CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

First-year composition instructors are expected to teach students how to write for college. Without considering students who speak marginalized varieties of English, instructors may unknowingly enforce culturally hegemonic language policies when “correcting” students’ non-standard grammars. By approaching language as an activity, first-year composition instructors can form critically aware language opinions and find new ways to encourage their students to do the same. First, this thesis will investigate Ebonics using terms and scholarship from the area of linguistics. Next, this thesis will use the frameworks of critical pedagogy to discuss practical classroom activities that will help students realize that many of their thoughts on language are based on social constructions and not objective facts. The final chapters will question the preliminary findings with theories from the field of Language as a Communicative Activity.
DEDICATION

I will never be able to express enough gratitude to Dr. Arthur Palacas and Dr. Wei Zhang for introducing me to the wonderful and exciting world of linguistics and also for giving me the opportunity to prove myself as a graduate research assistant for Project ACHIEVE.
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Without having my thoughts challenged, I would have never been able to write this thesis. My students are always challenging my ideas and inviting me to re-consider my arguments. My thesis committee members, Dr. Bean, Dr. Thelin, and Dr. Milam, questioned my ideas in thoughtful and constructive ways to make me a stronger writer. Without the participation of the students and instructors at The University of Akron, I would not have been able to collect any data through the language opinion surveys. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Telsha Curry for giving me her valued opinions on language.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The effect of linguistic diversity on students’ writings and successes, in academia as well as in society, is an issue contemplated by composition studies scholars. This thesis will address linguistic diversity, especially that of Ebonics-speaking students, in the first-year composition classroom through a lens of critical linguistics and critical pedagogy, adding discoveries that are closely related to and intertwined with what the established voices in the field say, while still offering a new view. Before jumping into the linguistics of Ebonics that separate it as its own language, the attitudes of composition instructors and students, the critical pedagogy that demonstrates the politics surrounding language variety, and critical language theory that puts the entire discussion into perspective, it will be important to address five common objections to encouraging students to write in Ebonics and to respecting Ebonics as an equal language to standard English\(^1\) in a writing classroom.

\(^1\) Scholars frequently interchange other terms for this phrase based on the setting of their writing. Lower-case standard English is used by William Labov in “A Study of Non-Standard English.” Labov says, “The traditional view is that the non-standard or sub-standard form of speech used by children is an imperfect copy of standard English, marred by a number of careless and ignorant errors” (1). This use rhetorically matches the situation of this thesis. A variety of terms are highly related and somewhat interchangeable with “standard English.” Language of wider communication is a broader term that can refer to the dominant language in countries where typically three or more
First, why spend time considering the needs of Ebonics-strong students separately when standard English-speaking students must overcome similar boundaries when turning speech into acceptable writing? Even white people\(^2\) have to change their word production when they move from writing to speaking. Peter Elbow says, “Standard Written English is no one’s mother tongue. People like me have a mother tongue much closer to SWE than many others do, but there is still a difference” (362). Only the strictest and most observant listener will notice, for example, if a speaker says, “The students moved quick to leave the class.” But when reading the same sentence in writing, the “missing” *ly* stands out much more. Most native speakers are also used to hearing, for example, “I should of left more quickly to avoid the traffic.” The initial /hæ/ slides into a reduced /ʌ/. The reduction of /hæv/ to /ʌv/ is a regularly occurring phonological change that is relatively acceptable, un-stigmatized, and unnoticed by native standard English languages are spoken; this is frequently English (Cummins 54). By using the term Edited American English Bruce Horner et al in “Opinion: Language Difference in Writing” can harness the feeling that “All speakers of English speak many variations of English, everyone of them accented, and all of them subject to change and intermingle with other varieties of English and other languages” (305). The existence of a language called Standard English (and in fact the existence of all languages) is questioned in Alastair Pennycook’s “The Myth of English as an International Language.” He says that to “assert that if we don't understand each other, we must therefore be using different languages,” is a flawed line of reasoning that assumes “as premises that which it set out to demonstrate” (91). This thesis will question the standard English’s existence as a language. But for now, the term used to describe the language of the institution will be standard English.\(^2\) Ian Haney Lopez says in *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* that he capitalizes “White” because “it is a reference to a specific social group…recognized to possess fluid borders and heterogeneous members…” ‘White’ does not denote a rigidly defined, congeneric grouping of indistinguishable individuals” but “refers to an unstable category which gains its meanings only though social relations” (xxii). In contrast, “white” is used in this thesis as a broad category for students and teachers who are socially privileged and not marginalized by the color of their skin. In this sense of the word, gradations are possible. Persons who are privileged not only by skin color but also by social class may be, in fact, very white. Can Black people be white? I argue that this question would be interesting to explore through another project.
speakers. Peter Elbow’s observation can be clearly seen: these divergences from the standard are acceptable in speech but not in writing. The act of reading written text offers opportunity to slow down, re-read, and take a break and then continue at the same spot. So when a standard English speaking freshman writer relies on her speech to write, her non-standard speech habits may appear. In writing, deviations from standard English become much more evident, and therefore, much more guarded against by various gatekeepers like teachers and editors.

The issues that surface when standard English speakers translate acceptable speech into standard academic writing are not the same kinds of issues that arise for Ebonics speakers when transcribing speech into writing. Aside from differences in grammar (which will be discussed in Chapter 2), there are differences between the rhetoric of standard English and of Ebonics. Lisa Delpit demonstrates that what many in the dominant culture see as “normal” or “correct” are actually rhetorical conventions of a specific community. She explains that standard English-speaking writers assume the knowledge of a rhetoric of power and do not consider alternative rhetorics as equals. In “Lessons From Teachers,” Delpit says, “What we [teachers] call basic skills are typically the linguistic conventions of middle-class society and the strategies successful people use to access new information” (loc. 2304 of 6385). Even though speech and writing are not exactly the same for standard English speaking students, the writing conventions are still based around the underlying rhetorical conventions that are used for everyday communication in middle class, standard English-speaking families.

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3 In an effort to promote gender-neutral language, pronouns in Chapters 1, 3, and 5 will be female, and pronouns in Chapters 2 and 4 will be male.
It is possible for standard English-speaking students with a conversational writing tone to be criticized by writing instructors who strongly value formality. However, instructors who favor more naturalistic writing styles may praise these students for having good, natural conversational flow to their writing. Compare this situation to an Ebonics speaking student with a conversational writing tone. School authorities may see the conversational writing from this student as error-filled, not conversational, not naturalistic, and perhaps, extremely inappropriate. When one student can write in a conversational tone, but the other cannot, it is worth investigating thoroughly why these forms of writing are unequal and question if it is ethical for writing instructors to maintain this current standard of linguistic judgment that favors an already privileged group of white people.

The second issue to consider is the advice from scholars that in order for Ebonics-speaking students to succeed, instructors must insist that they write in standard English in the classroom. In “The Silenced Dialogue,” Lisa Delpit condemns the endorsement of home languages in the classroom, especially from well-intentioned white educators. She wants teachers to recognize that middle-class conventions are not the standard for some speech communities, but she says that these standards need to be taught explicitly and enforced in the classroom. Delpit criticizes teachers who say, “We must fight cultural hegemony and fight the system by insisting that children be allowed to express themselves in their own language style. It is not they, the children, who must change, but the schools” (291). As a white liberal educator expressing that students are entitled to home languages in the writing classroom, I find it very important to consider her advice not to do that very thing. However, allowing students to write in their home languages
does not mean that standard English grammar is not explicitly discussed or that Ebonics-specific grammatical forms are not contrasted with the standard forms. Allowing students to write in Ebonics does not mean that they are not being instructed in the differences between standard English and Ebonics.

While it may be difficult to find time to discuss cultural hegemony and language politics in the K-12 setting due to the demands of standardized testing and regulated curriculums, a first-year composition classroom is a great place to discuss issues of language power by explicitly explaining the differences in the rhetorical and grammatical structures of Ebonics and standard English. Students can be taught the differences of the language varieties and then be given a chance to write in their own variety of English. Students can be empowered to celebrate their own cultures and share pride of their language with their communities and families. Students who speak marginalized varieties who wish to write in standard English will be respected and encouraged to do so, but not forced to do so. The composition I classroom is an ideal place to struggle with issues of language identity and the power that is held within different language varieties. If students are explicitly taught the differences between varieties of English, then they can come to informed decisions about their own language use.

The third issue is the practicality of talking about language issues that are tightly bound to race. Teaching a curriculum that critically analyzes language cultures can be uncomfortable regardless of the race of the instructor. If instructors are uncomfortable discussing possibly race-related language issues, there may be a deeper underlying issue. From my experience, white people who are comfortable with recognizing their own whiteness are those who have spent time wrestling with the advantages that they have
from their skin color. White linguists can be completely comfortable saying “the N-word” in front of a group of students or colleagues if they have devoted their studies to Ebonics and furthering the cause of educating university administration, staff, and students about its legitimacy and its cultural importance to the African American language community. However, it is also important to consider audience. Regardless of qualifications, studies, and intents of the speaker, audience members may still be offended by any use of the word. In order for a speaker to comfortably discuss race, she must be willing to confront her own race first.

I act white: I do yoga, attend graduate school, use an iPhone, and have bike carriage for my dog. I am comfortable recognizing my white privilege in front of a class of first-year composition students. Students laugh when you tell them things like this, but it helps to make it possible to discuss race in an honest and genuine manner. If instructors want to talk about Ebonics in the classroom, it is necessary to bring their own (dominant) culture out into the open. If the instructor is able to critically analyze her own culture in class, students may be more willing to do the same.

It helps to open a discussion based on the students’ ideas of race and language. However, it is also necessary to balance the opinions generated by the class by presenting marginalized varieties of English side-by-side with standard English texts. The instructor is responsible for painting a broad linguistic landscape in order for composition students to research, learn, discover, and come up with their own opinions towards learning or re-considering standard English.

Fourth, some instructors may be concerned that a classroom that focuses on the differences between non-standard varieties of English will not benefit standard English
speaking students as much as Ebonics speaking students. However, white students who are not aware of their linguistic assets will be given an opportunity to better understand different language communities. In a world that has a rapidly changing linguistic landscape, it is essential to understand that accents and non-standard varieties of English are not a result of ignorance but of diversity.

The fifth issue to consider is if it is acceptable to expect students to become successful code switchers at the end of first-year composition. Facilitating an environment for code switching in the first-year composition classroom is still asking Ebonics-speaking students to, as Barbara Melix says in her reflection of personal experience “From Outside, In,” wrestle with an act of “turning away from blackness” (75). Forcing the writing standard of the culture of power onto African American students is a form of cultural oppression, especially if the teacher were 100% “successful” in removing Ebonics from students’ speech and writing. By acknowledging students power to code switch, it is clear that Ebonics can be used at home and with friends. However, Geneva Smitherman says that facilitating a bi-English state for Ebonics-speaking African American students, “ain done nothing to address the crises in the Black community” (qtd. in Gillyard and Richardson 39). Statistics can help to illustrate this crisis. In “One of ‘These Children,’” Monique Redeaux says, “Black males drop out at higher rates than any of their counterparts, and the probability...increases exponentially when the black male is of low socioeconomic status” (loc. 1810 of 6385). While it is questionable whether the “Achievement Gaps” report published by the Department of Education actually measures anything other than cultural capital, the results may be considered a reflection of the crises of the Black community as well. The most recent “Achievement Gaps” graphs
illustrate that overall, there are only very small amounts of change in the fourth and eighth grade reading performance gap between African Americans and whites (Vanneman, Hamilton and Baldwin Anderson; Vanneman, Hamilton and Baldwin Anderson). These achievement gaps in fourth and eighth grade students lead to gaps in high school and college graduation rates between Black and white students; gaps in graduation rates lead to gaps in average income as adults. With such high barriers to overcome, it is necessary for educators to do as much as they possibly can to help alleviate the boundaries created by linguistic discrimination. While linguistic discrimination is only one area of many in which prejudices are formed, it is an important one because of the strong link between one’s identity and one’s language. It is also important to keep in mind that many students come to the classroom with the determination to master standard English. However, the ones who want to write in Ebonics may be developing mastery of their first language, which will be an extraordinary help in mastering the second (or third or fourth) language of standard English. The students who want to write in Ebonics may also have goals of publishing in Ebonics to change the status quo. Therefore, the teacher is responsible for allowing students to negotiate their own code-switching and not to force the choice upon them.

The discussion to these questions does not imply that the instructor should not teach standard English. The instructor is still responsible for presenting relevant material for the mastery of standard English. However, by allowing students to choose the variety of English in which they write, not on just journals or homework, but final versions of papers, students have more of an opportunity to question and change the power structures of language.
Chapter 2 discusses existing literature on the systematic, rule-governed nature of Ebonics. Examples from literature and from student writing will be used to further expand on the differences between aspect-based and tense-based languages. This chapter will address and put to rest the common notion that Ebonics is a version of standard English that is broken, incorrect or wrong. Chapter 3 discusses teaching first-year composition: what are the language opinions of composition I instructors regarding Ebonics? Do these instructors allow or encourage Ebonics to be spoken or written in the classroom? The chapter then addresses how Samy Alim’s Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy can be used to encourage language diversity while teaching writing. Chapter 4 demonstrates the problems with viewing language as a measurable, static construction and suggests that viewing language as a communicative activity is the most constructive way to think about language, in the classroom and in everyday life.
Many linguists research and discuss the systematic, rule-governed nature of Ebonics. The idea that Ebonics is an error-filled version of English has already been addressed and put to rest by scholars. However, the public does not view the two languages as separate or equal. Understandably, many who speak Ebonics believe the language is an obstacle to overcome and do not celebrate its cultural relevance. Similarly, some who do not speak Ebonics view it in a negative light as well. And even more interestingly, some who are convinced of the systematic nature and independent language status of Ebonics are still not willing to treat it as an equal to standard English. Common cultural attitudes towards Ebonics will be addressed first. It is beyond the scope of this project to retrace all of the linguistic scholarship that demonstrates the grammatical, phonological, and rhetorical system of Ebonics. This Chapter will use selections Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* to further expand on the differences between aspect and tense based languages and will use student writing to demonstrate how an intricate understanding of the differences between Ebonics and standard English can lead to conversations instead of corrections.

Without looking deeply into the grammatical structures of both standard English and Ebonics, it may not be apparent that the two languages are indeed syntactically and
grammatically different. The difference, to an untrained mind, between Ebonics and standard English lies in the use of slang. This is a very limited view of both Ebonics and standard English. The common derogatory view of Ebonics can be seen through an analysis of a Fox News Chicago broadcast featuring Garrard McClendon, Chicago school teacher and author of *Ax or Ask: The African American Guide to Better English*.

However, before criticizing McClendon’s teaching method, it is important to keep in mind that -method is somewhat consistent with Lisa Delpit’s advice that direct instruction is necessary in order for Ebonics speaking students to learn how to code-switch to standard English. Members of the African American community who take charge and assume the responsibility to teach other members of their speech community the differences between Ebonics and standard English are doing good things. These community leaders want to demonstrate how to gain access to the language and power of culture. If by thinking that Ebonics is broken and wrong, young Ebonics speaking people are motivated to learn standard English and are then able to achieve a higher level of success, it is not anyone’s right (other than that of the language learner) to question these methods. McClendon’s approach to language education demonstrates how he values students’ use of standard English over the cultural importance of linguistic diversity. By approaching language as a linguist would, teachers can meet both of these important goals, and the teacher does not have to choose whether to respect the students’ home languages or to allow only standard English in the classroom. This thesis is arguing that when educators show students a fuller picture of the linguistic landscape, the students have more of an opportunity to respect themselves as language users, to understand language use in their cultures, and also, to succeed at standard English and their home
languages. While McClendon’s method succeeds at being direct, it fails at maintaining respect for Ebonics and presents a non-scientific view of language in general.

The report on McClendon’s teaching techniques begins with news anchor Margaret Shortridge saying, “A Chicago teacher is targeting bad grammar.” Her co-anchor, Mark Suppelsa, continues the introduction to the feature by stating McClendon’s goal: to teach African Americans that “Speaking correctly isn’t about selling out, it’s about gaining clout” (Fox News). The news feature then moves to footage of a classroom. McClendon excitedly asks the class to pronounce “ask” and to avoid saying “ax” (Fox News). Suppelsa comments over a transition, “Garrard McClendon is giving these students…an English lesson they’ve never, ever, ever had” (Fox News). In the lesson, McClendon brings to the students attention that “the /k/ sound comes as the end, the /s/ sound goes in the middle…ask” (Fox News). Suppelsa asks, “Can ‘ax’ really be wrong, they hear it all the time” with a clearly sarcastic tone. His voiceover is followed by a barrage of clips from courtroom television shows with speakers of Ebonics and other non-standard varieties of English who say, “ax” (Fox News). At this point in the feature, McClendon’s book, The African-American Guide to Better English, is introduced and the author vocalizes his frustrations towards parents and teachers in the African American community. McClendon says he has a “serious problem with” anyone who is unwilling “to correct a person’s grammar” (Fox News).

To conclude the summary of the news feature, it is important to mention that both the students and teachers do not call Ebonics a language but instead “slang,” “street talk,” or, according to Aquinas Academy Director, Randy Thomas, “poor language skills” (Fox News). Also, the video does not just demean speakers of Ebonics, but speakers of all non-
standard varieties of English by showing clips from courtroom television sets. McClendon and Suppelsa admit that there has been, and will be, backlash to McClendon’s stance. The news story does not feature any interviews from educators or linguists with a respectful attitude towards linguistic variety in African American students or members of society. According to McClendon, the most important thing for him is to ensure that African American students are prepared for job interviews so that they can become successful members of society.

McClendon is worthy of praise because it is apparent from the online clip of the news special and from the contents of his book that he is passionate about the future success of African American students. *The African American Guide to Better English* does contribute to the multicultural education movement by including suggestions to, as McClendon says, “utilize the language of power and finance” without “BVE” (Black Vernacular English) being “forgotten, forbidden or forsaken” (63). McClendon empowers speakers of “BVE” by emphasizing that the two varieties of English have “differences between the words, the usage, the accents, and the rhythm” (65). He says that these variances make the language preferable to him “in the neighborhood…because it’s comfortable, communicable, colorful, and vast” (65). However, simply acknowledging preferred use of the language cannot make up for the overly negative view of Ebonics as slang or broken English throughout McClendon’s book and especially in the newscast.

McClendon’s book in discussion is not peer-reviewed and is published by Positive People Publishing, a company that has no online information available to view. Considering the book’s lack of scholarly credibility, it will not be useful to analyze and
respond to each idea of the text that contradicts linguistic theories, but the text is helpful to establish one of the current methods of acceptable instruction for Ebonics speaking students. McClendon’s published views on Ebonics represent the thinking of most (African-American and white) non-linguists. In his book, McClendon says, “Slang, jargon, and colloquialisms make the speech of African-Americans colorful,” but the Black community uses the language to “perpetuate the misuse and disuse of (the English) language” (1). These statements cannot be supported by any existing linguistic analysis.

The next section will explain a few aspects of the grammar and syntax used in Ebonics, and it will be clear that Ebonics is not a malformed version of English, but instead a language composed of attributes seen in West African languages. These attributes are called “Africanisms” by Charles Debose and Nicholas Faraclas in the article “An Africanists Approach to the Linguistic Study of Black English” (48). The information presented by Debose and Faraclas can explain why McClendon (and the general public) may believe that Ebonics is not its own language, but instead a corrupted form of English. They say the “high degree of surface similarity to English” has caused “BE” to suffer “inordinately from an Anglocentric approach to its analysis” (49). Ebonics seems similar to standard English due to its largely shared lexicon. Standard English clearly is more dominant than Ebonics, and therefore, this is how Ebonics becomes viewed as a “corrupted” form of English.

By understanding the grammar and syntax of the language, it is evident, as Arthur Palacas says in his article “Liberating Ebonics from Euro-English,” that Ebonics is a language that “is a rational, rule-governed linguistic system, just like any other language” (2). Palacas also emphasizes the crucial aspect that this language cannot logically be
called “bad, broken, careless, or lazy English” and that it is in no way a “degrading reflection of an untrained or even inferior intelligence” (2).

The most well-known feature of Ebonics is the language’s unique use of the *BE* verb. This investigation highlights the popularly characterized feature and adds to the existing literature on the differences between aspect-primary and tense-primary languages, demonstrating that the argument to call Ebonics a language of its own is strong.

Following the trends in linguistic literature, this section will discuss the copula and auxiliary *BE* (capitalized, italic form indicates the linking verb “to be,” its auxiliary functions, and its finite forms in both of these uses). In *African American English*, Lisa Green finds the Ebonics use of *BE* is “familiar even to those who have limited knowledge about AAE” (38). The public’s awareness of the unique use of *BE* in Ebonics is an important reason to discuss the feature in relation to the difference between tense and aspect primary languages.

Debose and Faraclas use samples of spontaneous speech from ten participants to find that in the subject + predicate construction of *BE*, there are three possible constructions: “a subject directly followed by either a nonverbal predicate…, a derived verbal predicate…, or a verbal predicate” (51). A nonverbal predicate is a verb in which the noun phrase subject is modified by a description of adjectival, nominal, or locative nature. Since this paper contains no interviews or spontaneous speech, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* will be used as illustrations of characteristics of Ebonics.

1.) a.) “Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr._____ say, Cause *she my wife*”

(Walker 22).
This is an example of Subject+Nominal Nonverbal Predicate. The noun phrase my wife (which is nominal because it is a noun phrase and “nonverbal” because it is not a verb, but a person—a noun) is connected to the subject she. In standard English, when there is a Subject+Predicate Adjective construction, the grammar requires the copula BE: “She is my wife.”

b.) “You not old enough to marry” (22).

This is an example of Subject+Adjectival Nonverbal Predicate. The construction is very similar to the previous example. However, instead of a noun phrase predicate, the structure shows an adjectival predicate. In this construction, also like the previous example, standard English requires copula BE: “You are not old enough to marry.”

c.) “Where her daddy at while all this going on?” (23). If the construction is changed from the interrogative, a possibility is “Her daddy at (location).”

This is an example of Subject+Locative Nonverbal Predicate. A locative nonverbal is a construction in which a location is specified by a construction other than a verb; in this case (see the indicative version), the locative nonverbal predicate is unknown. The locative predicate in the WH-interrogative is replaced with “where” and moved to the subject position. In standard English, the WH-construction with a locative nonverbal predicate is: “Where is her daddy (at)?” The addition of the preposition on the end of the question is generally not preferred in standard English. Other varieties of English share the feature of the +Preposition construction on the ends of interrogative constructions. For example: Where are my shoes at? is a widely acceptable construction in the Midwestern United States. Again, differing from Ebonics, standard English,
requires the copula *BE* in both the indicative and interrogative constructions of Subject+Locative Nonverbal Predicate, where as in Ebonics, the copula *BE* is optional.

d.) “Your place is here with the children” (35).

In the three previous examples of Ebonics, the slot with the optional copula *BE* has been empty. In example 1d., the copula does occur and *appears* to have the same structure as standard English. However, the Ebonics construction does not have the same meaning as the standard English construction that looks exactly the same on the surface.

Green finds that auxiliary/copula *BE* is “Overtly represented when it occurs with the first person singular pronoun (*I’m*)…the third person singular neuter pronoun (*its*)… in past tense (*was*)…without singular/plural distinction…[and] in emphatic contexts in which it is stressed (*IS*)” (38). In other cases, she says it “occurs optionally” (39). In example 1d, copula *BE* is not required, but perhaps was used by the speaker, Celie, for two possible reasons. The first reason is because in the context of the narrative, she was retelling a heated argument that had occurred between her and Sofía and “is” is used, as Green says, in a “stressed” emphasis. However, the copula could also be used to avoid the structural ambiguity created in “your place here with the children.” The two possible interpretations of the modified sentence are illustrated below by grammatical trees:
Figure 2.1 “Your Place Here with the Children” Tree Diagram 1

In this instance, there is not a null predicate. The meaning shown above indicates that *here with the children* is modifying the first noun phrase *your place*. Even though this interpretation uses a construction without any predicate, null or expressed, it is a possibility.

Figure 2.2 “Your Place Here with the Children” Tree Diagram 2

In this instance, there is both a noun phrase subject and a verb phrase predicate. The copula is not *absent*, but represented by Ø. By saying that the copula is *absent*, the Ebonics construction is being compared to the standard English construction in which the
copula is required. It is more structurally accurate to observe that the copula is not observed in the surface structure. The optional surface use of the copula occurs at the speaker’s (Cellie’s) discretion.

Emphasis and clarification are two possible reasons for the surface observation of the BE copula. Debose and Faraclas’s description of the optional BE use will further explain the possibly hard-to-grasp differences between Ebonics and standard English. They say, “The optional absence of the copular proverb (is) before stative predicates in the present tense is accounted for by the fact that the LSP automatically assigns noncompletive aspect and nonpast tense to such predicates, and therefore no proverb is needed for the specific purpose of tense marking” (67). In standard English, the finite BE that is required, in all of the above examples, signals person, number, and tense.

The grammatical structures underlying the Ebonics BE appear to be the same as the standard English BE, but when multiple examples are used and comparisons are made, it becomes more apparent that the assumed meanings and uses of grammar are actually different.

The investigation of BE will continue in a different type of construction. Speakers of both varieties of English do not exclusively use BE as a copula between subjects and predicate nouns, predicate adjectives, and locations. BE is used in both varieties as a helping, or auxiliary, verb in the present and past progressive aspects. Lisa Green says that in Ebonics these auxiliaries “can appear in a contracted, reduced or zero form such as ‘s, ‘m, ‘ll, ‘d, and Ø” (40). Again, examples of these are found in Walker’s The Color Purple:

3.) a. “If she talking when Harpo and Mr. ____ come in the room, she keep
right on” (35-36).

In this example, the auxiliary *BE* is Ø between the subject *she* and the present participle *talking*.

b. “Us git in a fight, it’s a sight to see” (41).

In this example the auxiliary *BE* is reduced in the same way that the auxiliary is reduced in standard English. The overlapping features of these verbs contribute to the long list of surface similarities between the languages.

In specific *BE* constructions in Ebonics, it is rare for the copula to be Ø. Green says that it is rare for “it” to occur as a subject without the reduced ‘s or is connecting it to the verb phrase. Green says, “Speakers rarely ever produce sentences such as *It the one I like*” (41). William Labov also found in his research that it is very rare for *it* to be used without the ‘s or is. Labov says, “We occasionally do get plain *it*, as in *It always somebody tougher than you are*, but it’s is found in the great majority of cases” (qtd. in Green 41). However, with the pronouns *he* and *she*, different rules apply in Ebonics. Green says, “Both variants *she’s* and *she* occur without question (*She’s/she here*)” (41). This may lead to the appearance that when Ebonics speakers choose to omit the ‘s, as in *she here*, that it is a mistake or a deviation of the standard English. However, this is not the case. In the previously mentioned instance, with the third person singular pronouns *he* or *she*, Ebonics speakers have the choice to choose either options—‘s or Ø.

This close look into *BE* demonstrates that McClendon’s claim that *BE* “has always been misused in the Black community” and “Black people have destroyed the *be* verb formally,” is not true (12). The analysis also shows that in Ebonics, the use of *BE* in situations that are present and non-completive are redundant and used for emphasis or the
clarification of structural ambiguity because the present tense and non-completive aspect are understood without the surface BE copula.

The next section demonstrates how the knowledge of the differing grammatical systems can open doors to collaborative learning between the instructor and Ebonics strong students in the composition classroom.

When grammar is in use (in writing and speaking) it has little to do with prescriptive rules and everything to do with the underlying grammatical constructions that reside in the human mind. Linguistic awareness can free grammar from the limited prescriptive views that are often placed on it, and students and instructors can collaborate at the sentence level. In “The Art of Collaborative Learning” Kenneth Bruffee discusses the benefits and techniques to working collaborative in academic settings. Bruffee cites studies from a variety of disciplines—“from business management to medicine to math”—as well as from surveys of research by David Johnson and Shlomo Sharan (in *Psychological Bulletin* and *Review of Educational Research*, respectively) to prove that in collaborative non-competitive learning environments students learn better (44).

In order for a composition instructor to work in a collaborative, non-competitive atmosphere with his students, it helps if the students know that the instructor respects their linguistic abilities. It is difficult to work collaboratively when one person (the teacher) has “correct” grammar and the other (the student) does not. Since the teacher has “correct” grammar, he is automatically placed in a position of power that takes away agency and legitimacy from the student with “wrong” grammar. If the instructor is aware of the two differing grammars and constructions, the teacher and student can collaborate, and both can contribute to an acceptable solution. Bruffee says the student’s autonomy
“is the key to collaborative learning because the issue…is the way authority is distributed and experienced in college and university classrooms” (46). When bound to the prescriptions of the teacher, the student is not free to explore the possibility of constructions available. Grammar prescriptions can also turn a one-on-one teacher student conference into a session where the student becomes an inactive member and simply a receiver of information. However, when the teacher uses knowledge of grammatical structures as a tool to engage the student, collaboration is possible.

Teamwork is a great thing for tutors, teachers, and students, but in order for true collaboration to occur, each individual member must contribute certain things. Bruffee acknowledges that collaboration works beautifully when the participants respect each other’s authority and intelligence, and have similar interests; overall, participants in collaborative learning are “willing to collaborate” and in classrooms, authority “begins…with the representative or agent of the institution” (47). In the writing classroom, the instructor is the agent of the institution and therefore responsible for initiating collaboration. Many students already have the preconceived notion that they are “bad at grammar” and need to be corrected by the instructor. However, in a collaborative learning atmosphere, the instructor needs to repeatedly remind students that his grammar is no better than the students’ grammars.

However, it takes more than willingness for an instructor to be able to use grammar as a tool to collaborate with students. Bruffee says, “Collaborative learning tends…to take its toll on the cognitive understanding of knowledge that most of us assume unquestioningly” (47). Bruffee’s observation thoroughly applies to grammar. An instructor who has lived around speakers of standard English his whole life and has
acquired a grammar that matches standard English may be able to speak and write textbook sentences, but may not be able to create a dialogue about grammar.

In order to create the most effective collaborative atmosphere, instructors must be trained in linguistics and in grammar so that they can engage their students in conversations about English. Knowing only how to follow the prescriptive rules of grammar is not enough for any English instructor. In order to engage students with writing in a collaborative atmosphere at the sentence level, instructors must have the vocabulary and skills necessary to converse about the structures that students use in their writing.

Students of all varieties of English would benefit from an in-depth look at the grammar they use when they write. However, students who have been told that their grammar is bad throughout their entire lives would be empowered by realizing all of the possibilities that they have with the understanding of grammar. Since language is such an important faculty in humans, when a student is told that his language is broken, that student may feel that he is broken.

When collaborating with a student, the teacher can avoid using grammatical jargon if the student is unfamiliar with grammar by drawing diagrams and using big-picture ideas. The following writing examples are from a student in English 113, African American Language and Culture: College Composition. The student paper used in this paper was obtained with the permission of the student and the instructor. The paper was chosen from four papers written by the student over the Fall 2012 semester, each with a first and final draft. I chose to analyze “Conversation in the Barber Chair” by the student who I have renamed Michael, in order to protect his identity.
The sentence used contains conflicts with standard English that are common to writers from a standard English speaking background, as well as features found exclusively in Ebonics. Both areas will be discussed. The grammars available on Ebonics only address features specific to the language of Ebonics and do not demonstrate mixtures between both grammars of Ebonics and standard English. The following student examples are not intended to describe the independent rules of Ebonics, but instead to demonstrate the possibilities that become apparent when the language of students is respected. Before students become master code-switchers, their prose utilizes grammatical constructions that are a part of a interlanguage between the home language, Ebonics, and the target language, standard English. In the following example, the changes made by Michael in the final draft are in parentheses and italics. The following analysis will discuss nouns derived from verbs, apostrophes, and the Ebonics freestanding possessive pronoun mines:

4.) a. I never went to school to receive (a) license, but I just cut my friends hair on the side for a little extra cash. I would either go to their house or they would meet me at mines (mine).

In the rough draft, Michael uses license, which could be the common noun or the infinitive form of the verb to license. First, license will be considered acting as a common noun. However, Michael does not use an article with the noun. In Ebonics, definite or indefinite article omission is not typically viewed as a feature of Ebonics. Either this is a typographic error, or there is something else leading Michael to believe that license needs no article. If a teacher simply wrote “article needed” or “the or a” needed before license, the student may not fully understand the comment. Consider license as the derived noun.
form of licensure. If license is replaced with licensure, no article is needed in standard English. If the community of barbers through which Michael learns about cutting hair uses license as a replacement for the standard English licensure, an interesting morphological change occurs:

![Figure 2.3 Student use of “license”](image1)

![Figure 2.4 Standard English use of “license”](image2)

It would be interesting to ask barbers (in both predominantly African American and white shops) how licensure is usually talked about to see how the use license varies from different communities. An ethnographic study of this kind would reveal if Michael’s use of license reflects a morphological change of the word in the community. The teacher’s awareness of Michael’s Ø derivational suffix allows the teacher to recommend more options than simply “you need to add an article.” With morphological knowledge, the teacher can begin a conversation with the student and could ask, “Did you mean the piece of paper, a license, or did you mean the process of obtaining the license,
licensure.” With more options available, the student will be able to learn more about standard English, Ebonics, and the differences between the two languages.

Michael’s omission of the possessive apostrophe on *friends* is a common area of question for writers of all varieties of English, including standard. If a student does not show full command of the use of apostrophes, perhaps he has never been explicitly shown how to use apostrophes with plural nouns and singular nouns. A diagram may be helpful, especially to visual learners or learners with dyslexia.

![Diagram of Noun Phrase and Genitive Noun Phrase](Image)

Figure 2.5 Genitive construction “My friend’s hair”

By seeing that *my friends’ hair* is one term that consists of a genitive noun phrase marked, the student may more easily understand what apostrophes do. When diagramming this illustration for the student, using terms like “genitive” may discourage the student from listening or frighten him away from the subject. However, through this illustration that shows the possessive apostrophe connects *my friends* and *hair*, and that the apostrophe modifies the entire term *my friends*, the student may be able to remember how apostrophes work in the future.
Prescriptive grammar rules and rote memorization may work for some students. However, unless reasoning and logic is demonstrated in the instruction of standard English usage, many students may find themselves thinking that the rules are arbitrary and may be discouraged from attempting to master them. The important thing to demonstrate as a writing instructor is that the rules make sense. By breaking down the application of the rules for the student, the student will be able to understand why apostrophes work the way they do. Another benefit of being able to recreate grammatical diagrams is being able to connect with visual learners. For a visual learner, a diagram might be able help him enter the collaborative conversation with his teacher.

Michael’s use of *mines* is also seen in another sentence that appeared in only his final draft:

5.) a. “Paul, a regular coming client of mines sits in the barber chair.”

Michael was most likely told by a peer tutor or the instructor that *mines* is not standard usage when he changed *mines* from *mine* in example 4a. When lengthening his paper, he added a new sentence and, again, used *mines*. This gives some proof that maybe Michael uses the freestanding possessive pronoun *mines* with his friends, family, and/or co-workers. According to Lisa Green, the pronoun *mines* “differs from possessive pronouns like *his, her, your, my* and *our* in that the former do not have to precede a noun” (183). According to Lisa Green, other freestanding possessive pronouns in AAE include: *ours/ourn, yours/yourn, his/hisn, and hers/hern*. In the example, Michael uses *mines* correctly as a freestanding pronoun in Ebonics without a following noun. However, an instructor unfamiliar with the different pronouns in Ebonics will view this as an error instead of evidence of linguistic diversity.
The examples from Michael’s paper show how instructors can zoom-in past sentence level discussions and focus on how single words are formed while still working in a collaborative manner with the student.

A close linguistic interpretation of a small selection of *The Color Purple* and of Michael’s adds to our understanding of the grammar of Ebonics in relation to understanding Ebonics as its own language as well as to teaching. While there is a large amount of scholarship currently available, more research opportunities lie within the specific areas of displaying and exploring the differences between the tense-primary standard English and the aspect-primary Ebonics and also closely examining student writing that displays interlanguage between Ebonics and standard English. While these sorts of linguistic analysis may be interesting, practical classroom application may be difficult to grasp from it. In the next Chapter, classroom application will be the focus.
Whether or not the audience is persuaded that Ebonics is a language completely separate from standard English has no real bearing on the reality of how Ebonics is regarded in first-year composition courses. Keith Gilyard, Samy H. Alim, Elaine Richardson, and Geneva Smitherman argue that instructors need to consider Ebonics as a language equal to standard English. This chapter will discuss how writing instructors will benefit Ebonics-speaking students by allowing and encouraging them to write and speak in Ebonics during class and on assignments. This advice has the backing of the world’s largest organization for researching and teaching composition. In 1974, the Executive Committee for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) wrote a language resolution that stated, “We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language” (1). In “Students’ Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and African American Rhetoric,” Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson investigate the effects of the language resolution twenty-seven years later. Even though the “sentiment” behind the document has remained important, Gilyard and Richardson say, “Conservatives have never embraced it and seek to undermine its expression whenever it appears to threaten their sense of order and, perhaps, control” (38). A survey conducted at The University of Akron asserts that more than “conservatives” do not embrace this
language resolution. The language surveys administered to Composition I instructors (see Appendix A and Appendix B for entire instructor and student language surveys) illustrate that even though a majority of instructors understand the systematic nature of Ebonics, they do not encourage or allow students to write in Ebonics in the classroom. Listed here are results from selected questions from the language surveys for full-time/part-time instructors and Teaching Assistants in Figs. 3-1 and 3-2, respectively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part-time Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is a language</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow Ebonics to be spoken in class</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage Ebonics to be spoken in class</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow students to use Ebonics in written assignments</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage students to use Ebonics in written assignments</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1 Full-time/part-time faculty survey result table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Assistants</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is a language</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow Ebonics to be spoken in class</td>
<td>63.64%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage Ebonics to be spoken in class</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow students to use Ebonics in written assignments</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage students to use Ebonics in written assignments</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2 Teaching assistant survey result table
Out of 21 full-time and part-time Composition I instructors who responded to the survey, 57.14% strongly agree that Ebonics is a language, where as only 9.52% strongly disagree that it is a language. The Teaching Assistant responses were more evenly distributed between strongly agreeing (36.36%) and mildly agreeing (18.18%) that Ebonics is a language. Perhaps the age and experience of the full-time and part-time faculty allow them to have stronger convictions about their language opinions. Without comparing these results to other institutions, it is hard to determine whether or not these are progressive or conservative results. However, in both types of instructors, the majority of participants strongly agree that Ebonics is a language. This data is certainly more hopeful than if the data had shown that more instructors strongly disagree or disagree that Ebonics is not a language.

These results in support of Ebonics as a language may be from the influence of the classes and workshops available at The University of Akron available on Ebonics for educators. For example, the systematic nature and African roots of Ebonics are studied in the course 400/500 level course African American Language. In a Practicum class for Teaching Assistants, during one three-hour class, the professor devoted time to discussing the Introduction to Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin’ That Talk*. The Teaching Assistants that participated in this classroom discussion were part of the population polled.

Professors are not the only ones involved in the Ebonics movement at this university; graduate and undergraduate students help to contribute to the existing knowledge as well. In the ongoing Supporting Student Success: In the Classroom (lectures available for free to instructors), Dr. Arthur L. Palacas, Linguist and Professor
of English, Ms. Telsha Curry, graduate student in English, and Mr. Michael Davis, a senior honors English major contributed to the presentation “Language Difference Matters in the Classroom: African-American Language,” which focused on encouraging participants to “become more familiar with the linguistics of Ebonics and its uses in education.” This lecture took place after the surveys responses were collected. However, the fact that it took place supports the suggestion that Ebonics education for instructors is available at this university. It would be interesting to discover if other universities are active in Ebonics education for instructors and if instructors at these universities recognize the systematic nature of the language.

The language survey distributed suggests that even though a majority of instructors strongly agree that Ebonics is a language, the knowledge does not mean that instructors treat it as a language with equal rights to standard English in the First-Year Composition classroom. No teaching assistants responded that they strongly agree that they allow or encourage students to use Ebonics in written assignments; 4.76% of full-time and part-time faculty said that they strongly agree that they allow and encourage students to use Ebonics in written assignments. A majority (38.1%) of full-time and part-time instructors responded that they mildly disagree that they allow Ebonics in written assignments, and an equal number of this group (33.33%) mildly and strongly disagree that they encourage Ebonics in written assignments. A majority (54.55% and 45.45%, respectively) of teaching assistants mildly disagree that they allow or encourage Ebonics in written assignments; 27.27% and 36.36% of this group, respectively, strongly disagree that they allow and encourage Ebonics in written assignments.
The results show that instructors have split opinions regarding how Ebonics can be used in the classroom because while a majority of instructors do not encourage or allow Ebonics to be written, a majority (47.62%) of full-time and part-time instructors strongly agree that they allow Ebonics to be spoken in the classroom. A majority (63.64%) of Teaching Assistants also responded that they strongly agree that they allow Ebonics to be spoken in class. No instructor (full-time, part-time, or Teaching Assistant) mildly or strongly disagreed that they allow Ebonics to be spoken in the classroom.

In “Holdin It Down: Students’ Right and the Struggle over Language Diversity,” Keith Gilyard analyzes a survey by the CCCC Language Policy Committee that surveyed “CCCC and NCTE members regarding their views on language diversity” (118). He says, “Findings reveal that a significant number of teachers are unaware of the CCCC policies on language diversity and that verbal commitment to language diversity often does not translate into classroom practice” (118). The results of this survey correspond to the ones administered for this project. The instructors surveyed at The University of Akron, however, were not asked about knowledge of the CCCC language resolution, but of their own teaching practices. If instructors considered the CCCC resolution, perhaps classroom instruction would be shifted to allow or encourage students to write in Ebonics. Gilyard says that the CCCC resolution “suggests possibilities for critical pedagogy, especially around issues of language and hegemony, that should not be dismissed” (115). The exploration of critical language methods in the remainder of the chapter will more closely outline what it means for instructors to facilitate a critical and diverse linguistic landscape in the composition classroom.
Writing instructors value when students contribute to the conversations of the classroom, regardless of the variety of English used. Consider the act of silencing the speech of a student because of the variety of English used; it would be disrespectful for the instructor to tell the student to speak “in English” when sharing thoughts to the class. To interrupt a speech act or to prevent a speech act from occurring in the classroom that is not vulgar or damaging to another student is not a pedagogically sound decision. But this realization begs the reader to ask another question: Is silencing a student’s voice in writing assignments a pedagogically sound decision?

In “The Teaching of Academic Language to Minority Second Language Learners,” Guadalupe Valdes argues that “the Bakhtin Circle” demonstrates “the context for all discussions, including academic debates, encompasses the surrounding voices that help shape, reconfigure, and constantly change the multivoiced utterances of the various speakers” (67). Valdes points out directly to educators, “The discussion of academic language is no different” (67). From my experience, most Ebonics-speaking students do not write in Ebonics for assignments. However, there are crossover patterns that appear in the voice of the grammatical decisions of the paper. To eradicate all of the Ebonics-like grammatical structures without the students’ understanding why the writing is “wrong” in standard English reinforces cultural hegemony. Judging a variety of speech, writing, or being as inferior to the status-quo is the task of oppressors. The non-Ebonics speaking students in first-year composition would also do well to realize this.

Bakhtin discusses voice in terms of Dostoevsky’s novels in “Discourse in the Novel.” Bakhtin says, “One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate
themselves from the author’s voice” (348). In the classroom, as well as in novels, the voice can be used as a liberating force. The instructors and teaching assistants at The University of Akron, through these language surveys, demonstrate a willingness to allow and encourage Ebonics speaking voices in the classroom.

When discussing language differences in an educational setting, it is essential for educators to consider critical pedagogy because it can empower students who speak marginalized varieties while allowing for instruction on standard English structures. By identifying and investigating the sources of language power, students who speak both standard and non-standard forms of English can more fully understand how language is viewed, used, and judged, making them more mindful users of language.

Scholarship on critical language awareness and instruction is still in its early stages, but critical literacy is an area of study that has grown tremendously in terms of amounts of scholarship in relation to college composition. In “What is Critical Literacy” Ira Shor points out that the words that we speak “help shape us into the people we become” (1). While Bakhtin investigates the power of diverse speech in novels, Shor writes on both spoken and written words. Words have a transformative power—they can change the future by affecting present ideas of the self and the world’s relation to the self.

Critical literacy is a form of critical pedagogy that asks students to analyze the power structures that influence the production and distribution of texts. It is not important in this context to argue for critical language awareness over critical literacy; both areas of scholarship are attempting to demonstrate very similar ideas. Instead, it will be helpful to consider Shor’s observations as a general starting point. Shor says, “Critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self” (2). If language is
considered to be an integral part of the self, this means that the self is questioned when language ideologies are investigated. Shor says that in this process of self-questioning “we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it” (2). Revealing that language judgments are constructions of the self is an essential part of both critical literacy and critical language awareness. In the case of Ebonics, critical classroom activities that linguistically demonstrate it is not a broken version of standard English can make the classroom more diverse and critical. It may not be the goal of composition instructors to facilitate a diverse and critical classroom. However, without looking at the world from a different point of view, the views of others may become less important or even go unnoticed.

In “Critical Language Awareness,” Samy H. Alim gives the details of a curriculum that uses critical language awareness (CLA) as an overarching theme throughout the semester. Critical pedagogy and CLA are highly related in theory. However, Alim is the one of the only scholars to connect the theories of CLA to practical use in critical learning classrooms. Alim admits that CLA has been criticized for being overly-theoretical and under-applied (214). Alim credits Freireian critical pedagogy and “engages youth in the process of consciousness-raising, that is becoming aware of one’s own position in the world and what to do about it” (214). The class begins with a sociolinguistic analysis of an interview with hip-hop artist, JT the Bigga Figga. The class listens to an audio recording of him responding in an interview. Each student is asked to transcribe a small part of it. The student transcriptions are compared to the instructor’s master transcript. The instructor then leads a discussion that asks students if they “standardized” the texts or wrote down exactly what they heard. In the specific audio
recording that Alim describes, the rapper at one time says, “He run everything” and then later in the interview says, “He runs everything.” Alim says this feature of the rapper’s spoken speech can be used to “conduct a sociolinguistic analysis of his speech, which leads to a larger understanding of the structure and systematicity of spoken speech” (216). Using Alim’s classroom activity as a framework, the next section will discuss different possibilities that expand the critical nature of the lesson while also incorporating the use of technology.

Transcribing an interview of a hip-hop figure unknown to the class may not generate as much interest as a well-known figure. YouTube is a website that students are likely to visit outside of their school experiences. Teachers use YouTube to show content to students, but it also helps bring the digital literacies developed at home into the classroom. The students could be assigned to visit YouTube and to look at part of the site that is usually not utilized in the classroom. For instance, when searching for “Chris Brown interview” on YouTube, an interview posted from user moretothemusic has comments with Ebonics crossover. For example: user Tyler Otis says, “I love chris no matter what, but that's up wid our generation kids don't feel the need to be playin at the park no more” (Moretothemusic). The linguistic analysis of YouTube can show speech patterns between different music genres. Students can even analyze lyrics and look for “mistakes” if considered standard English. However, before getting to that part of the assignment, it is essential for students to understand that linguistic diversity is not wrong, even though speaking standard English is valued in society by standard English speaking people and by those learning standard English as a second language.
To give the students more of a chance to decide what they want to study, class time can be used to brainstorm public figures who use speech patterns that are not standard and a list of those who speak a standard variety of English. It may be interesting to notice the differences between how different age groups speak. When the list is narrowed down to a few figures of interest, students can explain what this non-standard speech does to this figure’s perception. It is also important to find out if the students are influenced by this varied speech pattern. With the technology available in most classrooms, it is possible to view the interviews of the chosen public figures on YouTube.

There are a variety of options then available to the instructor. If, like Alim, the instructor wishes to focus very closely on specific sentences and structures, the students can be asked to transcribe parts of the interview and compare the results with their peers. If the instructor wishes to focus on the social aspect of speech, the students can be asked to listen to the interview and then imagine what the interview would sound like in standard English; how would your opinions change on the speaker and his message? Looking at speech at the sentence level and then at the level of social perception can give students a broader idea of this complicated lesson on linguistic identities.

The next project that Alim describes asks students to “analyze their own communication behavior in their everyday environments…and as it shifted across contexts and situations” (217). The language journal that the students keep has the following categories: “date, time, mode of language (reading, speaking, writing, listening, etc.), name of language, context (who’s involved, where is it happening, what’s happening), and comments on the style(s) of language used” (217-218). Alim says that this project “validates the language practices that students engage in outside of the
classroom” and also allows the students to “gain a much higher level of metalinguistic awareness” (218). Often times, these students are asked to leave many of their linguistic activities behind when engaging in scholarly activities. However, Alim’s language journal allows students to view marginalized speech acts as “valuable cultural and linguistic spaces for learning” (218). Again, bringing literacies that students use at home into the classroom allows students lists to include Facebook posts, Tweets, Instagram photos, YouTube clips, or any other social media that the student uses. The list should also contain more traditional items of speech as well—correspondence with friends, co-workers, and family.

Repeating Alim’s call to write more on practical critical language practices, it is important to note that this section can be expanded. It would be interesting to see an entire book on practical critical language classroom activities that analyzes the use and language opinions of Ebonics and varieties of English used around the world.

When discussing language differences it is essential to examine why language differences incur social judgment. In order for there to be language differences, there must be multiple forms of language. These variances (whether they be phonological, grammatical, semantic, or pragmatic) must be judged as deviant or separate from a “standard” form. The existing power structures inform language users what the standard form of language is. This created standard may not always be seen as a social construction because these power structures are so influential and take shape, in a globalized world, essentially everywhere. This means that language judgment from a standard language user’s perspective may be viewed more as a fact than as opinion, objective over subjective.
Many strong voices have internalized these standard structures and hold them very dearly as part of a national identity. Guadalupe Valdes says that many Americans have strong opinions about the education of speakers of marginalized languages. He says that these opinions come from “patriotic citizens whose parents or grandparents did not maintain their immigrant languages and who are afraid that the United States will lose its common language as well as the…nativists who fear that, because this country is being overrun with foreigners, Americans are being made to feel like strangers in their own land” (71). The dominant variety becomes the only correct way to speak and write, and other varieties are seen as incorrect. English instructors will benefit students by creating a classroom atmosphere that questions why some languages are correct and others are not. By having an open mind towards languages, students may be able to learn more than they would with a closed or judgmental attitude.

The average citizen is not especially aware of the power structures that create the standard, but she is, for example, aware that she may initially judge speakers of southern and Appalachian languages to be ignorant until they prove themselves worthy. Another way that average citizens exercise knowledge of language power structures is through what Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* calls carnivalesque. A carnivalesque parody of language may include a standard language speaker mocking a non-dominant variety or accent. Poking fun at the way others speak is not an intentional technique used to keep different linguistic communities separated. However, it is interesting to consider what power relations are underneath linguistically based parodies. It is important to know exactly what is being laughed at in these carnivalesque parodies. In “Intertextualities,” Charles Bazerman says that while Bakhtin’s examinations of linguistic mockery usually
“aim to deflate oppressively powerful ruling forces rather than to stigmatize the powerless,” Bazerman argues that language parody may be “a frequent method for keeping at a distance those who are different from us” (57-58). Critical analysis of the language power structures through the examination of linguistic parody, then, is another way to discuss language differences in the first-year composition classroom.

Instructors and students alike may be reluctant to focus so closely on language in the writing classroom. Focusing on grammatical structures requires the students and teacher to use specific vocabulary that may be unavailable. However, by investigating the cultures that use the languages, students can find comfort in analyzes subjects on which they already have opinions. Language can be investigated through cultural analysis, in addition to, or separate from the previous classroom activities. Richardson’s “(Dis)inventing Discourse” is a strong example of critical analysis that, as she says, “foregrounds the hierarchy of social structure, social inequality and unequal power arrangements” through the analysis of African American folklore and also of an OutKast music video (196). Richardson’s article is a great example of what can be used in the composition classroom to demonstrate the analysis of hiphop in relation to African American culture and language variety. Richarson says, “Hiphop discourse, like previous Afro-American expressive forms is a Black creative response to absence and desire and a site of epistemological development” (201). She says that despite claims that hiphop is a “corporate orchestration,” it is a “site of identity negotiation” (201). For example, she observes that Outkast’s music video “The Whole World” is “highly reflexive and explicitly conscious of the rhetorical situation” (206). She says that the circus setting of the video “decontextualizes and exploits performances by trained animals, people” and
represents them as “exotic” (206). In the same way she says, Outkast is pointing out how “the apparatuses of the global world power reduce culture to decontextualized commodities” (206). Turning to a linguistic analysis of the video, she says, “AAVE phonological and lexical systems are also employed by the rappers to (dis)invent or reinscribe and upset stereotypes” (207). Richardson’s analysis of Outkast’s “The Whole World” considers African American culture, language, politics, and history and demonstrates how the rap trio questions the culture in which they perform. While Richardson does not cite Bakhtin, her analysis of language and power structures is relevant to Bakhtin’s examinations of the carnival because the rappers are using cultural parodies of Black culture in order to make a social statement about race.

After reading and discussing Richardson’s article in a composition class, the instructor could ask students to consider their own subcultures or to investigate mainstream music videos. Depending on the interests of the class, analysis could go in endless directions. Students could continue to analyze rap music videos in the same way as Richardson analyzes OutKast. Critical analysis can be achieved with this activity through the exploration of power structures. The analysis is more than just an analysis of popular music; Richardson says, “My point…is to show that the best rap performances reflect the tensions apparent between dominant and subordinate discourses” (212). When analyzing rap and hiphop, it is possible to investigate solely the language used: does the artist code-switch, invent new uses for words, or use Ebonics phonology? Admittedly, it may be difficult for freshman to understand these power structures of language and dominant and nondominant cultures. However, if the discussions are based in student
experiences and examples are made from material that the students listen to outside of class, the material can be accessible for them.

If students are not interested in listening to or watching rap music videos, the analysis of language in hiphop and rap videos can simply be a starting point; any genre could be investigated for power structures in language or culture. For instance, students could argue that Miley Cyrus’s video “We Can’t Stop” culturally appropriates African American culture or, on the other side, that it merely appreciates African Americans. Students could also investigate a subculture like punk. What message is the band NOFX sending with their songs “Kill All the White Men” and “Don’t Call Me White?” Do their fans understand this message? Students do not need to specifically research power structures involving race and linguistics—this is simply a starting point and a specific interest of this instructor.

If students are not interested in analyzing music videos at all, perhaps the topic should not be approached. It is important to allow students to vote on topics before writing on them so that they feel like the topic actually belongs to them. In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor discusses strategies for motivating students to find their voices and speak of their own volition. He says, “The students found their voices, enough to carry us through a ferocious hour, once I found a ‘generative’ theme, an issue generated from the problems of their own experience” (3). Also stressing the importance of allowing students the choice to choose writing topics, in “Follow Their Lead,” Victoria Winterhalter Brame values introducing the strategies of real authors into the classroom. Writing instructors are not always authors themselves. Therefore, when creating assignments, the instructors may not be thinking, how can I get students to write like
authors? Instead, they may be aiming to just get students to write like students. Brame says, “My research leads me to believe that there is a real need for more authentic student writing experiences” (43). There is a difference between a student analyzing a music video to explore something of interest and a student analyzing a music video because it is a class assignment. Not all students will be interested in each topic, which is why it is important for the instructor to listen to the multiple voices of students when leading the class to write on different topics.

In classrooms that do not critically investigate language, teachers may be left with fewer options in teaching students how to code-switch. With the best intentions for students’ future employment opportunities, many educators attempt to eradicate speech patterns that do not conform to standard English. In “Critical Hip-Hop Pedagogies” Samy Alim interviews a high school teacher who says that one of her “few goals” was to “combat…issues with standard English versus vernacular English;” specifically, the teacher cites students who say, “They was, We be.” (373, 375). She continues to say that students tell her, “‘Well, you know, it doesn’t make sense to me’” (375). She responds to them, “This is the way it is. I’m sorry, but that’s just the way” (375). Educators like her, with intentions of making students more marketable to employers, think that they are doing the students an insurmountable service by finding that “students’ language is ‘unacceptable,’ ‘disrespectful,’ and ‘abrasive’” (376). Without a critical view of language power structures, this teacher is simply left telling her students that they must “play the game” (376). This form of uncritical pedagogy treats students like defective products that need to be transformed in order to operate with full function in society. As Paulo Freire in “The ‘Banking’ Concept of Education” says, the teacher’s task becomes filling the
students “with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (1). In this case, the teacher’s content is standard English. This instruction deems Ebonics speakers’ linguistic identities formed at home unacceptable for school. The language of standard English speaking students is rewarded in the classroom, and the language of Ebonics speaking students is wrong and must be changed. The teacher attempts to fill these students with the idea that their language is incorrect, but this is disconnected from the students’ realities.

Freire continues to say that in the banking model of education “Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity” (1). Lectures and comments on essays correcting language to meet the standard may not seem “alienating,” but simply like instruction. It is difficult to measure the impact a curriculum like this has on students’ psychology. By noting how standard English speaking students experience in the class differs from Ebonics speaking students, any boundary that lie between the students and their educations can be addressed. In order for the instruction to refrain from becoming hollow, the instructor must engage each student equally and refrain from the possible alienation that exists for “non-standard” students.

In “Performance as the Foundation for a Secondary School Literacy Program,” Eileen Landay explains further how teachers using a banking teaching technique to teach students standard English are not considering the actual nature of language. She says, “If, as Bakhtin argues, heteroglossia (in the original Russian, literally ‘different speechness’) is the fundamental condition within which meaning is constructed, then classrooms where didactic instruction is the norm and the teacher the primary speaker are not likely to be
effective instructional environments, particularly for those whose background, perspective, and knowledge base differ substantively from the speaker’s” (110). In educational environments, linguistic diversity is an asset to the entire class because it gives students an opportunity to consider different linguistic perspectives.

When considering critical linguistically diverse educational environments, it is necessary for the instructor to realize the students have many important decisions to make about their language. In “Ideological Becoming,” Arnetha Ball and Sarah Freedman explain how Bakhtin’s writings on ideological becoming and the ideological self can be interpreted in the context of schooling. They say, “The choices leaners make about what types of language to acquire and use are political just as the decisions teachers make about what types of language to promote and accent in the classroom are political” (5). It is essential to understand that students have to make a choice in their language decisions and that this decision is not up to the instructor. Discussions of language structures and language power structures allow students to be more informed about the decisions that they must make in regards to their own language use.

Alim’s interview with the high school teacher demonstrates the disconnection between student and instructor when attempting to simply fill the student with standard English constructions. By comparing the teacher in Alim’s interview to Freire’s description of “banking” education, one can be seen that simply “filling up” the student with standard English constructions is only effective is pointing to a rift in power that resonates throughout society: the Black student is wrong, the white teacher is right.

Simply calling to attention the differences between formal and informal speech does not address the problem of power when it comes to language varieties. In The
Problem of Speech Genres, Mikhail Bakhtin says, “Any utterance—oral or written, primary or secondary, and in any sphere of communication—is individual and therefore can reflect the individuality of the speaker…that is, it possesses individual style” (1229). It is not enough for a teacher to say that there are ways to speak with friends and ways to speak at school. Students do not become different people when they walk into a school. The classroom setting cannot be used as an excuse for marking students’ home language as “wrong.”

An analysis of rap and hiphop language shows that standard English is a construction of power, and without that power, all forms of language are equal. While this is a highly idealized view of language, this may be an empowering idea to speakers of marginalized varieties. However, this realization of language power construction does not only benefit speakers of marginalized varieties. Samy Alim argues that “educators are obligated to present the current sociolinguistic reality to students who are subjugated in mainstream institutions” to linguistic judgment. Alim hopes to “mobilize” the use and study of “the full body of language, social, and cultural theory to produce consciousness-raising pedagogies” (372). For standard English speaking students, the realization that they do not necessarily speak the “correct” version of English may change the way that they view language diversity and allow them to examine their own privileges. If instructors—people who surely sit on a throne of language authority—are not critically aware of the structures of language power and do not consider these powers when teaching, they simply become part of the machinery of the existing structures, which when viewed critically, may not be considered just.
With the instructors and classrooms addressed, the student surveys can now be interpreted. In Chapter 4, students’ linguistic opinions will be investigated to get a more detailed picture of what students think before being introduced to a critical language learning environment.
CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE AS A COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITY IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

The students who make up the composition classroom are an important aspect of critical language pedagogy that will not be overlooked in the next section. This chapter will examine the language opinions that first-year composition students have towards Ebonics and suggest how to interpret these results with the lens of language as a communicative activity. This chapter gives brief examples of how to expand sentence level awareness with the use of grammatical structures from student essays, how to give context to English grammatical structures with the use of Japanese, and how to reverse power structures by bringing Ebonics into the classroom through the play Black Cycle.

The language opinion surveys (see Appendix B for the entire student survey) were distributed to Composition I classes by five first-year teaching assistants willing to participate. Seventy student surveys were collected. Students responded, on a scale from 1-5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree), to the following questions: Ebonics is slang street talk, Ebonics is a language, Ebonics is a dialect, Ebonics is bad or broken standard English, and Ebonics has its own grammar. The findings are listed below:
Out of these five questions, the most popular response (45.71%) is that students mildly agree that Ebonics is a dialect. Next, 41.43% of students responded that they mildly agree that Ebonics is bad or broken standard English. After that 35.71% of students responded that they mildly agree that Ebonics is slang street talk. While these results do not match the responses from the first-year composition instructors, these responses match the language ideologies that the media portray (see McClendon in Chapter 1).

The item “Ebonics is a language” had interesting results, only 5.71% of students responded that they strongly agree; 20% mildly agree; 25.71% neutral, 27.14% mildly disagree, and 18.57% strongly disagree. The interesting part is that most students responded either neutral or mildly disagree. Their opinions on language may not be burning passions, but instead seem to be more of a sign of passively receiving language opinions from the media. The results that tend to stay more towards the neutral response
(either mildly disagree or agree) may suggest that students have passive opinions about Ebonics.

A few surveys had question marks next to the items and no responses. Perhaps these students did not know what Ebonics was, did not know how to classify it, or did not know what terms like “dialect” even meant. While it is not necessary or perhaps even relevant for students to be taught about Ebonics in the first-year composition classroom, it can be argued that being able to view language critically is an important skill. By learning about Ebonics, students can form more critical views on language, possibly challenging the status quo, or possibly gaining more support for their existing opinions. If language, which is tied so closely to our existence, can be looked at critically, students may be able to apply this critical lens to other aspects of their academic and personal lives, resulting in more informed and less passively acting students and citizens. Regardless of the topics of critical study, the tool to be able to critically analyze the world is invaluable; surely language is an appropriate topic of critical analysis for the first-year composition classroom.

In the classroom, a short language survey is a good way to get students to begin thinking about their writing in a different way. Regardless if students view Ebonics as a language or a dialect, the unequal treatment of it remains the same. Examining Ebonics through a linguistic lens, comparing it to standard English, and proclaiming it its own language does not have an innate liberating function. In “Disinventing and Reconstituting Language,” Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook explain that the process of trying to support “denigrated semiotic systems” (for example creole languages, dialects of languages, or sign languages) through the “use of the academic status of linguistics” is
just “confining such diverse domains to the straitjacket of linguistic description” (33).
They explain that in this process of academic legitimization “their complexity, variety, and locatedness in social and cultural worlds has often been lost” (33). With Makoni and Pennycook’s critical outlook on language, highlighting the difference between the aspect-based system of Ebonics and the tense based system of standard English will not necessarily liberate Ebonics from Euro-English. What is done by bringing examples of Ebonics into an academic setting and reviewing its structures with linguistic terms? By highlighting how the two systems work students can learn that Ebonics is not a deformed version of English, but a separate one. For those who have formed opinions about Ebonics based on misconceptions or “facts” from the media, these sorts of diagrams can be beneficial. However, teachers should view the opinions of informed users of Ebonics, regardless of the opinion of Ebonics, with respect.

Pennycook and Makoni question the linguist-created definition of “language,” getting at issues beyond the labels of language as “correct” and “incorrect.” The discussion in this thesis acknowledges that some people view Ebonics as broken English. However, this thesis is not arguing for scholars to officially change the label on Ebonics from “dialect” to a “language.” Speakers give legitimacy to languages, not linguists. How does the classification of Ebonics as its own language make its use more legitimate? To academics, the argument to view Ebonics as a language with equal rights to standard English may be convincing, but this message is removed from the Ebonics-speaking community, as well as from popular understanding.

Whether the public calls Ebonics a language or a dialect has no real barring on the reality that exists when people speak Ebonics and are then judged in a negative way for
doing so. A critical look at the process of classification involving linguistic labels (for example, “dialect” and “language”) will further complicate the argument that Ebonics is its own language. The underlying problem with the linguistic investigation of Ebonics is that it is removed from social context and subjected to observations based on what are considered objective facts, not by members of the Ebonics-speaking community, but instead by linguists. Instead of liberating Ebonics from standard English, the comparison of the two languages may instead constrict Ebonics even more. Classifying, dissecting, and comparing languages relies on the “concept of discrete languages,” which in An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Suzanne Romaine postulates is a “European cultural artifact fostered by procedures such as literacy and standardization” (qtd. in Makoni). By trying to support the existence of Ebonics as a separate language, the colonial sense of the term language is still in use and still being exercised to confine language use within the construct of the oppressive paradigm.

The language categories, necessary to argue that Ebonics is its own language, seem so natural and objective. However, critical language theory views these objective facts about language as constructions created by linguists. By analyzing a passage from The Indian Empire Descriptive by G. Grierson published in 1907, an example of language ideology of the western colonial enterprise becomes very apparent:

Few natives at the present day are able to comprehend the idea connoted by the words of a language. Dialects they know and understand. They separate them and distinguish them with a meticulous, hair-splitting subtlety, which to us seems unnecessary and absurd, but their minds are not trained to grasp the conception so familiar to us, of a general term embracing a number of interconnected dialects. Qtd. in Makoni and Pennycook 10

Even though the linguist who authored this may have conceived his research to be an earnest attempt at learning and classifying unknown languages, he is an essential part
of the colonization act that labels native knowledge as inferior to Western knowledge.
Societies that are not in contact are surely to have different ways to view language. The
society under Grierson’s observation has much different ways of communicating: there is
no monolithic standard variety of speech, and the people adopt multiple varieties of
speech in order to communicate. With such a different linguistic landscape, it is
important to treat their language opinions seriously instead of just comparing them to the
Western standard of how languages are studied.

In “Speech and Language: On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among
Speakers,” Dell. H Hymes describes why it is important to treat different cultures’
language opinions with respect. It is not a fact that mutually unintelligible types of speech
are language or that mutually intelligible versions are dialects. It is a popular notion that a
language is “a dialect with a country and an army.” But not even this observation really
values the importance of a native speaker’s view of his own language. Hymes says that
the way Westerners view language is based on a “‘Herderian’ conception of a world of
independent one-language-one-culture units” (30). Herderian language beliefs hold
strong importance in a nation’s language. Herder argued that language dictates culture
and thought before the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis did so. Hymes critiques the theory
because it does not take into consideration the possibility for multiple languages in one
culture as a standard. The Herderian theory is interesting and surely a useful tool to study
cultures in which one language is spoken. However, a different theory is needed to
explain more diverse landscapes.

Hymes classifies languages in a context that does not rely on the borders of
countries and the existence of imperialistic separations to describe language use. If a
community uses three to five non-mutually-intelligible varieties of speech, how can a linguist (from an environment that uses only one language) accurately or objectively investigate the community’s language use with a Herderian lens? In “Beyond ‘Language’: Linguistic Imperialism, Sign Languages and Linguistic Anthropology,” Jan Branson and Don Miller explain, “linguistics is a cultural construct…it is a way of thinking about communicative processes that is historically and culturally specific” (117). They say it becomes dangerous when the construct of linguistics “is viewed as ‘objective,’ as ‘scientific,’ as ‘rational,’ as neither culturally determined nor culturally specific” (118). Hymes proposes that the most informative language analysis extends “to the place of speech itself in the life of a community” and discovers if language is “a resource to be hoarded or something freely expanded, whether it is essential or not to public roles, whether it is conceived as intrinsically good or dangerous, what its proper role in socialization and demonstration of competence is conceived to be” (31). By looking at linguistics as a communicative activity (LCA), instead of as a set of forms, the field of LCA is able to bring the study of language closer to the language users, separating the colonization of language and the study of language.

In a composition classroom that uses critical language pedagogy, it should not be the goal of the instructor to change the language opinions of students. It is not “wrong” to strongly agree that Ebonics is a broken version of standard English. While the opinion may not consider that the verb system in Ebonics is completely different from standard English, or that Ebonics has African roots, the language opinion is part of the student’s linguistic belief system. Following Hymes’s theory of LCA, the student who strongly agrees that Ebonics is a broken version of standard English should be asked to expand his
views and explain his views in more depth. Language opinions are not to be molded into the same opinions as the person in power. However, if language opinions are formed by a lack of information or by the uncritical acceptance of the opinions of others, the instructor may feel it is ethical to attempt to hope to change a student’s language opinion. A critical language classroom encourages students to broaden their perspectives on language, to consider “normal” as only part of the picture, and most importantly, to critically analyze ideas that they may have taken for granted in the past. The purpose of a critical language classroom is not to “make” students realize that Ebonics is a language. After the information is presented and the students are led through discussions, the student may or may not have the same opinions as he did the first day.

The purpose of LCA is not to change the labels of the opinions that students hold, but to make students question and interpret the entire system in which language operates. In “A Linguistics of Communicative Activity,” Steven Thorne and James Lantolf say, “The motivation for developing the LCA framework is to disinvent language understood as an object and to reinvent language as activity, where the term activity describes a specific form of human societal existence that consists of purposeful changes to, and transformations of, natural, social, and mental realities” (171). Studying language as an object in the composition classroom can lead to the memorization of structures and formulas, which is not a critical way to learn English. Depending on how published texts are read and discussed, reading can easily become part of the study of language as an object. Teachers who want to teach language as an activity can implement techniques from critical literacy theories, as well as CLA theories to help make texts more social and less static.
Current scholarship shows that students can achieve higher levels of critical literacy by expanding the text from a static representation of characters (a form) into a dialogue. The field of critical literacy expands the study of texts from object to activity. In “An Interactionist Approach to Advancing Literacy” Nan Elsasser and Vera John-Steiner say, “The history of the last decades shows that traditional approaches to teaching writing do not work” (45). They say these traditional approaches “do not look beyond ‘good’ grammar” and say they are pushing to “raise more significant questions concerning literacy” (45). In theories of critical literacy, a standard approach is to discuss the text as a dialogue. Students in a critical literacy classroom may be asked to consider the situation of the writer, the writer’s purpose, and the audience’s purpose. Changing text into a dialogue encourages students to continue the conversation of the text; this transforms the text from a static form to a form that can be shaped by the students.

Following the same path of critical literacy, language as a communicative activity takes all language, whether written, spoken, gestured, or implied, and opens it up for conversation, critique, and study. Thorne and Lantolf cite Marxist theorist Perry Anderson, and say he “critiques the impulse to posit underlying structure to all human activity as an anti-humanist enterprise” and they quote him saying, “if structures alone obtain in a world beyond all subjects, what secures their objectivity?” (qtd. on Throne and Lantolf 174). Considering this theory, books that prompt college writing students to use formulas that dictate where exactly to put claims, evidence, and counter-points are dehumanizing. By molding student writings into the desired output the instructor may be “preparing” students for what will be expected of them in other classes because academic writing is very formulaic. Those who argue for the use of formulas say that it is the most
direct and understandable way for students to learn how to write in a way acceptable for academia. However, when the standard structures of language are part of a conversation, preparing students to succeed at writing in standard environments does not have to become a dehumanizing act of colonization.

In order to expose students to different varieties of language, it may be useful to engage in activities that compare different structures of grammar. In The Problem of Speech Genres, when explaining active understanding, Bakhtin says, “All real and integral understanding is actively responsive” (1233). By using student writing as grammatical examples for peers to follow, writing structures can be discussed in an active manner that does not simply, as Bakhtin says of passive understanders, “duplicate” the teacher’s own idea “in someone else’s mind” (1233). In my classroom, I framed good student writing as “expert student tips” and asked the writer to share them with the class. An example of an expert student tip comes from Jaden, a student who constantly wrote about the psychological influences on different topics ranging, from dreams to the supernatural. Reflecting on his writing technique, Jaden says:

Another thing I developed while in the semester was something I stumbled upon by accident. It wasn’t something you taught me or the class, but you were the one who encouraged me to continue with the technique. In the honesty and deception essay, I began to use noun phrases in my writing. In describing the circumstances leading to a lie, I wrote, “Parents were out of town. Soccer tournament in Toledo with my older sister, Grace.” I did it to break up the monotonous tone I felt I was using in the essay up to that point, but you also explained how it could be used to add emphasis. This encouraged me to do more of it in the essays to follow, and as I continued to do it, the circumstances caused it to become more dynamic and something I could do in multiple scenarios.

In the technique that I pointed out as being effective, Jaden broke the rules of sentences. He excluded an article in the first sentence and a verb phrase in the second sentence in order to vary sentence structure and put emphasis on both “parents” and
“soccer tournament.” Instead of saying, “My parents were out of town for a soccer
tournament in Toledo with my older sister, Grace,” Jaden is able to vary his structure,
breaking the rules and adding a feeling of dramatic speech to his writing. Isn’t it obvious
that he is about to do something he is not supposed to? Other students picked up Jaden’s
technique. In reflecting on what she learned from Jaden, in a letter addressed to herself,
Rachelle says:

You also find noun phrases as creative tools in narratives. In class, you discussed
noun phrases a little bit and you concluded that they make narratives more
interesting and add elements to them. You created a noun phrase in your mini
write 9 saying, “Now we are doing something in this class that I’ve never done
before. A group paper” (Pick). You also expressed that they have better
significance in narratives because they make them more colorful or amusing. In
regular papers, like the one you used the noun phrase in, it gives the paper a little
more flavor but not the kind it gives to a story.

Rachelle used Jaden’s technique of using a noun phrase as an entire sentence for
emphasis. Encouraging students to use each other’s ideas for varying sentence structure
gives them an entry point to discussing grammar. Instead of having students regurgitate
my grammar techniques, they are able to create a community of shared grammar between
students. My only job as an instructor is to highlight students’ techniques and put them in
a relevant context for the rest of the class. This exercise attempts to have students be
actively responsive to grammar instead of being empty receptacles for the instructor’s
grammar.

In Chapter 3, the possibilities of Samy H. Alim’s Critical Hip-Hop Theory and
Shor’s generative topics were discussed as ways of implementing critical linguistics in
the first-year composition classroom. The literature on activities for the classroom that
specifically use linguistics as a communicative activity is just in the beginning processes.
In “After Disinvention: Possibilities for Communication, Community, and Competence”
Suresh Canagarajah says, “Our pedagogical objective is not to develop mastery of a ‘target language’… but to develop a repertoire of codes among our students,” and he says that “what would help in this venture is the focus on developing a metalinguistic awareness” (238). Metalinguistic awareness is difficult to obtain when only reading texts that appear in standardized language. A native speaker may be able to use the demonstrative pronouns “this” and “that” perfectly, but when asked to explain the difference between the words, the speaker may be unsure of exactly what the words even mean. The differences in the pronouns are easy to see when comparing English to Japanese. In Japanese, there are three demonstrative pronouns: これ (kore), それ (sore) and あれ (are). Unlike English, the pronouns consider the distance between the speaker, the listener, and the pointed-to noun. これ is used when the noun being pointed to is closest to the speaker, それ when the noun is closest to the listener, and あれ when the noun is not close to either the speaker or listener.

In English “this” and “that” not only act as pointing pronouns, but also as expletives. When discussing expletive constructions, it is useful to use examples from a language that does not require the subject slot to be filled in grammatically correct sentences, what linguists call a null-subject language. Beginning writers use “there” and “it” needlessly. Internal grammatical structures tie writers up and that demand that there be a subject in the sentence, even if it is an expletive. Stylebooks suggest that students omit needless words like expletive “there” and “it,” but they do not explain why it feels natural to use them in the first place. By stretching the language used to demonstrate how expletives work to include Japanese, the students get to experience new utterances,
multiple voices, and new perspectives that they can apply to English and use to raise metalinguistic awareness.

For example, students can be shown that it is grammatically correct in Japanese to say:

watashi no chi chi desu.

I (poss) father is.

My father is.

This is my father.

“This” in the last English translation is a demonstrative pronoun that acts as the subject. In Japanese, unless you needed the demonstrative pronoun to “point” to where your father is, the subject position does not need to be filled in Japanese. This example can show students the arbitrariness of some English uses of “this.”

Japanese may not necessarily have a place in the first-year composition classroom, but metalinguistic awareness does. It is ironic that in order to transcend the judgment of linguistic categorization, the language user must be aware of the existing structures. In order to disinvest language, the pieces must first be individually dissected and questioned.

The study of language on such a small and intricate scale is not intended to compromise the entirety of a critical-language writing classroom. In “Educational Materials Reflecting Heteroglossia: Disinventing Ethnolinguistic Differences in Bosnia-Herzegovina” Brigitta Bush and Jurgen Schick discuss the creation of a school manual designed for primary schools in Bosnia, an area in which “the present post-conflict
situation language policies tend to emphasise national/ethnic differences by promoting the use of distinct ‘pure’ standard forms” (216). The school manual (titled *Pogledi*) is based on an approach that is new and radical and consists of authentic texts. The texts have “no didactic or linguistic intervention” and since they are in “original form,” they “mirror the heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) of Bosnian society” (217). Texts from a wide variety of voices are an essential part to establishing a critical language first-year composition classroom. Bringing attention back to Ebonics in the classroom, Martie Charles’s *Black Cycle* is a play that can be read aloud and re-enacted, raising awareness of the systematic nature of Ebonics and also generating metalinguistic awareness. In *Black Cycle* and Ebonics Grammar,” Arthur Palacas says students should “read the play for its cultural background and as background for discussing Ebonics” (1). The play shows Ebonics within the cultural context of its speakers, which is the most authentic way to study languages.

*Black Cycle* uses Ebonics, but it is not filled with slang sayings. However, the play was published in 1972 and does have some dated vocabulary. The play begins at a hair shop. Jeannie, a high school student, does not think that she should attend an awards ceremony in which she says the dean “gonna put us on stage and start talkin’ ‘bout how bad we was in our old school and how we was bad ‘cause we was so poor and how the school gave us a chance to be somethin’ by lettin’ us in, and how the people at the dinner should give more money to help other unfortunates like us” (Palacas 5). Jeannie is aware that the African Americans are treated differently at Walden Academy, the elite school she earned a scholarship to attend. In order to protest her being used as a pawn by the dean, Jeannie and most of the other Black students at the school have decided to stay
home during the awards ceremony. Jeannie’s mother, Vera, does not believe in what Jeannie and her friends are doing. She says, “niggas always gotta pull one another down” in response to Jeannie’s theories about Walden Academy (6 Palacas). Vera wants Jeannie to excel at school, and Jeannie sees this as turning away from her Blackness and towards the whiteness of the school.

When reading the play in class, it is not necessary to worry about casting roles to the same sex and race as the characters. A white male student in class volunteered to read the parts of Vera, a very sassy Black woman. The student tried very hard to get into an Ebonics accent. The students (and I) laughed many times when the student read Vera’s part with his attempt at Ebonics, which actually sounded more just like an Appalachian accent. A simple line, “What??” when read by the male student attempting to re-enact a female Ebonics accent had the class really engaged. Yes, we were all having a good time. The language awareness that was being activated within the students is important in attempting to maintain a critical language classroom.

A Black female student, who often called herself Z, took a side role as Sadie. Z’s Ebonics sounded authentic and smooth, and the students acknowledged that she did a great job reading the part of Sadie. A critical language classroom switches the language of power. When reading this play, Z, an Ebonics-speaker had an advantage over the standard English speaking students.

This activity was one of the last units in the class. I had alluded to my interest in Ebonics throughout the class, and I had even encouraged students to write in Ebonics. No students wrote any papers in Ebonics. The Ebonics-speaking students were strong code-switchers and they wrote in standard English. By the end of the semester, the students
were curious about my interest in Ebonics. 18 out of 20 students voted for our last unit to be on *Black Cycle*. After reading Act I in class, the students were asked to write an in-class assignment on the play. They were able to choose between two subjects in the play: content and language. The content question asked students to consider the tension between Jeannie and Vera and the motivation of the characters in the play. The language question asked students about the significance of Ebonics in the play and asked them to compare the language of the play to Ebonics from 1972 to Ebonics of today. Since this unit was the only time that we read in Ebonics and discussed the language, only a few students chose to write on language. When I asked the students to reflect on their decisions to write on the content, most agreed that they didn’t know enough about Ebonics grammar to answer the language essay question.

By reading a play in Ebonics in the classroom, students are exposed to a language other than standard English. By having a language to compare with standard English, language deconstruction becomes possible. Makoni and Pennycook say that their deconstructed view of language is “non-materialist,” meaning “languages do not exist as real entities in the world and neither do they emerge from or represent real environments; they are, by contrast, the inventions of social, cultural and political movements” (2). A goal of a critical language classroom can be to be able to discuss how the term “language” is a social construction. Using more languages than just standard English in the classroom gives students more of an opportunity to view language from a different angle. The existence of style manuals, dictionaries, and grammar guides reinforce the view that language is an object structure and not a social construction.
The act of deconstructing language in the composition classroom allows students to put their language use in a larger perspective. The act of disinventing language gives students a different way to look at themselves and others. Makoni and Pennycook say:

The perspective that languages are socially and politically constructed is necessary not only for an understanding of languages, but also for situations in which there are reasons either to change them or to change the way we think about them…It is, therefore, necessary to overcome ideas about language if we are to imagine alternative ways of conceptualizing the role and status of individuals of the world. For example, a world in which plurality is preferred over singularity requires rethinking concepts founded on notions of uniformity over those predicated on diversity. 27

The process of connecting the big idea of language disinvention to practical use in the first-year composition classroom is a project that calls for the help of a multitude of scholars. A diverse collection of texts with a diverse collection of opinions about the texts is a good place to start building a collection of resources for critical language composition classrooms. As the United States becomes a more globalized arena for schooling and work, the importance of critical language awareness will only grow.

In order for critical language first-year composition classrooms to exist, activities and materials need to be gathered by instructors, authors, and scholars. Few classroom resources exist that push students’ understanding of language. A first-year composition text that questions the definition of language has not yet been written. Scholars interested in pursuing this subject can advance this subject by beginning to incorporate texts in non-standard English into the classroom. How can Appalachian English be used to demonstrate language as an activity? How can the language knowledge of students in the classroom be used to generate meaningful writing about language? There is a great need for scholars to write on critical language activities for the first-year composition classroom.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

When writing this thesis, I was searching for answers to questions that I had as a new composition teacher. How should teachers treat Ebonics in the classroom? Should teachers “correct” students’ grammars, especially considering that Ebonics is a language with grammar that is just as structured as standard English? Linguists have already written much scholarship on the systematic nature of Ebonics. Composition researchers and teachers have written much on critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical race theories. As I read this scholarship, I still did not find a solid answer as to how Ebonics can be addressed in the first-year composition classroom. Even more unsettling, as I began to research deeply into critical pedagogy, I wondered what it mattered, in practical terms to students, if linguists acknowledged Ebonics as a language.

While trying to learn more about students’ language rights, I found the article, “The Right to Language: Towards a Situated Ethics of Language Possibilities” by Pennycook Alastair. He says, “Liberal pronouncements about everyone having a right to their mother tongue…unless such a position is allied to a broader politics…will remain little more than a bland pronouncement” (73). In this article, Pennycook explains his interest in “language as a verb” (73). Investigating this notion further lead me to research in the field of Language as a Communicative Activity (LCA), which focuses, partially, on the deconstruction of the definitions that linguists use to describe languages.
The scholarship from the field of LCA is relatively recent, beginning around 2008. Composition researchers should consider the benefits of drawing connections to content from the field of LCA and critical linguistics. Many composition scholars borrow from the field of linguistics to inform their teaching pedagogy. Questioning the conventions of linguistics can help composition scholars find many new discoveries about teaching English.

Through the process of writing this thesis, I came to the decision that language users are responsible for forming their own opinions on language. For example, Garrard McClendon, an educator who is a native speaker of Ebonics, has different views on how to teach Ebonics-speaking students standard English than I do. McClendon believes that standard English is the most appropriate language for school and Ebonics is not. If his students learn from him and respect him, then I am in no position to question his methods.

As language users encounter different situations and presentations of information, with an open mind, their language opinions are likely to change. The purpose of this thesis is to encourage teachers to create informed language opinions and also to suggest ways in which these teachers can help their students create informed language opinions. As long as we allow our minds to be open and free from judgment, we will never stop learning about language.
LITERATURE CITED


Palacas, Arthur L. “Black Cycle and Ebonics Grammar.” PDF.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTOR LANGUAGE SURVEY

Julie Saternus
IRB #: 20130801

This survey is optional. In no way will the completion of this survey or your answers to this survey be connected with the status of your employment or status at The University of Akron. A graduate student in the English Department created this survey. By participating in the survey, you consent to your answers being used as research for a master’s thesis.

This survey is intended to gather information regarding previous experiences you’ve had with students of different language backgrounds as well as classes you have taken in cultural diversity, linguistics, and English as a second language.

If you are uncertain about any of the survey items, please place a question mark next to it and move on.

**Please return completed survey to the mailbox of Julie Saternus (located in Graduate Assistant Office, Olin 376) by Monday, October 7th.**

1. **What do you think about Ebonics (African American English)?**
   
a. **Ebonics is slang street talk**
   
   [ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Mildly agree [ ] Neutral [ ] Mildly Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

b. **Ebonics is a language.**
   
   [ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Mildly agree [ ] Neutral [ ] Mildly Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

c. **Ebonics is a dialect.**
   
   [ ] Strongly Agree [ ] Mildly agree [ ] Neutral [ ] Mildly Disagree [ ] Strongly Disagree

d. **Ebonics is bad or broken standard English.**
e. Ebonics has its own grammar.

f. Ebonics is cultural and generally spoken by African American families.

g. Ebonics’ historical roots and grammar are strongly African.

h. I can distinguish between standard English speakers and Ebonics speakers by intonation, accent, and/or vocabulary.

i. Generally, African Americans speak or have spoken Ebonics at some point.

j. Generally, African Americans code-switch (speak standard English
instead of Ebonics) when talking to non-African Americans.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

k. African Americans are not the only race that speaks Ebonics.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

2. What do you generally observe regarding Ebonics speakers’ performance in the Composition I classroom?

a. Ebonics poses an educational barrier for Ebonics speaking students.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

b. Generally, students who speak standard English have correct intuitions about the grammaticality of standard English sentences.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

c. Generally, Ebonics speaking students have correct intuition about the grammaticality of standard English sentences.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

d. Generally, Ebonics speaking students already know the most appropriate way to write in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

e. Generally, standard English speaking students already know the most
appropriate way to write in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

f. Generally, Ebonics speaking students already know the most appropriate way to speak in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

g. Generally, standard English speaking students already know the most appropriate way to speak in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

h. I allow Ebonics to be spoken in class.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

i. I encourage Ebonics to be spoken in class.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

j. I allow students to use Ebonics in written assignments.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

k. I encourage students to use Ebonics in written assignments.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree    Strongly Disagree

l. Generally, I can tell the difference between errors made by all beginning
writers and errors exclusively made by Ebonics speaking students.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

m. Generally, I allow English as Second Language students to have more grammatical errors and mistakes in their assignments than Ebonics speakers.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

n. Generally, I spend more time with Ebonics speaking students working on drafts of assignments than with standard English speakers.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3. Accurately describe the training you have received regarding the teaching of writing. Check all that apply.

a. I have had special training in English as a Second Language (ESL)

☐  Undergraduate certificate in ESL
☐  Graduate certificate in ESL
☐  TESOL Endorsement
☐  One ESL class was taken.
☐  Two ESL classes were taken.
☐  Three ESL classes were taken.
☐  Other (Please list): _____________________

b. I have had special training in linguistics. Please check all that apply. If linguistic classes were taken at another university, please check the boxes of equivalent classes. If there is no equivalent, please write the name of the class on the line provided.

☐  Intro Linguistics
☐  Linguistics and Language Arts
c. I have had special training regarding cultural diversity in the classroom

- Special topics class on student cultural diversity
- Special topics class on student urban diversity
- The topic of student cultural diversity was substantially discussed in an education or English class.
- The topic of student urban diversity was substantially discussed in an education or English class.
- Other (Please list): _____________________

4. Accurately describe your preparedness to instruct Ebonics speakers in academic writing.

a. Generally, I feel confident in my ability to teach Ebonics speaking students academic writing.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree     Strongly Disagree

b. General linguistic training may improve my ability to teach Ebonics speaking students academic writing.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree     Strongly Disagree

c. Writing instructors need not be trained in Ebonics.
d. I wish my previous training would have prepared me more to help Ebonics speakers with academic writing.

5. **Accurately describe yourself**

   I am _______years old
   □ Female
   □ Male
   □ Hispanic
   □ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   □ African American
   □ White
   □ Asian
   □ Other; Please list:_________________

   □ A native speaker of Ebonics
   □ A native speaker of English
   □ A native speaker of another language; Please list:_________________

*Date of IRB Approval: August 8, 2013*
*IRB Number: 20130801*
*Project Expiration Date: December 1, 2013*
APPENDIX B

STUDENT LANGUAGE SURVEY

Julie Saternus
IRB #: 20130801

This survey is optional. In no way will the completion of this survey or your answers to this survey be connected to your Composition 111 grade. Keep in mind, the questions on this survey are not necessarily related to the content of your Composition 111 class. A graduate student in the English Department created this survey. By participating in the survey, you consent to your answers being used as research for a master’s thesis.

This survey is intended to gather information regarding previous experiences and future expectations of the incorporation of culture and the use of non-standard English language in the classroom. This survey is also interested in information about your language background and writing skills. Please answer these questions to the best of your knowledge. If you are uncertain about any of the survey items, please place a question mark next to it and move on.

1. What do you think about Ebonics (African American English)?

   a. Ebonics is slang street talk

      [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
      Strongly Agree   Mildly agree   Neutral   Mildly Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   b. Ebonics is a language.

      [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
      Strongly Agree   Mildly agree   Neutral   Mildly Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   c. Ebonics is a dialect.

      [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
      Strongly Agree   Mildly agree   Neutral   Mildly Disagree   Strongly Disagree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Ebonics is bad or broken standard English.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Ebonics has its own grammar.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>Ebonics is a cultural language generally spoken by African American families.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>Ebonics’ historical roots and grammar are strongly African.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h.</td>
<td>I can distinguish between standard English speakers and Ebonics speakers by intonation, accent, and/or vocabulary.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Generally, African Americans speak or have spoken Ebonics at some point.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>Generally, African Americans code-switch (speak standard English instead of Ebonics) when talking to non-African Americans.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
k. African Americans are not the only race that speaks Ebonics.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

2. How do you feel about your writing and speaking abilities?

a. I write the way I speak.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

b. I do NOT feel confident in my writing skills.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

c. I have natural intuition about the grammar of sentences.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

d. Generally, teachers encourage me to write the way I speak.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

e. I have good ideas for writing assignments, but writing is difficult because I am not good at grammar.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

f. Teachers encourage me to speak more formally in class than I would naturally.

Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree
g. I speak differently with my friends than I do in the classroom.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

h. I am a strong code-switcher when I speak. Meaning, I know the most appropriate way to speak in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

i. I am a strong code-switcher when I write. Meaning, I know the most appropriate way to write in a variety of situations, from informal to formal.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

j. Generally, writing teachers spend more time with me than other students.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

k. I am strong at creative writing.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

l. I am strong at academic research writing.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree

m. I can speak more fluently in standard English than Ebonics.

Strongly Agree    Mildly agree    Neutral    Mildly Disagree      Strongly Disagree
n. Teachers judge me negatively based on how I speak.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

o. Teachers judge me negatively based on how I write.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3. Please describe what you have previously learned in your classes.

a. I have been taught about code-switching.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

b. I have been taught about the differences between standard English and Ebonics.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

c. I have been encouraged to bring my cultural heritage into the classroom by teachers or school administration.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

d. I have been taught the importance of cultural diversity.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree

e. I wish I had learned more about code-switching in high school.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Strongly Agree  Mildly agree  Neutral  Mildly Disagree  Strongly Disagree
3. Describe yourself

I am _____ years old

☐ Female
☐ Male

☐ Hispanic
☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
☐ African American
☐ White
☐ Asian
☐ Other; Please list:_______________

☐ A native speaker of Ebonics
☐ A native speaker of English
☐ A native speaker of another language; Please list:_______________

☐ I earned a high school diploma
☐ I earned a GED
☐ I am in post-secondary and have not graduated high school

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Project Expiration Date: December 1, 2013
**APPENDIX C**

**SELECTED RESULTS FROM STUDENT LANGUAGE SURVEYS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ebonics Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Question Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is slang street talk</td>
<td>11.43%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>27.14%</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is a language</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>25.71%</td>
<td>27.14%</td>
<td>18.57%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is a dialect</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>45.71%</td>
<td>27.14%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is bad or broken standard English</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>41.43%</td>
<td>18.57%</td>
<td>12.86%</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics has its own grammar</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>31.43%</td>
<td>24.29%</td>
<td>22.86%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

SELECTED RESULTS FROM FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME FACULTY AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full and Part-time Faculty</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebonics is a language</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow Ebonics to be spoken in class</td>
<td>47.62%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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APPENDIX E

FIGURES

Figure 2.1 "Your Place Here with the Children" Tree Diagram

Figure 2.2 "Your Place Here with the Children" Tree Diagram 2
Figure 2.3 Student use of “license”

Figure 2.4 Standard English use of “license”
NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research Administration
Alum, 811 44521-2162

August 8, 2013

Julie Salaru
8327 Cleveland Avenue NW
North Canton, Ohio 44720

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 201300801 "Critical Language Teaching and Education in the Composition 111 Classroom"

Thank you for submitting your Exemption Request for the referenced study. Your request was approved on August 8, 2013. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Oc: William Thielin - Advisor
Cc: Valantis Calliasis - IRB Chair

☐ Approved consent forms included