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RACE AND LANGUAGE ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS

by

William H. Dozier

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
April 1995

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must acknowledge the contributions of my committee to this project. The time and guidance that Dr. Sue R. Crull and Dr. Douglas V. Davidson have been crucial to the completion of this research. Dr. Thomas L. Vanvaley and Dr. Lewis Walker have also given much time from their demanding schedules to contribute to this project. All four of these people had always had an open door for my work and I.

I have had considerable financial support in this project. Dr. Lewis Walker and the Sociology Department have generously provided me with graduate assistantships for each year of my work. These assistanships have contributed to my understanding of research and sociology in general in addition to easing the economic hardships of graduate school. Ms. Griselda Daniel and Dr. Rollin Douma of The Graduate College of Western Michigan University were also very helpful in the completion of this work. Eddie D. McClendon, who has been my friend for over twenty years and has kept me solvent when all else has failed, must be acknowledged for his support. Dr. Sindecuse who has given endlessly to so many students at Western Michigan University has helped me as well. Without the help of these people and the other faceless supporters of Western Michigan University I would have had to delay the completion of this work years.

Others have contributed to the completion of this research. I must thank the Staff and the contributors at the Sindecuse Health

### Acknowledgments--Continued

Center for patching me up and keeping me healthy. My chronic health problems would have forced me out of school and into the world of the insured long ago. Also Mr. Earl Mims of M+M Garage who has kept my cars on the road (often for free) must be acknowledged. Mr. Mims has made the 90 mile (round trip) commute from Benton Harbor to Kalamazoo and back possible. With the exception of my son, no person has given more to this project than Dr. Joyce Montgomery. Joyce has helped me with this research in every way. She has helped with suggestions, critiques, and even did telephone interviewing for me. In addition, she has been a full and true friend from start to finish of this project.

Finally, I must acknowledge my parents' contributions in preparing me for all I have done. Of course I wish both of you were alive to see what you have created for this research like I are your product. The subject of this work was selected because of your treatment by a society that too often used your language to deny you access to the valued resources of this country after it immorally denied you access to the dominant language through education because of your race.

William H. Dozier

## RACE AND LANGUAGE ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS

William H. Dozier, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1995

This research was used to measure the attitudes of students toward African American English at a predominantly European American University. It was hypothesized that significant differences would be found between the responses of the African American and European American students. Using a random telephone survey of the population, three (Language Legitimacy, Language Acceptance, and Cultural Value) of the four hypotheses were found to be significant. The fourth hypothesis (Employment Inhibition) was rejected indicating that both groups felt language was used as an employment stratification device. The data showed that although there were significant differences in the attitudes by race over 80% of the students had a somewhat positive attitude toward African American English.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare by race the attitudes of current college students toward African American English on a predominantly European American campus. Over the past twenty five years, research on attitudes toward the language of African Americans has focused on language legitimacy, language acceptance, cultural value, and, more recently, employment inhibition. In the tradition of previous research, this study will specifically reexamine each of these concepts [considering the past twenty five years of research and the resultant information].

The attitudes of college students toward African American English are crucial to interracial communication on campus (Smitherman-Donaldson, 1987). It must be considered that 80% of African Americans use African American English and the language of nurture is the preferred language for communication (Smitherman, 1991). Clearly, communication affects race relations and is extremely important for colleges and universities where unrest threatens interactions of racial groups. Poor interracial communication results from the disrespect others have for African American English Speakers. For the disrespect leads to African American English speakers avoiding dialogue with others. Poor interracial communication has been found to be at the root of interracial conflicts on

campus (Brignull, 1993).

African American students have indicated that the disrespect for African American English make them uncomfortable in conversations with whites, either because the lack competence or they refuse to compromise and use Standard English. Many African American students who are competent in Standard English feel its use lacks intimacy and when they use it, they are performing. These African American students consider comfort as important to personal conversations. Therefore conversations with European Americans are avoided. The absence of dialogue can have several negative consequences (Brignul, 1993).

Colleges and universities must consider a resolution of this linguistic dilemma because African American English speakers are students whose graduations are seen as socially beneficial by these institutions. The linguistic conflict reduces graduation rates for many African American potential graduates. Research has shown that one reason that African American students perform better and have higher graduation rates at predominately black schools than white schools has to do with comfort. Not being comfortable in conversations has been found as the source of discomfort in several studies. Also African American English speakers who write in African American English will be punished by many instructors who are lacking in the understanding of the language. This disrespect may reduce class participation by African American English speakers (Allen, 1989; Bunzel, 1993).

Yet linguistic conflict is not exclusive to the African American Experience. The retention of different linguistic characteristics is a tool of stratification, which often inhibits a group's inclusion into the dominant structures in the Western world (Chomsky, 1993). One who fails to use the correct language for the situation often finds discrimination a consequence. As part of the assimilation process some cultural groups have consciously worked to repress their non-dominant languages or non standard dialects to avoid this discrimination. For repressing linguistic differences allowed them to be assimilate into the social systems of the economically dominant culture's language system (Gordan, 1980).

Other non-dominant cultural groups strive to maintain their linguistic heritage. There are many non-dominant ethnic and cultural enclaves in major cities. According to Gans (1979) "the function of ethnic identities for many of these groups disappeared as full membership to the dominant cultural group was granted" (p. 15). For African Americans, cultural inclusion remains marginal (Asante, 1980). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that while ethnic identity may be considered only symbolic, it has been racially ascribed for African Americans. Other reasons why African Americans have maintained African American English will be discussed in the section on Black English.

The situation of African American English speakers is unique, for several reasons. Unlike other languages African American English is not connected to a land mass or taught in schools as a

legitimate foreign language. The result is that the language of African American English speakers is considered illegitimate or slang. In addition, the legally and socially forced reduction in conventional overt racism appears to have promoted a new and disguised racism that uses cultural differences, such as language, as the foundation of discrimination. Neo-racism involves racial/cultural prejudices that affect interactions based on cultural superiority (Balabar & Wallerstien, 1993).

Ironically, even with the Neo-racist practices, the dominant United States culture has embraced many components of African American English, even while considering its speakers inferior. The institution of education diligently works to promote the superiority of Standard English and its speakers, yet popular culture continuously borrows from the irreverent African American English. Many terms with African (i.e., cool, dig, jive, and jazz) etymologies are now part of the Standard English lexicon (Smitherman, 1986). Conversations of European American students reveal evidence of the current influence of African American English on the dominant culture. Even European American Rap songs are filled with African American English.

Assessing the attitudes of college students is unique for the perspective it offers. Campus life is often the first interpersonal interracial interaction that many students experience. College students' attitudes are also special because few people experience these initial interracial interactions as peers. It could not be

expected that college interactions could erase years of socialization. However, the opinions of students are more likely to be self-determined than those of people who have not experienced such relationships.

This research will examine the interracial/intercultural opinions of students of different linguistic backgrounds. Specifically, the goal of this study is to address the following questions:

1. Do students consider African American English a legitimate language?
2. Are students willing to accept African American English?
3. Do students see a relationship between language and culture?
4. Do students consider African American English to be a factor in employment opportunities?
5. Is race a significant variable in determining the opinions of college students toward African American English?

#### Definitions of Terms

In research, labels establish an identity for whom or what is being labeled (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Terms that are included in the discussion of linguistics, the political/ethnic area, as well as the terms used in the research instrument are defined below.

### Linguistic Terms

African American English is a concept that covers the whole range of African American speech, from the time African Americans were thrust unwillingly onto United States soil and began to struggle to communicate in a foreign tongue through the present, (except, for those who were educated away from cultural Africanness). African American English recognizes the predominant, although not exclusive, language family, (English) with which the speech of African Americans is associated. More specifically the term African American English identifies the speech of African Americans as a separate language and not a dialect or a subdivision of the language family of English. The term African American English implies that African Americans communicate in a linguistic system that is unique and separate from English (Winsboro, 1990).

The suggestion that African American English is a dialect results from an Eurocentric blindness that only describes what is missing and what is grammatically wrong. This lack of vision fails to acknowledge African language patterns, meanings and language structure or the new words that have been improvised to create a unique culture and language (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Considering African American English a dialect (or subdivision of Standard English) eliminates both the need to compare the two languages and the differences between them. More importantly, viewing African American English as a dialect fails to acknowledge that the history these two languages are different. Finally, the methods that African

American English uses to correct the illogical structures, meanings, and patterns of Standard English though clearly relevant are not discussed in most of this literature.

The concept African American English as it is used here has two major components. The first major component is identified as Africanized English, and it reflects the contribution of traditional African Languages to African American English. Black English is the second major component.

Africanized English is the mixture of West African languages with Standard English a base. The ratio of Standard English in the mixture has increased proportionately to that of the African Languages over time (Baugh, 1983). The proportions change by region, age, and education (University of Alabama, 1986). Regardless of the proportions, there is a presence of African linguistic lexicon, grammar, and syntax (Smitherman, 1986).

Black English is the political component of African American English. It is used as a defense against white oppression. The Africans' lexicographical extension of English terms originated as a consequence of the Black quest for freedom as well as the psychological releases from lifetimes of dehumanizing oppression. Labov (1972) used the term Black English Vernacular, to refer to the mercurial speech of urban African American youths.

The term Standard English will be used to identify mainstream English as taught by and to the white middle class in The United States of America.

### Political/Ethnic Terms

In the Political/Ethnic discussion the term Africans refers to those of African descent in the pre-emancipatory United States of America. This is the term they used to identify themselves (Dubois, 1970).

African American is a racial/ethnic group label in that it is an ascribed label that is genetic or at least phenotypical (Black Social Workers, 1989). To be an African American the individual has to be born with a least one drop of African American blood. Ethnic identity is part of the daily reality for African Americans, but for third and fourth generation European Americans it is voluntary or even symbolic (Gans, 1979).

Black is a political label (Black Social Workers, 1989). Black is an achieved label. According to this definition a European American can be Black and African Americans can be White, if the label is earned and can be measured in degrees of blackness. Black is used to refer to the political/cultural group. Black will be used as a political term, because it is the opposite of White. The term White refers to those Anti-African American or Pro-European American cultural structures and institutions, practices, myths, prejudices, oppressions, and ignorances that inhibit African American liberty, whether they are manifest or latent. An individual could be raised Black in their home, but learn to be or act white outside the home (in an environment such as school) or vice-versa (Davidson, 1980).

The term European American will be used to describe those of



European ancestry.

The term White will be used to describe that which is opposite to Black.

#### The Instrument Terms

Less explicit terms are used in the research instrument than in the discussion of Linguistics or the Political/Ethnic area to facilitate the interviewing process. First this is done because the respondent probably lacks the knowledge of the terminology above. Second less explicit terms are used because the terms African American and European American may seem too politically correct and may elicit the response the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear or create a tension for the respondent.

The term Blacks will be used in the research instrument to refer to those of African ancestry.

Black English is used in the research instrument because it is the most commonly used term to describe African American English.

The term Whites is used in the research instrument to refer to those of European ancestry.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent works in the literature offer more respectful and less Eurocentric views of African American English than the literature in the 1960s or even the 1970s. These works look at the value of African American English to African Americans psychologically, socially, educationally, and economically. Some researchers suggest beginning reading in the language of nurture will improve the child's overall school performance (Baratz & Shuy, 1969; Goodman, 1988; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Steward, 1967; 1968). However, efforts to use African American English readers were frequently met with significant resistance by parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members (Cazden, 1971). Nevertheless, there has been increased interest and debate concerning African American English during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

#### The Roots of Africanized English

The continuing debate centers on whether African American English is solely the product of English or a combination of the West African Languages and English. The competing theories of the Anglicists, the Geographers, and the Creolists attempt to explain the origins of African American English. Each of these theories will be discussed in the discourse that follows.

### The Anglicists

The oldest theory on the beginning of Africanized English is called the Anglican Theory. The Anglicist view demonstrates the pejorative nature that early social scientists had of Africans and Africanisms. Some supporters of this view suggest that when Africans were forced to communicate in English they lost their African roots (Krapp, 1924). Theorists had different reasons for supporting this view. Members of this group often thought it was in the best interest of African Americans to be White. This required completely surrendering the distinguishing characteristics of African Americans, in short a total assimilation into the dominant culture. For these Liberals (African American and European alike), African Americans, showing a cultural resemblance to European Americans would expedite their assimilation. A problem with this line of thought is that it demeans African culture, the African American identity, and thereby Africans and African Americans. These theorists find that Africanisms are valueless (Frazier, 1926; Johnson, 1930; Krapp, 1924; Park, 1925; Smith, 1926).

Anglicist theorists submit that all African groups were forced to speak English, therefore African languages were extinguished. Anglicist theorists assert that the Africans usually were prohibited from speaking their native languages to coworkers (African and European) or to slavers. Moreover, even when they were allowed to speak their native languages, there were rarely others of their specific language group in the immediate community with whom to speak.

Slavers usually mixed Africans from different language groups deliberately to prevent communication, thereby lowering the probability of escape or insurrection (Levine, 1978).

The Anglicists who were admittedly ignorant of African languages have suggested that over time, as the original Africans died, their African Linguistic roots and contributions died along with them. The Anglicists also suggested that with each generation the Africans became better English speakers. Their assumption was that over time the Africans had become so proficient in English that not a trace of their backward language remained (Frazier, 1926; Johnson, 1930; Krapp, 1924; Park, 1925; Smith, 1926).

The Anglicist's rationale for the differences between Standard English and Africanized English was that Africans had learned their English from lower-class British immigrants. These were the white people who were the actual overseers. Thus their imperfect Standard English remained the language of the Africans because of their continued isolation from the dominant culture. Those items that were not a part of Peasant English were modifications of English to serve the needs of the Africans (Johnson, 1930). The problem with this theory is that the Anglicists were ignorant of the African languages that they denied were the origins of African American English. These scholars were writing with ethnocentric biases, not from positions of linguistic expertise. In their ignorance, they denied that African influences were possible. Thus, they were unable to objectively compare the languages (Frazier, 1926; Johnson, 1930; Krapp,

1924; Park, 1925; Smith, 1926; Smitherman, 1986). The Anglicists considered studying African languages a complete waste because they felt there was nothing of value in African culture (Fold, 1980; Smitherman, 1986).

Although their position has been challenged for over sixty years, it still retains validity for some people even today (Mufwene, 1993). Lorenzo Dow Turner's (1935, 1949) empirical research (discussed more fully in the Creolists section) essentially laid to rest the Anglicist debates. It was important that an European American supported a work as controversial as Turner's in order for it to be accepted by mainstream social scientists. Melville Herskovits provided that support for Turner's work (1941).

### The Geographers

The second major theory is held by the geographers. The geographers suggest that more of the differences in African American speech can be attributed to geographic location than to Africanization. The geographers suggest that neither race nor ethnicity are as important as neighborhood in determining language patterns. Geographers moved into prominence after the work of Herskovits (1941) and Turner (1935, 1941) reduced the credibility of the Anglicist position on the origins of African American English. Geographers credited the work of Turner and agreed that many terms in the African American English lexicon were of African etymologies. Hans Kurath and Raven McDavid (1973), after studying Standard and

Non-standard forms of American speech samples taken from both African American and European American speakers, suggested that many characteristics of Africanized English speech were also present in other Non-Standard American speech.

In a review of examples in literature and from direct observations, Juanita Williamson (1971) found what she saw as insignificant differences in the speech of African Americans and Europeans. Williamson (1971) used data gathered from ecological observations to convince her readers that there was essentially no difference between African American and European American speech of a given geographical region.

The Geographers' strength is their position that, although African culture is a factor in African American language behavior, it is clear that not all African Americans speak one common language nationwide. They further reveal that European Americans also speak differently according to regions (Cazden, 1971).

The contributions of the geographers were twofold. First, their work examined how linguistic behaviors and language were learned from the environment and beyond the home. They believe that if there were enough people in an area with common absences of or additions to English phonic constructions, these will become the regionally correct sounds. Second, their work demonstrates that Standard English, often is illogical and unnatural, and exposed it as hegemonic ritual which is learned by the elites within their environment and can be used to eliminate opportunities for those

without a mastery of the ritual (Fanon, 1967; Smitherman, 1987).

While the latter is a latent benefit of the geographers' work, it is a critical product.

The latent benefit of the geographers' work will be discussed in the summary. First, to complete the discussion of the linguistic theories on the origins of African American English, the position of the Creolists will be discussed.

### The Creolists

The third major theory is that of the Creolists. The Creolists worked in the tradition of Herskovits (1941) and Turner (1935, 1949). Turner found that the Africans continued to be enslaved long after the 1808 Slave Trade Act made it illegal to import Africans into the United States for slavery. This provided for continued African influence on the language of the Africans in the United States.

Turner (1935) found over 100,000 Africans were brought from Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gold Coast, Togo, Dahomey, Nigeria and Angola, to the South Carolina-Georgia area after the 1808 Act. In his work Turner (1949) found that the Africans brought to the United States during that period spoke over twenty languages. Turner spent over seventeen years making himself familiar with the numerous African languages and Gullah in Africa and on the Sea Islands. Then Turner (1949) produced a detailed record of 4,000 Gullah words with African etymologies. Subsequently, all

serious studies of Africanized English consider Turner's work and many linguists follow his model.

Yet, it is important to note that linguists call themselves Creolists, although neither Herskovits nor Turner, called themselves' Creolists. Nor did either originate the Creolist system that their contemporaries suggest is the source of Africanized English. The Creolists' most prolific scholars are William A. Stewart (1967) and J. L. Dillard (1972), who criticize the positions of both the Geographers and Anglicists with whom they differ.

This group of scholars, like Turner, studied the West African languages. However, Creolists went beyond the work of Turner and Herskovits to hypothesize a four-step process in the development of Africanized English: From (1) Native African Languages to an (2) English Pidgin, then to a (3) Pidgin Creole, and finally to the (4) Decreolization stage. Briefly, the Creolists four stages suggest that before contact with the Europeans, the Africans lived in Africa and used their native languages. As trading began with English speaking Europeans, there was a need for a trading language. A simplified English pidgin was used to gradually replace the Portuguese pidgin as English speakers became the dominant traders (Dalby, 1971). The variety of languages spoken on the West African coast and the poor records of the time makes it difficult to suggest a single African language for this lingua franca (Todd, 1974). However, Williams (1987) suggests that Wolof was the African Language that survived most strongly in the United States. At this point the



structural affinity of the African languages allowed them to keep their grammar and syntax.

There are three major hypotheses for the third stage, the development of Pidgin Creole. The first and most widespread of the hypotheses of origin suggest that the pidgin from which Africanized English descended, was derived from a trading language.

The second hypothesis submits that the Africans were taken out of their respective communities, and intentionally linguistically isolated by limiting the number of like language speaking Africans purchased by individual slavers. In addition, it was to the advantage of the slavers to force the Africans to learn English. Therefore, soon one pidgin with an English component became the standard language of the slave community.

The third hypothesis is the most controversial. It proposes that when any two languages come in contact with one another, the characteristics that survive are those that offer a compromise between the deep structural characteristics and the surface structures of the two contact languages (Bickerton, 1974). However, the suggestion that African language has affected European American speech is the least acceptable hypothesis to Eurocentric researchers. The suggestion that European Americans have actually allowed African American English to influence their culture is unacceptable (Asante, 1990). Nearly fifty years have passed since Turner (1935, 1941), Herskovits (1939), and Myrdal (1944) published their ideas on the African influence in United States culture. Yet, such thought

remains peripheral to the literature on African American speech and was clearly absent from those of European American speech.

With the exception of the third stage, Creolists theoretically are united and propose that as the original Africans passed away, the Africanizing influences weakened. Therefore, the African American English that was their second language became the first language of the Africans. This transformation varied according to the termination of local African importation. Ultimately, the weakening of African influences will reduce the use and eventually ended the transference of the original African languages. Gradually, decreolization will occur unevenly across the nation.

The final stage in the development of contemporary Africanized English, which according to the Creolists is called decreolization. The decreolization stage suggests that as African American English speakers are increasingly exposed to Standard English and decreasingly exposed to African influences, eventually Africanized English will disappear. The Creolists suggest that Africanized English is currently in the process of decreolization, and this process will conclude when Africanized English has disappeared (Dillard, 1972). In the case of the development of Africanized English, contact between Africanized English Creole speakers and Standard English speakers has increased over the years (Asante, 1990). Since Standard English has been the language of greater prestige in the dominant cultural institutions, Creole speakers gradually assume the features of Standard English (1990). The Creole speakers, however,

hold onto the grammatical structures that are the most ingrained and those for which the rules of application are different from Standard English.

As its speakers continue to have contact with Standard English, the distinctive features of the creolized Africanized English dialect will presumably continue to disappear. The process of decreolization of Africanized English, then, is far from complete. Indeed, it will only be completed if and when Africanized English disappears and Africanized English speakers adopt the Standard English speech to which they are constantly being exposed.

The Creolists are very much like the Anglicists in that they see African American English as a temporary state. The difference is that the Anglicists saw African American English as dead while the Creolists view it as dying. Both fail to see African American Culture as enduring. Of greater importance, both have ignored critical political and historical elements of African American culture.

The Creolist like the Anglicists before them are ignoring the facts. They see that African American English has both altered and added to the dominant language (Asante, 1990). The Africanized English component altered syntax (Asante, 1990), intonation (Smitherman, 1986) and added lexicographically to Standard English (Smitherman, 1986). In addition recent research has shown that European Americans who have contact with African Americans on a regular basis use elements of African American English (Botan & Smitherman, 1992; Smitherman-Donaldson, 1987). Yet, even some Afrocentric scholars

suggest that African American English will succumb to the whiteness that protects Standard English thus predicting the death of African American English (Asante, 1990).

### Linguistic Research

Additional literature on the subject involves linguistic and political research on African American English. The linguistic research on language legitimacy and language acceptance are major factors in the literature (Hoover, 1973; Karenga, 1982; Labov, 1972; Shuy 1971). The political research on the cultural value and employment inhibition of African American English is also important (Graves, 1989; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Karenga, 1982).

Several studies, which solicited attitudes toward African American English found that many African Americans themselves were not accepting of the language (Cazden, 1971; Labov, 1960; Speicher, 1992). Eurocentric institutions have taught African Americans that their language is bad. Moreover, stereotyped linguistic self impressions are not limited to African Americans. This was also the indication in studies that examined the attitudes of non dominant speakers toward African American English (Hannum, 1981; Lambert, 1967; Underwood, 1974). These studies have included Hispanic Americans (Lambert, 1967) various regional southern dialects, Appalachian dialects (Underwood, 1974), French and English Canadians (Lambert, 1967), Jewish and Arabic (Hannum, 1981), students in Israel and Europeans (Hannum, 1981). Labov and Shuy considered that

an awareness of social stratification of language for all speakers starts early in life (Labov, 1967; Shuy, 1967). Yet, studies that compared attitudes have found that African Americans were more receptive than those of other groups toward African American English as the result of their understanding and knowledge of the language. In addition African Americans have political and historic attachments to their language (Asante, 1990; Stacey, 1970).

### Language Legitimacy

Many theorists have seen African American culture, and specifically, African American English as problematic (Sowell, 1982). Generally, these theorists suffer a Eurocentric bias when examining differing cultures (Asante, 1990; Baratz, 1969). The result is that when these scientists encounter an African American who speaks African American English, the language is not granted legitimacy. The scientists labeled the person verbally defective and conceptually impaired and are therefore unable to see that African Americans use a highly developed structured language that is different from Standard English (Smitherman, 1987).

The deficit theory views individuals who use different linguistic systems as deficient (Baratz, 1969). Specifically, forms of English that differ from the standard form are considered poor or sloppy by the deficit theorists. Those theorists who have studied African American English (generally psychologists and educators), suggest that the ability of the individual to speak Standard English

is positively correlated with math, writing, reading, and other test scores (Baratz, 1972; Brasch, 1981).

In contrast, the cultural difference theory suggests that the basic ethnocentrism of social science blinds it to the evidence that Africans-American have a distinct culture (Baratz, 1969). Cultural difference theorists hold that the differences in African American culture are surface manifestations of the fusion of African culture with over 500 years of interaction with Euro-American culture (Baratz, 1972). Therefore, cultural differences in individuals who are from different worlds should be expected. These researchers have recognized and acknowledged that African Americans have a highly developed language system (Baratz, 1972).

Consequently, cultural assimilation and the melting pot theory are merely myths for African Americans. Baratz (1969) said "the basic doctrine that all men are created equal has been misinterpreted by egalitarians to read all men are created equal if they act the same" (p. 18). The anomaly with the melting pot theory, when applied, is that it is expected that the dominant culture's characteristics are taken on in a one-way exchange (Baratz, 1969).

Equally troublesome is the fact that social scientists in the United States have generally ignored the African linguistic contributions to the nation's language behavior. This was conclusively the case for mainstream social scientists in the literature reviewed. However, a new group of researchers have, unlike their predecessors, allowed African American English to become the subject of

their work. However, even these current pacesetters in the field suggest that the death of African American English is imminent (Asante, 1990; Williams, 1987). With the one of the foremost promoter of Africanness predicting the death of African American English, the meager respect in the academy appears temporary (Asante, 1990).

The academy has never given full respect to African American English (University of Georgia, 1993). The negative effects of the consequential disrespect of African American English are numerous. African Americans suffer in terms of education, self-esteem, cultural pride, economics and life chances. The negative consequences of the disrespect for African American English often leads to avoidance of outsiders by African Americans (Bunzel, 1993). The respect for African American English will be measured through the concepts of Language Legitimacy and Language Acceptance.

African American students who avoid outsiders spend more time with African American English speakers. The reason is within the group the individual who uses African American English artistically is applauded, where outsiders frown on their language. Therefore, African Americans are expected to have higher opinions of African American English as a legitimate language than European Americans. This leads directly to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis I: African American students are more likely to consider African American English as a legitimate language than are European American students.

In terms of race relations, the lack of legitimacy for African American English leads to reduced and superficial interracial interactions. African American English speakers avoid interactions with Europeans who require code switching for communications which can become tedious. Research has shown that discomfort with linguistic interaction leads to self-segregation by African Americans on college campuses (Brignull, 1993). African American students are not relaxed in intergroup discussions using African American English, while it is clearly preferred by those who use it as a first language (Brignull, 1993). The failure to grant legitimacy to African American English will continue to serve as a barrier to harmonious race relations.

Legitimacy is only the first step in eliminating African American English's social marginality. After legitimacy is granted, it must be accepted by the total population as a means of communication.

#### Language Acceptance

In the communications literature, the issue of language acceptance is of considerable importance. Social acceptance is generally a goal of humans. When this acceptance is not granted in communication, avoidance is the most frequent coping mechanism (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau 1993). Behaviors such as self-segregation are too often the social product. The language of nurture is the language most comfortable for communication (Smitherman, 1986).



Therefore, students who use African American English are expected to be more accepting of the language than non-users.

Hypothesis II: African American students are more likely to accept African American English than are European American students.

For the reasons above concerning language legitimacy, the acceptance of African American English is very important to interracial/intercultural communications and interactions.

### Political/Cultural Research

#### Black English

Black English, usually considered Pop cultural slang, or Black Slang is actually a specialized vocabulary. The purpose is to disguise from outsiders the meaning of what is being said and attempt to find fresh, vigorous, colorful, pungent or humorous expressions. Black English is not a product of African culture as is Africanized English. Black English is a product of cultural adaptation to the social position of African Americans in the political structure of the United States and therefore is a product of Black Culture.

Black English (like Black Culture) is the result of the resistance to the racial oppression experience by Africans and African Americans.

Even if the Africanized English is eliminated, Black English will remain as long as race is a tool of separation in the United States of America. Black English is primarily a weapon of Blackness. As a weapon of Blackness, Black English keeps Africanized

English alive, for without Blackness to protect Africanness, assimilation would quickly kill what remains of the culture of the African.

Black English also allowed Africans (and later Blacks) to overtly denigrate European Americans (Brent, 1983). Semantic inversion allowed Africans, to verbally express their internal thoughts. The language allowed this while the ignorant "whites" were unaware of what had happened. The psychological benefit of language as an aggressive instrument in the lives of the Africans was immeasurably important for their mental well-being. The psychological benefit was valuable to Africans who did not or could not escape the oppression of European Americans (Levine, 1978).

Yet, Black English was more rewarding to the Africans who used it for their escape to freedom. Using spirituals, Africans could move to the north to freedom or plan their rebellion. Historical examples of this are found in the spirituals of the Africans (Wilson, 1991). Hidden within these songs were dates, times, plans, maps, and people, who would help emancipate the Africans (Wilson, 1991).

African American students who understand the use of Black English are more likely to see the connection between Black culture and Black English. Since African American students are more likely to use Black English they are more likely to see the connection between Black English and Black Culture. Thus; Hypothesis III: African American students are more likely to see the connection between

African American English and the culture of African Americans than are European American students.

Since its origination in the United States, Black English has increased in visibility as political ideological expressions and changes have occurred since the Civil Rights Era. During this period, the media gradually brought elements of Black English into the homes of European Americans. The presentations provided by the media generally were not positive. These quotations of African American speech were usually used to show differences or deficiencies, but not validity. However, the purposes of African American English for African American English speakers were to communicate their political situation and to present their views to society.

Considerable work in this area has been done by those who examine the value of African American English to African American culture. This group acknowledged African American English as a legitimate language with a history and a purpose separate from that of Standard English (Baldwin, 1979; Christian & Fasold, 1972; Steward, 1967). The foundation of this work is based on that of Turner (1949), Benjamin Lee Whorf (1935), W.E.B. Dubois (1970), and Herkovits (1941). Baldwin (1979) and Baldwin (1979) both discussed the value of African American English to the African American community. Whorf (1935) specifically suggested that all human thought is in words, and those with different languages cannot have the same thoughts. The suggestion of the interrelationship between language and thought, and language as a tool of cultural transmission, have

been crucial to establishing the importance of language to African American culture.

In this view, language is the foundation of culture. Language allows the transmission of interconnected configurations of conceptions, emotions, knowledge, values, and beliefs, through intra- and inter-generational communications (Webster, 1979). Also, meaning is given to the environment of each individual through language (Mead, 1936). Events lack implicit meaning; it is only language which makes the most rudimentary thoughts possible (Mead, 1936). It is through language that we become cultured and truly human (Adler & Adler, 1980; Baldwin, 1986; Mead, 1934; Whorf, 1935).

There are consequences to the influence language has over the thought process. The linguistic-relativity hypothesis holds that speakers of a particular language must necessarily interpret the world through the unique vocabulary and grammar their language supplies (Chomsky, 1966). Different language groups therefore, live in different worlds, not the same world with different labels, according to Chomsky. The language that provides understanding for one language group lacks meaning for another language group (Chomsky, 1966).

The current economic structure of the United States is one that regards most of the citizenry as tools of production and distribution. Some Blacks, seeing the exploitation of their labor, will not want to work for European Americans (Wilson, 1978). Few African Americans are owners of either the means of production or

distribution. In addition, African Americans are proportionately less likely to control businesses. This all but requires African Americans, not controlling or holding ownership, to maintain employment as their means to meet basic needs for survival from a European American employer.

Consequently, African Americans must disproportionately seek employment to participate in the current economic system. Yet, historically, institutions of the United States' economic structure have racially restricted employment opportunities for African Americans (Asante, 1990). Although racism is no longer blatantly an exclusionary device, African Americans continue to be prohibited from full participation in the economic system (Asante, 1990). The suggestion here is that if African Americans want to be exploited by the economic system it is their constitutional right to be so treated. However, with considerable legislation to guarantee their rights, the institutions of the United States of America use neo-racism to eschew African American full economic participation (Balabar, 1993). Language is one of the tools used by those institutions. The Human Resources literature indicates that hiring was subjective and relies heavily on personal bias, with similarity being paramount, followed closely by personal liking (Graves, 1989). Examination of the effects of African American English on employment indicates that it negatively impacts this process (Hooper, 1973; Robins, 1988; Shuy, 1973; Wolfram, 1974). According to Hooper (1973) these effects were intensified for supervisory and white

collar positions. Therefore, because of the use of language as a tool of neo-racism, African Americans will view African American English as an employment inhibitor. However, African American students who have seen African American English speakers employed in a variety of positions, are less likely to view African American English as an employment inhibitor than are European American students. Consequently the following hypothesis is proposed; African American students are be less likely to see African American English as an employment inhibitor than are European American students.

For the reasons previously suggested in the discussion of the earlier hypotheses, African American students will have a different view of African American English and employment than that of European American students. The experiences, knowledge, and use of African American English provides Black students with a perspective an outsider can not understand.

In the following chapter the methods for measuring the above hypotheses are detailed along with the sample. Information explaining how the respondents in the sample were selected is included in Chapter III. In addition information on who did the interviewing is presented. The items that were used to create the concepts of language legitimacy, language acceptance, cultural value, and employment inhibition are also furnished. Finally, the statistic used is last item in the chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

A telephone survey was conducted to collect data on attitudes on African American English from a representative sample of Western Michigan University undergraduates students at the Kalamazoo campus. The sample was randomly selected from all currently enrolled undergraduates with a telephone number listed with the registrar's office at the University in April of 1993. The lists included only the respondents' class status and phone number. The interviews averaged 14.3 minutes each.

The research population was stratified by race in order to include a statistically reliable and generalizable representation of African American Students. Also, in an attempt to reduce interviewer effects, two separate respondent lists were requested. The first list of 500 African American students was drawn from their population of 1,214. The second list of 1500 students who were not African American students was drawn from their population of 23,474. The African American students were interviewed only by African American research assistants and correspondingly, non-African American students were interviewed only by European American research assistants in the effort to reduce interviewer effect.

All interviewers were students at Western Michigan University and experienced telephone research assistants with the Leonard C.

Kercher Center for Social Research of the Sociology Department.

Though the interviewers had at least a year of telephone interviewing, additional training specific to this project was employed.

The unit of analysis for the project was the individual student. In the population it was very common for two or more students to share a dwelling. In cases where more than one student was in the household, the student who answered the phone was interviewed. If the individual who answered the telephone was not a student, the interviewer asked for the student nearest the telephone and this person became the respondent. The Fifth student on each list was called once. No student refused to be interviewed. Twelve of the 72 African American student telephone numbers called failed to produce student contact as did 36 of the 274 of the non-African American student telephone numbers.

In testing the hypotheses, the racial identity of the students was the independent variable. The final data set consisted of 288 completed interviews. The respondents were distributed in the following racial/ethnic categories: 50 were African American, 3 were Asian, 16 were Asian American, 213 were European American, 2 were Hispanic, 2 were Native American. Two respondents refused to respond to the question on racial/ethnic background. Only the 50 African American and 213 European American students were included in the analysis.

Before eliminating the 25 cases from the analysis, several consequences were considered. The rationale for removing respondents



was that the individual groups were statistically too small. They were also too culturally different to place together. In addition to being insensitive, placing the responses of these students in the residual category of "other" would group people who very likely have had quite different experiences in the same category. Even the suggestion that all Asians or even all Asian Americans have the same types of experiences was considered theoretically irresponsible. The consequence was that the opinions of these groups were not reflected in this study.

#### Measurement of Theoretical Concepts

The three concepts which serve as dependent variables were derived directly from the first three hypotheses and they are Language Acceptance, Language Legitimacy, and Cultural Value. All three of these dependent variables are measured by composite measures. Each of the composites combines several questions to build summary scores or indexes. In this way, they measure the domain of the three concepts. Two single indicator variables were used to examine employment; the fourth concept, and will be discussed later in this section.

Several steps were required to operationalize the measures on the three conceptual areas of concern. First the seven category response patterns used in the interview were reduced to a four category Lickert type scale by eliminating the "Neutral," "Don't Know," and "No Response" categories. Therefore the remaining values were 1

"Strongly Agree," 2 "Agree," 3 "Disagree," 4 "Strongly Disagree."

The rationale for eliminating the "Don't Know" category was twofold. First, these responses could not affect the values of the overall scales. Second, although many respondents said they were neutral or did not know enough on the subject to respond to the item, some may have actually felt strongly and were uncomfortable expressing an extreme view. As for the "No Response" category, these people elected to not share their response and it was beyond the ability of the researcher to determine in which direction or to what extreme the respondent felt.

Also, in the survey the direction of the statements were varied to avoid response bias, but for the analysis the negative items were recoded so low scores indicated a more positive view of African American English. Next, the values of the responses were summed, and then divided by the number of items included in the composite measure. This produced a set of average values for each composite variable. Those values were then collapsed into three categories. Values of 1 to 2 were placed in the "High" support category. Values of 2.01 to 3 were placed in the "Moderate" support category, while values of 3.01 to 4 were put in the "Low" category. Questionnaire items that were used in the measures are included as Appendix A.

Scale statistics for each of the composite measures are included in the Appendix B. The single measure techniques use only one question or indicator to measure the domain of the concept. Two

single indicators (dichotomous response 1 "yes" or 2 "no") were used to measure employment inhibition. The two single indicators were also recoded to allow the lower values to indicate a more positive view of African American English.

#### Language Legitimacy

Language Legitimacy was operationalized into a composite measure based on responses to three statements: (1) Black English is broken speech, (2) Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would lead to a lowering of standards in schools, and (3) The elimination of Black English from all corners of American life would improve the academic performance of Blacks. Following the combining of three items, the overall distribution of the Language Legitimacy scores included 42.2% in the "High" support category, 40.1% in the "Moderate" support category, and 17.7% scored in the "Low" support category. Once combined the three items produced a reliability coefficient of .71.

#### Language Acceptance

The Language Acceptance scale was calculated from four items that concern the acceptance of African American English: (1) Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would enrich the language background of all students; (2) Black English has a logic, equal to that of any other language; (3) Black English is one of the few things of African culture that survived in America; and

(4) The greater acceptance of Black English would lead to a greater acceptance of Black people. When the four items were combined, respondent scores ranged from 30% in the "High" support category, 57% in the "Moderate" support category, and 13% scored in the "Low" support category. Once combined the four items produced a reliability coefficient of .70.

### Cultural Value

Cultural Value as operationalized included three items examining the legitimacy of African American English: (1) Using Black English as part of the curriculum would promote Black culture in schools, (2) Black English is the foundation of the African American way of seeing the world, and (3) The elimination of Black English from all corners of American life would be harmful to Black culture. In this instance, when the three items were combined, the distribution of scores included 37.6% in the "High" support category, 46.3% in the "Moderate" support category, and 15.6% in the "Low" support category. Once combined the three items produced a reliability coefficient of .671.

### Employment Inhibition

Two single measure items were used to examine the concept of Employment Inhibition. The two items were: (1) Do you think Black English limits Employment opportunities? and (2) Do you think Standard English is preferred in getting a job? The items were answered with

either "yes" or "no" response. In response to the first item 16.7% answered "no" which was supportive of African American English. In response to the second item, only 1.6% answered "no," which indicated little support for African American English.

### Statistical Procedures

#### Chi Squares

Chi Square tests of significance were used to test the hypotheses. Each test used race (African American and European American) to examine the differences in the responses to each dependent composite or single measure indicator.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The results chapter is divided into six sections. In the final section the overall results of the research will be discussed. The results from each of the four research hypotheses will be discussed individually. Before the results of the hypothesis testing are given, a brief description of the sample is presented.

#### Demographic Data

##### Sample

Data indicate that the racial groups were about the same mean age. The African American students ranged in age between eighteen and thirty-four years, with a mean of 21.4 years. The European American group ranged from eighteen to forty-three years, with a mean age of 21.3 years.

The African American students included a larger proportion of females than the European American students. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the African American students in the sample were female. Just over one-half (52.6) of the European American group was female. National statistics and those reported at Western Michigan University indicate that African American women outnumber African American men two to one in higher education.

With the exception of freshman the class status of the

respondents was similar for the racial groups. Only 6% of the African American group were freshmen while 21.6% of the European Americans were members of that class. Most of the students were juniors and seniors (74% of the African Americans and 56.9% of European Americans). All respondents in the final sample were citizens of the United States of America.

The African American students were more likely to be members of school related organizations than the European American students. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the African American group were members of school related organizations in contrast to only 31.9% of the European American students. Also, the African American students were more likely to have jobs off campus than European American students. Over half (52%) of the African Americans held jobs off campus, while less than two-fifths (39%) of the European American students worked off campus.

As expected, African Americans had more exposure to African Americans before coming to Western Michigan University than European Americans. Most of the African Americans (86%) reported that they had a "Great Deal" of exposure before coming to Western Michigan University. Only 2% had just a "Little" exposure to African Americans before coming to Western Michigan University. Comparatively, only 13% of the European American group had a "Great Deal" of exposure to African Americans before coming to Western Michigan University, while more than two fifths (43.2%) had "Little" or "No" exposure to African Americans before coming to Western Michigan

University.

### Language Legitimacy

Considering the recent focus of scholarship in the study of African American English, language legitimacy was deemed an important concept used to measure student attitudes toward African American English. Hypothesis I predicted that African American students were more likely to regard African American English as a legitimate language than were European American students. Table 1 below displays the responses to the language legitimacy composite by categories of race. As the table reveals, higher percentages of African American students supported African American English than European American students. Over half (60.9%) of the African American students scores were in the high category, compared to only 37.6% of the European American students. In the low category 20.4% of the European American students were represented compared to only 6.5% of the African American students. About a third of the African American students scored in the "Moderate" support range compared to 41.9% of the European American Students.

To test the hypothesis for systematic significance, a Chi Square with two degrees of freedom was used. The obtained value of 9.55 when compared to the critical value of .599 indicated that Research Hypothesis I was significantly supported at the 0.05 level.

Although there are significant differences in responses, by race, the overall results are very positive. These data suggest



that the overwhelming majority of the students grant African American English at least "Moderate" support for legitimacy. Less than 20% of the respondents are found in the "Low" category. Below is an examination if the granting of legitimacy translates into language acceptance.

Table 1  
Degree of Support for Language Legitimacy Respondents  
Granted African American English by Race

	ALL RESPONDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICANS	EUROPEAN AMERICANS
HIGH	42.2 (f=98)	60.9 (f=28)	37.6 (f=70)
MODERATE	40.1 (f=93)	32.6 (f=15)	41.9 (f=78)
LOW	17.7 (f=41)	6.5 (f=3)	20.4 (f=38)
n=	*232	46	186

\*The 31 respondents who did not respond to all items in the scale were not included in the analysis of this item.

### Language Acceptance

Much of the recent research on African American English has also been concerned with the acceptance of the language.

Hypothesis II predicted that African American students were more likely to accept African American English than were European American students. More than 40% of the African American students show "High" support for acceptance compared to only 27.5% of the European American students. Nearly 60% of both groups scored in

the "Moderate" support range in acceptance of African American English. However, with regard to the "Low" category, 15.8% of the European American respondents were represented, in contrast to none of the African American students.

In this instance the Chi Square produced an obtained value of 7.69, which, when compared to the Critical value of .5991 supported research hypothesis II at the .05 level. This supports the hypothesis of a significant difference between the responses of the African American students and the European American students.

Table 2 shows the differences in the responses by race of the respondents but also the strong acceptance by both groups of African American English. As Table 2 displays, the differences in the responses were significant by race. However, there was clearly an overall social positive in these data. Less than 15% of the

Table 2

Support of Language Acceptance Respondents  
Granted African American English by Race

	ALL RESPONDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICANS	EUROPEAN AMERICANS
HIGH	30 ( $\underline{f}=62$ )	41.7 ( $\underline{f}=15$ )	27.5 ( $\underline{f}=47$ )
MODERATE	57 ( $\underline{f}=118$ )	58.3 ( $\underline{f}=21$ )	56.7 ( $\underline{f}=97$ )
LOW	13 ( $\underline{f}=27$ )	0.0 ( $\underline{f}=0$ )	15.8 ( $\underline{f}=27$ )
$\underline{n} =$	207	36	171

\*The 56 respondents who did not respond to all items in the scale were not included in the analysis of this item.

respondents scored in the "Low" acceptance category. These data indicate generally that the respondents were accepting of African American English and that the majority of students find little difficulty in acceptance of African American English in interracial communication. In the following section we examine if the respondents have similar feelings about the relationship between African American English and the culture of African Americans.

### Cultural Value

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to the relationship between African American English and African American and Black Culture. The third hypothesis predicted that African American students were more likely to consider African American English closely connected to the culture of African Americans than were European American students. The composite measure, Cultural Value, was created to examine the differences in the responses of African American and European American students. Again, the data were supportive. Almost half (48.8%) of the African American students showed "High" support for the connection between African American English and African American Culture, compared to just over a third (34.9%) of the European American students. About half of both student groups (46.6% of African American students and 46.3% of European American students) considered moderate support for the connection. Only 4.7% of the African American students showed low support for the connection while almost a fifth (18.9%) of the European

American students showed moderate support for the connection between African American English and African American Culture.

The Chi Square test produced an obtained value of 6.13 which fell into the critical region above the critical value of 5.99. Again the relationship was statistically significant at the .05 level. (See Table 3.)

Table 3  
Support for the Connection Between African American  
English and African American Culture by Race

	ALL RESPONDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICANS	EUROPEAN AMERICANS
HIGH	37.6 ( $\underline{f}$ =82)	48.8 ( $\underline{f}$ =21)	34.9 ( $\underline{f}$ =61)
MODERATE	46.3 ( $\underline{f}$ =101)	46.6 ( $\underline{f}$ =20)	46.3 ( $\underline{f}$ =81)
LOW	15.6 ( $\underline{f}$ =35)	4.7 ( $\underline{f}$ =2)	18.9 ( $\underline{f}$ =33)
$\underline{n}$ =	217	43	174

\*The 46 respondents who did not respond to all items in the scale were not included in the analysis of this item.

When compared by race these data show significant differences in the responses of the two groups, but there was a positive direction in the data the overall as well. Over 80% of the respondents scored in the "Moderate" category or above. This indicates that these students see some connection between African American English and African American Culture. The examination of the value of African American English to African American Culture leads to the final section of this chapter which explores students'

opinions on the effects of African American English on Employment opportunities.

#### Employment Inhibition

The fourth hypothesis predicted that African American students were less likely to see African American English as an employment inhibitor than were European American students. Two separate items were used as measures of perceived employment inhibition. The first statement was "Black English limits employment opportunities for Black English Speakers." The vast majority (83.3%) of all the respondents "Agreed" with this item. However a somewhat smaller portion of African American students "Agreed" with the statement than the European American students (77.8% and 84.4% respectively). This suggests that European American students felt somewhat stronger about the issue than the African American students. The Chi-Square obtained value of .584 when compared to the critical value of 5.99 indicates that there was no significant difference between the two groups. Thus the research hypothesis was not supported by the first item concerning employment.

Similar results were found for the second item, "Standard English is preferred in getting a job." The responses to this item were in the direction predicted in Hypothesis IV, but also lacked statistical significance to support the research hypothesis. The obtained value of .084 was considerably less than the critical value of 5.99. Again, nearly all (98.4%) of the respondents "Agreed" with this

item. Thus the second item concerning employment failed to support the research hypothesis. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

Percentage of Respondents That Agreed That African American English is Used as an Inhibitor to Employment by Race

	ALL RESPONDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICANS	EUROPEAN AMERICANS
ITEM 1	*83.3 ( <u>f</u> =209)	77.8 ( <u>f</u> =35)	84.5 ( <u>f</u> =174)
ITEM 2	**98.4 ( <u>f</u> =255)	98 ( <u>f</u> =49)	98.6 ( <u>f</u> =206)

\*The 54 respondents who did not respond to this item were not included in the analysis of this item.

\*\*The 8 respondents who did not respond to this item were not included in the analysis of this item.

It was clear that both African American and European American students believed that anticipatory socialization in the area of language is necessary to garner employment. This research however did not ask do they feel it should be that way. Yet, the above data does present an indication of a probable response to this question. As the above data indicate that less than 18% of the students showed low support toward African American English in either of the three composite variables. Which leads to the question: if over 80% of the students don't have a problem with African American English, why does 98% of those same students feel that it affects employment opportunities? The only answer could be that these students are aware of language discrimination against African American English speakers in the area of employment, but feel it is not necessary.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current opinions of students at Western Michigan University concerning African American English. The literature review suggested the concepts of Language Legitimacy, Language Acceptance, Cultural Value, and Employment Inhibition as major areas of interest. These four concepts led to the questions for the research. Specifically, this study was designed to answer the following five questions:

1. Do students consider African American English a legitimate language?
2. Are students willing to accept African American English?
3. Do students see an interrelationship between language and culture?
4. Do students consider African American English a factor in employment opportunities?
5. Is race a significant variable in determining the opinions of college students toward African American English?

The Black English Survey was developed for a telephone interview to ascertain the pertinent information useful in linking several hypotheses. A stratified random sample was drawn of students at Western Michigan University in the Winter of 1993 with telephone

numbers listed with the registrar's office of the university. Respondents included in this analysis were 50 African American and 213 European American students.

The first four research questions were converted into research hypotheses to examine the differences in perceptions by race (the African American students and the European American students) regarding African American English. Survey items were constructed to gather opinions on these issues.

Hypothesis I: African American students are more likely to consider African American English as a legitimate language than are European American students was supported by these data. This indicates that the African American students granted more legitimacy to African American English than European American students. The granting of Legitimacy must precede acceptance for the language of African Americans. However, over 80% of the respondents granted at least moderate legitimacy to African American English. The research data indicate that only 20% of the respondents totally failed to grant legitimacy to African American English.

Hypothesis II: African American students are more likely to accept African American English than are European American students was also supported by these data. However, by comparing results with those relating to Hypothesis I, apparently more of the students grant Legitimacy to African American English than are willing to accept the use of the language. The pattern is consistent for both African American students and European Students.



Still over 4/5 of the respondents were at least moderately accepting of African American English. These findings indicate that only 20% of the respondents refuse to accept the use of African American English.

Hypothesis III: African American students are more likely to consider the connection of African American English and the culture of African Americans than are European American students was also supported. This suggested that African American students see a stronger connection between African American English and the culture of African Americans. However, in contradiction to the literature reviewed, the scores of all the students showed an overwhelmingly awareness of the connection between African American English and Black Culture. Only a few of the respondents who totally fail to acknowledge the connection between African American English and Black Culture grant legitimacy to African American English.

The fourth hypothesis: African American students are less likely to see African American English as an employment inhibitor than are European American students, was not supported by the data. This hypothesis was operationalized with two single measure indicators: (1) Black English limits employment opportunities for Black English Speakers, and (2) Standard English is preferred in getting a job. Although descriptively the results were in the direction hypothesized, but lacked the statistical significance to inferentially support hypothesis four.

The data produced by this research seemed to contradict the

literature reviewed in several areas. The literature suggests that African American English would soon die; that it would not be granted legitimacy; it would not be accepted; and that it would not be seen as culturally valuable. Yet, over 80% of those in this survey view African American English positively. These data suggest that the current literature fails to reflect this swing in opinion at one major university.

### Conclusions

The results from this project can be generalized to the undergraduate population attending Western Michigan University during the period of the study. It should also be considered that Western Michigan University is demographically similar to many public universities. Based on the continued and increasing interactions of African Americans and European Americans and others students with similar concerns, the study of African American English was a worthy endeavor. The results of this study provide information that should improve understanding of the linguistic problems that exists on this and many other college campuses. Also such a study is extremely valuable to planners, developers, and implementors of race and ethnic relation programs within institutions. This study will also help those in the college community who are interested in increasing the recruitment, retention, and placement of African American students.

In addition, those in the university concerned with continuing and increasing the presence of African American students on campuses

should consider the results of this study. Less than 40% (37.6%) of the European American Students grant African American English high support for legitimacy. Just over a quarter (27.5%) of the European American Students granted African American English high support for acceptance. Only 34.9% of the European American students granted high support for the cultural value of African American English. Over 90% of the students think standard English is preferred in getting a job.

With the information from this study those interested in improving the conditions of African American students are better equipped to prepare students for both life on a predominantly European American campuses and the workforce in the 1990's. This information supports the belief that most people understand the value African American English has to Black Culture and has had to the culture of the United States of America and thus some of the reasons to retain this valuable language. The study also suggest that African Americans must understand the value of code switching in employment. This information can be used to prepare those who follow these African American students into colleges and/or the workforce.

#### Future Research

The differences in the opinions within the African American community concerning African American English would be an important area for future research. One purpose of such research would be to

examine the effects of demographic variables and the responses of African Americans in the general population. It would be interesting to find out what effect such variables as age, education, income, social position of parents, city size, housing, racial composition of various social situations (i.e., neighborhood, school, family, parent's job) student independence, politics, and social mobility, have on the opinions of African Americans on African American English.

Additional research should be pursued with respect to who should be educated on the differences between African American English and Standard English. Such an investigation should consider the following three recommendations:

1. It may be most beneficial to only educate African American English Speakers on the differences between the two languages and the perceptions that groups have about African American English. Then this information could be used to make African American students more aware of the obstacles African American English presents in a white world. By the same token, if European Americans continue to disproportionately make employment decisions, African Americans should know that there is a significant difference in opinions about African American English, or

2. It be more beneficial to educate all students to the differences in the languages and opinions concerning language? Helping European Americans to understand the differences may help them to become more accepting of other cultures in addition to the culture

of African Americans. This may help remove the attachment to the memorization of an often illogical ritual (Standard English) has to cognitive ability. This could open employment opportunities for many people but more importantly it improves the relationships of peoples who are different. Finally, educating all students may, improve the understanding of large group of students who fail to understand that African American English is different than Standard English and not inferior. This would allow for African Americans to talk freely with European American students on campus without being forced to speak Standard English to communicate interracially.

Previous research has often only considered the short term benefits of forcing African American English speakers to learn Standard English and has limited the scope to fixing the problems of those who are different. Hopefully future research would consider the long term consequences, which includes not only considering the possibility of African American English speakers learning Standard English, but also remembering the work of the Geographers and consider removing the inconsistencies that make Standard English difficult to master.

Finally, it is important to understand that addressing African American English will not eliminate all discrimination experienced by African Americans. However, if used to sensitize and better prepare students, knowledge of African American English can be used to remove one of the barriers to open and equal education, or

3. Maybe the institutions that force Standard English on

students be reeducated. The data reveal a large inconsistency. For there seems to be few students (less than 15%) who fail to accept African American English, but practically all (98%) see the institution of employment as rejecting African American English speakers. If the people do not have a problem with the language, why does both the institutions of education and employment hold on to these socially constructed rules so steadfastly.

Also, future research should consider the effects of recent African American immigrants on African American English. The Caribbean, Central American, and Africans who are entering the United States of America are clearly contributing to the language of African Americans. With the exception of Twiggs (1973) little discussion of the current African influence on African American English was mentioned in the scholarly literature reviewed. By considering the influence of the new African Americans, scholars will be less likely to predict the death of African American English.

An additional direction for future research should be to examine the use of African American English by people other than African Americans. Such research should specifically focus on those under the age of thirty. For the influence of Rap performers on pop culture has increasingly made the use of African American English common for those who participate and/or identify with that current genre.

Appendix A  
The Instrument

## APPENDIX A

## Language Legitimacy

7. Black English is broken speech.
8. Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would lead to a lowering of standards in schools.

[STEM] [The elimination of Black English from all aspects of American life would ....]

13. improve employment opportunities.

## Language Acceptance

10. Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would make reading easier for black students.

[STEM] [Black English]

18. has a logic, equal to that of any other language.

[STEM] [Black English]

19. is one of the few things of African culture that survived in America.
21. The greater acceptance of black english would lead to a greater acceptance of black people.

## Cultural Value

9. Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would enrich the language background of all students.
11. Using Black English as part of the school curriculum would promote black culture in the schools.

[STEM] [The elimination of Black English from all aspects of American life would ....]

16. would be harmful to black culture.

[STEM] Black English



17. is the foundation for the African American way of seeing the world.

#### Employment Inhibition

23. Black English limits Employment opportunities.
24. Standard English is preferred in getting job.

Appendix B  
Reliability Analysis - Scale (Overall)

## APPENDIX B

## LANGUAGE LEGITIMACY

## Reliability Analysis - Scale (Overall)

1. V7 black english is broken speech
  2. V8 black english in curriculum lowers stand
  3. V13 eliminating black english improves acade
- # OF CASES = 252.0

ITEM MEANS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0257	2.3651	2.1865	2.4960	.3095	1.1416

ITEM VARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0151	.6511	.5780	.7928	.2148	1.3716

INTER-ITEM COVARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0038	.2931	.2335	.3682	.1347	1.5769

INTER-ITEM CORRELATIONS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0051	.4516	.4023	.5439	.1415	1.3518

## ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	SCALE MEAN IF ITEM DELETED	SCALE VARIANCE IF ITEM DELETED	CORRECTED ITEM- TOTAL CORRELATION	SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATION	ALPHA IF ITEM DELETED
V7	4.6825	1.9307	.5695	.3348	.5752
V8	4.5992	1.6276	.5685	.3387	.5738
V13	4.9087	2.1072	.4613	.2130	.6989

## RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS 3 ITEMS

ALPHA = .7106      STANDARDIZED ITEM ALPHA = .7118

## LANGUAGE ACCEPTANCE

## Reliability Analysis - Scale (Overall)

1. V18 black english logic = 2 any other langua
2. V19 black english of African culture in Amer
3. V9 black english in curr. enrich language b
4. V21 acceptance of black english=>acceptance

# OF CASES = 228.0

ITEM MEANS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0403	2.3904	2.1053	2.5570	.4518	1.2146

ITEM VARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0092	.4904	.3413	.5914	.2502	1.7330

INTER-ITEM COVARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0040	.1595	.0733	.2611	.1878	3.5630

INTER-ITEM CORRELATIONS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0102	.3206	.1752	.4743	.2991	2.7066

## ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	SCALE MEAN IF ITEM DELETED	SCALE VARIANCE IF ITEM DELETED	CORRECTED ITEM- TOTAL CORRELATION	SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATION	ALPHA IF ITEM DELETED
V18	9.8465	4.3772	.3773	.1986	.6904
V19	9.4781	4.1273	.3809	.1598	.6905
V9	9.3947	3.3501	.6036	.4066	.5929
V21	9.6930	3.6763	.5014	.2642	.6418

## RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS 4 ITEMS

ALPHA = .7067

STANDARDIZED ITEM ALPHA = .7024

## CULTURAL VALUE

## Reliability Analysis - Scale (Overall)

1. V11 black english in curr. promotes black cu
  2. V17 black english foundation for seeing the
  3. V16 eliminating black english harmful 2 blac
- # OF CASES = 248.0

ITEM MEANS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0208	2.3172	2.1935	2.4758	.2823	1.1287

ITEM VARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0025	.4815	.4286	.5273	.0987	1.2304

INTER-ITEM COVARIANCES VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0001	.1947	.1809	.2043	.0233	1.1288

INTER-ITEM CORRELATIONS VARIANCE	MEAN	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	RANGE	MAX/MIN
.0006	.4060	.3806	.4349	.0543	1.1426

## ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	SCALE MEAN IF ITEM DELETED	SCALE VARIANCE IF ITEM DELETED	CORRECTED ITEM- TOTAL CORRELATION	SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATION	ALPHA IF ITEM DELETED
V11	4.7581	1.3177	.5026	.2547	.5493
V17	4.4758	1.4245	.4863	.2396	.5736
V16	4.6694	1.3153	.4625	.2141	.6053

## RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS

ALPHA = .6708

## 3 ITEMS

STANDARDIZED ITEM ALPHA = .6722

These historical differences are the basis for the suggestion that Africanized English and Standard English are separate languages. Creolized languages differ from their pidgins in that there are increases in syntactic complexity, of passive constructions and reverse order questions. Also the vocabulary increases and the grammatical structures become more uniform (Mufwene, 1993).

Appendix C

Letter of Permission From the Human Subjects  
Institutional Review Board to  
Conduct Research

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board



Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-3899

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**WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

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Date: May 14, 1993

To: William Dozier

From: M. Michele Burnette Chair *M. Michele Burnette*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 92-12-12

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "Black English Survey" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 14, 1994

xc: Davidson, SOC

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