Labov's work is generally used as the basis for discussion by other writers when considering the many facets of dialect differences and their relationship to other areas. When considering the extensive work of Labov and those studies based on his work, it is important that the reader not think that a complete picture of the differences between Black English and standard English has been developed. As Rystrom points out "... the research conducted by a number of linguists has provided glimpses into the nature of the black dialect; it has not, however, presented a comprehensive picture of how this dialect differs from other dialects..."¹ That is to say that while the Labov studies and their counterparts are the best available studies of the differences, more research is needed to establish a complete picture of those differences. In fact, it must be remembered that Goodman has said that there is not even agreement on what constitutes Standard English.² Because Labov's work is used by many writers as a basis for their interpretations of Black English and their comments on its


effect in other areas, a summary of his materials on differences is presented below.¹

The first area of differences to be considered is the area of phonological variables. Labov suggests that when considering the phonological variables one discovers that there are sets of homonyms which exist for Black English but do not exist for standard English. He suggests that problems in understanding can arise if the teacher is unaware of the homonyms and the underlying phonological features that cause them. The homonyms can further serve to clarify the meaning of the statements of differences. The phonological variables are:

1. the feature of r-lessness in which the r before consonants or at the end of words is dropped resulting in homonyms such as guard--god, par--pa, sore--saw, fort--fought, court--caught. Further an r before vowels may be glided or dropped and the r between two vowels in the middle of a word may not be pronounced resulting in homonyms such as Carol--Cal, Paris--pass, terrace--test. A third case of r-lessness covers the deletion of an r following initial

consonants and before back rounded vowels particularly in the words throw, through, threw, and throat.

2. the feature of l-lessness in which the sound of l is deleted or replaced with a back unrounded glide and which occurs in situations similar to those affecting r resulting in homonyms such as toll--tol, help--hep, tool--too, all--awe, soul--saw, fault--fought.

3. the simplification of consonant clusters, particularly those ending in /t/ or /d/ or /s/ or /z/, at the end of words, in which the clusters are reduced to a single consonant resulting in homonyms similar to past--pass, rift--riff, meant--men, mend--men, wind--wine, hold--hole. If sp or sk precede the final s the simplification can follow the pattern as shown in the homonyms asks--ask--ass. Further, in /s/ and /z/ clusters either the first or second element can be lost.

4. some weakening of final consonants is seen with /t/ and /d/ most affected followed by /g/, /k/, /m/ and /n/ resulting in the homonyms boot--boo, feed--feet, road--row, poor--poke--pope, seat--seed--see, bit--bid--big.
5. other less important changes and an example of resulting homonyms are

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\begin{array}{ll}
/i/ & = /e/ \\
/ih/ & = /eh/ \\
/uh/ & = /oh/ \\
/ay/ \text{ and } /aw/ & = /ah/ \\
/oy/ & = /oh/ \\
/o/ & = /f/ \\
/\ddot{o}/ & = /v/ \\
/str/ & = /skr/ \\
/\ddot{Sr}/ & = (sw, sr, s)
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
pin & = pen \\
beer & = bear \\
sure & = shore \\
find & = found = fond \\
boil & = ball \\
death & = deaf \\
bathe & = bave \\
steam & = scream \\
shrimp & = srimp = swimp
\end{array}
\]

After examining the phonological differences, Labov points out that

As we examine the various final consonants affected by the phonological processes, we find that these are the same consonants which represent the principal English inflections. The shifts in the sound system therefore often coincide with grammatical differences between nonstandard and standard English. (p. 23)

The grammatical differences that have been reported by Labov are:

1. Possessive: absence of //s// inflection due to overall simplification pattern and //r// change that results in the use of "you" and "they" for "your" and "their" and that change the standard form presentation of the possessive.
2. Future forms: the future forms are affected by the loss of / as in the forms "you'll" and "he'll"; however variants of going such as gon' and gonna are used to express future.

3. Copula: for various phonological reasons the verb forms of "be" are not expressed in sentences so that for example we're becomes we and you're becomes approximately you.

4. Past: the /t,d/ of the past tense is lost by phonological process such as is seen when passed becomes pass or picked becomes pick, but past tense does exist in some irregular forms. It appears that the ending ed does not serve as a past tense marker in Black English.

There are five other variables which are not included in Labov's discussion of grammatical variables that are generally in the literature. They can be summarized as:

1. there is exclusion of person-number agreement particularly in the third person singular present as seen when He runs becomes He run.

2. there is exclusion of the plural marker on nouns as seen when three boys becomes three boy.

3. there is a use of negation and negative forms that differs from the standard usage and that includes the use of double negatives.

4. there is restructuring of the past conditional question such that Do you know if he can go becomes Do you know can he go.

5. there is a special use of the form be as described by Funkhouser:

   It means that some object or event is distributed in some habitual manner in time. In a sentence like she be bad the speaker is not proclaiming a permanent quality about a lady or even indicating an intermittent condition of 'badness'. It is not a deviant form of She is bad or She was and still is and always will be bad. Black Vernacular English thus can express grammatically what other dialects must express verbally.1

   After reviewing the preceding summary of Labov's description of phonological and grammatical variables and the added grammatical variables from other researchers, the reader should further consider that any number of features from either category could interact at any given instant to produce the pattern that is divergent from

standard English. The following situation can be considered as a simple example of such a possible occurrence. The teacher asks the child to use the word end in a sentence and the child responds, "He go in them three car." The child has responded with what, for him, is a homonym of the desired word; he has heard a simplified final consonant cluster and has not discriminated the vowel sounds /i/ and /e/. He further has not conserved person-number agreement in his use of go in place of goes and he has not included the plural marker s on his noun car.

It is hoped that by looking at one example of a characteristic response, the reader will see that a familiarity with the historical background and the reported characteristics of Black English is a necessary factor in developing respect for and an understanding of the language of the black urban child. It is important that the reader remembers that "every dialect is in itself a legitimate form of the language, a valid instrument of human communication, and something worthy of study."¹

The Question of Interference

When he comes to school, the urban Black child brings with him a personal language system that he has

¹Raven I. McDavid, "Sense and Nonsense," p. 84.
developed in the context of his cultural setting to meet his communication needs. His language "permits the expression of a certain very wide range of information, experiences, feelings and thoughts"\(^1\) regardless of the fact that his cultural-economic setting may demand the use of the dialect Black English that differs in specific ways from the standard system generally in use in the schools. His own degree of competence in his dialect will vary from that of other users of the dialect depending on such factors as his degree of creativity and reasoning.\(^2\)

Because his Black English is different from standard English, school personnel may misinterpret his level of language development because they assess his speech "as an indicator of poorly developed language and thinking abilities rather than only a different language."\(^3\)

The problem of having a different, possibly unacceptable, language pattern is magnified when the child approaches beginning reading. There is general agreement by educators that the child must have some minimal level of language proficiency before he can learn to read. Hildreth lends support to the concept of a crucial

\(^1\)Carrol, "Language and Cognition," p. 177.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 180.
\(^3\)Anastasiow, Oral Language, p. 24.
role for minimal language facility with her statements that the words children use in their own speech are easier for them to read in print than words they do not use and that deficient readers are generally deficient in oral language.¹ There appears however to be a lack of agreement on what is the minimal level of proficiency and whether that proficiency must be in the standard English of the classroom.² There thus arises the question of whether the use of Black English by the child as his only form of language interferes with his learning to read standard English materials and if it does, to what degree.

The reader is reminded that interference was earlier defined as "the tendency of individuals to make a foreign language conform to the sound and structure of their native language" and that it also operates when speakers of one dialect of a particular language learn another dialect of that language.³ It can further be said that interference occurs when "the dialect pattern imposes itself upon certain aspects of reading performance;" in particular it occurs between the vocabulary, sound and

¹Gertrude Hildreth, "Linguistic Factors in Early Reading Instruction," The Reading Teacher, XVIII (December, 1964), 172-178.

²Ruterford, "Teaching Reading," p. 120.

³Above, p. 4.
grammar of standard and nonstandard English."\(^1\) The following quote from Goodman illuminates the above definitions:

A group of second-graders were reading round-robin fashion. It was Jim's turn. 'There was a lot of goats,' he read. 'There was black goats and white goats.'

His teacher smiled encouragingly. 'Would you repeat that, please, Jim,' she said.

Somewhat puzzled, Jim reread: 'There was a lot of goats. There was black goats and white goats.'

Still smiling, his teacher stepped to the board. In excellent manuscript she wrote two words. 'Do you see the difference in these words?' she said.

'Yes, they have different endings,' said Jim.

'Can you read these words?' the teacher asked.

'Was, were,' Jim read.

'Good,' said the teacher.

'This is was, and this is were. Now read again what you just read from the book.'

'There was a lot of ...' Jim began.

'No, no!' his teacher said with some annoyance. 'It's were. 'There were a lot of goats.' Now please read.'

'There were a lot of goats. There was black goats and ....'\(^2\)

Goodman's quote is interpreted by Isenbarger and Smith as:

The teacher in this example is unaware of what is happening in her student's mind. She believes that he has a perceptual problem: that of discerning the difference between was and were. But what he is actually doing is translating the printed word into his


own spoken dialect. He is using his own language system, in which 'There was a lot of goats' is the correct form.

The remarks on the question of interference do not all tend to support its existence as a factor affecting reading achievement. There are two major areas of dispute. The first area concerns the possible confusion arising from the lack of auditory discrimination of sounds in words when those sounds are not included in Black English. The existence of this confusion was supported by Labov when he noted that such a problem might arise if the teacher is not aware of the homonyms that exist in Black English that do not exist in Standard English. Generally those writers supporting the case for interference hold that problems arising from sound differences are probably less significant a cause of reading problems than grammatical differences.

1 Joan Isenbarger and Veta Smith, "How Would You Feel If You Had to Change Your Dialect?" English Journal, LXII (September, 1973), 994.


done by Wilcox using an auditory discrimination test given by both a dialect speaker and a standard English speaker led her to form the tentative conclusion that "familiarity with speech pattern context of the presentation was not a significant factor in phonemic auditory discrimination ability" without considering that the children who spoke standard English did score higher on both versions of the test and that the test used (Wepman) includes words that could be homonyms in Black English. However, Cohen was not tentative in his statements about role for auditory discrimination in comprehension. He asserted that the dialect-speaking child has his auditory abilities trained by television and if a lack of auditory ability could exist, good teaching could solve it because "most children can learn to discriminate sounds in words if they are taught to do so independent of their articulation."  

The second area of dispute evolves from the statement that "The mismatch between Black English (BE) syntax and Standard English (SE) syntax requires the Black child to translate written SE into spoken BE. That translation

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2 S. Alan Cohen and Thelma Cooper, "Seven Fallacies: Reading Retardation and the Urban Disadvantaged Beginning Reader," The Reading Teacher, XXVI (October, 1972), 43.
process increases the opportunity for a communication breakdown.\(^1\) Four research studies were found to support this statement.\(^2\) In all but one case, the repeating or reading of standard English sentences was used to see how often the child used Black English grammatical structures to replace the standard English forms and to see if he maintained comprehension in the process. Tatam devised her study in a more general way than the other writers to see if reading comprehension was improved by using materials that were based on the frequent oral language patterns of the children. She concluded that using known language structure patterns facilitated comprehension.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 40.


\(^3\)Tatam, "Reading Comprehension," pp. 402, 424.
due to grammatical variances. In their research supporting the contrary view, Hall, Turner and Russell maintained that there is little support for believing that speaking Black English impedes comprehension of standard English sentences. Weber further suggests that style differences between spoken and written standard English may eliminate any advantage that standard speakers might have over Black English speakers in comprehending reading materials.

It does appear that there are equally loud reports on both sides of the disagreement on the role of dialect in reading achievement. There does also appear to be little good research available to support either position and, although this writer did find more research to support


the existence of interference, there does not appear to be sufficient research to define the role of interference in reading achievement. Schneider supports this conclusion when she says that the question "that deviations in a child's dialect from standard English pose serious obstacles to learning to read remains a hypothesis."¹

It is possible that some of the difficulty of arriving at research conclusions that clearly support or refute the role of interference comes from the fact that the effect of dialect is difficult to isolate as a separate variable from other factors affecting reading achievement. One such factor is possible negative teacher attitude toward the use of dialect and the effect this attitude has on the child's sense of being able to achieve. Teacher expectation has been shown to have a major effect on a child's achievement and could well be influenced by a negative attitude toward dialect. There is also the factor of low socioeconomic background that the urban child who uses Black English may also bring to the learning process. His cultural patterns and his experiences may be markedly different from those of his teacher and those presented in his reading materials. These differences might affect his comprehension of and interest in the

¹Mary Schneider, "Black Dialect: The Basis for an Approach to Reading Instruction," Educational Leadership, XXVIII (February, 1971), 549.
materials he is presented and thus affect his reading achievement. One last possible factor that was pointed out by Ames and Rosen as a variable that may have affected their research results and that might in fact affect the results of other research into dialect interference, was the fact that those children who were so disabled as readers that they could not read the test materials were eliminated from their study; those may be the children for whom interference was an unsurmountable problem.¹

There is clearly a need for continued research into the problem of interference as it affects reading achievement; however it would appear that until such additional research has been completed the teacher should conclude that the low reading achievement of her urban Black child might be related to the fact that the child knows only Black English and that she should therefore be aware of the characteristics of the dialect and should study the alternatives suggested for teaching reading to children who speak Black English.

Alternatives in Reading Instruction

There are four alternatives suggested for teaching reading to children who speak Black English. The alternatives are:

1. training the child in the use of standard English prior to beginning reading instruction so that he is prepared for instruction using regular standard English materials;

2. instructing the child with regular standard English materials but accepting a dialect rendering of those materials;

3. instructing the child using the language experience approach, recording his stories as delivered in dialect but including a steady transition into stories that are in standard English, and

4. instructing the child using materials written in Black English, progressing through transitional materials to standard English materials.

There are arguments both in favor of and against each alternative; however, although there are many respected people presenting ideas in the field, there is a paucity of worthwhile research to support the various arguments. So that the reader might get a feeling for the interaction between the arguments being presented, the four alternatives will be examined to see how they relate to problems that might develop in three broad areas: problems related to implementation, problems related to the Black community and problems related to the child.
The first problem related to implementation is the problem of teacher training. This problem is found in all four areas to varying degrees. In each case, the teacher must have at least some basic familiarity with and understanding of Black English. A more extensive training would be required for teachers in alternatives two and three. In alternative two the teacher must be trained in Black English to such a degree that she can isolate reading errors from the restructuring of the standard English patterns into dialect. In three, she must be trained in discriminating the language patterns so that she can record them.

A second problem develops from a lack of available materials and is seen in alternatives one and four. At this time, there does not appear to be any series of materials commercially produced or methods suggested that have been proven to be effective in the teaching of Standard English to speakers of dialect at a young age.

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Nor are materials commercially available that incorporate the use of Black English in lower level texts to replace standard English.¹ Scant research has been done on the preparation of such materials.²

A final problem rests in teacher attitudes. Teacher attitude toward dialect is a factor in areas two, three, and four because these areas require that the teacher accept the child's Black English as a medium in which they can work toward his learning to read. This is a real problem.³

The problems related to the Black community reflect the social import of what happens in reading instruction in the school. If the school chooses to follow alternative one, then reading instruction must be delayed until standard English has been mastered. This delay in instruction is for an undetermined length of time, possibly


as short as a few months or as long as two years.\textsuperscript{1} In either case, the idea of a delay in starting formal reading instruction has not proven popular with parents.\textsuperscript{2}

A second problem emerges from the use of alternatives three and four, particularly four, because these two require that Black English be written down, and thus formally codified.\textsuperscript{3} Goodman predicted this problem when he said that

Primarily the opposition of the parents and the leaders in the speech community must be reckoned with. They would reject the use of special materials which are based on a non-prestigious dialect. They usually share the view of the general culture that their speech is not the speech of cultivation and literature.\textsuperscript{4}

A third community attitude is also related to alternatives three and four and somewhat to two. The attitude is stated "to attempt to lock (our children) into a provincial patois is to limit their opportunities in the world at large."\textsuperscript{5} The inclusion of dialect in reading instruction is seen by many members of the community as

\textsuperscript{1}Crammer, "Dialectology," p. 4; Venezky, "Nonstandard Dialect," p. 341.

\textsuperscript{2}Crammer, "Dialectology," p. 4.

\textsuperscript{3}William A. Stewart, "Current Issues in the Use of Negro Dialect in Beginning Reading Texts," \textit{Florida FL Reporter}, VIII (Spring/Fall, 1970), 7.

\textsuperscript{4}Goodman, "Dialect Barriers," p. 859.

\textsuperscript{5}George R. Beissel, "Comments on James Sledd," \textit{College English}, XXXIV (January, 1973) 582, quoting "Editorial," \textit{The Crisis} (April, 1971); \textit{The Crisis} is the Journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
an attempt to separate the child from the mainstream of American success. 1

The remaining problems to be looked at are those that relate to the child. Because the child is at the center of the learning situations his chance for success and his possible confusions arising from instruction are of paramount importance. A major problem arising out of following alternative one is that of the child's motivation for learning the necessary material. He may see little need to learn standard English because he would have little opportunity to use it outside of his classroom interaction with his teacher. Without motivation and reinforcement from the environment outside of school, progress could well be slow. 2 If alternative two is followed, the child may be called on to use sound-symbol relationships that may result in conflict in relating his spoken pattern to the written pattern. 3 In alternatives three and four the child is required to make a transition from one type of materials to another which might also result in confusion if the transition is not carefully controlled. 4


3 Crammer, "Dialectology," p. 4.

The preceding material covers the major problems related to using each of four alternatives in teaching the Black-English speaking child to read. It is also possible to compare the programs one against another.

If one looks generally at the four programs, it is seen that alternative one, which requires the child to adapt to standard English before reading instruction is begun, is in contrast to the other three alternatives which, in their own ways, require the teacher to adapt to Black English usage. It is possible then to look at the factors that are given as positive factors in favor of following alternative one as opposed to following the other three alternatives. It is also possible to look at those factors given in favor of following any of the three alternatives against following alternative one.

Those factors that are in support of using alternative one are:

1. It is closest to the current practice even though it does require using a more structured program than is currently used.

2. The teacher's attitude toward the use of Black English does not enter in as a factor in reading instruction.

3. The child must learn standard English to move ahead in today's society; he should learn it early so that he is reinforced by using it for reading instruction.
Those factors that are in support of using the other three alternatives are:

1. The child can continue to use his dialect and thus maintain positive feelings toward it; he can see his dialect as respected by the school even if it is different from the school's own dialect.

2. These alternatives stress learning reading over changing the child's language pattern.

3. It is not necessary to delay reading instruction.

4. The use of these alternatives does not preclude teaching standard English but it does require that such training be separate from reading instruction so that both can proceed efficiently.

5. The prognosis for success in learning standard English is low without motivation coming from the need to use the form with the peer group or in the home environment. It would appear that instruction at a later age is more effective because the young person may be broadening his experiences and may be looking toward the job market where he is required to use standard English.1

1Kenneth Johnson, "When Should Standard English be Taught to Speakers of Nonstandard Negro Dialect?" Language Learning, XX (June, 1970), 19-30.
The previous paragraph lists the contrasting factors that can be seen to support each side of the question of using alternative one or one of the other alternatives. It is also possible to list the factors that support two other possible contrasting sets. The first set considers the use of alternative two versus the use of alternative three or four. It is important to look at the factors in this question because the use of Dialect readers and the language experience approach, alternatives three and four, require that the materials used for reading instruction follow the dialect pattern while alternative two does not. Those factors that support using alternative two are:

1. Problems generated by the lack of acceptance of the codifying of dialect are by-passed.

2. The child can begin to apply standard forms to his reading as they become a part of his classroom form.

3. No new materials need to be developed and no transition from dialect materials to standard materials is required.

Those factors that support using alternatives three or four are:
1. The child sees his normal language pattern used in his reading instruction materials; he can see his spoken English transferred to the printed form.

2. It is not necessary to train teachers in discriminating reading errors from errors resulting from dialect use.

3. Swedish experimentation supports the fact that learning to read in dialect increases the child's reading achievement even when a transition to a new dialect form is required.¹

The last set of arguments can be developed to present the supporting factors in the case of alternative three versus alternative four, the language experience approach versus the use of dialect readers. Alternative three has in its favor:

1. The child's dialect usage can be recorded exactly; only those patterns that are used are recorded, which is significant if children in a particular

group use some standard English patterns in place of some expected Black English patterns.  

2. Materials will be relevant to the child and no new materials have to be produced.

Factors that support the use of alternative four are:

1. Teachers need not be as fluent in dialect as they must be if they are going to record the dialect pattern.  

2. The vocabulary load can be controlled.

3. A leveled series of transition materials can be developed to ease the child gradually from the use of dialect materials into the use of regular standard English materials.  

It can be seen by reviewing both the factors given in the last few paragraphs and the problems associated with using each of the four alternatives that were presented earlier, that considerable information exists on the factors that should be considered if one is going to use one of the four alternatives in teaching Black urban children to read. However, although considerable information is...
is given, there is little conclusive research to support the use of one program over another. In general, the various authors consider the factors and problems in using or not using a particular alternative and conclude that they will support their choice until research proves them wrong. Many do recognize the need for substantial research to define the effects of using their choice or another.

Summary

In this chapter the author has discussed Black English, its historical development and how it differs from standard English in the two major categories of phonological and grammatical variables. She has considered the question of interference and discussed four alternatives suggested for teaching reading to children who speak Black English. In reviewing the literature concerning both the role of interference and the teaching alternatives, she discovered considerable information on the factors involved and a dearth of research to support conclusively any of the arguments that were developed from that information.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

It is incumbent on the teacher in the urban school that is producing almost universal low achievement in reading to be dissatisfied with the current status. It is necessary that she consider all of the possible causes of reading failure including the possible cause of dialect interference. However, it is clear after completing this review of the literature that the question of the role that Black English plays in an urban Black child's attempt to learn to read has not been solved.

The problem of considering this role is complicated by the fact that, even though the existence of Black English has been recognized by linguists, it has not been recognized by a number of people in the schools. Further, even if its existence is recognized, acceptance of it as a valid language system does not automatically follow. There would seem to be a reluctance in the schools to accept that a dialect may be different from standard English and still not represent deficient language development.
The writer feels that a most significant first step to be taken in the schools is to change this attitude. To this end, she would recommend that the teacher of Black urban children should seek preservice or inservice training that:

1. acquaints her with basic language principles and gives her an understanding of elementary linguistics while developing a respect for languages as valid communication systems.

2. instructs her in the phonological and grammatical variables that delineate Black English from standard English.

3. considers the different specific areas of reading instruction in which the child's ability to learn might be affected by his language pattern, in particular the areas of sound-symbol relationships (including developing a familiarity with the homonyms that exist in Black English that do not exist in standard English) and unfamiliar sentence structure and tense markers.

4. equips her to distinguish the child's reading errors from his oral reading that reflects his changing the standard form into his dialect form.
The author further suggests that:

1. Additional research is needed to clarify the role of interference in learning to read and to define the effects of using each of the four alternatives for teaching reading to the urban Black child. This research should attempt to overcome the problems in experimental technique which were seen in much of the research reviewed.

2. The information that is available from the linguists should be reviewed by a team of linguists and reading specialists so that those points most relevant to the teaching of reading might be separated from that material which is more appropriate to theoretical linguistic arguments.

It should be made clear that it is not necessary for the teacher merely to wait until additional research data are available to support the use of one particular teaching alternative over the others or until a more selective body of information is developed. She is taking a positive step toward improving her reading instruction when she develops a familiarity with the ways in which the child's English differs from classroom English and realizes that difficulties in reading may result from those differences.
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