This study explored issues related the education of African American students; particularly the usage of Ebonics in writing. This study was designed to explore the effects of an instructional writing program called contrastive analysis (CA) on the Ebonics usage in the African American students. The study included an experimental group who received the CA instruction and a control group. Formal and informal writing assessments were obtained at pre and post test. Both sets of assessments were analyzed for Ebonics features. The results highlights change in Ebonics features from pre to post test including standard scores from pre to post. Limitations with the study are also presented as well as directions for future research.
EXPLORING ISSUES RELATED TO THE EDUCATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: A BRIEF INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WHO USE EBONICS IN THEIR WRITING

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Speech Pathology & Audiology
by
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2005

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Alice Kahn, my committee chairperson, for her guidance and support on this project. Thank you for you time and effort during this last year. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Donna Scarborough and Dr. Denise Baszile, for your time, support, and encouragement. Your contributions to this project are greatly appreciated. Thanks to Mr. Michael R. Hughes for your assistance with the data analysis. Thanks to Jairus Matthews for your assistance with examining the writing samples. I am also grateful to the school that allowed me to conduct my research in your classrooms; this study would not have been possible without you.

To my mother, thank you for your support and wonderful guidance as a Christian woman, your light continues to shine brightly my life. I would not be at this point in my life if it were not for your instruction, hard work, and throughout my life, your tireless commitment to helping my dreams become a reality. You are truly a phenomenal woman.

To Timothy, my future is brighter because you’re in it. Thank you for your patience, support, and most of all your love which motivated me throughout these past two years.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Chris, none of this would be possible with out you, I’m so glad your in my life.
Chapter I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

African American school children are performing more poorly in educational settings than students from virtually every other ethnicity, particularly in the central areas of reading and writing (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999). African American children are left unprepared for postsecondary education and for meeting the demands of a workplace. Generally, differences in the achievement of individual students exist; however, no reasonable explanation can be made for the patterns of differences in achievement among various demographic groups of students. These patterns are often called “achievement gaps” (The Report of the Ohio State Board of Education Closing the Gaps Task Force, 2003). Recently, educators have become exceedingly interested in achievement gaps; especially concerning improvement of instructional methodology for African American children (The Report of the State Board of Education Closing the Gaps Task Force, 2003).

Specifically, researchers, theorists, educators, and linguists, in the last decade, have begun to focus on exploring ways to use Ebonics, the unique language system spoken by many African Americans, as a possible means in attempting to close the achievement gap for these individuals (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Oakland Unified School District, 1997a; Franklin & Hixon, 1999; Fogel & Ehri, 2000).

Ebonics, sometimes referred to as African American English, African American Vernacular English, or Black English, is a systematic and rule-governed linguistic system with highly regular features (ASHA, 1983; Linguistic Society of America, 1997). Some educators believe that when students use Ebonics consistently for academic purposes, Ebonics itself becomes a language barrier to learning (Bountress, G 1994; Foster, M.,1992; Baugh, J, 1999). For children whose home language reflects standard American English the transition to the school environment poses few language problems. However, for many African American children (particularly those from working class families) this is not the situation. Rather, the language spoken in their respective homes represents a language different from standard English. Thus, the transition to the use of unfamiliar
standard English in school settings is rarely completed. Children regardless of ethnicity, will use the language that is familiar, unless explicitly taught to do otherwise, even in academic settings.

Far too many African American children have not acquired sufficient proficiency in standard English to facilitate academic success and career mobility. Ebonics has often been stigmatized by the mainstream society. Yet Ebonics often has currency among peers, family, and community as an acceptable means of communication, especially in informal situations (Taylor, 1997). For this reason, some educators believe that Ebonics can be used as a bridge to teaching standard English to African American children (Smitherman, G., 1999; Taylor, O., 1997; Bountress, N., 1994; Rickford, J., 1999; Perez S., 2000)

Certainly, Ebonics is by no means the universal remedy for all the problems that overwhelm African American students in schools, but Ebonics should be considered as a partial solution (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999).
Purpose of the Study

Sociolinguistic research has had little immediate impact on developing classroom environments, pedagogy, or curricula specifically designed to improve the literacy learning of African American children. Most of the research on instructional applications in the African American community has focused primarily on the code differences between standard English and Ebonics (Foster, 1992). Understanding the subtle differences between the way language is used at home and the way it is used at school is a current critical area in need of research.

This study was designed to explore the effects of a particular instructional writing program called Contrastive Analysis (CA) with culturally and linguistically diverse students. CA is an approach to writing that compares standard English phonological and grammatical features of standard English with those of the child’s home language. The approach is structured so that children can observe how the linguistic features of Ebonics differ from standard English. Researchers, educators, and linguists have indicated that the CA approach is shows promise in aiding culturally and linguistically diverse students improve their writing of standard English (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Oakland Unified School District, 1997a; Franklin & Hixon, 1999; Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Perez, 2000). However, only a small body of research indicating the effectiveness of such a program is currently available (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Harris-Wright, 1999; Taylor, 1989). The purpose of the study was to assist culturally and linguistically diverse subjects in decreasing the amount of Ebonics features in their school writing and to increase the use of standard English features in their school writing using the CA approach.

Educational practices, once identified and understood, can be developed to assist children in learning how, when, and in what instances to use each dialect. This study utilized the CA approach in instructing children who speak Ebonics in home settings and documented changes in standard English by examining written language samples. The present study sought to answer the question if children are taught the difference between Ebonics and standard English will they have less occurrences of Ebonics featured in their writing?; Consequently, improving their academic writing ability. Students were taught throughout the study, similar to the goals of a Bidialectal Program in Dekalb county Georgia (Harris-Wright, 1999): 1) that competence in more than one language or dialect
makes one more effective in communicating with a variety of groups 2) the value of more than one way of communicating 3) that American society values individuals who can use Standard English communication skills in appropriate settings, and 4) the impact upon educational, social, and economic goals of using the vernacular for all situations. This study sought to provide researchers, educators and practitioners a better idea of the educational needs of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Significance of the Problem

In 1996 America’s attention was drawn to Oakland, California where members of the Oakland school board resolved to recognize Ebonics as the primary language of many African American students. The board members recognized that Ebonics differed sufficiently from standard English. Ebonics differed enough to be worthy of further instruction in teaching African American children appropriate use of the academic standard language. The crisis that led Oakland to its radical resolution was the fact that primarily working class African American students were performing more poorly in school than students from virtually every other ethnicity, particularly in the central areas of reading and writing. A comparison of Oakland’s statistics with national statistics on reading and writing demonstrated that this phenomena was not just occurring in Oakland, California, but it was plaguing the entire nation and continues to do so even today.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and linguists have argued in 2005 that Ebonics is different from standard English. However, vernacular language systems are often devalued within societies, even when research indicates their validity. In their 1983 Position Statement on Social Dialects, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) recognized Black English or Ebonics, as a separate social dialect with systematic and highly regular linguistic features. ASHA also recognizes Ebonics as one of many linguistic varieties including standard English, Appalachian English, southern English, New York dialect and Spanish influenced English. Further, ASHA contend that no dialectal variety of English is a disorder or a pathological form of speech or language and that each variety serves a communication function as well as social solidarity function. The Linguistic Society of America (1997) also recognizes Ebonics as a systematic and rule-governed linguistic system.
Ebonics is not a deficient form of English rather a highly systematic linguistic variety of the English language. There is, however debate as to whether Ebonics is truly a language or a dialect. Linguistic, educational, political, social, and historical researchers, would place Ebonics somewhere on a continuum between a “legitimate” language to “merely” a dialect of some “legitimate” language or simply poor grammar and lazy English; with either end being the more extreme.

Linguists often avoid questions as to whether Ebonics is a language or a dialect, According to the 1997 Linguistic Society of America resolution the answer often depends on sociohistorical and political considerations rather than linguistic ones (Rickford, 1997). Despite these considerations, most linguists agree that Ebonics is more of a dialect of English than a separate language. Linguists believe Ebonics is more of a dialect since it shares most of its vocabulary and many other features with other informal varieties of American English, and because speakers can understand and be understood by speakers of most other American English dialects. At the same time, Ebonics is one of the most distinctive varieties of American English that differs from Standard English, the educated standard, in a number of ways (Rickford, 1997).

The Bidialectal Program in Dekalb County School System in Georgia has been operating for more than 10 years. This program teaches mainstream English and school communication skills to students who speak Ebonics without devaluing the language skills that they learn at home (Harris-Wright, 1999). Funding for this program has come from Federal Title I program. Federal Title 1 funds are also used for other students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, including speakers of vernacular dialects and students who have exited ESL programs (Adger, C.T. Christian, D. & Taylor, O., 1999, p. 56).

The Oakland Unified School District in California adopted a policy statement on January 21, 1997 that included a statement saying that all African American pupils who are assessed and identified as limited English Proficient (LEP) in all relevant district documents and included in all grant applications as LEP shall receive all LEP entitlements (Task Force on Educating African American Students, 1997). These entitlements are the same ones provided to bilingual and all other language different children who are also provided general funds for bilingual education, ESL and State and
Federal (Title VIII) Bilingual Education programs to address their limited and non-English proficient (LEP/NEP) needs (Oakland Unified School District, 1997b). Oakland considers Ebonics as a separate language from English and explicitly states it in their 1997 Resolution Statement on Ebonics.

One of the previously listed programs considers Ebonics a dialect and the other program considers Ebonics a “legitimate” language. Both programs are receiving federal funds. Both programs are addressing the significant academic needs in the African American community.

Despite conflicting opinions about Ebonics, two facts remain: 1) many African American children speak a variety of English that differs from Standard English and, 2) competence in Standard English is a critical aspect of academic achievement (Taylor, 1998). Ebonics did not become an issue to the Oakland school board because of linguistic interests, but because of the acute educational problems affecting African American students in their district, and the sense that taking the children’s vernacular into account might help to alleviate such problems.

Standard English is the linguistic variety used by the United States government, the mass media, business, education, science, and the arts. Therefore, someone who wishes to become upwardly mobile will use standard English to communicate effectively in an educational setting, in the job market, and in social settings. Essentially, mastery of standard English is paramount to the success of an individual in this society (Franklin & Hixon, 1999; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Students who develop communicative competence know how and when to use African American English and when to use standard English. Students with communicative competence also learn when to switch from one code; the language of the school, to another; the language of the home or community, whenever the need arises. Many students never succeed in learning standard English as a second way of speaking. Perceiving and learning the differences between syntactic, semantic, and phonological features that distinguish Ebonics from standard English are difficult tasks for some speakers. Speakers of Ebonics may require formal, explicit instruction in order to learn standard English.

Success of African American students, particularly those from working class families, is not solely dependent on standard English acquisition. Factors such as good
educational facilities, current educational resources, and appropriate funding also play a part. Rickford (1999) states that jails where the majority of the inmate population is African American generally have better facilities, resources and funding than schools whose primary population is African American students. Educational funding for some public schools is often tied to local property taxes. The best schools tend to be well funded, with high levels of parental involvement and consistent leadership; the worst schools tend to have fewer financial resources, and little in the way of coherent leadership, often with minimum parental involvement or support (Baugh, 1999). While these nonlinguistic components are not the focus of this study, they are factors that need to be considered during any discussion concerning the education of African American students.

Because of the evidence that schools are failing massive numbers of African American students with existing methods, Rickford (1999) mentions that it would be counterproductive and offensive to continue using the current educational methods without critically evaluating them. Clearly the school and classroom practices that do work for African American students are those that build on the students’ existing language resources and that teach from a linguistic philosophy of bidialectalism. But in order for such language pedagogy to thrive; teachers need training in language diversity. Teachers do not have to speak Ebonics or any other vernacular language in order to teach standard English. However, it is desirable for them to understand the rules of these systems if they are to use them as bridges to teach standard English (Bountress, 1994). Teachers today are facing and increasingly diverse population with regard to linguistic characteristics. Teachers must understand the conflicts intrinsic in the issue of language differences and the current consensus among sociolinguists and SLPs.

For most mainstream students, following the implicit rules for communication at school is easy. For many African American students and other culturally and linguistically diverse students, the pattern of communication inherent in school success may be unfamiliar, because these rules and communicative routines have not been part of their previous socio-cultural experience. Teachers may misanalyze students’ school work if they are unaware of how African American students’ communication style may affect
school performance (Harris-Wright, 1999). The effect of this could lead to misdiagnoses, academic difficulties, and possibly school failure for the student.

Classroom language practices must concentrate on using an Ebonics program that is designed to move students from the language they bring to school to English proficiency. Traditionally, Ebonics speakers have been taught standard English through the eradication of vernacular features or no intervention at all. Many educators do recognize that Ebonics is a product of the students’ culture; however, many educators are not familiar with methods specifically designed to use Ebonics as a facilitating language for educational purposes. Frequently, the choice the educator makes is to do nothing at all.

Language is a tool by which people measure level of intelligence, social or educational status, and one’s promotability in society (Franklin & Hixon, 1999). Those who speak in standard English, “the prestige dialect”, are less likely to be criticized or stigmatized by the public. On the other hand, users of a non-standard dialect especially if the users are members of a minority group that is already socially stigmatized are more likely to be criticized for their dialect (Franklin & Hixon, 1999). Proficiency in standard English is necessary to achieving upward mobility in the American society. However, while many children are succeeding in the American educational system, many children, particularly African American, are being left behind. Programs based upon sound theoretical foundations aimed at improving literacy and learning in African American children need to be developed in order to improve the educational predicament faced by many Ebonics speaking communities. As previously noted, Ebonics speakers who are bidialectal, that is, those who also have command of the standard or mainstream variety, will be able to compete in the professional job market and have a better chance of educational success; However, it should also be noted that acquisition of language mastery is not the only way to achieve upward mobility in this society it is however very key to the transition (Richardson, 2003).

The purpose of this study, in spite of the fact that some may view Ebonics as a language or a dialect, was to highlight the significant achievement gap between African American students and mainstream students and to examine a particular instructional program that could aid in closing this gap.
Chapter II
Review of the Literature

The Writing Abilities of African American Children

When looking at studies of literacy and language learning, reading is often the most common topic of interest, presumably because most people spend more time reading than writing. Even so, writing is of crucial importance in both the early stages and the long-term development of literacy. Data-based research on writing development in African American children and youth is sparse; although it is known that writing in the African American child generally develops in the same manner as other children of different ethnicities within the United States (Scott & Rogers, 1996). However, the transition from emergent to conventional writing may be more difficult for children speaking Ebonics, particularly because the beginning stages of spelling are more closely tied to speech. Therefore, children who speak Ebonics have additional dialect related spelling and pronunciation differences to learn. If a student is unable to spell and write at acceptable levels he or she is at a much greater risk for dropping out of school. If a poor writer manages to graduate from high school, he or she faces continuous risk whether they pursue more education or enter the work force (Scott & Rogers, 1996). Regardless of their speaking skills, children and adolescents who have difficulty spelling, forming grammatical sentences, and organizing texts for particular audiences will be at a serious disadvantage in the academic setting.

Researchers have indicated that the appropriate period for teaching standard English may occur during second and third grades because children between the ages of 6 and 8 show significant decline in dialectal feature use (Scott & Rogers, 1996). In addition, educators recognize that typically developing children learn to speak without aid of formal instruction, but few children learn to write without direct assistance. All students need support with writing, but many African American students need additional assistance because Ebonics and academic discourse exhibit greater linguistic discrepancies than exist between spoken standard English and standard academic writing (Bountress, 1994).
Examining the How Ebonics Affects Writing

Cronnell (1984) examined the influence of Ebonics in the writing of third- and sixth-grade African American students. The study used a set of narrative writing samples produced by third and sixth-grade students as part of an end-of-year assessment in a large school district in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Subjects included 99 third graders and 68 sixth graders.

Errors in the students' writing were analyzed and the results were as follows: The students in the third grade had a total of 550 errors and 39% were considered to have possible influences from Ebonics; the students in the sixth grade had a total of 437 errors and 33% were considered to have possible influences from Ebonics. Categories of errors were: verbs, nouns, and syntax. The largest category of errors was related to verb formation and use. A major problem was the lack of third person singular –s or –es in the present tense (e.g. “the elephant look” rather than “the elephant looks”). Another major area was the lack of –ed on past tense verbs and on past participles. For example, many third graders wrote, “the monkey name Bounce” instead of “the monkey named Bounce”. The use of be also created some problems, particularly for third graders, who frequently used was for were and is for are. Only one case of invariant be was in some sentences. (Mork be talking). Error related to nouns were in the form of the lack of the plural –s and lack of possessive –'s. The major syntactic problem (excluding noun and verb errors) was the Ebonics use of a for an. Consonant errors included omission of the last consonant in final consonant clusters; e.g., pon for pond and omission of the final consonant was most frequent in and, which was spelled an and in fine for fin. Vowel misspellings that could be attributed to dialect pronunciation were rare.

The results of this study suggest that a significant portion of the writing errors made by these third and sixth grade black children can be attributed to Ebonics influence, either directly or through hypercorrections. Some papers with few or no errors were short, simple, and dull. Some papers with many errors were lengthy, complex, and interesting.

One limitation of the study was the fact that samples of the student’s spoken English were unavailable for comparison with their written compositions, although there was no reason to believe that they did not speak Ebonics. The writing samples studied
were on different topics, which placed different linguistic demands on the writers. Consequently, the data for the two grade levels cannot be compared. The specific topics for the writing samples influenced the structures used by students and writing samples were produced under test conditions not under natural spontaneous circumstances.

Ball (1996) performed a study with a primary purpose to examine how students used Ebonics in their writing. The subjects included four 11th and 12th grade students who were all a part of a college preparatory English class during this one-year study. Three of four students described themselves as bidalectal. The 4th student stated that he primarily used Ebonics to communicate with others.

Throughout the year, the students wrote papers on various topics or themes such as an essay on Ralph Waldo Emerson and two informal letters. Five text samples from each student were included in this study. The researcher (A.F. Ball), with a unique knowledge of culturally influenced discourse, analyzed the texts for how some Ebonics speaking students have successfully utilized the language of their everyday lives, within the context of their expository writing. She outlined some of the strategies commonly seen in the students writing such as: using repetition to create formulaic patterning, using interactive dialogue with the audience with phrases like “you know what I mean, man”, and using common African American idioms that assume mutual understanding based on similar cultural experiences.

Farr & Janda (1985) explored the connection between oral and written language in one college-level basic-writing African American student. Difficulties in writings could occur because the writer may inappropriately use features from their oral language in their written language. The goal of this study was to determine if aspects of orality or literacy help to explain why students in basic writing classes have difficulty writing effectively.

Farr & Janda collected several excerpts from this student’s oral and written language and analyzed them. The student’s oral language showed that he used a number of characteristic features of Ebonics. Orally, the student in the study used high numbers of two Ebonics phonological features and one Ebonics syntactic feature, but very low occurrences of two other Ebonics syntactic features. The most frequent Ebonics feature was final consonant cluster reduction (I was very confuse-) and post vocalic –r absence (I
remember- we had to go). The results should be interpreted with caution because the information was gathered in a formal situation with his composition professor. It is possible that the use of Ebonics may have been increased if this had been a less formal situation with someone from his home or community. This may indicate that in formal contexts his language use is more standard, a desirable goal for many teachers. Two conclusions were made about his oral language: 1) he includes a significant number of Ebonics features in his linguistic repertoire, and second, that in ‘school’ contexts he retains the phonology of Black English but shifts to a more standard English grammar. This is not surprising, in view of the fact that phonology seems to be less subject to conscious control than grammar. When his writing was analyzed there were almost no occurrences of Ebonics and the authors stated that his writing evidenced many ‘literate’ characteristics, i.e. devices which have been found to be typical of written English. However, other significant problems in his writing were present that appeared unrelated with his Ebonics speaking status.

The previous studies mentioned were more descriptive types of research. All of the studies examined writing in Ebonics speaking students but the main purpose was to characterize the type of features and styles observed in the writing of Ebonics speakers. The present study was designed differently than the other studies. The present study implemented an instructional program, collected a writing sample and examined the writing samples because of the program.

Unlike other studies, the present study only examined one grade level. This study included a larger group of participants and did not analyze creative writing. Instead, emphasis was to be on specific Ebonics features of grammar, phonology, and syntax. Some aspects of each of these studies were included in the present study. Specific modifications and/or differences were in the current study were: 1) inclusion of elementary school subjects 2) the specific examination of researcher’s writing 3) distinction between Ebonics and standard English as “home” and school language or formal and informal language respectively and, 4) the shorter amount of time of writing intervention length as well as the length of the study was shorter.
Using Ebonics as a Bridge to Teaching Students to Write in Standard English

Contrastive Analysis used as a method of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse populations, mainstream language use which is based upon the concept of bidialectalism (Bountress, 1994). The goal of the method is to teach standard English through a graduated series of exercises that incorporate contrastive techniques (Bountress, 1994). This approach compares standard English phonological and grammatical features with those of the child’s language and is structured so that children can observe how their linguistic features differ from those of standard English.

Feigenbaum (1970) originally developed the concept of CA and he includes various exercises and phases to the approach. The initial or the preparatory phase, requires careful assessment of the grammatical and phonological features of the child’s speech and language for identifying targets for contrastive analysis. Feigenbaum believes that this analysis is best conducted by an SLP or other clinician with a strong background in the areas of language variation and development. Sampling of the child’s language should focus upon the use of formal tests of grammar and phonology, as well as the elicitation of imitated and informal spontaneous utterances. The next three phases of the approach allow the student to practice discriminating between their dialect and the standard dialect with in various contexts: at the word level, within sentences, and making distinctions as to whether stimuli are representative of home or school language. The next phase of contrastive analysis involves a series of translation drills where students would translate (using one feature at a time) their dialect to the standard dialect. The last phase of this approach is the response drill exercises. Stimuli can be in the student’s dialect or in the standard dialect and the students would be required to negate teacher’s stimuli with a dialectically consistent response. Because the focus of the current study was on written language, the last phase of the CA approach was not included in this study.

This type of approach can provide the child with an opportunity to observe his or her own linguistic features but also can create an appreciation of the consistency of those features. When employed by the sensitive and knowledgeable teacher, these activities can do much to provide the language different child with a tool for survival and success in the middle-class school setting (Bountress, 1994).
Many agree that this approach has value. However one drawback of the approach is that the type of drills used in the method may be repetitive and therefore boring for students. Also, limited empirical research exists on the success of the approach, and many of the reports on contrastive analysis are outdated, summarizing studies from much earlier periods.

The following, are examples of various programs, schools, and research studies that may have utilized the contrastive analysis approach or similar bidialectal approach when teaching Ebonics speaking children standard English.

The Bidialectal Program in Dekalb county Georgia since 1987 has been operating a program to teach standard English and school communication skills to students without devaluing the language skills learned from home. The program is made available through Title I, and is coordinated with the language arts and reading program. Students in the program learn that communication is sensitive to the relationship of the speakers, the purpose for speaking, and the context for communicating. An SLP trains the teachers on the various approaches.

During the explicit teaching, teachers give clear directives and concrete examples. Questions are encouraged from students. The contrastive analysis approach is utilized to developing students’ explicit awareness of mainstream phonology and syntax. Students examine words and phrases that contrast minimally (“She done been here” versus “She has been here”) and go on to develop minimal pairs from their reading (Harris-Wright, 1999). Students examine examples of syntactic forms that may contrast between dialects and that occur on standardized tests.

Another program is in the Detroit Public School System at the heart of the inner city for Ebonics speaking students; students learned Swahili and standard English all while recognizing and legitimizing the student’s native Ebonics. Results from the first assessment of this program in Detroit Public Schools effectiveness, done in 1994 by an independent evaluation agency, indicated that the Academy had more than met the Superintendents criterion for continued self-governance, namely that within the 3 years at least 75% of the students had scored at or above grade level on the California Achievement Test (Smitherman, 1999).
Perez (2000) discusses the various contrastive techniques outlined by Feigenbaum that were used with a group of Ebonics speaking children. Perez reports that each one of these methods seems to be very promising in the instruction standard English with these children enrolled in a CA program.

Hanni Taylor’s 1989 book entitled *Standard English, Black English, and Bidialectism: A controversy*, reported results of trying to improve the standard English writing of inner city university students from Chicago using two methods. The experimental group brought to the students’ attention the subtle differences between Ebonics and standard English through contrastive analysis, and tailored pattern practice drills. The control group simply followed “traditional English teaching techniques.” After nearly three months of instruction, the experimental group showed a 59% reduction in the use of Ebonics features in their standard English writing, while the control group, using traditional methods, showed a slight increase (8.5%) in the use of Ebonics features.

Ball (1994) completed a study based on Torrey (1972) an experimental study to investigate the correlation between language and educational achievement. The first part of Ball’s study was a replication of Torrey’s study. A spontaneous speech subtest was gathered that lasted approximately half an hour with two students at a time taking the test. The students were asked questions about their school, play and television. The students also played games and listened to a tape recorder. Some of the inhibitions to which Torrey referred were reduced in the replication study because, as an African American researcher, experienced classroom teacher, and bidialectal speaker of Ebonics and standard English, A.F. Ball, was able to establish an early and comfortable rapport with the students. The researchers were examining the children’s use of four /-s/ morphemes. The speech sample the context cue subtest and the picture meaning subtest were all designed to examine the student’s surface use of the morphemes. The purpose of the instructional program was to aid children in bringing the sibilant morphemes to their level of consciousness and not to replace their Ebonics speaking patterns with standard English forms.

An Explicit instructional program was completed which lasted about 30 min each, at approximately 1-week intervals for five weeks. First the researcher clearly identified the morpheme under study. She then explicitly explained the rules for using the
morpheme: “we usually added add /s/ when there is more than one”. Lastly, the application component of the program consisted of the children having the opportunity to practice responding with the target morpheme on a worksheet. The instruction took place in a regular classroom setting taught the usage of plural, possessive, singular verb inflection, present tense verb, and copula. Posttesting took place during week eight with students in pairs.

The second part of the study consisted of literature-based instructional program designed to target the same morphemes just through a literature based approach. Books were read to a different group of students during the 30 min sessions at one week intervals for five weeks; similar to the group that received explicit instruction. Six pieces of age appropriate children’s multicultural and African American literature were used for teaching the four morphemes. Findings revealed that the explicit instructional approach was most useful when teaching some morphological concepts but a literature-based instructional approach was most useful when teaching others (Ball, 1994).

The final study, performed by Fogel and Ehri (2000) examined how to structure dialect instruction to teach standard English forms to students who use Ebonics in their writing. Training occurred over two sessions totaling about 60 minutes. In the training procedures students were instructed to rewrite sentences in their “correct grammatical form” or to write a paragraph or respond to a question using the “correct grammatical form” The children understood these directions in reference to written grammatical forms that were consistent with the rules that had been taught, illustrated, and practiced in the classroom. A translation task, using Ebonics sentences, was also utilized. The students were told that the printed sentences contained a variety of written grammatical errors and asked to rewrite them in the correct form. Further, the students were asked to rate their ability to create correct sentences and stories using correct grammatical forms (via self-efficacy rating at certain points during the study). Three groups were outlined: 1) exposure to text 2) exposure to text plus explicit instruction in strategies depicting the rules of standard English and 3) exposure to text, standard English strategy instruction, and guided practice and feedback in the use of such strategies to transform Ebonics to standard English. The results suggested that students who were given instruction did not perform better than those who were not given instruction. Therefore, little value in
explaining the strategies exists if the student is not given an opportunity to practice. Group 3, the group that received exposure to text, standard English strategy instruction, and guided practice and feedback in the use of such strategies to transform Ebonics to standard English, showed the most improvement. The self-efficacy ratings for Group 3 were the highest at the pretest and lowest in the posttest. The researchers noted that providing students with an opportunity to practice and monitor the use of standard English forms in writing resulted in a more realistic, albeit decreased sense of their writing self-efficacy than was manifested in the ratings of the other two groups (Fogel & Ehri, 2000). Also receiving negative feedback revealing the presence of writing “errors” during the practice period may have eroded student self-confidence. The feedback may be beneficial because it may represent an important step in the self-regulation process. The researchers also discussed that some may fault the study design because skills were taught and then immediately tested. Increased awareness may have heightened the student’s awareness of the responses the researchers were looking for. Increased awareness is valuable because you want students to monitor their writing behavior. Making the students more aware is an accomplishment because it is very likely this could be and essential first step to teaching students to write in standard English.

Perez (2000) mentioned numerous ways to teach children who use Ebonics standard English writing however, little research on efficacy exists. The current study hopes to provide a stronger foundation to support the efficacy of such techniques. Taylor (1989), Ball (1994), and Fogel & Ehri (2000) all utilized a method of contrastive analysis in their research studies. However, Taylor’s study included university students as his subjects. The design of his study consisted of an experimental group who received the contrastive analysis instruction and a control group who received the traditional methods of English instruction. The present study differed from Taylor’s because it consisted of one elementary school classroom who only received instruction on contrastive analysis and a control classroom did not. The current study was a between-subject design. On the other hand, the subjects in Ball’s study were elementary school students however; the focus was on a different more specific set of Ebonics features than those that will be targeted in this study. Like Taylor, Ball also used a between-subject design in her study but used a literature-based approach to teaching the targets to the control group. The last
study by Fogel & Ehri, (2000) included elementary school subjects, was a between group
design, and differed from the other studies in that this study had three groups instead of
two. The groups in this study differed by the amount of assistance they were provided
when learning the standard English targets.

The last two studies mentioned nothing about the idea of a home and school
language or any type of education on linguistic differences. This idea was not mentioned
in Taylor’s study because the subjects were college level students and was probably
already aware of various linguistic differences among individuals. All of the studies
examined some aspect of the written language patterns of Ebonics speaking individuals in
an attempt to decrease Ebonics features for academic purposes. Comparable to the
previously mentioned studies, the present study continued to explore using a contrastive
analysis approach to modify Ebonics speakers writing in the school setting.

The previously mentioned programs and studies have demonstrated successful
methods of teaching Ebonics speaking children standard English. The Bidialectal
Program in Dekalb county Georgia and the Educational program in the Detroit Public
School System have recognized the educational needs in the African American
community and have developed outstanding curricula to meet those needs. In a sense, the
present study sought to provide supporting data for continued development of programs
such as these across the United States, in other cities where there is a need for standard
English proficiency programs.
Chapter III

Method

Participants

The study was conducted at an urban elementary school in southwestern Ohio. A total of 24 elementary school students from two 3rd grade classrooms participated in the study. There were only two third grade classrooms in the school. One classroom was designated as the experimental classroom (n=12). The other classroom was a control (n=12). Each class has an enrollment of more than 12 students; however, several students were excluded from the dataset either because: 1) they did not meet the minimum criteria of being an African American who used Ebonics in their writing, or 2) they were not present throughout the entire program. Regarding inclusion procedures for child’s data— all children were asked to participate, none were singled out for potential stigmatization because of race or speech characteristics. Each class was randomly selected to be the experimental or the control group. Parental consent was required from all students participating in the intervention regardless of background.

This school has a student population of approximately 70% African American. Although there was a possibility that all of the students in the classroom may not be have been African American, only the students who were African American and who have used Ebonics features in their writing samples were included in the research data.

Procedures

After the obtaining consent for each child’s participation in the study, the researcher administered a hearing screening for students in the experimental classroom. To qualify for participation, each student in the had to a) pass an audiological screening bilaterally at 25 dB across 1000, and 2000 Hz and b) be speakers or Ebonics. Again, there were only two third grade classes in the school therefore the second third grade classroom was by design, the control. All of the students in the classroom passed the hearing screening, however all of the students were not Ebonics speakers.

A writing sample was obtained to examine for Ebonics characteristics. This writing sample also served as the informal pretest. Both the experimental group and the control group completed the informal pretest. Both groups of the study were prompted to write about a story they had read in one of their reading books (a story about a spider).
All subjects of the study participated in the exercise regardless of a possible non-Ebonics speaker status. Each class had approximately 15 minutes to respond. The writing samples

Each group was also given a standardized written language measure, the Oral and Written Language Scales, (OWLS; Woolfolk, 1995) to further examine their writing abilities for informational purposes. This measure also served as the formal pretest. This measure was scored by the examiner. The assessment was also coded for Ebonics with the same graduate student using the previously mentioned criterion. This measure was administered each class; the administration time was about 15 minutes. After both the informal and formal writing measures, the experimental group participated in the teaching sessions that were designed to target the three most common Ebonics features observed in their writing samples. There were a total of 37 Ebonics features observed in their writing samples as a group. The control group did not participate in the intervention. The investigator did not attempt to influence their language or writing in any way, they only participated in the posttests after the teaching sessions were complete. After the teaching sessions, both the experimental and control group participated in the posttest which consisted of an informal writing assignment similar to the informal pretest writing assignment and a formal writing assessment, the Oral and Written Language Scales, (OWLS; Woolfolk, 1995).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most common Ebonics forms used in pretest writing samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject-Verb Agreement                                  42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Tense                                              63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural                                                  28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table shows the percentage of the 37 total features that was represented by each form.

*Teaching Sessions.* Three teaching sessions were conducted over a two week period, lasting for approximately 20 minutes each: 15 minutes to teach the methods and 5 minutes to practice. The sessions were restricted to a short duration to prevent boredom
and to effectively use the allotted class time, as the subjects of the study still needed to continue with their regular studies. The researcher utilized the prearranged class time by each teacher. The experimental classroom received instruction regarding the differences between home and school language and the contrastive features as well as received instruction on how to create sentences for different individuals in those particular setting. The examiner focused on these Ebonics forms listed in Table 1. Some instructional materials were gathered from various speech and language resources and were used to teach appropriate use of Ebonics forms in the school setting (Noven, 1997; Simms, 2004; DeNinno & Gill, 2002). The only distinction made between the types of English was that one type is appropriate for home (informal) and one is appropriate for school (formal). Throughout the sessions, the researcher continued to emphasize the fact that differences can be good; it is good to have different ways of speaking to different individuals, and the importance of communicating appropriately in specific situations. Through personal examples, the researcher told the students that she uses Ebonics as a way of communicating with her family and friends but in the school environment, with teachers and for school work she uses a different way of communicating her ideas. By emphasizing and validating all types of communication styles, the researcher presented a positive message regarding their home culture and language. A variety of communication styles are appropriate and at no time during the study was the term bad be used. The focus was on identifying appropriate ways of reading, writing, and speaking in the public schools. Through writing and classroom discussion, subjects also practiced distinguishing between home and school language. Other examples were be used to stress the idea of using different ways of speaking with different individuals and in different environments. For example; talking with a friend then speaking with a religious leader, or speaking to a newborn baby and then speaking to a sibling. Through writing and classroom discussion, the students also practiced distinguishing between home and school language. At the end of the teaching sessions, each child received a posttest writing assignment similar to the pretest writing assignment and was reminded to use the school language when writing. A final reassessment took place using the OWLS during a fourth session within the two week time period. The control group also took both the informal and formal posttests.
Experimental Design

The type of research that was conducted in this study was Experimental Research. Independent Variables included the pre and post tests writing samples. The Dependent Variables included the scores on the pre and post tests and the Ebonics features in the pre and post writing samples. Since the study consists of an experimental group receiving treatment and a control group not receiving treatment the design of this study is a between-subjects design. The control group was only administered the pretests and the posttests with no intervention from the researchers in between the tests.

Research Hypotheses

As a result of the contrastive analysis instruction program, the students will have fewer occurrences of the targeted Ebonics features in their posttest writing samples. Question: Did the students have fewer occurrences of the targeted Ebonics features?

Data Gathering

Data consisted of results from the audiological screening using an audiometer; Standard scores from the formal pretests and posttests using the Oral and Written Language Scales, (OWLS; Woolfolk, 1995); Examples of the Ebonics features in the pretest and posttest writing samples using the information on Ebonics forms consistently used by previous researchers (Washington & Craig, 2002; Dandy, 1991; Jackson & Roberts, 2001).

Statistical Analysis

To decide whether or not there was a significant mean difference between the two classrooms on the OWLS, a Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive Statistics were used to analyze the formal measures with regard to the evidence of Ebonics features exhibited in the pretest and the posttest for each group. The informal pretest and posttest are also represented by descriptive statistics for each group.
Chapter IV

Results

Inferential Statistics

The OWLS scores were reported with two standard scores per each participant: 1) and age standard score and 2) a grade standard score. A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical comparison shows that (p=.05); within each group, with regard to the age standard school, there was no significant difference in the mean standard grade score from pretest to posttest, estimates of mean change from pretest to posttest for the control group (M=2.33) with a standard error of change in mean from pretest to posttest of (2.35), p=.33. The experimental group had an estimate of mean change from pretest to posttest of (M=-1.75) with a standard error of change in mean from pretest to posttest of (2.35), p=0.46. With respect to the grade standard score the results are similar: There was no significant difference in the mean the mean standard grade score from pretest to posttest, estimates of mean change from pretest to posttest for the control group (M=2.25) with a standard error of change in mean from pretest to posttest of (2.33), p=.0.34. The experimental group had an estimate of mean change from pretest to posttest of (M=-1.50) with a standard error of change in mean from pretest to posttest of (2.33), p=0.52. Moreover, when using a repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare mean change that occurred between the control group to the mean change that occurred in the experimental group from pretest to posttest there was no significant effect, F(1, 22)=1.50, p=.233.

Descriptive Statistics

With respect to examining Ebonics features; three features were examined during pretest and posttest, 1) subject-verb agreement (SVA) 2) plural and 3) past tense (PST). There were 12 participants in each group. Each student had 12 opportunities to exhibit each Ebonics feature throughout his or her test. For example, there were 12 items on the test, each item was examined for SVA, plural, and PST. Potentially, a student could have had each feature in all of his or her answers (Item 1=1 SVA, 1 Plural, 1 PST; Item 2=1 SVA, 1 Plural, 1 PST, etc.). Since there were 12 items and each feature was only counted one time for each item (even if it occurred more than once per item) that student would have a total of 12 SVA features, 12 plural features, and 12 PST features for the entire
test. Therefore, for an entire group, either control or experimental there would be 144 opportunities for each feature to be exhibited. See Table 2 below for Ebonics features results.

Table 2  
*Frequency of Ebonics features on the OWLS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pretest-Feature</th>
<th>Posttest-Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SVA</td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Each feature has the possibility of being exhibited 144 times per group.

The fact that each group had a total of 144 “opportunities” to utilize each Ebonics feature as a whole, the results show that their use of Ebonics features is extremely minimal throughout the pretest and the posttest.

Informal tests were simply used as measure to determine which Ebonics features students were using in their writing.

Table 3  
*Frequency of Ebonics features on the informal writing assignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pretest-Feature</th>
<th>Posttest-Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SVA</td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the informal measures indicate the frequency of features for the groups as a whole. In the pretest students were asked to write about story they had read previously in class. The posttest writing assignment was to write about their future goals.
Using the Contrastive Analysis (CA) approach, this study was designed to assist Ebonics’ speaking children in decreasing the amounts of dialectal features exhibited in their school writing. As noted in the results there was no significant change from pretest to posttest in the experimental group. As evidenced in the results the control group and the experimental group results in fact look about the same. The results are so close that one cannot discern whether the intervention really made a difference or not. There is not enough evidence to say that the intervention was not unsuccessful nor can a statement be made to say that it was. The main reason that the success of the program cannot be measured is that there were only twenty-four students who participated in the study. The ability to detect results that are real relies on the evidence. In this case there was not enough evidence to state that there was really an effect or not. Future studies of this nature would seek to include a sample size larger that twenty-four.

Sample Characteristics and Ebonics Usage

The participants sampled may not truly represent the overall population being studied. Many individuals who use Ebonics are African-Americans from working class backgrounds. This is not to say that other African Americans from different backgrounds don’t use Ebonics, it is just more commonly spoken in this population. Therefore, this school was chosen because it is in an urban school district, all of the students were on the free lunch program, and 70% of the students are African American. However, upon observing the Ebonics feature results from the formal pretest, it is evident that neither classroom exhibited large amounts of Ebonics features initially (see Table 2). Prior to beginning study the classroom teachers reported that overall, many of their students had difficulty with various Ebonics features in their school writing. Scott & Rogers (1996) reported that the appropriate period for teaching standard English might occur during second and third grades because children between the ages of six and eight show significant decline in dialectal feature use. Many of these children were between the ages 8 and 11 although they were in the third grade and they may have been experiencing this decline in dialectal features in their writing. It may be helpful for future research to focus on understanding the type and frequency of dialectal features produced by second
through fourth grade and attempt to understand why this change may occur and to understand the factors that contribute to the change. The school setting itself may have contributed to the outcome of this study; this school district was ranked as the best urban school district in the state of Ohio (New Ohio Institute, 2000) and 90% of the students in the 4th grade were at or above the proficient level in writing during the 2002-03 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2002-03) It appears that this school is doing an adequate job of meeting the needs of its students regardless of the background of the students. Further, the families of the students may be involved in their child’s education. In essence there could be a number of factors that contribute to the success of this school. It is important for researchers to be aware of information about the school/home involvement. Further, a thorough screening of Ebonics should be performed in order to be certain that the sample studied is a true representation of the population.

Another aspect to note about the Ebonics features that were observed in the posttest with the experimental group were that many of the specific past tense errors were not related to what was taught in the intervention. For example, in the intervention the irregular PST was not target nor was the practice of adding –d to the end of a word that ended in “e” such as “practice(d). Only the regular exact PST errors that occurred were: dress(ed) (once), practice(d) (six times), turn(ed) (once), and blew. Although this still does not make significant difference compared to the amount that could have be exhibited it is worth stating.

The informal tests simply served as a means to determine what types of Ebonics features the students were using in less structured writing. The children were to write one paragraph for each sample, pretest and posttest. Extensive variability in the length of the students’ samples was obtained. For instance, some students wrote one sentence, other students wrote an entire page. Therefore, accurate comparisons of the students writing or changes in Ebonics features as a result of the intervention were difficult to determine. Characteristically, the longer the sample the greater the opportunity for an Ebonics feature to be used; In shorter the samples the probability of Ebonics use decreases.

Another aspect related to the informal samples was that different writing styles were required for each sample. In the first sample, the students were instructed to provide factual information about a spider studied in class and in the second sample, students
were instructed to write about a future event. Characteristically, the nature of the two samples required different grammatical and linguistic forms. For example, the writing sample obtained that describes what they want to be when they grow up, past tense forms are less likely to appear in the sample.

For future studies, researchers should consider establishing better controls for the length of each sample so that less variability in the amount of writing provided by the subjects occurs. Consequently, better comparisons could be made about the samples. The style of writing should also be similar throughout the program so that similar linguistic forms can be observed throughout the study and statement of the effectiveness of the program could possibly be made.

**Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) Administration**

The OWLS was used as the formal measure to evaluate change in Ebonics features on a standardized measure, it was not necessarily used to determine if their standard score would improve. All of the students in each class scored average to above average for the age and grade standard score. The administration rules of the OWLS states that if it appears that the items are very easy for a student it is appropriate to move on to more difficult items (Woolfolk, 1995). The researcher just used the section of the test that was most appropriate for the age range and grade included in the study. Again, the OWLS was used as a measure simply to observe Ebonics feature use on a standardized test. The students were not penalized for their dialectal answers with regard to the included information in the statistical analysis. Subject-Verb agreement was considered an error on this test so the students who utilized the SVA Ebonics feature in their writing had their tests re-scored. There were not enough errors in the students’ scores to reanalyze the entire data set and the difference in their raw scores were on average about 2 points. This did not greatly alter their standard scores either as an increase or a decline. The change did not appear as if it would make a statistical significance either way. However, for the purposes of reporting all the data the adjustments in scores for select students, are listed in Table 4.
### Table 4

*Adjustment of scores with regard to Ebonics features*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject and Group</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade SS</td>
<td>Age SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>114</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>102</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SS means Standard Score most of the raw scores were one or two points different from the score previous score.

It appears that the OWLS does not take into account dialectal features. The examiners manual makes no mention of cultural diversity and how to score responses based on language or dialectal differences. Clinicians should be knowledgeable about cultural and linguistic diversity and consider these variables when evaluating a student from a different background. Penalizing a student for a dialectal difference and counting it as incorrect or defining it, as a disorder even in written language is unethical. Clinicians should possess general knowledge about culturally and linguistically diverse students especially if they are serving this population.

**Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) Scoring**

In the scoring section of the OWLS, the authors provided examples of common errors. However, one must ask if this is a conclusive list and if it is not, what other
information can one draw from so that we are accurately rate the child’s writing abilities? What is the clinician relying on to make distinctions? Could it depend on the population? Could it depend on what types of knowledge the professional possesses? What counts as an error is very unclear especially when assessing potential dialect speakers. Another interesting characteristic about the scoring of the OWLS was that none of the examples mentioned the types of features/errors that the children were using. The book does not say that an answer is incorrect but does that mean it is correct? Some dialect features are scored as incorrect some are not mentioned as being correct or incorrect and no example could help you make that distinction. In essence it appears to be up to the examiner to make a clinical decision at this point. Would they penalize or/not and then make clinical notes that those are dialect features and try to address those in elective intervention? Or does one just overlook them and depend on the decent standard to make an assessment about the students’ school writing. Various researchers (Washington & Craig, 2002; Dandy, 1991; Jackson & Roberts, 2001) have provided lists of and references to Ebonics features, therefore if one is suspected of being an Ebonics speaker it is important to understand that they may be exhibiting some of these features in there writing, and this needs to be addressed for better school standard American English writing.

It could also be that many of the students did not understand what they were required to do because they had already taken the exact test. Some kids complained that this was the same thing they had already done, and therefore this could have influence the length and quality of their responses. If their responses were shorter, the less chance and “error” to be made this decreased the chance that they will display Ebonics features. The longer the narrative, the more likely they are to display Ebonics features. Their score could have gone down or changed because they wrote shorter answers. They had to recall a long story that was worth the most points on the test many students in the experimental group only wrote about 1-2 sentences providing little information about the story that would allow them to obtain the all points for that answer. During the first test their answers were longer. Because they knew they were not being graded on this task they may have put forth less effort to provide correct or adequate answers. The students lost points on different areas that were not related to Ebonics or morphosyntactic structures. And again since Ebonics features were not initially scored as being incorrect. This test
was not specifically measuring Ebonics. A different standardized test that was more sensitive to Ebonics features and dialectal differences needs to be chosen in order to obtain the most accurate results of change in Ebonics features. The OWLS is a very commonly used standardized test many schools and hospitals. However it is not sensitive in detecting or eliciting dialectal features. It may be an appropriate measure for examining other areas of writing and maybe better for a different population of children. The OWLS does not appear to be appropriate for identifying children who use dialectal features in their writing. These children could either be under identified or over identified depending on their Ebonics usage.

Comparison with Other Studies: Ebonics Usage

Many of the Ebonics features that were observed in the students writing are similar to those observed in other study examining Ebonics features in the writing of third graders; In Cronnell (1984) Errors in the students writing were analyzed and the results were as follows: The students in the third grade had a total of 550 errors and 39% were considered to have possible influences from Ebonics; The largest category of errors was related to verb formation and use. Another major area was the lack of –ed on past tense verbs and on past participles. The results of this study suggest that a large portion of the writing errors made by these third and sixth grade black children can be attributed to Ebonics influence. Some papers with few or no errors were short, simple, and dull. Some papers with many errors were lengthy, complex, and interesting.

Comparison with Other Studies: Time Frame

Lastly, the intervention was completed over a two-week period. Each session was only approximately 20 minutes each and there were only 3 sessions. It could be that 60 minutes of intervention with a delayed evaluation of the intervention may not be enough time to promote significant change especially if the students did not appear to have large amount of Ebonics features in their pretest writing samples. This is not to say that the students don’t typically use Ebonics in their writing, this was just one writing sample. Other studies had a longer time frame of intervention and evaluation. For example some programs were examined over years to see the effect of the program; results from the first assessment of this program in Detroit Public Schools effectiveness, done in 1994 by an independent evaluation agency, indicated that the Academy had more than met the
superintendents criterion for continued self-governance, namely that within the 3 years at least 75% of the students had scored at or above grade level on the California Achievement Test (Smitherman, 1999). Taylor (1989) addressed the writing of inner city university students from Chicago using two methods. The experimental group brought to the students’ attention the subtle differences between Ebonics and standard English through contrastive analysis, and tailored pattern practice drills. With the control group he did not do this, but simply followed “traditional English teaching techniques.” After nearly three months of instruction, the experimental group showed a 59% reduction in the use of Ebonics features in their standard English writing, while the control group, using traditional methods, showed a slight increase (8.5%) in the use of Ebonics features. Ball 1994, her study was conducted for 30 minutes per week five weeks. Ball’s 1996 study was conducted for one year before an evaluation.

Other studies similar to the present study, actually tested them on what they were taught (Fogel & Ehri, 2000) immediately after learning the target change in Ebonics feature, which would make more sense for educational purposes. Most of the time in educational settings students are taught something, that specific target is possibly reviewed and students are tested very directly on that specific target. Whereas the researcher just went straight to a more abstract observation of the targets. It would have been more beneficial to give them worksheets with the targets similar to a fill in the blank test with the correct grammatical forms, SVA, PST and Plural. Giving the students the OWLS was more abstract and an accurate picture of what they learned was not able to be obtained with this measure because it was not necessarily related to what they had been taught during the intervention session.

Conclusion

The present study sought to provide supporting data for continued development of programs such as these across the United States, in other cities where there is a need for standard English proficiency programs. One significant finding of the study showed that the OWLS may not be the best measure to use with students who are Ebonics speakers. This test is a very common standardized assessment used in hospitals and in schools. As observed in this study there is a strong possibility that students could either be over identified or under identified because the test is not sensitive to dialect features. It is best
for clinicians who use the OWLS with dialect speakers to supplement the test with informal measures of written language and language sampling in order to obtain the most accurate illustration of the child’s speech, language, and writing abilities. Key factors that would be beneficial to future research of this type would be to include a larger sample of the population of study, increase the length of the study and the frequency with which the participants are exposed to the target behavior, and to be certain a variety of measures are used adequately assess the students behavior change.

Ebonics, sometimes referred to as African American English, African American Vernacular English, or Black English, is a systematic and rule-governed linguistic system with highly regular features (ASHA, 1983; Linguistic Society of America, 1997). Some educators believe that when students use Ebonics consistently for academic purposes, Ebonics itself becomes a language barrier to learning (Bountress, G 1994; Foster, M., 1992; Baugh, J, 1999). Researchers, educators, and linguists (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Oakland Unified School District, 1997a; Franklin & Hixon, 1999; Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Perez, 2000) have indicated that the CA approach shows promise in aiding culturally and linguistically diverse students improve their writing of standard English. Continued research is needed to confirm the effectiveness of such a program.
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