

Ebonics, Pidgins, and Creoles

(oh my!)

Dec. 18, 1996: Oakland School Board passes a resolution to recognize "Ebonics" as the native language of some of its students, and to take this into account when teaching them Standard English.

Ebonics

"...a language that has no right or wrong expressions, no consistent spellings or pronunciations and no discernible rules."

--William Raspberry

"...the patois of America's meanest streets."

--George Will

Ebonics

"Y'awl might be axin me why Ah be writin dis way. Y'awl might tink ma fambly didn't gib me a gud upbringing."

--Walter Williams, Detroit Free Press

Ebonics

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Ebonics

- "double negatives"

I ain't seen nothin

Ebonics

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- "double negatives"

I ain't seen nothin *Ebonics*

non ho visto niente *Italian*

not I-have seen nothing

ja n^je vid^jel ničevo *Russian*

I not saw nothing

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
- extremely rich tense system:

He runnin

Present progressive

He be runnin

Present habitual progressive

He be steady runnin

*Present intensive habitual
progressive*

He bin runnin

Present perfect progressive

He BIN runnin

*Present perfect progressive
with remote inception*

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
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- rule-governed copula drop:

He is rich —————> He rich

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He is rich —————> He rich

I don't know how rich he is ~~is~~ ...how rich he
(*sentence-final*)

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
- extremely rich tense system
- rule-governed copula drop:

He is rich —————> He rich

I don't know how rich he is ~~X~~ ...how rich he
(*sentence-final*)

I want to be rich —————~~X~~—————> I want to rich (*inf.*)

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
- extremely rich tense system
- rule-governed copula drop:

He is rich → He rich

I don't know how rich he is ~~is~~ → ...how rich he
(*sentence-final*)

I want to be rich ~~be~~ → I want to rich (*inf.*)

He was rich ~~was~~ → He rich (*past tense*)

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
- extremely rich tense system
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He is rich → He rich

I don't know how rich he is ~~is~~ → ...how rich he
(*sentence-final*)

I want to be rich ~~be~~ → I want to rich (*inf.*)

He was rich ~~was~~ → He rich (*past tense*)

He ain't rich ~~is~~ → He not rich (*negation*)

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- extremely rich tense system
- rule-governed copula drop:

He is rich → He rich

I don't know how rich he is ~~is~~ → ...how rich he
(*sentence-final*)

I want to be rich ~~be~~ → I want to rich (*inf.*)

He was rich ~~was~~ → He rich (*past tense*)

He ain't rich ~~is~~ → He not rich (*negation*)

I am rich ~~am~~ → I rich (*1 sg. subject*)

Ebonics

- "double negatives"
- extremely rich tense system
- rule-governed copula drop
- rule-governed negative inversion

Can't nobody do it.

*Can't John do it.

Ebonics

...but don't we have to teach
Standard English?

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1989, Aurora University (Chicago):

11-week study:

"contrastive" technique

vs. traditional methods

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59% reduction in Ebonics use

vs. traditional methods

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Standard English?

1989, Aurora University (Chicago):

11-week study:

"contrastive" technique

59% reduction in Ebonics use

vs. traditional methods

8.5% increase

Pidgins and Creoles

pidgin: language developed by people encountering each other's languages as adults.

Pidgins and Creoles

pidgin: language developed by people encountering each other's languages as adults.

creole: what happens to a pidgin when children learn it as a first language.

Pidgins and Creoles

Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)

Papa bilong mipela

yu stap long heven,

mekim nem bilong yu i kamap bikpela.

Mekim kingdom bilong yu i kam....

Haitian Creole

Jan vann bèf

Jan sell cattle

'Jan sells cattle'

Mwen renmen l.

I love him/her

'I love him/her'

Haitian Creole

mwen 'I, me'

ou 'you'

li 'he, she, him, her'

nou 'we, us, you-PL'

yo 'they, them'

Haitian Creole

mwen manje	'I eat'
ou manje	'you eat'
li manje	'he/she eats'
nou manje	'we, you-PL eat'
yo manje	'they eat'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

Jan achte liv la

Jan bought book the

'Jan bought the book'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

Jan achte liv **la**

Jan bought book the

'Jan bought the book'

Jan achte liv **yo**

Jan bought book the-PL

'Jan bought the books'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

timoun [ki achte liv **la**] **yo**

child who bought book the the-PL

'the children who bought the book'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

timoun [ki achte liv **la**] **yo**

child who bought book the the-PL

'the children who bought the book'

... **or** 'the child who bought the books'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

timoun [ki achte liv **la**] **yo**
child who bought book the the-PL
'the children who bought the book'
... **or** 'the child who bought the books'

timoun ki achte liv **yo**
child who bought book the-PL
'the children who bought the books'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners

timoun [ki achte liv la] yo
child who bought book the the-PL
'the children who bought the book'
... or 'the child who bought the books'

*timoun ki achte liv yo yo
child who bought book the-PL the-PL
'the children who bought the books'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners
- 'factative effect'

Jan vann bèf
Jan sell cattle
'Jan sells cattle'

Jan vann bèf **yo**
Jan sell cattle the
'Jan **sold** **the** cattle'

Jan ak Sisi
Jan with Sisi
'Jan is with Sisi'

Haitian Creole

- postnominal determiners
- 'factative effect'
- predicate clefting

Se fatige m fatige. Se pale m pale ak li.
it's tired I tired it's talk I talk with him
'I'm tired.' 'I talked with him'

Haitian Creole

Why are creoles different from their
"parents" (lexifiers)?

Haitian Creole

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- UG?

Haitian Creole

Why are creoles different from their "parents" (lexifiers)?

- UG?
- ordinary language change?

Haitian Creole

Why are creoles different from their "parents" (lexifiers)?

- UG?
- ordinary language change?
- substrate influence?

Haitian Creole

Fongbe

Jan achte liv la

Jǎn xò wémà ò

Jan bought book the

Jan buy book the